

Chapter 24

Mapping Design Values Across Time for a Single Product Category (Two Wheelers) Using Harley Davidson Advertisements



Deepshikha Dash and Sugandh Malhotra

Abstract In the field of mobility, Harley Davidson is an iconic brand that has a loyal fan following. Hence, it is beneficial to observe the design values that the company has been propagating over time. To do this, the authors conducted a manual text analysis of 150 American Harley Davidson advertisements, which were evenly distributed across five decades beginning from 1920. The result of this analysis showed that irrespective of social, cultural, political, economic, or technological changes, ten design values were repeatedly observed in the advertisements, namely aspirations, style, performance, convenience, affordability, comfort, durability, safety, conservation, and security. In addition to this, the authors also documented the changing propensities of the design values across time and the ways in which they were achieved.

24.1 Background

24.1.1 Introduction

Advertisements are one of the most important cultural artifacts produced by a society. They provide key insights into design values. For the purpose of this paper, ‘design values’ may be defined as the factors of consideration in a designed intervention, that are of value to human beings. To understand how these design values change over time for a single product category, 150 American Harley Davidson magazine advertisements were studied across a period of 50 years, beginning from 1920.

D. Dash (✉) · S. Malhotra
Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai 400076, India
e-mail: deepshikha.dash@gmail.com

S. Malhotra
e-mail: sugandh@iitb.ac.in

24.1.2 Relevance of Advertisements for Designers

Advertisements have often been critiqued as being fallacious or attempting to sell products, systems, and services that are unnecessary or harmful, to benefit the seller.

These arguments may be valid. However, such criticism can also act as an obstacle in understanding the role of advertisements in our society. Indeed, advertisements have been created with the intent to sell things, but to achieve this, they must also create structures of meaning. ‘Advertisements must take into account not only the inherent qualities and attributes of the products they are trying to sell, but also the way in which they can make those properties mean something to us’ [1]. Hence, advertisements have to translate designed interventions that belong to the world of ‘things’ into a form that means something to human beings. For example, if a car could travel 50 miles per gallon, then it may be translated into affordability or imply that the user is a certain kind of person, for example, a smart saver. The numeric connotation of ‘mpg’ is simply a factual attribute. However, advertisements must translate these facts into ‘humanly symbolic ‘exchange value’’ [1]. It is this ‘humanly symbolic’ value that is explored in this paper in the form of ‘design value.’

Traditionally, designers first identify design values and then use them to create designed interventions. This process reverses in the case of advertisements, which take designed interventions and use ‘humanly symbolic’ values to sell them. However, in doing so, they provide a key insight into what sellers think humans value, thus becoming important sources of information with respect to exploring design values that were of relevance in the past.

24.1.3 Novel Approach Adopted by the Authors

According to traditional design approaches, designers are heavily dependent on user and context-based methods such as ethnography, contextual analysis, and user interviews to gain insights on design values. However, these values would be relevant only if there is no change in the user or the context, which might suffice for the near future but not the far future. This fundamental shortcoming has been identified by the authors in their previously published work where they suggest observing factors of change rather than factors of immediate influence [2, 3]. To observe factors of change, the authors have explored magazine advertisements as the medium of study. Though magazine advertisements have been extensively studied before, it was found that no existing research attempted to identify patterns in design values projected by Harley Davidson over time.

Another study relevant to this paper is the development of the Design Futures (DeF) framework [3]. It was formulated through the historical study of modern design movements, a variety of successful products from the past century, and award-winning contemporary products. The framework identified 19 factors that were consistently observed through time and categorized them under three headings,

namely technology, environment, and human. Specifically, the ones related to human were joy of using, styling, comfort, convenience, safety and hygiene, affordability, social advancement, and cultural advancement.

24.2 Methodology

24.2.1 Data Collection

Harley Davidson is an American motorcycle company that was founded in 1903. By the 1920s, it managed to get the largest two-wheeler manufacturer title. During the Great Depression that began in 1929 only two major American Motorcycle companies were able to survive, of which Harley was one of them. Since then, the company has managed to endure intense global competition, two world wars, and numerous technological disruptions. Today it is known as one of the world's most iconic two-wheeler brands and is widely acknowledged for its loyal fan following [4]. The historical artifacts chosen to be studied were old American, Harley Davidson, magazine advertisements. These advertisements were seen as mediums of communication that contained content curated for Harley Davidson to communicate the design values of its products. A repository of 150 advertisements was created that spanned across 50 years beginning from 1920. Each decade was represented by 30 magazines. These magazines were uniformly distributed across the years. Also, it was ensured that the samples belonged to a variety of publications ranging from technical to family genres.

24.2.2 Data Sorting

The authors chose to follow a manual documentation process to capture the context sensitivity reflected by the text occurrences, which would otherwise be overlooked by typical content mapping and digital text mining software. Though this may be seen as a limitation with respect to errors due to human interpretations, it has also helped add richness to the study. During documentation, each complete meaning was acknowledged as an occurrence. Every occurrence expressed a single complete idea which could be in the form of a word or a phrase. The information projected by the magazines was then divided into two hierarchies. The first comprised of '*design values*' while the second comprised of ways to achieve '*design values*,' known as '*design value considerations*.'

24.3 Observations

24.3.1 Design Values Across Time

Based on the manual text mining process, 10 unique mobility-related design values were found to be relevant across the time studied. These values were aspirations, style, performance, convenience, affordability, comfort, durability, safety, conservation, and security. See Fig. 24.1. Decadewise, it may be observed that the top

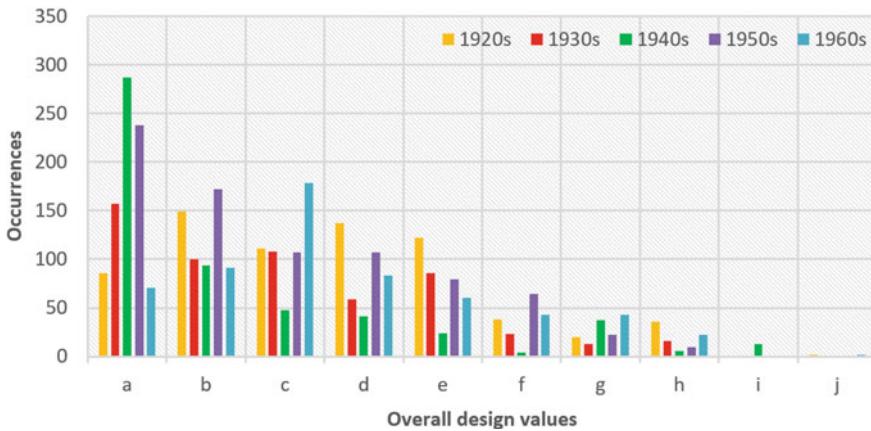


Fig. 24.1 Total occurrences of design values across five decades. Key for design values: **a** aspirations, **b** style, **c** performance, **d** convenience, **e** affordability, **f** comfort, **g** durability, **h** safety, **i** conservation, **j** security

projected values in 1920s were style, convenience, and affordability while in 1930s, they were aspirations, performance, and style. In the 1940s, aspirations and style were prominently observed along with the entry of a new design value, conservation. In the 1950s, aspiration, style, performance, and convenience were predominantly observed while in the 1960s, performance, style, and convenience dominated along with the reentry of security which doubled from its last observed occurrence in the 1920s. However, compared to all design values, conservation and security seem to have the least presence. Hence, only the first eight design values have been elaborated in this paper.

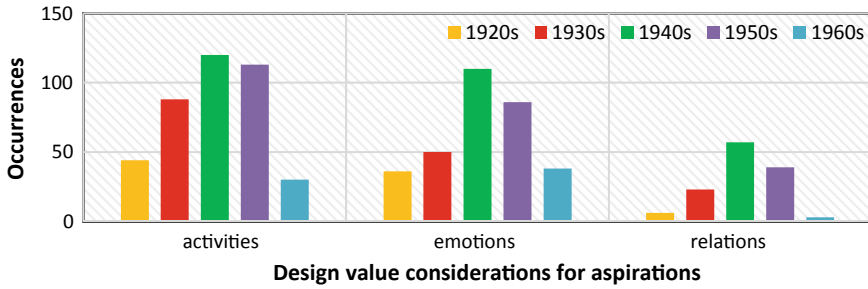


Fig. 24.2 Total occurrences of design value considerations for aspirations across five decades

24.3.2 Design Value Considerations for Aspirations

Aspiration (*n*) may be defined as ‘a strong desire to achieve an end’ [5]. The advertisements were observed to propagate three types of design value considerations for aspirations, namely activities, emotions, and relations. See Fig. 24.2.

Aspirations peaked during the 1940s. The war had stirred many emotions and the Harley oscillated as an object for a ‘dream getaway’ to an object ‘in the fore front of action.’ During World War II, soldiers desired the carefree life and hence, the advertisements reminded them of life before the war. Postwar, many engaged in meetups and as the Harley had been used as a war vehicle, the clubs became common grounds for many veterans to develop new relationships. The Harley also saw a spurt of sports events in which many loyal fans would participate. This created a new search for challenges and risk taking, thus stirring emotions of joy, thrill, and excitement. The activities related to the product also gradually changed to incorporate ‘play’ along with ‘work’ such as ‘vacations’ and ‘weekend getaways.’

24.3.3 Design Value Considerations for Style

Style (*n*) maybe defined as ‘a kind or sort, esp. in regard to appearance and form’ [5]. The advertisements were observed to propagate five types of design value considerations for style, namely personalization, aesthetics, personality, associations, and demography. See Fig. 24.3.

From as early as the 1920s, the Harley began to be associated with the ‘police’ and ‘crime fighting.’ In the 1930s, associations were made to the latest scientific advancements such as ‘rockets’ and in 1940s they were to ‘defense’ and ‘victory.’ Finally, in the 1950s, they were associated with the good old ‘outdoors.’ All these associations created a distinct personality for the product that soon became identified as ‘the protector’ with a bold, strong, and sturdy frame. Till the 1950s, there were little variations in the models. However, post-1950s, Harley Davidson emphasized

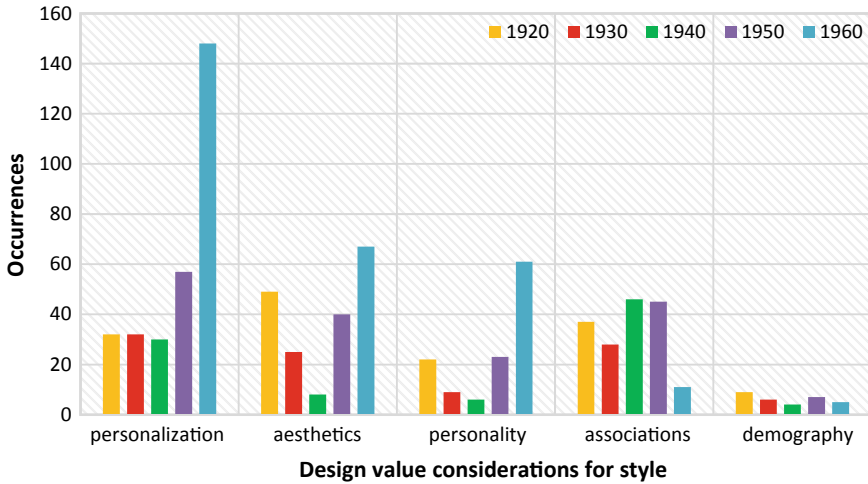


Fig. 24.3 Total occurrences of design value considerations for style across five decades

on choice and personalization with minimum demographic variety. During this time period, the primary focus of the Harley was male users.

24.3.4 Design Value Considerations for Performance

Performance (n) may be defined as ‘achievement under test conditions or the capabilities of a machine’ [5]. The advertisements were observed to propagate five types of design value considerations for performance, namely power, speed, acceleration, quality, and reliability. See Fig. 24.4. Performance has greatly increased over the

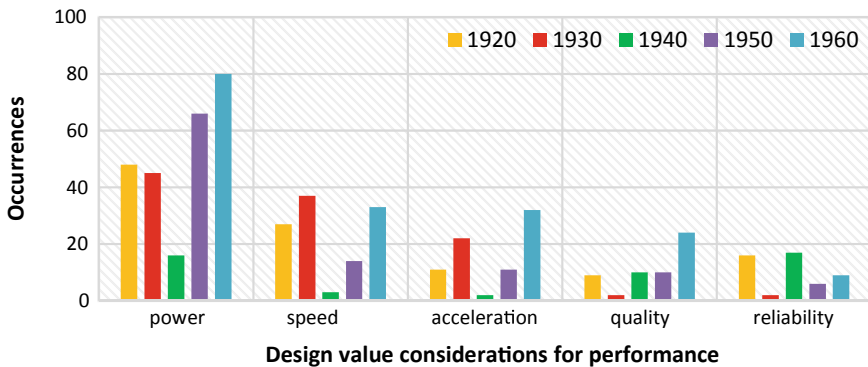


Fig. 24.4 Total occurrences of design value considerations for performance across five decades

years due to new technology. The occurrence of ‘reliability’ related words became more dominant in the 1940s where references to its successful use in defense activities were mentioned. However, this reduced in the later years as the company established its market position.

24.3.5 Design Value Considerations for Convenience

Convenience (*n*) may be defined as, ‘the quality of being convenient, freedom from difficulty or trouble, an advantage, a useful thing, esp. an installation or piece of equipment’ [5]. Here, convenient (*adj*) may be defined as ‘serving one’s comfort or interest, available at a suitable time or place, easily accessible, well situated for some purpose’ [5]. The advertisements were observed to propagate fifteen types of design value considerations for convenience, namely (A) time saving, (B) terrain versatility, (C) easy maintenance, (D) easy use, (E) easy access, (F) storage facility, (G) easy visibility from the outside, (H) easy visibility from the inside, (I) effort saving, (J) environmental protection, (K) traffic advantage, (L) easy parking, (M) easy delivery, (N) manageable weight, (O) easy learnability. See Fig. 24.5.

In the 1920s, movement between city and the countryside increased due to industrialization, two wheelers were the speediest form of transport available. The company even introduced a sidecar attachment to carry guests. As many places still did not have roads, the ability of two wheelers to be versatile enough to go through a variety of terrains and spaces made them very popular. Unfortunately, the 1940s were greatly impacted by the war, Harley stopped civilian motorcycles and began manufacturing for the defense.

Visibility became an exciting aspect as one could see more when driving on a motorcycle, resulting in a richer immersive riding experience. Sightseeing and adventure outings were also encouraged. Hence, two wheelers soon became the best vehicle to discover and see ‘America’ with. Also, visibility from outside acted as a great opportunity for the brand to create accessories. It also helped the police and defense command attention and easily communicate while being mounted on the

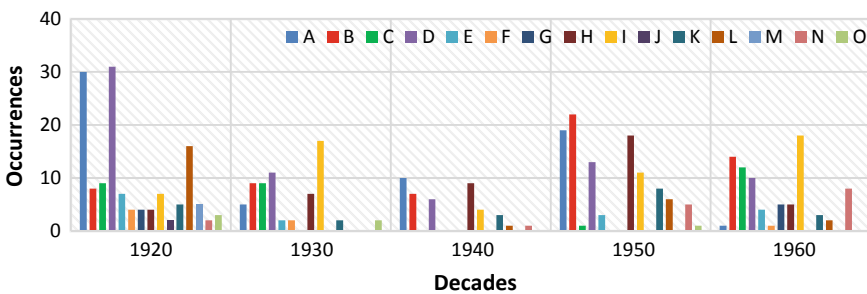


Fig. 24.5 Total occurrences of design value considerations for convenience across five decades

motorcycle. Speed and terrain versatility further added to the Harley becoming a symbol of national security.

By the 1950s, two wheelers were more developed and had been tested in different extreme conditions in the war. This helped the advertisements to use the Harley’s success in rough terrains as their value proposition. Also, as traffic increased, the Harley was seen as a convenient way to avoid traffic jams and parking issues.

24.3.6 Design Value Considerations for Affordability

Affordability (n) may be defined as ‘ability to be afforded, inexpensive,’ ‘the cost or price of something’ [6] where afford (v) may be defined as to ‘have enough money, means, time, be able to spare, be in a position to do something (esp. without risk of adverse consequences)’ [5]. The advertisements were observed to propagate six types of design value considerations for affordability, namely initial cost, running cost, upkeep cost, resale cost, insurance cost, and garaging cost. See Fig. 24.6.

Affordability was an important aspect in the early years as the two wheelers provided the cheapest form of transportation. The company also offered easy payment plans to help make the two wheeler more affordable. However, in the later years the Harley was able to create a niche that went beyond affordability. After initial cost, running cost was the most mentioned in the advertisements. Interestingly, garaging cost appeared in the 1920s but then vanished. A new type of cost in the form of insurance began to surface during the 1950s and 60s.

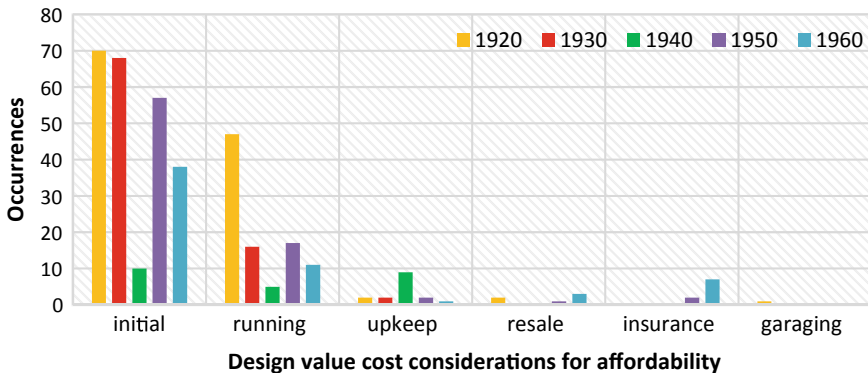


Fig. 24.6 Total occurrences of design value cost considerations for affordability across five decades

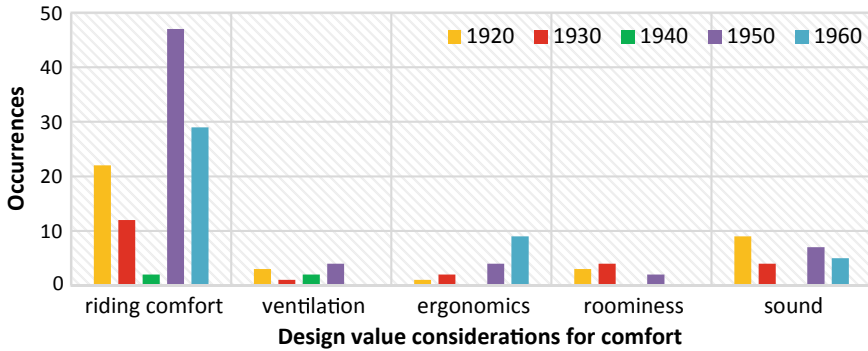


Fig. 24.7 Total occurrences of design value considerations for comfort across five decades

24.3.7 Design Value Considerations for Comfort

Comfort (*n*) may be defined as ‘a state of physical wellbeing, things that make life easy or pleasant’ [5], while comfortable (*adj*) may be defined as ‘free from stress or tension’ [7]. The advertisements were observed to propagate five types of design value considerations for comfort, namely ergonomics, ventilation, riding comfort, roominess, and sound. Riding comfort remained the most prominent consideration and was expressed through two aspects—balance and smoothness. This consideration became even more highlighted in the 1950s due to the availability of superior technology.

Ventilation and roominess were related to access of fresh air and space to stretch and move. Roominess was also expressed as a factor when the Harley offered a sidecar during the 1920s and 1930s. Interestingly, though the Harley is today associated with being the ‘noisy’ motorcycle, advertisements in the initial years used words like ‘wonderfully quiet’ and ‘silent,’ by 1950, words like ‘soft purr’ and ‘purring’ began to be used. Meanwhile, ergonomics peaked in the 1960s and was mainly expressed through saddle form and handlebar grip (Fig. 24.7).

24.3.8 Design Value Considerations for Durability

Durability (*n*) may be defined as ‘The ability to withstand wear, pressure or damage’ [8] or implying durable. Here durable (*adj*) may be defined as ‘capable of lasting, hard wearing,’ where ‘durare’ means endure and ‘durus’ means hard [5]. In synonyms of durability one can find ‘longevity, permanence and ability to last’ [8]. The advertisements were observed to propagate three types of design value considerations for durability, namely longevity, endurance, and strength. Durability has steadily increased over the years with endurance playing an important role in the 1940s. For a complete picture of durability, it should be read along with ‘associations’

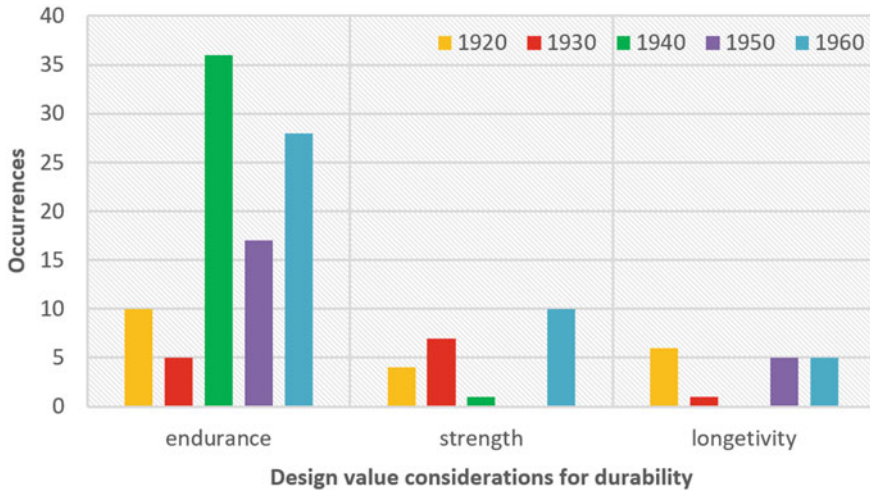


Fig. 24.8 Total occurrences of design value considerations for durability across five decades

under ‘style’ and ‘terrain versatility’ under ‘convenience.’ Durability was greatly expressed through the Harley’s association with the defense and police departments. It was also acknowledged as a winner at sports events that required endurance and strength. Mentions of climbing steep hills and difficult off-road tracks were often made (Fig. 24.8).

24.3.9 Design Value Considerations for Safety

Safety (*n*) may be defined as ‘the condition of being safe, freedom from danger or risks’ where safe (*adj*) is defined as ‘reliable, certain; that can be reckoned on’ [5]. The advertisements were observed to propagate three types of design value considerations for safety, namely control, user protection, and object protection. Though the initial years reflected overall safety, later it was mainly expressed through the ability to have greater control over the product. For example, superior breaks. The gradual reduction of focus on user or object protection may be attributed to the development of safety products like helmets, body guards, and wind shields (Fig. 24.9).

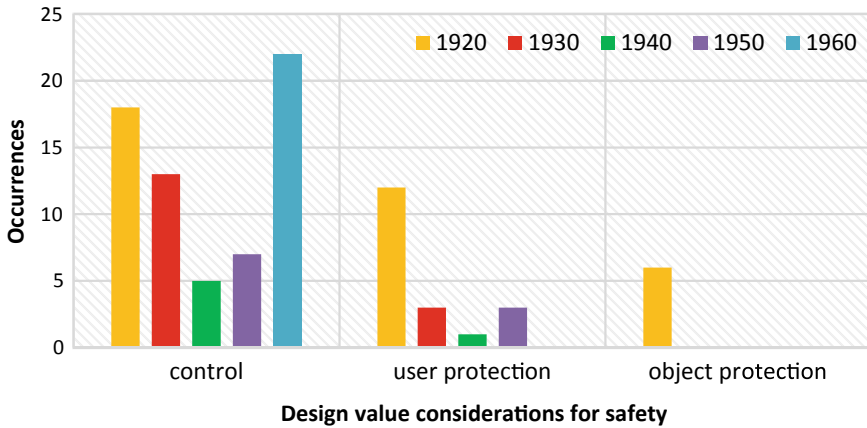


Fig. 24.9 Total occurrences of design value considerations for safety across five decades

24.4 Discussion

24.4.1 Design Values Through Time

The years between 1920 and 1970 demonstrated a crucial period for Harley Davidson two wheelers. There was growth in industry, the Great Depression, world wars, nation rebuilding, and technological and scientific advancements. Hence, it was a dynamic and ideal period to explore how drastically diverse the changes in design values could become with time. However, the study demonstrated that the same set of design values were observed throughout the 50 years. Except in the 1940s when conservation of resources was introduced due to the world wars. Also, though security vanished post-1920s, it came back in the 1960s. This encourages one to believe that though new design values may be added, existing ones would most likely remain, making them relevant even in the future. This hypothesis is further strengthened when one compares this study’s findings to the (DeF) framework research outcomes.

24.4.2 The Relevance of Design Value Considerations and Their Occurrences

Design values are often abstract. Hence, the observation of how they are achieved in the form of design value considerations greatly helps to quantify them. For example, how do you compare the comfort of two vehicles? The design value considerations help provide means by which the comfort of two vehicles can be compared. Additionally, documenting their occurrences adds another layer of learning. Through the analysis of occurrences, we gain a deeper understanding of how design values are

interconnected, what external factors influence them, and how their meaning might change based on which design value considerations are given more emphasis.

24.4.3 *Future Scope*

The intention of this study was to observe design values over time rather than observe design values of immediate influence. However, its relevance to future contexts can be further validated by the study of current design values. Another interesting direction for future research is to compare this study's results with other two wheeler products to explore factors of variation.

References

1. Williamson, J.: Decoding Advertisements. Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd., London (1978)
2. Dash, D.: An overview of futures research for designers. In: Chakrabarti, A. (eds.) Research into Design for a Connected World. Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies, vol. 134. Springer, Singapore (2019)
3. Malhotra, S.: Framework for design possibilities. Ph.D. Thesis, IIT Delhi (2015)
4. <https://harley-davidson.com/us/en/museum/explore/hd-timeline.html>. Last accessed 2020/10/22
5. Thompson, D. (ed.): The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. Clays Ltd, St Ives plc, England (1996)
6. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/affordability>. Last accessed 2020/10/22
7. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/comfortable>. Last accessed 2020/10/22
8. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/durability>. Last accessed 2020/10/22