

A Study of Brand Image and Design

The Character Design for the Improvement of Brand Image

Mikio FUJITO*, Mikio YAMASHITA**, Yoji KITANI***

**Kyoto Institute of Technology DEM Hashigami-cho Matsugasaki Sakyo-ku Kyoto-shi 606-8585
JAPAN, mikio@ipc.kit.ac.jp*

***Japan Design Foundation 3-1-800 Umeda 1-Chome Kita-ku Osaka-shi 530-0001
JAPAN, yamashitajdf.or.jp*

****Kyoto Institute of Technology DEM Hashigami-cho Matsugasaki Sakyo-ku Kyoto-shi 606-8585
JAPAN, kitani@ipc.kit.ac.jp*

Abstract: In recent years, there has been a boom in ‘brand’ issues in a large number of companies. Why are we experiencing such a boom now? The one of possible reasons is the fear that China and Korea are going to catch up with Japan in the near future. On the other hand, if we could have a good corporate image, we would also be possible to get more profit. However, we do not know how to brush up a brand image, especially marketing specialists and designers in companies are not likely to have enough knowledge and skills. This report is to suggest some clues for finding some solutions for design management.

Key Words: Brand, Design, Image, Character Design, Design Management

Introduction

There is a boom in ‘brand’ these days. Books on brand management sell well, and people who engage in marketing, design and product development in companies often talk about ‘brand’ strategy. Behind this trend, there seems to be the intentions of companies to sell products at a higher price and obtain more profits by improving their image. This article aims to illustrate the relationship between the image and brand,” and the “design and brand.”

1. The Background of the Brand Boom

First of all, why have so many companies become interested in ‘brands’ recently? It may be caused by the following factors.

China and Korea Catching up with Japan

China and Korea are catching up with Japan in the manufacturing industry of household electric appliances, watches, and motorcycles. When one compares the average sales prices of watches, watches made in China cost 2,000 yen, watches made in Japan are 20,000 yen, and watches of the famous European brands are over 200,000 yen. Although most of the parts are made in Japan and there is no great difference in quality, there is such a great difference in price. This difference in price may depend on the difference in the image of the brand power of companies. Moreover, it can be said that this spread influences the differences on the profit of companies.

Considering the situation, the only option for Japanese companies is to heighten a brand name in order to

avoid China and Korea from catching up.

The Publication Boom of Books on 'Brand'

As a result of the trend mentioned above in , many 'brand' books have been published and influential on the boom of the 'brand' issues.

Advertisement Companies' Approaches

Major advertising agencies and consultant companies are calling for the improvement of the corporate image to many companies. All that matters here is whether it is possible to perform the improvement of corporate image in the field of advertising, and whether it covers whole products and sections of manufacturing and sales. How to improve a corporate image is one of the main subjects of this argument. On the other hand, because few major advertising agencies take charge of the work, similar brand strategies may be developed.

The Boom of the Fashion Brand

It is not clear whether it can be considered a general trend, there have been many store openings of European big-name fashion brands in Ginza, Tokyo, etc. Despite their high prices, they are quite popular and the percentage that the Japanese market occupies in their sales and profits tends to be high. This trend may remind Japanese companies of the importance of brand strategy.

This report will illustrate the meaning of 'brand' in this context and its recent effects.

2. The Meaning of 'Brand'

Companies bring goods on the market with differentiating strategies. They are divided roughly into the management of 'product identity' for each product, 'brand identity' for a series of products and 'corporate identity' for the whole corporation. Small and medium sized companies generally regard 'brand identity' in the same light as 'corporate identity.' Today many corporations accept proposals without considering theories, rules or the standards for improving the brand and corporate image. Although most manuals emphasize the importance of brand strategy, they do not propose any concrete and practical strategies. There are few established theories which can actually be applied to businesses. As a result, in the field of business, the way to make use of brand strategy on various products is obscure, and sometimes causes confusion in businesses. This article aims to propose some concrete plans in this field by giving examples and analyzing the social phenomena.

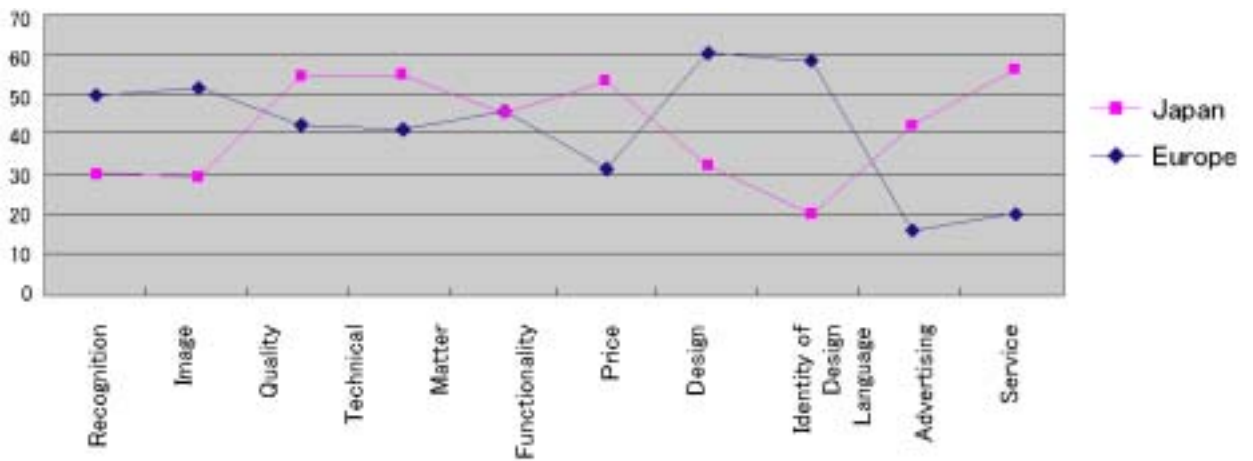
3. A Comparison of Brand Images in Japanese and Overseas Companies

This section shows a comparison of a brand image in Japanese and overseas companies. The following categories will be considered in the European and Japanese context.

1. Quality
2. Design
3. Price
4. Service
5. Store
6. Advertisement

Generally speaking, in the field of cars and watches, the brand power of the overseas products is more influential. Evaluation of household electrical appliances varies depending on the items. While the brand power of Japanese products is generally strong in audio-visual products, overseas products, mainly European, show their strength in the manufacturing and marketing of refrigerators and washing machines. Overseas products tend to specialize in design, quality and image, and Japanese products tend to specialize in quality, performance and price. (See Fig.1, 2)

Japan

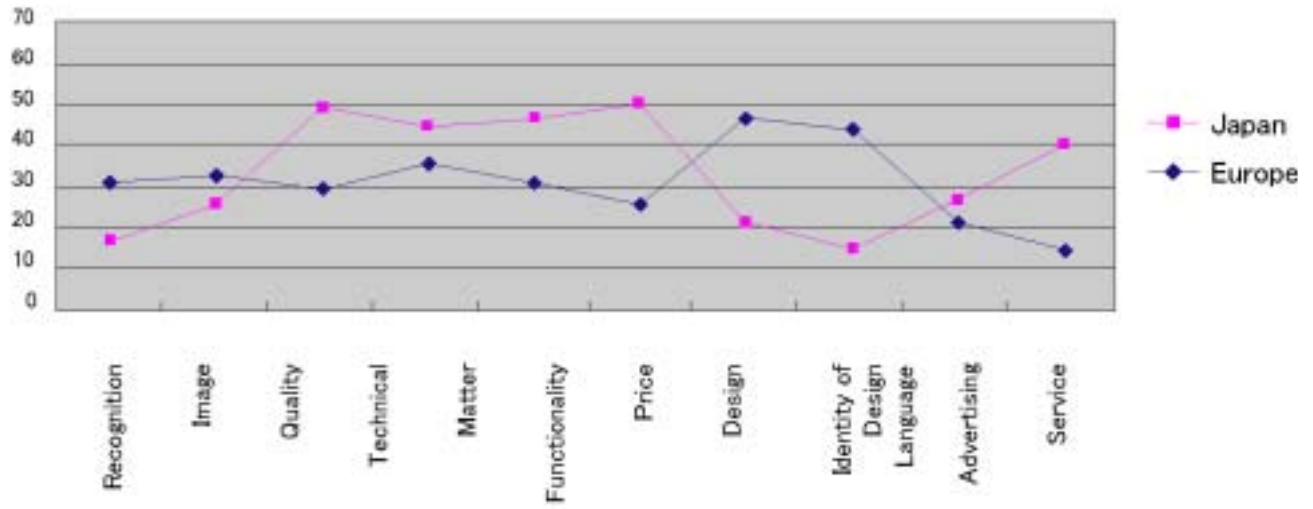


Europe



Figure1: Estimation of Automotive Company (n=150 5/2002)

Japan



Europe

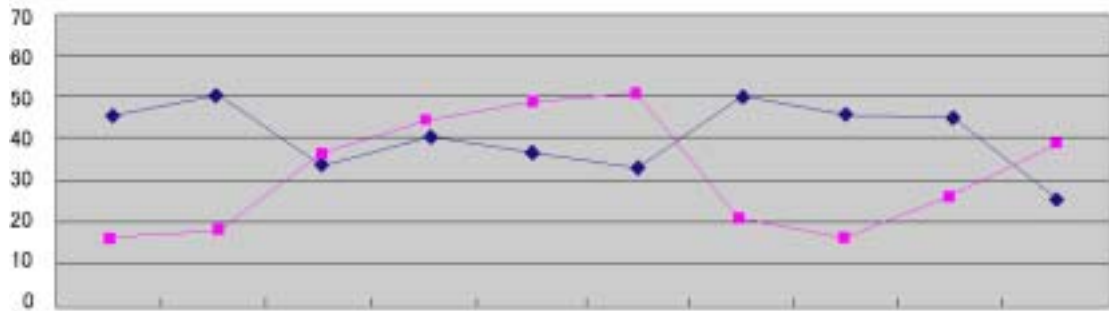


Figure2: Estimation of Electronics Company (n=150 5/2002)

4. Relation between Brands and Design

Good brand image is recognized in a mental process, in which consumers firstly have an impression that a product has good quality and desirable form (style and design). And as time passes, new products of the same company still attract people and remind them their policy and function. As a general rule, one should remember and memorize the brand. Visual elements have a remarkable effect. Advertisements include visual effects as well as product design. While products are made to be sold and durable, advertisements are only a tool for selling something and may be temporal. However, considering their visual effectiveness, they are both essential for brand management.

Compared with Japanese products in terms of the visual effect, European products that are highly recognized tend to have unified visual design and consistency in expression through time. This tendency is remarkable in the fields of cars, electric products, luxury goods, watches, and cosmetics.

5. Conclusion: the Best Use of Design in Brand Management

Though it may contradict what is mentioned above, each company has their own ideas and projects. That is to say, they should exhibit visual expression and display their function and quality. Therefore, in order to express brand identity, it is desirable to have its own means of visual expression and unity in ideas.

In other words, an unified visual expression of the company is the desirable. Many Japanese companies are prone to be influenced by the concepts of various goods, the designer's individuality, the best selling line of other companies, prices, problems with production, or factors of sales, and can not adopt their own unified design. However, in order to give priority to improving the brand image, getting it to be recognized, and appealing to the market, an unified language may be indispensable. To have an unified language means using unified grammar in language, sound, and expressions which create unity. When comparing the data of car and electricity companies in Europe and Japan by correlation coefficient, One will recognize that highly recognized companies that have a strong image use its own visual language.

(See Fig. 3,4,5,6.)

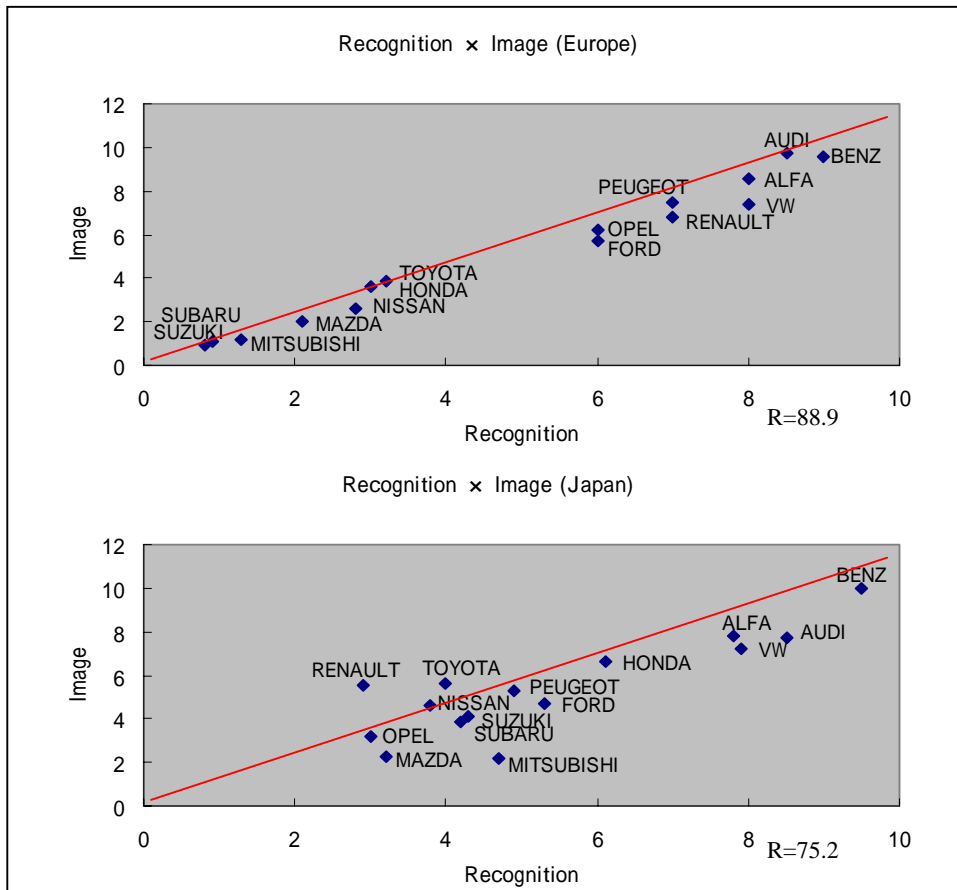


Figure3: Relation between Recognition x Image (Automotive) (n=150 5/2002)

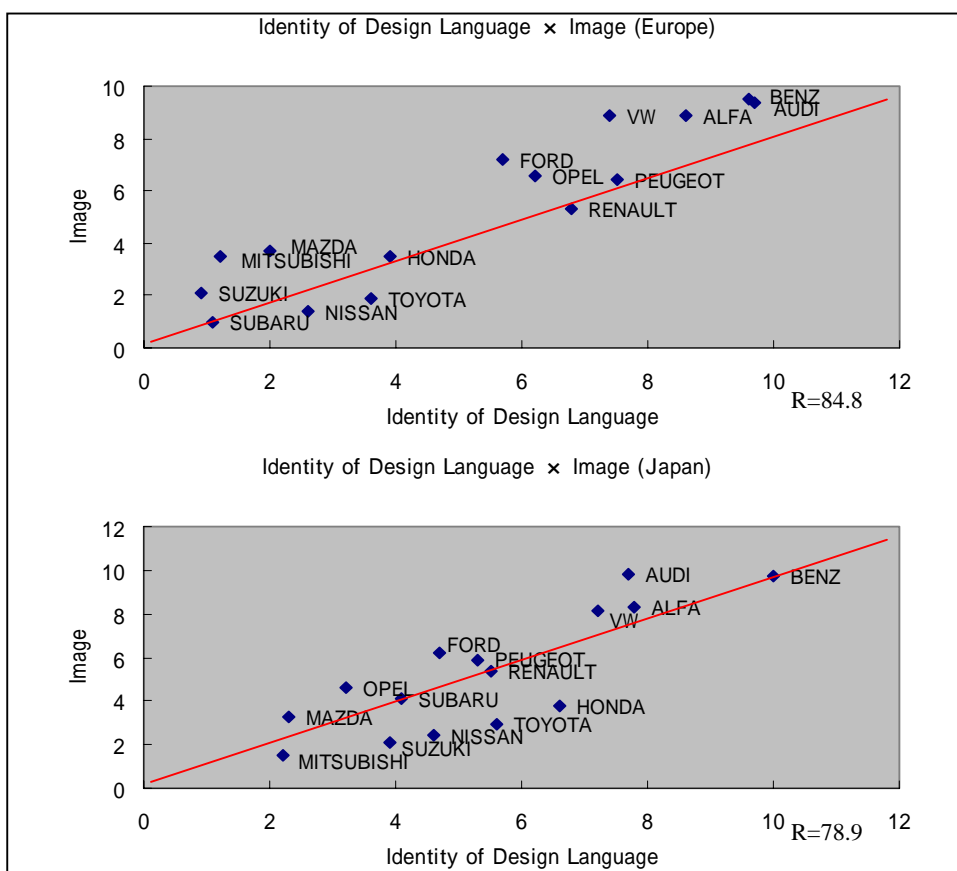


Figure4: Relation between Identity of Design Language x Image (Automotive) (n=150 5/2002)

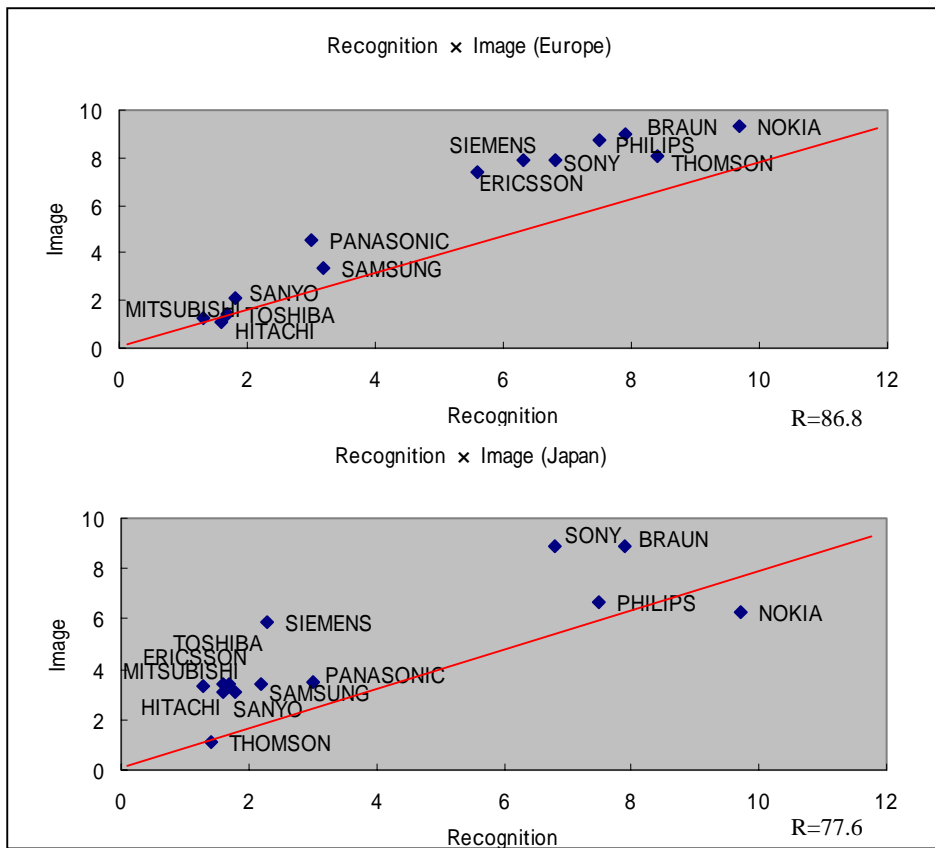


Figure5: Relation between Recognition x Image (Electric) (n=150 5/2002)

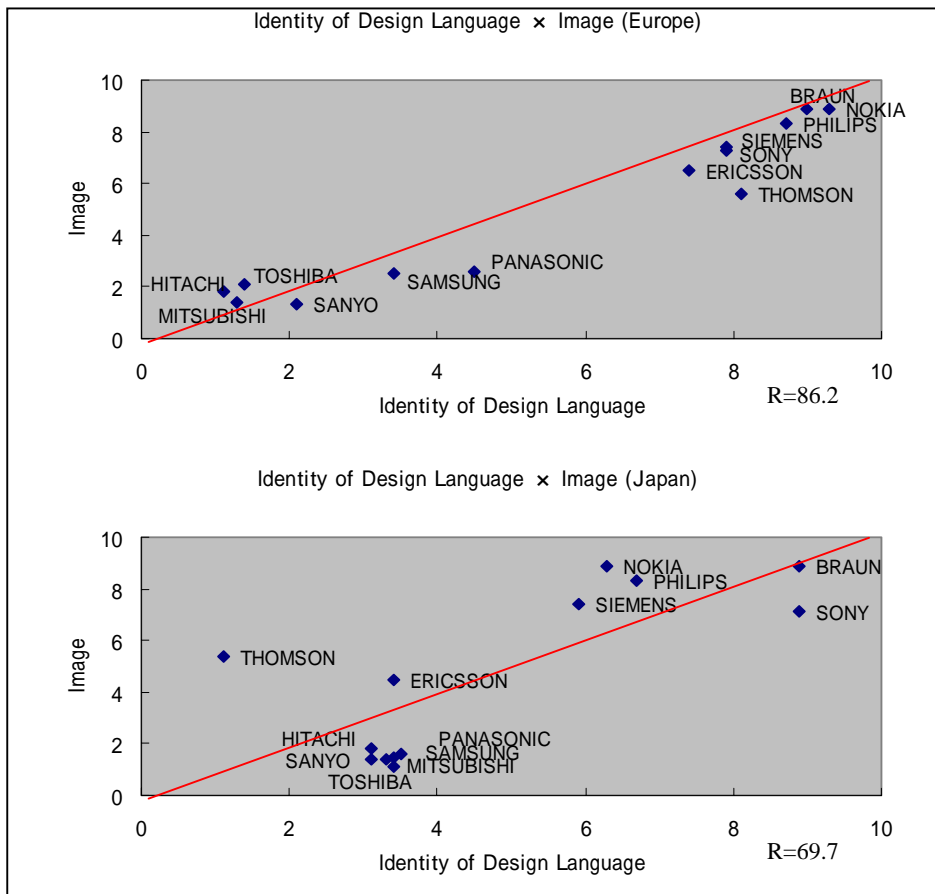


Figure6: Relation between Identity of Design Language x Image (Electric) (n=150 5/2002)

Thus, it is required to transpose the image of the company to visual elements, and such a visual language is called Character Design. In the design section of companies, adoption and practical use of this Character Design are shortcuts to the development of the brand. To evolve Character Design, keeping up with the times is as effective as design management (1).

There is a large gap between European and Japanese companies in the technique of Character Design itself. This technique is relevant to the development of brand image, and is one of the important subjects in future design management.

As you know and I described before, today there are few books of brand, researches and dissertations, which refer to the Character Design in Japan. And also, they may not be found even in Europe nor USA.

Though some companies recognize the importance of the character design, there has been no report to prove it using data. Even in the design department in companies, people who think much of the Character Design are quite a few. Most of the Japanese companies have not adopted the solution, because no report proved it by data. This report proves that the Character Design is effective in the Japanese market. It has not been done before.

However some designers point out the facts that though Japanese companies know its importance, it is difficult to carry out because of the large number of products. I should like to consider this issue in the next opportunity.

References

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