# An Investigation into Features of Design Thinking in Fast Moving Consumer Goods Brand Development: Integration and Collaboration

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## Abstract

Most companies and researchers have no doubt now that design envisages a way toward future products, services, and systems. Recently, however researchers have started to highlight 'design thinking' to ensure that design becomes the next competitive advantage in companies. They acknowledge that design thinking enables companies to develop differentiated products, services and systems which consumers and users need. However, there is little research which reports how design thinking can be embedded and fostered in different business contexts, especially in FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) brand development. This paper investigates what features of design thinking are employed in FMCG brand development via stakeholder interviews in three domains: agencies, companies, and retailers. This paper concludes with suggestions of how design thinking can be embraced in FMCG brand development.

### Keywords

Design thinking; brand development; Fast Moving Consumer Goods; design integration, and collaboration


Branding is a key strategic asset for organisations in an increasingly competitive retail environment (Lincoln & Thomassen, 2007; Thomassen, Lincoln & Aconis, 2006; LePla & Parker, 2002; Southgate, 1994). Brand development is a complicated process in which stakeholders have different needs and expectations of the development process. Hence, to ensure that brands can be both competitive and sustainable, an understanding of integration and collaboration between different disciplines is of prime importance to the various stakeholders involved (Olins, 2007; Mozota, 2003). Literature suggests that design can assist in the development of competitive advantage in an integrated and collaborative way and support effective brand development (Brown, 2009, 2008; Mozota, 2003, 2002; Vazquez & Bruce, 2002). The manner in which this could be achieved has not yet been described within the literature. There is less research discourse detailing the interaction of design within brand development. This in part can be attributed to current working practices in organisations and associated resistance to change as well as the lack of awareness of the potential added value design can bring to this development process.

Many researchers affirm that design envisages a way toward future products, services, and systems (Berger, 2010; Martin 2009; Brown, 2009, 2008; Neumeier 2009; Mozota, 2003, 2002). Recently, 'design thinking' has received attention claiming that design can help companies to create competitive advantage such that they can develop differentiated products, services and systems which consumers need and desire. However, research has yet to focus upon how design thinking can be embedded and be fostered in different business contexts. Many researchers (Kimbell, 2009; Fraser 2006) also claims that design thinking research in design disciplines needs to consider approaches employed in design practice in more detail.

While FMCG brand companies compete in fast changing markets, they also call for new approaches to communicate with consumers and to develop brands effectively. In these contexts such challenges faced are not easily described, and this is not discussed in a meaningful way. Such problems currently faced by these companies are 'wicked problems', where neither the problem nor the solution is known (Buchanan, 1992). Recent discourse has likened wicked problems to design problems (Berger, 2010; Martin, 2009; Brown, 2008, 2009; Neumeier, 2009). Neumeier (2009) claims that the central problem of brand building is getting a complex organization to execute a bold idea so that design thinking helps organizations to appreciate fast

changing markets and to find opportunities or solve undefined problems. Design and designers are well placed to tackle wicked problems that companies face and design thinking gears up for what FMCG brand development needs. Martin (2009) illustrates how P&G could avoid downturn in activities by adopting design as a core driver for a company. As organisations involved in the FMCG sector experience a competitive and fast changing market, it is imperative to employ design thinking in order to explore new brand ideas. This investigation aims to address the above needs for new approaches to both branding and design thinking research.

There has been limited research which outlines design thinking in FMCG brand development. This paper aims to investigate the role and features of design thinking in FMCG brand development and compare these identified features to more broadly defined concepts of design thinking.

The central research questions are:

1) What is the role of design thinking in FMCG brand development?

2) What features of design thinking can be identified in FMCG brand development?

## 1.0    Research Design

To provide a brand effectively to a market, brand development has to embrace diverse stakeholders from different disciplines supporting appropriate and effective communication. Companies who traditionally develop and produce FMCG brands (known as national brands) now face competition not only from other companies but also from retailers' own brands. In some instances, retailers' own brands are even taking over national brands (Lincoln & Thomassen, 2007; Thomassen, Lincoln et al, 2006). Since the growth of own brands, companies not only employ design thinking internally but also collaborate with external specialists to keep bringing new thinking into the development process (Martin 2009).  Many companies, besides retailer, tend to collaborate with external agencies. It is more efficient to work with them in terms of time, money and creative efficiency (Berger, 2010).

As has been illustrated, it is crucial to study design thinking of three dominant stakeholders, who play a critical role within FMCG brand development: companies; retailers; and agencies. This research framework investigates the three stakeholders in Korea and in the UK in order to generate general features of design thinking in FMCG brand development.

## 2.0    Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was employed to explore the main research questions and included a series of semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders within FMCG brand development within companies, retailers, and agencies. The research aims to understand various perspectives upon FMCG brand development. These interviews informed a series of case studies that explored FMCG brand development processes and the role of design and design thinking within this context.

Communicating design thinking terms with interviewees is difficult because design thinking is not defined yet as a broadly understood concept. Due to the lack of awareness and the variety of interpretations of design thinking, interview questions explored terms associated with design thinking (design, design approaches, and creative design) rather than design thinking as a term itself. Therefore, interview questions are development to investigate design integration and collaboration through their project processes and their value to design.

Researchers (Berger, 2010; Brown, 2009; Neumeier, 2009) recognize that collaboration with external specialists is a way to foster design thinking. Design integration and collaboration are also important to embed design thinking into projects both internally and externally to an organization. Interviews investigated how agencies and their clients (companies and retailers) conceive and foster design thinking depending on perspectives of agencies, companies and retailers.

## 2.1 Rationale for interviewee selection

Interviewees of a company and a retailer in Korea were selected based on 'Best Brand Award' and 'Brand of the Year' by Korea Advertising Society. Participants were selected based on 'design of year' from 'Design' magazine, which specializes in brand and packaging design or have an independent team of packaging in the agencies. Packaging design is substantial aspect of FMCG brand development in contrast other brand development such as cars, electronic products, luxury products and so forth. Agencies that undertake packaging design were considered important to the study due to the relationship of packaging design to FMCG brand development. In the same way as in Korea, agencies and company in the UK were selected from the DBA's (Design Business Association) 'Design Effectiveness Award'.

## 3.0 Design Thinking

Before presenting the analysis of the interviews, it is necessary to discuss the term 'design thinking' to convey an understanding of its features and characteristics. Even though researchers have studied concept of design thinking from 60s, the term design thinking is ambiguous and confusing when used in design (Simon 1996). Definitions refer to the way in which designers think as part of the creative process (Brown 2009, 2008; Lawson 2006; Cross 2006; Rowe 1987); and a design attitude (most current researchers work in this area). In contrast to earlier design thinking research which studied that design thinking was analytical thinking or inductive thinking (Rowe, 1987), recent research argues that design thinking is synthetic and abductive thinking aligning with ways of approaching wicked problems as applying design thinking to whole organizations (Martin 2009, Brown 2009). Currently, Brown's (2009, 2008) claim that the concept of design thinking is thinking like designers is accepted and broadly applied to other disciplines.

Successful cases employing design thinking can be found in pioneer design driven companies from design-related companies like Herman Miller and Steelcase to technology- related companies like Philips and Apple. Previous companies embrace design thinking to solve ill-determinate problems and to find a way toward undefined goals (Brown 2009, 2008; Martin 2009; Neumeier 2009). Research has started to investigate what these successes are derived from and design thinking becomes highlighted in other disciplines: business, organizational studies, and non-profit organizations. Researchers (Berger, 2010; Martin 2009; Brown 2009, 2008; Kimbell 2009; Neumeier 2009) start to delineate ways of applying design thinking at general strategic level. Even though, their concepts of design thinking are slightly different, most researchers claim a balance of thinking: integrated thinking; systematic thinking; balance between analytical thinking and intuitive thinking or abductive thinking, balance between divergent thinking and convergent thinking so that currently design thinking can be adopted to other disciplines beyond design practice. There is also the prime claim among researchers that design thinking helps organizations transform to implement innovation.

Research has sought to clarify characteristics of design thinking to help people to embed it into their organizations and develop competitive and efficient products, services and systems. Early research which investigated design, delineated some design methods and designers' techniques like visualization, sketching, drawing, and so forth as attributes of design thinking (Rowe 1987; Cross 2006). On the other hand, recent research seeks to characterize design thinking as design attitude (Berger, 2010; Brown 2009, 2008; Martin 2009; Owen 2007; Lawson 2006; Dunne and Martin 2006). These attitudes can be interpreted as features of design thinking. Research identifies how design thinking is employed, and thus embeds design thinking beyond traditional design contexts and establish pervasive design thinking culture, incorporating this into business strategy (Porcini 2009) or non-profit organizations' goals.

Research has emphasized different features and methods for design thinking. For examples, Brown (2008, 2009) makes emphasis on prototyping and user-centred approach in *industrial design*. On the other hand, Neumeier (2009) highlights agility, collaboration, and approaches to wicked problems and so comes closer to *branding*. So, there can be different acknowledgements of what stakeholders conceive for design thinking methods in FMCG brand development.

## 4.0    Interview Analysis

Interview data was been clustered in three groups: 1) agencies, 2) companies and 3) retailers (Table.1). The research data was analysed by thematic analysis utilising theoretical codes to link together the features that arise from the interview data and the concepts from literature. Thematic analysis is appropriate to provide a potentially rich and detailed account of data across theoretical and epistemological approach (Braun and Clarke 2006). Flexibility in thematic analysis bestows no limit so that a researcher can find essential and flexible themes from complex data without bias. Through reviewing data, latent codes arise and this provides the following themes.

Through using thematic analysis without any bias to data collection, three themes are distilled from agencies interviews: 1) features of impacting design integration and collaboration in FMCG brand development, 2) features of impacting FMCG brand development, 3) features of impacting own brand development. Two themes are in companies and retailer: 1) features of impacting design integration and collaboration in organizations, 2) features of impacting brand development or own brand development.

|  | In Korea |  | In UK |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agency | Agency K1 | CEO<br><br>Specializing in FMCG brand development and packaging design development. | Agency UK1<br>Agency UK2<br>Agency UK3<br>Agency UK4.1<br>Agency UK4.2 | CEO<br>Co-founder and creative director<br>Senior client team manager<br>Director of brand valuation<br>Creative director of FMCG<br><br>Specializing in brand development and packaging design development. Whereas agency UK 3 and 4 are global agencies, agency UK 1 and 2 are based in the UK and work cross the countries. And comparing initial ones, companies are small. |
| Company | Company K1 | Manager for design planning and packaging design<br><br>A Korea leading FMCG company. Company K1 has a lot of brands in different businesses. | Company UK 1 | Head of creative<br><br>Starting from a SME company and now a leading company in category section |
| Retailer | Retailer K1 | Brand manager for furniture and storages<br><br>Being established as joint venture. | None |  |

**Table1.** Summary of respondents' organisations and roles [K=Korean; Agency K1=1st interviewee of Korean agency; UK=United Kingdom; Agency UK1=1st interviewee of United Kingdom agency]

## 4.1    Agency

Design thinking in agencies can be found in both internal projects and external collaboration. However, their role in FMCG brand development is limited and performs generally in identity development. Through their workflow and cases, features were extracted and analyzed. Approaches of agencies to FMCG brand developments are different depending on client processes, timing of agencies' engagement, types of brand development, their budget and so forth. Because as previously noted, problems which clients face are undefined or wicked problems, so if they have proprietary processes, agencies tend to tailor their process. If there is no proprietary process, the reason is that they build up an appropriate process and adapt it toward each different task. Especially in agencies UK 4 interview one respondent stated that projects and associated processes are "depending on clients" and emphasized flexible approaches.

| **Features of impacting design integration and collaboration in FMCG brand development** | | |
|---|---|---|
|  | +Encouragement | -Barriers |
| Agency K1 | **+Clients' understanding of design**<br>**+Consensus of what agencies and clients are doing**<br>**+Early engagement**<br>**+Long term relationship**<br>**+Communication** | **-Clients' understanding of design**<br>-Lack of money<br>-Lack of time |

| Agency UK1 | +**Consensus of what agencies and clients are doing**<br>+**Communication**<br>+**Working together as one team with clients**<br>+**Early engagement**<br>+**Building relationship**: long term relationship, strategic partnership<br>+**Integrated work processes**<br>+**Understanding consumers**<br>+Challenge mindset: challenge<br>+Proprietary processes<br>+Key decision maker involvement<br>+Combination strategy and execution<br>+Clients attitude working with agencies<br>+Articulated design brief<br>+Keep providing good works<br>+Who handle projects | -**Poor clients' understanding of design**<br>-**Client mindset: cautious**<br>-Clients attitude work with agencies<br>-Lack of money<br>-Who handle projects<br>-Poor design brief<br>-Consumer's reaction<br>-Focused group |
|---|---|---|
| Agency UK2 | +**Consensus of what agencies are doing and how ideas work**<br>+**Communication:** Working at the same places for communication<br>+**Early engagement:** early involvement on product development<br>+**Integrated work processes**<br>+**Building relationship**: providing good experience with clients<br>+**Understanding consumers**<br>+**Client mindset**: Brave, design leadership<br>+**Working together internally**<br>+Cover whole spectrum of brand development including campaign<br>+Challenge to change the way of perception<br>+Working with right people<br>+Develop new research methods for consumer research<br>+Changing clients recruiting systems<br>+Consistent creative ideas | -**Poor clients' understanding of design**<br>-**Client mindset:** anxious<br>-Client internal politics<br>-Wrong ways of consumer research<br>-Recruiting systems |
| Agency UK3 | +**Consensus of what agencies and clients are doing**<br>+**Understanding consumers**: observing consumers and their lives<br>+**Building relationship**: trust, long term relationship, partnership and credibility<br>+**Early engagement**<br>+**Agency's attitude: passionate, confident, and strong rational argument**<br>+**Working together as one team**<br>+**Integrated thinking and process**<br>+**Clients mindset**: respect an agency, Clients' value design and design thinking<br>+**Key decision maker involvement**<br>+Cover whole spectrum of brand development<br>+Proprietary process<br>+Structure and processes of clients' companies<br>+Providing what clients want<br>+Collaborative work processes<br>+Collaborative strategic design<br>+Tailoring agencies' processes<br>+Part of Global company<br>+Rigor for creativity<br>+Fusing client's confidences | -**Poor clients' understanding of design**<br>-**Client mindset:** nervous<br>-Structure and processes of clients' companies<br>-A lot of clients' background work and agencies late involvement |
| Agency UK4.1 and 4.2 | +**Agency's attitude: passionate**<br>+**Consensus of what agencies and clients are doing**<br>+**Communication:** informing clients<br>+**Integrated approach and processes**<br>+**Clients' understanding of design**<br>+**Understanding consumers**<br>+Flexibility<br>+Interaction with clients<br>+Designers' intuition<br>+Diagnose situations<br>+Inspiration: by environments, materials and so forth | -**Clients' understanding of design**<br>-Rigid structure and processes<br>-Insufficient knowledge<br>-Wrong information that clients have<br>-Time consuming convincing stages |

**Table 2.** Summary of agencies' Interview: features impacting integration and collaboration in FMCG brand development (items mentioned more than three times from different interviewees are in bold)

The goal of FMCG brand development in agencies is to find opportunities, to find the optimum arena for the focus of their activities, and to change consumers and clients perceptions. When agencies and clients seek to find a way to achieve goals, they need a consensus about (re)defining problems and establishing frameworks to solve them. In agency interview UK 3 the respondent stated that "using design and design thinking helps actually to find out what's the optimum arena for brand and to load this presences". This evidence suggests that agencies seek to achieve these strategic goals by employing and adopting design and design thinking.

As demonstrated in Table 2, there are nine common features to be found about encouraging design integration and collaboration: 1) clients understanding of design, 2) consensus, 3) early engagement, 4) building relationship 5) communication internally and externally, 6) working together internally and externally, 7) integrated approach and process, 8) understating consumers, 9) clients and agencies' mindset. Each common feature has different details depending on interviewees. In contrast to the above common features, there are opposite opinions about some features. Whereas, Agencies UK 2 and 4 point out proprietary processes for encouraging features, Agencies UK 1 and 4 mention that these processes sometimes are avoided due to lack of flexibility. They account for developing flexible proprietary methods and then depending on projects, they prefer adopting appropriate methods in response to the specific requirements of each project. This difference is influenced by the nature of each organization, such as vision, size, structure and so forth. Above all, it depends what they value in brand development. The latter two agencies tend to value intuition, creativity, and disruptive thinking.

Features of encouraging design integration and collaboration in each group are interlinked and dependent each other. For example, building relationship between clients and agencies determines design integration and collaboration to cultivate effective design thinking. Communication between clients and agencies is necessary to build strong relationship and consensus of overall aims. Conversely, better relationships determines that agencies and clients communicate with each other well and that agencies can have more engagement with clients at a strategic level. This leads clients and agencies to have strategic partnership with trust and credibility. Through working with agencies interplay and integration issues enables design thinking to embed clients businesses and have more chance to identify consumers' need and desire. It can be concluded that communication is a key factor in fostering design thinking within FMCG brand development

As demonstrated above, whether they are common or not, a variety of factors influence both national and own brand development. In their experiences, most interviewees noted that there are different design integration and collaboration approaches because the goal of brand development, and associated organizational structures, are different. Whereas national brand development is a matter of independent brand and is normally handled by a design manger, designer, or marketer, own brand development is a matter of developing brand architecture of category and is carried on by a marketer. Features of own brand development overlap with features of national brand development but there are also differences. Therefore, features seen in FMCG brand development in table 3 can be considered as developing own brand.

| | Features of considering in FMCG brand development | Features of considering own brand development |
|---|---|---|
| Agency K1 | • Emotional approach rather than marketing approach<br>• Time consuming marketing research | • Communicating value rather than price |
| Agency UK1 | • Providing new opportunities<br>• Combination strategy and execution<br>• Developing independent brand<br>• Defining what brand stands for<br>• Design development for building brand equity<br>• Client's project design brief<br>• Consumer reactions<br>• Changing consumers' perceptions<br>• Macro and micro consumer researches<br>• Projects handled by a design manager, a designer or a marketer in client side | • Understanding brand differently<br>• Developing architecture of categories rather than each independent brand<br>• Different structure from national brand companies<br>• Valuing product (category) not brand<br>• Mostly In-house design team involvement<br>• Projects handled by a marketer |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Agency UK2 | • Providing new opportunities<br>• Wit and humor<br>• Higher risk in national brand development<br>• Contribution by design<br>• Developing brand itself<br>• Role of packaging in FMCG brand: the voice of brand, entertaining consumers to engage them, differentiation from competitors | • Low risk in own brand development<br>• Developing own brand with corporate statements<br>• Tactical advantage<br>• Challenge with innovation |
| Agency UK3 | • Providing new opportunities<br>• Holistic approach<br>• Creative ideas or disruptive thinking to change design<br>• Brand engagement<br>• Emotional residences<br>• Decision's effect sales<br>• Different approaches depending project types: new brand development and existing brand development<br>• Role of packaging: embodying brand essence through packaging, differentiation of brand, communication of brand, change consumers' perception and lives | • Different creative approach but similar brand development process<br>• Brand architecture process: communicating hierarchy of architecture on packaging<br>• Navigating consumer to find own brand products: providing category cues<br>• Changing consumer's perceptions: letting consumers feel pride to buy good quality |
| Agency UK4 | • Holistic approach<br>• Broad consumer target<br>• Getting maintenance on shelves<br>• Providing new opportunities | • Approach localizations: understanding what local consumers want |

**Table 3.** Summary of agencies' Interview: features of considering in FMCG brand development and own brand development

## 4.2  Company

As previously mentioned in agency analysis, how companies value design determines design integration and collaboration between companies and agencies in order to develop a competitive and sustainable brand. Company K1 has many brands in different businesses and all design activity relating to their brands is carried out in-house a design centre in the company. However, the role of design centre seems to be limited in companies' strategy such that design thinking is not pervasive to other departments. Above all this company is a big organization and to achieve time and financial efficiencies, every stage is executed through computer-systematized processes. There seems to be a lack of communication to share ideas and opinions. In contrast, company UK 1 has two category lines but it is to be a leading company. The organisation has a flat managerial structure so its culture is appropriate to share ideas about problems. In addition, the mindset of company UK 1 stimulates challenge new opportunities rather than cautious attitude that company K1 has. The reason that this company can achieve leading position in around a decade is communication for sharing problems and finding a way together.

| | Features of impacting design integration and collaboration in organizations | Features of impacting brand development |
|---|---|---|
| Company K1 | +Updating new knowledge for design and design management<br>+Sending designer to other countries to research their design and learn how other companies manage design<br>+Design team supported by CEO in organizational hierarchy<br>+Confidence of design<br>+Developing design tool kit or library<br>+Developing process for design<br>-Strong sales team power<br>-Reward for big profit<br>-Stage gate process between teams<br>-Brand mangers and category mangers handle design projects<br>-Complicated process system<br>-Every stages counted by money | +Design center for whole design spectrum<br>+Planning tool<br>-Sales person attitude: cautious for changing design to lose brand loyalty |

| Company UK1 | +Entrepreneurship: entrepreneurship in design<br>+Open space and mixed placement<br>+Space (office place) itself: creative space for employees<br>+Horizontal hierarchy<br>+Whole employees engagement to solve problems<br>+Whole employees involvement in generating ideas<br>+Get problems and ideas from consumers<br>+Commercially intelligent<br>+Finding right external agencies: agencies' understanding problems<br>+Taking about ideas freely<br>+Simple decision process<br>+Keeping finding great people<br>+Keep learning<br>-Wrong definition for problems | +Keep consistence of what brand stands for<br>+Keep nature of brand<br>+Great products<br>+Brand engagement with consumers<br>+Find what consumers want and then engaging them |
| --- | --- | --- |

**Table 4.** Summary of Companies' Interview: features impacting design in organizations and features impacting brand development

As can be seen in table 4, ways of finding and sharing problems in organizations affect approach to projects. Therefore, companies seek to find a way, which stakeholders can be engaged in order to find opportunities to meet consumers' unmet needs.

## 4.3    Retailer

Through this study, it is clear that retailers have started to value design to enable the development competitive advantages. They develop new ways to bring design in their organizations and own brand development such as collaboration with star designers and developing premium brands. However, they confront barriers, for example, complicated decision system and insufficient resources such as budget and people. The retailer seeks to adapt design for competing with competitors. The retailer employs design to develop differentiated own brand from other retailers and take a leading position in a market.

| | **Features of impacting design in organizations** | **Features of impacting own brand development** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Retailer K1 | +Collaboration with a star designer<br>+Value design for competitive advantage to shift to premium line<br>+Starting to hire designers in each different category line<br>+Own brand test room<br>-Structure complication<br>-Complicated decision stages | +Brand development guideline<br>+Packaging guideline<br>+Using consumer panel and data<br>+Benchmarking<br>+Specific step guideline for developing own brand<br>-Guideline and policy without considering capacity |

**Table 5**. Summary of Retailer's Interview: features of impacting design in organizations and features impacting own brand development

## 5.0    Findings

Firstly, perspectives of design thinking from companies and retailers can be found in their interviews and agencies interviews. The role of design in FMCG companies is not to act as a catalyst and facilitator for design thinking, but to supporting other departments and to add aesthetical touches. Specially, the role of an agency is limited in developing brand identity. Thus, collaboration and integration between companies and agencies tend to take place at the latter stages of brand development. However, there are some approaches in companies and retailers to adopt design thinking consciously and unconsciously.

In Company UK 1 interview, they do not explicitly set out to employ design thinking but the organizational culture already has important features of design thinking. Employees from different departments share problem-solving approaches and collectively find ways to define problems in consultation with consumers. The space of the company is open and designed to communicate conveniently. In contrast to this, Company K1 has a different organizational culture in relation to design thinking, having rigid processes and roles within each department. This represents a barrier to effective communication and prevents integration of processes across departments.

Secondly, features extracted from three groups of interviewees are integrated and interlink with each other. Thus, it is necessary to conceive these features integrally. As can be seen in agencies' interviews, most interviewees argue that clients' understanding and valuing design has an impact on collaboration and integrated design process between companies and agencies. Most features, which are described in table 2, are determined by agencies' clients (companies and retailers), hence agencies need to build good working relationships for design thinking to pervade projects. In FMCG brand development, unlike in industrial design, evidence suggests that agencies do not foster design thinking within client projects and more broadly their strategic planning processes. It can be claimed that agencies are preoccupied with pleasing clients rather than engendering creativity and questioning the status quo. However, there is another stream of design agency. Agency UK 2 was the smallest within this study nevertheless they ranked in the top 5 agencies in UK (as published in Design Week, 2008). They are broadening their business activities from packaging design to brand campaigns. The respondent claimed that their agency needs to dominate projects rather than pleasing clients, and their intention is to strongly promote design thinking. In conclusion, it is crucial that agencies seek to find ways to collaborate and integrate with clients without losing their creative abilities.

Thirdly, retailers have potential to create a new way to develop own brands. Retail K1 collaborates 'star designers' to reinforce their brand and infuse creativity into their brands. Interviews with agencies demonstrated that retailers have a lot of potential to develop own brands in an innovative way. There is opportunity to implement design thinking and develop own brands with lower risks than national brand companies. There are some barriers to this, namely a lack of understanding of the value of design, rigid hierarchies, and focus on sales profit for example.

Data analysis (Figure 1) illustrates the features of design thinking for FMCG brand development between clients and agencies. This is divided into two groups: i) agencies, and ii) companies and retailers. Features identified in bold have a substantial impact. In first column, organizational culture has to be fortified as a foundation stone, and features in the second column need to be cultivated for design thinking to penetrate into projects. The third column provides further details. The features in the third column do not take place in a linear manner and these are iterative and integral in processes and further more organizations.
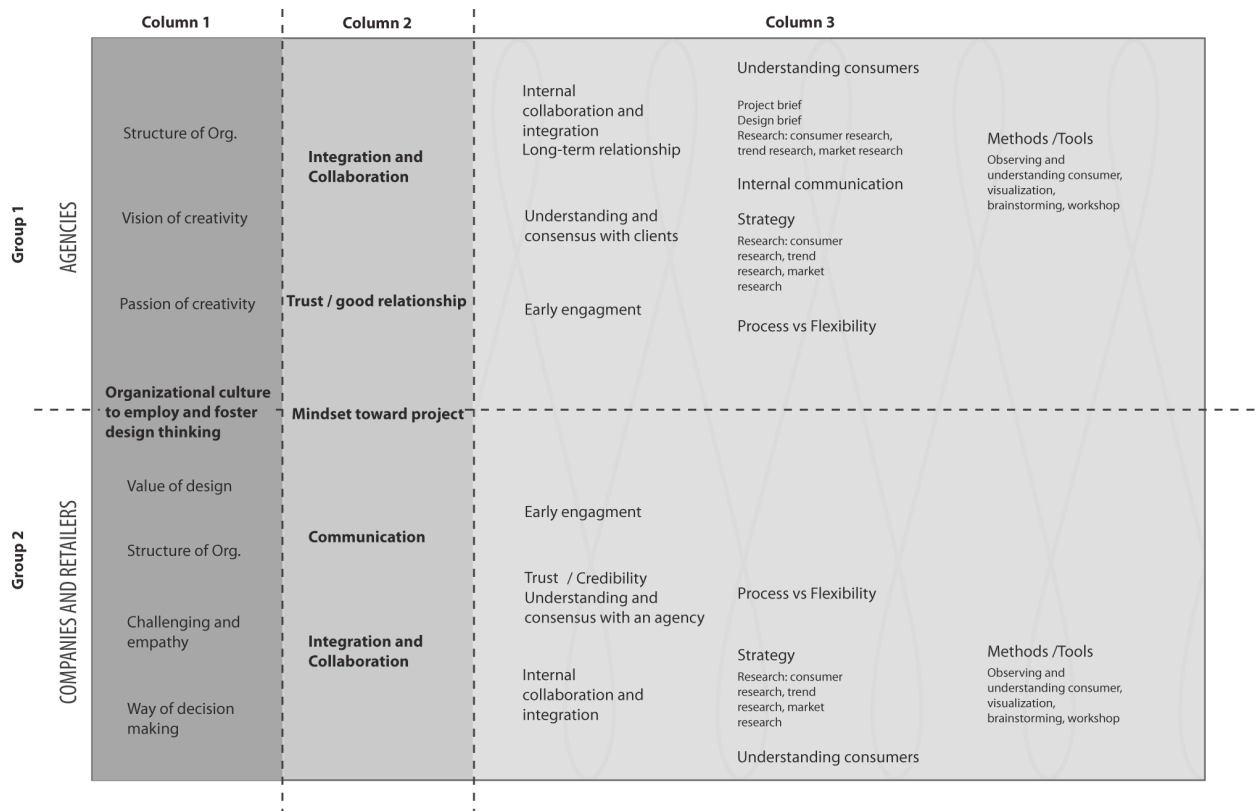


**Figure 1.** Design thinking features map in FMCG brand development

The empirical data collection via the research interviews has identified features of the role of design thinking in FMCG brand development that has not previously been identified in research literature. These features include lack of money to devote to a project, lack of time to undertake design thinking related activities, and the need to please clients. There is a clear implication of resource availability and the ability for organizations to undertake design thinking-led FMCG brand development. Many features identified within the interview analysis correlate with published literature upon design thinking. However, features such as prototyping and user-centered approaches (Brown 2009, 2008) which are noted in design thinking in industrial engineering design, is less pronounced in FMCG brand development.

Most companies and agencies still maintain traditional management styles and while FMCG industry operates in fast changing markets, associated strategies are not long-term. Agencies are often engaged in the latter stages of the brand development operating under compressed and unrealistic timescales. Therefore, agencies build long-term relationships with clients to engage with early stage of brand development, however the nature of these relationships results in agencies seeking to please rather than question clients. For this reason, disruptive ideas may not make it into presentations agencies make to clients.

In summary, the following are three important reasons for differences between design thinking in the literature and design thinking in FMCG brand development practice:

- FMCG industry context: fast changing market, a short-term brand strategy, value of sales, different stakeholders' involvement;
- Conventional relationship between agencies and clients (companies and retailers): the role of agencies is conceived as carrying the last stages of development of the aesthetical part of brand;
- Conventional approaches for developing FMCG brands: late design engagement, conventional consumer research methods, rigid roles of individual departments.

## 6.0    Conclusions and Further Work

It can be concluded from the interviews that design thinking is not yet a core aspect of FMCG brand development, but there are instances where its value is recognized and its use is increasing. Respondents identified the role of design thinking in the FMCG brand development process, where design is already valued and recognized a core activity. Where literature provides evidence of the value of design thinking across the functions of an organization, there was little empirical evidence of its adoption in organizations involved in FMCG brand development. Thus research undertaken within this study suggests that design thinking has not yet been adopted into broad processes of FMCG brand development organizations. Although literature claims that to develop competitive and sustainable brands it is imperative that features of design thinking are employed and fostered, there is a requirement to communicate this in an effective and concise manner to FMCG brand development organizations. The ongoing debate regarding design thinking – its meaning, value, and role in both design process and more broadly in business contexts – contributes to this communication challenge. There is a need for stakeholders involved in the use of design thinking (in its various guises) to provide concrete examples to stakeholders in the FMCG brand development process.

This research provides evidence that it is necessary to frame the role of design thinking in FMCG brand development while recognising the fast changing market context and the complexity of stakeholder accountability. Further work is planned that seeks to develop the initial work in this study by engaging with a much larger audience of stakeholders in FMCG brand development.

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Younjoon Lee is a PhD student in design at Lancaster University. Before she started her PhD, she worked at Interbrand Seoul as a senior designer and Gaid Associates for six years. She has experience working a lot of big Korean FMCG companies to develop brand and packaging design.

She also graduated with MSc Communication Design from Pratt Institute and gave lectures in Woosong University in Korea.

**Martyn Evans**

Martyn Evans is a Senior Lecturer in Design at Lancaster University and Director of its MA in Design Management. As a trained product designer, his research activities explore the approaches designers use to consider the future. His PhD investigates the role of future thinking in design and has published over 30 peer review articles in this area. Martyn is external examiner at a number of UK institutions and have acted as an academic advisor for curriculum development both nationally and internationally.