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Corporate Visual Identity Implementation and Management in SMEs

Case study: NDTC Group, Happy Foreigner World

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ABSTRACT

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Today, the competition between businesses is on the rise. The digital era has taken over and revolutionized the way people communicate and the way they do business. This trend has enabled new SMEs to obtain market from experienced companies and grow significantly faster than before. For these reasons, maintaining a solid and non-interchangeable company visual profile is more crucial now than ever.

Each organization has its own unique identity. It is incorporated in every company action, in both external and internal communication. From the subtlest activities like exchanging emails, business cards, to the most fundamental such as an annual report, a company of any size should communicate a consistent visual message. All of these reflect the company's professionalism and confidence in its way of doing business. Therefore, the application of CVI, which is normally used for big corporations as the term suggests to SMEs in order to facilitate their maintenance of visual profile was studied.

This thesis defines CVI and all its inclusive elements, and the methodology to manage it in SMEs. The thesis could be utilized as a supportive guideline for SMEs in setting up their visual profile or improving the current system in order to gain a competitive edge in the market. The research investigated the implementation of CVI and how it is currently managed in two random case companies, one in Hanoi, Vietnam and the other in Valencia Spain. A qualitative method was utilized to obtain insights from personnel, to discover the best practices and the current situation inside the two particular SMEs.

Keywords	CVI, Corporate Visual Identity, Brand Identity
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

1	LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	5
2	INTRODUCTION	7
	2.1 Objectives of the thesis	7
	2.2 Research problems	7
	2.3 Limitations of the research.....	8
	2.4 Terminologies	8
3	CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS	9
	3.1 General Introduction	9
	3.2 Corporate Identity	10
	3.2.1 The Birkigt and Stadler Model of Corporate Identity.....	12
	3.3 Corporate Reputation	13
4	CORPORATE VISUAL IDENTITY	15
	4.1 Corporate Visual Identity elements	16
	4.2 Function of Corporate Visual Identity	17
	4.2.1 The relationship between Corporate Identity and Corporate Reputation	18
	4.2.2 Five dimensions of Corporate Reputation supported by CVI.....	19
5	CORPORATE VISUAL IDENTITY MANAGEMENT	22
	5.1 Corporate Visual Identity Management methods	23
	5.2 Platform for managing intangible Company Visual Identity Elements..	24
	5.2.1 CVI marketing materials provided by managers of higher level	25
	5.2.2 CVI Marketing Materials Provided in a Shared Folder	25
	5.2.3 Third party platform for managing Company Visual Identity Elements.....	26
6	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH	27
	6.1 Research Methodology	27
	6.1.1 Interview Respondents	28
	6.1.2 Interviewing plan	29
	6.1.3 Validity and Reliability	30

6.1.4	Limitations	31
7	RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH	32
7.1	Acknowledgment of the benefit of CVI.....	32
7.2	CVI Implementation and Management.....	33
7.3	Platform for managing digital CVI materials and Respondents’ evaluation	37
7.4	Graphical elements.....	38
7.5	Challenges.....	43
7.6	Prioritization for CVI elements.....	45
8	CONCLUSION	47
8.1	Empirical Research Evaluation.....	47
8.2	General Conclusion.....	49
	REFERENCES.....	51
	APPENDICE.....	54

1 LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1: Shell's logo evolution from 1909 to today	p. 11
Figure 2: The Birkigt and Stadler Model of Corporate Identity	p. 12
Figure 3. Corporate identity in relation to Corporate Reputation	p. 18
Figure 4. CVI supports Corporate Reputation and its dimensions	p. 19
Figure 5. NDTC Group logo	p. 21
Figure 6. Organizational characteristics, CVI management characteristics, and CVI management instruments	p. 24
Table 1: A brief overview of two cases companies	p. 29
Table 2: The two cases companies' acknowledgment of CVI	p. 32
Table 3: CVI Implementation and Management	p. 34
Table 4: Platform for managing digital CVI materials	p. 37
Table 5: Graphical elements	p. 39
Figure 7.1: Happy Foreigner Website interface	p. 40
Figure 7.2: Happy Foreigner World's logo	p. 40
Figure 7.3 Happy Foreigner World's advertisement in Valencia	p. 42
Table 6: Challenges in CVI management for two companies	p. 44
Table 7: Prioritization for CVI elements	p. 46
Table 8.1. Evaluation of CVI Management in the two case companies	p. 47
Table 8.2. Result summary CVI Management in the two case companies	p. 49

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Interview Questionnaire

2 INTRODUCTION

The first chapter includes the objectives, research problems, limitation and terminologies of the thesis, with the purpose to assist the reader to navigate through the content of the thesis

2.1 Objectives of the thesis

The main objective of this thesis is to introduce the concept of Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) for Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the methodology required for its implementation and management. Corporate Visual Identity system is not a new phenomenon, but as the name suggested, this concept is more relatable to big corporations. However, even for SMEs, Visual Identity management is necessary for maintaining their originality and non-interchangeable ability (Martina, Alzbeta, Erika, 2015). The implementation of a CVI system ensures that a company applies brand value to every visual element for the purpose of promoting its image (Joy Miller; 2015). The success of CVI implementation in a company requires good management to ensure the marketing materials are correctly produced and utilized on a daily basis. However, the study does not intend to focus on every marketing material, but instead, the focus is on the management methodology in order to maintain the consistency of CVI on a daily basis.

The research section of the thesis aims to give a general impression of how CVI was implemented in the 2 chosen SMEs. It expresses the practicalities in the application of CVI, in terms of management, methodology, and challenge. Additionally, the research will focus on specific issues of the company when the implementation took place, so the insights could shed light on the topic.

2.2 Research problems

In order to clarify the main points of the aforementioned objectives of the thesis and facilitate the study in following the right direction, the three major research questions are given

1. What is CVI and what are the elements included in the concept?
2. How was CVI implemented in certain SMEs in practical situations?

2.3 Limitations of the research

The research firstly introduces CVI from a business perspective, and strongly focuses on the implementation of management methodology for the concept in SMEs. Visual identity is expressed in many ways, from the small and most basic objects such as a signature pen to something as significant as an architectural building (Annette L.M. van den Bosch, Wim J.L. Elving, Menno D.T. de Jong, (2006). However, the study only mentions and explains briefly all the elements (logos, color palette, imagery, and typography) of any object considered marketing materials instead of presenting the specific details and examples for each element. The limitation is implemented to prevent the thesis from being analyzed from a graphical design perspective. In case the reader wants to do more in-depth research of psychological effects and guidelines to design signature patterns in practical, it is suggested that he or she should investigate more materials related to the field of graphical design.

Second, the research only includes two random SMEs, which were chosen to give an impression of the practicalities and the set of techniques that can be implemented in SMEs in practice. Therefore, this thesis does not present the situation of how SMEs are currently implementing Company Visual Identity system anywhere geographically. Further, researchers are suggested to investigate on a quantitative basis to cover more companies and to draw a conclusion on the current situation of CVI in SMEs in a specific geographical area.

2.4 Terminologies

In the thesis, the term Corporate Visual Identity will be used in significantly many situations. I will refer to this concept in many different ways of expression: CVI, CVI guideline, CVI system, Organizational Visual Identity, and Visual Identity. VIA stands for Visual Identity Assets, which has the same meaning.

Marketing materials are defined as all company literature, printed pieces which represent its characteristics, values, vision, services or products (Entrepreneur Europe, 2018), which again consists of many elements such as: business cards, newsletters, catalogs, product brochures, presentation templates, posters, advertisements, websites, labels, email templates.

3 CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

3.1 General Introduction

In this chapter, corporate communication will be selectively introduced and analyzed. I chose to include this concept in the thesis because corporate communication is a broader concept that covers Corporate Visual Identity. Therefore, the chapter gives a short introduction to Corporate Communications and the selective theory related to CVI.

In the past, the term corporate communication was used in equivalence with the term 'Public Relation' (Richard J. Varey. 2002, 4). However, when stakeholders, internal and external personnel develop a need for more information from the company, Corporate Communications become more than just 'Public Relations'. According to (Podnar, 2015), Corporate Communication is an organizational function to which is responsible for the integration between internal and external communication of the company. This ensures that all the stakeholders regardless of any levels of the company are properly notified and it maintains consistency and differentiation of brand message. The main concern of Corporate Communication is to create a unified and consistent guideline, so all the activities from individual departments in an organization could follow it and avert all miscommunication, misunderstanding, and abnormality.

There are many forms of communications which are used in practice. Some remarkable examples are corporate story and spirit, messages from CEO or high-level management, company sponsorship, celebrity endorser, personnel behavior, corporate marketing, and Corporate Visual Identity. The bigger the size of the organization, the more important it is to establish an efficient form of communication to ensure CVI is properly or consistently implemented according to general guidance.

According to (Podnar 2015, 9), corporate communication is the channel and set of methodology that a corporation uses to communicate its identity. Simply understood, corporate identity answers the question of what the corporation is, while corporate communication address how or in which channels the communications can take place. Podnar also pointed out that corporate communication shows that there is a link between corporate identity, image, and reputation. In addition, Van den Bosch, A. L. M., de Jong, M. D. T., & Elving,

W. J. L. (2006) advised that one should seek in the relationship between corporate identity, image, and reputation in order to figure out the importance of Corporate Visual Identity for organizations. In the following headline, I will discuss this concept and the related theory.

3.2 Corporate Identity

Corporate Identity has been defined as attributes that distinguish one entity from another, giving it consistency and continuity, and contribute to its differentiation, stability, unity, and visibility by (van Riel 1995, Podnar 2003). However, there are other definitions to this concept, which are mainly derived from graphical designer's perspectives and which identify characteristics mostly in graphical symbols. In fact, originally, corporate identity and company house style, visual identification were considered synonyms (Cees B.M. van Riel, John M.T. Balmer, 1997). According to Podnar (2015), the modern understanding of identity should not only be considered from many different perspectives, but it should also be defined holistically. Corporate Identity reflects the reality of an organization and gathers a mix of actual characteristics to enhance its uniqueness. Having a corporate identity is vital for success whatever size of the firm. The globalization of business is happening and leading the way for many new corporations to establish operation around the world, creating more competition than ever. In order to make sure the organization is visible, companies need to creatively and properly present their identity. This identity ensures they cut through the clutter and maintain a remarkable profile in the mind of their target customers.

Although Corporate Identity is the foundation for all communications activities and the most fundamental features of the organization, it is not unchangeable. Corporate Identity directly aligns with corporate changes (Wally Olins, 1989), whether it is an acquisition, change in management, company architecture or a new marketing strategy. The case company used in the thesis (NDTC Group) currently implements its logo as a symbol of four brown moraceae leaves, which represents the four sectors of the company. However, if the company had the intention of diversifying the business to a fifth sector, the change of logo will be unavoidable.

The adaptation of new Corporate Identity is not only triggered by the need to stay relevant, but also the company might just need a new and refreshing image which appears more attractive to the audience. It is common for small companies and start-ups to pay little attention to company identity, especially their visual identity at the beginning of

their operation due to the lack of budget, skilled personnel, knowledge and motivation. The findings in the study of (Nyman, J. 2013) suggested that entrepreneurs in a start-up context consider corporate identity is an important aspect, however, they would put more focus on improving corporate culture and communication instead.

The graphical system is usually created and modified in-house and sometimes the personnel responsible does not have any previous knowledge in graphical design. For example, the logo might be of low quality, or its combination of color is conflicting and unmatched. As time goes by, the management often invests on the quality of the graphics, by adding color and details to make the logo more powerful and appealing. That is one of the reasons to suggest a change on visual identity, which is to adapt to modernization, to follow the constantly-changing design trends (Annette L.M. van den Bosch, Wim J.L. Elving, Menno D.T. de Jong. 2006). To illustrate how the changes in the corporation management could affect the corporate identity of the company, I take the most important graphical element of the company as an example – which is the logo. **Figure 1.** shows the revolution of Shell's logo, which evolved from 1909 till today. The logo started as a plain black and white shell icon, with low-quality graphics and little representation of the company's unique characteristics. The logo was altered detail by detail over time to improve its aesthetic features and incorporate the characteristics of the company into it. The most recent logo that is still used today is considered much better than the original one because it follows three rules, according to the criteria created by Podnar (2015, 121): (1) It is simple and easy to remember, (2) The color is bold and attracts attention, (3) It is unique and represents the company, instead of something such as a plain seashell.

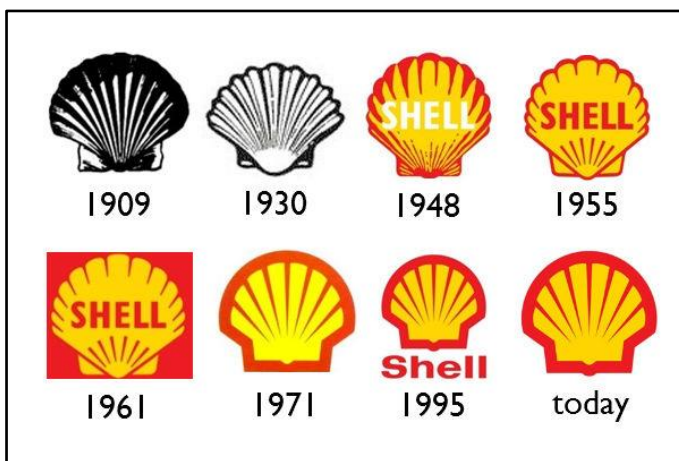


Figure 1. Shell's logo evolution from 1909 to today

3.2.1 The Birkigt and Stadler Model of Corporate Identity

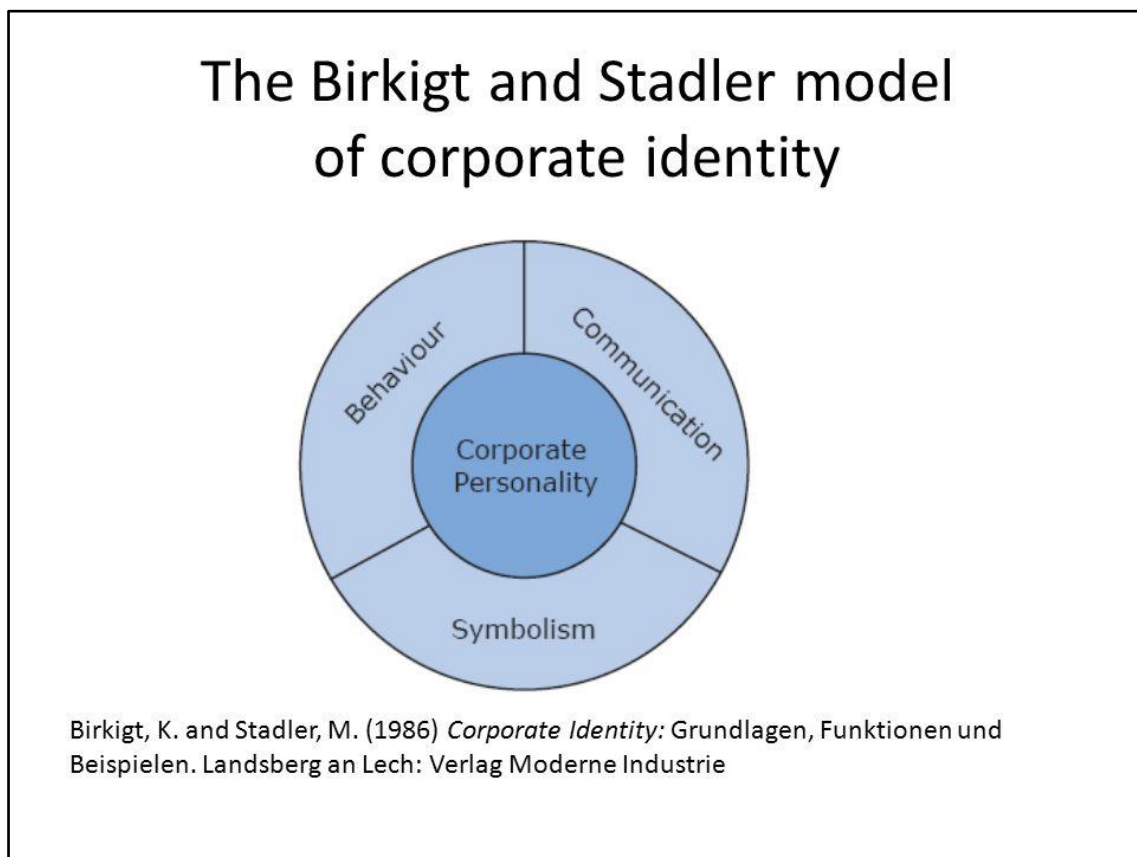


Figure 2. The Birkigt and Stadler Model of Corporate Identity

One important objective of corporate communication is to manage corporate identity and how it is perceived by the stakeholders. According to Joep Cornelissen (2004, 66), the concept of corporate identity is no longer limited to only logos and visual design, instead, it consists of all forms of communication and behaviors that appear in the marketplace. Birkigt and Stadler are the two German corporate design specialists who came up with the aforementioned models, illustrating all the aspects that relate to corporate personality, or in other words, corporate identity. The model encompasses three elements of corporate identity: behavior, communication, and symbolism. The three elements are perceived by the outside world and they directly influence the company image (Joep Cornelissen, 2004, 66) First of all, company behaviors refer to all personnel behavior, from the employees who directly work with customers in the frontline, to the highest level of management in the company. All of the personnel in the company have a certain impact on the general impression of the company behavior, and this eventually influences the corporate personality as a whole. In some cases, the bad behavior of one or two individuals might sabotage the general behavior of the whole group, even though everyone else is performing well

(Olins, W. 1978, p13). The second element that directly affects the corporate identity is communication, which includes all the marketing communications, activities that a company implement for the purpose of promoting its image. Examples of this form of communication are press releases, advertisements, sponsorships, social events, trade fairs, and other promotional activities. The last element is symbolism, which could also be referred to as Corporate Visual Identity, which will be discussed in detail later in the thesis.

3.3 Corporate Reputation

After understanding the concept of corporate identity, which is how companies want the public to know about them, it is essential to investigate corporate reputation, which is the perceived image of the public about the company. In other words, corporate reputation and public image are the end-result of all the brand messages published by the company. Because it would be insufficient to create an identity and not ensure that it is correctly or fully understood by the public, companies need to take control of the perceived image and reputation.

In order to seek a correct definition for corporate reputation, Manto Gotsi, Alan M. Wilson (2001) have put together, studied and analyzed various scholar and academics materials. They concluded the definition for corporate reputation as a stakeholders' overall evaluation of the company over time, which relies on either their direct experience with the company or any other types of communication and symbolism that express company business operation.

Differentiation between Corporate Image and Corporate Reputation

Corporate image is another concept that also describes the perceived image of the company. Although the focus of the thesis is on company reputation, corporate image will be briefly mentioned to avoid mixing of these two definitions. It is common that corporate image and corporate reputation are mistakenly interpreted as one concept even in academic literature. Although both concepts are similar to each other, there is a considerable difference between them (Podnar. 2015) corporate image refers to the personal impression of a company, while corporate reputation is formed over time by a larger group of people through judgment on company behaviors and performance. All forms of communications of the company have direct effects on company image. In the long run, as many messages are received by the public, a reputation will be formed. company reputation will

exist as long as there is a group of people who shared the same judgment and evaluation of the company (Podnar, 2015, p158).

A reputation could affect the organization in two ways, it could bring strategic value to the business, or it could rapidly destroy it. All organization, regardless of size, need to maintain a good reputation in doing business. Good reputation generates many positive impacts on operations of a business. The most remarkable benefit is the increase in sales and financial performance. Some other benefits are high morale among employees and stakeholders, good support from the general public and authority, and additionally, it might form an intangible asset which enhances the company's competitive edge, making replication of its business model become more difficult (Podnar. 2015)

4 CORPORATE VISUAL IDENTITY

According to Baker and Balmer (1997) and Melewar (2001), corporate visual identity is defined as a visual element of corporate identity. Therefore, corporate visual identity is based on corporate identity. It is a visual statement of a company identity, which exists to present the characteristics and attributes to anyone associated with it.

Visual identity of a company is expressed through some key elements. The two most basic elements are logo and name. The rest of the elements are subtler, but they remain to be the signature of a company, such as its color, tagline, typography and other company descriptors (Klement Podnar, 2015). These visual elements are carefully designed and aligned with the company identity, and they are selectively chosen to apply to various marketing materials: such as uniforms, banners, office supplies, presentation templates, signposts, stamps, vehicle fleets, paper layout, website design, and the internal and external architecture and design of the company's property (Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al. 2006). Google is one example of a company which applies its visual identity to the design of its office. The company incorporates the characteristics of the brand, which are humor, fun, creativity, and free movement, into the workplace environment in the form of colorful decoration, funny images and interactive games (Courtney Price, 2015). This idea encourages creativity and innovation from employees and stimulates the brain power to its maximum level by using the power of interior design.

Visual identity is not limited to only the elements that could be perceived visually, but it also covers the elements that are identified by all other senses, for example, the sound, the smell and the touch (Klement Podnar, 2015). However, this thesis only discusses the visual elements that could be perceived visually, because the aim is to ensure the thesis remains targeted and focused, rather than scratching the surface on all theories about CVI.

Many people believe in a myth that creating a corporate visual identity is fully responsible by designers. However, taking into consideration people with a designer background, they believe that from the first stage of designing visual identity, all the visual elements must be based on a company's real identity (Klement Podnar, 2015). This notion ensures that the CVI system integrates all the remarkable characteristics into its visual representation. Therefore, designers do not usually work alone in this with this. They cooperate with personnel from other backgrounds, such as strategists, copywriters, marketing department

and a host of other professionals to optimize the quality of the work delivered (Design Is History, 2018). Since this study approaches the matter from a business perspective, it could provide outsider's knowledge for designers responsible for creating a CVI guideline for companies.

4.1 Corporate Visual Identity elements

Although a company usually have a large number of marketing materials, all of them consist of these five visual elements that work together to create visual unity for the brand. (Jessie Ford Coots. 2018). The five visual elements are logo, typography, color palette, imagery, and other graphical elements, and they will be briefly mentioned and explained in this chapter of the thesis. Practicalities regarding graphical design are not discussed in details.

1. **Logo:** The logo is the most fundamental element of any brand. The logo is a unique symbol and represents the characteristics of the company, which are recognized by both internal employees and your clients. Both case companies in the thesis have agreed that the logo is the top priority in CVI implementation, and they put the most efforts in creating and improving it. The logo presents on various preferred supplies, and they are the indispensable part of all marketing materials.
2. **Typography:** The typography is the collection of fonts that used in CVI implementation in various places in the marketing materials. The fonts are selected in advance and incorporate in the tagline of the logo, headline or simply in the document template. Most of the SMEs take advantage of the fonts which are provided in the computer system, which are also the case of two companies in the thesis. Nonetheless, companies are recommended to create their own typography system to bring additional characteristics to their brand, as long as they ensure all the personalized fonts are downloaded and implemented in the computer system accessible by employees if necessary.
3. **Color palette:** Color Palette is the collection of color that are repetitively used in various visual elements of the company. The number of colors is usually from 3 – 6 colors and they are required to work well together. The color is recommended to be chosen according to brand personalities and clients' preference. Although the Color Palette consists of many colors, it is preferable to avoid using two contrast color palettes. In the case of Happy Foreigner World, the company has two color palettes, one is blue and white on the website and the other is a colorful

palette on all other marketing materials. The chosen of two palettes as such creates confusion for customers, but the company is currently working on a solution to this.

4. **Imagery:** It is essential for images to generate a consistent feeling and characteristics. In addition, SMEs should develop a common folder to store all company photos, they facilitate the consistency in CVI implementation, save time and effort, as well as avoid copyright infringement on the use of images. Currently, HPW is doing a great job in this area by creating a guideline for taking and using photos correctly, resulting in a consistency in terms of imagery in marketing materials.
5. **Supporting graphic elements:** The rest of the elements consist of various graphical practicalities, like icons, shapes, patterns, textures, and lines, which are used complementarily only in certain cases. They should be systematically stored in the common folders under the right name, size, and purpose. If the work of the employees does not concern with these elements, they could be made available only for graphical designers or personnel working in this area.

4.2 Function of Corporate Visual Identity

The visual identity system exists everywhere in our daily life, and it always takes astute management to properly implement it. Visual identity systems are used in many places outside the business world: in sports teams, student uniforms, in the army, in a parade or even on a brand created by a single person. One main purpose of the visual identity in such cases is to create consolidation between many entities – to unify many as one. When a person is wearing the color, it would represent something bigger than oneself and create a sense of proudness and devotion. Similarly, in the business world, proper management of Visual Identity could create a considerable effect on the employees, which makes them proud of working for the company and share the leader's vision and responsibility. However, that is only the major benefit of Visual Identity. The system has been proven to bring even more value, as it was illustrated by the five positive effects that CVI has on company reputation, in the form of visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency, and consistency (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2004). The model will be explained in further detail below.

(Annette L.M. van den Bosch, Menno D.T. de Jong, Wim J.L. Elving, 2005) demonstrated and concluded that Corporate Visual Identity provides supportive value for building and maintaining a good corporate reputation. Also, taking into consideration the model based on C.B.M. Van Riel, and J. Balmer (1997), **Figure 3.** expresses how symbolism, which is one of the corporate identity elements, has influenced the Corporate Reputation and, ultimately, on organizational performance. Although companies are highly interested in creating a good reputation, they have a tendency to undermine the importance of CVI. The consistency in visual identity of a company is similar to that of the person, the more they are capable of maintaining professionalism and consistency in their appearance, the more likable they are by others, and ultimately the better the reputation they gradually create. Therefore, Visual Identity is a useful tool to apply to any organization (Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al, 2015) in order to support the public image and reputation.

4.2.1 The relationship between Corporate Identity and Corporate Reputation

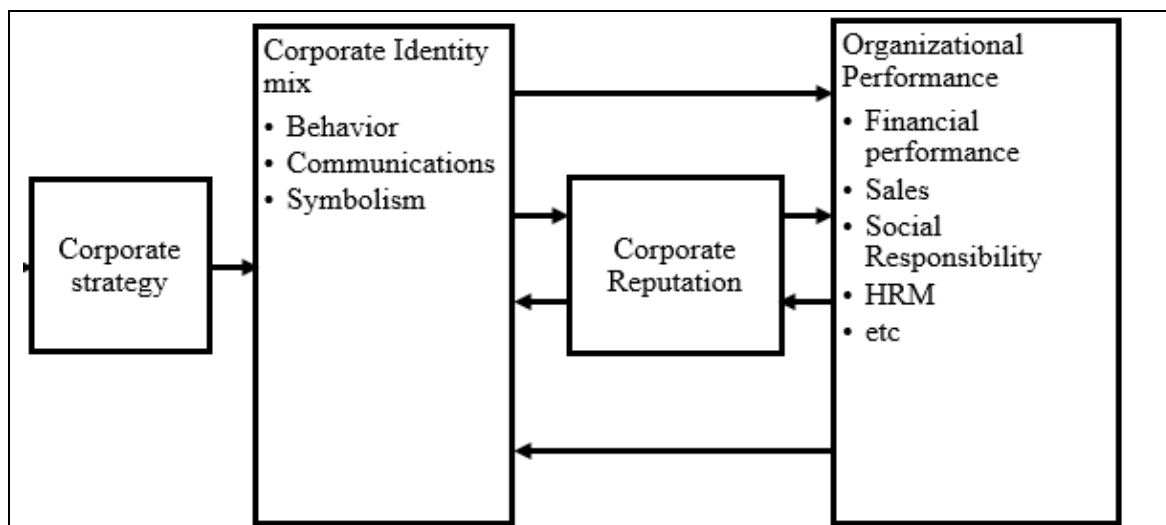


Figure 3. Corporate identity in relation to corporate reputation.

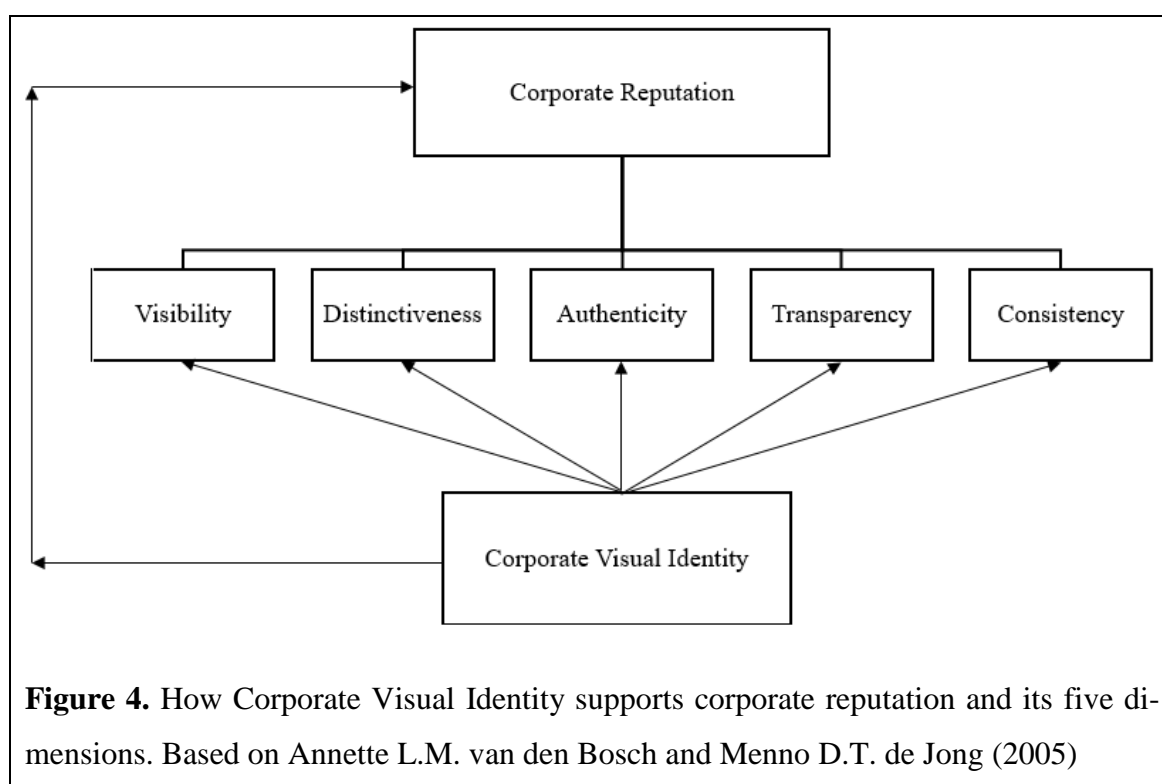
(based on C.B.M. Van Riel, and J. Balmer (1997), 'Corporate Identity: The concept, its measurement, and management', European Journal of Marketing, 31:342)

According to Cees B.M. van Riel, John M.T. Balmer. (1997), the main objective of corporate identity is to create a favorable reputation which supports business performance. The model in **Figure 3.** clearly illustrates the fact that three concepts: corporate identity, corporate reputation, and organizational performances are connected and influential to each other. The better a corporation defines and maintains a good corporate identity by

carefully controlling and monitoring its behavior, communications, and symbolism, the better reputation it receives, this again ultimately creates positive benefits for the organizational performance. The influence also applies the other way around, when a company has good business performance, this creates a good reputation for them and strengthen the corporate identity.

4.2.2 Five dimensions of Corporate Reputation supported by CVI

Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al. (2015) have demonstrated how Corporate Visual Identity supports Corporate Reputation based on five dimensions of corporate reputation model created by Fombrun and Van Riel (2004). The five dimensions of reputations are visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency, and consistency (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2004) and Corporate Visual Identity management supports them all together.



Visibility

Visibility is defined by Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al (2015) as the prominence of the company in the eyes of the customers. A company acquires visibility when customers can see it and acknowledge its existence. This element includes all the exposure in many

places such as the media, stock exchange, on the street or for example, someone mentioning the company name. In this case, CVI supports visibility by enhancing the company's presence, and by using the psychological effects of the name, symbol, color, it creates a strong perception in the mind of the customers. CVI also increases the exposure of the company brand to the public using logo architecture, or building design, specially created to draw attention to the company.

Distinctiveness

This element concerns the uniqueness of the company and how it could stand out from the competition. Every company should aim to distinguish themselves from the others, even when they have substantial similarity with the competitors. Instead of spending many hours trying to explain how the company is different than its competitors in the form of text, it is much more powerful and easier to create and utilize a system of symbols, slogans and visual appearance that demonstrates the distinctive quality of a company. The case company used in this thesis (NDTC Group) is well-aware of their differences and the need to align their visual identity with it. They focus on two words in the promise, which is local expertise and professionalism. As an example, for the latter, the company strives to always maintain a formal presence in a business meeting and the employees are required to dress impeccably in suits and ties with a company logo icon on the suit lapel. They acknowledge that there are not many companies in Vietnam which could deliver a professional approach, so they consider this is a strategic advantage they have on other competitors.

Authenticity

The existence of Corporate Visual Identity increases the credibility of a company because it represents a promise that they make to the public. The visual identity system enables the company to deliver a story to the customers, and when they deliver a personal story, it creates a more reliable, personal and transparent company image. According to Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al (2015), CVI does not directly represent authenticity, but there are some cases where the visual elements actually refer back to the root of the company. In addition, they represent its belief and principles. NDTC Group uses a symbol of a four-lobed leaves (Figure 5), which are considered sacred by Hindus, and Buddhists. So, using this symbol as the company logo, NDTC Group implies that they incorporate the principle and the morality of Buddhism into the company behavior, communicating trust and reliability in the Vietnamese community.



Figure 5. NDTC Group's logo

Transparency

The more transparent the corporation is, the more reliable it appears from the perspectives of stakeholders. According to Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al (2015), CVI can support the transparency of the corporation in two ways: (1) It illustrates the corporate architecture that encompasses the main brand and all its subsidiaries, (2) Depending on the interest of the company, they could provide a special logo that could be used to legitimate the operating of the company by proving that it provides high-quality products or service, and meets a certain reliable standard.

Consistency

The last dimension is consistency, which supports company reputation and CVI guideline exists to enhance this consistency (Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al, 2015) In fact, the main purpose of Corporate Visual Identity is to support consistency, through a form of a guideline, clear instructions on how to properly implement the visual elements of the company. The guideline ensures all type of communications follow the same visual design, which acts as a visual cue for stakeholders to identify company brand whenever they see the company's marketing materials. The most common and conspicuous visual element in the Corporate Visual Identity system is color, which could be used to illustrate how consistency supports reputation. The use of color is implemented in NDTC Group marketing strategy, and all the marketing materials from the company follow brown color design with clear instruction from the CVI manual. In this way, the company could create a strong impression of the brand, so whenever the brand color and design are presented, it is associated with the company brand. In this way, the design facilitates the growth of reputation among stakeholders.

5 CORPORATE VISUAL IDENTITY MANAGEMENT

Corporate Visual Identity is not a concept that companies could apply and neglect it after it has set into motion. Although most of the effort and investment are required when creating a new visual identity or a new change to current visual identity, constant management practices are essential even after the implementation of the new image, in order to monitor, scrutinize and take corrective measure whenever the visual guideline is not thoroughly followed. van den Bosch, et al (2006) pointed out that after the new CVI is implemented, attention to CVI related issues generally decreases. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon that companies do not pay sufficient attention to Visual Identity after they introduce and implement it, allowing distortion and misunderstanding to happen even with the existence of such guidelines. van den Bosch, et al (2006) also mentioned that it is essential for a company to form a structure in managing CVI, to ensure that the guidelines are internalized and fully adopted by the employees, and kept up with company's future development. To function optimally, a company should utilize a system to store and manage all forms of marketing materials, which could be accessed by all the employees who are responsible for working with them. All marketing materials, especially those which are used externally, should be subject to constant or random inspection to assure the correct implementation of visual identity. In the case of company development which demands changes to Corporate Visual Identity, the guidelines should be updated automatically regarding all graphical elements. This set-up keeps the employees informed about the organizational development, which decreases the time and effort of introducing and communicating changes across all levels of the organization.

There is also one important point why companies need to monitor and control the use of Corporate Visual Identity: CVI cuts both ways. On one side, it brings a positive effect to the company reputation if managed efficiently, but on the other side, it damages the company reputation if the management does not succeed in controlling it. (Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al, 2015) Taking as an example, a company vehicle with the corporate logo might be stacked up with many layers of dirt after being driven for a long time without washing. That careless appearance not only forms a bad image of the company which owns that vehicle, but it might also give an impression of how such a company takes care of its asset and employees in general. (Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al, 2015). The same could apply to many other elements, such as any printed company marketing materials, dirty employee uniforms, a sloppy email template or bad User Experience on company website, to name a few. Company management should strike to take good care

of all the visible brand elements to ensure they serve their purposes well, instead of back-firing and generating unprecedentedly bad reputation.

5.1 Corporate Visual Identity Management methods

Annette L.M. van den Bosch, Wim J.L. Elving, Menno D.T. de Jong, (2006) considered Corporate Visual Identity as an important strategic instrument within Corporate Communication. It is highly important that a significant level of consistency needs to be maintained when implementing CVI. In most cases, to ensure the success in implementing CVI, large investment and effort are required on both stages, which are the induction of CVI and the management in using CVI.

There are three rules that companies must follow when creating a new Visual Identity, and they are Simple (easy to remember), unique and aesthetically durable (attractive for a long period of time) (Podnar, 2015, p.121). These rules do not only facilitate the identity to stay visible and attractive, but they also reassure that the CVI can be implemented with ease.

Van den Bosch, A. L. M., de Jong, M. D. T., & Elving, W. J. L. (2004) conducted research to understand the various measure and their effectiveness on the consistency of a CVI. They presented all the management methods and tools which could be utilized to consistently implement Corporate Visual Identity. The list of specific management tools that managers could use is presented in the third column of **Figure 6**. These CVI management instruments encompass Up-to-date CVI guidelines, Access to CVI guidelines, Extensive CVI guidelines, Regular Consultation with Users, Preferred Suppliers, Technical Tools, Managers Setting an Example, CVI as a topic in induction programs, CVI helpdesk, and CVI manager. Up-to-Date CVI Guidelines, Access to CVI Guidelines, Extensive CVI Guidelines, Regular Consultation with Users, Preferred Suppliers are understood as, for example, signs on buildings, uniform, instruction from supervisors or printed or digital guideline. Technical Tools refer to pre-designed templates for word processing and presentations. The rest of the instruments are Managers Setting an Example, CVI as a Topic in Induction Programs, and the existence of a CVI Helpdesk and/or CVI Manager as support and motivation for employees to implement CVI successfully. To understand this study in details, the reader is recommended to study further into the research conducted by Van den Bosch, A. L. M., de Jong, M. D. T., & Elving, W. J. L. (2004).

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Organization and CVI Management Characteristics</i>	<i>CVI Management Instruments</i>
Consistent CVI	Knowledge of organization strategy Tools and support Managerial quality Internal communication Open and dynamic Knowledge of CVI strategy CVI tools and support CVI socialization processes	Up-to-date CVI guidelines Access to CVI guidelines Extensive CVI guidelines Regular consultation with users Preferred suppliers Technical tools Managers setting an example CVI as a topic in induction programs CVI helpdesk CVI manager

Figure 6. Organizational characteristics and CVI management characteristics, and CVI management instruments based on a study conducted by Van den Bosch, A. L. M., de Jong, M. D. T., & Elving, W. J. L. (2004)

The results of the research show that all the measures overall create a positive effect on the consistency of Corporate Visual Identity (Van den Bosch et al., 2004). But specifically, the study concludes that two of the measures, which are **Up-to-date CVI Guideline** and **Management setting an example** are the two most important and influential instruments. (Van den Bosch et al., 2004). Therefore, companies of any size are recommended to implement all the aforementioned instruments to manage CVI efficiently, while paying attention to providing up-to-date CVI guidelines and setting an example as managers.

5.2 Platform for managing intangible Company Visual Identity Elements

The intangible CVI elements, in this case, refer to presentation templates, banners, header of documents, company logo banks, company images and all other digital visual elements, which are highly essential in representing the brand. It is common for SMEs, especially the small companies and start-ups, to manage all digital brand assets manually. This means that most of the time, the company's personnel need to actually do the work in terms of searching, distributing and updating materials. There are two common ways SMEs use to store, distribute and update all their visual elements: CVI marketing materials provided by managers of higher level and CVI marketing materials provided in a shared folder, which are the manual methods of managing CVI elements. However, companies can choose to automate CVI management using the service provided by a third-party platform, which maximize the efficiency of the platform and reduce manpower in exchange for a service fee periodically. All the three management methods are discussed in detail below.

5.2.1 CVI Marketing Materials Provided by Managers of Higher Level

In a first case, some companies follow a primitive practice, in which managers or superior leaders hold most of the brand assets, either because they are allowed to have access to it, or it is simply because they have used them in some of their work before. For example, a small company, in which I used to work does not use any shared platform to manage Visual Identity. When an employee needs to access some brand visual elements for their work, they have to request them from the superior managers. The superior managers must then search their personal folders to find the brand assets that have been used in the past projects, and forward it to the person needing it. In the case of NDTC Group, the management method is based on this practice, but the managerial personnel who provide the materials also takes responsibility for them. The practice is efficient in SMEs because it saves time and effort of direct training and monitoring from the CEO. In addition, the personnel could receive correct instruction coming from top management, ensuring that they understand how CVI works. However, this practice is also criticized due to various reasons: (1) The long waiting time in getting the materials, due to managers being busy and sometimes disorganized. (2) The visual asset might be incompatible for the current requirements. For example, the image bank provided by the manager is limited or irrelevant due to a misunderstanding of the purpose. (4) The difficulty in maintaining Company Visual Identity: Because the brand assets are passed down from personnel to personnel, it is difficult for CVI manager to identify if there are personal changes to the brand assets. Sometimes distortion could happen with CVI in communication, and the effects are more critical in the case of external communication, so managers are recommended to monitor it.

5.2.2 CVI Marketing Materials Provided in a Shared Folder

In the second case, SMEs create a common folder to store all the CVI assets, which are accessible for selective employees in the organization. The common folders exist in many different forms, ranging from a company USB to a shared folder on Internet Cloud Service. This is a more organized and professional way of managing visual marketing materials, which solves most of the problem of the first method. The waiting time for accessing to materials is eliminated because now employees can acquire them individually and instantaneously. In case there is a need to update the graphical details in the materials, management just needs to implement it once, and the changes will be applied to all shared

materials. Compared to the first alternative, this arrangement requires more effort in setting up the system, but the result leads to better consistency and faster acquisition of materials.

However, there is also a downside to this way of content management. Some managers criticize that using cloud service to store brand assets makes the resources vulnerable, which jeopardize the company's privacy. It could be difficult to keep track of all the people having access to company VIA, and sometimes, companies end up giving access to the wrong people. For example, personnel who have left the company could still receive unlimited access to company VIA.

As the company grows bigger, there is usually a need to seek a better method to manage brand assets. This is because of four reasons: (1) Bigger companies require more accuracy in brand assets management, (2) A need for selective access to certain materials and (4) The importance of keeping track of all the users' activities on CVI materials (creating new elements, editing existing elements or simply using them)

The aforementioned reasons are the motivation for SMEs to upgrade their brand asset management system into a new automatic CVI management platform, either by themselves or by outsourcing this to a third party specialized in this area.

5.2.3 Third party platform for managing Company Visual Identity Elements

Some third-party companies offer their platform to improving efficiency in managing all brand elements, even though this type of business has not yet gained its popularity. Using a third-party platform means that a company will not manage the brand assets by themselves using their own in-house platform, but rather give the right to another company to do so. The third-party company will be provided access to all the brand assets, which they will organize and synchronize into their own platform. The brand assets are systematically organized, constantly updated and accessible to only the personnel concerned. Basically, all the problem regarding CVI could be solved by using a specialized platform, but companies have to pay a considerable amount for the service. This platform is applicable for all companies which are concerned about their CVI, especially companies that have a large number of brand assets in their databases.

6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

6.1 Research Methodology

Research Question: How do SMEs implement and manage CVI system in practice?

After discussing the theory related to the implementation and management of CVI in SMEs, reflecting them into reality is the next step. The choose of a suitable research methodology to obtain the right and necessary information to support and answer the research question is made next.

There are two types of research methodology, which are qualitative and quantitative research. Quantitative research is based on the belief that large number and repetition of responses can assure the reliability of the facts gathered from the world (Gina Wisker. 121. 2009). The method to conduct this type of research consists of questionnaires and observation. On the other hand, qualitative research informs the researcher in the form of rich and detailed information, which offer new insights and concepts (Ospina. 2014). The qualitative methodology is used when general or probability information is needed on people's attitudes, opinion, initiatives, and selection (K. Hammarberg, M. Kirkman, S. de Lacey. 2016). Qualitative research methods include interviews with people, focus groups and observation (Gina Wisker. 129. 2009). According to (Catherine Marshall, Gretchen Rossman. 2010), qualitative research often involves human interaction and requires profound interpretation in response, therefore the research could develop further as the conductor move forward, which is unlike the quantitative research being strictly prefigured.

The methodology is typically selected so that it serves the purpose of answering the research question. In some cases, a mixed method could be used to interpret the matter even further. The research question in this thesis demands a profound explanation about how SMEs implement CVI, at the same time clarifies humanistic experience the interviewees came across regarding challenges, prioritization, personal preference, and other practicalities. Due to the aforementioned reasons, quantitative research is the most suitable solution to this problem. In-depth interview on selected SMEs is the method used in this research.

6.1.1 Interview Respondents

The subjects chosen for interviewing are company representatives whose company has been exposed to a certain level of CVI. The chosen companies should have below 250 employees, which are referred to as SMEs by definition. The case companies are selected randomly by the interviewer. The representatives for the companies are required to (1) hold a relatively important position and (2) have been working in the companies for a sufficient time period to profoundly understand the SMEs. These persons should also have access to the majority of the brand assets and work with them on a regular basis.

Two representatives were chosen from two SMEs for interviewing:

The first company is NDTC Group, which is a small company in Hanoi, Vietnam formed by a group of lawyers and consultants, who provide service to business or governmental clients in the fields of Legal Practices, Investment Consulting, Financial Consulting, and Fund Management. They utilize their excellent local expertise and professional practice based on understanding and connection with clients and competent agencies. The chosen respondent for the company is Mr. Khoi Bui, who is the project manager at NDTC. He has worked for the company for more than seven years, and he is one of the members in the top management. His sufficient period of working for the company, as well as the high position he holds ensure a deep understanding of his business and, especially, the CVI system.

The second company is Happy Foreigner World - an SME based in Valencia, Spain. The company provides housing services and organizes field trips, parties, and other interesting activities to help international students settle into their lives in Valencia, Spain. The representative for the company is Minh Anh Tran, a Sales and Marketing intern who answered the interview with help from the CEO – Mohssin Moumni. The CEO was ready to help in case of difficult questions, and some of them were even answered directly himself.

There are two reasons why the companies were selected: (1) The two companies fit all the requirement to be selected as samples, and (2) Due to personal connections, I could extract a good amount of insights, as well as assure the accuracy of such information. Information about the two respondents is provided in Table 1: A brief overview of two case companies: NDTC Group and Happy Foreigner World below.

	NDTC Group	Happy Foreigner World
Specialties	- Legal Practices, Investment Consulting, Financial Consulting, and Fund Management	- Real estate, Language Courses, and Activities for students
Type of business	- B2B, B2G, G2G (Government to government)	- B2C
Number of employees	- 11-50	- 11
Headquarter:	- Hanoi, Vietnam	- Valencia, Spain
Year founded:	- 2011	- 2010
Website	- http://ndtcgroup.com.vn	- http://happyforeignersworld.com

Table 1. A brief overview of cases companies: NDTC Group and Happy Foreigner World.

As the purpose of the empirical study is to give an impression of how CVI is currently implemented and managed in SMEs, the case companies were selected randomly. The two companies are both SMEs and they are less than ten years in operation, but except for that, the differences between them are significant. The location, number of employees, customer target group, market, the service they provide, and most importantly, the leader's vision, are definitely not the same. For that reason, the way they implemented CVI is also different. It is possible to extract a lot of information to understand how businesses utilize this tool with various management methods.

6.1.2 Interviewing plan

First of all, long before starting the interview, the purpose of the interview was introduced to the respondents. The interviewees were notified a few days in advance so they could prepare some background knowledge, if necessary. Appropriately scheduling for the interview is essential, in order to avoid disruption and ensure their commitment and cooperation. The interviews are required to follow the standards for validity and reliability of the research.

The questions were prepared in advance for the interview, however, I am flexible and open for further addition in the process if the SMEs suggest them. The questionnaire was also sent to the supervising teacher, and his recommendation was applied to the study, as well as prepare a response to possible scenarios. All questions are open questions and there are many possibilities for responses, which is why the answers in some cases are possibly unexpected. In case the questions are too difficult for the interviewees to answer, some suggestions will be made to facilitate the process. However, personal influence on the respondents will be minimized to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the research.

There are three sections in the interview. The first section is brief and direct. It investigates the current stage of CVI implementation in the SMEs and introduces the concept if it is unknown for them. The second section focuses on the central topic, which is to illustrate how CVI is implemented in SMEs, involving the planning, excursion, and management of the concept. The last section includes the interviewer's personal evaluation for SMEs performance in CVI and the suggestion for its implementation or improvement.

6.1.3 Validity and Reliability

Validity

In terms of research, validity refers to the true view of the studied matter or people (Gina Wisker. 2009). In other words, a research is valid when it measures what it claims to measure (MeanThat. 2016). There are several practices which are implemented to validate the study: (1) The choice of methodology, which is qualitative research, in this case, must answer the research questions. (2) The sampling and analysis of data are required to be appropriate and sufficient, and most importantly, (3) all conclusion and evaluation from the research must be relevant and rigorously supported by the data and theory (Leung, L. 2015).

Reliability

According to Leung, L. (2015), reliability in qualitative research means that exact replication of the research process would generate the same results and data. Specifically, in qualitative research, the thesis supervisor suggested two ways to validate this study. (1) It is possible to replicate the research many times with different case companies, however, this is out of the question due to the limitations of resources and time, and the coverage

of the thesis. (2) The other way is utilized; the validity of the thesis will be maintained by pointing out the similarity of the theory and the theoretical framework

The limited number of sampling was due to the significant length and amount of information extracted from the companies with limited time and resources. However, one sample could only give a general impression, but two samples enable discovering the similarities and the dissimilar results. The identical results show how SMEs implement CVI commonly, while the dissimilarity suggests new data and their interpretation. The sampling is satisfactory since the research purpose was to give a general impression, but further research with bigger sampling is suggested to increase the reliability of the research

6.1.4 Limitations

The research focuses on implementation and management of CVI on a general level, therefore, practicalities involving graphical design are not discussed. The specific details about each graphical element are not profoundly discussed in the interview, but they could be briefly mentioned to explain the concept of CVI.

Due to the limits in resources and time, there were not many SMEs selected to cover a broader view of the subject. It serves the purpose of the study, which is only to give a general impression of how CVI works in SMEs. However, the study could not illustrate the current situation of SMEs in a specific location or an area of business. Intention to cover a larger area of business or location would require further study using a quantitative research method.

Additionally, the concept of CVI is relatively new for the chosen companies, and it is usual to encounter CVI at primitive stages in SMEs. Therefore, the respondents would encounter difficulties when answering the questions, leading to the absence of some vital information. However, it was expected from the beginning that: (1) Most SMEs are in the stage of developing their business, that is why some areas in the business are not fully developed accordingly, (2) Quantitative research in the form of interviewing is often influenced by human factor, despite being inevitable, effort will be made to minimize it in all possible ways.

7 RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

7.1 Acknowledgment of the benefit of CVI

NDTC Group	Happy Foreigner World
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Acknowledge both external and internal effect of CVI on many levels- The CEO believes CVI is not just a supportive system, it is also considered visionary to the company.- CVI relates to brand identity, which helps the company to understand who they are, what is their purpose on the market, who they serve...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focus only on the external effect of CVI- Focus on building an external reputation with CVI system- Building your CVI right from the first days will provide a favorable condition to grow the brand stronger every day.

Table 2. The two cases companies' acknowledgment of CVI and its benefits

It is fundamental that the respondents are informed about the definition of CVI, if necessary. CVI is expected to exist inside all companies to a certain degree, however, most companies implement it, being unaware of the concept. Therefore, the definition of CVI was mentioned to ensure that the companies were informed right before starting the interview, to prevent misunderstanding, misleading answers and to allow the following discussion to proceed in the right direction.

Both companies acknowledge CVI, its definition and its necessity in business operations. They agreed that CVI has acquired many benefits to their companies and they had implemented CVI system to a certain degree. However, the remarkable differences between answers appear in the beginning.

NDTC Group believes that CVI should be implemented for both internal and external purposes, while HFW is more focused on the benefits of CVI for external customers. The representatives for NDTC Group mentioned the important point that CVI is considered visionary inside their company, not just a supportive tool. This statement aligns with the theory created by Annette L.M. van den Bosch, Wim J.L. Elving, Menno D.T. de Jong (2006), in which Corporate Visual Identity is considered as an important strategic instrument within Corporate Communication. For example, the logo of NDTC Group consists of four brown moraceae leaves, for internal employees, it represents the four business

sectors. For both employees and customers, the color brown refers to the spirit and philosophy of the Buddha, which is integrated into the company culture to prove their reliability and authenticity for both employees and customers. In this case, according to the aforementioned theory by Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al (2015), the company focused on Reliability, Transparency, and Authenticity, which are the three out of five dimensions of CVI which directly connects to company reputation.

In contrast, Happy Foreigner World is highly concentrated on creating their market reputation using CVI. They strongly focus on Authenticity and Visibility to show the market that HFW is a real company with a strong reputation. The respondent believed that a company without CVI has no Authenticity, and it could be considered a ghost company or a scam. In addition, HFW increases their exposure (Visibility) among international students to build a reputation among them, so the students can recognize the company immediately after seeing the logo, said the respondent. However, during the interview, the company showed a lack of interest on the benefits of CVI among employees, which is opposite to NDTC Group.

7.2 CVI Implementation and Management

	NDTC Group	Happy Foreigner World
Guidance and Training	- Actively involve employees in CVI training and guidance	- Provide templates of letter, email automatically with signature, logo, and stamp.
Guideline	- Generate a handbook on the use of brand asset	- One guideline for the use of image, only used by designers
Set an example	- The CEO and top management always wear uniform correctly	
Control of email and external document	- The CEO and top management supervise every important email or document, but they do not always require authorization	- All emails are draft, only the CEO can authorize the sending of email.

Physical documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strict regulation regarding printing and copying - HR manager approves the document on behalf of the CEO. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only the CEO could freely utilize the physical document. In case of a need for them, he must first give permission - All the tangible VIA was kept at least one sample in a locker.
Personnel responsible for graphical solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Freelance designer - Third party company - All employees can contribute their opinion, but only designers and top management have the ultimate authority on them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Main designer - Supportive designer - Freelancer - Everyone can contribute to CVI, vote for the design and influence the final decision
Best time for CVI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Before the business comes into operation, but CVI should stay only on a basic level. - CVI will be improved when the business starts making consistent profit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Before the business comes into operation. - The logo and other elements can still change since the business is developing.

Table 3: CVI Implementation and Management

In the interview, many questions were asked regarding the implementation and management of CVI, and the above information (**Table 3.**) is the summary extracted from all the answers. The interviewees were suggested several topics to answer, there was flexibility in receiving new topic for the discussion from interviewees. There are many similarities in the answers from both companies, but the answers apparently show that NDTC Group possesses a more established CVI management method compared to HFW.

NDTC Group has generated a guideline to instruct employees about the way to use CVI materials. Their top management also actively provide training and direct guidance to the employees to ensure they use the materials properly. Happy Foreigner World does not follow the same method, and the only CVI guideline they provide is an image guideline for the designers. However, they have pre-designed templates to employees in terms of presentations, documents and emails. Especially for the form of letters, the template always already includes the CEO's signature, logo, and stamp. The CEO always double

checks the end results of all materials, therefore, it is also unlikely that the employees will misuse them. Both companies confirmed that with the help of CVI guidelines and a pre-designed template, the companies could save a considerable amount of time and effort regarding CVI training and supervising, allowing the CEO and top management to focus on other operative matters.

The respondent from NDTC Group especially emphasized that it is highly essential to maintain the uniform regulations inside the company. The top management always reminds the employees to come to work in a suit and tie and at the same time, not to make common mistakes when wearing them. The only way to enforce this regulation properly, said the respondent, is by setting an example by the top management. For this reason, the CEO and the top management are always impeccably dressed before they come to the office. Additionally, they provide direct guidance to subordinates about the choice of suit and tie if necessary. By setting the example and take this regulation seriously in the office, the company successfully implements the use of uniform correctly to everyone in NDTC Group regardless of position.

There are regulations applied for the controlling of all messages coming from inside the company to customer, for both tangible and intangible. In case of tangible documents, for both companies, either the CEO or another responsible person supervise every email and document. At Happy Foreigner World, all emails need to be authorized by the CEO before they are sent to customers. The situation is more flexible at NTDC Group in the sense that employees are usually allowed to take responsibility for the documents themselves. the CEO and top management only supervise the process, but they do not always need to give authorization to proceed. For the physical documents, both SMEs are highly cautious when distributing and using them. NDTC Group implements strict regulation for printing and copying of company documents. The HR Manager has the responsibility to manage and supervise the printing of documents carefully and keep track of them in the system. Happy Foreigner World is even more strict that only the CEO can freely utilize the physical documents. The CEO kept all the tangible VIA, at least one sample in a locker, but in case of a need for them, the CEO must first give permission. Both methods of managing and controlling CVI messages shows a high level of caution from these SMEs to ensure the security and proper implementation of CVI assets.

Different companies have their own approach to graphical solutions to their brand assets. Some companies utilize in-house support, others outsource the graphical solutions to a third person or party outside the company, and sometimes both approaches are used in one company. In the case of NDTC Group, they said that every graphical solution is outsourced to someone outside the company since they do not have people with the right know-how nor experience. The website is currently outdated and unattractive, but they are slowly developing it as this is not the main priority for the company. The company currently operates based on business relationships and referrals, and their target customer group are traditional and unresponsive to technology, hence the low-quality website. However, they receive help from only one freelancer for this, which prevents conflicts in the design, resulting in a consistent graphical system. In the case of Happy Foreigner World, the company is currently using both people from inside and outside the company, and they also hire interns to gain additional workforce. Clearly, HPW put more effort and attention into creating high-quality graphical elements, and they are currently succeeding with this to some degree. Nonetheless, having many people working with the graphical elements results in a problem of consistency in the design. The company is working on a solution to unify two designs, two color palettes, and two logos, which are created by two different designers with conflicting interest and lack of communication. Both companies allow all employees to contribute on the graphical system, and influence the final decision, but only designers and top management have the ultimate authority on them at NDTC Group. In general, apparently, the graphical system improves as companies invest their budget and effort, but good communication and management are always essential in creating (1) high-quality and (2) a consistent CVI system.

When the respondents were asked about the best time to plan and implement CVI, both companies agreed that every business should do that on a basic level before starting it. All the graphical elements will be improved gradually, as the company starts making considerable profit and growing bigger. The agreement also confirmed the necessity of CVI system in SMEs, even at the inception of the business.

7.3 Platform for managing digital CVI materials and Respondents' evaluation

Platform for managing digital CVI materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shared folders are created to provide access to only to top management. - Limited access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All company VIA are stored in Google Drive. - Unlimited access
CVI Management Platform Evaluation from respondents	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CVI is used under direction of the CEO and directors. - Saves time and effort for other division <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It does not encourage creativity and flexibility - It is not as efficient as expected nor professional method 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Everyone can contribute - Increase flexibility in updating graphical elements - It is easy to change CVI if necessary <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low security - It is difficult to control how employees use CVI

Table 4: Platform for managing digital CVI materials

As expected from the theory, the two SMEs use a shared folder to manage all Visual Identity marketing materials. However, the nature of the platform is the same, but the approach is different.

At NDTC Group, there is an internal network for storing all the companies' files and folders, and only top management has the authority to access all the company's materials. The top management will provide certain employees with the right materials, and they take responsibility to ensure the people provided with CVI properly implement them. Therefore, if there is a mistake with the use of CVI materials from the employees, the top management who provides such materials will also be held accountable. With this method of CVI management, every time there is a change made in the marketing materials, every

single person of the company will need to know and make changes accordingly. Therefore, in case of such new update, the CEO will have to personally make changes to the files in shared folder, and then inform everyone in the company by email or in person. This method of management shows positive results by ensuring that everyone is under the correct guidance before using the materials. Additionally, it saves time and effort for the CEO and other divisions, since only the person who provides CVI materials take responsibility for them. Nonetheless, the respondent deemed this method not flexible nor responsive to changes, and as the company grows bigger, they need a more professional and efficient way to manage CVI.

In contrast, the method in managing CVI materials in a shared folder is slightly different at Happy Foreigner World. The company uses a third-party software, Google Drive as their main platform for CVI management. If the employees would like to use the assets, they only need to request permission from the CEO's secretary once, and then they can access all of the materials. The respondent deems this method easy, convenient and responsive to changes and updates to CVI. There is also the possibility for everyone to contribute their opinion on the company's CVI materials and improve them under supervision. However, the method potentially results in low security and it should be closely regulated (for example, interns have access to the company's CVI even after they leave the company). It is also difficult to manage how employees are using the materials since they have access to everything without having to consult the superior manager. Therefore, the CEO has to always authorize the documents, is inefficient and time-consuming.

7.4 Graphical elements

	NDTC Group	Happy Foreigner World
Logo	- Represents the company's structure, characteristics, and vision.	- Logo only represents the brand characteristic
Slogan	- There are 2 slogans, each of them is used for internal and external purpose - For external purpose: Practical Advice Sound Solution.	- Only 1 slogan for external use: Study, Live, Enjoy

	- For internal use only: Small firm that acts big.	
Basic typography	- Times New Roman size 12	- Ariel 12
Uniform	- Uniform consists of a suit and tie for men and long dress/pants with a shirt for women. The uniform is strictly required.	- Company T-shirt is required at work, even though it is not too strict
Color palette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All marketing materials are always in brown, dark orange and white. - 1 color palette 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Website and the discount card for students, the logo and the newly released slogan are always blue and white - 2 color palettes
CVI physical elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signature, badges, suit and tie uniform, office supply, calendar, decorative objects... - Gift: Decorative objects which symbolize the company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stamps, signature, stickers, glasses, key chains, t-shirt... - Gift: Stationary and T-shirt with company logo
Purpose of CVI materials	- CVI physical elements are made for both employees and customers	- CVI physical elements are made mostly for customers

Table 5: Graphical elements

The two companies focus effort on creating a remarkable logo. As was mentioned above, NDTC Group's logo represents the company structure (4 sectors) and company culture (according to Buddha philosophy). Happy Foreigner World was also acquired an interesting and rememberable logo, but it mostly presents the company brand image, which is the variety of associations customers have based on their experience and interaction with the business (Solomon Timothy. 2016). The company wants their customers to associate their brand with being happy, positive, interesting, fun and carefree, which is also the value of the service they offer.

After analyzing the above result, it is recognizable that the CVI system is more complex at NDTC Group than at Happy Foreigner World. NDTC Group has two slogans to be used both externally and internally, while HPW only has one, which also was only recently created. NDTC Group provides a handbook to instruct employees on using the CVI materials correctly, while HPW has only created a guideline for photographers and designers. However, in both situations, the two guidelines were effective and serve their purpose well. Especially for HFW, the company has done a good job in aligning all supportive images with the company's logo and general brand personality. The main image on the website is the most remarkable example, the company website in **Figure 7.1** has a background image of students raising two arms in the sky, which resembles the symbol in the logo in **Figure 7.2** below. The combination strengthens the brand's personality and appeals to the target audience.

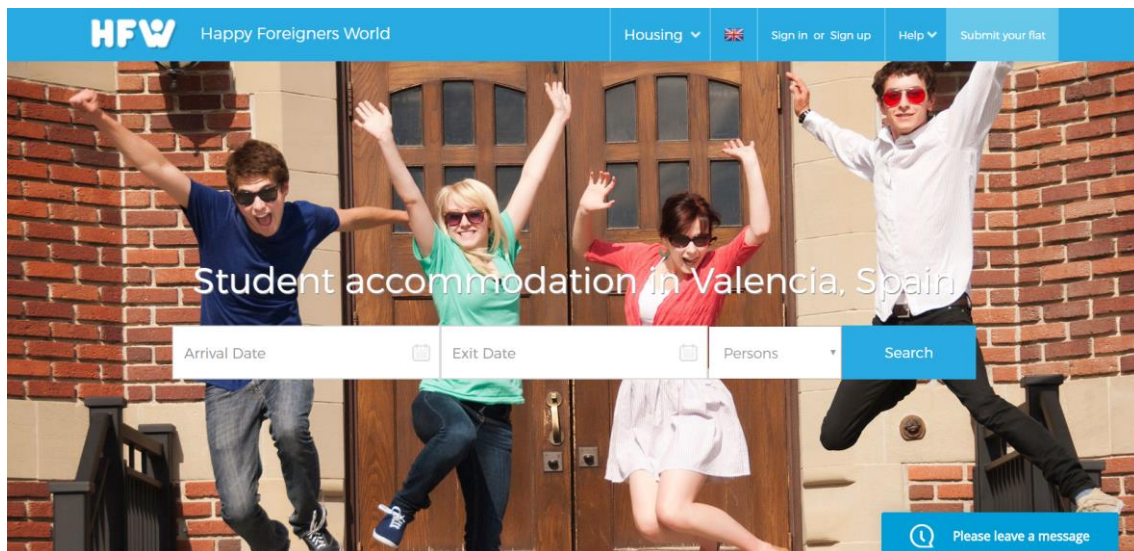


Figure 7.1: Happy Foreigner Website interface



Figure 7.2: Happy Foreigner World's logo

Regarding the typography, both companies decided to use the standard font in the system without creating their own. This is because the collection of fonts used in the system is already abundant. Both companies consider typography low priority, so it is unnecessary to allocate the resources and effort creating them.

Since there is a big difference in the nature of two businesses and their customer groups, it is understandable that the two companies take into consideration the use of uniform differently. In NDTC Group, it is a must that every employee must wear a shirt and a tie every day without an exception. For high-rank employees, they have to represent the company in the front line, which creates an impact on how the customer perceives the company's brand image. For new employees, they are required to wear a uniform to contribute to the internal company culture, which sequentially affects their attitude and behavior at work. At Happy Foreigner World, the employees work in a more relaxed environment since their customers are students. The personnel is encouraged to wear the company T-shirt to work, and it is not a strict requirement. The t-shirt is also more replaceable, so the company can always provide employees with a new one if necessary, however, the case cannot be applied to the suit and tie uniform.

It is usually preferable for companies to have one color palette, which is a pack of colors which will be used in all the marketing materials of the company. NDTC has one color palette of brown, dark orange and white, to which they refer to as Buddha's color. The colors appear in almost all marketing materials provided by the company, allowing them to create a remarkable brand characteristic. The situation is different at Happy Foreigner World, as there were two packs of color used for CVI. As described in **Figure 7.1** and **Figure 7.2**, the CVI is expressed in two different color and design in both cases. One color palette consists of blue and white color, while the other one has four bright colors as **Figure 7.2** shows. In one of the company's advertisements in **Figure 7.3**, the graphic designer even added five more colors to the color palette, which is completely different from the CVI blue and white design on the website. The respondent expressed that the inconsistency in color design was due to the lack of communication between two designers. The main designer and the second designer were working on two different tasks, which were general design and website design respectively. She also mentioned that this is a problem with their CVI that it would lead to is ineffective and unprofessional symbolism, and this is currently addressed by the company.



Figure 7.3. Happy Foreigner World’s advertisement in Valencia

The physical elements of CVI, which can be referred to as preferred supplies, are among the most important areas of CVI implementation. Preferred supplies encompass all the physical equipment that is used to operate the business on the daily basis, for example, stamps, badges, uniform, office supplies, calendars, decorative objects, etc. Both case companies have their own choice of favorite materials, which they emphasized before everything else when answering the interview questions.

NDTC group focused on the uniform and badge that employees wear every time they meet the customers, which improve the perception of the company’s Distinctiveness in the mind of customers (Annette L.M. van den Bosch, et al, 2015). Since most of the companies do not have this regulation of wearing suit and tie at work, the employees boldly represent the company culture, showing that they are willing to take the extra mile to serve their customers with their competence in a professional manner. The company also has all other office supplies, such as pens, papers, notebooks, and business cards with company logo and color. The preferred supplies are more often provided to clients for external use, so the company sometimes distribute the normal supplies to internal users to save time and cost.

Happy Foreigner World, on the other hand, concentrated more on proving the Authenticity of the company, and their favorite preferred supplies are the company stamp (as well as the CEO’s signature) on all documents. The stamp is limited to use only by the CEO and it is highly protected. The company also provides preferred supplies to employees and customers, mostly pens, papers, notebooks and t-shirts for both external and internal use, and they are flexible with the use of company supplies inside the company. The same case applies to the company uniform.

As for gifts, Happy Foreigner World distributes stationary with the company’s design and logo to all the customers using the service, since their customers are international students

who have the need for them as well as they do. Unlike Happy Foreigner World, NDTC's customers are more sophisticated and demanding, so the company never uses preferred supplies for this purpose. They usually hand out decorative objects symbolizing the company in many different ways (vehicle model, badge for suit with company, logo) for their customers to place them in their office glass display cabinets.

In general, the physical supplies are fundamental objects in keeping the business running, but they also exist to serve the purpose of improving company reputation and image, both externally and internally. Most of the time, employees prefer to use company supplies as long as they are proud of the company and the supplies are well-functioning.

7.5 Challenges

NDTC Group	Happy Foreigner World
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The leader's lack of attention and to CVI - Little amount of budget was spent on developing CVI at the moment - Centralized CVI management style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confusing logo - Protection of intellectual property, especially logo - Constant changing of personnel - Inconsistent CVI design - Centralized CVI management style

Table 6. Challenges in CVI management for two case companies

In this chapter, the author will be discussed the challenges that the two SMEs encounter as they implement and manage CVI.

From the interview with NDTC Group, I found out that the biggest challenge is the CEO's lack of attention, effort and budget were allocated to CVI. He explained that although CVI supports the company operations and is considered visionary, it was not the main prioritization for the SME, because it does not directly relate to business operations and profit. However, the theory proved otherwise. According to **Figure 3**. Corporate identity in relation to corporate reputation, which is the model created by C.B.M. Van Riel, and J. Balmer (1997), showed that symbolism (a part of Corporate Identity and equivalent to Company Visual Identity) has a direct influence on organizational performance, of which Financial Performance is a part. When this matter was mentioned in the interview, the

interviewee explained that because the company archived the fundamental level of CVI, the attention to improving CVI temporary decreases and will be resumed once the company successfully resolves more immanent matters. The second challenge acknowledged by the respondent is the centralized method of managing CVI, which usually involves only the CEO and the top management. Although this method is relatively professional and efficient, the company still seek a better method to reduce work for the top management, at the same time increase the flexibility and accuracy of CVI management.

With Happy Foreigner World, the company apparently have several more challenge with the protection of the visual assets (1) They are having trouble with the most important graphical element of the company, which is the logo. HFW's logo is constantly mixed with the one of a gas company, and which is a bigger company in a completely different business field. The company saw potential change or improvement to address this important issue with the logo coming from the CEO in the future. (2) The second challenge the company encounters are the scam artists who take advantage of company logo for illicit business activities. In the worst-case scenario, they could con other people into sending deposit or renting different apartments using the reputation of the case company. (3) Thirdly, the company has many interns who come and go, and they all have access to CVI materials even after they have left the company. Therefore, increasing protection and scrutinization to intellectual property are imminent.

The other challenges at HFW are due to the management method and the lack of careful planning before implementing the CVI system. The respondent said that it is a problem when CVI design is inconsistent and excessively changed. Customers and the personnel sometimes confuse the current CVI marketing materials with the old materials. Moreover, there are two different graphical designers working on two different areas of the business without sufficient communication. This problem creates inconsistency in the design of materials, as mentioned above in the instance with the company website and the advertisement on the leaflet. Furthermore, the CVI management style at HFW is highly centralized, which is similar to that of NDTC Group. Unlike at NDTC Group, only the CEO has the right to authorize every document, and he does not delegate the responsibility to the subordinates. This method slows down business operations and was considered inefficient by the respondent.

7.6 Prioritization for CVI elements

NDTC Group	Happy Foreigner World
1st priority: Logo	1st priority: Logo.
2nd priority: CVI Preferred supplies package	2nd priority: Company stamp and the CEO's signature
	3rd priority: Brand personality

Table 7. Prioritization for CVI elements

The two companies both agreed that the logo would be the first priority that they focus on before everything else. Firstly, NDTC Group explained that it is because the logo appears in the many marketing materials and facilities of the company, and it is the major element of CVI. For the company, the logo is the most visionary element, which defines its sense of identity. Similarly, Happy Foreigner World also mentioned that the logo is existed and printed everywhere and it is the intellectual asset that indicates how the company is different from all the other organization.

The second priority for CVI in NDTC Group is the CVI package, which consists of everything that the employees use in their daily office lives. The package includes uniforms, badges, notebooks, pens, color palettes and most importantly, business cards. The company representative said that the CVI package is the second must, due to their necessity in business operation and communication of brand vision and characteristics. The package also expresses the authenticity and professionalism in the way they do business, and they are the qualities in the company statement that supports a strong reputation (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2004). The company respondents answered the two priority without hesitation, expressing his confidence and solid opinion on this matter.

For Happy Foreigner World, the second priority in the CVI system is the CEO's signature and company stamp. According to the respondent, the management style is highly centralized, and these CVI elements guarantee that every document is authorized by the CEO before being officially in use. Secondly, these CVI elements prove the authenticity of the company, and its documents and email. Thirdly, the CEO's signature and company stamp are highly secured and nearly impossible to copy and duplicate without permission. They have significant benefits in safeguarding company's intellectual property.

Although the respondents are only requested to mention two priorities, Happy Foreigner World's representative believes that the third priority is also highly important. For a company offering service to international students, using CVI to enhance brand personality contributes significantly to the company reputation. HFW takes advantage of the design for the website, logo and the use of image and video to create interesting, happy and exciting brand characteristics. This spirit is represented in all marketing materials, as funky logos, a colorful palette and a brief slogan are constantly in use.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Empirical Research Evaluation

	NDTC Group	Happy Foreigner World
Graphical quality	Low	High
Consistency	High	Low
Strictness	High	Low
Control	Medium	High
Platform security	High	Low
Efficiency	High	Low

Table 8.1. Result summary CVI Management in the two case companies

In this chapter of the thesis, the most remarkable features in CVI management will be discussed and evaluation will be made. The features are described in level of intensity, with High, Medium and Low. The elements are explained in detail to ensure the reader understands the intended perspective. One of the most important elements in CVI – the *Graphical Quality* differs between the two case companies. The quality of brand assets at NDTC Group is substantially lower than that of Happy Foreigner World. Apparently, the problem at NDTC Group roots from the lack of attention, personnel, and budget allocated for CVI. However, it is totally contrary regarding *Consistency* – which is the consistency regarding brand messages and graphical elements, NDTC Group is apparently doing better than the other company. For example, HPW still creates confusion by the inconsistency in the choice of color palette, for which they will need to work on a solution. The combination of efficient management and tough regulation and enforcement (*strictness*) makes *consistency* possible at NDTC Group. In addition, Happy Foreigner World is subject to a different challenge than NDTC since they have more personnel working on the graphical elements, making it difficult to maintain *consistency* of the outcome. On the bright side, the abundant amount of personnel working on the graphics allows Happy Foreigner World to maintain high *Graphical Quality*. The level of *Control*, which is not the same as *Strictness*, refers to the frequency and intensity of the managers regarding checking and monitoring employees. The degree of *Control* ensures employees follow

the regulations and correctly implement CVI elements, as well as protect the company's brand assets. Happy Foreigner World monitors the employees intensively regarding the use of CVI, and the CEO is present on most occasions to give authorization, while NDTC Group reduces *Control* by delegating responsivity, implement regulation and setting an example. However, even with efforts to *control* and protect CVI elements, the level of *platform security* is low compared to that of NDTC Group. The *platform security* refers to the protection of brand assets from being stolen and misused for illicit purposes. Happy Foreigner World provided unlimited access to everyone inside the company, and the access even remains after the employees stop working for the company. On the contrary, NDTC Group gives access only to the top management, and they selectively equip employees with the necessary materials, while at the same time taking responsibility of ensuring they are properly implemented. The practice from NDTC Group protects the brand assets, and it also ensures every one implements them correctly with little effort and involvement from the CEO.

There are some general practices that both companies could use to improve CVI management. As mentioned before in the thesis, NDTC Group utilizes CVI on both internal and external communication, which is something Happy Foreigner World could follow to maximize the benefits of CVI for the company. The CVI Guideline and Regulation are also implemented efficiently at NDTC Group, and the practices could help Happy Foreigner World save time and effort in managing CVI. HFW could expand the CVI guidelines so that it would cover more areas in CVI than just imagery, which would facilitate the CVI training to new employees. This is highly important since the company has interns come and go occasionally, and most of them need to understand company CVI. The biggest problem for the NDTC Group and Happy Foreigner World is the graphical quality and consistency in end-product respectively, and the two companies are highly recommended to improve them. For NDTC Group, the problem could be solved gradually if the company would pay more attention and budget into improving CVI. In the case with Happy Foreigner World, the company need to improve the communication between the managers and designers, as well as among the designers themselves, so that way they could prevent the inconsistent outcome of the graphics and unify the whole CVI system.

	NDTC Group	Happy Foreigner World
Focus	Internal and External	External
CVI Guideline	Extensive	Intensive
Biggest problem	Quality	Consistency

Table 8.2. Result summary CVI Management in 2 case companies

8.2 General Conclusion

The thesis introduced the concept of CVI – Company Visual Identity and its implementation and management in SMEs. First of all, the work investigated the concept and all the elements related. It also explained why it is essential for SMEs, not just big corporations to implement CVI in their business. Furthermore, in this thesis, all the management methods regarding CVI were included and evaluated in the practical situation inside the case companies. The two companies selected for interviewing provided in-depth information about the topic and their results are reflected back to the theory discussed at the beginning of the thesis.

The combination of the theoretical framework, the empirical study results, and the evaluation provided sufficient answers to the main research problems. However, several limitations that the readers need to bear in mind before utilizing this study have been stated earlier, and those limitations are also suggestions for further research in the future.

1. What is CVI and what are the elements included in the concept?
2. How was CVI implemented in certain SMEs in practical situations?
3. What are the good and bad practices utilized in SMEs?

The research expressed the necessity of CVI implementation and management in SMEs in general. Although CVI management is considered a new concept, it is usually implemented inside SMEs on a basic level without the acknowledgment of its existence. In the beginning, it is acceptable for SMEs to have an incomprehensive CVI system and management, since they have a lack of budgets and personnel to work on it. Later, companies must gradually improve CVI as the business grows bigger since the companies with a good reputation are the ones that thrive. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for SMEs to

decrease the attention to CVI once the business starts making consistent profit. The absence of a good CVI system and management hinders the growth of the company, as the theory has proven the direct connection between CVI, company reputation, and organization performance.

The readers are suggested to select the best practices of each case companies as they are relevant for practical implementation in business, especially the Corporate Visual Identity Management methods. However, most importantly, SMEs always need to profoundly understand their businesses, what is its nature, customer group, products, purpose, and advantage point on the market, in order to select the best practices for implementation. Eventually, a CVI system and management are customizable according to each business's needs, and SMEs need to clearly understand their prioritization and which practices would be most suitable for them.

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APPENDICE

Qualitative Interview Research

Research Question: How do SMEs implement and manage CVI system efficiently in a dynamic business environment?

Note: The suggestions are not brought up unless the interviewees need help with answering it. This is to prevent bias created by the interviewer.

Presenting Results: The interviewer will compare the results of 2 SMEs and find out the similarity as well as the differences in each approach. After obtaining the result, the interviewer will proceed to analyze it and make personal evaluation and feedback to the aforementioned SMEs.

Interviewee:

Minh Anh Tran, Mohssin Moumni: Sales and Marketing Interns & CEO at Happy Foreigner World, Valencia Spain

Khoi Bui: Project Management at NDTC Group, Hanoi Vietnam.

Section 1: Interview Question

1. Every company has a certain amount of visual assets even from the inception of the business. Have you acknowledged the existence of CVI? How is your current CVI system beneficial for your company?
2. What has been done so far in your company regarding CVI?
3. What are the solutions that you have to maintain consistency and discipline in utilizing CVI system? Why are you using them?
4. What kind of platform is used in your company to manage Visual Identity Assets?

Suggestion:

- CVI marketing materials provided by managers of higher level

- Shared folder in the company
 - Third party platform for managing Company Visual Identity Elements
5. Express your opinion on the company's method of managing them. What are the pros and cons of this method in your opinion?
 6. What are the challenges that you encounter in the implementation of CVI for SME? Why?
 7. When it is the best time to implement CVI? Why so?

Suggestion:

- Before the business comes into operation
 - After the company starts making profit
 - After the company starts making sustainable profit
8. What are the most important elements of CVI which you will prioritize first before anything else?

Suggestion:

- Memorable logo
- Brand personality
- Attractive color palette
- Professional typography
- On-brand supporting graphics
- Stationery Package

Why?

9. A comprehensive guideline encompasses many predesigned templates for document, presentation, as well as instruction on use image correctly. Do you think there should be a need to develop a guideline to ensure all the brand assets are

implemented consistently? What is the type of approach you prefer to train employees? Why?

Suggestion:

- Periodic training session
- Distribute documents to employees, especially newcomers
- Instruction and supervision from superior employees
- Using technical platform
- Open access to CVI guide

10. What are your preferred methods in designing the graphical elements for your company? Why?

Suggestion:

- Hire a graphic designer
- Use a third-party company, or a freelance designer to work on one project
- In-house design by employees
- DIY by CEO

Why?

11. How do you evaluate the quality of brand assets which are currently used in your company?