

IMPROVING UNDERGRADUATE VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN EDUCATION IN SOUTH KOREA

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ABSTRACT:

Graduate designers inevitably face tremendous challenges in adjusting to society when entering the workforce. Visual designers frequently experience difficulties, particularly in the brand development process, when working with strategists and clients, often as a result of gaps in linguistic and cognitive understanding. In response to these issues, this paper aims to propose a module guideline for teach branding theories, which can be integrated into visual identity design modules from an interdisciplinary perspective. To develop the new guideline with an objective standard and prove its validity a number of branding, pedagogy, and design theories are reviewed, accompanied by an analysis of existing identity design modules from three countries and the opinions and suggestions of four stakeholder groups. The final guideline proposes suitable branding theories, integrated into a course of instruction appropriate to the identity design development process, and is intended to help students better develop strategic designs and provide educators with a guide for their classes on identity design development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many countries nowadays seek to foster creative specialists who can empathise with the language of business (Bicahrd, 2005), but designers often lack business and strategic thinking skills. Some marketers and brand strategists claim that designers should move away from focusing primarily on aesthetic qualities and good looks, to understanding business itself, particularly branding. Many designers believe current design education is causing the problems (Sun, 2012), and feel frustrated soon after starting work when they realise that many of the requisite workplace skills, including entrepreneurship, innovation, marketing, and branding, were not included in their university design curriculum. Design education in South Korean universities has similar problems, being focused primarily on design skills and aesthetics with little emphasis on business strategy, including marketing and branding (Shin and Kim, 2012) despite businesses needing design students with a good understanding of business strategy. In a survey conducted by the Korea Institute for Design Promotion (KIDP, 2008), many South Korean companies responded that design curricula should include planning and marketing-related programmes.

This research specifically addresses the undergraduate visual identity design modules of several design courses, because visual identity design serves as the foundation for visual communications design (Marsden and Thomas, 2012), and is one of the most significant components of a brand. The research aims to create module guidelines for undergraduate Visual Identity Design which integrates branding theories.

2. METHODOLOGY

An inductive quadrangle approach is arguably the most appropriate methodology for establishing a new guideline. As described above, many topical issues have been identified by designers involved in branding work. The research methodology is therefore formulated to elicit brand experts' and designers' candid opinions of academic theories. The identified issues are verified using the quadrangle approach with four relevant groups of brand experts, designers, educators and students (Figure 1), which allows the subject groups to confirm

mutual opinions and explore diverse perspectives. Specific recommendations are thus articulated and reflected in the new guideline.

The research uses a three-step methodology: Step 1, the literature review, examines pedagogy and branding theories, identity design, and elements of design education. Step 2 identifies and verifies the feasibility of appropriate branding theories by interviewing four relevant groups of experts, while the contents and structures of broad-based identity design modules are explored concurrently through case studies. In Step 3, all the outcomes are analysed and combined with the stakeholders' opinions from the focus group discussions to create a new guideline.

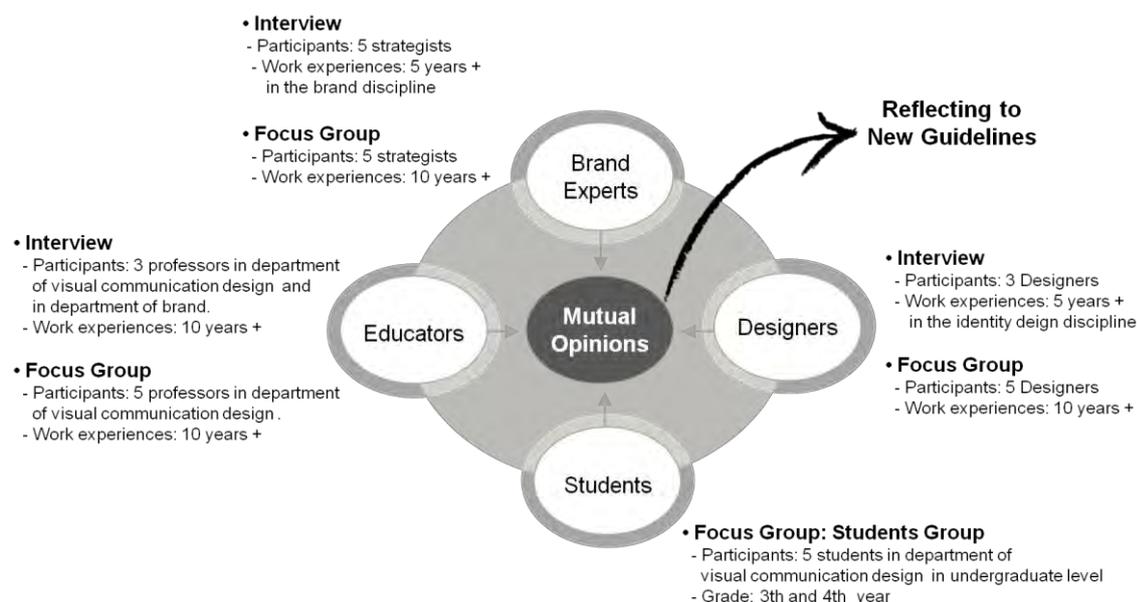


Figure 1: Research approach

3. KEY ELEMENTS OF VISUAL IDENTITY DESIGN AND BRANDING METHODS

Visual identity design is a key discipline of the background research, in order to improve visual identity design modules. This paper also examines the role and key elements of identity design to establish a new visual identity design module. Visual identity both increase brand awareness and consumer recognition and improves brand perceptions correlated with brand associations (Wheeler, 2009), because consumers usually trust their overall impression. All authors mention the elements of visual identity, symbol, logotype, typography and colour (Olins, 2008); other elements, including sound, shape, motion, and materials, were also occasionally mentioned (Wheeler, 2009; Design Council, 2013b). These visual identity elements play an essential role in engaging with consumers, and are part of communication disciplines (Design council, 2013c).

Immediately after the end of World War2 the "Brand Management System" was introduced to boost sales (Keller, 2008), ushering in a renaissance in brand theories and models, including brand analysis, brand strategy, brand identity, and brand communication theories. Amongst the many branding models, the Saatchi & Saatchi "LoveMarks" theory used emotional approaches to win people's minds (lovemark.com), proposing the notion of the "future beyond brand." The brand management process is also essential to branding. Keller's (2008) "Strategic Brand Management Process" model outlined a brand's various dimensions; simpler models than Keller's such as Wheeler's (2009) identity spectrum model and the Key Ingredients Model (Design Council, 2013). The "Brand Identity" model, which combines verbal identity and visual identity (Allen and Simmoms, 2009), is currently regarded as one of the most important branding theories. Aaker's (1996) "Brand Identity Planning Model" serves as a norm, which comprehensively covers all the processes to develop a brand identity from analysing to measuring brand performance (Figure 2). This conventional model

specifically addresses both the key attributes of each phase and the brand management process, and has been selected here to establish proper branding contents through analysis.

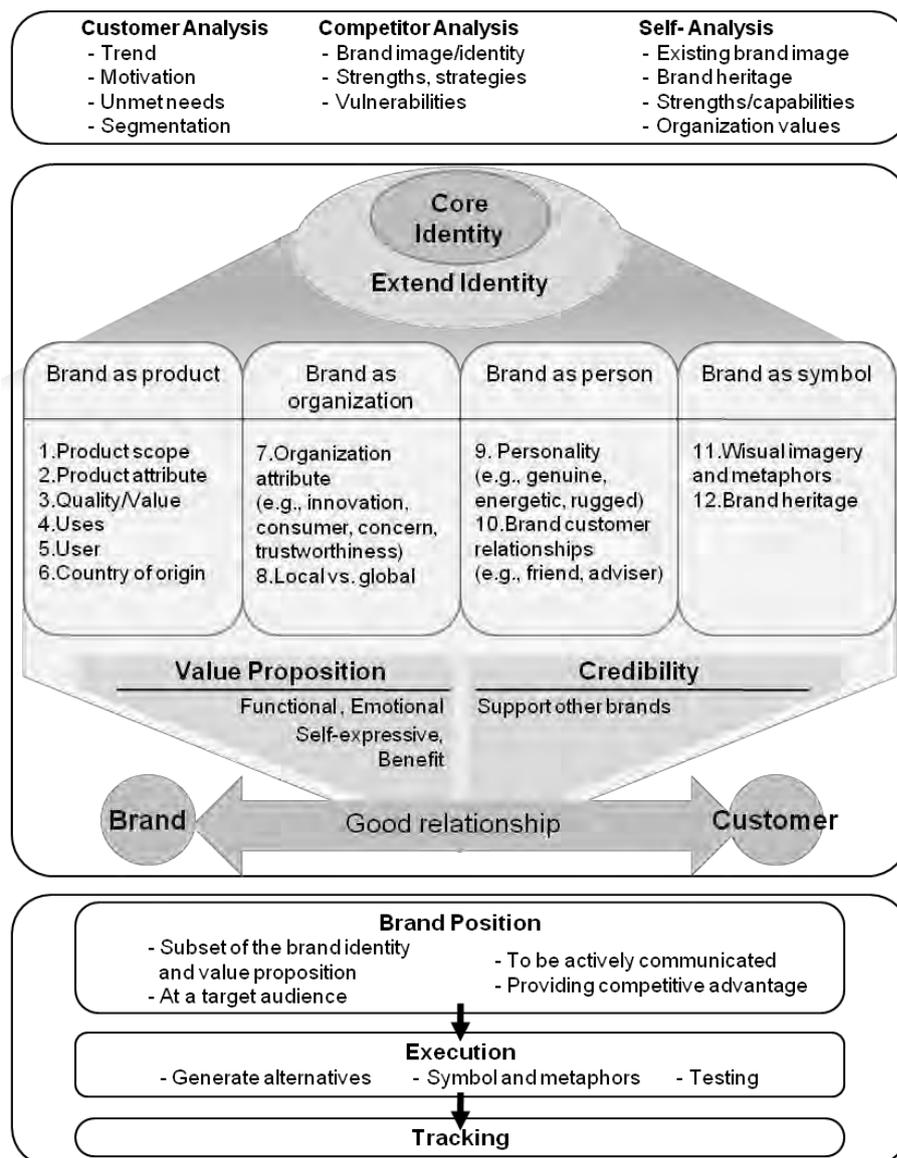


Figure 2: Brand Identity Planning Model (Aaker, 1996)

CONTENTS OF BRAND MANAGEMENT COURSE

A review of the curriculum of Brunel University's "Applied Corporate Brand Management MSc" course found educational insights from a branding theory perspective. The course is known for its branding specialism, though the school was chosen on a random basis amongst others which offer a brand management course. The contents of the core module were examined and analysed. Table 1 shows specific key words representing the content themes which were examined and analysed: brand management appeared four times and strategy, communication and equity twice each, frequencies which clearly represent their importance in the branding discipline. These key words are included, with brand models, as candidates for proper branding theories.

	Modules	Contents
Core Module	Corporate branding theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Branding Theory • Stakeholder Theory • Brand equity, Brand Management
	Applied corporate Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand Positioning, Brand Architecture • Retailers' Brand Management • Luxury Brand Management • Crafting New Branding Strategy • Building Brand Equity, Rebranding • Co-Branding, Branding and New Media
	Strategic corporate brand Management and consulting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Corporate Brand Management, Inter-Relationships with Other Business
	Strategic corporate Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Branding • Corporate Identity • Corporate Communications • Corporate Image and Reputation
	Marketing communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process and Theory of Communications • IMC(Integrated Marketing Communication) Plan
	Understanding business and management research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Methods and Techniques (Quantitative / Qualitative)
Dissertation		

Table 1: Contents of the Applied Corporate Brand Management MSc course core module (Brunel, 2013)

4. BRANDING THEORIES FOR THE VISUAL IDENTITY DESIGN MODULE

As already mentioned, the Brand Identity Planning Model (Aaker, 1996) has been regarded as the most prominent branding theory in that it delivers detailed, accurate information encompassing all the phases of identity and brand management processes. Each phase outlined in the model is reclassified and compared with the identity design process. The first step breaks down the model into three phases of strategic brand analysis, brand identity system and the brand identity implementation system (Figure 3). Each phase has a role to play from analysis to planning and from development to implementation. To identify the essential contents of branding, all the key words are shuffled then sorted again in each phase. Although there is considerable branding content, these words do not have features specific enough to suggest core contents. A minor feature noted during sorting is the regular appearance of words such as "identity" and "value".

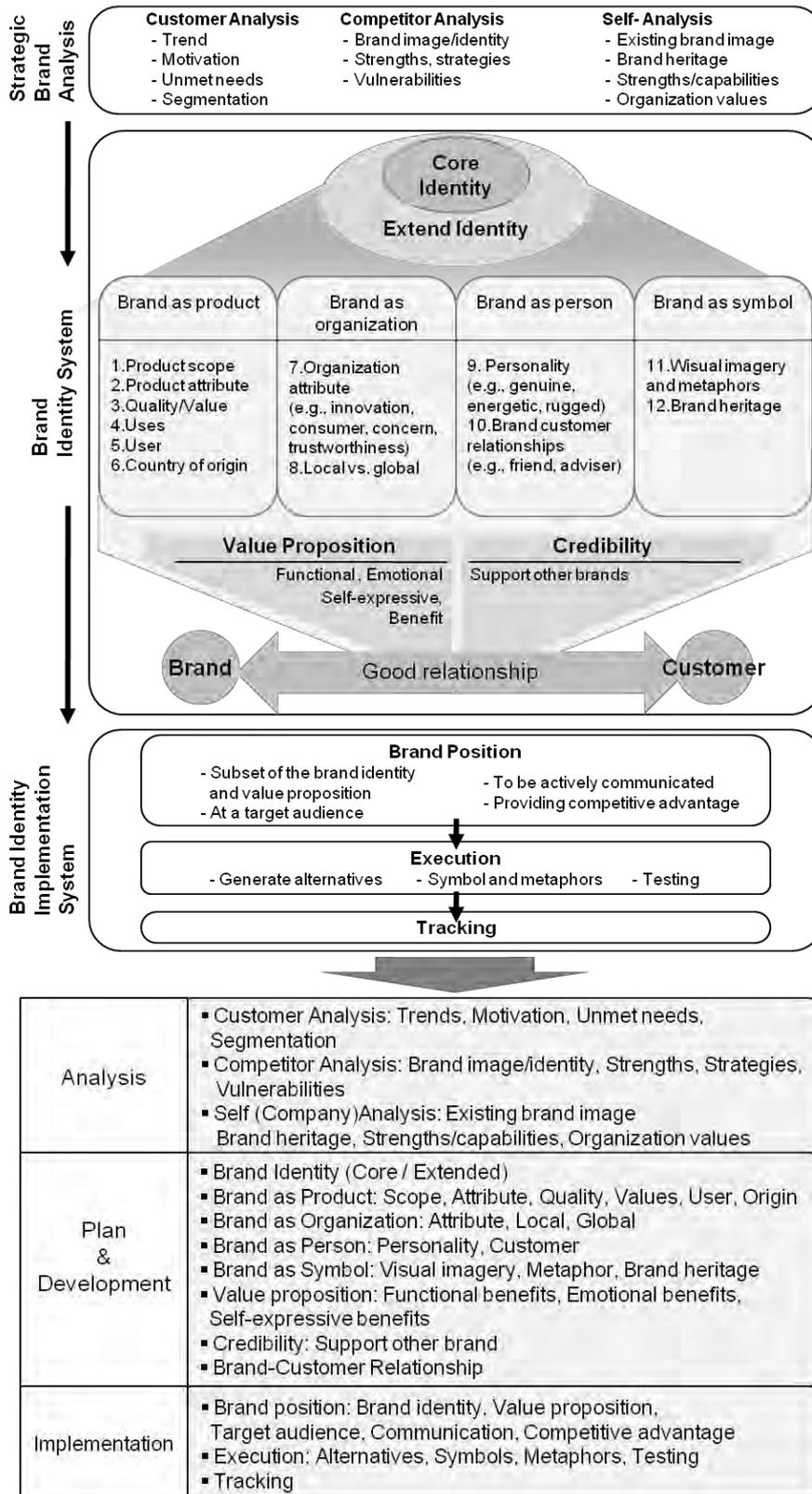


Figure 3: Key Contents of Brand Identity Planning Model (Aaker, 1996)

In the next step, Wheeler's Identity Design Process (Wheeler, 2009) is subdivided into work steps to gain insights for branding contents relevant to identity design. This model also has three phases (Figure 4), similar to those in Aaker's model. All branding-related content in each phase is categorised into three groups so that they can be compared with the key words for branding in Aaker's Brand Identity Planning model. The sorting of key words (Figure 4) reveals considerable branding content in each step.

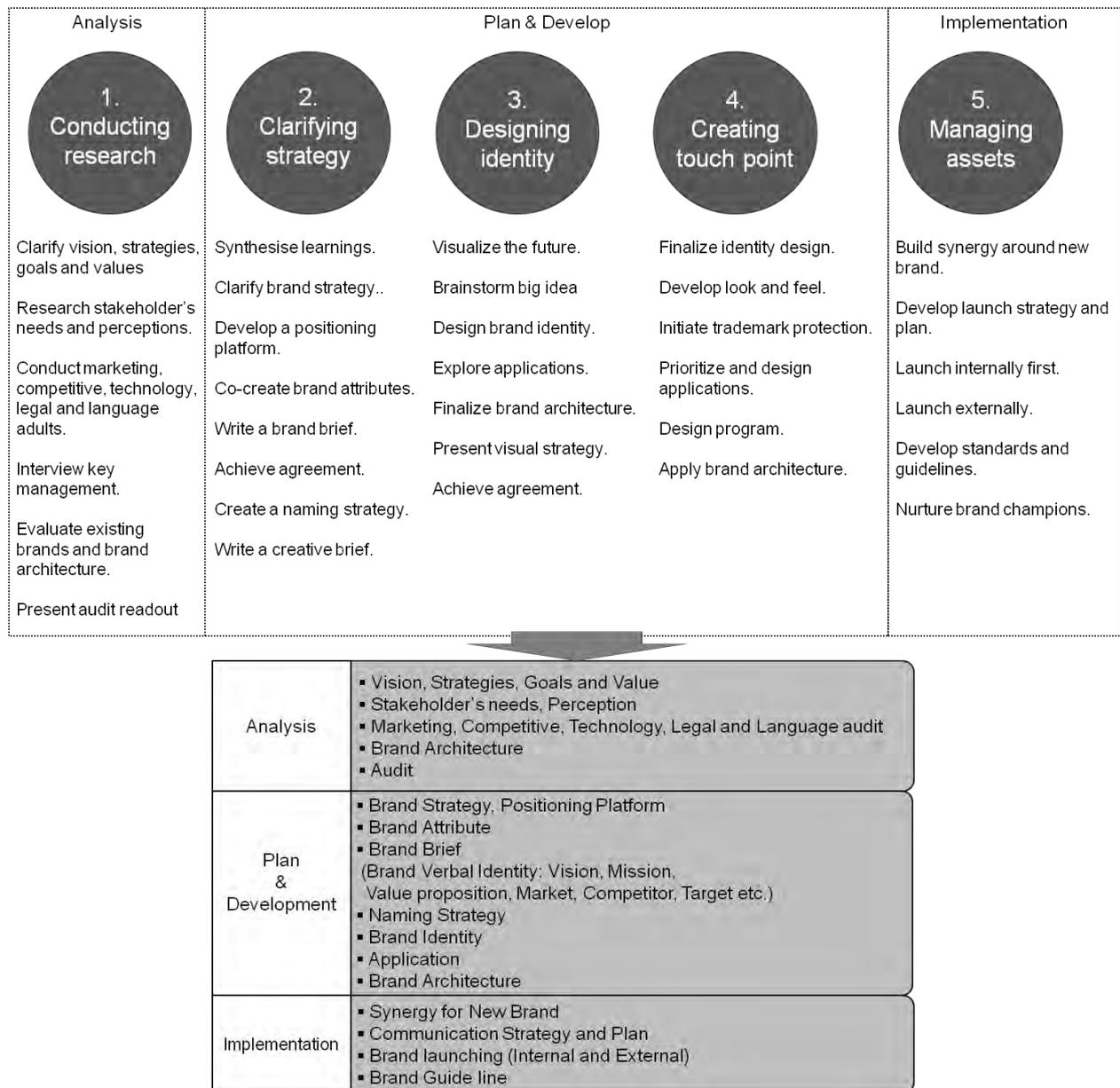


Figure 4: Branding Content of the Identity Design Process (Wheeler, 2009)

Step 3 identifies the contents of the brand identity system and design in each step to select eight key and common words as essential content of both disciplines (Figure 5).

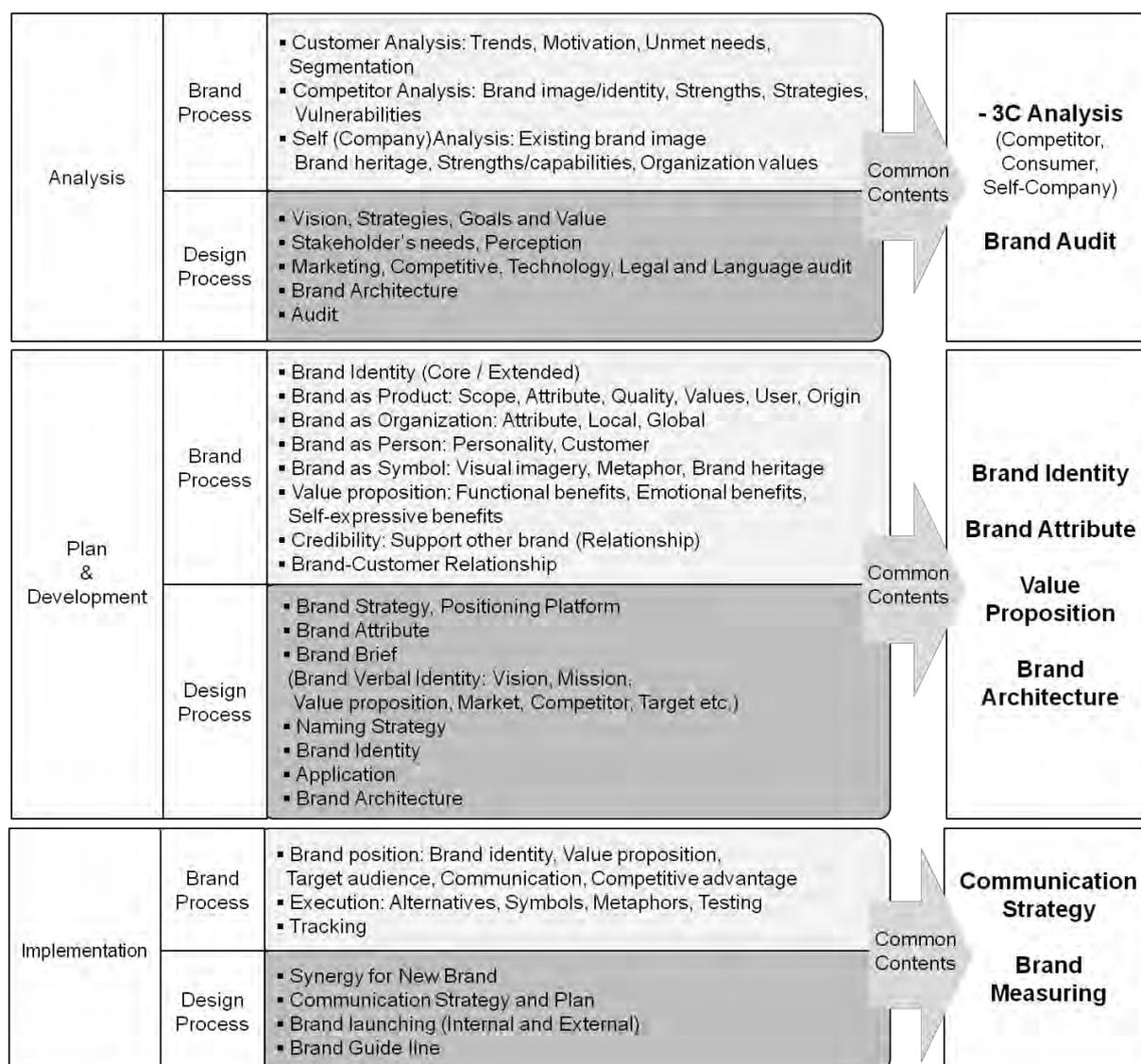


Figure 5: Branding Content of the Identity Design Process

The key content from the brand management course (Table 1) are then combined with the branding content. Through these steps, the branding content from several theories is selected as viable candidates to constitute the core branding content (Figure 5), including 3C Analysis, brand audit, brand identity, brand equity, brand communication, brand attributes, value proposition, brand architecture, brand strategy, and brand measuring. Finally, the validity and feasibility of branding theory candidates were proven through interviews used to collect expert opinions on which branding contents should be provided for students to improve their recognition of the importance of visual identity design. The five branding theories selected by the experts are brand identity, brand strategy, brand communication, brand architecture and 3C analysis.

5. THE VISUAL IDENTITY DESIGN MODULE CASE STUDY

In order to identify best practice and issues in current visual identity modules, the five key elements of courses in schools in the U.K., the U.S. and South Korea were studied. Hanyang University, Seoul National University of Science and Technology, the School of Visual Art and the University of Creative Art were randomly chosen from these countries for unbiased results. The case study found the contents and structures of classes of visual identity design modules shared across these four universities. The strengths, weaknesses and differentiation of the contents and teaching methods are analysed for synthesis into an initial module guideline.

	Strength	Weakness	Different contents	Different methods
Han Yang University South Korea	- Training for strategic design and research approaches - Experiences of verbal identities and a brand life cycle	Not develop brand identity design guide book	- Design research - Brand design strategy - Brand life cycle	- Group critiques - Research process book
Seoul National University of Science and Technology South Korea	- Case study - Practice to create a brand name	Similar contents, methods and process between both modules	- Case study - Development of brand name	- Discussion
School of Visual Art The U.S.A	- Foster a practical designer - Practice more logo and symbols design than other schools	Too much focus on designs and skills oriented contents	- Presentation in front of a client	- Brainstorming - Concept generation
University for the Creative Art (UCA Farnham) The U.K	- Depth debate and critique through work shop and tutorial in every week - Develop work book with logical explains of outcomes	Shorter periods of class than other schools	- Explore new media - Create design solution	- Tutorial - Group work - Work shop - Work process book

Table 2: case study analysis

Each university, as outlined in Table 2, has several strengths in teaching strategic design and research of verbal identity or nurturing designers' practical skills. However, all the schools inevitably have weaknesses, understandably, given the different direction and contents pursued by each school. However, none offers a module on branding theories for visual identity design. Hanyang University's design research, the case study at SNUST, SVA's presentation to clients and the UCA work process book are the unique features of each school. The findings and conclusions of analyses and the case study are integrated into the initial module guideline, as they are good drivers to guide students to develop a strategic design.

The findings of the case study of four universities thus become the common module guideline of visual identity design. These schools operate their visual identity design modules at two levels (foundation and advanced), consisting mainly of mandatory subjects for juniors and seniors. The shared features of the modules are analysed using the five key elements of design education, considering the differences of the two levels, to create the common module guideline. The model is the basic framework for the initial module guideline.

FOUNDATION LEVEL

All four schools were found to offer their foundation level largely focused on design. Students learn design-related knowledge and the role and elements of visual identity design through practice. In most schools, the class has three phases (Figure 6). The first phase delivers fundamental knowledge and content for design identity. The second phase provides a design practice process. In the completion phase, students must elaborate their design to deliver their final work to the audience.

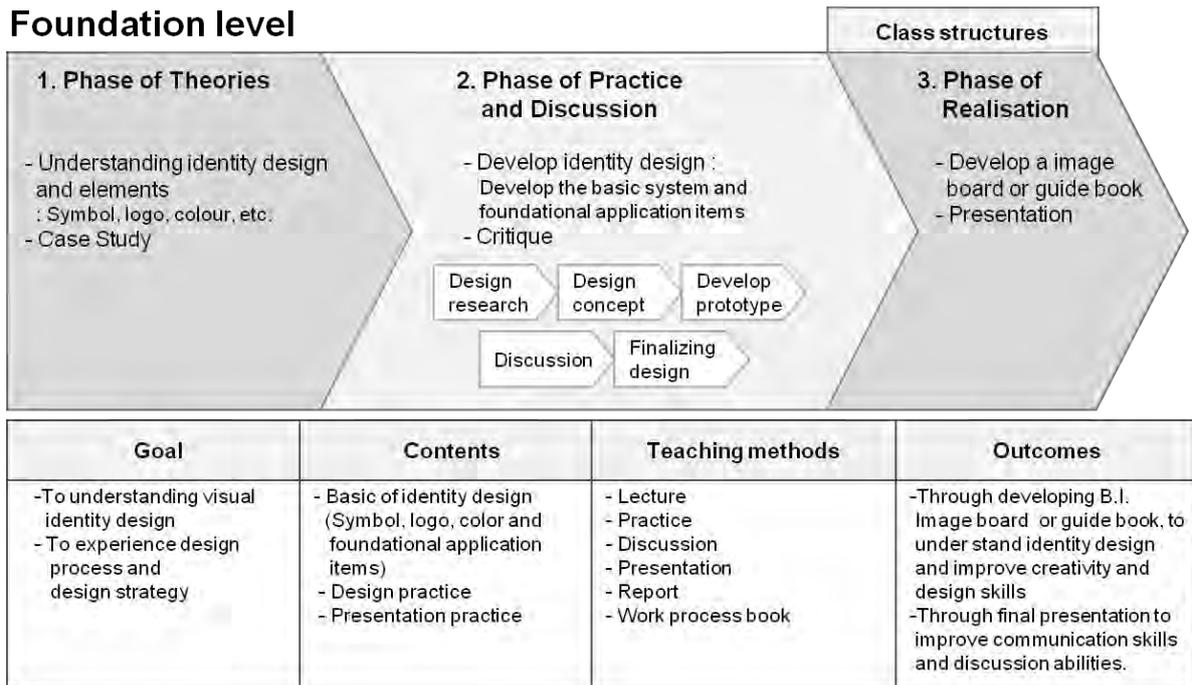


Figure 6: Common module guideline (Foundation level)

ADVANCED LEVEL

The four schools differ at advanced level because of their unique education goals. Despite these differences, a common and general educational guideline can be summarised (Figure 7). The guideline aims to teach students how to develop a strategic design through design research and analysis, using their foundation knowledge, and the structure mirrors that of the foundation level. However, the detailed contents differ considerably, and students learn how to proceed with a more strategic approach and analysis than at foundation level.

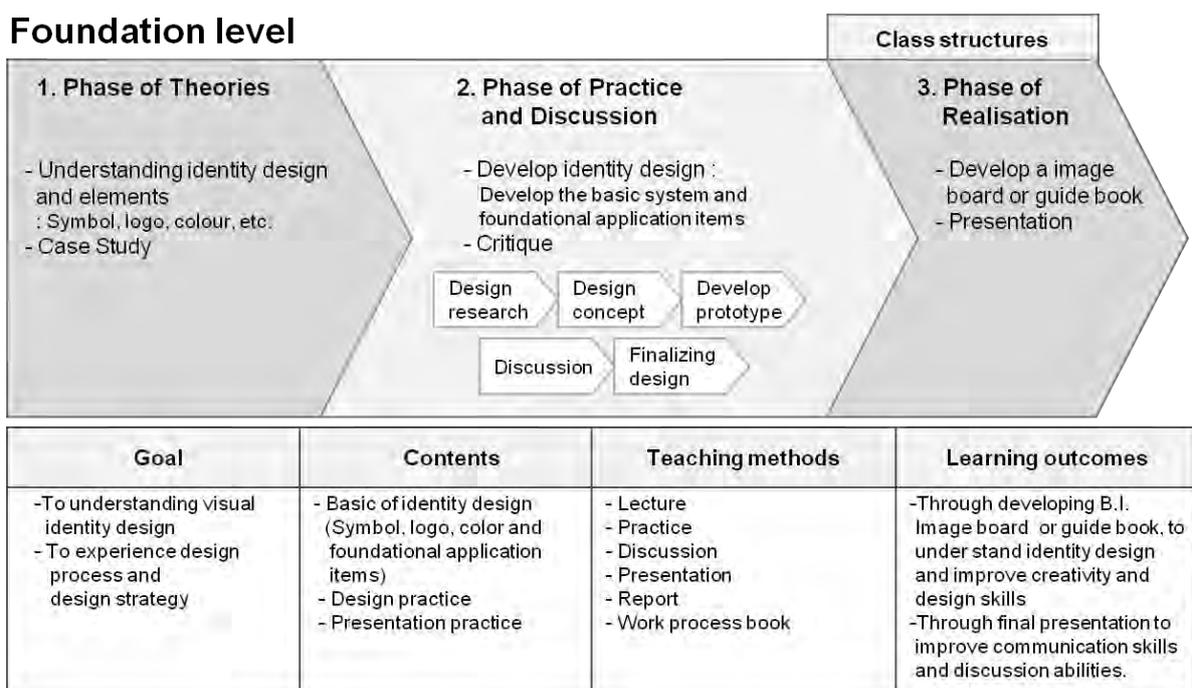


Figure 7: Common module guideline (Advanced level)

6. GUIDELINE FOR THE VISUAL IDENTITY DESIGN MODULE

In order to narrow the gap between theory and practice from the interdisciplinary perspective (Chettiparamb, 2007), the outputs presented above — the common module guideline and branding theories — are combined to build the initial model of a new module guideline. The model is structured for foundation and advanced level learning. As all the schools in the case study teach design-focused classes at foundation level and in-depth classes at advanced level, including design research and strategy, the branding theories are integrated into the initial model following this structure.

FOUNDATION LEVEL

Foundation level is primarily intended to facilitate a rudimentary understanding of visual identity design and brands, and its design practice also aims to translate a verbal identity into a creative form and teach how basic identity designs can be applied (Figure 8).

- The goals of foundation level classes are 1) to learn the concept, principle and elements of brand and visual identities, 2) to study the role and application of design through case studies of identity design, 3) to develop simple creative identity design items, and 4) to present a complete design to peers and practice professional presentation skills for the future.
- The class structure has three phases: theory, practice and completion (Figure 8), making reference to the common module guideline (Figure 6) and Wheeler's Identity Design Process (2009). In the case study of the two Korean schools, the one-semester course is 15 weeks long.
- The contents of the theory phase are largely categorised into three parts. The first part teaches the basic theories of visual identity design including its elements and role. The practice phase has two major components, identified in the literature review: to design the key identity elements of a design, and its subsequent application. The application is creating the design of a simple item e.g. stationery. In the completion phase, students give a practical presentation of their goals and design output intentions, to persuade their audience.
- Various teaching methods are used depending on the contents and teaching phase, similar to the common module guideline. However, a notable difference is that students develop their work process book like that of the UCA in the UK (Table 2) throughout the entire process, which helps students develop their own insights and implications.
- Expected learning outcomes are that students should understand the visual identity design and its role and relationship with verbal identity. At the creative level, students can sharpen their skills to develop aesthetic forms and apply them to their design. Finally, the class will help students improve their capacity to deliver their thoughts and rationale, and engage in debate and critique.

ADVANCED LEVEL

The advanced level incorporates the selected branding theories from the common module guideline. Classes at this level are designed to teach relevant branding theories through the theory and design practice phases, and allow students to judge the rationale behind what and how to design.

- Advanced level delivers in-depth content and helps students experience the professional working field (see Figure 9). Students are expected to experience the process in the actual work field and relevant branding theories through the course.
- Advanced level divides the fifteen-week course into three phases, as at foundation level. However, the theory phase takes eight weeks, accounting for over 50% of the entire

course, a week longer than at foundation level. In parallel, in the design phase, basic and application designs are developed, drawing on brand architecture and communication theories. As the theory phase is intended to provide a clear strategic direction for design and avoid vague idea sketches, the shorter practice phase should not pose a challenge to students.

- Advanced level content is tailored to each phase. The branding theories and design development process are merged to form the contents, drawing on the brand development and management sequence of Aaker's "Brand Identity Planning" model (1996) and Wheeler's "Identity Design Process" model (2009). In the theory phase, students learn the theories essential to the initial brand development. Students initially learn the detailed concepts of verbal identity, including brand personality and core value, and survey the verbal identity of the brand they choose. Through this process, they understand 3C analysis and establish a brand strategy, then develop a brand brief and execute their presentation in the last step. The practice phase teaches the integral aspects of brand architecture and communication, alongside design work. They also examine customer touch points and develop an applied design suitable to the brand and industry characteristics. Conventional media, including television, newspapers and new communication vehicles, are being invented thanks to today's technological evolution, rapidly changing consumers' behaviours and business structures (Dad, 2012). Design should ultimately be developed for each touch point as students evaluate its coherence and deviance based on the strategy, reviewing each feature from a communication perspective. The theoretical and applied design work drawn from the process constitutes the basic structure as a visual identity guideline. The presentation and design completion phase is the final step, strongly focused on sharpening professional communication skills, with further stricter standards than at foundation level. Students should also learn how to convince an audience, particularly about design intention and goal, through discussion, and how to elicit their opinions. The audience's collective ideas are then reflected in the design to create the final visual identity guideline.
- Similar teaching methods are used to those at, foundation level, but the proportion of each method differs as the contents differ markedly between the two levels. When teaching branding theories, teachers need to use specialised branding texts to enable students to understand the definition and concepts of theories, and are recommended to include their own experiences in the lectures. In the practice phase, simple sketch and drawing methods are used as at foundation level, but lecturing is also used to deliver branding theories. Tutorials and discussion are proportionately increased, to critique and debate to better identify the validity of design.
- Throughout the advanced level, students can indirectly experience the professional working field and develop a strategic visual identity design. They will learn to understand verbal identity through branding theories to develop a strategic design, and thus create an optimised basic design, pertinent to the brand structure. A relevant message and design should also be developed as a communication for customer touch points. Students can also improve their communication skills to deliver and convince the audience of the strategic basis and validity of their design output.

Foundation level

Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To study the basic concepts and principles of brand identity and visual identity design • To examine case studies of visual identity design and the role of design • To create basic and application items for identity design • To practice communication skills with partners and clients 		
Class Structure	<p>1. Phase of theories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To study the theories of visual identity design and brand identity 	<p>2. Phase of practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To create visual identity design • To explore the relationship between basic and application design 	<p>3. Phase of Completion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To finalize designs and sharpen communication skills
	1~7 Week	8~ 13 Week	14~15 Week
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theories of identity design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To identify roles of identity design in the branding - To examine elements of identity design (Basic and application items) • Theories of branding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To examine brand definition through using lecture and books - To understand brand identity and research of market circumstances for identity design • Create a brand brief and present it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic designs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To create unique and creative design of basic items. - Symbol, logo, color and 4th elements • Application designs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To explore how basic designs are extended into application designs - To create application list Focus on stationery items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of students to sharpen their skills to well convey the purpose of design • Organise and revise the identity design by reflecting audiences' opinions
Teaching Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture & books • Design research • Case study • Presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thumbnail and rough sketch • Discussion among students • Tutorial with teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation • Discussion
	Work process book		
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand brand and visual identity design. • To become proficient at ideation and symbolization of brand in aesthetic aspects. • To understand the roles and relationships between basic and application designs. • To effectively deliver their outcomes and convince audiences or clients. 		

Figure 8: Initial module guideline (Foundation level)

Advanced level

Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To study relevant branding theories and understand relationship of branding and design To experience strategic and analytic identity designs To experience real work process of identity design To explore touch points with customers in terms of brand communication To practice communication skills with partners and clients 		
Class Structure	1. Phase of theories	2. Phase of practice	3. Phase of Completion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To study branding theories To explore verbal identities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create visual identity design To understand brand architecture and touch points with customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To sharpen communication skills
	1~8 Week	9~ 13 Week	14~15 Week
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theory of branding - 3C analysis (MK Research) To analyse market competition, customer needs and situation of the selected brand - Brand identity To identify verbal identity of brand such as product attribute, personality, core values etc. - Brand strategy To investigate strategy through case study Brand brief Summary of verbal identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning design strategy aligned with brand strategy. Basic designs with brand architecture theory - To create basic designs fitted to brand architecture Consumer touch points with brand communication theory - To create proper designs for each touch point Brand guide book or brand look and feel guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of students to sharpen their skills to well convey the purpose of design Organize and revise the identity design by reflecting audiences' opinions
Teaching Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lecture & book Design research Presentation Case study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lecture Thumbnail and rough sketch Discussion among students Tutorial with teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation Discussion
	Work process book		
Learning Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand verbal identity through branding theories in order to create strategic design. To create strategic basic designs fitted to the architecture of sibling or corporate brands. To understand customer touch points and the role of each as a communication channel, and create proper design and message for each touch point. To effectively deliver design outcomes and convince audiences or clients 		

Figure 9: Initial module guideline (Advanced level)

EVALUATION OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The initial model was verified through focus group discussions (FGD) to check its feasibility, suitability and potential problems for visual identity design classes. FGD sessions were held with four stakeholder groups: designers, educators, brand experts and design students. As the goal of this research was to propose a guideline for Korea's universities, all participants

were recruited and participated in FGD sessions in Korea. All FGD sessions showed a positive response to the initial guideline, but some participants pointed out that the module change might cause time constraints to classes, while others said that this could be solved by adjusting the depth of the theory education. The professor and designer groups believed the specialised branding theories at advanced level should also be taught at foundation level to further students' understanding and help them develop a strategic design. They suggested that branding could be effectively integrated into practical design process. Some argued that the class hours should be clearly defined. In considering content, brand experts pointed out that basic marketing theories or more branding theories should be addressed, whilst educators recommended that the contents of brand and identity design management and administration should be added. Most claimed it would be essential for students to have professional experience and a joint project, working with their counterparts in other fields.

In considering teaching methods, most groups stressed that the theory class would be more effective when focused on real case studies, rather than only on academic theories, including an introduction to the discipline. The FGD also suggested that basic knowledge of design management and business administration could be introduced at the foundation level.

7. CONCLUSION

This research considered helping foster students' capacity to develop strategic identity design by integrating branding theories into the visual identity design module, to make their education more highly relevant to branding. The literature review on design education, branding methods and visual identity design, and the case study of the four schools reached several crucial insights. The findings were verified through the stakeholder groups, to set up appropriate branding theories and develop an initial model, resulting in creating a new module guideline by elaborating and refining the common module guideline and reflecting the focus group opinions. The newly developed guideline for the visual identity design module is expected primarily to provide support for visual identity design educators, to develop teaching methods and directions for strategic design development and, secondly, for students to nurture their capacity to develop strategic design using learning branding theories. Finally, the author hopes this paper lays the foundation for other academics to develop effective new guidelines or curricula incorporating marketing theories, going beyond branding theories, into other visual communication subjects and the wider area of design.

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