

QUALITY VISUALIZATION OF THE COMPANY FOR A BETTER RECOGNITION

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Abstract

We were interested in how to create an effective visualization of a company and how big is the impact of corporate visual identity elements on company recognition. Effectiveness of corporate visual identity elements was tested. We were also interested in which are the steps of design process. Existing company was included in our study. Data was collected through a combination of interview, questionnaire and survey. Results of the research show that the company has a well-planned brand name, typography and colours. These are used appropriate according to the purpose. Some of the key elements of symbol design (harmony, naturalness and ratio) are badly designed, which result in negative impact of the symbol, symbol also does not broadcast desired meaning and generally does not contribute to the construction of the desired brand or company image.

Keywords

visualization of the company, corporate visual identity, color, symbol, brand name, typography

INTRODUCTION

Santesmases /1/ talks about trademark importance. Simões & Dibb /2/ mention that currently consumers purchase brands and not products. Trademark is created when company adds a certain value to a product which makes it different from other products with similar characteristics and advantages /3/. The main goal of a company is to gain a favorable image among key stakeholders, which in time cause favorable corporate reputation. This is translated into predisposition to buy organization's products and services, to invest in or to work for the company, buy their stocks, talk positive about the company /4/. Because companies coexist in extremely competitive and unpredictable environment, every successful brand has to have a well-designed corporate visual identity. Corporate visual identity is consisted of trademark or company name, symbol, color scheme and typography. Despite the importance and widespread use of visual

identity elements, many of them evoke negative evaluations, are unrecognizable and hurt the corporate image because of their improper selection.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Color

Whelan /5/ says that it is possible to predict responses to specific colors or color combinations and therefore they should be taken into consideration in graphic design otherwise we can achieve opposite of desired. For example we can completely change identity of the company with a certain color and act destructively because corporate visual identity will be unsuccessful in achieving its goal. Also Itten /6/ agrees and states that all evaluations should be based on color theory. He shows how to combine colors to achieve harmonious relationships. Butina /7/ states that colors are causing equal physiological effects but psychological

reactions differ from an individual to an individual. Gray /8/ talks about the link between emotions and colors, or more precisely, each color has its own emotional value. For example: yellow is known as extremely pleasant, happy and excited in contrast to its complementary color which is unhappy. At this point we can also mention the symbolic values of colors that are mostly the same within the same cultures. Taylor /9/, Bordeianu and Hristian /10/ and Frieling /11/ are dealing with the meaning of colors, both within cultures or universally. For example: orange is an energetic color, happy, suggests optimism, joy and companionship. It facilitates communication and pleasant feelings. Frieling associates it with autumn, youth and sunrises.

Typography

The primary purpose of typography is to create conditions for the most optimal transmission of linguistic messages /12/. Typographer must be familiar with different typefaces, their various characteristics, advantages and disadvantages, features and know how to use them appropriately. He must be able to determine the different range of parameters: size, which typeface and color to use, the best line spacing, position of a text on a page, the right printed format, etc. The role of typographer is to create the best possible result and therefore to communicate a certain idea, a feeling or an image /13/. Which typeface to use is usually affected by the content, purpose, sometimes also the issue of the content and history of the typeface /14/. Schriver /15/ points out that suitable choice is the one when genre, purpose and context interrelate with mood or personality of the chosen typeface. Shaikh, Chaparro and Fox /16/ have confirmed that readers are assigning typefaces certain personality features. Shaikh's /17/ article presents results from a study which investigated the personality of classes of typefaces (serif, sans serif, display, script / handwritten). For example: Script/handwritten typefaces are much more feminine, soft and delicate than others. Mazzini /18/ and Mancini /19/ describe which typeface group to use in various contexts. For example: Mazzini recommends using serif typefaces for subdued and traditional content.

Name

Chan and Huang /20/ concentrate on criteria and conditions for creating successful brand names and emphasize that they differ from a researcher to researcher. They've investigated and compared four different criteria (McNeal in Zeren (1981), McCarthy in Perreault (1987), Kotler in Armstrong (1997) and Collin (1977)) and recognized that there are inconsistencies and similarities between them. They constructed a three component criteria (marketing, legal and linguistic component) that they consider as essential for development of a good brand name. This criterion is represented in Table 1. Also Turley and Moore /21/ wrote about importance of brand name and due to the diversity of services, brand name strategies vary. They gave us five classifications of service brand names: descriptive, person-based, associative, geographic and alpha-numeric. Kohli and Thakor /22/ point out five categories of names regarding trademark protection and they affirm that the level of trademark protection increases as we progress in the given order below. For example, generic names cannot be registered whilst coined names are expected to receive the best protection. The five brand name categories are: generic, descriptive, suggestive, arbitrary and coined.

Symbol

Many symbols evoke negative evaluations, are unrecognizable and hurt the corporate image. It is possible that desired responses are not achieved because selected symbol has a design that is difficult to store or access in memory, is not likable or fail to create any sense of meaning /23/.

Graphic design literature identifies which are characteristics of design that will create desired responses /24/. Study made by van der Lans et al. reviews findings on this topic, including certain aspects of study made by Henderson and Cote /25/, which will be our focus point. Consumers perceive design of a symbol along objective design elements and design dimensions, which are presented in Picture 1. The objective design elements include repetition number of times identical shapes are re-

peated), proportion (the ratio of a symbol's width to its height,) and parallelism (number of parallel lines). Design dimensions are elaborateness, naturalness, and harmony. They con-

sist of eight subjective design elements (complexity, activeness, depth, representativeness, organicity, roundness, symmetry and balance).

Table 1: Three component criteria (from Chan in Huang (1997))

The Marketing Component
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suggestive of product benefits;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotable and persuasive;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suited to package;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fit with company image and other products' image.
The Legal Component
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • legally registered and available for use (not in use by another firm);
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unique in competition.
The Linguistic Component
The Phonetic Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easy to pronounce;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pleasing when read or heard;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pronounceable in only one way and in all languages for goods to be exported.
The Morphological Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple.
The Semantic Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive, not offensive, obscene, or negative;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • modern or contemporary;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • always timely;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understandable:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • memorable.

Very important are also consumers' responses to symbol design. Symbols should be recognizable, familiar, elicit consensually held meanings and evoke positive affect. Consumer responses include affect, meaning, subjective familiarity and true and false recognition /26/. Positive affect is important because feelings can transfer to the product or company. Positive stimulus will attract and hold attention more than emotionally neutral or new stimulus /27/. Symbols with high share of shared

meaning are valuable because they are perceived, interpreted and remembered better than stimuli with varied meanings /28/. Naturalness, harmony and, to a lesser extent, elaborateness may increase shared meaning /29/. Because shared meaning and subjective familiarity are closely related, the rationale behind the relationships between the design characteristics and subjective familiarity are similar to those for shared meaning, that's why they are connected into a single response called familiar

meaning. Familiar meaning is increased by naturalness and by having a proportion close to that of the golden ratio. One of the benefits

of selecting symbols with familiar meanings is that they improve correct recognition.



Picture 1: Design characteristics (from Henderson & Cote, 1998)

Symbols should speed recognition of a company or brand /30/. The rationale is that pictures are perceived faster than words /31/. This is important because many company communications are seen for only a brief time (e.g., driving by outdoor advertising, walking by products on shelves, flipping through advertisements in magazines). Symbols are important particularly in stores as a means of speeding recognition of products. Remembered pictures can enhance memory of accompanying verbal material (e.g., the company name) /32/. Finally, achieving symbol recognition is a means of protecting the symbol from infringement /33/.

We distinguish between two types of recognition /34/:

1. True recognition is the correct assertion that one has seen the symbol before. It is improved with a more natural design, repeated elements and moderate levels of

harmony (the symbol is not perfectly balanced or symmetrical which is more memorable);

2. False recognition is the incorrect assertion that one has seen the symbol before. False recognition is not necessarily a bad outcome as companies may deliberately create new symbols that seem familiar. It seems to be driven by characteristics including a lack of naturalness (less memorable), high harmony (less distinctive), and multiple parallel lines (less distinctive).

It can be assumed that a set of so-called intrinsic properties will affect an individual's understanding and interpretation of a symbol /35/ and are resulting directly from a confrontation with the symbol itself. They are divided into:

- A perception of the graphical parts (what is the factual interpretation of the symbol?).

Henderson and Cote have shown that specific »graphical« properties of symbols contribute strongly to increase the familiarity and appreciation of an organization. Graphical elements relate to how the image is constructed for the viewer; the manner in which certain elements are inserted into the symbol raises all sorts of meanings.

- Perceptions of the referential parts (what does the symbol represent?).

Green and Lovelock have stated that referential properties can also explain the impact of symbols on reputation. Referential properties of the symbol suggest what the symbol actually displays.

METHODOLOGY

We used an online questionnaire (study A), a survey (Survey B), document analysis and we conducted an interview with the company regarding elements of their corporate visual identity. Our purposive sample represented students who do not live in Sweden, are not Swedish-speaking (which is one of the target groups of company) and were therefore exposed to company's corporate visual identity elements for the first time. The meaning of these elements is over specific period of time partly defined by the behavior of an organization in the past and by the intensity of the communication in which they express their values. In our case, we are talking about students of Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science in Maribor, but possible also of other faculties who have had the opportunity for a student exchange in Blekinge Tekniska Högskola in Sweden. The average age of students who participated was 23, 3 years. With this research we've answered research questions, which are located in the section with the results.

Procedure of collecting data

Instrumentalism A

This part of the research is based on previous studies for evaluating symbol. Questionnaire was answered by 46 students from Slovenia.

Respondents were asked to describe:

1. graphical associations;
2. meaning of the symbol;
3. purpose of the company with their symbol;
4. interpretation of the company's activities;
5. interpretation of typeface;
6. affect of the symbol.

At the end of the questionnaire we asked respondents to evaluate the match of the symbol with the activity of the company (real estate Company) on a scale from 1 to 5.

Instrumentalism B

The purpose of this part of the research was to measure correct and false recognition. Respondents watched the video where symbol of the company is displayed for 3 seconds, followed by a 3 minute video with arbitrary content. When they were finished with watching the video, they had to choose the symbol from a list of randomly chosen symbols, for which they thought that they saw at the beginning of the video.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

For analysis of open-ended questions in Study A, we used qualitative content analysis. In encoding process, we used an inductive approach which was followed by content analysis and creation of frequency tables which states how many times the phrase appeared in the text. It was then followed by a narrative description of the findings. Frequency tables were also used when analyzing quantitative data. Visual and textual parts were analyzed in documentation, especially we focused on argumentation of the company for their use of colors, typeface, symbol and name, which we combined with data obtained from the interview.

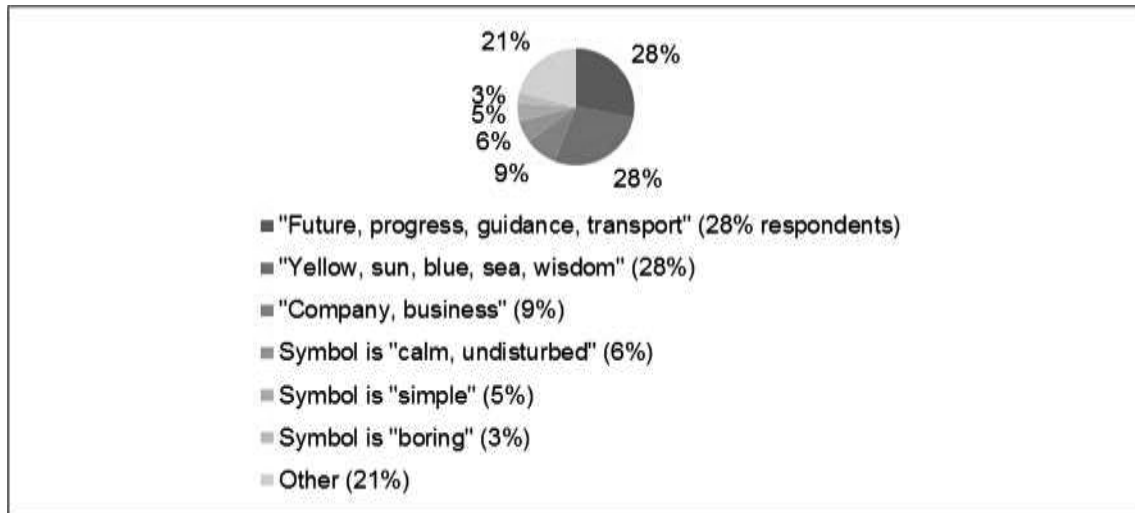
Study A

Graphical associations

In this part of the survey we focused on how the symbol is built; how certain elements are introduced into the symbol and what associations they cause. Graphical associations signif-

icantly contribute to increase of the recognition and positive judgment of the company. Respondents associations are represented in Graph 1.

Graph 1: Graphical associations



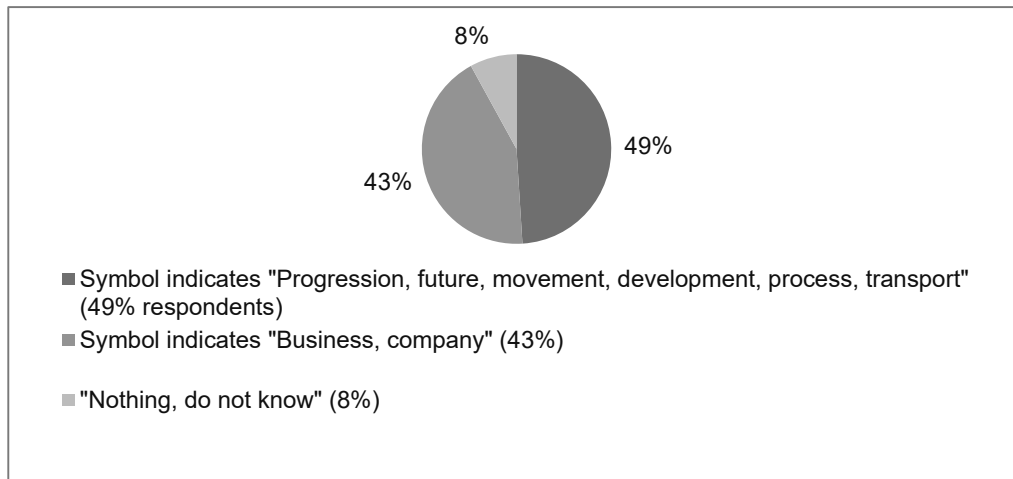
The largest number of associations relate to the future, transport, progress. Since all arrows in the symbol are directed to the right, we can talk about movement forward, certainly not back. As a result, the concept of movement is highly emphasized, much more than expected. Respondents therefore perceive the company's activity as some kind of transportation and not as a real estate company. Colors are correctly attached to warm and cold associations in the image of the company. The use of orange and two shades of blue should associate something warm and cold, in this case home, seaside location, and sea. Blue should be understood as calm and serious color, orange as warm and

complementary contrast as lively and dynamic. But symbol evoked a more limited amount of graphical associations about colors. Associations about the symbol also relate to business in general, that symbol is calm and simple, which is one of the intentions of the company. This arises from the use of simple elements.

Referential associations

With this part of the survey we wanted to provide answers about what the symbol means to our respondents; what is its reference. Referential associations explain the impact of the symbol on reputation of the company. The respondents are following.

Graph 2: Referential associations



Gained associations again talk about:

- companies engaged in transport, any kind of movement,
- companies that are striving to progression, development, future,
- process, business in general.

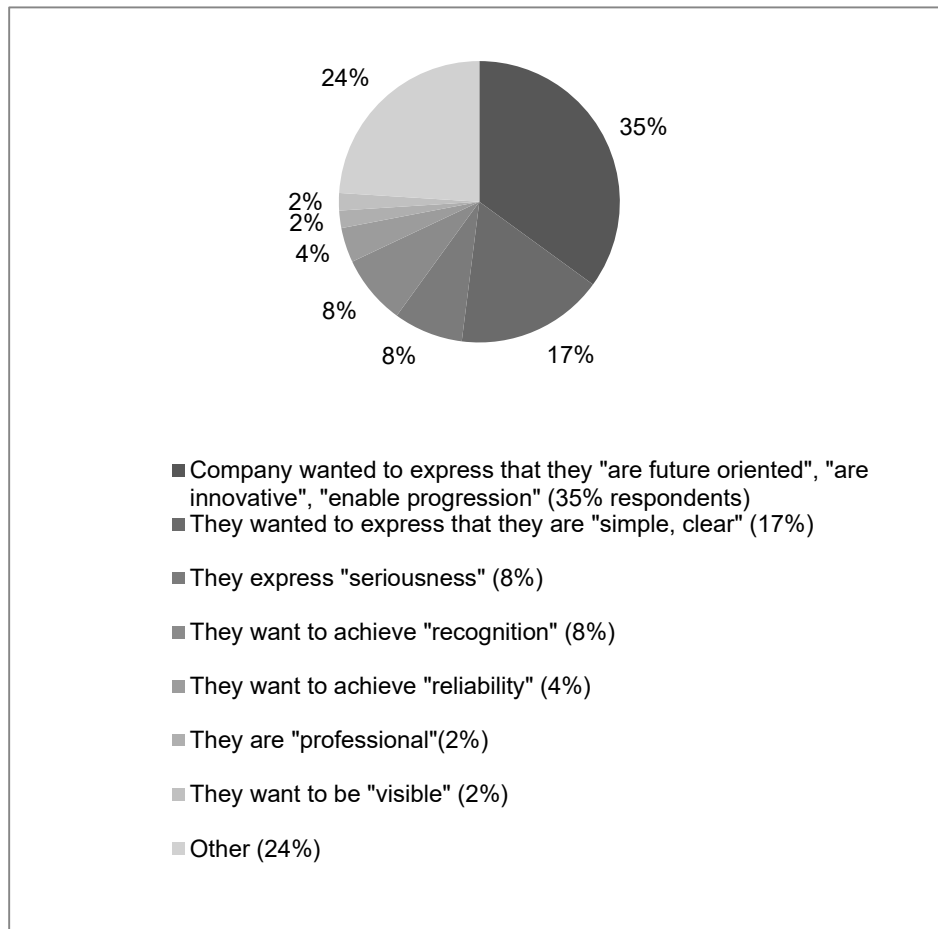
Elements of the symbol represent roofs; therefore symbol stands for a real estate company. Referential associations that company wants to

communicate were therefore not properly recognized.

Intentions of the company

We asked respondents what they think the company wants to express with its symbol. On this basis, we can measure fit between external perceptions and organisational intentions.

Graph 3: Intentions of the company



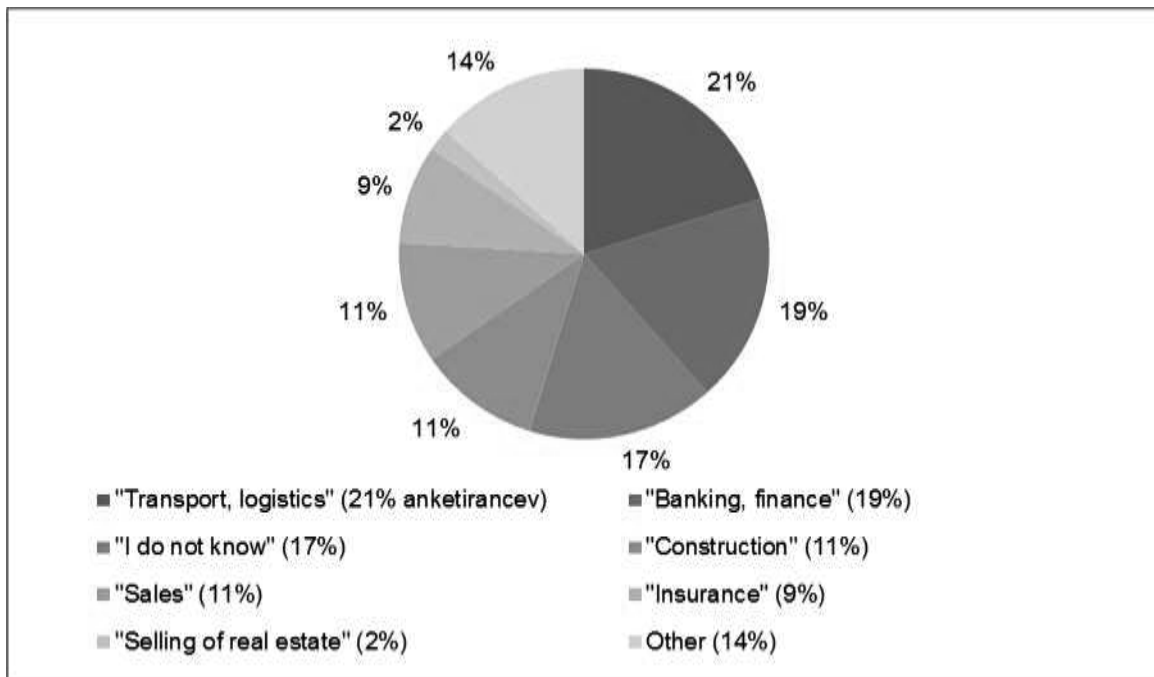
The purpose of the company is to communicate stability, security, modernity in moving and aiming forward, ambitions and other general positive associations. We assume that many of the responses are based on general assumptions about the values that every company wants to express with its symbol. For example, its image reflects professionalism, reliability; it attracts attention, etc., as written by some of the respondents. The largest group of answers results from arrows which are facing right. At this point fit between external

perceptions and organisational intentions is very good.

Business of the company

Respondents were asked to spontaneously describe the category that came to their mind when confronted with the symbol. It is highly relevant that stakeholders perceive a symbol as fitting with, in this case, the real estate sector.

Graph 4: Business of the company

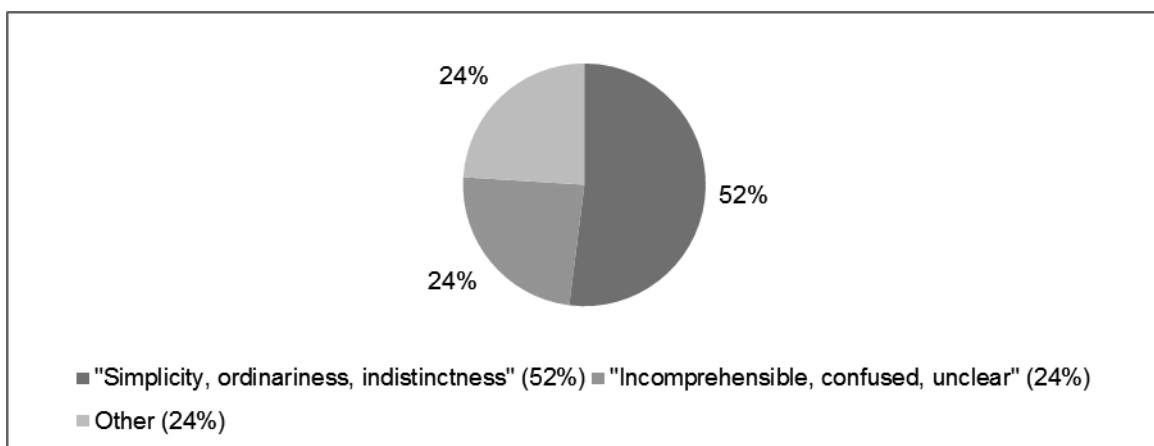


The correct answer gave only one respondent. At this point we can already see that it is necessary to improve the elements of the symbol so its meaning will be easily and most important correctly recognized in the future.

We've collected associations regarding typeface used in the symbol. The role of a typeface is to create the best possible result, and thus communicate an idea, a feeling, an image that is associated with the image and features of company's service.

Associations about typeface

Graph 5: Associations about typeface



Answers about simplicity derive from the fact that sans serif typefaces do not contain any tails or ornaments. In any case, the simplicity of this typeface makes it less distinct, hard to

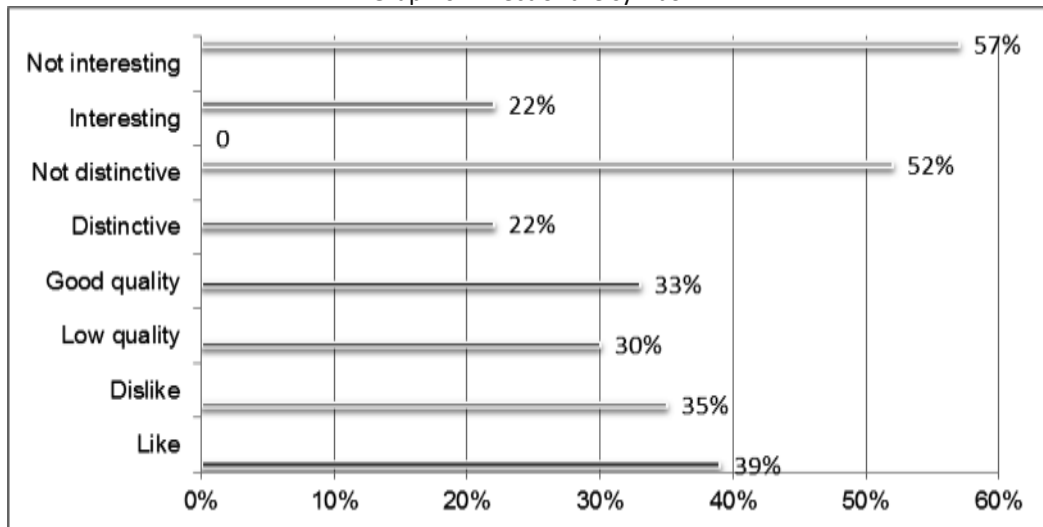
remember and probably also does not attract attention as good as others.

Affect of the symbol

We've collected a small set of results regarding the impact of the symbol – its quality, likeness,

distinctiveness and if it's interesting or not.

Graph 6: Affect of the symbol

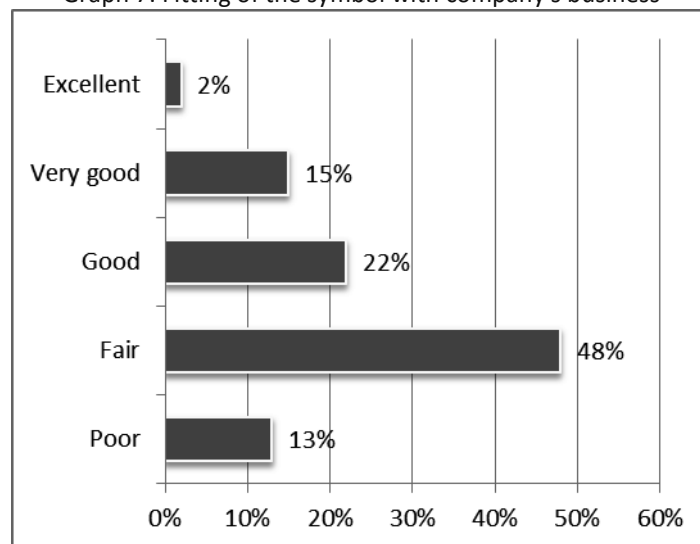


General outcome about symbol's affect was negative. It is mainly perceived as not interesting and not distinctive. It was an expected outcome since naturalness and elaborateness in the symbol are not very good represented. Every symbol should be perceived in a positive way, which is also company's intention in this case.

Fitting of the symbol with company's business – REAL ESTATE COMPANY

We asked respondents to evaluate the fit of the symbol with the category of the company's activities after they already had to guess the activity by themselves. We were interested if disclosure of company's activity will facilitate recognition of the meaning of the symbol.

Graph 7: Fitting of the symbol with company's business



More than 48% of people answered that fitting is less than good which was an expected outcome on a basis of responses about what is the business of the company.

Study B

The purpose of this part of the research was to measure correct and false recognition. 94% of the respondents recognized the correct symbol,

while 6% of them chose the wrong one. One of the reasons for correct recognition lies in the repetition of elements in the symbol (arrows) and that symbol is not perfectly balanced and symmetrical. These deviations from perfect symmetry and balance are considered more memorable.

Answers to research questions and suggestions for improvements

RQ 1.1: Do a Swedish company and the respondents have a different appreciation about the meaning of the typeface used in their symbol?

Swedish company and the respondents rated typeface mostly different. The purpose of the Swedish company is to communicate "modernity". Also, when choosing a typeface, an important element of "simplicity", which can communicate to their wide audience, should be considered. The biggest match is that they both evaluate typeface used in symbol as typeface that is simple and easy.

RQ 1.2: Is there a connection between what certain typeface represents to various authors and what to a Swedish company?

Often are sans serif typefaces used for companies that wish to express their involvement in modern times /36/ which is actually quite similar to intentions of the company with usage of the typeface used in symbol. Authors and company consider it simple due to its appearance. Typeface Erazure, which falls into a group of handwritten typefaces, is used for highlighting. Even Shaikh, Chaparro, and Fox /37/ define handwritten typefaces as those that create good contrast with other groups of typefaces. The company uses Arial for internal texts, specifically for headlines and short texts (reports, letters and PowerPoint presentations) and Times New Roman for longer texts. For printed, public materials they use Eureka Sans, especially for headlines and body text. Mazzini confirms that sans serif typefaces, which include Arial, are not suitable for longer texts. Serif typefaces, which include Times New Roman and Eureka Sans is better suited to relaxed, traditional content and for longer text.

RQ 2: Do a Swedish company and the respondents have a different appreciation about affect and meaning of the symbol?

Company intention was that people associate their symbol in a positive way which is not detected in respondents' perceptions. Affect increases when harmony increases, especially symmetry and balance which are both in their symbol in low or medium levels. We can also achieve harmony with correct color combination. Naturalness should be increased to medium levels (especially organicity and roundness).

The meaning of the symbol was recognized excellent, regardless of the fact that local market was not included in the study. Meaning of the symbol - both agreed by the company and respondents is: modernity, future oriented, blue color that both associated with the sea, etc. They both talk about symbol being simple, maybe also a bit boring. But otherwise there was no mentioning that the symbol represents roofs, usually respondents associated the arrows in the symbol with moving forward, being future oriented, transport, etc. Among the responses there was also no mentioning of stability, probably due to lack of harmony, and security, which in principle could be linked with blue color in the symbol, which associates with the uniform /38/.

If we want to achieve that symbol is linked with meanings such as stability and roofs, we suggest some improvements. Again - symmetry and balance of the symbol should be improved. If abstraction is reduced and organicity is increased, meaning of the symbol would be easily associated with roofs and respondents could easily determine the activity of the company. Shared meaning of the symbol is, as already mentioned, enhanced by the naturalness and a ratio which is close to the golden ratio.

RQ 3: To what extent Swedish company fulfills recommendations regarding selection of good brand names?

We relied on recommendations of Chan and Huang /39/ and evaluated company's brand name on a basis of answers from an interview.

The company has a well-planned brand name; however, we can extract some weaknesses. Because Karlskronahem's brand name falls into the group of descriptive brand names – which only describes the offering, not the benefits - the level of trademark protection is very low. Their name is not understandable to international markets, also they did not state that this as an important element. Subordinate to this point are also following: name cannot send positive connotations to potential users, it is not persuasive, easy to spell or read. However it can be easily translated into foreign language, because it is composed of two, simple words (Karlskrona and home). It fits the company image, is not offensive, obscene, or negative. It's legally registered and available for use (not in use by another firm). It's hard to tell if it's unique in competition. Because it contains the name of the city and because the company is public, internationally means it's unique, but because it is simple it may not be very unique. It's suited to package and it is always timely.

RQ 4: Do Swedish company and authors evaluate colors used in the symbol differently?

Meanings that both authors and company attach to each color in the symbol are similar. The company wanted to combine associations such as »Karlskrona«, »islands« and »home«. Karlskrona is known for its seaside location, navy, islands, which are all extremely important for its inhabitants.

Based on Taylor /40/, Bordeianu & Hristian /41/ and Frieling /42/, orange is warm and energetic. It suggests optimism and joy. It is associated with autumn, youth and sunrays. The blue color suggests winter, clarity, liquid or ice, cold temperatures and emotional coldness. It is associated with heaven, sky, sea, summer, law, uniform, navy, hair care products, cleanliness and antiseptic products. It is a calming, cold color.

Meanings come together perfectly. Their entire color scheme is based on complementary colors and with its usage they want to express multiculturalism, which they certainly achieved.

CONCLUSION

The identity of an organization is supposed to be an expression of characteristics of a company. These characteristics are transmitted towards external and internal stakeholders by three elements /43/: behaviour (of employees), communication (advertising, sponsoring, etc.) and symbols (logotypes, brand names, corporate dress, colors, typography etc.). The only more or less consistent element is the corporate symbol. What we wanted to show with this research is that is extremely important to very carefully choose elements of corporate visual identity and thereby create the desired image.

Due to limitations, we suggest further research. The changes that we proposed should be measured and then the most appropriate version should be applied. We assume that company's reputation is increased when behavior and intensive communication is added to image creation /44/ and therefore the perception of these elements is better. It would be interesting to analyze the current state of corporate visual identity with users who are already familiar with the company and already use their services. We also believe that intercultural and among different target groups, there are different responses to elements of corporate visual identity elements.

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KVALITETNA VIZUALIZACIJA PODUZEĆA ZA BOLJU PREPOZ- NATLJIVOST

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Sažetak

Zanimalo nas je kako stvoriti učinkovitu vizualizaciju tvrtke i koliko je velik utjecaj elemenata korporativnog vizualnog identiteta na prepoznavanje tvrtke. Ispitana je učinkovitost elemenata korporativnih vizualnih identiteta. Također smo bili zainteresirani koji su koraci u procesu dizajna. Postojeća tvrtka je uključena u naše istraživanje. Podaci su prikupljeni kroz kombinaciju razgovora, upitnika i anketa. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da tvrtka ima dobro planirano ime branda, tipografiju i boje. Oni se koriste odgovarajuće, ovisno o svrsi. Neki od ključnih elemenata simbolike u dizajnu (sklad, prirodnost i omjer) su loše dizajnirani, što za posljedicu ima negativan utjecaj simbola, simboli ne emitiraju željeni smisao i općenito ne pridonose izgradnji željenog branda ili imidža tvrtke.

Ključne riječi

vizualizacija tvrtke, korporativni vizualni identitet, boja, simbol, ime branda, tipografija