



# Mind the Gap: *Perceptions of Design Awards from the Wild*

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Design awards have become a valuable means for firms to distinguish the quality of their design work from that of their competitors, thus acting as symbols of recognition. Although their benefits appear to be clear, this empirical study contributes to the knowledge and understanding of the factors that inform how the notion of a design award is perceived by those who may take part in awards competitions. A qualitative content analysis of survey responses highlights how attitudes towards design awards are informed by perceptions of and associations between such factors as the perceived quality of awarding criteria, validity of judgments during design evaluation, perceptions of fees, and the quality of awarded designs. These factors and their associations contribute to a greater understanding of how contemporary attitudes towards awards competitions are formed. Findings are positioned to both stimulate debate and provide a point of departure for studies of attitudes towards and perceptions of various design awards competitions. Through a greater understanding of how awards competitions are perceived, opportunities exist to continue to increase their reputation for the benefit of both those that stage awards competitions and those who may participate in them.

**Keywords** – Design Award Schemes, Selection Systems, Perception.

**Relevance to Design Practice** – The study provides those that may wish to take part in awards with a more informed understanding of awards systems; and those who stage awards competitions insight into the principles that may inform attitudes towards awards schemes.

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## Introduction

Design awards are an established part of the design landscape and an important vehicle for the promotion of design excellence and its dissemination to a wider audience (Park, Nam, & Chung, 2010; Sung, Nam, & Chung, 2010). Case studies of design excellence have often focused upon the role and importance of awards schemes in the success of business (Design Council, 1990, 2004; Gemser & Wijnberg, 2002; Lockwood, 2007; Sung et al., 2010). For example, Temple and Swann (1995) examine the British Design Awards as a means of promoting industrial competitiveness and as a benchmark for good design practices. They conclude that an awards system's provision of a suitable benchmark for international excellence plays an important part in a firm's ability to develop competitive strategies. However, in conclusion the authors also emphasise the importance of an award competition's reputation as a benchmark of design excellence and a means to demonstrate good design practice. Although many previous studies explore the relationship between design awards and commercial success, little work was identified to explore perceptions of awards competitions and the possible influence this has upon the reputation of design awards.

An interesting and valuable exception was found in Sung's (2007) study of attitudes towards three awards competitions (Japan's G-Mark and the two German design awards, iF and Red Dot) as they are perceived by 62 of Taiwan's award winning design firms. Sung concludes that while the firms investigated value design awards, little difference is perceived between the various design competitions. Aoki, Liu, He, Zhong, and Ashizawa (2013) explore the success factors associated with Japan's Good

Design Award, concluding that an emphasis upon the development of the award's wider social significance is a key factor for their continued success.

Building upon prior work related to perceptions of design awards (Aoki et al., 2013; Gemser & Wijnberg, 2002; Sung, 2007; Sung, Chung, & Nam, 2009) the current study identifies some of the factors that inform how awards are actually perceived by those who may participate in them. With the continuing proliferation of awards schemes internationally, the identification of these factors provides a timely contribution to an understanding of the drivers behind perceptions of awards competitions. The current study is positioned to both stimulate debate and provide a point of departure for further investigation of how these factors and their associations may influence attitudes towards and perceptions of individual design awards.

## Design Awards

The evolution of design awards and their commercial and symbolic value can be traced to the British Council of Industrial Design (CoID), established in 1944 to, "promote by all practicable

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means the improvement of design in the production of British industry” (Sung et al., 2009). To this end, the CoID began to stage high profile exhibitions to promote awareness of design, including *Britain Can Make It* in 1946 and *The Festival of Britain*, 1951 (Design Council, 2008). By 1957 the organisation had developed the Design Centre Award Scheme to exemplify and promote good design. Later, a renamed and restructured CoID (now the Design Council) together with the London Business School published a review of British Design Awards (Temple & Swann, 1995). The paper indicates the importance of awards as benchmarks for good design practice, and that this symbolic benchmarking is required for competitions to act as stimulus for competitiveness.

With similar aims, the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry founded the Good Design Awards in 1957 (then called the G-Mark System, Japan Institute of Design Promotion, n.d.). As with the Design Centre Award Scheme in the UK, the Awards followed similar principles, namely “advancing lifestyle and industrial activities by selecting outstanding design” (GoodDesign, 2013). In Germany, the iF Design Awards, established by the International Forum Design Hannover, express the objective of, “recognising outstanding design as assessed by international expert juries” (iF Design, 2013). Also in Germany the Red Dot Award, founded in 1953 (Red Dot Award, 2013), have been internationalised under the direction of Peter Zec (2007), who describes the scheme as, “a seal of quality; it stands for membership with the best in design and business”. In the United States, the Industrial Design Excellence Awards (IDEA) were established in 1980 by the IDSA (Industrial Design Society of America) with the aim of “recognizing design excellence” (IDSA, 2013a). Since the development of these early competitions, design awards have continued to proliferate to a point where it is now a challenge to identify the number of award schemes currently in existence. For example, in a study to investigate success in design award schemes and corporate competitiveness, Sung et al. (2009) identify 22 design competitions worldwide.

A review of the aims and objectives published by award schemes indicate their philosophy of the promotion of design in the interests of the design industry (Japan Institute of Design Promotion, n.d.; IDSA, 2013a; iF International Design Forum, 2013; Red Dot, 2013). However, as also noted by Sung et al. (2009), the continued commercialisation of design award schemes adds a

new dimension to the staging of awards competitions. In terms of the potential commercial and marketable benefits of winning awards, Zec (2007) suggests that in a modern, industrialised society the more difficult it is for products to distinguish themselves from one another, the more important design awards become. Lockwood (2007) explains how the receipt of design awards can contribute to corporate reputation and brand image and confer prestige to the consumer. West, Collins, and Miciak (2003) describes how awards may bring publicity and attract potential clients to award-winning agencies. In the same study, however, West et al. analyse the judging and evaluation criteria of awards to conclude that a more rigorous and open criteria for panels making creative judgments is desirable. As noted by Zec (2007), an individual juror’s evaluation is by definition subjective.

In terms of economic and symbolic value, three specific benefits of winning awards have been identified (Gemser & Wijnberg, 2002; Sung, 2007). First of all may be the award’s specific and tangible values. For example, awards may infer rights and privileges to awardees; the publication of winning designs in yearbooks; prize money, galas, and winners events; promotional websites and archives of winners (West et al., 2003; Zec, 2007). Awards also have value as a symbol of excellence, with awardees seen to belong to a certain group. This signals that they are aligned with the values and principles expressed by the group; the awarding body for example. A third benefit relates to the wider symbolic value of the award as a stamp of approval with the potential of providing commercial success (Zec, 2007). Of course these benefits only hold if the perceived reputation of design awards and the values they express align with the desires and values of those who receive them.

## A Conceptual Framework

Similarly to Sung’s (2007) categorisation of award characteristics, we classify the characteristics of existing awards competitions and define the ways in which the term design award is to be used as the object of this study. We then present and describe elements of Gemser and Wijnberg’s (2002) framework for the analysis of awards schemes as a conceptual scaffold for the current investigation.

Various design award schemes provide categories for multiple design disciplines (Red Dot, IDEA, iF Design Awards), while others identify with specific fields such as automotive, graphic, or furniture design. Some awards target specific applicant profiles, such as the James Dyson Foundation Student Awards, while others are open to all. The frequency of awards also varies, with many annual awards (Australian International Design Awards, Core77 Design Awards); others run biannually (INDEX) or quarterly (Quarterly Design Awards). Design awards may be government sponsored or corporate events, with various associated exhibitions, publications and ceremonies. Table 1 illustrates the various characteristics of a number of the most frequently cited design awards competitions (see results section below).

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**Table 1. Characteristics of design awards competitions.**

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Competition</i>	<i>Number of Categories</i>	<i>Organiser</i>	<i>Publication of Awards</i>	<i>Exhibition &amp; Ceremonies</i>	<i>Country</i>
Product, Concept, & Communication Design	Red Dot	3 main, numerous sub divisions	Design Zentrum	Yearbook, online gallery	Winners dinner and exhibitions	Germany
Industrial Design	IDEA (IDSA)	16 industrial, 5 design	Industrial Design Society of America (IDSA)	Yearbook, online gallery	Exhibition at international conference, awards ceremony	USA
Product, Communication, & Packaging	iF Design Award	3 main, 31 sub divisions	International Forum Design	Yearbook, online gallery	Awards ceremony and exhibitions	Germany
Industrial/Product Design	Good Design Award: G-Mark	5	Japan Institute of Design Promotion (JDP)	Online gallery, yearbook	Good Design exhibition	Japan
Industrial/Product & Other Disciplines	Core77	17	Core77	Online gallery		USA
Product Design	BraunPrize	4	Braun Design	Online gallery	Award ceremony, BraunPrize exhibition	Germany
Graphic Design	D&AD	24	D&AD	Online archive, D&AD annual	Awards ceremony, exhibitions, and screenings	UK
Product/Service Design	Good Design Australian	18	Good Design Australia	Yearbook: Digital & print	Awards ceremony and exhibition	Australia
Multi-Disciplined	International Design Awards (IDA)	5	International Design Awards	Online gallery	Awards ceremony	USA
Product/Industrial/Graphic Design	Athenaeum's Good Design Awards	25	Chicago Athenaeum & European Centre	Online gallery	Exhibited	USA
Multi-Disciplined	Observateur du Design	24	Agency for promotion of industrial design	Online showcase, awards catalogue	Awards ceremony	France
Multi-Disciplined	INDEX	12	Confederation of Danish Industry, various government institutions	Online showcase	Awards ceremony and exhibitions	Denmark
Multi-Disciplined	Compasso D'oro	11	ADI Foundation for Italian Design	ADI design index annual	Award ceremony	Italy
Branding	Plus X	7 design features, 23 design	Media Society Networks	Digital hall of fame	Awards ceremony, trade show, and exhibition	Germany

Although a thorough classification of the individual characteristics of all design awards is beyond the scope of this study, Table 1 provides an indication of the notable characteristics of often-cited awards competitions (Aoki et al., 2013; Sung, 2007; Sung et al., 2009; Zec, 2007). Design awards appear to be either discipline specific, as with Red Dot design awards (industrial/product design focused) or multi-disciplinary (International Design Awards). The number of categories within design awards may range from as few as five (Japan's Good Design Awards) to as many as 31 (iF Design Awards). Design awards often offer participants opportunities to publish design work in digital catalogues and/or printed yearbooks. Many awards also provide opportunities for award-winning designs to be exhibited at dedicated museums (Red Dot) and more temporary exhibitions and expos (BraunPrize, G-Mark: Good Design Award).

For the purposes of this study we define a design award as focused upon the evaluation and judgment of design. We use the term *design award* to describe a competition staged by an organization (private, NGO, governmental), the outcome of which

is the awarding of prizes as recognition for good design. As such, design awards exist as a means through which good design may potentially gain greater publicity and recognition. This often takes the form of digital and published winners' catalogs, yearbooks, awards ceremonies, exhibitions, and/or appearances at expos. Within systems of design awards, reputation appears critical. This may be seen, for example, in Aoki et al.'s (2013) discussion of reforms to Japan's Good Design Awards, the processes of application, judgment, and presentation being revised to 'bring the system into the open'.

An award's system of selection may be characterised as a relationship between '*selectors*', those responsible for making decisions to produce the outcome of the process, and '*selected*'; those competing with one another for recognition (Gemser & Wijnberg, 2002). Figure 1 illustrates this relationship, with the line running between 'Selected' to 'Selectors' indicative of the aims of this study in understanding how the potential selected (those that may enter awards) perceive their selectors (those who stage awards).

Three types of selection system may be distinguished: market selection, peer selection, and expert selection (Gemser & Wijnberg, 2002; Sung, 2007). Design awards fall into the third: expert selection. The evaluation of the selected is dependent upon the judgment of design experts (Lockwood, 2007; Zec, 2007). Figure 2 further elaborates the stakeholders within the selection system deployed by design awards.

The 'Selectors' within a system of awards consist of two groups, those responsible for staging the awards process, 'Awarding Organisation', and those whose role it is to judge the selected, 'Judges' (Figure 2). Due to the subjective nature of the criteria used during evaluation, the reputation and influence of the judging panel is critical in ensuring the selected perceive the process of selection as fair, well informed and without bias (Gemser & Wijnberg, 2002; Zec, 2007). With the aim of acting as a conceptual framework for the current empirical study of perceptions towards design competitions, a slightly adapted version of Gemser and Wijnberg's model is presented in Figure 3.

The framework suggests how a relationship between winning an award and its value is moderated by the type of product involved, 'Product Characteristics', and the reputation of the design award itself, 'Reputation of Award'.

Here we investigate perceptions of awards competitions to consider implications for their reputation as a means to better understand the relationship between the 'Selection system expressed by the award' and the 'Selection system perceived by industry' (Figure 3). Of course it is difficult to know if indeed improved reputation would result in a more harmonious relationship between selectors and selected. This is because the Gemser and Wijnberg (2002) model does not well reflect the wider context within which design awards and awards competitions are located. Reputation itself may not merely be a product of the relationship between the selection system expressed by the award and that desired by industry; as indicated in Figure 3. Instead, other actors, individual and groups may influence and control the standing and reputation of awards, while still others play the role of mere followers. For example, Wijnberg (1995) discusses the importance that networks of groups and individuals play in informing and perpetuating the rules and conventions that govern the selection processes. Simonton (2011), in a study to explore film awards as indicators of creativity, describes how a select group of individuals, rather than the selection system itself or indeed the selected, maintain the reputation of an awards system. The self-serving opinions of the members of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, who in themselves are described as being subject to political contamination, play a significant role in maintaining the reputation of the award, with others (movie fans and industry experts who lack voting membership) in this system being demoted to the role of mere passive followers.

As such Gemser and Wijnberg's (2002) model is limited in its ability to account for the various stakeholders, groups and actors that may maintain a system of design awards. Instead the model merely expresses this complex network of groups and individuals as 'the selection system expressed by the award'. This then has implications for an analysis of the reputation of awards that does not well account for reputation as influenced by the various stakeholders who potentially make up a network of actors

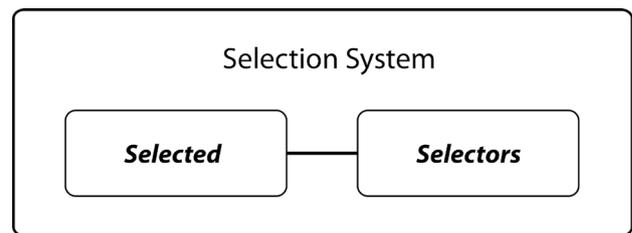


Figure 1. Relationship between selected and selectors within system of selection.

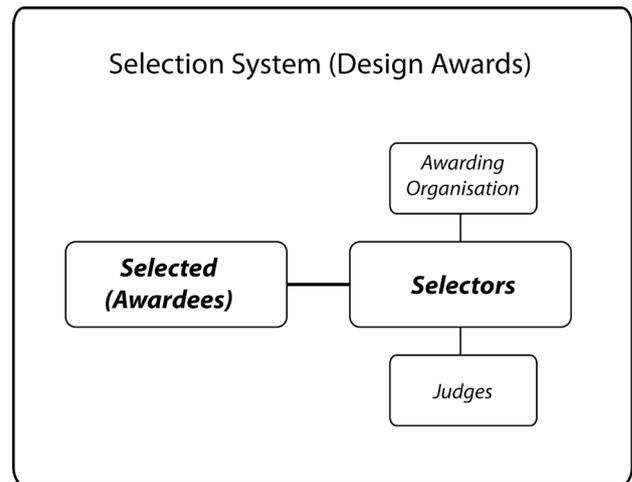


Figure 2. Elaboration of stakeholders within selection system of design awards.

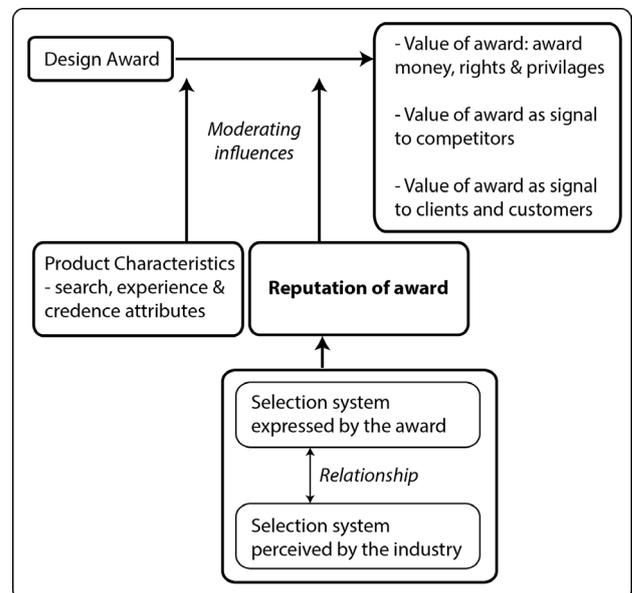


Figure 3. Framework for assessing perceptions of design award (adapted from Gemer & Wijnberg, 2002).

within an awards system (Wijnberg, 1995). Without a deeper understanding of the attitudes of the groups and individuals that may influence and maintain the reputation of awards, any analysis of reputation is limited to the provision of more general indicators of the perceived reputation of awards and the factors that may underpin and influence these attitudes.

However, although the author acknowledges these wider factors and the ways in which they may serve to influence the reputation of awards, this study is positioned as a means to identify the underlying issues and principles that associate to inform perceptions of design awards among those that may take part in them. The study thus highlights important factors that inform attitudes toward awards completions. In doing, we position this work as a departure point for further investigation of these issues and how they associate inform attitudes toward various awards competitions. Future research may, for example, explore how the factors identified in this study relate to the various stakeholders and groups that initiate and perpetuate the reputation of various design awards; and what implications this may then have for the reputation of the awards themselves.

## Aims

We explore the reputation of the notion of a design award through an empirical study of the perceptions of those who may participate in awards competitions. Here the study's aim is to explore the attitudes of practicing designers and related professionals. In reality a variety of actors take part in design awards, from students to educators and from academics to design professionals. Moreover, the decision to participate in an award scheme may be made at an executive or managerial level (Lockwood, 2007). Although there can be no doubt that many stakeholders participate in a decision to enter awards competitions, this study aims to identify the factors that inform the attitudes of the designers whose names appear on the awards themselves, rather than others involved in a decision to aspire to attain them. Here we wish to explicate the attitudes of potential awardees towards the awards they may receive.

## Investigating Perceptions of Design Awards

Survey was used as an instrument to gather data related to attitudes towards design awards. In particular we focus upon the discipline of industrial design as defined by the IDSA (IDSA, 2013b). With this focus the study employed the following criteria to identify a sample population.

1. Participants must be engaged in design practice, education or management in a professional capacity.
2. Responses are sort from those that describe themselves as professionally or academically associated with the profession industrial design (as defined by the IDSA).

Sampling was taken through the online survey tool Net-Q. Invitations to complete the survey were posted to the JISMAIL PhD-Design Forum, a popular discussion forum for design academics, educators and practitioners and the Core77 design research forum, a popular and internationally recognised design magazine and website. Further invitations were made via direct email to design firms and consultants. Contact information for these firms was sourced from Core77's directory of design practitioners. The search terms industrial design and product

design were used to identify respondents who potentially satisfy the two sampling criteria. The survey attracted 292 respondents, of which 94 went on to complete the survey in its entirety indicating a completion rate of 32%. This rate falls within suggested acceptable rates for self-administered surveys (Alreck & Settle, 2004) and is comparable to rates experienced by other design researchers conducting survey studies (Gemser, de Bont, Hekkert, & Friedman, 2012).

The category of Industrial Design received the highest frequency of response, 26%, followed by Design Management, 12.3%, Design Research and Strategic Consulting, 7.9%, and so forth (Figure 4). These results provide evidence to indicate a majority of the sample satisfied the two sampling criteria.

A first survey question was designed to gather data related to the relative standing of design awards:

Please list the leading design awards and/or competitions in your field. Example: Good Design Award, Edison Awards, Korean Design Awards. In no particular order list as many or as few awards as you wish.

We consider that the comparative proportion of times the various design awards are cited reflects the award's relative standing. To this end the survey asked respondents to list, in no particular order, the leading design awards in their field. The study then derived awards ranking from the absolute number of times an award was mentioned by all respondents (Table 2).

A second question employed an open-ended design to gather qualitative responses related to attitudes towards design awards:

If you would like to add any comments and suggestions related to your opinion of design awards or the aims of this study, please do so below.

Qualitative responses were then analysed for emergent themes within the data in a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). This analysis was undertaken in three stages. First, the qualitative responses were divided into segments of discourse according to the grouping of words that appeared to hang together as a single idea, theme, or concept within the data. Segmentation of the response data was performed by a single coder over a period of approximately four days. This resulted in 98 segmented qualitative responses, or units of coding. A coding frame was then constructed based upon these units of coding. To do this the 98 segmented units were coded along two dimensions; those considered as evidence of positive attitudes towards design awards and those considered negative. In order to limit coder subjectivity, a portion of the segmented responses were coded along the negative and positive dimensions by a second coder. Results were then compared and discussed for consistency of coding. The two categories 'Negative Attitudes' and 'Positive Attitudes' constituted the two dimensions or main categories of the frame (Figure 5).

The units of coding within the two dimensions were then analysed to identify themes within the positive and negative dimension. Seven themes related to negative and five related to positive attitudes towards design awards were identified and employed as subcategories under each of the frame's two main dimensions (Figure 5).

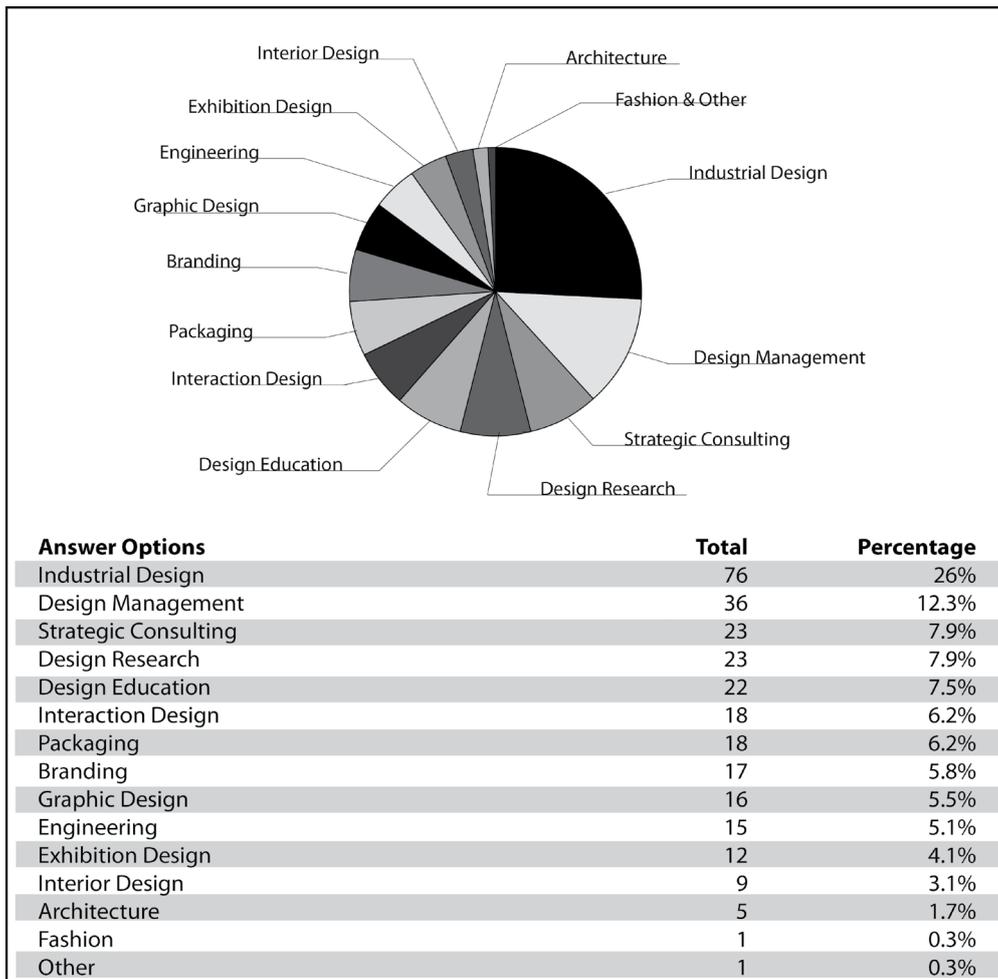


Figure 4. Respondents' field(s) of expertise.

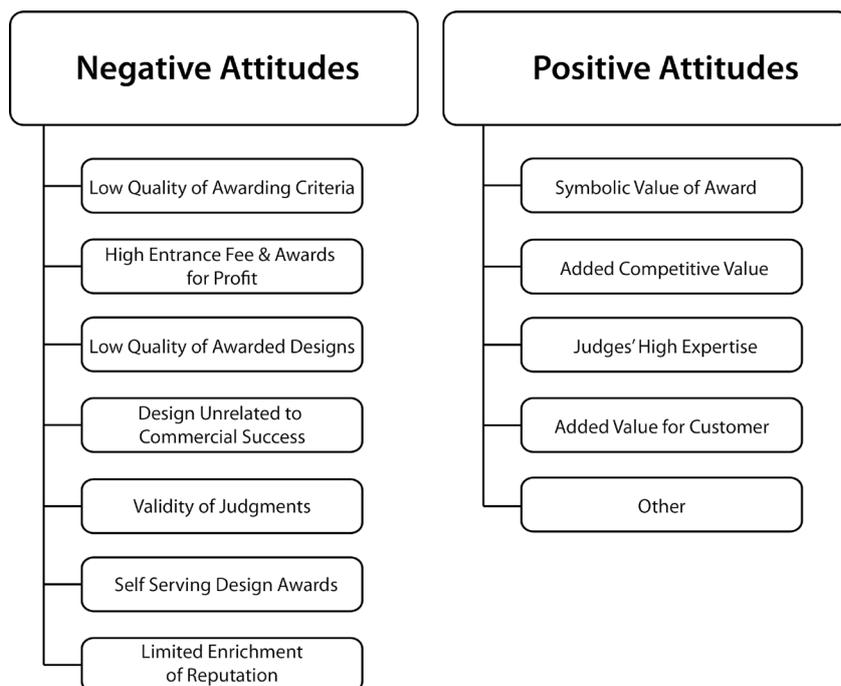


Figure 5. Coding frame for survey question 2.

Finally, the units of coding within the positive and negative dimensions of the frame were coded using the seven positive and five negative subcategories. In order to assess the validity of the identified themes (their ability to describe attitudes towards design awards) and the reliability of the coding frame (its ability to classify attitudes towards awards), units of coding were coded by two coders at different times. The coding was then discussed to assess the interpretation of the categories and the ways in which units of coding were assigned to them. In this way the subjectivity inherently involved in QCA was mitigated to provide evidence of validity and reliability. This process resulted in a body of coded data expressing evidence of respondents' attitudes toward design awards.

## Ranking of Design Awards

The ranking of design awards is based upon the absolute frequency with which the various design awards were cited by respondents as a reflection of the award's relative standing. The study derives award rankings from the absolute number of times an award was mentioned by all respondents.

A total of 92 design awards ( $n = 92$ ) were cited. This resulted in an extremely long tail and an indication of the proliferation of design awards globally. Table 2 illustrates those awards which received an absolute citation frequency of three or more.

The awards ranked from 1st to 4th place were mentioned significantly more often than any of the other competitions (Table 2). This agrees with existing studies that indicate their significance both in terms of their history and potential for value creation (Brunswicker & Seymour, 2006; Sung, 2007; Sung et al., 2009). All four of these awards competitions provide opportunities for awardees to exhibit and showcase their work through publication and exhibition. All are annual awards, and

all have comparatively longer histories and are often described as providing greater opportunities for media exposure (Sung et al., 2009). These results suggest that, despite their proliferation, the awards landscape is still dominated by the two German (Red Dot, iF), Japanese (Good Design Award), and American (IDEA) competitions. The Core77 awards were the only award scheme to approach the frequency with which the top four ranked awards were mentioned. However, given part of the sample was drawn from the Core77 directory, the implied significance of the 5th place design award may suffer from bias. These findings indicate that the visibility of design awards may depend upon their ability to perpetuate interest from industry through promotion and exposure of awardees through galas, award winning publication and exhibitions. It appears the oldest and perhaps largest design awards competitions remain foremost in the minds of the respondents.

However, frequency of citation does not provide a means of assessing the reasons for the popularity of design awards as it is not possible to understand why certain awards were cited more often than others. However, the ranking does provide evidence to indicate which design awards may be foremost in the minds of the respondents as they responded to the survey's second question. This evidence is also supported through instances of the respondents' citation of the top ranked design awards when discussing their attitudes towards them (Table 3, '*Low Quality of Awarding Criteria*'; Table 7, '*High Entrance Fees & Awards for Profit*' and '*Low Quality of Awarded Designs*').

## Perceptions of Design Awards

In this section we analyse the perceptions of survey respondents toward awards competitions. In doing this we recognise that no distinction is made between the various awards presented

**Table 2. Ranking of design awards based upon number of times mentioned by respondents.**

Rank	Competition	Organiser	Country	Frequency	(%) Frequency
1st	Red Dot	Design Zentrum	Germany	57	18%
2nd	IDEA (IDSA)	Industrial Design Society of America (IDSA)	USA	44	14%
3rd	iF Design Awards	International Forum Design	Germany	38	12%
4th	Good Design Award (G-Mark)	Japan Institute of Design Promotion (JDP)	Japan	35	11%
5th	Core77	Core77	USA	14	4%
6th	BraunPrize	Braun Design	Germany	6	2%
7th	D&AD	D&AD	UK	4	1%
8th	Good Design Australian	Good Design Australia	Australia	4	1%
9th	International Design Awards (IDA)	International Design Awards	USA	4	1%
10th	Athenaeum's Good Design Awards	Chicago Athenaeum & European Centre	USA	4	1%
11th	NeoCon	Merchandise Mart Properties, Inc.	USA	3	1%
12th	Observateur du Design	Agency for promotion of industrial design	France	3	1%
13th	INDEX	Confederation of Danish Industry, various government institutions	Denmark	3	1%
14th	Compasso D'oro	ADI Foundation for Italian Design	Italy	3	1%
15th	Plus X	Media Society Networks	Germany	3	1%

in Table 2 above. Instead we aim to gather data as evidence for attitudes towards the concept or notion of a design award at a more general or abstract level. As such the study does not provide data related to any individual design award. Instead, the findings provide a starting point to explore and consider perceptions of design awards systems more generally. Figure 6 illustrates the absolute frequency of coding across the coding frame’s negative and positive dimensions.

## Negative Attitudes

Seven subcategories were identified from an analysis of units of coding assigned to the negative dimension (Figure 7).

Of these seven subcategories, ‘Low Quality of Awarding Criteria (22)’, ‘High Entrance Fees (19)’, and ‘Low Quality of Awarded Design (16)’ received the highest frequency of coding. Table 3 illustrates example units of coding assigned to these three subcategories.

‘Low Quality of Awarding Criteria’ related to responses associated with perceptions of the criteria by which designs are judged and awarded. For example, respondent comments indicated perceptions of the growing ubiquity of design awards, the many categories and classifications in each and the possible implications for attitudes towards awarding criteria. The following example

indicates the respondent’s views towards an inflationary effect of awards, driven by their ubiquity. The response appears to suggest the implications this has for the respondent’s perceptions of the value and exclusivity of awards: Some awards lack in rigour as too many products get awarded, making the award seem less valuable.

The following response indicates a misalignment between the respondent’s own criteria for the assessment of good design and that expressed through design awards.

It seems that much of the criteria for awards have to do with fashionable solutions. While the selected designs are generally good ones I wonder about great designs that aren’t even submitted or those that were rejected.

In this instance, the response indicates negative attitudes appear to relate to the concept of “fashionable” awards, resulting in a concern that the respondent’s own criteria for assessment remain unrecognised. In this instance perceptions of what constitutes “great design” is not well aligned with the kinds of designs benefitting from design awards, which instead is equated with the notion of a “fashionable solution”.

Responses which related to expensive or unjustified entry costs were coded within the subcategory ‘High Entrance Fees’. An example is provided below.

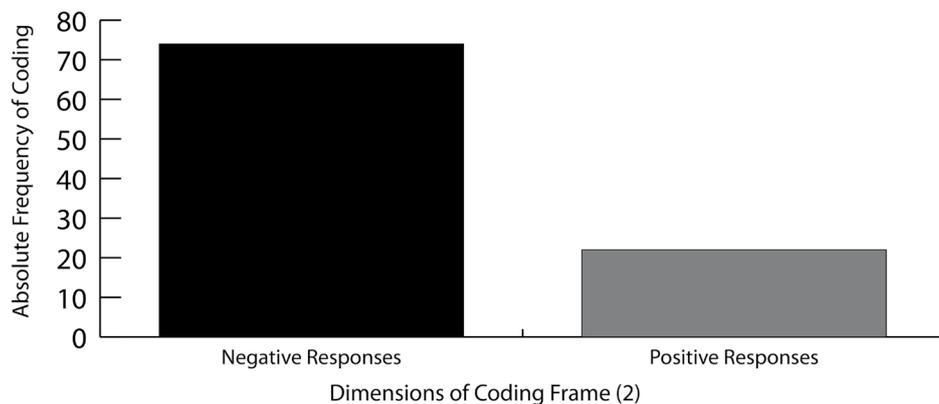


Figure 6. Absolute frequency of coding across negative and positive dimensions of the coding frame.

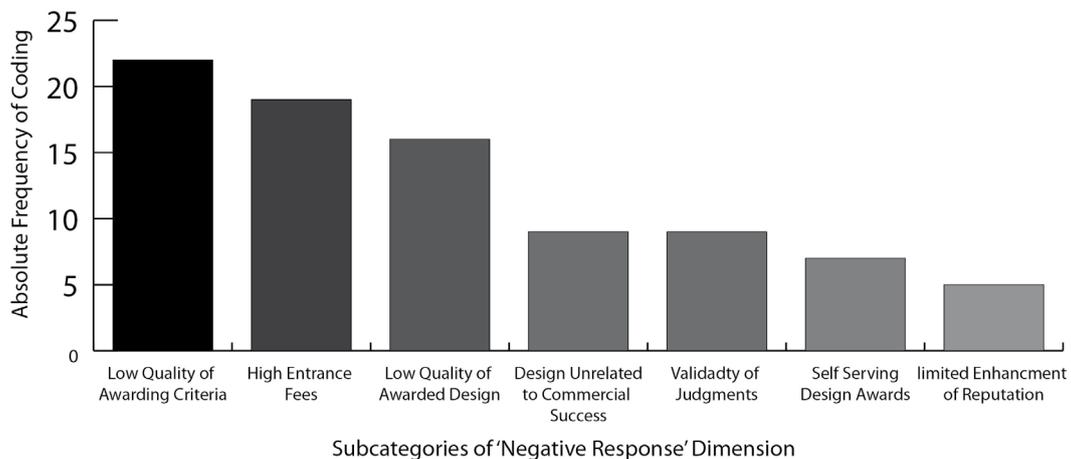


Figure 7. Seven subcategories of negative dimension and their absolute frequencies of coding.

**Table 3. Survey Comments assigned to the three subcategories with the highest frequency of coding.**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>Example Comments</b>	<b>Explanation of Response</b>
Low Quality of Awarding Criteria	<i>"Big question marks about validity and quality."</i>	Indicative of concern for awarding criteria
Low Quality of Awarding Criteria	<i>"We're highly skeptical of the actual value of design awards, mostly because - of the amount of awards that are awarded (e.g., almost 1000 at iF per year) - the reasons for awarding."</i>	Citing of proliferation of awards as negative influence upon their reputation
Low Quality of Awarding Criteria	<i>"Most of the design awards have too many categories. They are no longer a statement for good design."</i>	Indicates misalignment between desired scope of awards and that expressed by competitions
Low Quality of Awarding Criteria	<i>"A lot of design awards have very poor evaluation objectives."</i>	Concern for evaluation criteria expressed by awards
Low Quality of Awarding Criteria	<i>"With some of these design awards, competitors do not seem to be as strongly reviewed as in others. Even with this, they all seem to be respected the same."</i>	Issue of concern related to identification and prominence of some awards over others
Low Quality of Awarding Criteria	<i>"Red Dot is not really a design award. It's a strange business model."</i>	Infers misalignment between respondent and values expressed by award
High Entrance Fees	<i>"I wonder about the relationship between money and awards. If registration fees are high can we say that the awards are a real reflection of merit?... I am uncomfortable about this"</i>	Indicates misalignment between motivations expressed for staging awards and respondents own views
High Entrance Fees	<i>"Most design awards these days require a hefty entrance fee. Many are thinly disguised funding methods for the organizations that present them."</i>	Suggests poor fit related to the respondents perceptions of motivations for staging awards and own beliefs.
High Entrance Fees	<i>"Therefore, even though we participate in and win many no/low cost, heavily competitive, industry sponsored awards, we dismiss the others which require large entrance fees as obvious 'awards for hire' type competitions."</i>	Indicative of misalignment between respondent principles for motivations behind design awards and motivations expressed by awards themselves.
High Entrance Fees	<i>"I am inclined to say that we have almost millions of design awards all over the world. Most of them are just useless and pointless in any possible way, especially since they keep arising in an inflationary way."</i>	Indicates perceptions towards proliferation of awards and motivations for staging awards as misaligned with own principles.
High Entrance Fees	<i>"Australian Design Awards are the most respected in Australia. There is a perception that Red Dot Award are purchased, rather than won."</i>	Expresses concern over ability to win award as related to costs. Indicative of misalignment.
Low Quality of Awarded Design	<i>"I feel design awards that are awarded solely by designers fail in that they do not address the business or user needs."</i>	Indicates misalignment between respondents' own values related to good design qualities and those expressed by awards.
Low Quality of Awarded Design	<i>"I have witness many honours given to what seems like good designs but in the reality are not a good products and don't have what it takes to become a commercial success."</i>	As above
Low Quality of Awarded Design	<i>"I don't remember many because I don't particularly pay attention. I do not take them seriously and sometimes see the results as doing a disservice to designers, giving them false measures of what they should strive for."</i>	Suggests an issue between the respondents own opinion of what constitutes good design and that expressed by awards.
Low Quality of Awarded Design	<i>"They are like so many of the design blogs that are common today - concerned with novelty and cleverness over the principles that inform and drive designers on a day to day basis."</i>	As above
Low Quality of Awarded Design	<i>"In some, not all cases, prizes are awarded to products that are flashy concepts, that experience has many times proven not effective functionally in the past. A triumph of form, or symbolic manipulation, or a kind of naive functional hope, over solid engineering."</i>	As above

In general, in the design world, awards are rarely free. To compete you have to pay. To claim a prize you have to pay, and to get the right to communicate on the fact that you have won something - or to get the trophy - you have to pay again.

Here the response suggests perceptions of costs as an influence upon the respondent's attitude towards design awards. The response appears to indicate a perception of compounded costs and fees at various stages of a competition. Other responses indicated attitudes towards a perceived relationship between costs and the recognition of good design: Design awards today seem to be "pay-to-win exercises." The respondent goes on, "if

registration fees are high can we say that the awards are a real reflection of merit?" Here the response suggests a relationship between perceptions of costs and recognition through design awards, with high registration fees limiting competitiveness..

Finally, the subcategory 'Low Quality of Awarded Designs' was used to code responses associated with the quality of those designs judged to be good by design competitions.

In some, not all cases, prizes are awarded to products that are flashy concepts, that experience has many times proven not effective functionally in the past. A triumph of form, or symbolic manipulation, or a kind of naïve functional hope, over solid engineering.

The response uses the notion of, “flashy concepts” which is then equated with, “symbolic manipulation” and “naïve functional hope.” This may be evidence to indicate the respondent perceives a difference between the qualities expressed by awarded designs and a personal notion of design quality associated with what is termed “solid engineering”. It is not possible to assess the extent to which these attitudes are held or even the validity of often subjective opinions. However, these findings provide evidence to suggest a misalignment between the respondent’s opinion of the principles of good design, and those expressed by award winning designs. The nature of any misalignment as well as its possible extent, are still unclear. However, if misalignment does exist to influence the reputation of awards, as this study has begun to indicate, further identification and exploration of these principles as drivers for attitudes towards and perceptions of design awards is required.

In the following response a specific design award (ranked 2nd, Table 2) was mentioned and coded as related to Low Quality of Awarding Criteria.

We’re highly skeptical of the actual value of design awards, mostly because of the amount of awards that are awarded (e.g. almost 1000 at iF per Year) - the reasons for awarding.

Here the respondent cites a particular design award as an example of what appears to be a concern over the quality of awarding criteria. This response may indicate the respondent associates a notion of ubiquity in the awarding of design awards

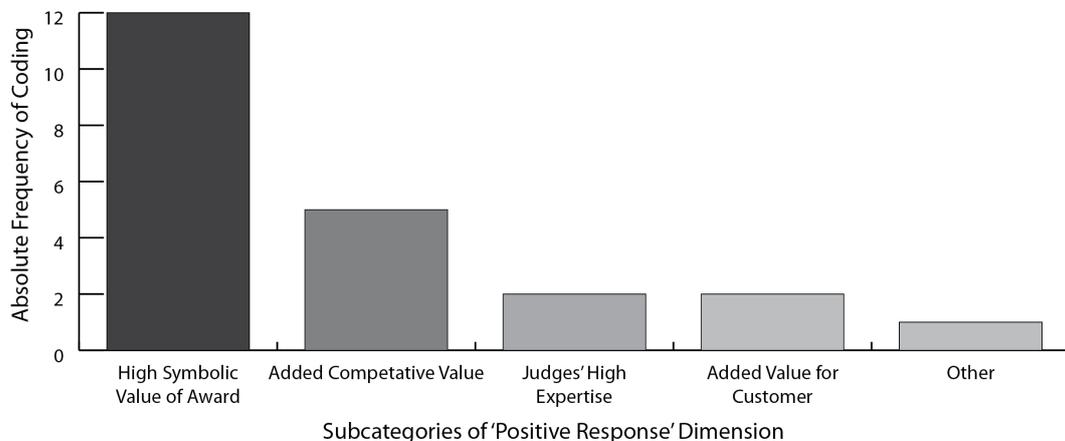


Figure 8. Five subcategories along the positive dimension and their absolute frequencies of coding.

Table 4. Survey Comments assigned to the subcategory symbolic value.

Sub-Category	Example Responses	Explanation of Response
Symbolic Value	<i>"Gives the consumer another vital piece of information at their disposal when choosing a design firm."</i>	The respondent cites the symbolic value of awards as contributing to a desirable reputation for good design.
Symbolic Value	<i>"Design awards give the industry and companies in it, some much needed media exposure."</i>	Media exposure is cited as providing added symbolic value and cited as a benefit of winning design awards.
Symbolic Value	<i>"I feel prestigious awards are a good way to tell clients that your work is calibrated and appreciated by judges."</i>	The importance of reputation is expressed by the respondent and related to the ability of awards to improve it. Indicates alignment between desires of respondent and values expressed by awards.
Symbolic Value	<i>"The awards may be most useful as a marketing device for client manufacturers."</i>	The commercial and marketing potential of design awards is cited.
Symbolic Value	<i>"I'm in marketing and believe design awards have great value to prospective clients seeking validation of the quality of a firm's design work."</i>	As above

and their ability to express value. It may be that the respondent associates issues or concerns for awards with those competitions most conspicuous within the awards landscape. If this is the case, questions are thus raised on the implications of negative attitudes towards the notion of a design award for those schemes that are most successful as benchmark awards competitions. It may be that negative attitudes towards the notion of a design award are projected upon those awards most close at hand; or uppermost in the minds of the respondents.

## Positive Attitudes

Figure 8 illustrates the distribution of 22 units of coding along the frame’s five positive subcategories.

In agreement with existing research on design awards (Gemser & Wijnberg, 2002; Zec, 2007), themes within the frame’s positive dimension appear to relate to an awards’ perceived, ‘High Symbolic Value’, which received a coding frequency of 12. This is a reflection of fewer units of coding assigned to the frame’s positive dimension (Figure 6). Due to the limited assignment of coding to the remaining four subcategories, we restrict the presentation of results to the subcategory ‘High Symbolic Value’ (Table 4).

The findings support previous studies which indicate the symbolic value of awards as markers of excellence (Brunswick & Seymour, 2006; Sung, 2007; Zec, 2007). Here we use the term symbolic value to denote how an award may add value as a

referent for outstanding design success for those who may enter and win awards competitions and for the competitions themselves. Results suggest positive attitudes towards design awards may relate to perceptions of the symbolic benefits of receiving them. The following response provides an example of this, “gives the consumer another vital piece of information at their disposal when choosing a design firm.” The respondent appears to equate the value of awards with a perception of awards as symbols of quality, “vital piece of information.” The response may suggest a perceived ability of symbolic value to positively influence the decisions of potential clients with the prospect of increasing the firm’s competitiveness, “when choosing a design firm.” Further evidence of this association is found in the following response:

Our take on design awards is that they’re really important for two main reasons: (1) It gives a key competitive advantage. (2) They also provide important PR opportunities to keep a firm top of mind.

Here the respondent equates the symbolic significance of winning awards with the perceived benefit in terms of competitive edge, “key competitive advantage” as well as opportunities to disseminate and promote the quality of design work to those that may wish to invest in it, “keep firm top of mind.” These examples provide evidence to indicate how the symbolic value of awards are perceived to provide opportunities for increased competitiveness.

The analysis also suggested that awards may be seen as providing recognition from peers, “I know awards are often viewed (by peers and/or in general) as a gauge of success.” The response indicates how attitudes towards the value of design awards may relate to a perception of awards as symbols of success within a community, “often viewed by peers.” Further evidence of this was identified from units of coding assigned to the ‘Symbolic Value’ subcategory, “the awards serve to acknowledge design excellence and the designers and firms receiving them.” Here the response indicates a perception of design awards as a more enduring symbol to identify and reward good design, “serve to acknowledge design excellence.” Although we cannot say with any certainty that these responses are a true reflection of the opinions the respondents hold, they are both supported by and

provide further evidence to support existing work related to positive attitudes toward the symbolic benefits design awards may bring (Gemser & Wijnberg, 2002; Park et al., 2010; Sung, 2007; Zec, 2007).

## Associations Analysis

Due to the limited use of the coding frame’s positive dimension in the assignment of coded responses it was not analysed to identify associations between subcategories. However, as a result of units of coding assigned to more than one subcategory of the frame’s negative dimension, associations between subcategories were identified. During the QCA, if a unit of coding was judged to relate to the subcategories ‘Validity of Judgments’ and ‘Low Quality of Awarding Criteria’ for example, the unit was assigned to both. The associations identified along the negative dimension are presented in Figure 9. As the figure illustrates the subcategory ‘Low Quality of Awarded Designs’ was used in the assignment of units of coding across three of the four associations.

Representative units of coding assigned as both subcategories ‘Validity of Judgments’ and ‘Low Quality of Awarding Criteria’ are shown in Table 5.

The findings suggest an association between attitudes towards the ‘Low Quality of Awarding Criteria’ and the ‘Validity of Judgments.’ Negative perceptions of the criteria by which awardees are judged may relate to negative attitudes toward the ability of judges to make valid judgments based upon evaluation criteria seen as insufficient or ineffective, “generally, I think awards are highly subjective and inconsistent, other than a tendency to give awards to past award winners.” Although these comments are highly subjective in themselves, the response may indicate a dissatisfaction with the ways in which awards are judged, “are highly subjective and inconsistent.” It could be that the respondent holds a perception of inconsistency in the awarding of good design, influenced by a view that past award winners are in some way favoured, “a tendency to give awards to past award winners.” We cannot say with any certainty to what extent these comments are a true reflection of the respondent’s

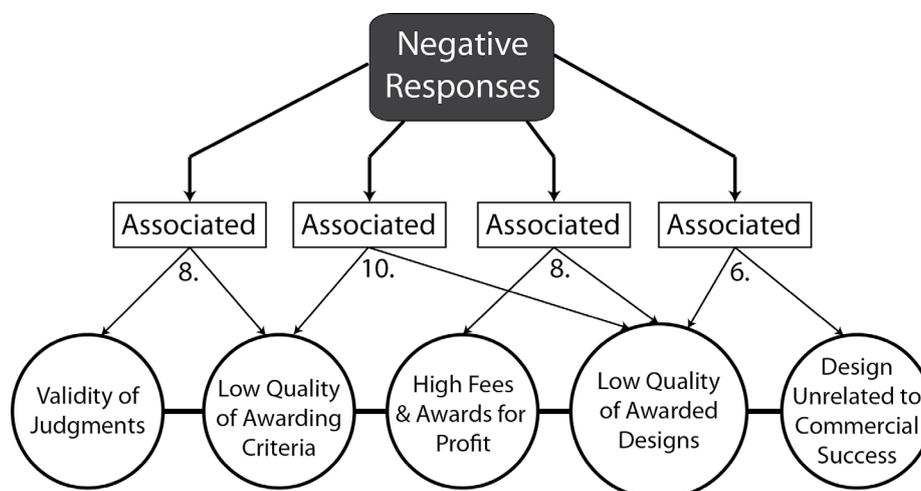


Figure 9. Associations between subcategories of the negative dimension.

**Table 5. Survey Comments assigned to both ‘Validity of Judgments’ and ‘Low Quality of Awarding Criteria.’**

Example units of coding assigned to Validity of Judgments & Judges and Low Quality of Awarding Criteria	Explanation of Response
“Generally, I think awards are highly subjective and inconsistent, other than a tendency to give awards to past award winners.”	Indicates discontent with criteria and consistency of awards. Questions motivations of judgments
“We’re highly skeptical of the actual value of design awards, mostly because - of the amount of awards that are awarded (e.g., almost 1000 at iF per year) - the reasons for awarding.”	Appears to question the ubiquity of awards and consequences for their validity. Also questions awarding criteria.
“One thousand designs are ultimately quite personal, subjective and extremely hard to understand. We’re suspecting a high rate of awards.”	Questions judgment of awards in terms of subjectivity and appears to criticism number of awards as negative influence.
“They are subjective - great design is often overlooked and not awarded, and mediocre design often wins.”	Perceptions of subjectivity as influence upon criteria and resulting awards

opinion. However, the responses pose important questions related to why the respondent feels inclined to make them and what might be done by those responsible for maintaining design awards to mitigate them.

The following response indicates a perceived inability of awarding criteria and judgments to identify exemplary design: “great design is often overlooked and not awarded, and mediocre design often wins.” It appears the respondent may see this inability as compounding a tendency to recognise less deserving design, “mediocre design often wins.”

It may be that these responses provide evidence to indicate a relationship between attitudes toward the ways in which awardees are judged and the criteria upon which such judgments are made. Attitudes toward criteria may be associated with perceptions of subjectivity in what the respondent may see as invalid or incorrect judgments. These findings appear to suggest perceptions of validity in both the judgments made in evaluating award winners and of awarding criteria as dependent upon and influenced by one another. If this is the case, further studies are required to examine attitudes towards awarding criteria and how these may be associated with perceptions of validity in the judging of awards. This may then reveal opportunities to identify a best approach to the design of criteria and judging frameworks as a means of mitigating negative attitudes.

A second association indicated in the coded survey responses was identified between the categories, ‘Low Quality of Awarding Criteria’ and ‘Low Quality of Awarded Design.’ Table 6 provides an indicative sample of coded responses assigned to both subcategories.

Responses suggest an association between the ability to reward good design and the structure and application of evaluation criteria deployed in its assessment. An example is seen in the following statement, “I feel design awards that are awarded solely by designers fail in that they do not address the business or user needs.” The response appears to indicate an association between a perceived deficiency in criteria with an inability to account for commercial aspects of design, “the business” and the satisfaction of the needs of the potential user, “user needs.” Further evidence of a relationship between attitudes towards awarding criteria and the respondent’s perception of what may constitute design quality is seen in the following response:

It seems that much of the criteria for awards have to do with fashionable solutions. While the selected designs are generally good ones, I wonder about great designs that aren’t even submitted or those that were rejected.

The response appears to relate a perceived concern for the selection and evaluation of good design with the criteria used, and its inability to reward what the respondent sees as good design. As above (*Validity of Judgments* and *Low Quality of Awarding Criteria*), the findings indicate the importance of a clear communication of awarding criteria. If these responses are indicative of the attitudes of the sample population, it appears negative perceptions of awarded designs can be extended and/or compounded by understanding of and thus attitudes towards the awarding criteria employed in the evaluation of design. If this is indeed the case, a greater understanding of the ways in which perceptions of awarding criteria influence attitudes

**Table 6. Survey Comments assigned to both ‘Low Quality of Awarding Criteria’ and ‘Low Quality of Awarded Design.’**

Example Units of Coding Assigned to Low Quality of Awarding Criteria and Low Quality of Awarded Design	Explanation of Response
“I feel design awards that are awarded solely by designers fail in that they do not address the business or user needs.”	Concern over awarding criteria’s ability to address needs and effect upon perceptions of awarded designs.
“What’s needed and barely ever found are design management awards, recognising the design processes and business structures inevitably leading to good design.”	Concern for the kinds of awarding criteria and its ability to recognise what the respondent values as good design.
“It seems that much of the criteria for awards have to do with fashionable solutions. While the selected designs are generally good ones, I wonder about great designs that aren’t even submitted or those that were rejected.”	Indicates concern over the criteria by which designs are awarded and the ability to identify with a personal perception of good design.
“Most of the design awards have too many categories. They are no longer a statement for good design.”	Indicates concern for relationship between awards structure and ability to reward good design.

towards awarded designs is required. This may come from further exploration of the extent of the association and its possible implications for the reputation of design awards. This knowledge may then be used to develop strategies for the development of awarding criteria and, importantly, to communicate the criteria to those that may enter design awards, with the potential to influence attitudes towards the awarded designs themselves.

A third association was identified within coded responses assigned to the sub-categories ‘High Entrance Fees & Awards for Profit’ and ‘Low Quality of Awarded Designs’ (Table 7).

The responses suggest awards may be perceived as motivated by a desire to benefit financially from the staging of awards competitions. An example of this is indicated in the following response, “Design awards used to promote dreams and heroes. Now they collect dollars and spoil our industry.” Here the response provides evidence to suggest some respondents may associate negative attitudes towards the perceived benefit of design awards, “spoil our industry” with a perception of awards for profit, “collect dollars”. Instances were also identified where evidence of negative attitudes towards awarded designs appeared to relate to perceptions of prohibitive costs of entry.

I wonder about the relationship between money and awards. If registration fees are high can we say that the awards are a real reflexion of merit?

Here the response provides evidence to suggest an association between negative attitudes towards costs and fees, “fees are high” and the quality of awarded designs, “reflection of merit.” The respondent’s attitudes towards the merit of awarded

designs may depend upon and be influenced by a perception of the financing of competitions. From this study alone it is unclear of the scale or scope of this possible association. However, the findings are indicative of a relationship between negative perceptions associated with the respondent’s understanding of the financial motivations for staging an awards competition, and how these then have implications for attitudes towards the awarded designs themselves.

Taken together the responses provide evidence to suggest how perceptions of a financial dimension to the staging of competitions appear to have implications for how the quality of awarded design is perceived. If this association does exist to any great degree, a deeper understanding of how attitudes towards quality are associated with perceptions of the ways in which competitions are financed could provide insights into how attitudes towards awarded designs are formed. This knowledge could then offer opportunities to develop strategies to allay possible concerns over financing with the potential to improve perceptions of the quality of awarded designs. If well communicated to participants, this has the potential to provide opportunities to improve the reputation of design awards for the benefit of both awardees and those who stage design awards.

A fourth association was identified in coded responses assigned to the subcategories, ‘Low Quality of Awarded Designs’ and ‘Design Unrelated to Commercial Success’ (Table 8):

Responses within this association indicate negative perceptions of awarded designs may relate to attitudes toward their commercial viability, “in reality are not good products and don’t have what it takes to become a commercial success.” As

**Table 7. Survey Comments assigned to ‘High Entrance Fees & Awards for Profit’ and ‘Low Quality of Awarded Designs.’**

<b>Example Units of Coding Assigned to High Entrance Fees &amp; Awards for Profit and Low Quality of Awarded Designs</b>	<b>Explanation of Response</b>
<i>“I wonder about the relationship between money and awards. If registration fees are high can we say that the awards are a real reflection of merit?”</i>	Response indicates relationship between financial gain and a negative influence upon the quality of awarded designs.
<i>“I am inclined to say that we have almost millions of design awards all over the world. Most of them are just useless and pointless in any possible way, especially since they keep rising in an inflationary way.”</i>	Indicative of relationship between costs of entry and quality of awards received.
<i>“Australian design awards are the most respected in Australia. There is a perception that Red Dot Awards are purchased, rather than won.”</i>	Evidence of perception of cost as influence upon ability to win awards.
<i>“Design awards used to promote dreams and heroes. Now they collect dollars and spoil our industry...”</i>	Indicative of perception of staging of awards competitions for profit, implications for quality of awardees.

**Table 8. Survey Comments assigned to both ‘Low Quality of Awarded Designs’ and ‘Unrelated to Commercial Success.’**

<b>Example Units of Coding Assigned to Quality of Awarded Designs and Unrelated to Commercial Success</b>	<b>Explanation of Response</b>
<i>“I have witness many honours given to what seems like good designs but in the reality are not a good products and don't have what it takes to become a commercial success.”</i>	Relationship between the kinds of designs awarded and the ability of the typology of design to be successful commercially.
<i>“The REAL award is watching the product you've designed succeed in the market...numerous products who win awards do not.”</i>	Association between the kinds of designs awarded and their inability to achieve commercial success
<i>“They do not however forecast a product design's likely success, nor are awards to be used as overall excellence metric.”</i>	Suggestive of perception of design awards as less influential as a barometer of commercial success.
<i>“In some, not all cases, prizes are awarded to products that are flashy concepts, that experience has many times proven not effective functionally in the past. A triumph of form, or symbolic manipulation, or a kind of naive functional hope, over solid engineering.”</i>	Indicative of a view of design awards as unrelated to personal attitudes towards the concept of good design.

this response indicates, it may be that perceptions of awarded designs are equated with attitudes toward their feasibility in terms of a potential for commercial success. Other responses provide evidence to indicate negative perceptions are related to a belief that design awards do not well account for the possible and/or potential success of a product in the market, “not however forecast a product design’s likely success.”

Perceptions of the quality of awarded designs may be influenced by pragmatic attitudes towards any potential for commercial viability. The strength and scope of this relationship is still unclear. However, if these responses are indicative of an association, it is important to develop a clearer understanding of how potential for commercial success is assessed within awarded designs by those who would enter design awards, and to then explore any relationship between the assessment of awarded designs and perceptions of their ability for commercial success. This may provide greater opportunities for those that stage awards competitions to consider how perceptions of commercial success may influence attitudes towards the quality of awarded designs. As a result, strategies may be developed that both provide opportunities to evaluate potential commercial success and better communicate evidence of the commercial viability of awarded designs to those that would enter design competitions.

## Conclusions

The study employed a qualitative approach to analyse attitudes toward the reputation of design awards. Taking this approach we aimed to draw out some of the underlying issues that serve to inform attitudes towards awards competitions. Although positive attitudes towards award competitions were evident in the survey sample, qualitative responses encoded along our coding frame’s negative dimension outnumbered positive responses by a frequency of more than three to one (negative responses  $f = 74$ , positive responses  $f = 22$ ).

In agreement with existing literature (Gemser & Wijnberg, 2002; Park et al., 2010; Sung, 2007; Zec, 2007), positive responses were most frequently encoded as indicative of a belief in the symbolic value of winning design awards. As suggested by Zec (2007), symbolic value relates to the perceived recognition awards can bring, both to potential clients and as a sign of excellence among peers. In the encoding of positive responses, the coding category ‘Symbolic Value’ was the most frequently used category along the coding frame’s positive dimension. What drives the recognition of design awards as indicators of design quality among peer and how can recognition be best maintained? Although the current study was unable to indicate the specific drivers behind the recognition of value in design awards competitions, negative responses provided evidence to show how attitudes towards distinct components of an award system may undermine their reputation.

Among negative responses, respondents most frequently cited a concern for the quality of awarding criteria, encoded as ‘Low Quality of Awarding Criteria’ ( $f = 22$ ). Further analysis of responses within this category indicated concerns for the

relevance or adequacy of criteria for assessing exemplary design, with respondent attitudes towards assessment criteria instead influenced by their own beliefs of what constitutes outstanding design. For the respondents, if criteria appeared unrelated to their own criteria for evaluating outstanding design, this also resulted in uncertainty over the quality of the criteria upon which judgments are made and the quality of the awarded designs themselves. A further associations analysis of encoded responses assigned to the frame’s negative dimension indicated how the respondents’ core concern for assessment criteria served to also influence both attitudes towards the awarded designs themselves and the validity of the judgments upon which design awards are awarded. If this is representative of more widely held beliefs among those who may enter awards competitions, a key requirement for the maintenance and development of the reputation of design awards appears to be a competition’s ability to justify the criteria used, how it is applied and how awarded designs reflect the criteria upon which they are assessed.

The encoding category ‘High Entrance Fees’ was also used comparatively often in the encoding of negative responses. The associations analysis again indicated a relationship between attitudes towards entrance fees and the encoding category, ‘Low Quality of Awarded Designs’, with responses indicating the influence concern over affordability had for attitudes towards the quality of the awarded designs themselves. If this is indicative of a relationship between the affordability of entrance and attitudes towards design quality, perceptions of affordability have wider implications for the reputation of design awards. For competitions to build their reputation as benchmarks for design quality among peers, design awards may wish to clearly justify entrance fees, emphasising the value and benefit of participation. This may then help to dispel negative attitudes towards affordability as well as the wider implications unaffordability may have for attitudes towards the quality of the awarded designs themselves.

Within survey comments encoded along the coding frame’s negative dimension, a further association was identified between responses encoded as ‘Low Quality of Awarded Designs’ and ‘Design Unrelated to Commercial Success.’ This association indicated that, for some respondents, negative attitudes towards the quality of awarded designs was influenced by the level of commercial success awardees are able to achieve. If this is indicative of beliefs more widely held by those who take part in design awards, competitions that highlight how awarded designs achieve market success and profitability will enhance the reputation of award winners. This then has the potential to increase the significance of winning awards for the benefit of the competitions themselves and for those who may enter them.

This study has explored attitudes towards and perceptions of design award competitions. Within this analysis specific components of design awards systems were identified as influencing respondent’s attitudes, with implications for the reputation of awards competitions. Specifically, attitudes towards the quality of awarding criteria cost of entry and quality of awarded designs emerged as influential to the attitudes of our respondents. These also appeared to relate to informing the reputation of the awards systems.

This study contributes to an understanding of how design awards are perceived by achieving an initial mapping of the components of design awards system that appear most influential in informing respondent attitudes. We have presented and discussed the components of awards system that appear most important in effecting more holistic attitudes to awards competitions. To continue the development and maintenance of their reputations, competitions may wish to further explore how for example, their own articulation of criteria for assessment may have implications for the reputation of awards. Our findings may also be of value to design researchers in studies aimed at further exploring how attitudes towards individual components of a system of design awards may relate to influence their reputation. As reputation is critical to the continued success of design awards competitions (Zec, 2007), further studies to explore how reputation is perceived by those who may enter awards competitions will provide opportunities to maintain and develop reputation for the benefit of both competition organisers and awardees.

Design awards are of growing importance to the landscape of contemporary design. They provide a valuable opportunity to promote design within the industry and to a greater public. However, in order that design awards continue to develop and maintain their reputation for the recognition of outstanding design achievement, competitions may consider how the distinct components of their awards systems work together to inform more holistic attitudes towards the significance of the awards themselves.

There has yet been little empirical work to examine the reputation of design awards among peers, namely those who may take part in awards competitions. Our findings are positioned to both stimulate debate and provide a point of departure for further investigation of attitudes towards and perceptions of awards competitions. Further studies might, for example, explore the drivers behind the building and maintenance of reputation among successful competitions and how these are communicated to potential entrants. This research, and other studies like it, may then have further pragmatic application in the development and staging of successful and desirable design awards.

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