How cars tell stories — content and narrative analysis

Master's thesis

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Abstract

This thesis combines the automotive industry and storytelling techniques. The primary purpose of this work is to examine the stories of the companies depicted in their advertising spots, look at the values of each brand, and then analyze the interaction between these stories and the brand values of two global automotive companies. The analysis seeks to delve into the brands' values and interpret why, how and to what extent the values relate to the stories presented.

The qualitative approach to the study — which entails using a suitable theoretical, philosophical, and methodological framework — involves using two methods of analysis: content and narrative. While content analysis allows the researcher to focus on and extract the most information regarding the brand's values, narrative analysis allows the researcher to understand how the values were used in creating the story. Equally relevant data includes the values of two brands, derived from their websites, and two advertising spots (one per brand), derived from their YouTube channel. The data collection process led to the selection of Audi AG and Volvo Cars.

A comprehensive analysis led the author to key conclusions and provided answers to the research questions posed. First, the report highlighted the correlation between brand values and advertising spots and the narrative introduced into them. Additionally, it allowed the author to analyze how and to what extent values and stories overlap. The study highlights any similarities, differences, and gaps.

This thesis is a concrete, relevant, measurable, and achievable case study that can, directly and indirectly, influence the industry and field under study by shaping and influencing marketing experts, storytelling practitioners (especially in the context of branding), or future CEOs.

Introduction

People are storytellers. We tell stories. We share our stories and receive the stories of others. We tell stories about the past, the present, and the future. Not to create a chronicle of life but to manifest the meaning of it. We drown in stories. They fill us with emotions; they keep us in suspense. We drown in stories because they make us think and help us organize our thoughts, actions, and even life. We treasure stories because they can entertain us. We treasure stories because they tell us how to live, act, and function. We tell stories all the time. People are storytellers.

This is a story of a Polish student living and studying in Denmark who realized that stories (and the act of telling them) are compelling, influential, memorable, and can be effectively applied in different aspects and contexts, on different levels, and in different arenas of day-to-day life. As storytelling is a marketing technique as well as a communication model, this thesis aims to explore the stories of two known worldwide car companies — AUDI AG and Volvo Cars. These companies tell their stories using storytelling techniques and share them via advertising spots. Moreover, this research assesses the interplay between these stories and the companies' values communicated on their websites. Accordingly, the crux of this work is both the advertisements of automotive companies that share their stories through advertising and storytelling and the values that these companies represent. The data, under the umbrella of the storytelling concept, is intended to help assess how and why stories are told in a certain way in relation to values.

Since this area is of great importance and interest to the author herself, she decided to look into these topics in more detail. The automotive industry's advertising is present all over the world and all over the platforms. In television, the industry is present through product placements or ads; in audio forms, the industry can be heard about on podcasts or the radio; and digitally, there are online publications, social media, or brands' websites. Effective advertising reminds the customers of the brand and encourages them to continue buying the product. In connection to brand image, it also creates an emotional appeal that convinces the customers to remain loyal. According to the report, 66% of people believe that "[...] the best automotive stories are about ordinary people." (Fozzard, n.d.). This emphasizes that the automotive industry is using the storytelling technique in its ads and is thriving because of it. Storytelling is considered a powerful tool — not only in day-to-day contexts but also within business, communication, and

marketing. The latter manifests in brand loyalty, trust, connection, or relationship. It is regarded as crucial in building and maintaining brand image, authenticity, and validity.

Here, this intersection merging the automotive industry and storytelling technique has sincerely intrigued the author of this work as understanding how different elements of ads (for example, narration, dialogue, characters, or colors) turn into stories and analyzing how these stories overlap with the brand values will unveil elements common to both research elements and will allow to pinpoint and highlight similarities, differences or gaps. The following work serves as a practical contribution to improving automotive companies' marketing and branding efforts. In addition, this work sheds light on the storytelling technique in the context of the mentioned industry and the context of experts within the communication field. Since the author also investigates the issues of brand values, the backbone of any brand, what differentiates this work is that it juxtaposes brand values with the actual message flowing from the brand, which could also interest marketing practitioners, branding experts, or future CEOs.

To summarize, this case study is based on the companies' statements regarding the brands' culture, characteristics, and — most importantly — their values to achieve this goal. The information regarding companies' values is obtained from both companies' websites. In addition to the above, the empirical data subject of the analysis includes two advertising spots — one for AUDI AG and one for Volvo Cars. In the report, it is sought to unfold the related contexts by describing relevant details and scenes. Therefore, the two companies from the automotive industry — and brand values thereof — are a chief element of this paper. The author, however, both zooms in and seeks to dig deeper into the stories these companies tell through the ads concerning their values to zoom out later to relate it to other concepts. Since AUDI AG names: appreciation, openness, responsibility, and integrity as its values, and Volvo Cars names: customer success, trust, passion, change, and performance, it is essential to evaluate how these values – superficially similar – lead to narratives and story production, and evaluation of how similar or different these stories are (AUDI AG, 2020) (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

The research area, problem, and various considerations are placed within specific theoretical, methodological, and philosophical frameworks crucial to thoroughly grasping these matters and the data collected. Within the theoretical framework, the author focuses on concepts such as models of communication and, evidently, the storytelling technique. The design of methodology chapter contains methods such as narrative analysis and content analysis which help to unravel the narratives present in ads (the former) to be later able to connect them with

the values stated on the websites (the latter). The mentioned chapters can find information that justifies using particular theories, methodologies, and underlying philosophies, making this research a specific, relevant, measurable, and achievable case study. The last section of this report aims to discuss, reflect, and conclude upon the overall findings and discoveries concerning the problem area. The desire to find the answers to previously stated considerations will be looked at through questions:

How do brand values correspond to advertising spots of companies within the automotive industry? & Why do they lead to these narratives?

Theoretical framework

This chapter presents theories, concepts, and ideas fundamental to understanding the problem in depth. This chapter, therefore, ought to provide a comprehensive theoretical review and framework and, at the same time, it indicates a clear context for this study. Before introducing the storytelling technique, the author presents and focuses on communication styles and models, the concept of *brand* as well as key marketing concepts.

Communication types and models

Since storytelling is both a communication tool and branding (i.e., marketing, advertising) tool, it is crucial to understand how people communicate first before learning how (and why) people tell stories.

Following Latinitium's explanation — an online website operated by Daniel Pettersson, teacher and author, and Amelie Rosengren, a historian, and author, who dedicated their resources to creating a website for anyone learning or teaching Latin — derived from Latin, the word *communication* translates into (Latinitium, n.d.):

- o "The act of imparting, conferring, or delivering from one to another."
- o "Intercourse by verbal or other means."
- o "A connecting passage."

This explanation proves that *communication*, at its core, can refer to all — the message itself, the transmission of the information, as well as the field of inquiry studying this transmission.

In the book called "Theories and Models of Communication" (2022), its authors argue that "A model is a symbolic representation designed to help us equalize the relationships among various elements of a structure, system or process of discussion and analysis." (Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2022, p. 275). Accordingly, "Communication models put together all communication elements and activities involved." (Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2022, p. 275). These authors' conclusions also support the above mentioned explanation originally derived from Latin language.

Within communication, one can discuss its models and types. A general understanding of the term *model* usually means something intended to serve as a pattern, figure, or design. In contrast, the *type* usually expresses a particular style or includes specific characteristics. In the communication context, models of communication are there to "[…] help identify and understand the components and relationship of the communication process […]." (TutorialsPoint, n.d.). On the other hand, types of communication refer to the ways (styles) one communicates. These ways may depend on whom someone communicates with or the purpose of a particular encounter or communication. Such understanding must be included while discussing the matter in question. As proved above, matters surrounding *communication* are crucial to mention and present when discussing storytelling, among other vital topics. Both categories mentioned, i.e., models and types of communication, are further discussed in the subchapters below.

The basics of communication models

For the context of this paper, considering the concepts of advertisements, the business industry, and storytelling, it is essential to understand the communication models to exhaust the subject accurately. The models, i.e., framework (design), help to define how people interact to achieve specific goals. Not unexpectedly, there are several communication models. Even though one can identify several categories of these models, such as linear, circular, triangular, spiral, concentric, or transactional, this paper concludes the overall principles and relevant vital points concerning models of communication.

Many fundamental concepts within communication reappear within different models. Their exact meaning varies from model to model, e.g., despite their different usage for the same idea or goal. The speaker, the speech, the occasion, and the effect derive from different approaches than the sender, the message, the processes of encoding and decoding, and the receiver, even though they share the same idea. The main concepts of any model (both Aristotle's linear model of communication and Schramm's interactive model, among others) share the goal of creating and delivering messages from the sender to the receiver. The message type can differ depending on the scenario and should contain some form of information. The channel is a concept that explains "the route" through which the message travels, and noise is any influence that can disrupt the very route. Feedback proves that the receiver responds and interprets the message by returning some information to the original sender. The context surrounding the models refers

to any circumstances of the communication, such as physical environment, mental state, or general social situation, for example, school, job interviews, grocery store, geographical position, or online setting).

In the lump, within digital and business communication models (and processes), communicating with the audience is complex and often threefold. Following the scholar, university professor, marketing practitioner, and the President of Riverside Marketing Strategy, Heidi Cohen, there are three basic marketing communication directions (Cohen, 2011):

- *One-to-many*, this traditional model indicates that the message goes one way, and whether the audience receives the message is often discussed.
- *One-to-one* direction indicates a more targeted form of communicating, meaning there is much likelihood of being acted upon by the recipient.
- *Many-to-many* is a relatively new form of communication that evolved with the increased usage of social media networks that enable many conversations between and within large audiences, some of whom may only listen or react.

As communication evolves, it is crucial to adapt the marketing messaging to remain pertinent. The following chapters further unfold this paper's brand, advertising, and storytelling aspects.

Communication types

There are several types of communication. Types of communication refer to characteristics and the ways the act of communicating is conducted. In the pages of this paper, the author will utilize four types of communication. That is: verbal, non-verbal, written, and visual.

The most apparent type of communication is verbal communication. Verbal communication is used when communicating or transferring information through spoken words. This type of communication circles around using (the right) words when speaking, using a specific pitch and tone of voice, pauses, speed, structure, logic, and flow, among others. According to Personio, a company that streamlines HR operations at multiple companies, great verbal communicators get the message across and can inspire other people (Personio, n.d.). Verbal communication requires considering the context, speaking clearly, and adjusting the way of speaking based on people's non-verbal responses (Personio, n.d.).

In contrast to verbal communication, non-verbal communication focuses on one's tone of voice on top of one's posture, body language, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, or physical distance (Personio, n.d.). Following Albert Mehrabian's theory, known as the "The 7%-38%-55% Rule", non-verbal communication is the dominant type compared to verbal communication. The Armenian professor states that words account for 7% of the encounter, while tone of voice accounts for 38% and facial expressions for 55% (British Library, n.d.). Additionally, as to the physical distance mentioned above, it relates to the term *proxemics* composed by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall who wished to "[…] denote the different kinds of distance that occur between people" (Libraries, n.d.). T. Hall differentiates three interpersonal distances: intimate (0 – 45 cm), personal (45 – 152 cm) and social (1,5 – 2,1 m) (Libraries, n.d.).

The third type of communication is written communication. Written communication is the act and result of writing or typing to convey information. It is commonly performed to produce and share information via books, blogs, letters (or others) to disseminate it clearly and concisely (Willkomm, 2018). By contrast with verbal communication, the written type may be constructed over a more extended period; hence, it is often asynchronous, meaning it may occur at different times (Libraries, n.d.). As single words do not bear any context or cues, people might receive written communication and interpret it somewhat inappropriately, the opposite of what has been intended. It is, therefore, critical to consider matters such as structure, clearance, and composition to avoid miscommunication.

The fourth and last type of communication presented is visual communication. Next to verbal, non-verbal, and written, visual communication "[…] is the practice of using visual elements to get a message across, inspire change, or evoke an emotion." (Ezell, n.d.). Undoubtedly, there are several components of such type of communication, e.g., color, shape, texture, balance, and hierarchy, and they consist of objects, models, graphs, maps, diagrams, or photographs (InfoGraphic Design Team, 2019).

Distinguishing these four types of communication allows one to understand better other topics that circle the core of this study and are described in the following chapters. Understanding the basics, similarities, and differences between the types and models of communication later in this work helps to draw attention to the critical elements of this work as well as facilitates the underlying core within the analysis process.

The brand and key marketing concepts

In this chapter, the author describes matters regarding *the brand.* Additionally, this section includes elementary but related to the earlier topic, key marketing concepts. The author trusts that the information in this chapter adds to further considerations or discussions and might shed new light on the general conclusion. This section contains information on brand identity and image, corporate identity, the concepts of branding, and advertising communication. Indeed, it is essential to consider that this chapter is intended to create the contextual framework and add to its theoretical framework.

The brand — understanding key notions

The *brand* comprises more than a dozen concepts or notions and even more lenses to analyze those concepts, such as marketing, psychology, sociology, economics, neuroscience, anthropology, etc. In this subchapter, the author focuses on some of the critical elements that make up *the brand* with the recognition and awareness that numerous concepts have many standard measures nonessential to this work. This chapter introduces and clarifies describes concepts such as:

- o   brand identity,
- o   brand image,
- o   brand assets,
- o   brand strengths,
- o   brand values, and
- o   brand equity.

As pointed out, these concepts constitute smaller parts of more significant concepts. However, at the same time, they appoint the critical theoretical framework for the author's interests in relation to the study's research questions.

To elaborate on the topics of brand identity and brand image, Kapferer's Brand-Identity Prism Model is used. Jean-Noël Kapferer (2008) alone dedicated his four-part, 531-page book to brands; this book is a considerable source of this portion of the study. The model is derived from the author's book "The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term" (2008); the book is a significant source for this subsection. Essentially, a brand's *identity* differs from its *image* in that the identity is generated, designed, built,

constructed about the brand, and presented by the brand itself. In contrast, its image is customers' perceptions thereof. Additionally, such an understanding presupposes the existence of communication, which includes: the sender, the message, and the receiver (Kapferer, 2008, p. 174) (see: Image 1). In his book, Kapferer states that brand identity can be clearly defined once the following questions are answered (p. 183):

- What is the brand's particular vision and aim?

- What makes it different?

- What need is the brand fulfilling?

- What is its permanent nature?

- What are its value or values?

- What is its field of competence? Of legitimacy?

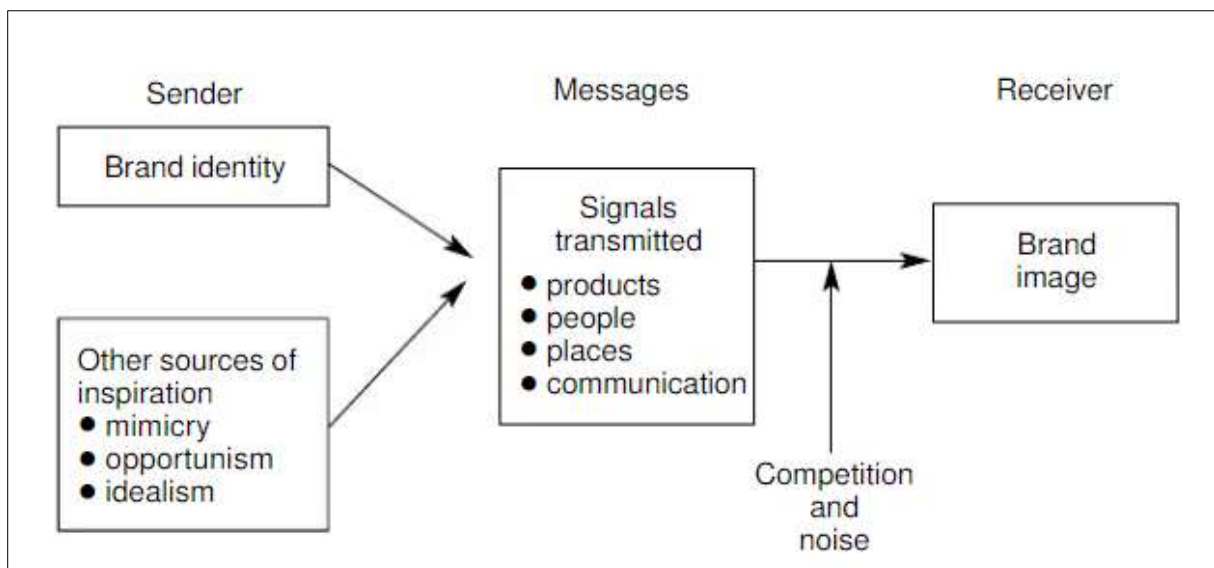- What are the signs which make the brand recognizable?

Image 1. Identity and image. Derived from (Kapferer, 2008, p. 174).

With that in mind, the author adds, "Brand image is on the receiver's side. […] The image refers to the way in which [certain groups] decide all of the signals emanating from the products, services, and communication covered by the brand." (Kapferer, 2008, p. 174). In other words, the *image* is a combination of all of the opinions and perceptions of the public about all of the messages (e.g., products, brand name, its values, or advertisements) the brand sends through its *identity* as the identity is created and presented about and by the brand. Therefore, it lies on the sender's side of the communication. The image of the brand, as the result of decoding a message and interpreting signs and meaning, comes from the brand and other possible sources, i.e., the *noise* (see: Image 1.) (Kapferer, 2008, p. 175). The noise "[…] speak in the brand's

name and thus produce meaning, however disconnected they may actually be from it."
(Kapferer, 2008, p. 175). An example of such noise is usually the brand's competitors.

Following Kapferer's point of view, "Since brands speak about the product, and are perceived
as sources of products, services and satisfactions […]", their identity must be well thought out,
studied and measured (Kapferer, 2008, p. 182). On the basis of Kapferer's deliberations as well
as European Institute for Brand Management's (EURIB) summary, one can see that there are
six primary facets of brand identity-image. Those are divided into two dimensions, namely
"Sender-related / Recipient-related" and "Internalization / Externalization".

Assets (6) and dimensions (4) of brand identity-image
According to Kapferer & EURIB

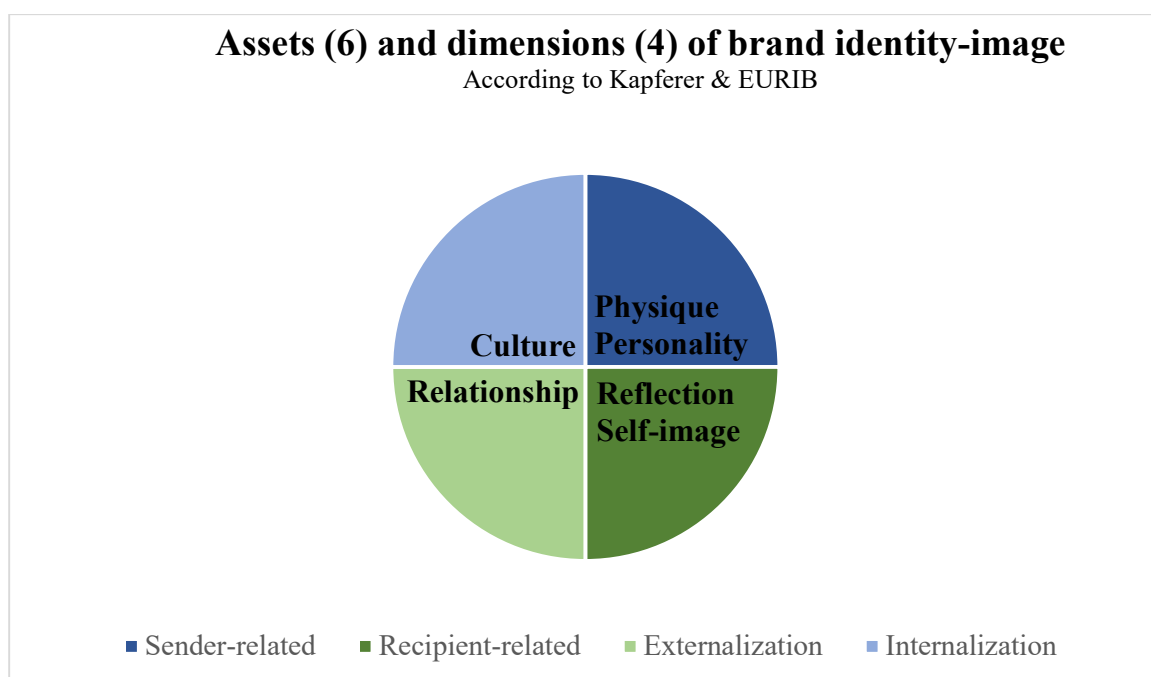- Sender-related   ■ Recipient-related   ■ Externalization   ■ Internalization

Figure 1. Assets and dimensions of brand identity and image. Summarized by the author of this paper. Derived from: (EURIB, 2019) and (Kapferer, 2008, p. 183).

The two following paragraphs explains each aspect of brand identity in details.

Physique reflects on the brand's physical features and appearance, for example, the (shape of)
logo, trademark, colors, and the like. Kapferer states that the physique of the brand is "[…] both
the backbone and its tangible added value." (Kapferer, 2008, p. 182). *Personality* should
introduce and show what kind of a real-life person the brand would be, e.g., dynamic, caring,
calm, sophisticated, etc. The brand's character (*ergo*, personality) results from how it
communicates with the customers about the products. Such explanations of
both *physique* and *personality* facets prove the justness of being placed on the sender-related
side of the hexagonal prism. The facet of *culture* "[…] refers to the basic principles governing

the brand's outward signs (product and communication)." and pose an essential aspect at the core of the brand (Kapferer, 2008, p. 184). In other words, the aspect of *culture* indicates that the brand's product is not only that but also a mean of communication. In that sense, the brand's culture might be influenced and affected by, e.g., the brand's country of origin. All three of the aspects mentioned so far — physique, personality, and culture — are incorporated into the brand itself which lean them toward the dimensions related to the sender and internalization (see: Figure 1.).

Relationship aspect, "[…] defines the mode of conduct that most identifies the brand. This has many implications for the way brand acts, delivers services and relates to its customers." (Kapferer, 2008, p. 186). Building specific relationship is particularly important as brands fundamentally create and deal with relationships, services, transactions or exchanges between people. Relationships are built and created not only at the level of communication with customers but also with how products are delivered, how they are being advertised, etc. *Reflection* makes reference to the stereotypical user of the brand. At the same time, it does not equal brand's target group. The target audience centers around the potential buyers, users or clients while reflection mirrors how they wish be perceived by the brand. However, the confusion between these two notions is ongoing, and according to the author, the problem lies in that "[…] managers advertise their product to show the targeted buyers as they really are, ignoring the fact that they do not want to be portrayed as such." (Kapferer, 2008, p. 186). Lastly, *Self-image* category explains how brands speak to the customers' self-image. It is "[…] the mirror that the target groups holds up to itself." (EURIB, 2019). In other words, the facet of *self-image* is the customers' internal mirror as their attitude towards a brand simultaneously create an inner relationship within themselves. These three aspects — relationship, reflection, and self-image — are rather leaning towards the side of the receiver, and, therefore, have more to do with the dimension of externalization (see: Figure 1).

Moving on to the matters of brand assets, strengths, and value. The subject of assets refers to recognizable elements that embody a company's identity and are the sources of influence of the brand, e.g., awareness, image, type of relationship with consumers, learned mental associations, attributes, patents, as well as others that cue customer associations (Kapferer, 2008, p. 14). Brand assets are acquired through time from direct or symbolic interactions with the brand (Kapferer, 2008, p. 14). Similarly, assets can also be defined as "[…] the collection of elements that brand uses to express itself visually, verbally, and audibly." hence, they include brand

name, logo, color palette, slogans, packaging (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). There are many ways to leverage brand assets, for example, making them easily accessible (i.e., easily found and used), creating rules for others to follow them (i.e., protecting the consistency of brand), monitoring the performance of them (i.e., distribution, usage, creation), among others (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). In a digital world, the company's asset is, e.g., its website: "A consistent, idiosyncratic user experience of a website […] is unique enough to provide a one-of-a-kind experience." (Brand Master Academy, n.d.).

Brand strengths encompass the value the company delivers to the customers and allow them to distinguish between one brand and the other. These strengths are usually captured by behavioral competitive indicators such as market share, market leadership, and loyalty rate and are usually a result of well-put assets (Kapferer, 2008, p. 14). Lastly, brand value refers to the brand's ability to deliver profits and income as "A brand has no financial value unless it can deliver profits." (Kapferer, 2008, p. 14). In other words, the value is the monetary worth of the company. It is worth pointing out, following Kapferer, that different brand assets may produce different brand strengths over time as they result from competitive or distributive pressure (Kapferer, p. 15). The difference between brand value and brand equity is that the former is the monetary worth of the brand that depends on plenty of factors that vary but could be controlled; the latter is the assessment of the brand's value in terms of customer engagement and perception thereof. The criteria are often hard to measure and intangible (in contrast to the varying but controlled criteria of brand value) and could be based on how people see the brand's value. When equity results from customer recall, the value is based on the brand's clarity and performance.

Moreover, in his book, Aaker (2014) suggests the concept of considering a brand as an asset. He states, "Shifting the emphasis from tactical measures, such as short-term sales, to strategic measures of brand equity and other indicators of long-term financial performance is a monumental change." (Aaker, 2014, p. 10). He states that there are three major dimensions to brand equity —

- o brand awareness,
- o brand associations, and
- o brand loyalty (Aaker, 2014, p. 10).

According to the author, brand awareness is an asset that affects the clientele's perceptions, liking, and behaviors. It can also be a signal of success and commitment, "[…] if a brand is recognized, there must be a reason." (Aaker, 2014, p. 10). To achieve the awareness goal, it is

crucial that the company knows its audience, defines clear awareness goals, shares the differences (in comparison to other companies), and uses storytelling as "Stories, no matter how small, help us to find meaning." (Brand Master Academy, n.d.).

The associations include attributes, design, quality, innovation, brand personality, product breadth, symbols, and "[…] anything that connects the customer to the brand." (Aaker, 2014, p. 11). Considering a brand as an asset involves determining which associations to develop and link to the brand and which to avoid. Concerning the associations regarding brand personality, the company's tone of voice serves as an example. The tone of voice is a tool used to communicate the brand personality – "Will your tone of voice be playful or serious, progressive or traditional, aggressive or laid-back?" (Brand Master Academy, n.d.).

Finally, brand loyalty "[…] once obtained, loyalty is persistent.". (Aaker, 2014, p. 11). Loyalty is being compared — by Stephen Houraghan, brand strategist, educator, and the founder of Brand Master Academy — to "[…] creating an army of brand advocates who will rave about your company to anyone who will listen." (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). Brand loyalty builds on strong emotional connection and commitment of the customers, which, resultantly, improves brand awareness.

Finally, Kapferer asks, "What are the company's values?" (Kapferer, 2008, p. 183). The author trusts that the answer to this question constitutes the brand's identity, which (among other concepts in this subchapter) is crucial to grasping the matter in question. To summarize, the values are a set of guiding principles that dictate how the brand behaves, which also means that "[…] when there are tough decisions to make [one must] revert to those brand values to stay true to the overarching principles." (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). This definition also differentiates the values (standards that guide branding activity), the company's vision (an inspirational look at the future of the company), and mission (the "why," the reason the company exists) (Brand Master Academy, n.d.).

For the sake of clarity, the author of this paper from here on out defines the notions and concepts within *the brand* accordingly to explanations evident above.

Corporate identity

It is essential to state that a successful corporate identity can only develop if there is a brand identity, the core and solid foundation of the brand. Understanding the latter helps to understand the former. In the context of the research questions posed in this paper, it seems essential to elaborate on corporate identity. The reason for elaborating on this concept is that it further enhances the importance of brand identity while remaining a separate concept relevant and revolving around other relevant ideas. By understanding how brand identity is created and why brand image matters, one can better understand the importance of corporate identity, which refers to the qualities that distinguish one brand from another. Regardless (and in respect of) how elaborate, complex, and multi-dimensional the elements of this subchapter are related to the research in question.

Corporate identity relates to the qualities of a company that differentiates it from other companies and refers as well as includes matters such as product design, advertising, public relation, corporate communication, corporate title, logo, typefaces, and page layouts (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) Therefore, corporate identity is "[…] the actions that a company takes to achieve a better perception from their ideal target audience." (1338Tryon, 2021).

In their article, (Markwick & Fill) define the word *identity* as "[…] the individual characteristics by which a person or thing is recognized." and *corporate identity* as "[…] the organization's presentation of itself to its various stakeholders and how it distinguishes itself from all other organizations." (p. 397). According to the authors, corporate identity can include corporate identity programs, consistent content in advertising messages, internal or external operating procedures and policies, or even dress codes (Markwick & Fill, 1997, p. 397). Here it is essential to remember and mention those elements that, similarly or identically, have transmitted to the Internet and social media space through the technological revolution and new media. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that many corporate identity practitioners are rooted in graphic design (van Riel & Balmer, 1997, p. 340). Hence the visible importance was (and still is) assigned to graphic design (van Riel & Balmer, 1997, p. 340). The flip side of corporate identity lies within the corporate image. Simply put, the corporate image "[…] exists in the mind of each stakeholder and cannot be managed directly.". It can, however, be repositioned or altered "By presenting orchestrated cues […]" (Markwick & Fill, 1997, p. 398). According to (Balmer) corporate identity first addresses the question of "What are we?" to later explain,

elaborate, and answer the questions such as: "What is our business / structure / strategy / ethos / market / performance / history and reputation / relationships to other identities?" (2001, p. 257). On the other hand, the corporate image first answers the question of "What is the current perception and/or profile?" concerning "[…] the immediate mental perception of the organization held by an individual, group or network." (Balmer, 2001, p. 257).

Four significant elements within corporate identity need to be addressed. These core facets are derived from the article by Dr. Birgit Joest, a strategy director experienced in international brands and owner of Agency Helder. The elements of corporate identity are (Joest, n.d.):

- corporate communication **(A)**,
- corporate design **(B)**,
- corporate behavior **(C)**, and
- corporate culture **(D).**

Regardless of the brand identity (and image) discussed in the previous subchapter, corporate identity collects and puts together all the key elements to create the face of the company. All four components and pillars of corporate identity, coupled with the previous section on key brand-related notions, align and connect to facilitate the answer to the research questions. The corporate identity comprises the overall corporate design, behavior, culture, and communication. Within corporate communication **(A)**, one should consider all the company communicates. It includes internal communication — policies, procedures, or internal newsletters and communication, and refers to the means of media relations such as earned-media communication, public relations, and news. It also sums up the messages communicated to investors and other stakeholders. Finally, corporate communication also includes paid communication, which is vital in this case, as it involves advertising, print, radio, communication released through paid media, events, sponsorships, etc. Corporate design **(B)** showcases — as mentioned above, historically vital and visible — the visual identity and assets. These can be seen through logos as an instant recognition of the company, colors representing the brand, and fonts, typography, or typefaces used in communication. Visual assets also include internal design (e.g., the interior of the offices) and online websites, i.e., how the brand represents itself in the digital world. Lastly, corporate behavior **(C)** examines how the company acts as a single entity, mainly when triggered by political, economic, social, legal, technological, and environmental factors. Corporate culture **(D)** answers to the brand's philosophy and guiding principles. Together with the behavior asset **(C)**, the culture

one **(D)** brings out the core values, mission, and philosophy of the brand, which remain at the core of this paper.

To sum up, the Indeed Editorial Team (the team of writers, researchers, and subject matter experts for Indeed) shares that the purpose of a corporate identity is to

"[…] facilitate the realization of both organizational objectives. The objectives may vary from organization to organization but commonly include: increasing brand awareness, brand differentiation, establishing a company culture, fostering trust with a customer base, greater customer engagement and loyalty, and reduced advertising costs through higher brand recognition." (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).

In other words, a well-planned strategy helps the business distinguish itself from its competitors within the industry it is in; it can also communicate the company's promise to people within and outside the organization (awareness), it showcases the company as more reliable and thus can boost its market presence; it can also build its credibility over time and maintain a consistent corporate identity following to the company's values and principles, thereby building customer loyalty. According to this article, a well-developed corporate identity can benefit the company in expertise (in creating a definitive corporate identity), reliability (in standardizing marketing techniques across platforms), and cohesion (in cultivating a corporate identity that ensures brand representation) (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).

Branding

The corporate identity, hence also the underlying brand identity, is usually exhausted by the means available through its core pillars, such as public relations, trademarks, internal / external communication, advertisements, or overall behavior. However, it can also be enhanced and visualized via branding. Branding is, therefore, another concept vital to discuss here as it plays "[…] the central role […] in marketing […]" (Bastos & Levy, 2012, p. 347).

Firstly, the phenomenon of branding and the way the concept entered the discourse of marketing and research is quite riveting. Bastos and Levy (2012) describe branding's history in an intriguing way listing several turning points for the notion. They state that "At the root of all branding activity is the human desire to be someone of consequence, to create a personal and social identity, to present oneself as both like other people (e.g., to belong) and unlike other people (e.g., to stand out), and to have a good reputation." (Bastos & Levy, 2012, p. 349). This definition immediately translates the matters of symbols and signs – a signed and denoted object

(or a company) becomes a symbol and implies connotations of ownership and reputation. Branding starts "[…] by using some kind of mark placed either directly on the object or indirectly on a label (e.g., a slip, a flap, a patch) that is affixed to the object." (Bastos & Levy, p. 349). The authors also point out other roots or meanings of branding, for instance, marking the skin for cosmetic, medicinal, social, psychological, political, and cultural purposes. (350). On the other hand, scholars note the pejorative connotations of branding, explaining that "The brander is often regarded as superior to the branded. For example, marked animals and slaves are dominated by their owners." (Bastos & Levy, pp. 349-350).

Kapferer (2008) says,

"Branding means much more than just giving a brand name and signaling to the outside world that such a product or service has been stamped with the mark and imprint of an organization. It requires a corporate long-term involvement, a high level of resources and skills." (Kapferer, 2008, p. 31).

The author adds, "Companies want to stamp their mark on different sectors and set their imprint on their products." which relates to Bastos and Levy's stamping or burning marks on animals to claim ownership thereof (Kapferer, p. 32) (Bastos & Levy, p. 350). In that sense, and according to Kapferer, branding is not about overwatching the company but being within the company (Kapferer, p. 32). Many scholars and practitioners notice that the awareness of the branding's strategic value has developed considerably (Yakup & Sevil, 2011). Brand Master Academy defines *branding* as "[…] a set of short and long-term expressions of the brand to attract and nurture the target audience to become and remain customers." (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). Ergo, branding expresses a brand in the market and communicates what it stands for — from its differentiation strategy to its personality to its purpose, whether aesthetically, vocally, or otherwise. Therefore, for example, branding activity could be launching a new website, telling a story, and sending out emails (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). (Bastos & Levy) continue,

"Branding is exciting and alluring; it is a creativity challenge; its burning, fieryheart suggests its power to draw devotees, fans, co-creators, and communities rather than merely buyers and users. It implies the union of technology and aesthetics, the integration of the pragmatism of engineering and the elevation and elegance of art, addressed to the sociology and psychology of the intended audiences.". (p. 363).

As introduced at the beginning of this section, branding is a key player within marketing. However, these two notions differ. Put, marketing is the collection of "[…] activities and tactics brands use to place their messages into the market with the goal of influencing the audience to

buy." (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). Hence, if branding is a holistic concept that should express the brand in the market through storytelling, communication, and differentiation from other companies, marketing serves as a tool that mostly drives sales and provides the initial traction for the brand. In that sense, branding strategy and marketing strategy share the same goals, but their development differs (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). Brand strategy is the plan of brand expression and sets the foundation of what the brand represents; it creates a relationship and includes audience research, positioning, personality, brand voice, storytelling, and visuals. On the other hand, marketing strategy uses the tools determined during brand strategy to promote and activate the brand with the goal of transaction. (Brand Master Academy, n.d.). As Stephen Houraghan summarizes, "[…] marketing is never "not branding" (Brand Master Academy, n.d.).

Advertising communication

In contrast, advertising is the initiative, effort, and ambitions toward promoting a company (its products, services) through paid channels. This directly suggests that advertising is a component and critical part of marketing communication (American Marketing Association, 2020). Advertising is an audio-visual form of marketing that "[…] engages an open, non-personal message to promote a product or a service." (StudiousGuy, n.d.). Most often, advertising is communicated through various mass media, e.g., newspapers, radio, or — like in this case — the Internet. As stated in the previous chapter, multiple communication types and styles exist. Generally, however, those refer to exchanging information between two or more people, and *advertising communication* equal "[…] a perception process of the source, a message, a communication channel, and a receiver." and include "Any material published using any medium or activity undertaken by or on behalf of the advertiser over which [they] have minimal control over" as well as "Something that attracts the attention of the public in a way to promote directly or indirectly a product or service." (StudiousGuy, n.d.).

The message should refer to the content, concept, or idea the sender wants to convey to the receiver. Such a message should be transmitted through a medium (channel) that meets specific expectations and enables the intended communication style, e.g., verbal channels (telephone), non-verbal channels (e-mail), television, or billboards (StudiousGuy, n.d.). Naturally, each channel's impact and different communication forms differ, i.e., billboards, e-mails, newsletters, or Internet advertising might lead to different effects than word-of-mouth or a

phone call. In advertising communication, the receiver refers to the target audience (demographics, lifestyle, and other characteristics) (StudiousGuy, n.d.). In this case, feedback remains a crucial element of advertising communication as it enables the analysis, interpretation, decoding, and later understanding of the message (StudiousGuy, n.d.). The communication noise can affect the message, its sender, or receiver. It can result from too many messages or too much resemblance compared with the company's competitors. These definitions and clarifications mean that advertising is a type of communication or even a compelling form of communication. In the same way, as brands thrive and function through communication, neither can advertising function without communication. As a type of (marketing) communication, advertising communication seeks to engage the audience and enlarge prospects to purchase, and by advertising on various platforms — like in this example, on individual websites and YouTube — companies can achieve better results, higher incomes as well as publicity, renown, acclaim or reputation. This communication method, i.e., advertising, tends to be extensive and expensive. However, through advertising, "[…] a symbolic communication is established between consumers and brands," which leads to the brand's presence in the consumers' minds. (Kılıç & Okan, 2021, p. 882). Naturally, the key is to provide effective advertising communication. Statista states, "As of 2022, the Internet was considered the most important medium for advertisers, accounting for 62% of total media ad spend in 2022. Internet expenditures are projected to grow 8.4% in 2023." (Statista, 2023). Additionally, "Digital advertising spending worldwide – which includes both desktop and laptop computers as well as mobile devices – stood at an estimated 522.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2021. This figure is forecast to constantly increase […], reaching a total of 835.82 billion U.S. dollars by 2026." (Statista, 2023). According to MediaRadar — "an award-winning advertising intelligence solution that is used by media planning, buying, and selling teams" — both companies relevant to this study have spent ca 100 million dollars on advertising in digital, print, and national TV in 2022 (MediaRadar, n.d.) (MediaRadar, 2022) (MediaRadar, 2022).

Storytelling

This section describes the key theoretical concept of this paper — storytelling technique. The author divides this section into four smaller subsections that unfold: (1) the history and overview of the notion of storytelling, (2) types of storytelling, and (3) the difference between the *narrative* and *storytelling*. Last section (4) shows and contrapose storytelling within branding, business industries (i.e., automotive industry), and advertisements.

A brief overview of the concept

"Storytelling is the act of telling or writing stories, or narratives." says National Geographic (National Geographic Society, 2022). Usually, the stories are told for entertainment or informational and educational purposes (National Geographic Society, 2022).

Today's knowledge of storytelling allows one to confirm that many cultures have been telling stories for years. One of the oldest examples is a cave drawing in Lascaux and Chavaux (France) that dates back 30,000 years. It is also known that stories can be told orally, printed, written, shown, or heard via sounds and images. "Regardless of the media, we are all consumers of story and always has been." (National Geographic Society, 2022). National Geographic Society also answers Why people are drawn to stories? The article proves, "[Stories] help us feel in control." and "[Stories] can also let us see how others think and feel. […] they can allow us to empathize." (National Geographic Society, 2022).

Additionally, the article explains the practical and informative reasons for peoples' interest in stories as they (regardless of the form conveyed) may have helped our ancestors survive, cooperate, and coexist. Storytelling's evolution mirrors how humans learn and communicate. In that sense, the voice of narrative will always have a place and purpose, whether it is oral, written, or visual. In his article, Matt Peters explains that under the cloak of traditional storytelling, one can find its oral and visual forms, such as drawing in a French cave, ancient Greek legends, and myths (Peters, 2018). One of the earliest forms of written storytelling dates back to 700 BC (the first story: "The Epic of Gilgamesh" carved in the city walls), followed by 200 BC, when stories were used for persuasive purposes (literature, the Bible). In the middle of the second millennium, the first newspapers appeared, and in 1826 the first photograph was taken, the seed of visual storytelling. Digital storytelling emerged in the 1930s with the advent

of television, followed by the first advertising on television, then music videos, and finally, digital media. As the author notes, today's storytelling draws on the early history thereof, using its traditional forms to tell a story and create a narrative (Peters, 2018). It is an especially unmissable comment, considering this paper's area of investigation.

Traditional? Oral? Written? Visual? Digital?

The Storyteller Agency, owned by writer, content creator, storyteller, and editor Laura Holloway, states, "Storytelling at its core is about connecting people, whether through the arts or business. Between generations and across cultural barriers, a well-told story can always bring people together." (Holloway, n.d.). As pointed out above, storytelling has been around for thousands of years and has taken on many forms — from rocks to smartphones. Nevertheless, its goal has remained the same, i.e., to entertain, communicate, pass down information, educate, or provoke. This subchapter briefly summarizes the evolution of (and, therefore, the types) of storytelling.

The Storyteller Agency says that the earliest forms of storytelling were visual (e.g., hieroglyphics, cave drawings). Clay, wood, or stone were the first materials that allowed communication and served to pass down information or pose as artistic expressions (Holloway, n.d.). Former visual storytelling was influential in the sense of communication and telling stories. However, the stories were not accessible enough to be spread or shared as opposed to today's forms of visual storytelling.

Oral storytelling is as historic as the human language — word-of-mouth passed down myths, songs, chants, and poetry (Holloway, n.d.). The invention of the radio in the 1890s drastically changed how stories were orally passed down or told. The oral communication transferred from being individual and in person to being addressed to the entire audience regardless of physical proximity (Holloway, n.d.). According to Holloway, today's podcasts, radio broadcasts, or even socializing with family or friends draw from this specific type of storytelling.

The invention of paper the early 1150s and led to the creation of books and art pieces, ergo, written storytelling (Holloway, n.d.). With that also came the idea of combining text and images to tell stories. Gutenberg's invention of the printing press allowed written stories to travel and to be more accessible to others (Holloway, n.d.).

Photography and motion (TV) were the catalysts for modern visual storytelling (Holloway, n.d.). The Digital Age, the discovery and evolution of the Internet, according to Holloway, has drastically changed how we tell stories. Digital Age combine all forms of storytelling, but it has not changed the primary purpose and reason why we cling to stories; instead, what changed is the medium — the Internet, i.e., our phone or laptop.

Storytelling vs. narratives

As explained earlier, storytelling is a crucial part of human existence: "Ever since we were children, we have been told stories." (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 30). Naturally and instinctively, one can spot a good story when they hear one. However, the authors say the good ones constitute four specific elements and underlying mechanisms. Even though Fog et al. state that there is no fixed formula, there are guidelines that can be used. The guidelines can be mixed, matched, and adjusted in various ways depending on the context in which the story is told and its purpose (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 31). The four elements can be used as checkpoints, especially in connection with building stories about/within the company, helping to ensure that *a* story becomes *the* story. Hence, understood as both a communication type and a branding tool, storytelling consists of four elements:

1. the message,
2. the conflict,
3. the characters, and
4. the plot (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 31).

The message needs to be clearly defined as the company's goal is not to tell stories for the sake of it but to communicate the message that reflects positively on the company brand. The message has to have a central theme throughout the story; however, too many central stories "[…] runs the risk of becoming messy and unclear." (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 32). The conflicts – both in real life as well as in stories – force us to act, hence in the context of storytelling, conflict "[…] is the driving force." (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 32). The underlying feeling of conflicts are fear and change, so the story comes to life when the conflict is resolved, and the feeling of harmony and order are intact (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 32). In storytelling, conflict is not damaging as long as it is not brought to the extreme. Instead, the idea of the struggle between the good and the bad and resolving the issue makes a good story. The characters are there to "[…] play off the conflict" (Fog, Budtz,

Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 37). The audience must identify with the characters. Finally, the plot is how the story progresses with its message, conflict, and cast of characters. For clarity and continuum, the story should have a beginning, middle, and end (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 42). The story should therefore be based on: the opening, the introduction of the conflict, the point of no return, the climax of the story, the story's fade out, and the moral (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 44).

With that understating of the storytelling (the act of telling), it seems crucial to further explain the notion of the *narrative* (the story). For the sake of clarity, however, it is essential to state that in the pages of this paper, the author uses those terms interchangeably. Nevertheless, the term *narrative* comes from the Indo-European root "gna", which means both *to know* and *to tell*. The *narrative*, therefore, helps to transfer *knowing* into *telling*. (Elliott, 2005, p. 12).

A narrative "[…] can be understood to organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole. In this way, a narrative conveys the meaning of events." (Elliott, 2005, p. 4). According to Jane Elliot (2005), the definition of *narratives* stresses three key features thereof; they are:

- temporal / chronological – as they represent a sequence of events,
- meaningful – as they create the means to understand the meaning of behavior and experiences of both the teller and audience,
- social – as they are produced for a specific audience (Elliott, 2005, p. 5).

In that sense, narratives (i.e., stories) can also be defined as "[…] discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the word and/or people's experiences of it." (Elliott, 2005, p. 5).

The temporality suggests that the narrative is a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end — "It is this placing of events in a sequence which is therefore considered by many to be the defining feature of the narrative." (Elliott, 2005, p. 7). In addition to chronology, causality is vital as it adds coherence to the storied narrative. On top of that, causality, as an inferred feature, suggests a plot relating events to each other and a change in situation or meaning. The causality, yet to be recognized as a fundamental narrative feature, remains essential in understanding the links between events. The chronology of the narrative "[…] distinguishes it from a description." (Elliott, 2005, p. 10). It is the structure of the story that "[…] the teller [uses] to construct a story out of the past experiences, and to make sense of those experiences both for him- or herself

and for the audience." (Elliott, 2005, pp. 10-11). It is also the evaluation of the events that convey to the audience how they are to understand the meaning of the events. This critical element of the structure is also said to be socially the most essential component of the narrative. Additionally, "[…] evaluation provides an insight to how the narrator has chosen to interpret the events recounted that the evaluative elements of narratives can be of particular interest for sociologists." (Elliott, 2005, p. 11).

Moreover, as explained by Jane Elliott, there are two types of narratives,

- first-order narratives, and
- second-order narratives (Elliott, 2005, p. 15).

The first type can be defined as "[…] the stories that individuals tell about themselves and their own experiences." (Elliott, 2005, p. 15). They usually occur in day-to-day settings during regular interactions, for example, at work, school, between spouses, at the dinner table, and during job interviews. The second-order narratives "[…] are the account we may construct as researchers to make sense of the social world and of other people's experiences." (Elliott, 2005, p. 15). These are, for example, constructed to understand people. In short, they differ concerning the teller and the purpose of that telling.

With the topics of communication and storytelling (understood as a form of communication as well as the act of telling), narratives and the tellers thereof need a "conversational space" to tell the story to another person (Elliott, 2005, p. 12). While telling the story, the listeners "[…] immediately become active co-participants in the recounting of a narrative", hence it is essential for the teller to "[…] decide how to communicate their message best, and in making this decision will attempt to take into account what the listener can reasonably be expected to know" which directly explains the key features of the narratives described above, i.e., the meaning, the chronology, and social contexts (Elliott, 2005, p. 12). In that communication, there is also the risk of sharing too much (or not sharing enough) information which might lead to the listener's boredom and lack of focus. Consequently, this understanding might affect the core of this paper — advertising spots and underlying company values (looked at through storytelling lenses).

Storytelling & branding, advertising, and automotive industry

Storytelling —

"[…] has become an integral part of marketing. […] With these technological advances, social media and storyteller marketing allow businesses to reach numerous people, create a personal connection with their audience, educate consumers about their product or service, and ultimately drive sales." (Holloway, n.d.).

The concept of storytelling in branding has massively impacted the way brands are being shaped — "[….] the strong leaders of today's companies distinguish themselves by being good storytellers; voices that employees listen to, are inspired by and respect." (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 16). Storytelling is powerful as it "[…] triggers a biological response." (French, n.d.). In the same manner, that our ancestors shared who they were and what they stood for, companies nowadays do the same. The story grabs one's attention and engages regardless of the medium. The point is for the product or service to "[…] provide us with unique experiences […] that appeal to our dreams and emotions and add meaning to our pursuit of the good life" (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 19).

According to Kate French, the company's story should be meaningful, personal, emotional, simple, and authentic (French, n.d.). The author discusses seven steps to tell the brand story effectively. These are (French, n.d.):

1. Know your story – clearly defining the brand's identity, principles, values, vision, and mission and understanding the target audience is vital to success.

2. Brainstorm ideas – answering the questions of who the brand is, what the company does, who the company does it for, why it does it, how it does it, and what the company's future looks like allows the company to come up with story ideas.

3. Vet the ideas – "The goal is to find something in that sweet spot" that considers the brand's identity and values and the why is, the what is, and the who is."

4. Choose the suitable format – choosing the medium through which the communicated story flows must fit the story itself; one of the most popular storytelling formats is articles, videos, or advertisements.

5. Craft a narrative – constructing a compelling narrative that captures attention is crucial.

6. Add the branding – every content should accurately reflect the brand and its personality, voice, tone, visuals, etc.

7. Share the story – according to the marketing strategy guidelines.

(Fog et al.) sum up that storytelling and branding share the same starting point: emotions and values — "A strong brand builds on clearly defined values in a language easily understood by all. A strong brand exists based on its emotional ties to the consumer or employee, while a good story speaks to our emotions and bonds people together." (2010, p. 21). This understanding and employing the branding-storytelling relationship ultimately strengthens the brand internally and externally.

People enjoy hearing stories; telling them remains the most popular way humans communicate, share information, evolve, learn, and groove on. Human beings store and retrieve much information through stories throughout their lives. Through telling stories, "[…] advertisements can communicate effectively by capturing consumers' attention to promote advertised products, demonstrate the products' appeal, and persuade consumers to consider those products." (Lien & Chen, 2013, p. 516). In other words, advertisements with storytelling techniques elicit emotion and connect prospective buyers to companies. Whether an ad is motivating, heartwarming, humorous, brilliant, or even devastating, one may launch a product, service, or brand into the stratosphere by presenting a tale that is delightful to watch over and over. It is even more (or — most) appealing "When a consumer finds something about himself in an advertisement, the narrative self-referencing is less vulnerable to weak argumentation than common analytical thinking." (Kılıç & Okan, 2021, p. 883). However, instead of being guided by traditions, religions, and shared values, i.e., the very past core of storytelling notion, contemporary brand ads should contain something that fits the personality, values, and particular lifestyle (Kılıç & Okan, 2021, p. 884). Finally, according to (Lozzard, n.d.), people should be left wanting more, and the finest automobile stories have a conclusion that serves as the beginning of the new conversation.

According to reports, 66% of people believe that "[...] the best automotive stories are about ordinary people." (Fozzard, n.d.). Honesty, compliance, and uniformity are vital elements of compelling storytelling in the automotive industry. Following that quote, one can state that these are people buying people. Hence, the stories should have human characteristics at heart (Fozzard, n.d.).

Brief summary — theoretical framework

In the case of this report, the Theoretical Framework chapter anchors the author's interests and the research questions that flow from them in a specific frame, context, and surround. Therefore, it serves as a specific theoretical review as well as a theoretical framework.

First, this chapter describes the notions of communication types and models to grasp how people (or companies) communicate. This subchapter is useful for understanding the overall communication processes before understanding and unraveling how and why (brand) stories are told. Since storytelling is understood as a communication tool and a marketing tool, understanding the very roots of communication models and styles is a necessary section to address. Naturally, this section dedicates a subchapter to define storytelling as a technique. Pointing out the nature of the concept, the differences between storytelling and narratives, and the differences between different types of it serves as a solid base to thoroughly grasp the matters in question. The storytelling is later compared, contrasted, and juxtaposed with the matters of branding, advertising, and the automotive industry to further dig into this report's very backbone (introduced in the beginning, see: Introduction chapter). Finally, the author looks at *the brand* and critical marketing concepts related to this study, including branding and advertising communication. Understanding thereof only seems reasonable when preluded with the concepts of *the brand* and related to it identities, values as well as corporate identity.

Methodological framework

This chapter shows and describes how this study is designed and why it is designed in this manner. Together with the following chapter (see: Introducing the companies – automotive industry), it describes and justifies the approaches and methodological choices that constitute this paper's framework. This section presents and outlines the author's philosophical and methodological underpinnings and choices.

This chapter is structured in a specific manner. Firstly, the author presents the underlying philosophy of science of this paper. Secondly, the author presents, describes, and justifies the methods used to conclude and answer research questions — i.e., narrative and content analysis.

Philosophy of Science

To effectively reply to the research question, it is necessary to identify the philosophical standpoints the study is done under, as the philosophical standpoints and subsequent ontology and epistemology clarify the parameters of the research in question.

In this research, the interpretive perspective (i.e., standpoint) will be used, as this paper's underlying and critical matters circle the social fields, such as, e.g., marketing. Interpretivism asserts that reality cannot be understood independently of social actors (including the researcher) that construct and make sense of this reality (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 13). Therefore, interpretive analysis is holistic and assumes that the social reality is not singular or objective. Epistemologically, interpretivism asserts that,

"[…] the language humans use to describe social practices constitutes those practices. Thus, understanding social reality requires understanding how practices and meanings are formed and informed by the language and tacit norms shared by humans working towards some shared goal." (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 13)

Due to the above, ontologically,

"The interpretive perspective emphasizes the importance of subjective meanings and social-political as well as symbolic action in the process through which humans construct and reconstruct their reality. […] this tradition does not presume that organizational structure or social relations are objectively known and unproblematic but attempts to understand how and why individuals […] give it a certain status and meaning." (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 13)

Such a standpoint assumes an in-depth examination of and exposure to the phenomenon of interest and presumes that social reality is understood to be reproduced through ongoing interactions. This perspective also emphasizes the importance of subjective meaning. It attempts to understand "[…] how and why individuals, through their socialization into, interaction with, and participation in, a social world, give it a certain status and meaning." (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 14). With this in mind, it is clear to assume that this standpoint directly presupposes that such interpretations might change with time. Given the primary focus on the data examined through the methods (both data content and methods are explained below), it also indicates the application of the social constructivist lens of shared meaning and language as any social process is "[…] an extension of human consciousness and subjective experience", and there is no clear-cut objectivity or reality (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 13).

Considering interpretivism, which tolerates the subjective uniqueness of reality, this work adopts a qualitative and exploratory approach. Regarding the relationship between theory and data, this work suggests abductive reasoning because even though it was a specific phenomenon that inspired this thesis, the further scope shifted with the creation of relevant ideas, and vice versa.

To sum up, the interpretative approach allows the researcher to consider social contexts and provide accounts of emotions, beliefs, and personality characteristics crucial in the context of this paper. That perspective also leads to pinpointing and emphasizing the importance of subjective meaning by understanding how interactions and participation in a social world give it a particular meaning. In that way, it also helps the researcher to grasp the study's uniqueness. As an insider, she can complete reflective, interpretative work that enriches the overall perspectives on the topic. The abductive approach regarding theory and data allowed her to think creatively and explore new possibilities, leading to new insights and ideas that would not have been considered otherwise.

Narrative analysis

In her book on narrative analysis, Catherine Kohler Riessman (1993) reminisces about her students who had not been able to find an accurate methodological resource for previously conducted 10-hour interviews with sexually abused women. Riessman concludes: "Although the talk was the object for study, the qualitative methods literature was largely silent about ways

to approach long stretches of talk that took the form of narrative accounts." (Riessman, 1993, p. V). Even though the following work does not contain such drastic data and does not deal with — however essential — topics similar to the Riessman's students, it similarly contains elements of stories, communication, and narratives. Generally, narrative analysis helps to examine the structure, content, and socio-cultural context the narratives are situated in (or influenced by) by paying attention to language, themes, and symbols used by storytellers. At the same time, this summarizes the validity of using such a research method in this work, as narrative analysis can be applied to various forms of communication, including texts, interviews, or — like in this case — visual media. Here, it helps to recognize the narratives in the broader context of storytelling and the stories presented in advertisements of the automotive industry. Like individuals who, according to Riessman, recapitulated and reinterpreted their lives through storytelling, brands also communicate and elucidate their values through stories (Riessman, 1993, p. V). In the context of this paper, seeing, analyzing, and understanding how "[…] narratives are constructed and how a teller rhetorically creates it to make particular points" is crucial to unravel these narratives (hence also, the message, communication, and essence) presented in the ads of the car companies (Riessman, 1993, p. V).

Since "Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself.", it assumes that people (or companies, in this sense) create and emphasize a particular order (Riessman, 1993, p. 1). The researcher should analyze how the story is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity (Riessman, 1993, pp. 1-2). Riessman points out that *interpretations* are "inevitable" as it is people who tell stories, not the world or nature (1993, p. 2). Therefore, narratives represent experiences, encounters, incidents, circumstances, and involvement or participation. Hence, it is also not uncommon to pinpoint the breaches between "[…] ideal and real, self and society." both in terms of Riessman's students' case and in regards to what is studied here in this paper (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). That is why the narratives and stories ought to be preserved and not fractured by those studying them to be later able to answer the question of "Why was this story told *this way*" instead of "Why was *this story told* ?" (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). In the context of this paper, this involves examining the "[…] different elements of the story, such as the plot, characters, setting, and themes to identify the underlying values, beliefs, and attitudes […]," which leads to an understanding of the insights or constructs of identities, and relationships with others (Hassan, 2022).

Furthermore, it is also vital to mention and introduce the chosen method to conduct the narrative analysis. Over the years, understandably, multiple typologies have been presented. Following Kohler's classification performative approach to narrative analysis will be used (Riessman, 2005, p. 5). In comparison to the thematic model, which interrogates what a story is about, and the structural model, which asks how the story is composed, the performative approach adds to the former "[…] the context and view of narratives as being multivoiced and coconstructed and the visual which links words and images in a coherent narrative." (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015, p. 546). The performative view allows one to dig deeper into the matters of identity construction, which is vital in the context of this paper. Additionally, it allows one to see "[…] how narrators want to be known and precisely how they involve the audience in "doing their identities." (Riessman, 2005, p. 5). Undoubtfully, as already mentioned, this approach does not lack the concept of interpretation as "[…] the readers are the ultimate interpreters, […] than either the teller or investigator." (Riessman, 2005, p. 5). Additionally, this approach accounts for the visuals as well as the written and the spoken as an innovative contemporary turn that undoubtedly serves the researcher well.

Content analysis

"Content analysis is one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences. It acknowledges that society is enacted in talk, texts, and other modalities of communication and that understanding social phenomena cannot be achieved without understanding how language operates in the social world." (Krippendorff, 2019, p. XII).

Krippendorff's statement could be directly translated as having (i.e., examining) the insights of communication trends, the types or styles people talk about different things, and how well they use the language to express themselves. Here, content analysis, in its flexibility, serves as a tool that can be applied to the institutional level. In this sense, as the author also highlights in the Introduction chapter, the content analysis helps and aims to better understand assets such as companies' principles and values. Therefore, this method is used to accentuate further the stories companies present in advertising spots by connecting those narratives with the companies' underlying values presented on their websites.

Before the author explains the importance, relevance, and general ideas behind the content analysis, it is essential to distinguish the matters of *qualitative* and *quantitative* research approaches concerning both this research method and this thesis. Quantitative research generally applies when testing the hypothesis using statistical analysis (Warren, 2020). Testing

already-theorized ideas, wanting to measure or describe something numerically, calls for using quantitative research (Warren, 2020). However, it is worth noting that the dividing line between quantitative and qualitative might be viewed as "rather thin and discreet" (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 11). In her book, Neuendorf states: "Even the most sophisticated piece of quantitative research remains dependent on natural language (words), while the most qualitative studies contain some kind of quantitative information (numbers)." (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 11). Even so, qualitative studies look into the narration and throughout analysis of what is written, said, or displayed in contrast to quantitative studies that reduce meaning to calculated and physically measured averages (Warren, 2020). It is essential to state that the research approach should be chosen based on the broader research aims, objectives, and research questions stated in the Introduction chapter (see: Introduction). Hence, here the author takes a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is rich, detailed, and valuable for exploratory research that explains worldview and understanding of human perception and experiences (Warren, 2020). The qualitative content analysis aims to help clarify and pinpoint what is stated in the companies' external communication concerning what is shown in the advertisements. The external communication mentioned above focuses mainly on Audi AG and Volvo Cars' brand values listed and explained on their websites.

In their article for the Qualitative Health Research Journal, Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon state that qualitative content analysis can be described as "[…] subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns." (2005, p. 1278). Essentially, it means that within qualitative and communication data, the content analysis goes deeper than typical coding and counting word occurrences in a text. The authors distinguish three approaches to this research method — conventional, directed, and summative. In this project, a summative approach will be used. The usage of this approach allows the author to go deeper in interpreting and analyzing the underlying meaning of the data as it "[…] goes beyond mere word counts to include latent content analysis." (Hsieh & Shnnon, 2005, p. 1284). This also demonstrates how qualitative content analysis can be argued to combine the study generated with a theoretical stance and the openness and flexibility of interpretation. As stated by (Hsieh & Shnnon) "Researchers try to explore word usage or discover the range meanings that a word can have in normal use." (p. 1285). With this approach to qualitative content analysis, the study usually starts with keywords typically identified before and during data analysis and derived from both the researcher's interests and a literature review (Hsieh & Shnnon, 2005, p. 1285). The summative approach is

beneficial because "An analysis of the patterns leads to an interpretation of the contextual meaning of specific terms or content." (Hsieh & Shnnon, 2005, p. 1286). Hence, this approach (i.e., qualitative and summative) allows one to reconstruct contexts and demonstrate multiple possible connotations that, in this case, play a more significant role than carefully counted and measured patterns.

As Mayring (2000) stated, a qualitatively oriented content analysis procedure consists of four major elements. The first element should fit the material into a model of communication. This means that it should be determined "[…] on what part of the communication inferences shall be made, to aspects of the communicator, to the situation of the text production, the socio-cultural background, to the text itself or the effect of the message." (Mayring, 2000). Second element sets the rules of analysis. The material should be analyzed step by step, dividing the material into "content analytical units" (Mayring, 2000). The third fundamental element discusses the rules of categories as the aspects of text interpretation should be "[…] put into categories, which were carefully founded and revised within the process of analysis." (Mayring, 2000). The last component that must be considered is the reliability and validity criteria. Additionally, this procedure, also described by Mayring, is twofold. Here, the deductive category development will be used as this application "[…] works with prior formulated, theoretical derived aspects of analysis, bringing them in connection with the text." (Mayring, 2000).

Introducing the companies – automotive industry

Even though this section directly corresponds with the previous chapter (see: Methodological framework), separating these two large segments seems tactical. The meaning of devoting an entire chapter to presenting, introducing, and discussing the companies that constitute the research material is to show the exciting history of the companies, situate them within the theoretical framework of this project, and present the necessary contexts.

Naturally, in the analytical section of this paper (see: Analysis), the author highlights the key elements in the theoretical and methodological context and the context that forms the core of this work, i.e., the storytelling technique. However, in this chapter, in addition to displaying the selected companies, the author wants to point out and focus on elements such as the history and genesis of the companies' creation, their development as well as brand-related matters. Additionally, this section concludes with a summary of the data content of this paper.

Audi AG – overview

Audi AG[1] is a German automotive manufacturer of luxury vehicles headquartered in Ingolstadt, Germany; the company is a subsidiary to the Volkswagen Group (Audi AG, n.d.).

"Eventful and varied" — these words, according to the company itself, describe the history of Audi, which dates back to the 19th century (Audi AG, n.d.). In 1899, prior to the development of the Audi company, August Horch started his business A.Horch & Cie. in Cologne (Germany), however, following differences of opinion with the Board of Management and Supervisory Board, Horch left his own company, and in 1909 established a second car company in Zwickau, Germany — today known as Audi AG (Audi AG). Since the founder's last name was already in use and protected by trademark, the new company's name was based on the Latin translation of the founder's name, i.e., Horch, meaning *listen*, became Latin *audi* (Audi AG). From the company's website, one learns that in later correspondence, August Horch signed his letters with the words "Kind regards – Audi-Horch". Audi's logo, famously recognized four

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[1] Hereinafter referred to as: Audi.

interlocking rings, symbolize the merger of four automobile manufacturers based in Germany: Audi, DKW, Horch and Wanderer which became Auto Union AG, second-largest motor vehicle manufacturing group in Germany (Audi AG).

Reflecting the economic pressures of World War II, Auto Union concentrated increasingly on smaller cars through the 1930s, so by 1938 the company's DKW brand accounted for 17,9% of the German car market, while Audi held only 0,1%. After several Audis were delivered in 1939, the Audi name disappeared entirely from the market for over two decades. From 1954 onwards, Friedrich Flick — the company's largest single shareholder, gradually acquired a large stake in the equity of Auto Union GmbH, and his strategy was to find a strong partner for Auto Union. As a result, in April 1958, Daimler-Benz AG (today known as The Mercedes-Benz Group AG) acquired 88% of Auto Union's shares, and in the following year the company became a fully-owned subsidiary.

The succedent chapter in the company's book is famously marked as "Reborn – the Audi 100 forms a clean break" (Audi AG). A lack of model policy and critical press coverage led to a downward spiral of sales of DKW in the early 1960s which would later be rescued by a new engineer Ludwig Kraus. The newly launched car, DKW F 102 passenger car, was the company's first post-war design with a four-stroke engine, and it "[…] heralded the start of a new era […] the rebirth of Audi, a name rich in tradition." (Audi AG). The DKW F 102 passenger car was widely advertised, became a resounding success, and remained in production until 1972. In the meantime, in 1965, a new era had dawned in Ingolstadt when the company became a subsidiary of Volkswagenwerk AG. In secret, Audi engineers, led by Kraus, continued to develop new models of cars. Ultimately sanctioned, the new Audi model was first presented to the international press in Ingolstadt in November 1968. The new model — Audi 100 (see: Image 2.) —

"[…] was the first vehicle to have shaken off all genetic links with the former DKW models. The huge success of this new Audi proved its creators right. The Audi 100 also helped Auto Union to preserve its separate identity." (Audi AG)

Image 2. Audi 100 Model. Derived from (Audi AG, n.d.).

In 1972, "in the spirit of these new guiding principles", the first-generation Audi 80 was launched (Audi AG). Two years later, in 1974, Ferdinand Piëch was appointed as Kraus' successor. During his proprietorship, called the "Piëch era ", Audi was transformed into a highly innovative car manufacturer, raising the Audi brand's positioning (Audi AG). Finally, new model — Audi Quattro — debuting in 1980 at the Geneva Motor Show, represented "[…] a quantum leap in the new positioning of the Audi brand on the world stage." (Audi AG).
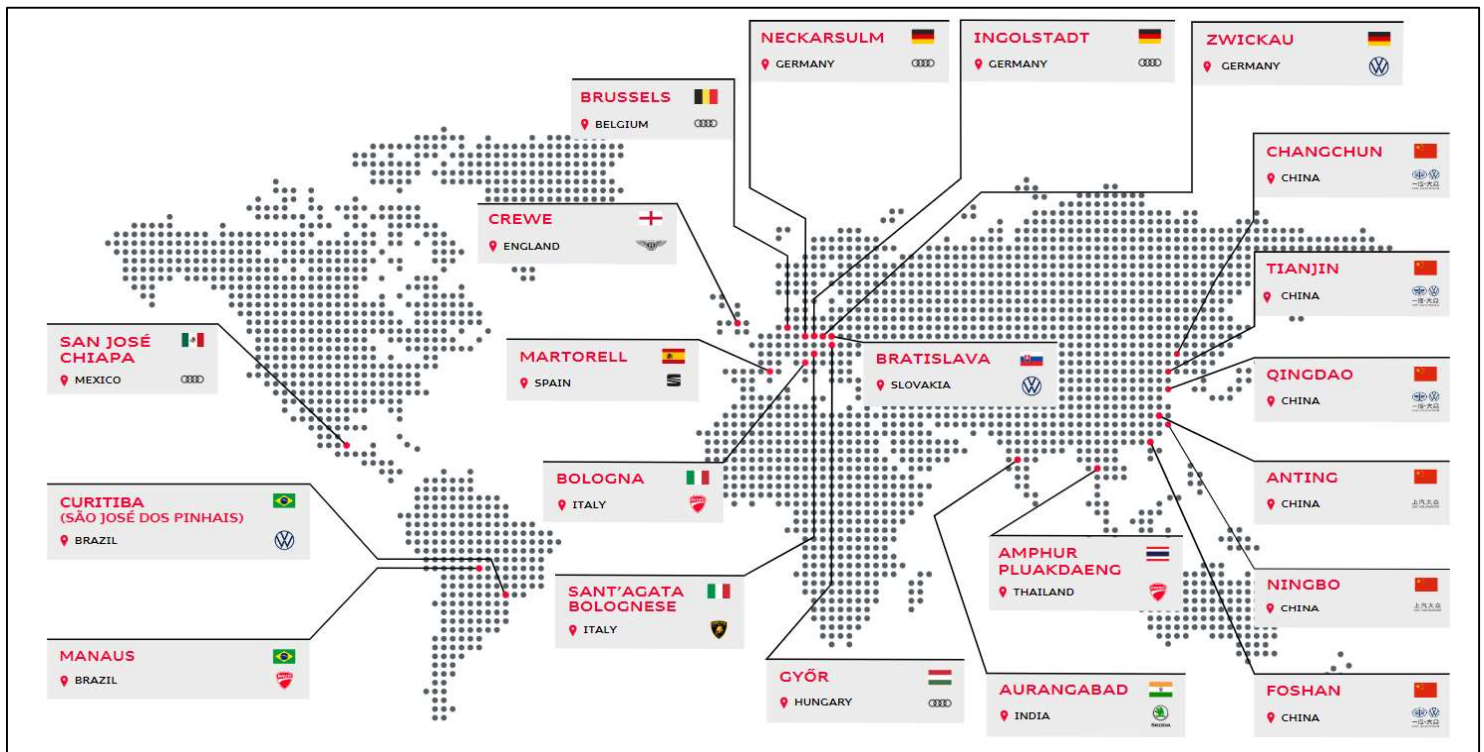
Image 3. Production sites Audi Group (as of: May 19, 2023). Derived from (Schwägerl).

"Eventful and varied" history led the brand to being "[…] one of the most successul manufacturers of automobiles and motorcycles in the premium and luxury segment." (Schwägerl). The brand produce at 21 locations in 12 countries, Audi and its partners are present in more than 100 markets. According to Agnes Schwägerl, the Head of Communication International Sites at Audi Group, in 2022 the Audi Group delivered 1,61 million vehicles (Schwägerl). Additionally, in December of 2018 the company informed that it will invest 14 billion Euro through 2023 in electric mobility, digitalization and self-driving cars (Reuters, 2018).

Audi AG – *the* brand

Having outlined the history of the creation and development of the Audi AG, in this subchaper the author presents those elements of Audi that make a brand, *the* brand of AUDI. Therefore,

this section unravels matters related to the concept of brand and corporate identity such as its mission, vision, values as well as physical characteristics that constitute the brand.

Before the author gets into more details regarding the brand Audi, it must be clearly stated that the company's website is filled with content regarding the brand itself. It is safe to state that the website provides fundamental guides on brand appearances and basics, such as rings, brand claims, typography, the layout structure, imagery, illustration, and tone of voice; in addition, the company provides guides regarding used interface, communication media, dealer facility or motion pictures, among others (AUDI AG, n.d.). Such a guide — especially when created publicly and proudly presented by the company — can be valuable for employees, customers, individuals, or other companies. It also proves that the company's dedication to such matters leads the way around *the* brand.

For clarity, it is essential to point out that this tab of Audi's website makes up the source of this section (for details, see: the summary table of this chapter). Moreover, the author does not discuss every element of those guides and fundamentals. Instead, on top of company's slogan, values, and mission, the matters of — logo, colors, typography, imagery, and tone of voice — are described and examined.

First, Audi's logo. As mentioned above, the four overlapping rings represent the four brands of Audi Union. The first ring on the left represents Audi, the second represents DKW, the third is Horch, and the fourth ring stands for Wanderer (Audi AG). The emblem — the ring design itself — was the idea of Klaus von Oertzen, the sales director at Wanderer. It is said that Oertzen felt inspired by the Summer Olympics held in Berlin in 1936 and believed that Audi's rings similarly represent a desire to succeed. Later in 1995, the International Olympic Committee sued Audi and lost in the International Trademark Court, as Pierre de Coubertin, one of the founders of the Olympic Games, commented that the four rings in the logo have nothing to do with the five Olympic rings, as they "[…] represent the five parts of the world which now are won over to Olympism and willing to accept healthy competition." (Dumitrache, 2009). Audi's logo has changed over time (e.g., the distinctive slanted tails on the "A" and "d", originally designed in 1920 and revived

Image 4. The typeface Audi Type (used since 2009). Derived from (AUDI AG., 2023).

in 1965), however, during Audi's centennial celebrations in 2009, the company updated the logo to one designed by Rayan Abdullah (see: Image 4. & Image 5.) (Evans, 2009). As stated on company's website "A new freedom. Plain and simple. No effects. […] Simply black or white."
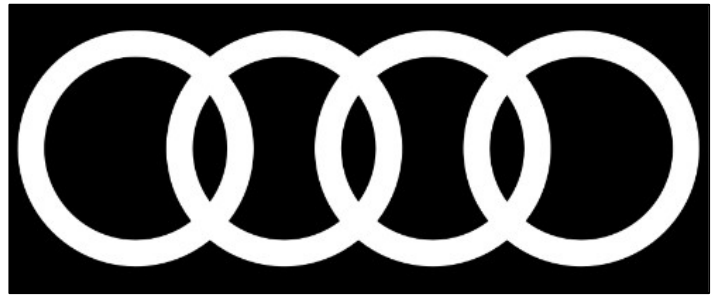

Image 5. Audi AG logo. Derived from (AUDI AG., 2023).

(AUDI AG., 2023). The company adds that "[…] Whether finely wrought or thick, reduced or self-assured – the rings can act as amplifiers and drivers of the message." (AUDI AG., 2023).

As the company states, "Striking and loud. Or reduced and elegant – the Audi Type font styles allow a wide variety of scenarios and moods." (AUDI AG, 2023). Specifically constructed and flexible typography of the brand (see: Image 6.), can "[…] ensure uniform brand perception across all points of contact – from smartwatch to TV commercial." (AUDI AG, 2023). Therefore, the font is a distinguishing feature of the brand that is not assigned to any particular vehicle model, category or business area and can be freely selected. However, it is explained that, for instance, the "Typography does not appear in uppercase lettering", "[…] does not appear with an outline.", "[…] should not be applied veritacally." (see Image 6.) (AUDI AG, 2023).

The tone of voice category extensively explained on the website, defines "[…] how we as a brand speak and write. It brings the brand personality to life in linguistic terms" (AUDI AG, 2023). The company continues that it is not

Image 6. Typography's Don'ts. Derived from (AUDI AG, 2023).

about *what* or *to whom* but *how* things are being said. The company proposes four linguistics principles (AUDI AG, 2023):

- Ahead of our time – "Just as we seize every opportunity to create a livable future for our planet and generations to come, our language is trendsetting and versatile."

- Confident – "Everything we do is done with conviction. […] Our language is powerful and clear, active and open-minded."
- Cultivated – "We communicate eloquently, our language is fluent and full of elegance. We emphasize the premium character of the brand […]."
- Inspiring – "Since we believe in the will to create, we are convincing and engaging."

At once, in the context of tone of voice, it is also worth mentioning the company developed a Corporate Sound Concept, with Audi Sound Studio designed for producing Corporate Sound (Bochmann, 2010). Even though, the brand does not have a distinctive brand song as such, the sound "[…] forges a new path in audio branding." (Bochmann, 2010). According to Margarita Bochmann, project manager for Corporate Sound at Audi AG responsible for defining acoustic brand identity of the company, the Corporate Sound concept:

"[…] adds a whole new dimension to the brand experience. […] It implements the brand's visual identity and embodies the sound of Audi. The objective in developing the Corporate Sound was to ensure that the Audi brand values can be recognised and experienced at all acoustic touch points while retaining the wealth of musical styles." (Bochmann, 2010)

In terms of colors, the company uses white, black, and a progressive red — those are considered "Audi brand colors" (Audi AG, n.d.) (see Image 7.). However, for functionality reasons, the color palette can be extended to include grey tones ranging from white to black. There is another rule concerning notifications, warnings as well as electric vehicles. For the former, the company uses green, yellow, and red, while for the latter, neon blue and neon green.
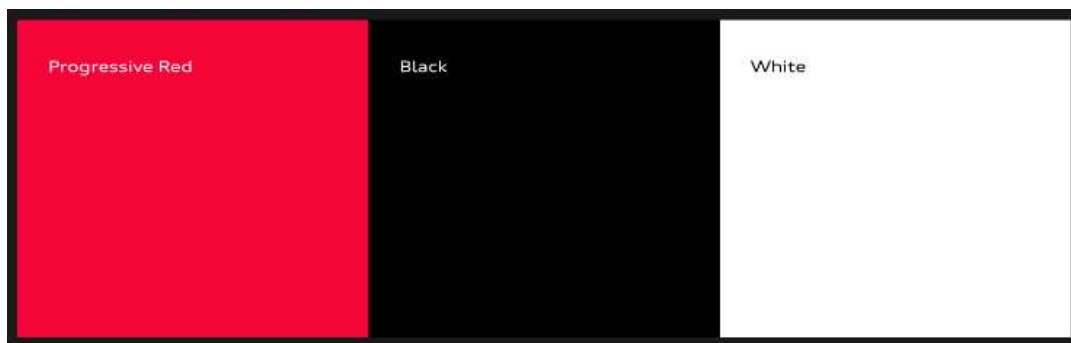
Image 7. Audi's brand colors. Derived from: (Audi AG, n.d.).

The brand's imagery is explained as "Visual World. Authentic and Extraordinary" (Audi AG, n.d.). In reality, it reflects visual aesthetics. The brand explains and elaborates on attitudes, the cast, places, colors, and composition, among others. For example, "The style is minimalistic and clear-cut, with the situation in each image depicted in an authentic […] focus on essential. The images don't look all staged, and yet every single detail is meticulously composed." (Audi

AG, n.d.). Accordingly, the attitude represents bravery, curiosity, approachable and optimistic expressions, and charisma (Audi AG, n.d.). Similarly, the cast should be stylish and "[…] know what life is about. And if kids are shown, they should be curious and bright." (Audi AG, n.d.). Places should be epic, fascinating, unique, and exclusive; composition should create authentic and engaging surroundings (Audi AG, n.d.).

Moving on to Audi's slogan. Known to the worldwide audience claim "Vorsprung durch Technik" (which translates to "Being Ahead through Technology"):

> "[…] is the DNA of our brand and drives our future-oriented brand identity. Our brand name Audi and our claim […] go together […]. While the rings interact with the content, it has a clear yet unobtrusive sender function." (AUDI AG., 2023)

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the brand's slogan, Audi MediaCenter published an article to commemorate it is changing shape and form towards the one heard and repeated today (Fischer & Henger, 2021). The authors of the article — Spokesperson Lifestyle and Marketing Sebastian Fischer and Spokesperson Audi Transition Daniela Henger — state that Vorsprung durch Technik "[…] isn't just a slogan for Audi – it is also an expression of the company's future-oriented approach." (Fischer & Henger, 2021). When Audi 100 made its first appearance in the 70s, it was apparent that is represented "Vorsprung durch Technik"; however, the slogan was adapted over many years, including "Audi. A nice bit of technology" or "Audi. Relaxed driving with perfect technology" (Fischer & Henger, 2021). The company soon returned to the catchy original. Hence, when introducing Audi Quattro in the 80s, advertising began to use the slogan more frequently. Nowadays, "[…] it's synonymous with the company." (Fischer & Henger, 2021).

Finally, presenting and describing matters such as brand values and mission is essential. As stated by the company, "The AUDI AG stands for sporty vehicles, high build quality, and progressive design – for Vorsprung durch Technik." (AUDI AG, 2023). Audi's corporate standards and values are: appreciation, openness, responsibility, integrity.
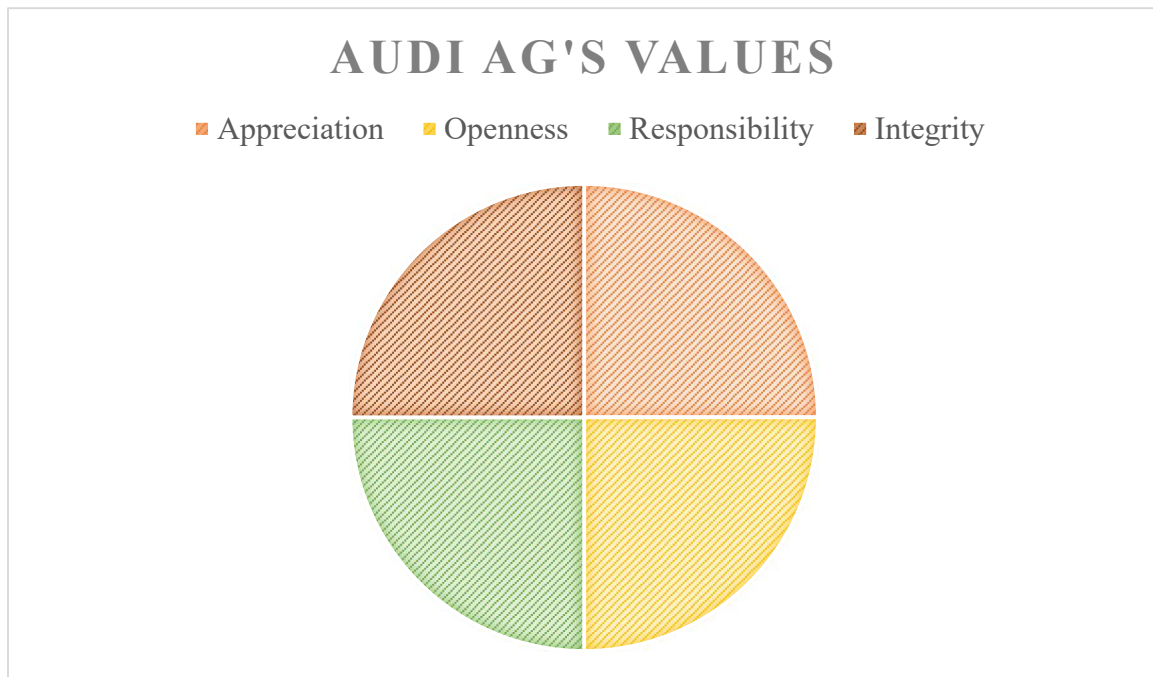
AUDI AG'S VALUES

■ Appreciation   ■ Openness   ■ Responsibility   ■ Integrity

Figure 2. Audi AG's standards and values. Prepared by the author. Derived from: source.

The values of Audi "[…] relies on teamwork, embraces new challenges and embodies diversity." (AUDI AG, 2020). These rules are firmly anchored in the corporate culture of the brand. Additionally, the company focuses on attributes such as: "genuine," "straightforward," "open-minded," "as equals," "united," and "trust," which were gradually implemented in the HR tools and studied during a series of workshops (AUDI AG, 2020). On top of other internal measures to raise awareness among its employees, improve morale and highlight the importance and significance of the company's culture and values, Audi also organized a series of events titled "try.fail.learn" intended to encourage employees to take risks, fail once in a while and masters how to learn from it. The website also promises that "We will make the difference by the way our products look like, work and feel. By progress you can feel." (AUDI AG, 2023). The company shows four elements that may allow it: sustainability, design, digital, and performance (AUDI AG, 2023). Each element takes the reader to individual articles, testifying to the activity and progress within each element.

Volvo Cars – overview

Volvo Cars[2] is a Swedish multinational manufacturer of luxury vehicles headquartered in Torslanda, Gothenburg.

The Volvo company was founded in 1927 in Gothenburg, Sweden, and was formed as a subsidiary of AB SKF, a Swedish bearing and seal manufacturing company built in 1907. Assar Gabrielsson, a Swedish industrialist, and Gustav Larson, a Swedish automotive engineer, were sequentially appointed Volvo's managing director and technical manager. In 1927, the two co-founders stated — "Cars are driven by people. The guiding principle behind everything we make at Volvo, therefore, is and must remain safety." (Wikipedia, n.d.).

The trademark *Volvo*, Latin for *I roll*, was first registered by SKF in 1915, but it was not until 1927 that the trademark was used again, now known as a trademark and company name for an automobile. The famous logo with the arrow pointing to the right symbolizes the Greek alchemical symbol for iron. That same year, in 1927, "On the morning of April 14, the first Volvo car drove out the factory gates in Gothenburg […]" (Volvo Cars, n.d.). The first Volvo car was called ÖV4, an open tourer with a four-cylinder engine. Almost 20 years later, in 1944, the brand expanded into the profitable U.S. market with the arrival of Volvo's smallest vehicle, the Volvo PV444 passenger car. The "little Volvo," as PV444 was often called, "[…] was seen as a promise of post-war prosperity, and in the course of two weeks 2,300 people placed orders for it." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). The car eventually entered the U.S. in the late 50s. Volvo quickly became the second-biggest import brand in California, and by the 70s, the USA had become Volvo's most significant market at the time. In the meantime, in 1963, the Volvo Halifax Assembly Plant was opened by Prince Bertil in Canadian Halifax, Nova Scotia, making it the second plant (after California, U.S.) Volvo opened outside of Sweden and was the second non-domestic auto plant in North America after Rolls-Royce (Wikipedia, n.d.).

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[2] Hereinafter referred to as: Volvo.

Image 9. Volvo ÖV4, 1927. Derived from (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

Image 8. "The Little Volvo" PV444, 1944. Derived from (Volvo Cars, n.d.)

With time, the U.S. market has also given way to other automobile brands, which led Volvo to sell its car manufacturing business in order to focus on commercial vehicles and buy a 5% stake in Japanese automaker Mitsubishi Motors. Later, "Ford saw an advantage in acquiring a profitable, prestigious European mid-size car manufacturer known for its safety aspects as an addition to its Premier Automotive Group. The buyout of Volvo Cars was announced on January 28, 1999." (Wikipedia, n.d.). As a result, the Volvo trademark was used by two companies: Volvo Group (a manufacturer of trucks, buses, and construction equipment owned by Swedish interests) and Volvo Cars (or Volvo Car Corporation, a manufacturer of automobiles owned by Ford Motor Company).

Volvo Car Corporation, aka Volvo Cars, was part of Ford Motors Company's Premier Automotive Group, Jaguar, Aston Martin, and Land Rover. The outcome of the Ford era was a luxurious second-generation Volvo S80 and a premium crossover Volvo XC60. As stated, in addition to the automotive achievements, the Ford era also brought Volvo Car another significant change, mainly caused by the economic crisis of 2008 (Wikipedia, n.d.). Ford offered Volvo Cars for sale in December 2008 after suffering losses that year. In October 2009, Ford confirmed that the company would go to the parent of the motor manufacturer Geely Automobile. A definitive agreement was signed in 2010 for 1,8 billion dollars. Under Geely's ownership, Volvo has refocused its product lineup. Five years later, the company sold more than half a million cars for the first time in its 89-year history (Wikipedia, n.d.). In July 2017, the automaker announced that starting in 2019, all of its new models will include electric motors leading to Volvo becoming the first manufacturer to end production of internal combustion-

only vehicles, with all vehicles hybrid or electric powered. Also, in 2017, Volvo announced a vehicle subscription offering called Care by Volvo, which offers the Volvo XC40 for a monthly payment that includes insurance and maintenance. In 2020, Volvo and Geely announced that they had started formal discussions about the merger of business, while in early 2021, the company announced plans to stop selling fossil fuel-based cars by 2030, switching to electric-powered cars (Carey & Soderpalm, 2021).

The notion of safety — here repeated after the company co-founders — has been recurrent when looking at the company's website. Volvo Cars acquired plenty of safety milestones, inventing some of them. Firstly, in 1944, two- or three-layered laminated glass was introduced, which was (and still is) to prevent the glass from breaking into large sharp pieces (Wikipedia, n.d.). In 1959, Volvo's engineer invented and patented the modern three-point safety belt designed to secure the driver and passengers against harmful movement that may result during a collision or sudden situation. Eventually, the originator shared his patent and made it accessible to other manufacturers. In 1976, the U.S. Government bough 24 Volvo Cars for extensive crash testing, resulting in "[…] Volvo being officially chosen at the time as the benchmark to set safety standards for all new cars." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). In the 1990s, the company introduced the first three-point seatbelt for the rear seat's middle and a child safety cushion integrated into the middle armrest (Wikipedia, n.d.), and, in 1991, it introduced the Side Impact Protection System, which channels the force of a side impact away from the doors and into the safety cage. Later, Volvo invented a safety device to prevent injury to front seat users during collisions, and in 2004 it introduced the Blind Spot Information System, which detects vehicles entering the vehicle's blind spot with a side-view-mirror-mounted camera. These are solely a few examples of Volvo's safety-related innovations. The brand has also incorporated other technologies and is working on new ones.

Nowadays, the company sells 1,2 million cars annually with 50% online sales, aiming to reduce the overall CO_2 lifecycle emissions per car by 40% (compared to 2018) and to sustain 50 percent of their global sales volume to be fully electric cars (Volvo Cars, n.d.). Today, "Volvo is one of the most well-known and respected car brands in the world […]" with world sales in more than 100 countries, including Sweden, Belgium, China, Malaysia, India, and the United States (Volvo Cars, n.d.). As of December 2021, Volvo Cars employed approximately 41,000 full-time employees (Volvo Cars, 2022).

Volvo Cars – *the* brand

As indicated and expected, this subchapter is dedicated to the matters that constitute Volvo as *the* brand. This section aims to unravel matters related to the brand identity of Volvo, such as its values, mission, or slogan, as well as physical characteristics, e.g., colors and logo.

Accordingly, before the author gets into more details regarding the Volvo Cars brand, it must be clearly stated that its website is filled with brand-related content. The company's website provides essential guides on brand appearances, design, resources, media, logotypes, icons, typography, sound, illustrations, and its vision or values (Volvo Cars, n.d.). Such a guide, named Volvo Experience System, created and published to the public eye, can be valuable for customers, individuals, or other companies. It also proves that the company's dedication to such matters leads the way around *the* brand. Here, the author focuses on several key elements — logo, typography, tone of voice, slogan, values, and vision.

First, the logo. As mentioned earlier, the name of the company was formed in 1915 to manufacture and market bearings in the automotive industry. However, it was used again years after that. It is believed that a member of SKF management had come up with the Volvo name.

> "Not only was the name ingeniously simple, it was also easy to pronounce in most places around the world and with a minimal risk of spelling errors. And best of it all was its immensely strong symbolic connection to the company's entire operations." (Volvo Cars, 2006).

Volvo comes from the Latin *volvere*, which in the first person singular forms *Volvo*, i.e., *I roll*. At the same time as Volvo was reactivated, the ancient chemical symbol for iron — a circle with an arrow pointing diagonally upwards to the right, was adopted as a logotype (see: Image 10). Derived from the Roman Empire and the god of warfare, Mars, first and from Western culture later, such an ideogram has long been the symbol of the iron industry, "The iron badge on the car was supposed to take up this symbolism and create associations with the honored


Image 10. Volvo Iron Mark (left) and Volvo Spread World Mark (right). Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.)

traditions of the Swedish iron industry: steel and strength with properties such as safety, quality, and durability" (Volvo Cars, 2006). Today, the company uses two types of logos to communicate the brand — the Volvo Iron Mark, and the Volvo Spread Word Mark, explaining that "The logo usage is carefully restricted, for a strong and relevant brand experience and to safeguard the Volvo brand." (see Image 10.) (Volvo Cars, n.d.). The Volvo Iron Mark is a combination mark derived from the iron and Swedish steel symbol and is used on products in a small space. On the other hand, the Volvo Spread Word Mark is a spaced-out version of the core Word Mark and is used in marketing and communication with the restriction for events and signage (Volvo Cars, n.d.). It is worth noting that the company provides instructions on clear spaces, sizes, positioning, coloring, or incorrect usage of either of the logos. Below, (Image 11.) and (Image 12.) show examples of the correct use of the logos.
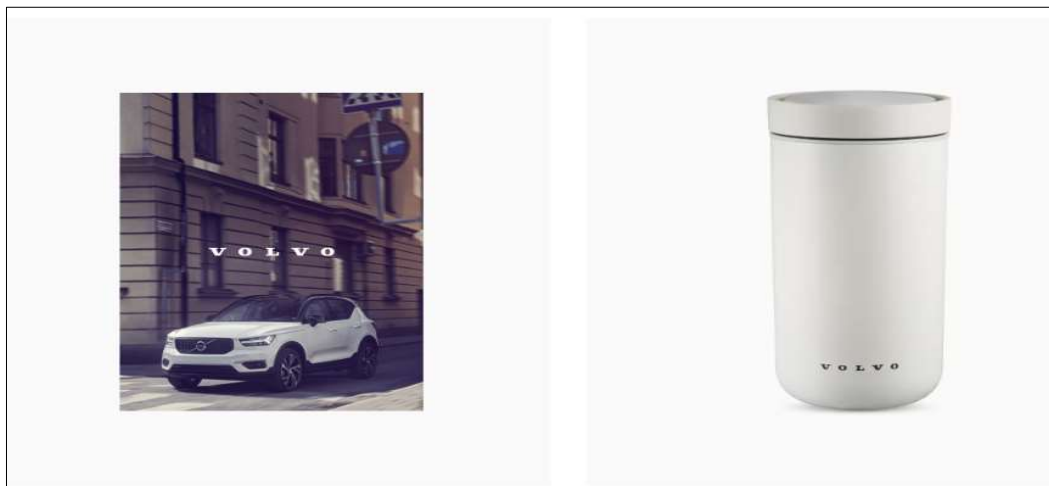
Image 12. The correct way to use the Volvo Iron Mark (left: mobile app icon; right: profile image on SoMe platform). Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.).
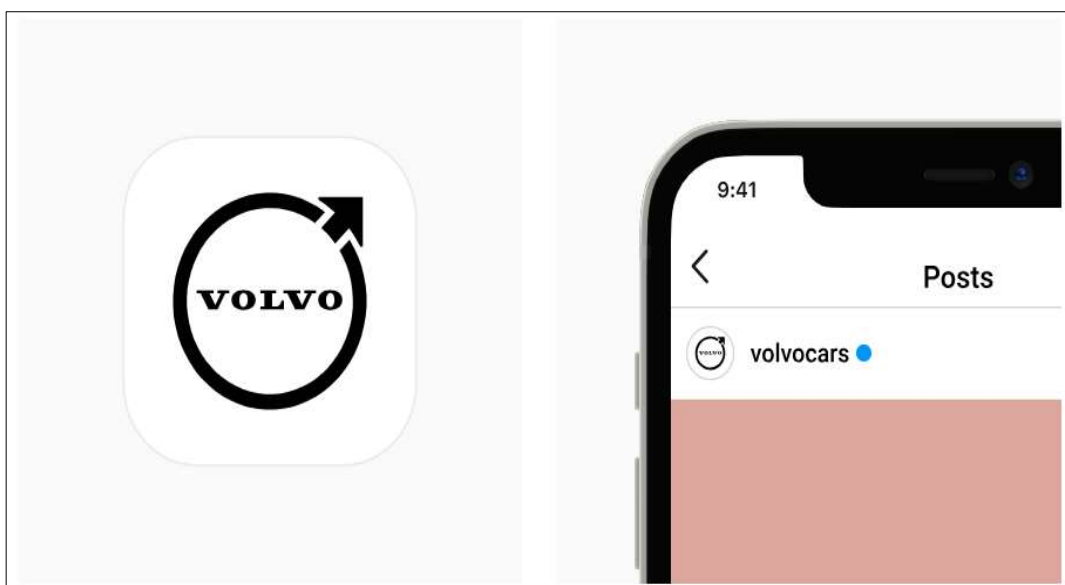
Image 11. The correct way to use the Volvo Spread Word Mark (left: end of the video in social media; right: merchandise products). Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

As stated on the brand's website, another vital component of the brand's communication is its typography, as "Consistent typographic elements ensure legibility and brand recognition when people interact with our designs across platforms." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). The typefaces of the brand are Volvo Novum, Volvo Anikva, and Volvo Broad, and the design includes support for extended Latin, Cyrillic, and Greek characters (Volvo Cars, n.d.). To summarize, Novum is used for most texts, including headings, subheadings, introductions, body copy, and captions. Antikva is mainly used in editorial content, captions, and quotes. The Broad one "[…] remains iconic typeface which provides the recognition" (Volvo Cars, n.d.). While Volvo Broad is available in 1 weight, and with Novum and Antikva, Volvo Cars uses 21 fonts. The images below, i.e., (Image 13.), (Image 14.), and (Image 15.), show the typefaces and fonts of Volvo Cars.

Image 15. Volvo Novum typeface and fonts. Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

Moreover, the company treats color as a key factor in the Volvo Car design system. The company says, "Our color palette consists of timeless, versatile blue and grey colors, as well as accent colors." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). Blues and greys are used in most contexts. However, accent colors can be used sparingly for specific activities or campaigns. (Image 16.)
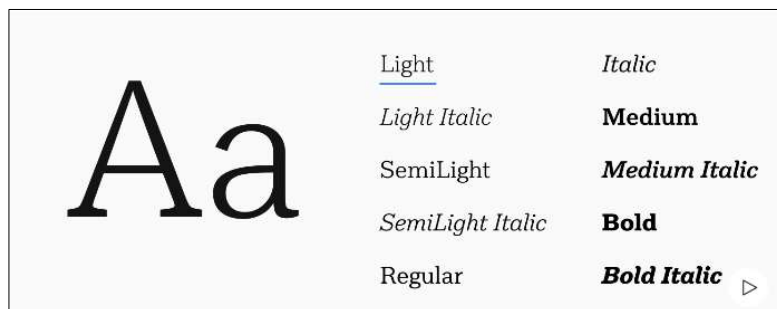
Image 13. Volvo Antikva typeface and fonts. Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

shows the brand's color palette, "Used correctly, it creates a consistent brand expression and distinct identity, and helps define our refined, understated aesthetic." (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

Image 14. Volvo Broad typeface. Available only in 1 weight. Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

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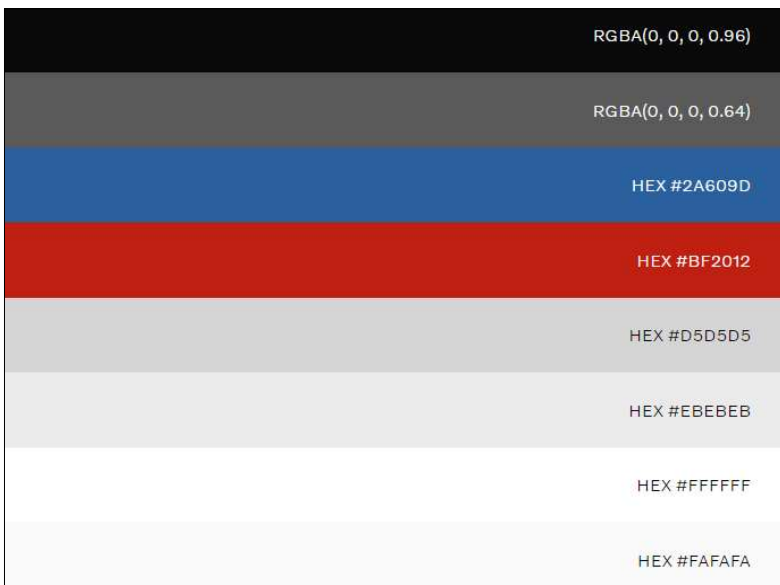*Image 16. Volvo Car's color palette. Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.)*

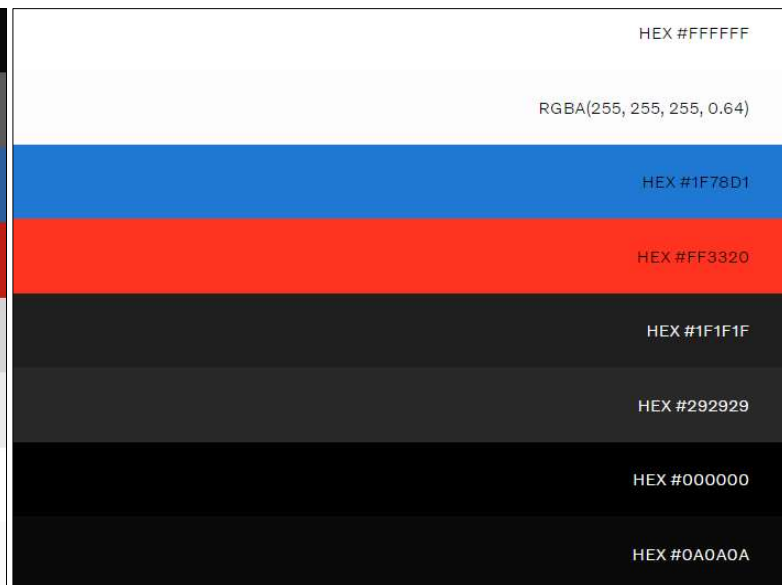*Image 17. Color theme for Light UI. Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.)*   *Image 18. Color theme for Dark UI. Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.)*

There is a different and carefully selected User Interface color pallet. It is used to communicate visual hierarchy, guide interactions, and create the identity. The company offers two themes to support light and dark UI creation. Both of these are optimized to meet color contrast compliance (presented above, see (Image 17.) and (Image 18.)).

A special tab on the brand's website dedicated to its design also discusses elements such as icons and imagery. Similarly to elements previously mentioned above, these are also crucial for the context of this chapter. Icons represent and form the brand's attributes. As explained, "Our icons embody the Volvo Cars brand identity along with our typography, copy, color, imagery, motion and (of course) our logo marks." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). The initial ruling is that the company evaluates all icons and sets of icons based on the principles of Volvo Car iconography: effectiveness, personality, simplicity, composition, perspective, and consistency (Volvo Cars, n.d.). For instance, every icon must be effective and add value; hence, effective icons are immediate (understood rapidly), clear (readable, recognizable), matching (in size, style, motion,

and weight), or measured (designed to size/context), among many others (Volvo Cars, n.d.). The personality aspect is exhausted when blending key ideas with creativity. Hence, some techniques for adding personality to iconography are combining straight and rounded corners elegantly or creating a style for metaphors (Volvo Cars, n.d.). Conversely, consistency creates trust; "Consistent icons borrow ideas from one another to heighten the sense of unity" (Volvo Cars, n.d.).
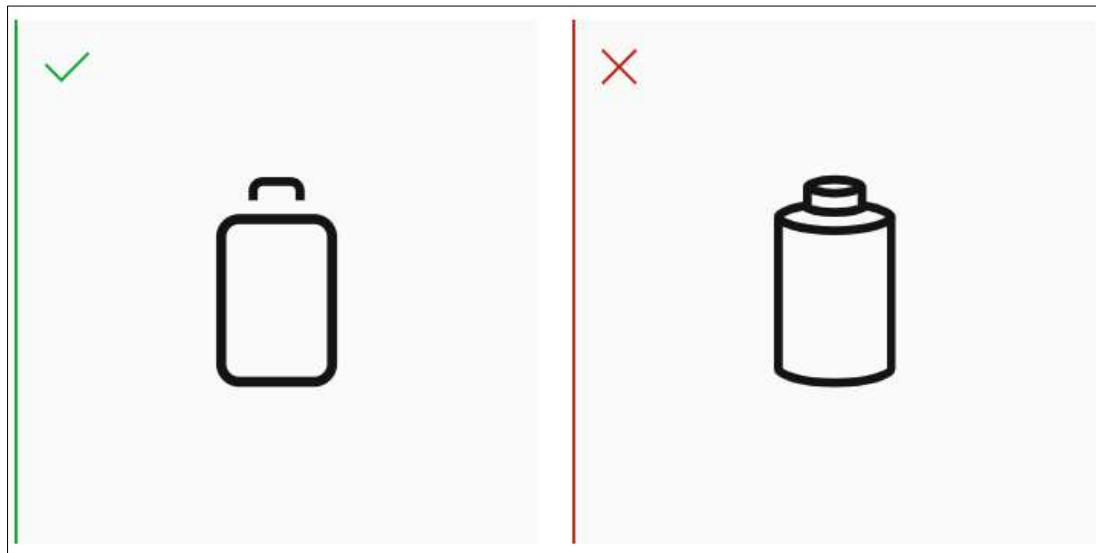
Image 19. The principles of Volvo's iconography: the matter of perspective. Opting for a flat, 2D appearance consistent with other icons. Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.)

The imagery facet refers to Volvo's visual language, which includes images and videos. As explained, "These add greater depth to our visual identity, creating a look and feel that is true to Volvo Cars while showcasing our products and services." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). According to the company, the purpose of the images is to "inspire or inform," and understanding to which category and image fall helps to determine its placement and treatment (Volvo Cars, n.d.). The categories of the brand's visual language are as follows:

- ➢ Concept studio (focus on a product's expression in a studio environment),
- ➢ concept location (focus on a product's expression in a natural environment),
- ➢ storytelling (create narratives by showing the product in use),
- ➢ descriptive (functional and product-centered) (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

The visual language pyramid (also shown here, see (Image 20.), highlights "[…] what we want to communicate and where our communication falls on the scales of emotional vs. rational and challenging vs. confirming." (Volvo Cars, n.d.).
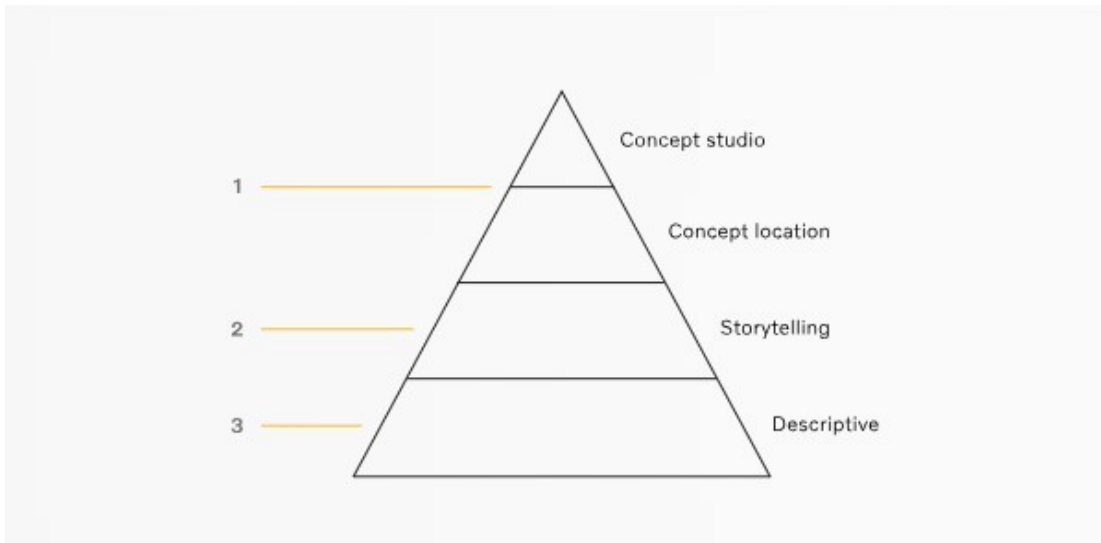
Image 20. The visual language pyramid, Volvo Cars. Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

Numbers 1, 2 & 3, seen in (Image 20), refer to — hero assets (1) that include both concept studio (the minor portion) and concept location and are used to help draw attention from prominent positions, such as websites homepages or product launch campaigns (Volvo Cars, n.d.). storytelling assets (2) used to build narratives and commonly used in campaigns, PR imagery, editorials or running footage; ad lastly, descriptive assets (3) that are functional images, videos or animations used for detailed specifications and shopping contexts (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

Moreover, the company discusses the matters of tone of voice as well as the sound of Volvo. The tone of voice reflects the company's personality. As explained, "It is this personality that makes people connect with us – both emotionally and intellectually." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). The voice is, therefore, competent but not arrogant; intelligent but not intellectual; sympathetic, not flattering (Volvo Cars, n.d.). In that sense, the talk is not to lecture, describe or claim but to explain, reveal and prove. Volvo also says that when it "[…] talk about prosperity, we take on that big picture perspective." *prosperity* cannot function as a standalone word. Audio branding covers many aspects of sound. It aims to strengthen brand awareness and identity, and the keywords in that sense circle around the ideas of premium quality, relevance, human-centric authenticity, inclusivity, safety, warmth or progressive innovations, dynamics, and beat (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

The overall story of the company also marks its mission. On the website, Volvo Car states, "We have made it our mission to make life easier, better, and safer for everyone." (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

The company adds, "For a better future. We want to provide you with the freedom to move in a personal, sustainable and safe way." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). The personal way refers to new car ownership models and services available whenever and wherever needed. The sustainable aspect is set to protect the world by doing more than "merely electrifying cars" and to rethink the sustainability in daily operations, Volvo cars, and society (Volvo Cars, n.d.). Safety, however, consists of making cars "[…] for people who care about other people. So when it comes to safety, we think just as much about your surroundings as we do about you and your passengers." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). While reading the brand's website, one notices a significant focus on safety. The company dedicates a few tabs to elaborate on safety issues. One reads, "Safety is much more than sticking a label to a product" (Volvo Cars, n.d.). Our Volvo Cars culture aims to ensure that every individual and every team across the company is firmly committed to having safety as their highest priority." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). Safety is mentioned both in places dedicated to engineering or automotive concerns and in places presenting the brand's mission, culture, and vision or history. For example,

"Cars are driven by people. The guiding principle behind everything we make is, and must remain safety." (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

"A leader in the field for decades, safety is part of our heritage and the backbone of our company. We have always been a human-centric brand that cares for people around us." (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

"To protect what is important to people, we always strive to equip our cars with safe and intelligent technology. Building on our heritage, we are now aiming for a new era for safety." (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

On its website, Volvo asks Who are we? To answer later, "From the very outset, Volvo Cars has been a brand for people who care about the world we live in and the people around us. We have made it our mission to make life easier, better, and safer for everyone." (Volvo Cars, n.d.). The company's culture, according to Volvo itself, is the way it interacts with each other, the customers, and society. Such culture, "rooted in the history of the brand" also helps to achieve business goals as well as long term success (Volvo Cars, n.d.). Volvo Cars present these five as the company's values (see: Figure 3).
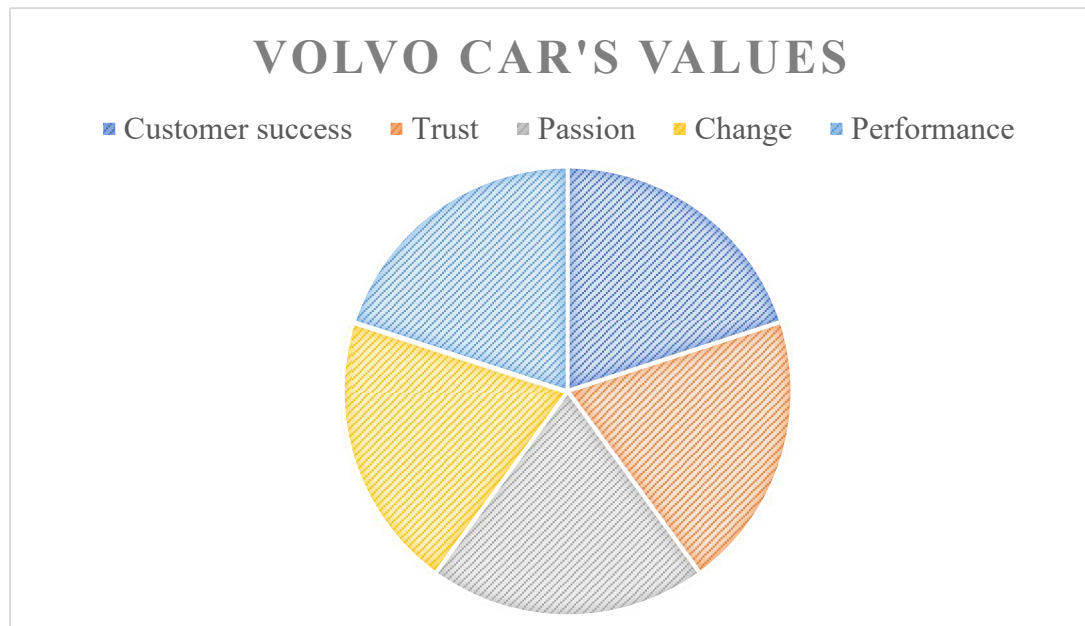
Figure 3. Volvo Car's values. Prepared by the author. Derived from: (Volvo Cars, n.d.)

"The Volvo Group culture is defined by a set of five carefully chosen values [...]. These values are a major force in guiding our day-to-day behavior and drive our decision-making at all levels of the organization. The Volvo values are easy to understand – and yet fundamentally important." (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

Data content and summary (table)

This section provides an overview of the empirical data content of this report. It includes all the elements and contexts surrounding the selected ads and why they were chosen. This subchapter also summarizes the selection of these specific companies. It incorporates all necessary information (primarily related to the data) that are helpful and crucial for further analysis and comprehensively grasping the matter in question. Similarly to the order presented in the Introduction to the companies part above, the author will first describe elements of the Audi brand, followed by Volvo. This section will be summed up in concluding paragraph and table.

Future is an Attitude. This is the title of Audi's advertisement, which will be examined in this study. In 2020, the company published an article on its "MediaCenter" website's tab. From the article, one learns that the company launches a new global brand campaign that is "[...] our communicative approach for future campaigns." (Clemendt, 2020). In that same article, Senior Vice President Audi Brand, Henrik Wenders, announces a re-orientation of the brand and its strategy by giving a new contemporary definition to the *Vorsprung*, making the company "ready for the future." (Clemendt, 2020). He says this ad will be the first time people see the reworked

corporate identity (Clemendt, 2020). In line with the new *Future is an Attitude* approach, Audi unified its marketing efforts worldwide, "taking into account cultural and country-specific requirements" (Clemendt, 2020). The re-defined strategy aims to "[…] improve people's lives through technology and to make a contribution to society." (Clemendt, 2020). The campaign runs through all communication channels, including a brand-new website that combines all campaign content[3]. Audi redesigned its visual identity and language; however, at the same time, it maintained its pre-existing values – all of which are relevant to this work and were described above.

The advertisement was published on October the 1st, 2020, on Audi's YouTube platform. Until July 2023, it has been watched over 14 million times and received over 34 thousand likes. To complete this ad, the company collaborated with one of the most awarded creative agencies in Germany, Thjnk (Thjnk, n.d.). The spot lasts 1 minute and 52 seconds and features the caption:

> "We look at the same world, but we all look at it in a different way. Sometimes you have to change your perspective. We at Audi change mobility. We look for inspiration and vision in everyday life. We create a vision of a common good; we live in progress. For the sake of a better and progressive tomorrow." (Heidrich, 2021).

This nearly 2-minute commercial contains visual, auditory, and narrative, among other elements.

For Life – When you feel safe, you can be truly free. This is the title of Volvo's advertisements that will be examined in this study. In February of 2023, Volvo Cars launched its new platform[4] as it "[…] seeks to expand the definition of safety." (Natividad, 2023). Andreas Malm, creative director at Volvo Cars, stated,

> "We have ambition to be pioneers in the protection of people and the planet. We hope to bring to life safety beyond the traditional sense and highlight how you only can live life truly free when you both are and feel safe." (Natividad, 2023).

To complete this ad, Volvo Cars collaborated with AKQA (an awarded design and innovation company) and Grey Group (an advertising and marketing agency). According to (Natividad), cooperating companies hired Swedish pop star Seinabo Sey, Paralympian Lui Cuiqing, and professional skateboarder Sky Brown to star in the ad. Global Chief Creative Office of AKQA, Peter Lund commented,

> "It has been an exciting creative journey to expand how we think about safety. We have all been taught that the safety net is merely there to protect us when we fall. But, in fact, it carries

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[3] Read here: Audi AG, Progress, https://www.progress.audi/progress/en.html.
[4] Read here: Volvo Cars, *For Life*, https://www.volvocars.com/us/for-life/.

deeper importance, giving us the confidence to take flight and create progress." (Natividad, 2023).

The CEO of Grey Group, Laura Maness, added,

"In a world where people are seeking safety in all forms, we are incredibly proud and privileged to be part of this continuous-learning journey together with Volvo Cars and AKQA. At the heart of our partnership are brilliant, passionate, and talented people with the hunger and drive to unlock insights, deepen our understanding, and collectively inspire a safer world. 'For Life' speaks to the extraordinary power of cultivating psychological safety and putting mental health and emotional well-being at the center of everything we do." (Natividad, 2023).

The new initiative (i.e., the new platform), complemented by the ad and vice versa, also boasts a set of provocative questions, such as: "Is joy a safety hazard?" or "Can love steer you wrong?" that serve to communicate with the customers and elicit answers or insights and invite them to "[…] share how life affects their capacity to drive [….]". (Volvo Cars, n.d.).

The advertisement is 1 minute and 55 seconds long. It was published on Volvo's YouTube platform on February the 22nd, 2023. Until June 2023, it has been watched over 22 thousand times and received 400 likes. It contains a brief description:

"We believe safe is the silent partner to progress, to greatness. To think differently. To be different. Feeling safe makes us push ourselves. To be ourselves. To challenge ourselves. Because when you feel safe, you can truly be free." (Johansson, 2023).

These, combined with the explained context and history behind the ad itself, the elements in this chapter overall, and other theoretical and methodological considerations, will be analyzed in the following chapters.

Additionally, data content includes the websites of both companies. The analysis only includes some of the websites' activity and communication. Only the tabs where one finds information regarding the brand's values and related statements concerning, e.g., corporate identity, are looked at.

Audi asks *Who are we and how we want to be?*, and dedicates a generous amount of its website's space to answer the questions accordingly. As mentioned and described in detail in the previous subchapter, the company also dedicates the same generous amount of spacing towards *Brand Appearance.* It guides that elaborate on the matters of, e.g., brand appearance, basics, corporate branding, or sounds. Therefore, these two tabs of Audi's websites will be examined and elaborated on throughout the analysis chapter. Similarly, Volvo dedicates one

tab to elaborate on *Our values & whistleblowing*, which serves as an overview and explanation of the company's values. Additionally, the brand has a whole tab dedicated to matters of *Volvo Experience System*, e.g., logos, typefaces, colors, icons, etc. Therefore, these two tabs of Volvo's websites will be examined and elaborated on throughout the analysis process.

To sum up the data content chapter, it is important to point out that, undoubtfully, there are plenty of vivid similarities and a few notable differences that have ultimately defined the data content. As for similarities, the ad's duration and content (at first, evaluated briefly) should be mentioned. The advertising spots last around 2 minutes and include similar features, i.e., audio, visuals, narration, and music. The contexts of the ads provide superficially similar and exciting elements to explore concerning this study. In addition, on a general and technical level, the companies produce cars considered and rated as luxurious. Both Audi and Volvo share a similarly aged history of about a century. On the other hand, both brands originally come from different European countries, which make an impression and evoke different associations. Despite a few similarities (technicalities and features), it is worth pointing out that the context and genesis of both differ — one is three years old, and the other is three months old. Finally, concerning the research questions and interests in the Introduction to this paper, companies' websites are also considered as equally essential data. In all righteousness — more extensively described in the previous chapters — the author of this work understands and is aware of the multidimensionality and diversity of possibilities. However, for the context of this work and the author's interests, these elements (data) form its core.

	AUDI AG	VOLVO CARS
The title of the ad	*Future is an Attitude*[5]	*For Life – When you feel safe, you can be truly free*[6]
Ad's publication date	2020 – new digital platform, WWW Oct the 1st 2020 on YouTube platform	Feb 2023 – digital platform, WWW Feb the 22nd 2023 on YouTube platform
Duration of the ad	1 min 52 sec	1 min 55 sec
Websites	Tab(1): *Who are we and how we want to be?*[7] Tab(2): *Brand Appearance.*[8]	Tab(1) *Our values & whistleblowing.*[9] Tab(2) *Volvo Experience System.*[10]

Table 1. Data content - summary table. Created by the author.

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[5] Watch here: Audi AG, *Future is an Attitude*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWaHZ2oRE7s.
[6] Watch here: Volvo Cars, *For Life – When you feel safe you can be truly free*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwIDxY-mMso.
[7] Read here: Audi AG, *Who we are and how we want to be?*, https://www.audi.com/en/company/sustainability/corporate-culture.html.
[8] Read here: Audi AG, *Brand Appearance*, https://www.audi.com/ci/en/intro/brand-appearance.html#.
[9] Read here: Volvo Cars, *Our values & whistleblowing*, https://www.volvogroup.com/en/about-us/company-values.html.
[10] Read here: Volvo Cars, Volvo Experience System, https://www.volvogroup.com/experiencesystem/en/.

Analysis

This section serves to analyze the data collected and unravel significant key points in order to answer the research questions of this study, that is:

How do brand values correspond to advertising spots of companies within the automotive industry? & Why do they lead to these narratives?

This analysis takes the following form. First, the content analysis is conducted to unravel, fully exhaust and understand the values of both brands — i.e., Audi and Volvo (in that order). Later, the focus is transferred to conduct a narrative analysis that serves to examine how and to what extent those values are presented and used to create a story shown in the advertising spots of the companies (in the same order).

The values of Audi & Volvo — content analysis

A U D I

To conduct the content analysis, Audi's website was chosen. While the website highlights many company-related matters, this content analysis focuses on the key findings regarding the matters in question, ergo, the company's brand values. The content analysis aims to dig deeper into the company's values and principles to understand them thoroughly.

The website contains information on innovations, models, and career opportunities. It also discusses the matters of concept cars, e-mobility, and digital services, as well as the company's profile, history, and partnerships (AUDI AG, 2023). This content analysis highlights solely the significant data to the research; hence, the keywords looked at revolve around the company's brand values when analyzing.

During the coding process for this content analysis, four categories (keywords) emerged: appreciation, openness, responsibility, and integrity. The categories, derived deductively from the website, represent the company's values. The categories uncovered several codes.

Appreciation

Within this category, one can see different aspects of the company's ideas and outlooks in terms of the value of Appreciation. With codes like 'Teamwork' and 'Challenges,' it becomes clear that the company addresses these matters actively. To begin with, Audi states that "[…] The Audi Group relies on teamwork, [and] embraces new challenges […]". Additionally, the company held a series of events to encourage employees to embrace new challenges called "Try.Fail.Learn". During the events, "Participants share their own stories of failure, how they handled the situation and what opportunities arose as a result.". Hence, the company is making it clear that the focus on teamwork and embracing, facing, and addressing the challenges is seriously exhausted through various events, intensifying and restoring the ideas of teamwork and challenges within the employees and the company itself.

Openness

Within the value of Openness, the coding process unraveled codes such as 'Diversity,' 'Cultural change,' and 'Open-minded' as a reoccurring code. The company states that it "[…] embodies diversity". The openness also shows when Audi describes the need to "Raise awareness […] for the need for a cultural change in the working world […].". As a part of such a need and raising awareness, the "KulturZeit" project and panel discussion was held in 2018. During the "KulturZeit" and a second edition of the series, "BE INSPIRED," movies were shown, and visitors had the chance to talk to guest speakers, including the documentary's director. The Cultural Change is also seen when the corporate lens is discussed as "[…] guiding principles ensure that corporate culture is consistently put into practice during everyday work at Audi.".

Responsibility

Under the umbrella of the value of Responsibility, one can establish a few codes, e.g., 'Environment,' 'Society,' and 'Principles.' As stated, "Audi has itself the goal of being a company that bears responsibility – for the environment and society." Those codes prove strong engagement and effort put into improving environmental and societal issues. Additionally, the company concluded "[…] on socially responsible job cuts along the demographic factor, for development and production of innovative and environmentally friendly premium vehicles […]", among other environmental conveniences. In terms of the responsibility and arising out of its principles, the company shared that "The focus is on the attributes «genuine,» «straightforward,» «open-minded,» «as equals,» «united» and «trust.» both concerning customers but also business partners and all 600,000 employees.

Integrity

The last category shows a standard code of 'Collaboration.' A successful collaboration is exhausted as "Nobody is perfect. Ensuring that this adage becomes part of the culture requires pioneers who frankly and honestly discuss matters that did not go well". Collaboration also means smooth and open communication that requires flat hierarchies. The collaborative initiative seems to be also pushed toward employees by employees to "[…] encourage the exchange of views."

It is vital to draw attention to the result of the coding and categorizing processes as it is safe to state that the codes derived from the material are interrelated and correlative. In that sense, different codes belong to different categories. The table of categories and codes can be seen in (Appendix A).

Altogether, those four categories show a lot of dedication and effort concerning maintaining, addressing, and preserving the company's brand values. Audi is very aware of the importance of its values, which are nurtured proactively.

V O L V O

Similarly, to conduct the content analysis, Volvo's website was chosen. Even though the website highlights many company-related matters, this content analysis focuses on the key findings regarding the matters in question, ergo, the company's brand values. The content analysis aims to dig deeper into the company's values and principles to understand them thoroughly.

The website contains information on sustainable transportation, careers, investors or media, the the analysis highlights the significant data of the research solely; hence, the keywords looked at revolve around the company's brand values when analyzing.

During the coding process for the content analysis, five categories emerged: customer success, trust, passion, change, and performance (a table of categories and codes can be found in (Appendix B). Similarly, the categories are the company's values presented on their website with the codes that emerged from them.

Customer Success

The value of customer success focuses on both the success of the customers' business and delivering promises by the company itself. With the codes of 'Needs and desires' and 'Promises,' it seems natural that the company focuses on success – both from internal and external points of view.

Trust

The codes of 'Transparency,' 'Respect,' and 'Collaboration' emerge when looking at the value of trust. The trust value seems twofold. For one, the company promises, "We are transparent and have respect for the individual." Later, it promises, "We trust our teams to do their best, and we respect the decisions made." The trust is also exhausted when "We collaborate easily and create excellent results through teamwork.".

Passion

This category reflects the company's engagement towards meeting its goals, admitting mistakes, and being proud of the work and the business. With codes like 'Proud,' 'Commitment,' 'Diversity,' and 'Achievements,' it seems clear that Volvo cares about the well-being of its clients and employees. Additionally, the company values its work and achievements, often the results of the mistakes that Volvo proudly admits and learns from.

Change

With the codes of 'Curious,' 'Innovative,' 'Transformation,' and 'Open-mindedness,' it seems clear that the company is curious about the changing world and seeks innovation within business solutions. With that comes the open-mindedness that creates possibilities to grow, gain or share knowledge.

Performance

The value of performance unraveled codes such as 'Instinct,' 'Skills,' or 'Big picture.' As stated, "We have a strong business instinct […] [and] the skills, knowledge, and intuition to do the right thing according to Volvo values."

Altogether, these five categories show a great deal of understanding and self-awareness toward the brand's listed values. At the same time, Volvo vocalizes its values in a distinct but twofold

way. First, values are indicative of the brand itself. Volvo directly refers to its employees, operations, or daily business life. Second — and just as important — the values appear to be a testament to Volvo's users and customers, who are influenced by the values, and vice versa.

The stories of Audi & Volvo — narrative analysis

Designated advertising spots were chosen for the narrative analysis (as described in the previous subchapter). This analysis aims to unravel how and to what extent the brands' values lead to creating narratives present in advertising spots within the automotive industry.

Additionally, narrative analysis helps examine the narrative structure, content, and context to --understand the stories presented in the ads. The researcher's goal is to analyze how the stories are put together by examining the different elements of stories and identifying the underlying values, beliefs, and attitudes. Hence, all elements (e.g., visual, written, spoken) are considered throughout the analysis. To thoroughly grasp the matter, the author applies and follows a Fairy-Tale Story Model derived from (Fog et al., 2010) (see: Image 21).
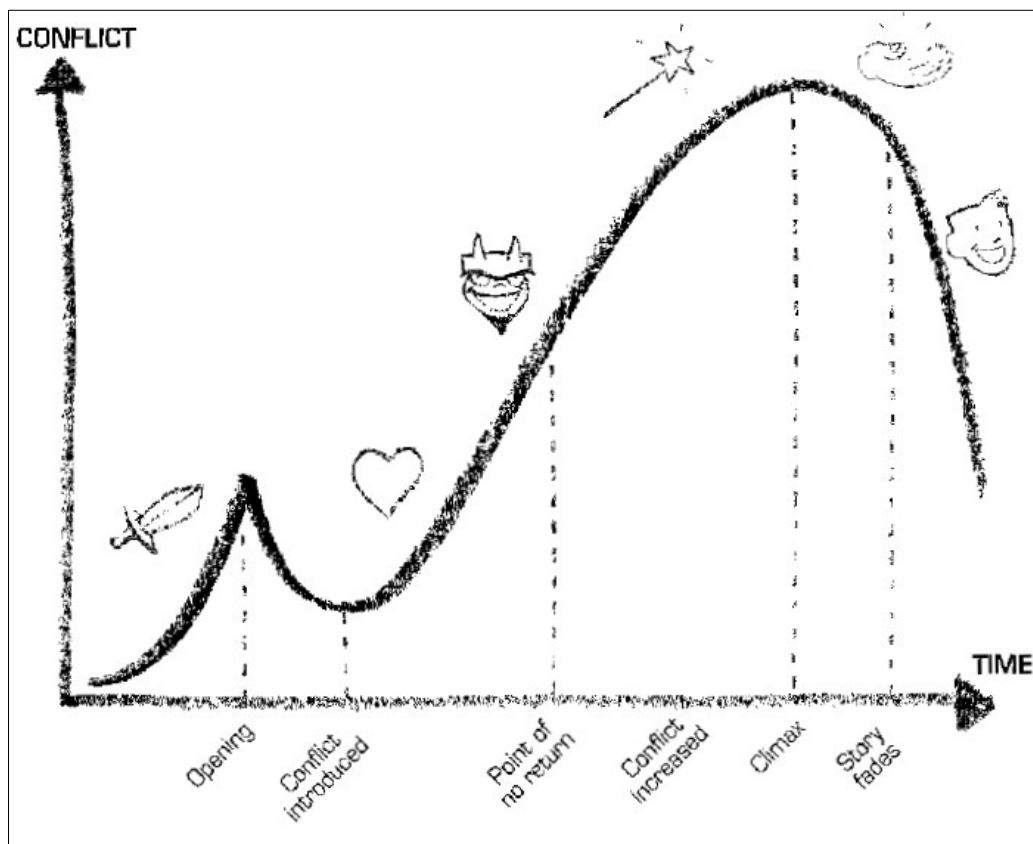
Image 21. A Fairy-Tale Story Model. Derived from (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010, p. 43).

The model is based on the core basis of storytelling (explained in the theoretical chapter). Hence, applied in the marketing industry, it helps to determine whether the story has a basic structure to give action and conflict. The structure portrayed in (Image 18), presents the: opening of the story, the rise of conflict, the point of no return, and the climax that lead to the story fading. The Fairy-Tale aspect of the model portrays the need for a specific goal, the heroes of the story, the conflict (understood as disruption of harmony), and the ways heroes and villains address the conflict (climax) and lead to the story ending. With the frames of such a model, on top of other elements discussed (e.g., visuals), this narrative analysis helps unravel how the companies tell stories with an eye toward the underlying values.

A U D I

Audi's almost 2-minute advertising spot (the context of which is described in previous chapters) shares a story that is expressed via the very title of the ad, i.e., *Future is an Attitude*. This message reflects positively on the company that is ready to violate (in this context, develop and exploit) the path towards the future, which the company identifies and associates with overall technological development or advancements as well as the comfort of the users thereof.

The narrator, who leads the viewer throughout the ad, enhances its message. The male's voice, in a calm and subdued manner, describes the potential conflicts within the story. At the same time, he indicates that the company addresses them as the conflicts appear by using the "Some see… [vs] We see…" utterance. That said, it is safe to say that this story has many characters. Naturally, the most apparent character is Audi. The story, however, includes additional characters that play a significant role within the ad and, as it turns out, the brand itself. The flow of the story is evident in the sense that the story has a beginning, middle, and end. The story fades out with the same take as it starts with, creating a form of compositional framing.

In more detail, this story's protagonist (i.e., hero) is the brand itself, whose goal is to create, to co-create a shared future, which is essentially *an attitude*. Throughout the ad, the brand reveals *its* attitude toward the future, evident in the verbal narrative, e.g., "Some see a new motor. We see a new era." And other "Some… [vs] We…" statements. The main goal is to look, examine, change, and lead the way to a new, challenged, altered future by changing perspectives and evolving technologically and within society. It seems easy to indicate that the benefits of this change will be felt by both the company itself and its customers. Indeed, some external threat

to the brand might occur behind the idea of changing the future, as change is always difficult regardless. However, this story does not elaborate on these matters. It seems like this story lacks its villain, even though it does not lack potential conflicts.

A first look at advertising allows one to notice many elements or facets. For example, the people at the beginning of the ad are dressed elegantly and in bright colors. This reflects the brand's luxury and status, which could bring customers closer to buying the car or the opposite. It is also straightforward to notice the backgrounds of the ad, i.e., both day and night time. This might set out the efficiency and comfortable of Audi cars. In addition, they catch the attention of passersby and the characters driving an Audi car. Interestingly, there are seconds when the Audi ad depicts people outside the car and not necessarily in the car. Hence, we see a tunnel full of lights, an impressive sunset, a car factory, and the process of sketching and pre-modeling a new model in wood.

A more detailed look at the ad allows one to understand hidden symbols and critical points the company wishes to emphasize. For example, when the narrator says, "Some see a new light. We see a new vision", and the viewer sees a black, dark, and closed space with tons of red triangles imitating lights, what we actually see is César Muntada, a Head of Light design at Audi, who uses light to shape the character of every vehicle (Zerelles, 2020). He trusts that "Light may not weigh anything, but it nonetheless carries considerable weight. As human beings, our perception of the world is very much dependent on how light portrays it." (Zerelles, 2020). Similarly, when the narrator says, "Some just see beautiful lines. We see the character," we can see Marc Lichte, Head of Design at Audi, who sketches a new Audi car model. When the story invites the viewers to the brand's manufactory, one can spot a *B20* written on the wall behind working machines. B20 most likely refers to biodiesel derived from more sustainable sources, such as plants (Collins, 2012).

Altogether, the spoken narrative, led by a male narrator, says:

"We all look at the same world, but we all look at it in a different way. Some see concept, we see potential. Some just see sheer speed, we see inspirational engineering. Some just see beautiful lines, we see character. Some see a new light; we see a new vision. Some see a factory, we see progress. Some see a new motor; we see a new era. Some see what is there, we see beyond. Audi." (Heidrich, 2021)

The visuals focus on ethereal images, and characters found both in nature and enclosed areas, as well as in the city. Prominent lights and the camera's focus on architecture allude to the

brand's newly rebranded vision, concentrating on technological, design, and sustainability-based progression. The ad is summarized by showing the brand's logo and the main message flowing from at least the ad's title. Hidden symbols and other elements show a commitment to new perspectives and awareness of new actions, change for the better, and looking to an improved, healthier, and more sustainable future for Audi. Additionally, the soundtrack heard in the background throughout the ad has been composed for the spot and is not commercially available (Heidrich, 2021). Seeing the people behind the brand shortens the distance between the brand and the customer. Concerning other characters, a sufficiently racial representation is a tribute to diversity. Moreover, it is a tribute to all those who stand for change, a new approach to the future — the brand itself, the engineers, the technology, and the brand's customers. The ad certainly bears the hallmarks of luxury and appeals to such associations as strong character, speed, sleek and advanced technology.

To sum up, it is safe to say that the company's values are present within the advertising spot. Responsibility, integrity, appreciation, and openness are critical underlying features of the ad.

V O L V O

Volvo's almost 2-minute advertising spot (the context of which is described in previous chapters) tells a story of *When you feel safe, you can be truly free.* The title expresses the very message flowing from the story, i.e., protecting and defending the feeling of safety and freedom. Following the title, it is clear that security, the sense of freedom as well as courage become the story's central theme.

The story's main goal focuses on restoring and reimposing the feeling of safety among people overall — regardless of how and why that sense of security was previously violated or taken away from them. Hence, it becomes clear that the story's purpose aligns with its message — providing security and freedom (to be one's true self). There are a few characters in this story. Naturally, one of them is the brand itself and, as can be deduced, the people within it. The hero, however, is only one — customer, i.e., Volvo. Potential villains could be pointed out as external characters threatening the feeling of safety or freedom by enhancing the sense of anxiety and fear.

The characters must overcome the conflict, address the issue of hesitancy and doubt, and face their fears to regain their safety and comfort. Naturally, as suggested and deducted, they do not have to do it alone.

This story has its beginning, middle, and end. Such a straightforward plot is evident in all five mini-stories that the viewer experiences. The mini-stories share the same message, goal, and conflict (as well as a happy ending). Due to those factors, those mini-stories are referred to as *situations* that constitute the same story, i.e., the ad itself. Nevertheless, those situations start with the characters' visible struggles, anxieties, stress, and fear. Those feelings are later addressed by the individuals' companions, for example, a parent, a sprinter's guide, or a group of friends. We learn that by the end of the ad — the safety, security, or freedom are restored, and the ad serves us a happy ending. That said, it is also important to point out that the story and its fringe situations situate the characters in various places, for example, on stage, at the seaside, at a skatepark, in an Olympic stadium, or at school.

Excitingly, the first time the actual brand (Volvo's car) appears on the screen is in the 32nd second of the ad. To put that into perspective, the ad is ca. 90 seconds long. The reason for doing so might be twofold. First, the brand might want to give the impression of a quiet helper of everyday life that takes care of safety regardless of factors, situations, weather conditions, or circumstances happening in real life, i.e., outside the car. That prompts the idea of treating the car like a safe space, an extension of the home. Secondly, the brand might (quite confidently) recognize that the association linking the automotive industry with the idea of safety, additionally based on storytelling, naturally points to Volvo. Looking at the ad, it becomes vivid that those are the moments of restoring the harmony that the brand (i.e., Volvo car) appears as a background helper that converts that disruption. For example, we witness a conversation between a mother and son in a car, in which she tries to convince her son to go to a school party; it is when the son returns from the event and is content and smiley, we see that the car he is getting into is a Volvo. In addition, when we see a stressed singer pulling up in front of the stadium where she is to perform and where she can see paparazzi outside, we see, only after a while, that her shelter is a car of the same brand.

This ad does not have a narrator to it. However, a slowed-down version of Queen's "Don't stop me now" plays throughout the ad serving as a commentary and narration of what is visually presented. Some of the characters featured in different situations verbally state something, but

we learn that those statements are just lyrics to the Queen's song. For example, a too scared to swim in the ocean child hears from his dad, "Like a tiger, defying the laws of gravity," or when a female adult and child skateboarding state at the same time, "I'm a racing car passing by," just before taking a leap and overcoming their fear. The song is performed by Seinabo Sey, a Swedish singer and songwriter.

Overall, and in connection to the ad's brand solely, the visuals are more — but not entirely — focused on the outside environment of the car rather than its insights. Since the ad shows us a story of overcoming fear and restoring the feeling of safety and freedom, it might indicate that *safety* comes from technological innovations and vehicle systems. However, more importantly, it might come from the outside, *real* world that includes the well-being of people and their feeling of security. In that sense, safety is the silent partner to progress, greatness, and development. Hence, the story seems to be a pure tribute to people. As could be inferred from the ad's context and the story itself, this advert is instead an acknowledgment of human beings and their willingness to overcome fear and excel.

The ad is summarized by the slogan *When you feel safe, you can be truly free* appearing ahead of *For Life* and Volvo slogan. All of the elements within the brand (i.e., the visuals, music, etc.) show a commitment to this altered and enhanced narrative focused on people rather than vehicles. Concerning other characters, a sufficiently racial representation is a tribute to diversity. The ad certainly bears the hallmarks of safety and appeals to revolving associations and brand values thereof — i.e., customer success, trust, change, passion, performance — can be spotted.

Discussion

As the author of this thesis states in the beginning — she wishes to zoom in and dig deeper into the values and stories of the companies within the automotive industry. The choice and process of content and narrative analysis methods enabled her to execute so. However, the researcher's goal is also to zoom out and discuss the discoveries concerning other concepts described throughout the paper. Therefore, this chapter serves as a section that enables her to do so.

By examining the advertising spots, the author looks into Audi and Volvo's communication. That communication is based on a message transmitted by the sender (the brand) via a digital channel called YouTube. That message is sent with a particular goal and aims to tell the story, inspire and educate people, as well as (optimistically) encourage companies' sales. As can be inferred, the message certainly faces challenges and noises, such as, for example, the activity and communication of other companies or the vastness of content in the YouTube world, among others. That communication model is called *one-to-many* because one sender (the brand) communicates to many receivers. Given that advertising communication engages an open but non-personal (in contrast to the 1:1 communication model), it can create an indisputable relationship between the customers and the brand. However, there is a possibility of losing control over the message and the reception level. In that case, the feedback or the ways of encoding the message might come back to the sender in all forms in a vague timeframe. Naturally, within the examined ads, one experiences different types of communication. For example, Audi focuses on visuals that enhance the overall message, boost it, and inspire change. On top of verbal communication, all of this is expressed through the narrator, whose calm and soft tone of voice reassures the viewer of the upcoming full of technological, social, designer, and sustainable future. Similarly, Volvo draws the viewers' attention toward the visual elements enhancing the message stated in the very title of the ad. Even though the story has no narrator, verbal communication is featured in short dialogues and the cover of Queen's song playing in the background and performed by a Swedish pop artist hired for the ad. What is written (in both ads) is the very premise of the ad, hence, at the same time, the ads' titles.

That said — with the knowledge that the use of storytelling in advertising is only one branch of the technique's potential — the author believes that communication and storytelling interplay.

This was also advocated when translating storytelling techniques as a communication tool and a marketing tool. It is especially seen within, for instance, the communication types that constitute the storytelling types and vice versa. As the analysis proves, both companies' stories have four essential elements: the message, conflict, characters, and plot, and the actual narratives bear apparent traces of chronology, meaning, and social components evident in the later processes of interpretation or meaning-making. As a subjective interpreter, the researcher became a part and co-participant of those stories and their potential effectiveness. Even though this report does not reflect on the matters related to feedback or customer engagement, the narratives prove the brands' efforts to become effective by knowing their own stories (i.e., values), discussing and reflecting on what might be considered *real-life* struggles or reaching out to others, e.g., the customers, by telling *their own* stories — for example, the stories of overcoming fear, regaining freedom and safety or facing the changing future.

Since the notion of branding corresponds to the activities undertaken to express (vocally, verbally, visually, or otherwise) the brand and what the brand stands for, it is safe to say that one of the most outstanding examples of branding activity undertaken by Audi and Volvo was launching a new website, while simultaneously, launching their new ad. Naturally, the storytelling technique used in those ads also stands as an example of branding. In that sense, the very contexts of the launch of the ads as well as the companies' new websites, prove the use of a branding technique. For example, Audi — through its MediaCenter — informed of launching a new global brand campaign that re-oriented the brand communication strategy and redefined the *Vorsprung* thereof. The ad is heavily focused on Audi cars, but its message is about the future being changed (mainly by the brand) through technology enabling those changes and developments. In addition to the overt *attitude* towards the future, the underlying message is improving people's lives through technology and other sustainable facilitations that contribute to societies, communities, countries, diversity, environment, and culture. By vocalizing these statements and hiring a creative agency, Audi sets out to achieve this goal, which is a marketing, branding, and advertising activity. Analogously, Volvo launched its new platform intending to seek ways to expand the definition of safety. As mentioned above, the new platform provocatively asks questions that circle around the ideas of one's safety, joy, or fear that might affect their capacity to drive. Those questions reflect people's needs, promises, commitment, diversity, and the so-called *bigger picture*. In opposition to Audi, Volvo does not seem to carry an underlying premise in its ad. The entire campaign and the ad significantly focus on the sense of safety, its imbalance, or restoration. This is also evident in the very way

the brand is positioned in the ad — while Audi focuses on the technological elements inside the car (e.g., we see the lights, a newly sketched car model), Volvo car is visible for a few seconds in the middle and at the end of the ad spot. Nevertheless, it seems that the issue of technology somewhat unites the two brands (in the context of the ads themselves). However, in the case of Audi, it is to reveal and effectively create such technological features that will make people's lives easier. In contrast, in the case of Volvo, the technology hides in the background, putting the outside of the car and human beings first.

It is also evident that both Audi and Volvo carefully *designed* their ads. The design wheels out the topics of the physique or corporate design and is based on companies' own design-related rules and guidelines published online (and cited in previous subchapters). For example, Audi shows its logo in white, followed by the company's slogan. The narrator's tone of voice is based on confidence, elegance, and premium character. Additionally, the company composed the background music specifically for the ad. Similarly, Volvo shows its logo at the end of the ad. It is white and carefully placed, concerning the company's guidelines. The tone of voice (communicated through a song and short dialogues) is based on safety, quality, durability, and well-being.

By firstly looking into companies' values— another vital element constituting the backbone of this work — the author digs deeper into the matters of brand identity and, consequent upon, corporate identity. Interestingly, Audi dedicates its website's tab to presenting the values and refers to them as corporate values. On top of pointing out the values themselves (in the form of graphics), the company also draws one's attention to other corporate activities and general behavior when explaining different technological, sustainable, environmental, or societal solutions as well as internal procedures, policies, or events. On the other hand, Volvo's website's tab succinctly lists brand values in the form of listed subpoints with additional comments regarding the underlying significance of each value. However, based on careful analysis and theoretical reflections, it is not very likely to conclude that there is *corporate* identity without a solid *brand* identity.

Limitations and future research suggestions

This study encounters potential limitations. The first one raises methodological obstacles, i.e., the sample size. Even though the type of research problem dictates the number of units of

analysis, it might be helpful to gain more units of analysis to avoid generalization. This study faces this issue by focusing on two major companies, their values and their advertising spots (one for each company). Secondly, the limitations regarding the researcher might include bias. With the author being a co-interpreter, she might carry biased opinions. To avoid bias or negatively affected credibility or validity of this report, the author excluded literature that could lead to bias and collected the data at random with no prior preferences or fondness. Additionally, when interpreting, she consciously made efforts to avoid overgeneralization. Future research could further address and include the topics of brand image, corporate image, or customer engagement to elaborate on the matters such as the reception of ads and the impact of storytelling techniques within those. Investigating other automotive companies with similarly short histories, prestige, and status but different European or worldwide countries of origin might be interesting.

To answer the research questions — conclusion

This project set sail to investigate the questions:

How do brand values correspond to advertising spots of companies within the automotive industry? & Why do they lead to these narratives?

To help with the project, existing data was utilized. The data regarding brand values and advertising spots were derived from relevant sources, i.e., WWW and the YouTube platform. The data was analyzed qualitatively using content and narrative analysis methods.

To answer the research questions, it is clear that brand values correspond to advertising spots of companies within the automotive industry as they remain the very core of any brand, and, therefore, they pave the way toward any communication or activity of the brand regardless of their form or extent. In that sense, brand values set the scene for future overall brand communication, advertising, branding, and corporate behavior. In addition, these values lead to specific narratives by navigating implicit, underlying, or overt meaning or storytelling. As explained (see: Discussion chapter), it is unreasonable not to recall the contexts and backgrounds for both stories (i.e., ads) that led to such narratives. However, these conclusions

seem to be boiling down to the overall inference that brand values correspond to advertising spots and lead to narratives as they are the core of the brands that affect their activity as least as much as their underlying contexts.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Categories and codes — Audi AG

Categories Brand values	Codes
Appreciation	Teamwork Challenges
Openness	Diversity Cultural change Open-minded
Responsibility	Environment Society Principles
Integrity	Collaboration

Appendix B

Categories and codes — Volvo Cars

Categories Brand values	Codes
Customer success	Needs and desires Promises
Trust	Transparency Respect Collaboration
Passion	Proud Commitment Diversity Achievements
Change	Curious Innovative Transformation Open-mindedness
Performance	Skills Instinct Big picture

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