Norges Handelshøyskole, Spring 2012

How to Build and Measure Brand Equity in a B2B Context

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Master Thesis in Brand Management and Marketing

Summary

Little research has been conducted on Business to business (B2B) marketing compared to the significant amount of research conducted on Business to consumer (B2C) marketing. This master's thesis is intended to aid B2B companies build and measure their level of brand equity. Consequently, we have created a theoretical framework, seeking to fulfill this purpose.

The main model we present is mainly based on Keller's (2008) The Customer Based Brand Equity Model, adjusting and developing it to fit the needs of a B2B company. The modifications and further work we have made throughout this process are also based on other theoretical articles, books, newspapers and lectures. Thus, some of the alterations are made on our interpretation of translatability.

In addition to a modified version of Keller's CBBE model, our framework consists of a methodological tool schema, based on the drivers of our adjusted model. The methodological tool schema's intention is to help reveal the differences between the desired and actual perception of a company, and identify measures that can be taken into action in order to minimize the deviation. We suggest that this should be done by interviewing both internal and external resources on matters concerning the drivers identified in our modified model. The schema also gives an overview of the respondents' answers, and helps systemizing it. To assist the interviewers using the schema, we have created an interview guide, containing all information and questions that should be presented and asked to the interviewees.

We have partly used Vimond, a startup company providing the technology for internet streaming services, as an illustration for a company in the introduction phase to demonstrate how the model is intended to work. Still, the framework should help any B2B company build brand equity in a purposeful way.

Foreword

Business to consumer (B2C) branding has long been an interesting field of study for researchers, and extensive studies have been performed in this area. There have been conducted far fewer studies on business to business (B2B) branding, which is just as important in a practical sense as B2C branding. As we wanted to focus our studies on a research field where we could contribute, B2B was a natural choice. Building brand equity in a developing market is something we have found engaging during our studies, so when we were offered the opportunity to write the thesis for startup internet streaming provider, Vimond, this was ideal.

We started working on the thesis in August of 2011, and it has been a lengthy and educational process which has been prolonged through long term sickness and work obligations. Even though we have written several extensive papers throughout or master studies, the opportunity to really explore a subject to this extent has been especially rewarding. We have learned to connect, modify, improve and create theory based on a specific case which has developed our core understanding of brand management. Our way of thinking, as well as the ability to pose critical questions, analyze and weigh arguments has been improved through working on this thesis. In addition, working as a writing team has improved our abilities to cooperate.

We want to specially offer our gratitude to Herbjørn Nysveen. His guidance and advice has been an invaluable asset for us and has given us an avenue to delve even further into the subject. Additionally, we want to thank our professors at the Strategy and Management department for their input. Finally, we want to express our appreciation to all family members and friends that have taken an interest and given us advice on our thesis.

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 – Background for Thesis

In today’s rapidly evolving, crowded and globalized marketplace, standing out from competitors is becoming increasingly important for companies. One way to stand out is by differentiating oneself from the competitors in terms of branding and positioning, and thus building brand equity. This has for a long time been regarded as the right strategy for businesses selling goods to consumers, and extensive research has been done on the subject (Keller, 2008). However, the majority of all transactions are being done between companies (Sandhusen, 2008). This is referred to as business-to-business, or in short B2B. The amount of research done in this field is small in comparison to the field of traditional business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing (Bennett et al., 2005).

Prominent researchers in marketing such as Keller, Kotler and Aaker all mention B2B in their writing, but it appears that the research is not anywhere close to being exhausted. As not all research conducted on B2C branding is necessarily transferable to the B2B context (Keller, 2008), we intend to create a framework, based on an existing B2C brand building model, on how to build brand equity for companies that are involved with B2B. We are not the first to see the need for more research in this area, i.e. Jensen and Klaustrup (2008) have made an improved version of Martensen and Grønholdt’s (2004) general customer-based brand equity model. We, however, wish to take a different approach and use other variables, mostly based on Keller’s work.

In addition to the B2B brand equity building framework, we intend to create a methodological tool which companies can use to test if they are successful in building brand equity. A tool like this can be important in the long term strategy planning for a company.

Furthermore, we will tailor this theoretical and methodological framework to a B2B setting. Internet streaming is making video content available online. The internet streaming service market is a relatively new and complex market which is evolving at a rapid pace. We therefore believe such a framework and methodological tool to be useful for a startup company looking to both establish and differentiate themselves in this market. We will also seek some input from Vimond, on what elements are especially important for them. They will use our framework in their strategy, and we plan to tailor the framework to give it maximum effect.

1.2 – Research Questions

As we have indicated in the introduction, we intend to create a framework for how to build brand equity in a B2B context. As most companies have to do business with other companies to obtain raw materials or seek consulting help before they can do B2C business, we find it surprising that more research has not been conducted in this field. This being said, most of the principles for B2C branding also apply to B2B branding (Schultz and Schultz, 2000). Thus existing B2C brand equity building is a basis for our research, and Keller (2008) on how to build brand equity was a natural starting point for our framework. Our research question is the following:

How can brand equity be built in a B2B context?

Additionally, we want to create a tool for companies using the framework to measure how effective they are in building brand equity. To include this tool in our research, we will add a second research question:

How can brand equity in a B2B context be measured?

As this project is focused on a specific company, we consider it essential to create a framework that is not just theoretical, but also applicable in an actual business setting.

1.3 – Contribution

This thesis aims to have both theoretical and methodological contributions to B2B research.

1.3.1 – Theoretical Contribution

As we have mentioned previously, extensive research has not been performed on the B2B marketing field. Our model is meant to combine research from different academic areas and researchers into a framework which gives a complete overview on how to most purposefully build brand equity. In addition, the thesis intends to prove certain links between B2C and B2B marketing.

1.3.2 – Methodological and Practical Contribution

Our methodological contribution is primarily the generic tool that measures the effectiveness in building brand equity. There is some literature which specifically aims to help measuring effectiveness in a B2B setting, which has helped develop our tool. However, we are presenting a unique tool based on both literature and input from Vimond. Still, the tool is meant to be generic and applicable for companies in similar strategic positions.

In addition to this, our thesis also has a practical contribution. The contribution consists of the generic tool we have developed, which is intended for use by B2B companies who want to build and measure their brand equity. Hopefully, our tool can be a helpful contribution in that respect. For example, imagine a B2B company struggling to survive in the markets. There may be many causes for their poor performance and low brand equity may be one of them. If they lack any brand equity strategy, utilizing our framework would prove beneficial. Initially, the company may use our methodological tool schema and belonging interview guide to measure their level of brand equity. If unsatisfied, they can use the B2B Brand Equity Building Model in order to create and implement a strategy. After a while a new survey should be held in order to measure any changes. Hopefully, proof of improvements will show in both their performance as well as in the outputs of the methodological tool schema.

1.4 – Limitations

The research question «How can brand equity be built in a B2B context?» is an open ended question for which we are not trying to find the definite answer, as there are several ways of building brand equity in a B2B setting. We will create a framework which has several elements that all contribute to building the brand equity. We recognize that there are different elements and ways to build equity that we might overlook or we consider a limited way to build equity. If there are elements we consider to be lacking, and thus do not include it in our framework, we will indicate these. Still, it would be difficult to comment on everything considering the sheer number of possible elements. This is meant to be a contribution to B2B research and not an all-encompassing answer which excludes other answers.

We address the second research question «How can brand equity created from B2B branding be measured» with a methodological framework presented later in the thesis. There is no definite way of measuring brand equity and measuring the building of brand equity is hard to do accurately which must be factored in as a limitation of the model.

The second research question is not limited to the case of Vimond. It will be viable to use in a different setting, but some customization is necessary to achieve maximum effect.

Further limitations that we discover during our work will be presented in the final chapter, where we also discuss further implications of our research.

1.5 – Outline

Chapter 2 – Presenting Relevant Theory

In this chapter, all relevant theory for our thesis will be presented. This includes the Customer Based Brand Equity Model, brand concept management, corporate identity vs. image, theory on positioning, brand alliances and cultural differences. We will also present a framework for building brand equity by Keller (2008) that we will develop further in a later chapter.

Chapter 3 – Development of Theoretical Framework

Based on the theory and the brand equity model presented in chapter 2, we develop a theoretical framework fitted for B2B branding, which is a field in which limited research has been conducted in comparison to B2C branding.

Chapter 4 – The Market Place

This chapter presents an overview of the internet streaming provider market. We will present Vimond – the startup company on which we apply our framework on – in addition to their two main competitors, KIT Digital and Brightcove. What we present in this chapter is limited by what information is available in the public domain due to the secrecy of companies in this business. As business secrets can create a competitive advantage, this is not surprising.

Chapter 5 – Tailoring the Framework to Vimond's Need

In this chapter we will adapt the framework to fit Vimond's specific needs and profile. By doing so, our goal is to furnish Vimond a framework they can start using immediately. The framework is a suggestion on how to build brand equity in a B2B context, not a definitive answer.

Chapter 6 – How to Evaluate

After modifying the framework for Vimond's need, we will also develop a score sheet system which Vimond can use to evaluate their marketing goals and their fulfillment of them. This is to ensure that the theory is applicable in a real life business environment.

Chapter 7 – Summary and Further Discussion

In chapter 7 we will discuss the framework and what it is intended to do. We will also discuss how our framework will contribute to the B2B research field and how it will contribute to existing research. Finally, we will discuss the limitations of our research and the implications it may have for B2B branding.

Chapter 2 – Presenting Theoretical Framework

2.0 – Chapter Introduction

Our focus in this chapter is to present the relevant theories and research that are the foundation of the model and strategic positioning for our subject. Some theories will feature more prominently in the later chapters, but every theory helps the basic understanding of our framework and is important for the conclusions we make.

2.1 – The Customer Based Brand Equity Model

A key theoretical framework for understanding how to build brand equity is the customer based brand equity model by Keller (2001). Even though some researchers like Kuhn et al. (2008) have argued that the one limitation with the CBBE, is its applicability in a B2B context (Kuhn et al., 2008), we along with key researchers like Keller and Aaker (1991), believe that it is an instrumental part in understanding how to build brand equity regardless of setting.

According to Kotler (1991) as cited in Keller (1993, p.3), a brand can be defined as «…a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors». Others have defined brand equity as «...the added value endowed by the brand to the product» (Farquar, 1989, p. 47) or as «a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers» (Aaker, 1991, p. 15).We have, like Keller, chosen to base our work mainly on Kotler’s definition, as it is Keller’s model we have chosen to develop.

Keller has developed the Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid to show how you can build a strong brand. The pyramid consists of four different stages. According to Keller (2008) the first stage relates to brand identity, and it uses brand salience as a measurement for awareness. In the second stage called brand meaning, it is imperative to establish brand image in the customer’s mind. The third stage refers to eliciting the proper consumer response in relation to brand identity and brand meaning. Finally, the aim is to transform brand response into a loyal relationship between the customers and the brand (Keller, 2001).

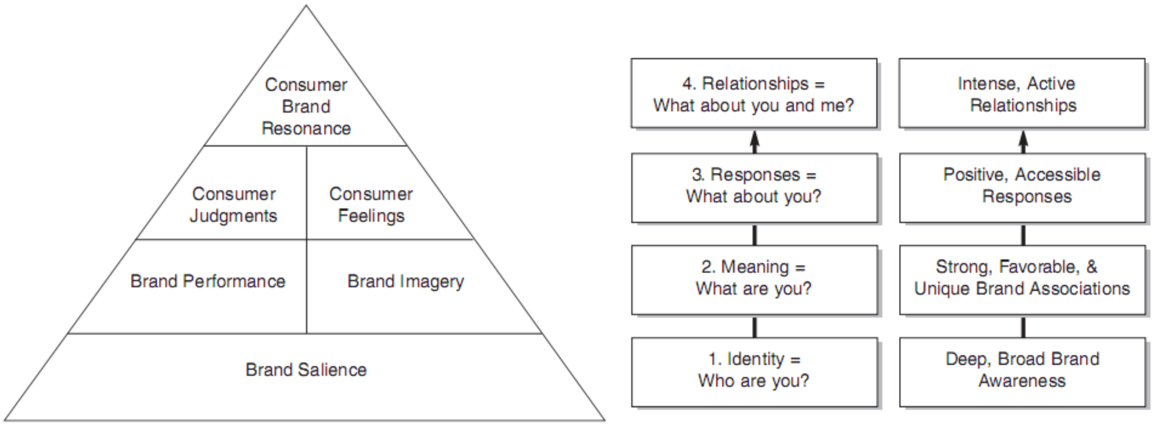

Figure 1: Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid (Keller, 2001)

2.1.1 – Brand Identity

In order to achieve the right brand identity, it is vital to create brand salience, meaning customer awareness of the brand. Brand awareness refers to identification, and can take different forms. One such form is depth, where recognition and recall are important factors. Recognition is the aided form of awareness where the respondents are shown a brand element, and asked whether they have seen it before. Recall and top-of-mind awareness, on the other hand, is somewhat more demanding for respondents. It requires them to recall the brand or a brand element from memory, when given a probe or a cue. The recall can be both aided and unaided (Keller, 2008). According to Nedungadi and Hutchinson (1985, p. 264), «top-of-mind awareness is often a good predictor of brand choice and usage». The brands which a consumer recalls/remembers, form a consideration set (Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986). From the consideration set, the consumer will make evaluations based on subjective criteria, which in turn form the choice set; the set of brands which a consumer realistically would consider buying. This is particularly the case in low-involvement situations, where heuristics, or «rule of thumbs», come in to play. When buying a pack of gum, for instance, one is not likely to consider the decision very thoroughly and instead pick out of habit from the choice set.

It seems logical that this is also the case in B2B situations. In all probability, many companies have a set of businesses they will consider buying products and services from, and an even larger set of businesses whose products and services are not considered at all.

The managers in charge of procurement are human and thus do add personal and subjective criteria in their search, forming their choice set. In low-involvement situations especially, this can lead to companies buying products and services from other companies out of habit rather than making a qualified decision. An important distinction to make is the difference between buying a service rather than a product. The involvement level of the decision maker is usually higher when acquiring a service rather than a product due to the added human element.

There are many reasons why brand awareness is important. A brand needs to be evoked in one form or another to be in the consumer's consideration and choice set. When the brand is included in both sets, brand awareness is important to influence evaluation. In addition, it is quite important that the consumer builds associations to the brand to make it appear more frequently in their consideration set.

2.1.2 – Brand Meaning

Keller's model divides brand meaning into two categories of association/brand image; *performance* and *imagery*. Where Keller (1993, p. 3) defines brand image as «perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory», Supphellen (2000, p. 17) defines it as «the set of associations linked to a brand name». In addition, Agarwal and Rao (1996), maintain that «image is composed of various associations of the brand». No matter what definition one might choose, the critical component is association. The goal is to produce positive associations in the consumer's minds. Associations are nodes linked together in large memory networks, and are said to «...help consumers process and retrieve information, and hopefully they evoke positive effect, as well as cognitive considerations of benefits that provide a specific reason to buy» (Henderson et al., 1998, p. 2). In his article, Keller (1993) states that brand associations can take different forms. A possible way is to use the associations' level of abstraction as a distinguishing factor. By doing this, the brand associations can be classified into three major categories of increasing scope: attributes, benefits and attitudes.

Descriptive features that characterize a product or a service are called attributes. Benefits, on the other hand, are what consumers think the product or service can do for them. Keller (1993, p. 4) defines benefits as «the personal value consumers attach to the product or service attributes». Benefits can be divided into functional benefits, experiential benefits and symbolic benefits (Keller, 1993). Functional benefits are intrinsic advantages of product. Experiential benefits are what the consumer experiences during the use of the product. In their article, Park et al. (1986, p. 136) define experiential benefits «as desires for products that provide sensory pleasure, variety, and/or cognitive stimulation». Symbolic benefits are extrinsic advantages of product consumption. Finally, there are attitudes, or brand attitudes. This is the consumer's overall evaluation of the brand (Keller, 1993).

Associations may differ in terms of favorability, strength, and uniqueness. Consumers have favorable associations towards a brand when the brand has attributes and benefits that satisfy their needs and wants. When this is the case, the consumers form an overall brand attitude, which is mainly positive. In his article, Keller (1993, p. 5) states that «the strength of associations depends on how the information enters consumer memory (encoding) and how it is maintained as part of the brand image (storage)». The associations' strength depends on how much a person reflects around the information and the manner in which a person thinks about the information. A brand association is unique when it is not shared with other competing brands. However, it is important to be aware that some product category associations are shared with other brands in the category (Keller, 1993).

Every company wants consumers to have associations towards their brand that are relevant, as well as favorable, strong, and unique. To accomplish this, the companies need to gain significant knowledge of the brand and peoples' associations of it. However this is not an easy process. First of all, there are good reasons to believe that a majority of associations are nonverbal, but visual with no corresponding verbal descriptions (Supphellen, 2000). Research has shown that two-thirds of all stimuli that reach the brain are visual. Second, it is normal that brand associations can be represented in memory as sensory or emotional impressions. Third, associations tend to be stored in terms of metaphors (Supphellen, 2000).

2.1.3 – Brand Responses

Brand responses can be divided into two parts: brand judgments and brand feelings. Brand judgments are how customers link all associations to form an opinion about the brand. According to Keller (2001, p. 9) «there are a host of attitudes that customers may hold toward brands, but the most important relate in various ways to the perceived quality of the brand». In addition, brand credibility, brand consideration and brand superiority are all part of brand judgments. Brand credibility describes the level to which consumers see the brand as convincing in terms of three dimensions: perceived expertise, trustworthiness and likeability. In addition, it measures whether the customers see the organization or company behind the brand. Consideration depends partly on how personally relevant customers find the brand and is also an important filter in relation to building brand equity. Even though a brand is considered to be credible, that alone is not enough to enter the customer's consideration set. Hence, a high effort is needed to go from the level of being credible to being in the consideration set and this is an important part of building brand equity. Brand superiority refers to the measurement of the extent to which customers view the brand as unique and greater than other brands. The notion of a superior brand is critical in building a strong relationship between the costumer and the brand.

Brand feelings refer to the emotional responses and reactions in connection to the brand. There are six important types of brand-building feelings: warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval and self-respect, all important feelings treasured by an individual. A brand is successful in building brand equity when it evokes feelings. One of the benefits of brand feelings is reaching the consideration set of the customer. The first three types of feelings are experiential and instantaneous, increasing in level of intensity. The latter three types of feelings are private and enduring, increasing in level of gravity.

2.1.4 – Brand Relationships

The final step of the CBBE model is brand relationship, and has to do with the degree of identification the customer has with the brand. The nature of this relationship is described by the brand resonance and «the extent to which the customers feel that they are 'in synch' with the brand» (Keller, 2001, p. 72). This is the stage that all brands want to reach, but is very hard to achieve. A typical example of a brand that has extremely high customer loyalty is Harley Davidson, where consumers have their own HOG (Harley Davidson Owner Group) communities, both online and in real life.

Brand resonance can be broken down to four categories, according to Keller (2001): behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement. Behavioral loyalty concerns how often the customer purchases the brand, and in what quantity they purchase. This is necessary, but not sufficient, for achieving brand resonance. In addition, a strong and personal attitudinal attachment is necessary, with the customers viewing the brand as something special, and states that they «love» it (Keller, 2001). Also, by conveying a sense of community, the brand relationship might be strengthened. By identifying with a brand community, a feeling of affiliation with others belonging to the same community might occur, improving the brand relationship. This community can be both online and offline. Finally, the strongest brand loyalty arises when the customer is engaged in the brand, willing to use time, energy and money in the brand, beyond the actual purchase and consumption. By doing so, they become brand evangelists and ambassadors, helping communicate the brand and strengthen the brand relationship for others.

The four categories mentioned can be summed up in two dimensions, intensity and activity. While intensity measures the strength of the attachment and commitment, activity measures engagement and loyalty.

2.2 – Brand Building Tools and Objectives

Above we have explained what the concept of customer brand based equity is. In this part we will elaborate how customer based brand equity is built. As we stated in our introduction, many of the principles of B2C branding also applies for B2B, which is why we present theory that is B2C related. Keller (2008) presents a model in which there are three major ways of building brand equity. This model is specifically made for B2C purposes.

2.2.1 – Brand Elements

Firstly, a company makes an initial choice of the brand elements that forms the brand. These elements are brand name, logo, symbol, character, packaging and slogan. Together these brand elements are meant to create *memorability, meaningfulness, appeal, transferability, adaptability and protectability.*

Brand name according to Keller (2008) should be both meaningful and familiar, in order to connect accessible knowledge structures. A company can choose a name which is either abstract or concrete. The point is to create links that increase memorability. A consumer should extract a meaning from the name, both explicit and implicit, as it can reinforce an important attribute of the company. The actual process should go through six stages including the definitions of, generating, and screening of the potential candidates and selecting the final name. The careful process is to maximize the brand name potential and also prevent any names that can be unfortunate and potentially hurt the brand (Keller, 2008).

To add something visual to the brand name, a *logo* is also important for building brand equity. The logo can indicate origin, ownership, or association (Keller). The brand names are often incorporated in the logos, or they are a simple *symbol*. Hence, like a brand name, they can either be abstract or concrete. One of the greatest benefits of a logo is its ability to communicate across cultures since it is nonverbal. In addition a range of products can be communicated. Another benefit is that a new logo can revamp the company image, and make it more contemporary. Changing the logo is less invasive than changing a brand name and it can still help to change the brand image which can help the appeal of the company (Keller, 2008).

The *brand characters* are usually introduced through advertising, and are personalities intended to reflect the company. Famous examples are the Green Giant and the Michelin Man, which have been culturally transcending and are faux celebrities. Achieving cultural transcendence has to be the ultimate goal for a brand character as it benefits brand awareness greatly. Some of the advantages a brand character has are the ability to attract attention and the ability to breathe life into something which is in theory dead. However, one drawback is if the brand character becomes too famous and detracts from other brand elements and ultimately decrease brand awareness (Keller, 2008).

Packaging is also an important part in the process of building brand equity. The packaging should be both aesthetic and contain functional components to comply with the overall brand image. Some of consumer's strongest associations with a brand are its packaging, thus rendering it of the utmost importance (Keller, 2008).

A *slogan* can help brand equity in several ways. The slogan can be used to play on the brand name and create brand awareness and brand image. A slogan holds the same advantage as a logo, the ability to be reinvented and thus facilitate updating the brand profile. Some marketers also deem it the easiest part of the brand to change (Keller, 2008).

The brand elements that promote brand awareness increase the level of *memorability* and are keys to building brand equity. Associated with this, are the principles of building brand equity through entering the consideration set of the customer. At the same time, the brand elements need a level of *meaningfulness* with either persuasive or descriptive content. There are two important criteria for how well the brand element conveys general information about the nature of the product category and specific information about particular attributes and benefits of the brand. The *appeal* of the brand elements is independent from *memorability* and *meaningfulness* when it comes to the aesthetics. Brand elements can provide imagery and simply be fun and interesting regardless of providing any actual function. Brand elements can also provide *transferability* to new products for the brand. As a general rule, the less specific the name, the more easily it can be transferred across categories. Another important aspect of brand elements is its *adaptability* over time. Demands change over time, and brand elements in most cases need to change accordingly to follow the trends for maximizing brand equity. The final consideration of brand elements is *protectability.* The brand elements should be easily protected internationally, registered with appropriate legal bodies and defended against anyone who tries to breach trademarks regulations.

2.2.2 – Marketing Programs

The second major way of building brand equity is through marketing activities and the design of marketing programs. Among the aspects that a marketer can manipulate in the marketing programs, are tangible and intangible benefits that a *product* may give. The marketing program can for instance focus on the dandruff-removing qualities of a shampoo, or simply the great feeling the shampoo gives you.

Another element in the marketing program can be the product's *price*. According to Keller (2008), the objective when communicating on price is to project a perception of the product's value. Most people are of course interested in receiving as much value as possible for their money, but some are only interested in the highest quality and the status the product might give them. Furthermore, the price can play an important role, and should therefore be carefully considered in each individual case, depending on the product.

Additionally, a marketer can use different *distribution channels* in their marketing programs, in order to maximize the brand building. Keller (2008) suggests that one should aim for an integration of both «push» and «pull» strategies. Where push strategies involve the company's sales force trying to create a demand for a product by bypassing wholesalers, pull strategies require high spending on advertising and consumer promotion in order to make the customers approach retailers demanding the product. The objective should be to successfully integrate the two strategies in a manner where the brand building is optimized.

Finally, Keller suggests mixing and matching options in the *communications* to maximize brand equity even further. This can be done by choosing a broad set of communication options, which all should be chosen based on their different ability to affect brand awareness in addition to create, maintain, or strengthen brand associations that are favorable and unique. This can for instance be a matter of how much focus the price should receive in the communications, compared to the focus on the product's benefits, and how it can best be combined. Keller also recommends the marketing communication should be consistent, thus reinforcing some communication options with other communication options. For example, a product constantly being communicated as easy to use might have this attribute reinforced if demonstrations of this very attribute are communicated as well.

Marketing plans are usually organic ideas which become formal plans when written down. The core of the process is that the plan moves from the general to the specific; moving from the vision to the mission to the goals to the corporate objectives of the business. From there the plan moves from the individual action plan for each part of the marketing program. The idea is to make the plan interactive, making adjustments when moving from one stage to another.

In a sales-oriented organization, the marketing planning function develops incentives to not only motivate and reward frontline staff properly, but also to align marketing activities with corporate mission, regardless of the core business being B2C or B2B.

The final stage of the marketing planning process is to establish targets and standards so progress can be supervised. Accordingly, it is important to put both quantities and timescales into the marketing objectives and into the corresponding strategies. Plans only have validity if they are actually used to control the progress of a company as the success lies in the implementation of the plan, not the development of the plan.

2.2.3 – Secondary Associations

The final major way of building brand equity which Keller proposes in his model is the leverage of secondary associations. This entails using the company, its country of origin, channels of distribution, other brands, endorsers and events to create awareness, meaningfulness and transferability.

There are three possibilities when a new product is created: Create a new brand, adopt or modify an existing brand and/or combine an existing and a new brand. These are all ways of gaining secondary associations. The companies are inextricably linked to both the industry and the category they are in and this can be both negative and positive. An industry in which companies are usually regarded negatively is the oil and gas industry. Within a company in the oil and gas industry, negative spillover effects can transfer from one division to another in times of crisis (Keller, 2008), i.e. the British Petroleum scandal in 2010.

The country of origin or a geographic area of the product can also leverage secondary associations (Keller, 2008). Some countries are famous for particular industries, and this often reflects quality. Salmon from Norway is often marketed explicitly as Norwegian, because the country is known for its high quality salmon. The association of Norway to the product salmon helps build brand equity for the product. A country of origin can also have negative effects. An example of this is how the British beef industry suffered after cases of mad cow disease were confirmed, rendering the British beef unsellable. Companies are legally obliged to put the country of origin on the packing; hence it is practical and advisable to benefit from it in marketing (Keller, 2008).

The channel of distribution for the product can also leverage secondary associations. A nice store can help the brand image and elevate the product. Most big clothing brands have flagship stores at famous locations such as Madison Avenue in New York, which is meant to leverage associations to exclusivity as well as creating brand awareness. Distributing the product in line with the brand profile can further enhance the brand image and brand awareness thus helping to build brand equity (Keller, 2008).

We will further elaborate how other brands and the endorsement of those can each contribute to leveraging secondary associations in the third chapter of the thesis, connected to the modified model.

2.3 – Consumer Knowledge Effects

Together, the brand building tools mentioned above (brand elements, marketing programs and secondary associations) can create powerful consumer knowledge effects. These effects manifest as *brand awareness* and *brand associations*.

2.3.1 – Brand Awareness

When used appropriately, the brand building tools of choosing brand elements, developing marketing programs and leverage of secondary associations create consumer knowledge effects. One of them is brand awareness, which we described in chapter 2.1.1 under brand identity. In this chapter, we will elaborate on the desirable depth and breadth effects that can occur when the brand building objectives are achieved.

As the brand awareness refers to the customer's ability to recognize and recall the brand under different conditions and to link different brand elements to associations in the memory, both the depth and the breadth of the awareness is of vital importance (Keller, 2008).

As previously described, the depth can be divided into recall and recognition. And naturally, when building customer-based brand equity, it is an advantage having both the recall and recognition at as a high a level as possible. High brand recognition can have positive effects on sale, as customers are more likely to choose familiar brands to unfamiliar brands. Similarly, a high level of brand recall is important especially if the consumer decisions are made in settings away from the point of purchase (Keller, 2008). An online brand, for instance, is likely to be dependent on such recall, as the consumers in many cases need to actively seek the brand before purchasing it.

Breadth can be divided into purchase and consumption. They refer to the different purchase and consumption situations in which the brand comes to mind. Take coffee as an example. Any coffee brand would want their coffee to be considered for purchase by consumers in as many purchase situations as possible: grocery stores, restaurants, airplanes, and so on. Likewise, they would also want to be considered in as many usage situations as possible, not only for breakfast and as an antidote for fatigue. Thus, Keller's brand building tools can prove useful for a brand seeking to improve their position.

2.3.2 – Brand Associations

Another consumer knowledge effect Keller's brand building tools can create is brand associations. As mentioned in chapter 2.1.2 – Brand Meaning, brand associations should be strong, favorable and unique in order to have a positive impact.

The strong brand associations are created by marketing programs that transfer relevant information about the brand to the consumers. According to Keller (2008), this should be done in a consistent fashion, either at one particular point in time or over a longer period.

The favorable brand associations, on the other hand, are created when the same marketing programs efficiently deliver both product and non-product related benefits that are desirable to the consumers.

Finally, the unique brand associations, which should be both strong and favorable, create points of difference (POD) which distinguish the brand from other brands in the same category. Those strong and favorable associations that are *not* unique can create points of parity (POP), which can be used to neutralize competitor's points of difference, or simply be used to establish a category membership. We will elaborate on this in the next chapter, 2.4 – Strategic Positioning.

2.4 – Strategic Positioning

According to Keller’s Strategic Brand Management (2008, p. 98), positioning is «the act of designing the company’s offer and image so that it occupies a distinct and valued place in the customer’s mind». Positioning refers to how a company wishes to be perceived by others. When a company decides on their positioning, it should therefore be consistent between the company’s positioning and the corporate strategy. This requires a frame of reference and ideal brand associations, both some that are not unique for the brand, and some that differentiate them from their competitors. The positioning is based on common, important needs and drivers for choice in all stakeholder groups. In strategic positioning, marketers therefore need to know the followin*g:* who is the target customer, what is the frame of reference, who are the main competitors, how is the brand similar to these competitors (POP), how is the brand different from them (POD), and how is the brand inferior to them (POI)?

2.4.1 – Target Market

As different potential customers may have different brand knowledge structures and different perceptions and preferences for the brand, it is important to identify the target market. A market is defined as «the set of all actual and potential buyers who have sufficient interest in, income for, and access to a product» (Keller, 2008, p. 99). It is important to segment the market by dividing the market into distinct groups of homogeneous potential customers who have similar needs and consumer behavior, and who require similar marketing mixes (Keller, 2008).

2.4.2 – Category Insight - Frame of Reference

The frame of reference should signal to consumers the goal they can expect to achieve by using a brand. The starting point when a brand decides on its competitive frame of reference is deciding on category membership. In some instances it is of the outmost importance to communicate the category membership. One example of this is the introduction of new products, where the category membership is not always apparent, especially for high tech products. Things that can influence the frame of reference can be other competitors or the product’s stage in the life cycle. Because of competitors, it is important that potential customers understand what the brand is, and not just what it is not. Brands with large resources can create customized marketing programs to inform consumers what the product or service actually represents. To assure costumers that they receive what they expect from the brand, brands use benefits to announce category membership. The benefits are presented in such a way that does not imply brand superiority but merely notes that the brand possesses them as a means to establish category. (Keller, 2008)

2.4.3 – Nature of Competition

Targeting a certain type of potential customers helps determine the nature of competition. When defining the competition it is crucial not to define it too narrowly. This is something many firms fail to recognize. Therefore, a firm needs to recognize the nature of different levels of competition (Keller 2008).

2.4.4 – Points of Parity Associations (POP)

Points of parity associations are associations which are not unique to a specific brand, and are quite often shared with other brands. But it is important to note that a brand has to achieve the level of parity to operate proficiently in a segment. Keller divides POP into two groups: category and competitive. Category points are the necessary, but not sufficient conditions for brand choice (Keller, 2008). These points change over time, and they become critical when a brand launches a brand extension into a new category or a whole new product. The more dissimilar the extension category, the more important it is to make sure that the category POPs are well established (Supphellen, 2010). The focus of a marketing program in that context should be whether the extension also has the necessary points of parity.

The competitive points are the associations designed to negate competitors' point of difference. Thus, if a brand can nullify those areas where its competitors are trying to find an advantage and can achieve advantages in some other avenues, the brand should be in a strong, and perhaps unbeatable competitive position.

POPs are usually not cause to choose a specific brand, but their absence can be a reason to avoid a brand. A company should be extremely careful not to negate an association as it could prove costly.

2.4.5 – Points of Difference Associations (POD)

Points of difference are with reference to Barwise and Meehan (2004) defined as «attributes or benefits that consumers strongly associate with a brand, positively evaluate, and believe that they could not find to the same extent with a competitive brand» (Keller, 2008, p. 107). Thus, PODs are the unique, favorable and strong associations connected to a brand; in other words a unique selling point which makes customers prefer one company to another. POD may rely on performance attributes, performance benefits or imagery attributes.

When choosing the PODs, the two most important criteria are that the associations are desirable and deliverable (Keller, 2008). For an association to be desirable, it needs to be relevant, distinctive, and believable. The relevance refers to that the costumer needs to find the product personally relevant and important. At the same time the product need to stand out and be distinctive. Sometimes it is not apparent for customers why the product is different from one of its competitors, even though it is apparent for the brand itself. The task is then to make this difference transparent and easily recognizable for the consumer. The reasoning for why the product is different need to be believable. Given the amount of user reviews online, products strengths and weaknesses are transparent. Hence faking a potential POD would not be effective.

In order to be deliverable, the association needs to be feasible, communicable, and sustainable. Feasibility refers to the firm's ability to create the POD. The product and marketing must be designed in a way to support the desired association. The POD also needs to be communicable. The difficulty arises when creating an association that is not consistent with existing consumer knowledge, or that consumers do not believe in. The POD also needs to be sustainable, and not be easily challenged. Otherwise, the POD can become a POP, which would harm long term strategy. If the consumers find the brand's PODs desirable, and also truly believe that the PODs will be delivered by the brand, the associations have a real potential of becoming strong, unique and favorable, which is essential for a brand communicating their PODs. According to McKenna (1988) and Aaker (1991), it will make it harder for competitors to attack, when a brand is well positioned upon a key attribute in its product class.

2.4.6 – Points of Inferiority (POI)

Points of inferiority (POI) are the associations a company has chosen to negate. There are a multitude of reasons to negate an association, for example, if it does not make financial sense, or the association does not fit the company profile. A company has to be extremely careful when they decide which associations to give up as they can hand competitors an immediate competitive advantage. Every association negated should be evaluated with an extensive risk assessment (Thorbjørnsen, 2011).

2.5 – Branding Benefits

There are several different possible outcomes that can transpire if the model is followed successfully. Greater loyalty is the most obvious one. Having a loyal customer base is critical for any business in any segment. The loyalty enables the brand to be less vulnerable to competitive marketing actions and potential crises. The margins will also increase as well as a more elastic response to price decreases and a more inelastic response to price increases. Another benefit is potential improvement in trade cooperation and support. Organizations like to be affiliated with brands that have strong brand equity simply because it can create opportunities for them in different avenues. This can also lead to possible licensing opportunities. Companies trust brands that have strong brand equity and are professionally built. One of the most obvious outcomes is increased marketing communication efficiency and effectiveness. A brand with strong brand equity can more easily communicate with its market because customers are interested in what they have to say. However, changing the message too drastically can have adverse effects. Finally, strong brand equity opens the door for brand extensions. A strong parent brand can help new products be successful with its inherent advantages.

2.6 – Summary of the Brand Equity Model

Keller's Brand Equity Model is sequential, and aims to build brand equity through three stages. The first stage consists of three parts, the second stage consists of two parts and the final stage consists of one part; the potential outcomes if the model is executed effectively. The emphasis of the first stage is establishing the most basic requirements to build brand equity. Choosing brand elements, developing marketing programs and leveraging secondary associations are all fundamental processes in establishing a brand. The second stage is influencing consumer knowledge effects as the brand is trying to build upon the groundwork laid in the first part of the model. And the third stage is the payoff where the brand discovers just have successful it has been building brand equity.

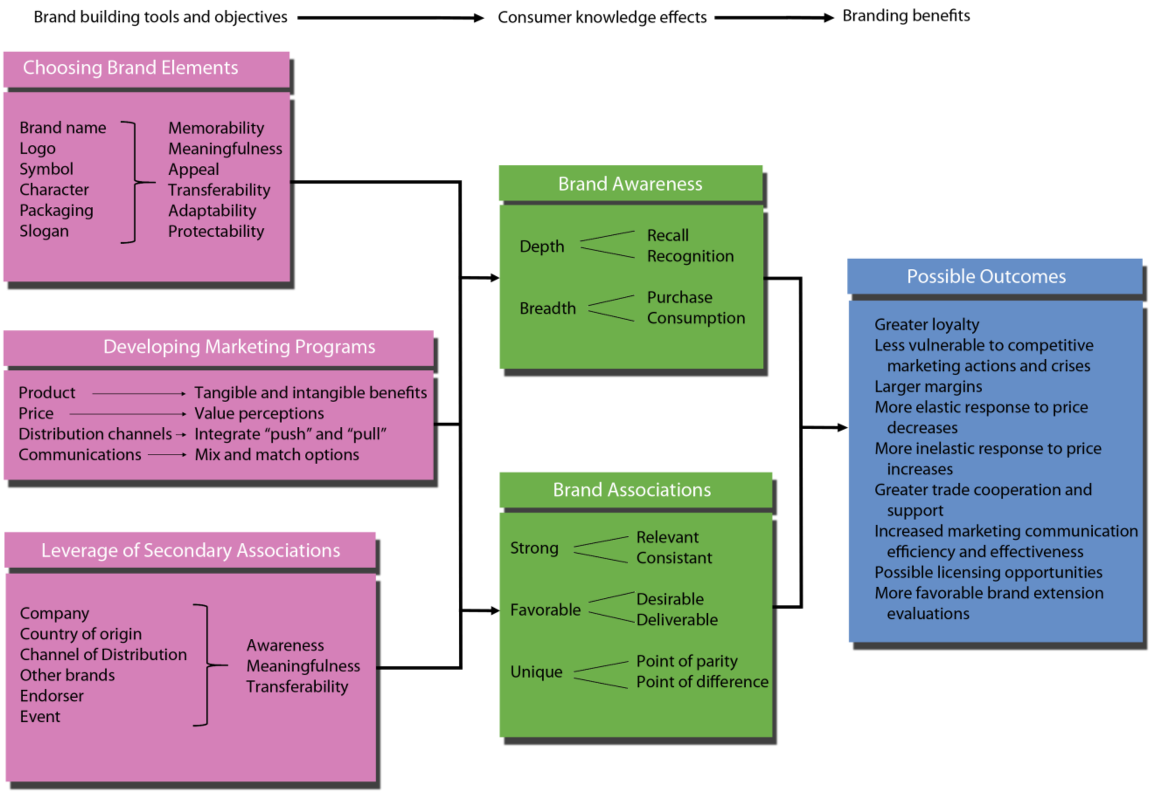

Figure 2: The Brand Equity Model, by Keller (2008)

2.7 – Brand Concept Management

Brand concept is derived from basic consumer needs (Park et al., 1986), and can be divided into three main categories dependent on the motives for consumption: functional, symbolic and experiential needs. However, it is important to have in mind that a brand can offer a mixture of functional, symbolic and experiential benefits. According to Wee and Ming (2003) consumers buy products and services not just for what they can do, but also for what they mean symbolically. The brand concept is managed over three stages: introduction, elaboration and fortification (Park et al., 1986). As our model will focus on building brand equity for a company in its introduction phase, the theory presented in this thesis will focus on this aspect of the brand concept model (BCM). We have also been inspired by certain elements of the BCM in our framework and our measuring tool.

In the introduction stage of BCM it is important to perform activities to establish the brand in the marketplace. The portrayed image should reflect the brand concept without going beyond the frame that has been set by the company. There are two tasks that need to be conducted in order to affect the brand’s image at the introductory state. Firstly, communicating the brand and secondly, expatriating the operating activities. The operating activities refer to the removal of transaction barriers. The two tasks go hand in hand, as they are co-dependent to achieve the marketing mix goal and creating synergy effects (Park et al., 1986).

Park et al. (1986, p. 138) also states that «another goal of BCM during the period of market entry is to develop an image that can be extended easily and logically during subsequent stages». This should be a main concern for any company using the BCM.

It is important to differentiate between the three different brand concepts: functional, symbolic and experiential. As Vimond is mostly a functional concept, this is what we will present in this thesis. For companies with a functional concept at an introduction stage, the mix elements «should emphasize the brand’s functional performance in solving consumption-related problems» (Park et al., 1986, p. 140). The marketing mix should differ from the competitor’s mix, and this cannot be stressed enough. The BCM only offers general strategies; hence the strategies should be refined further to maximize effect.

Regardless of brand concept in the introductory phase, the main objective is to establish the brand’s image and position. However, the brand concept decisions that are made in the introductory phase should be influenced further in the elaboration stage, thus the emphasis should be on creating long term strategies. For the brands with functional concepts, the marketing mix elements should place the emphasis on the strengths and performance in solving what the product is intended to do. The marketing mix should also point out how the product differs from its competitors, i.e. why it is more effective (Park et al., 1986).

In general, the brand concept should be regarded as long term investment which in the end will be a long term competitive advantage. The decisions made in each stage have an influence on the effects in the next stage as well, and this should be taken into consideration.

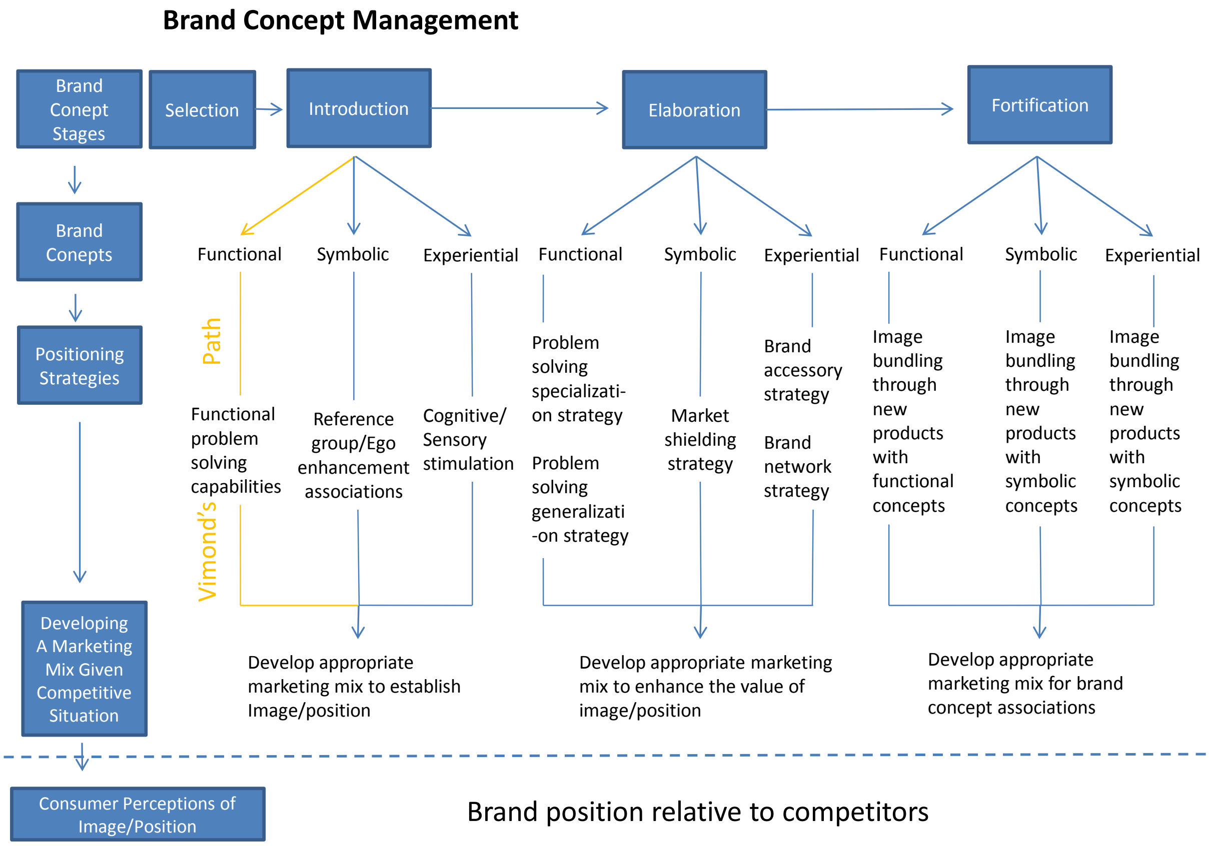

Figure 3: Brand Concept Management (Park et al., 1986)

The framework contains several key elements in deciding the brand position. It is selected depending on the stage of the brand's phase (introduction, elaboration or fortification) and its concept (functional, symbolic or experiential). In Figure 3, we have highlighted the path of a functional brand in the introduction phase.

2.8 – Corporate Identity vs. Image

Every part of an organization communicates and contributes to the external image (Brønn and Berg, 2002). That is why overlooking any aspect of the organization can prove to be detrimental. There is a clear difference between corporate identity and image; being able to make the distinction between the two is important. Albert and Wetten (1985) states that organizational identity as what is distinctive, central and enduring about an organization. Brønn and Berg (2002) offer another perspective and states that organizational identity is how an organization's members perceive and understand it: «who are we» and «what we stand for». The general awareness which organization's members have of the correlation between corporate identity and the corporate image is essential and vital when portraying the company.

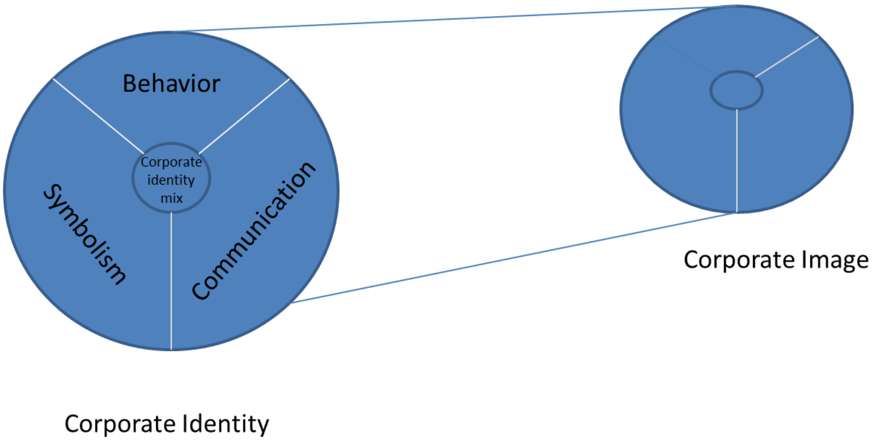

Figure 4: Corporate Identity versus Corporate Image

Figure 4 shows image as a direct reflection of identity, this is however not always the case.

The image of a company is in most instances subjective and therefor in the eye of the beholder. This is reflected in the complexity of composition of the corporate identity. Accordingly, the corporate image can be viewed very differently. Dowling (2001, p. 19) defines image as «the set of meanings by which an object is known and through which people describe, remember and relate to it». This indicates that an image is highly subjective to any individual. Still, the goal for any corporation is to create an image that appeals to an individual regardless of what the image itself portrays.

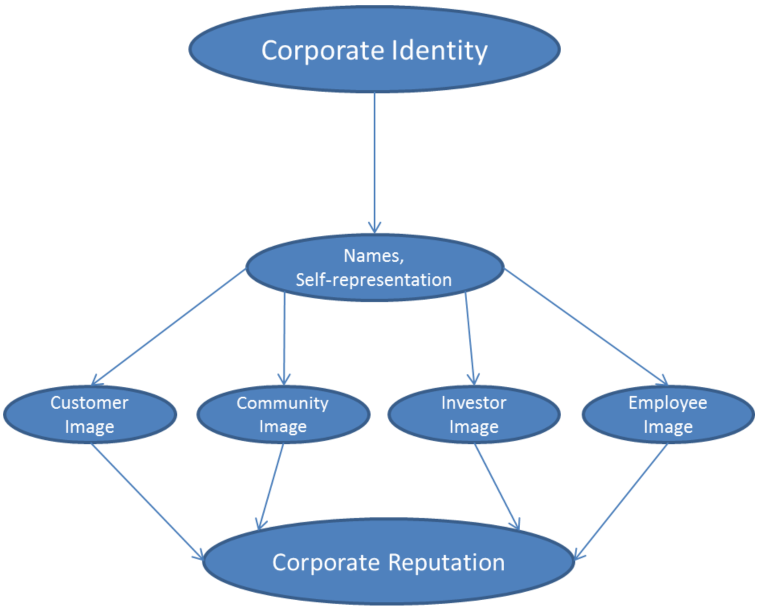

Figure 5: From Corporate Identity to Corporate Reputation

Figure 5 shows that different stakeholders have a different image which makes up the corporate reputation as a whole.

Different stakeholders will perceive a corporation's image according to their interests. This increases the complexity of portraying a holistic image that satisfies every party involved. The model above shows all the most relevant stakeholders a corporation needs to consider while trying to create adequate image for their business purpose.

2.9 – Culture

In our opinion, culture is an important part of building brand equity. Hofstede has defined culture as «the collective mental programming of the people in the environment» (Hofstede, 1980, p. 43). Culture is not a characteristic of individuals; it encompasses a number of people who were conditioned by the same education and life experience. In other words, culture is learned, not inherited, and derives from one's social environment – not from one's genes. Hofstede therefore distinguishes culture from personality. Personality is unique from individual to individual, while culture is what individuals in a group have in common. Our ideas, values, acts and emotions are all cultural products.

The term *culture* exists on many levels. It may apply to groups within a society at different levels, as for instance a country, an age group, a profession, a social class etc. When discussing culture, it is important to be specific about the level, in order to avoid confusion. «Corporate culture», «age culture» and «regional culture» are all specific examples of different cultures. What applies for one culture might not be the case to another. However, culture is the glue that binds a group together, and Geertz (1973, p. 49) suggests that «there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture».

When it comes to organizational – or internal – culture, McShane and Von Glinow (2010) describe it as consisting of values and basic assumptions that are common in an organization. This defines what is important, right and wrong, and thus controls much of the activity within the organization. In a sense, it is the DNA of the organization.

By values, McShane and Von Glinow (2010) mean stable and conscious attitudes towards what is right and wrong, and good and evil. Values in connection with organizational culture are values that are common and important for the members of the culture. While efficiency and competition can be important in some organizational cultures, community and well-being can be important in other organizational cultures. Assumptions, on the other hand, are basic, unconscious attitudes which affect the way one thinks and acts regarding to problems and opportunities.

On a more general level, Hofstede et al. (2010) differs between four manifestations of culture, namely symbols, rituals, heroes and values. He illustrates these manifestations like an onion, indicating that the symbols represent the most superficial manifestations of a culture, while values represent the deepest (Figure 6).

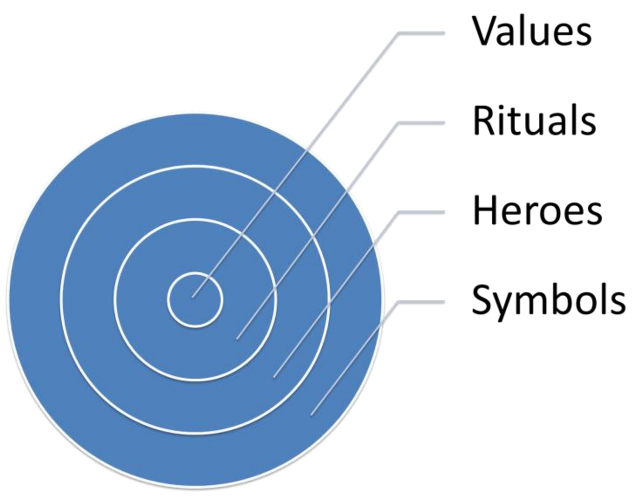

Figure 6: After Hofstede et al. (2010), Culture as an Onion

Symbols can be words, pictures, gestures or objects that give a particular meaning only to those within a group who share a culture. An example of this is the symbol for the «play» button on different devices, which always is a triangle pointing forward. Two triangles in this position, means «fast forward». This must be assumed to be a symbol recognized by most of the youth and grown-ups in the western culture who has ever dealt with a music or video player.

Rituals are collective activities that are carried out within a culture for their own sake, and that are socially essential to those carrying them out. The rituals are visible to outsiders of the culture, but their meaning may not be. For example, in countries around the Mediterranean it is common to kiss each other on each cheek when saying hello or goodbye to someone. For a person from a different culture, it is obvious that they are doing this, but the purpose behind it is not necessarily understood without an explanation.

As cultures differ between countries and companies, the culture within a Norwegian company and a foreign can be completely different in a number of ways, even though the companies operate in the exact same line of work. This needs to be appreciated when entering a new market, and maybe in particular when entering as a newly started company.

Heroes are people with attributes highly appreciated within a society and who serve as role models for behavior. They might be real or characters of fiction, and they might still be living or dead. Martin Luther King and Batman are both considered as heroes in this sense.

Hofstede et al. argue that the symbols, heroes and rituals can all be included under the term *practices*. While they are visible to an outsider, their cultural meaning is invisible to those unfamiliar with the culture. The meaning of the practices lies within the way it is interpreted internally in the culture.

Values are in the core of Hofstede et al.'s onion, and is thus in central in the formation of cultures. They describe values as broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others, and as feelings that deal with pairings such as evil versus good, and moral versus immoral. Thus, it conforms to McShane and Von Glinow's understanding of the term.

2.10 – Chapter Summary

In this chapter we have compiled the relevant theory for our brand equity model. The theory is however shortened and customized to fit our model and case. The most important theory presented is Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity model, which our model is based on. The model is evaluated in subsequent chapters to see if it fits in a B2B setting.

Chapter 3 – Development of Theoretical Framework

3.0 – Chapter Introduction

In this chapter we will first present some basic theory on B2B, basic thoughts and conceptions and set the framework into context. Secondly, we will go through our proposed model stage by stage and part by part. This is to ensure that our thoughts and the model itself are properly explained and that the process of development is transparent.

Unlike the B2C field, the research conducted made on B2B branding in general is sparse, and there are no general models on how to build brand equity in a B2B setting, at least not based on brand concept. This study will therefore be exploratory. In such a study, the objective is to seek insights, find out what is occurring and assess phenomena in a new light (Saunders et al., 2009).

Business-to-business (B2B) is a term for commerce transactions between businesses. Examples of businesses doing transactions can be dealings between a manufacturer and a wholesaler or between a wholesaler and a retailer. B2B differs from B2C, which is a term for the relationship between a business and a consumer. There are far more B2B transactions than there are B2C transactions (Sandhusen, 2008). This is due to the many layers of the supply chains utilized to create an actual product.

B2B marketing differs from B2C marketing (Jensen, 2006) as the latter emphasizes the use of mass communication disciplines. B2B marketing communication on the other hand uses more relational building disciplines such as product demonstrations (i.e. conventions) and online events. Most B2B companies spend more of their budget on online disciplines in comparison to B2C companies (Barwise and Farley, 2004). Jensen in his article from 2006 argues that online marketing is more appealing for B2B companies as it fills a gap within relationship marketing. He also stresses that the preferred marketing communication is targeted and personalized disciplines like events and exhibitions, relationship marketing and sales support activities.

3.1 – Basis for Framework

As there is a clear correlation between B2C and B2B, as previously mentioned, we decided to use an existing model for how to build brand equity in a B2C context to form our framework for building brand equity in a B2B context. The model we chose was made by Keller (2008), as this is a widely acknowledged framework in the marketing field. The model is presented in «Building Brand Equity» in chapter 2. The Keller model works as an inspiration for our model, but we have decided to modify it and use a language that fits our intentions. However, certain elements are necessary to form the basis for a model on building brand equity, thus similarities are inevitable. Therefore portions of the theory presented in chapter 2 relates to B2C as it can be used as a foundation for B2B.

3.2 – Brand Building Tools and Objectives

In the following, we will present the different steps of our framework, resulting in a model designed to build brand equity in a B2B setting. The first part describes the different brand building tools and objectives that apply when building B2B brand equity.

3.2.1 – Choosing Brand Profile

In the first stage of our model, the company uses brand building tools and sets their objectives. The first part of that stage in Keller's model as presented in Chapter 2 is choosing brand elements such as brand name, logo, symbol, character, packing and slogan. This is a must for any company that is trying to create brand equity (Keller, 2008). The benefits one obtains from choosing these elements are memorability, meaningfulness, appeal, transferability, adaptability and protectability. All these elements and benefits are important in a B2B context; hence we retain this part of Keller's original model. The benefits are an integral and important part of the model; therefore it would be unwise and impractical to change it and will be included in our model. However, our main focus will be on choosing an all-encompassing brand profile, which is made up of several elements. We consider that brand name, logo/symbol, packaging, slogan and general design are important elements when creating a brand profile and adding them up will make up the overall profile. Arguing that a brand should have a profile which encompasses these elements is basically redundant as they are integral and overall accepted as necessary to create brand equity regardless of what context the business is operating in. This is the reason why we will not discuss every single element in-depth. Still, it is important to notice that the emphasis on each element can be weighted differently as different strategies are suitable for different companies in unique situations. Hence, the emphasis should be contingent upon both the situation and what the company aims to achieve (Keller, 2008).

3.2.1.1 – Brand Concept

In addition to elements already mentioned, choosing a brand concept is in our opinion a vital part of creating a brand profile. Thus we have included elements from Park et al.'s (1986) *Brand Concept Model* (BCM). The BCM suggests that a consumer has a functional, symbolic or experiential motive for consumption. Businesses operating as consumers also have the same motives for consumption, though the functional motive is probably the most frequent in a B2B context. Most companies need a certain type of materials or services to produce goods. Still, companies also have the need to align themselves with other companies that might be able to fulfill symbolic and experiential needs they might have. An example of how companies fulfill their symbolic needs is the use of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR is quite often used as a way to create goodwill and help the brand image (Friedman, 1970). A company can conduct CSR in several different ways. A simple way of doing so is supporting an organization which exclusively does philanthropic work like Doctors Without Borders. An example of experiential need would be if a company wants services which could help enhance company morale, such as trips, lectures or even buying tickets for sporting events. It is important that a company can provide a crossover for the three needs, but focusing on one aspect might be preferable, as it can create crossover effects (Park et al., 1986).

For these reasons we consider the needs included in the BCM are applicable in a B2B context. For the same reasons we believe that these elements should be taken into consideration when creating a brand profile. Subsequently, the product that the company provides is easily recognizable for a company who has a particular type of need. It also facilitates the process of projecting a certain brand image (Brønn and Berg, 2002). The intention is that our model will be fluid in such a way that certain benefits, like employees projecting the brand image, can happen in multiple parts of the model. There is a difference in both *how* a brand should communicate and *what* it should communicate, depending on what type of brand they want to be. If a company is trying to offer goods or services that are largely symbolic, the communication should reflect that. This points back to the fluidity of the model; a company needs to be conscious of what kind of brand image they want to project in every part of the first stage of the model, where the focus is on brand building tools and setting their objectives.

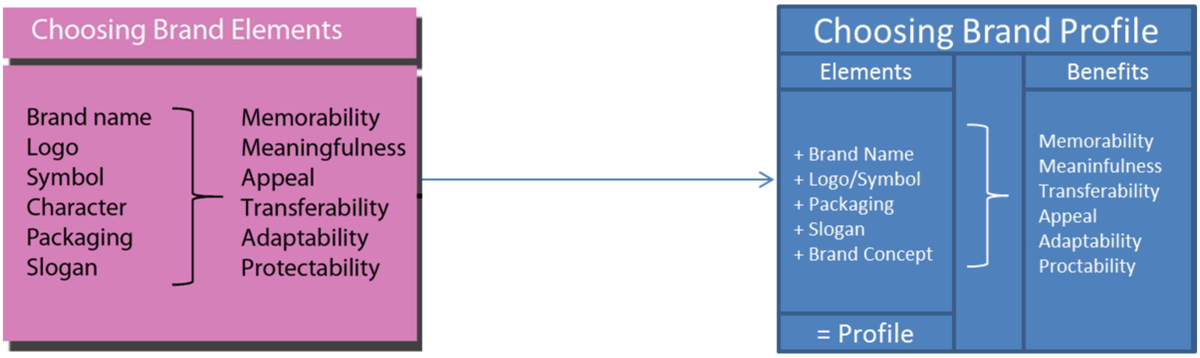

Figure 7: Choosing Brand Profile

Choosing a brand profile is an important part of choosing brand elements and set objectives.

Thus, the end product of the first part of the first stage has an emphasis on creating an all-encompassing brand profile that gives benefits in a marketing perspective. The different elements should be weighed differently to customize the brand profile to the overall brand image the company wants to portray. There are not necessarily right or wrong answers on how to build the brand profile, but the choices should be well considered and well informed to ensure maximum benefits.

According to Schultz and Schultz (2000, p. 25) «A critical challenge for many organizations is how to achieve a high level of branding consistency across a product portfolio numbering in the dozens, hundreds and even thousands». Having a cohesive brand profile and synchronizing the message can help eliminate that problem. A multi-faceted company especially should try to synchronize their message to eliminate the problem Schultz and Schultz present. According to Aspara and Tikkanen (2008, p. 87) «The research has implied that rather than brands in general, or product brands, particularly corporate brands are important in the B2B context». This underlines the need for synchronizing the message, so that other companies are not confused what a brand represents. It also implies that sister brands can have a positive and negative effect on each other if the parent brand is particularly important in a B2B context. However, if the core business of a daughter company differs too much from the parent brand, a cohesive brand profile might not be favorable. Again, this should be evaluated on a case-to-case basis as no situation is the same.

As a general rule we recommend, however, to be as cohesive as possible when deciding on a brand profile.

To ensure both culpability and cohesiveness, senior management should be responsible for choosing brand building tools and objectives (Schultz and Schultz, 2000). We believe this to be true, but should not exclude input from different levels in the organization. An organization which ignores the input from its lower management and employees can have difficulties achieving a consistent brand image as many voices can clutter the overall message.

3.2.2 – Communicating the Brand

The second part of the first stage in Keller's 2008 model is to create marketing programs to promote the brand. While Keller focuses on creating marketing programs, we believe that in a B2B setting the overall focus should be on how to communicate the brand, both internally and externally.

An important aspect of a brand's communication is its values. As with much of the other research done in the branding field, especially when dealing with emotions, the research is far more extensive in the B2C context than in the B2B context. The importance of the psychological and emotional aspects of branding has been highlighted in the recent years, and research shows that brands that are based on intangible, emotive characteristics, such as trust, reassurance, reputation and image are seen as more robust and less likely to suffer from competitive erosion (Lynch and de Chernatony, 2004). The research on whether this also is the case for B2B branding is lacking. There is however evidence from some markets that B2B marketers are recognizing that the creation of an emotional connection with buyers can add a valuable dimension to their products or services (Lynch and de Chernatony, 2004).

Furthermore, Lynch and de Chernatony argue that these organizational buyers are influenced by both rational and emotional brand values. This has significant implications for B2B communication strategies, and in light of this the authors present two suggestions. First, they argue, B2B sales organizations need to recognize the power of emotions, and incorporate this into their brand identities in order to be successful. The emotional brand values must then be communicated internally. Secondly, B2B firms should ensure that their salespeople are trained to understand and communicate emotional brand values externally in response to the needs of the buyers. After all, a large portion of many business' sales happen through a sales force. We have taken this into account in our model under both internal and external brand communication.

3.2.2.1 – Internally (Promotions and Culture)

Internal Promotions

Internal branding is a fairly new concept in marketing. Traditionally, the focus in branding has been mainly external, failing to recognize that a successful external brand communication is highly dependent on employees understanding and committing to the organization's brand values. Recently, more and more organizations appreciate this dependency, and rightfully so. We therefore take both internal and external communications into consideration in the second step of our model; communicating the brand.

According to Bergstrom et al. in Lynch and Chernatony (2004), communicating the brand can be done using the three core elements of internal branding: effective brand communication to all employees, convincing employees of the brand's value and its relevance, and finally connecting every organizational position to the delivery of the brand values. Further, the developed B2B brand values - both functional and emotional - are spread internally through three main channels (Lynch and de Chernatony, 2004). The first channel is the organization's culture. The organization should seek to implement the values into their organizational culture, thus making the values a part of the employees everyday life. The second channel in which values can be spread internally is via internal communication media. This includes all verbal and written messages about the organizations and its brand (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004). Many organizations have their own internal online newspaper, or occasionally publish editorial material. This is a golden opportunity to communicate the organization's emotional and functional values. However, it can also be communicated in a number of other ways, for example verbally, on vehicles, or by newsletters by e-mail. The third channel is sales force training for industrial salespeople, and might be the most important, depending on the type of organization. Investment in this area has long been viewed as a necessity (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004). In many cases, the only contact the industrial buyer has with the seller is via the company's salespeople. How they act, what they say, and how they appear can all be interpreted as the company's values, and might make the difference between making a sale or not. This underlines the importance of proper training and education. Black and Decker, for instance, specifically incorporate training of affective responses to brand values. This is because they have realized that purchases are often influenced by the emotions connected to the corporate brand (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004).

Internal Culture

Another issue to note when building brand equity in a B2B setting (in regard to communicating the brand) is the concept of culture, both internal and external. By internal, we mean the corporate or organizational culture, and by external we are referring to the external area where the corporation operates.

As above mentioned, culture is a channel for spreading brand values. However, unless the organization is entirely new, an internal culture will already exist before new values and basic assumptions are developed and implemented. It is wise to recognize and identify this culture before trying to change it. Some of the elements of the culture will perhaps be positive and unnecessary to change.

Using Hofstede's definitions as a basis, the easiest part is identifying the symbols, as described in chapter 2.7 – Culture, and Figure 6 – Culture as an onion. Particular gestures and signs, for example, that are unique for the particular organizations are all different kinds of symbols. Observing them and interpreting whether they represent the desired functional and emotional values should be a part of the process.

Secondly, heroes, or potential heroes within the organization, should be identified. Employees who are looked upon as role models and appreciated by their colleagues should not be too difficult to identify. After doing so, one should evaluate how the hero(es) match up with the desired values. If there is a mismatch, one can consider trying to get them to change in the desired direction.

While rituals might be uncommon and irrelevant to focus on in regards to corporate culture, values, which are the core of Hofstede et al.'s onion, are more important. In old and neglected organizations, the core values might have turned into something negative, or at least undesired. Identifying them and changing them might turn in to a profitable effort.

3.2.2.2 – Externally (Promotions and Culture)

External Promotions

As the employees are starting to understand and commit to the brand values, expanding the focus externally is appropriate. As with the internal brand communication, both functional and emotional values should be communicated externally. In Lynch and de Chernatony (2004) model, adapted from Petty and Cacioppo (1983) and Gillian and Johnston (1997), the corporate brand values are communicated externally through sales forces, advertising and PR, trade shows and direct marketing. This can be described as the communications mix.

Creating Marketing Schemes

Rowley (1998, p. 384) defines the communications mix as «the combination of different channels or tools that are used to communicate a message», and this is the essence of a marketing scheme. A company has the opportunity to use different communication channels and communication to maximize synergy across platforms to maximize the effect of marketing programs. There are five main tools of the marketing communication mix: advertising, direct marketing, sales, promotional activities and public relations (Dahlén et al., 2010). At what time and instance each individual tool is effective, depends on various factors such as what communication objective is to be achieved and what the competition is like within the market. The cost, breadth and effect of each tool also vary a great deal. The overall point is that some form of marketing campaigns can be a necessity when building brand equity. We therefore suggest that a marketing scheme should be planned, determining which channels to use, what impression of price level to project, and what benefits to focus on.

Lynch and de Chernatoy (2004) suggest that in a B2B setting, the external marketing communication mix should consist of advertising and PR, sales forces (sales), trade shows (promotions) and direct marketing, and we have taken this into consideration in our model under external communication.

Advertising and PR

Advertising and PR are two of the main tools of the marketing communication mix, at least in the B2C segment. The traditional forms of advertising are usually non-personal one-way messages seeking to inform and influence a homogenous audience, while public relations covers events and sponsorships, publicity and product placement (Dahlén et al., 2010).

While many B2C firms want to get their message out to as many as possible, this is very often not the case in the B2B segment. A super market chain would benefit from communicating their offers to as many customers as possible, for instance via a TV commercial or an advertisement in a newspaper. For the wholesaler delivering the merchandise to the super market, on the other hand, such a broad means of communication would be expensive and meaningless, risking not reaching a single person of interest. For such a B2B firm, advertising in a more narrow way would be much more efficient, as for instance via a branch magazine, which is often to be found within different branches.

In regards to public relations, the opportunities for B2B firms to communicate their brand values are many. Sponsorship is one possibility. Accenture, a global management consulting company which solely operates in the B2B segment, has long been a sponsor of professional golfing (accenture.com). This is of course not coincidental, as golfing is a popular and upper-middle-class sport, often associated with business leaders and networking.

Similarly, product placement can be a clever way for some B2B firms to communicate their values (Dahlén et al., 2010). If KPMG is used as an auditor for a successful firm in an up to date movie, chances are that some business leader consciously or unconsciously will take notice, and process the communicated values.

Finally, the firms can seek to communicate their brand values via publicity (Dahlén et al., 2010). Getting publicity is not always easy, but doing stunts and giving press releases to the desired channels is one way to proceed.

Sales Forces

Sales forces are the equivalent of personal selling in the marketing communications mix. Lynch and de Chernatony (2004) argue that despite the availability of an ever-increasing range of marketing communication tools and media, personal selling continues to be the main form of brand value communication in B2B markets. The reason for this is that sale representatives can adapt and adjust their marketing message to seek their specific audience. This has been identified by both researchers and managers as an essential component in improving both the performance of sales persons and customer satisfaction (Lynch and de Chernatony, 2004). The successfulness of a relationship between and B2B firm and its customer may ultimately depend on the sales persons’ ability to communicate. After having received proper training, as discussed under internal culture, the sales force should know when to push and when to pull, causing the customers to experience the brand values in a positive manner. Research suggests whether the sales force achieve a satisfactory outcome or not is dependent on the degree to which the sales force are competent in the content of their communication, in addition to the style. The communication can again be split into five different types: utility, socio-organizational, emotional, situational and curiosity - each variable varying in importance depending on the buyer's characteristics, role or line of work, of which a skilled sales force is conscious. If this is done correctly and the communication in the sales encounter is efficient, research shows that this increases both trust and commitment in the business relationship (Lynch and de Chernatony, 2004).

This is of course highly desirable for any company, and underlines again the importance of a dedicated and trained sales force. Under the right circumstances they can communicate the brand values first hand to customers, and have a considerable impact not only on the sales and bottom line, but also on how the brand is perceived in the market which the company operates in.

Trade Shows

Tradeshows are a nontraditional method of marketing which demand substantial resources. Tradeshows give businesses an opportunity to speak directly to potential customers in a sales setting, and serve as a golden opportunity to attract leads through follow-up calls for direct mail campaigns and cold-calling on prospects (Galambos, 2007). Research by Bendixen et al. (2004), states that for corporate buyers, trade shows and exhibitions are the primary source of information to generate brand awareness. However, it can be a quite expensive affair, as it may demand large and technologically intense installations in order to attract the desired level of attention. After all, attraction is one of the major goals in a trade show, creating buzz and awareness, and thus increasing the chance of drawing interest from potential customers. One of the problems of trade shows is that they tend to produce a high volume of prospects, but far from all of them are necessarily of quality (Galambos, 2007). This is why this method works best when a company has a specific service to offer, which is interesting for prospects guaranteed to be attending the trade show. There is little point in going to random trade shows just to build brand image and awareness, if the audience is outside the company's target group.

Bearing this in mind, it is easy to imagine why tradeshows work especially well in a B2B setting. If a company is working in a B2C setting, for instance selling telephone subscriptions, trade show presence is far less effective than a television commercial, although one might of course be successful. For a company working in the B2B section, operating on a small, but worldwide market, a trade show might give a great return. As opposed to using large amounts on reaching out broadly, trade shows can be a cost-effective way to meet and display oneself for target business customers, despite a costly trade show booth. This makes trade shows convenient channel in external brand communication.

Direct Marketing

Similar to trade shows, direct marketing has the advantage of precision. Where TV commercials find all who watches TV at a particular moment, including those who never will have any interest in the company, direct marketing is aimed directly at those who are of interest to the company. This means that not only do the company save time; also the time of those who are not of interest, is saved. A common way of direct marketing is direct mail campaigns. If the right message is delivered to the right audience, they can be very successful (Galambos, 2007). The direct marketing can be conducted in many ways, for example by using full-circle campaigns, integrating a message in the e-mail with a belonging web site, mailers e-mails and follow-up calls to the most interesting and promising target customers. It can also be used for seminar invitations, for letting know where to find the company at a trade show, or even for branding campaigns (Galambos, 2007). The goal is nevertheless to have the recipient to take some kind of action towards the e-mail, such as visiting the web site, making a phone call or register for an event. To increase the possibility of a successful campaign, the company should follow up on the prospects, either by phone or customized e-mails. It is however important not to be too aggressive. But with a positive approach and a message tailored for the individual recipient, it can pay-off in terms of new leads and new receivers of the company’s brand values (Galambos, 2007).

External Culture

In today’s globalized market, trading with businesses from other parts of the world has become extremely common. Frequently, production is outsourced to countries far away with entirely different national cultures. In order to avoid conflict or offending business partners, being prepared on the culture you will meet is important. When communicating the brand in another country with another culture, respecting and obeying their culture’s premises is a key.

Again, taking Hofstede et al.’s «onion layers» into consideration might prove helpful. Before visiting another culture in the purpose of business, one should prepare oneself for the symbols, heroes, rituals and values of their culture. For instance, a Nordic company sending their salespeople to Japan, hoping to make a deal, should be aware that the Japanese ritual for greeting is not similar to the Nordic handshake, but a bow instead. Similarly, while using «uncle Sam» as a hero in advertising in the USA might be useful, it may very well be counterproductive in a country hostile to the USA. By taking precautions and preparing for the four different dimensions, many potential problems can be avoided, and success will be more likely.

However, when it comes to communicating the brands desired values in a different culture, the most difficult part might be adapting them into a fitting format. One may risk that they are not approved as appropriate values, or they may be irrelevant for that particular culture. A company, whose core value is incorruptibility, may have problems adapting to a culture permeated with corruption. In some cases the differences might be too extensive, making it extremely difficult to adjust and integrate. Such cases demand and extra efforts in preparations and analyses. It may very well be that not entering will be the most beneficial solution when analyzing a market in a different culture.

Preparing in this way is becoming more and more relevant in today’s globalized society. Corporations of all sizes frequently expand their businesses into unchartered territory. As opposed to markets that are maturing, these sometimes nearly untouched markets might have the potential of enormous incomes. This is probably how the Norwegian mobile operator Telenor viewed India when they decided to enter the country in 2008. So far their losses have been gigantic, and the whole operation has raised criticism from both, investors, analysts and politicians (dagensit.no). Perhaps would a better cultural analysis in advance of the entering have led to another outcome?

3.2.2.3 – Price

When communicating the brand there are a lot of elements that must be taken into consideration. And of course, communicating only the brand values is not enough in the long run; some potential customers will be interested in what price level to expect and how reliable and frequent the delivery will be. A study by Bendixen et al. (2004) confirms the importance of both price and distribution. Together the two variables explain 51 % of the decisions made by procurement executives when buying a service or product.

Although Bendixen et al. showed that price is an important factor; it is succeeded by other factors in their study, such as perceived quality. The reasoning behind this is that industrial equipment is sufficiently differentiated and therefor can be separated by other factors than price alone (Bendixen et al., 2004). However, this does not mean that the communication of price should be neglected – communicating both price and distribution might be what moves the industrial buyers in the desired direction, by generating to brand equity.

If brand equity already is present, attaining a premium price may be possible. A premium price is what customers are willing to pay extra for one brand, compared to similar products or services of other brands, and it can be a useful indicator of brand equity, and vice versa (Persson, 2010). It is also argued that taking a price premium is the most important way of creating values for the shareholders, as taking a higher price has no additional costs (Persson, 2010). As price is closely connected with perceived quality (Gabor and Granger, 1966), communicating the high price might actually increase the perceived quality, which is the most important criterion for selecting brands.

3.2.2.4 – Distribution

The associations to distributions are connected to such variables as delivery speed and lead times, reliability, payment, ease-of-ordering and availability (Persson, 2010). For a company, obtaining objects in a reasonable amount of time can be crucial. Not being able to trust the preciseness of the delivery, or having difficulties making the actual order, can prove to be costly. Research by Persson (2010) confirms the importance of distribution in the B2B segment, and identifies it as a contributor to brand equity.

In a study by Mudambi et al. (1997), exploring branding in industrial markets, distribution services was named as key decision criteria, emphasizing the same variables as mentioned by Persson (2010). In particular availability and reliability were highlighted by the participants in the study. This seems logical, as most industrial companies are dependent on reliable production the availability of replacements and/or new products or services whenever they need it.

In addition, the study also underlined the importance of support services – a driver that can be seen as a part of availability, or function as a variable of its own. Support services were mentioned by many of the respondents, and particularly the importance of the ability to provide technical support and troubleshooting in the field. This was cited as important on both an on-going basis and in emergencies.

This suggests that companies in the B2B industry should be aware of how well they perform when it comes to distribution – and also how well they communicate it. A study by van Riel et al. (2005) confirms that the perceived quality of the distribution of a product is positively associated with overall satisfaction of the product. It is not unlikely that this may also be the case for services. The research shows that the perceived quality of the distribution reflects on the company as well as on the product itself, although to a somewhat lower extent, meaning that a poorly distributed product or service will harm the equity of the product of service more than the corporate brand selling it. However, there is still an effect on the corporate brand, implicating that distribution is to be taken seriously on all levels.

3.2.2.5 – Product/service

When communicating the brand, focusing on the benefits of the product or service that the brand offers, is common. The focus might be on tangible assets, such as the soda Urge's *«with carbos» (coca-cola.no)*, or it may be on intangible assets, such as Mercedes' *«The best or nothing»* (worldcarfans.com). It should be kept in mind that tangibles, even though they are patented, are easily copied. Intangibles, on the other hand, such as «quality» and «supremeness» are much harder to reproduce. A study by Bendixen et al. (2004) showed that in a B2B setting, the most important criteria for selection of preferred brand are *quality, reliability* and *performance*, which all obtained a top score on a scale from 1 to 5. One could argue that reliability and performance both fall under the term quality, thus making it an obvious benefit trying to be linked to for B2B companies. For high-tech products and services, focusing on quality as an association, could be even more important, as many high-tech products and services are too complex for the customers to understand. If they believe that the brand always provides quality, they might not have the same need for a deeper understanding of the product as otherwise (Keller, 2008).

Additionally, a study by Biedenbach and Marell (2009) shows that perceived quality correlates with brand loyalty in a B2B setting. Thus, the higher quality an industrial customer perceives the brand to deliver, the more likely the customer is to be loyal to the brand.

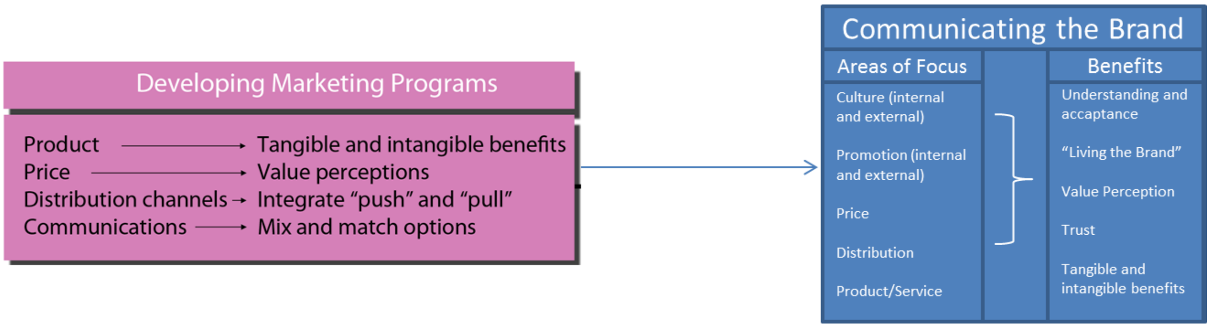

Figure 8: Communicating the Brand

The figure shows how several elements from Keller's 2008 model have been adjusted to fit the B2B setting.

3.2.3 – Creating Associations and Incentives to Buy

3.2.3.1 – Keller's Leverage of Secondary Associations

The third part of the first stage in Keller's model is moving consumers to reach into their secondary associations of the product. All the immediate associations are those that are closer and are more tangible like the location of the company, the channel of distribution and events. The intention is to make the consumer aware of other benefits, which give meaning to the product. In turn this meaning makes the products more memorable. Such benefits can be anything from achieving status or something as simple as identifying with country because of political beliefs. This part of the first stage is different in our model, as we do not consider all the elements in the Keller model to be entirely valid for a B2B setting, and that there are other elements that are more important in a B2B setting. However, we kept both *country of origin* and *sponsorship*, as they both are strategies also commonly used by B2B companies.

3.2.3.2 – Country of Origin

According to Thorbjørnsen (2011) the country of origin is a structure of associations about a geographic area. These associations can create a sense of security as well as a relationship between brands, i.e. because of geographical proximity. As an example of how country of origin can work, Norway is a country with a low number of corruption cases (Transparency International, 2011), and this might reflect favorably on companies located there. It can also work unfavorably, if the country of origin has negative connotations. In addition, the country of origin can also legitimize the product or service the company is selling. A Norwegian yard building ships can take advantage of being from a country with long tradition in the field and positive associations towards the maritime industry.

Laws and regulations are also a vital part of a company's origin, and might be of even more importance in a B2B context, as trade beyond borders comes with certain implications. Closer geographic proximity may eliminate problems with different laws and regulations, but this is not always the case. Establishing foreign offices to be available for clients, is a clever solution to show commitment and eliminate problems that may occur if the company headquarters are far away from clients and the country of origin appears as a problem.

If the company believes that there are benefits for potential clients based on the country of origin, they should try to emphasize this through their communication.

3.2.3.3 – Sponsorship

Sponsorship has its origins in the ancient Greeks where wealthy citizens supported arts and athletics festivals in an effort to improve their civic standing (Thorbjørnsen, 2011). In modern times Coca Cola is attributed to be the pioneer with being the official soft drink of the 1928 Olympic Games (Keller, 2008). The main purpose of sponsorship is aligning the company with events or other benefits that can reflect positively on them. The goodwill aspects distinguish sponsorships from advertising as it is a communication form that profits the society in general, as well as it hides the commercial intent. The degree of goodwill depends on the sponsorship category (Keller, 2008). It is evident that a large portion of sponsorship is B2B related. An example of this is KPMG sponsoring famous golf players like Phil Mickelson. KPMG is primarily an audit company which caters to companies, not private individuals. Furthermore, golf is often viewed as a corporate sport where companies entertain clients and try to build relationships. In our opinion sponsorships are an excellent way of building brand equity as the intentions of selling a product is less visible than in direct advertising. Sponsorships also reach avenues where companies are more receptive to information than traditional advertising; subsequently including sponsorship in the model was obvious (Keller, 2008).

3.2.3.4 – Brand Alliances

Joint marketing or co-branding takes place when two or more brands form an alliance in their marketing strategy present their products or brands together (Simonin and Ruth, 1998). These products or brands can be represented physically, as is the case with Compaq PCs with «*Intel inside*», and Nike shoes with room for a GPS tracker from Apple. It can also be represented symbolically, for instance in adverts, by the association of brand names, logos, or other proprietary assets of the brand. During the 1990s this type of branding experienced an explosive growth. Simonin and Ruth (1998) investigated the spillover effects on consumer brand attitudes after such brand alliances. Among other things, they found that the evaluations have spillover effects on attitudes toward each partner's brand, and that the strength of these effects is moderated by brand familiarity.

3.2.3.5 – Line Extension

A line extension is a form of brand extension, which takes place when a brand is applied «to a new product that targets a new market segment within a product category the parent brand currently serves» (Keller, 2008). This strategy has several advantages. First of all, acceptance for the new product is already facilitated. As opposed to a new and unknown brand, an established brand will already be known to the public, which in turn will reduce the perceived risk of the new product by the customers. The new product can also benefit from the brand image, and the marketing costs will be reduced.

Secondly, a line extension can provide feedback benefits to the parent brand. The brand meaning can be stressed and clarified, the brand image and market coverage can be enhanced, and the brand itself may experience revitalizing and new and enhanced interest and liking (Keller, 2008).

Line Extensions and Brand Alliances as B2B strategies

We have furthermore decided to add strategies and other intangibles that can create associations and incentives to buy products or services from a specific company.

Both line extensions and brand alliances are suitable strategies for companies trying to attract business in a B2B setting. The Keller model has line extensions and brand alliances in the third stage of the model, as possible outcomes after developing the two first stages. As both line extensions and brand alliances can leverage secondary associations from their other service and partnership company, this can be a method to build brand equity, not only a possible outcome. The outcome could create stronger line extensions and brand alliances. This does not exclude the company using them as a method to build brand equity in the early stages.

The advantages that derive from these strategies are just as viable for business as consumers (Keller, 2008). An example of a line extension in a B2B setting could be an audit company expanding into consulting work. Companies expanding services is quite common and it can be beneficial strategically. An example of a brand alliance is a cell phone company entering a business relationship with a company providing cellphone accessories like headphones. With these strategies a company can create immediate awareness of the brand, and simultaneously a sense of security for the company buying the products or services.

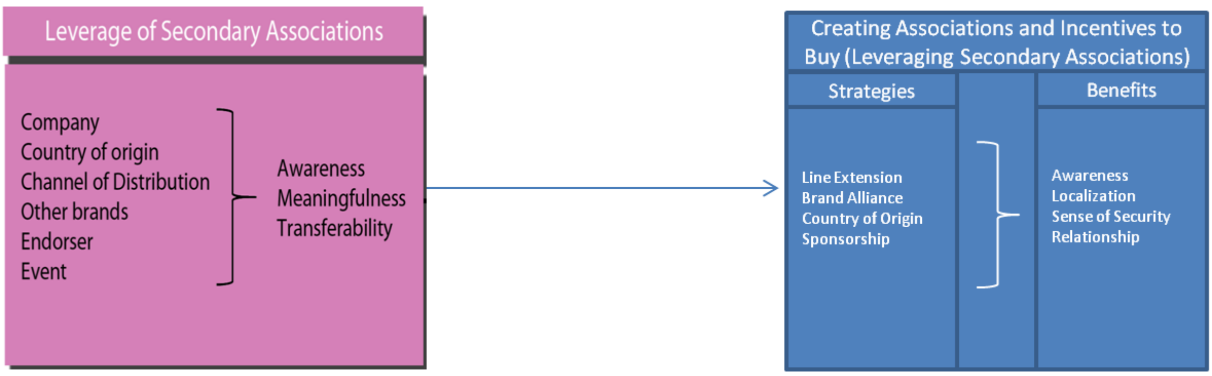

Figure 9: Creating Incentives to Buy from Secondary Associations

Figure 9 shows how several elements from Keller's 2008 model have been adjusted to fit the B2B setting.

3.3 – Consumer Knowledge Effects

The second part of our framework describes the knowledge effects that are caused by the brand building tools and objectives, when applied successfully. The different variables in the two boxes are defined in Chapter 2. The purpose of the second stage is the knowledge effects that are gained by the recipient and how these effects ultimately lead to certain outcomes.

3.3.1 – Brand Image and Brand Awareness

In the Keller model for building Customer-Based Brand Equity, brand awareness and brand associations, seemingly have the same amount of significance. Together, brand associations, also referred to as brand image, create brand equity (Keller, 1993). Following the work of Keller (2008), van Riel et al. (2005) concluded in their research that as B2B marketers invest in various marketing mix components in support of a brand, they create brand awareness and a brand image, which result in brand equity (Davis et al., 2008). This is indicating that Keller's CBBE model, and thus also his model on how to build CBBE, is transferable from a B2C to a B2B setting.

Davis et al. (2008) have taken the research on the relationship between brand image, brand awareness and brand equity in a B2B context a step further. Their study of branding in the logistics services industry first of all proved the existence of brand equity in that particular branch of B2B. However, and more importantly for our thesis, they also provided evidence for differences in perceptions of brand image between logistics providers and their customers – thus in a B2B setting. Their research revealed a significant difference in what respectively business customers and service providers viewed as the most important contributor to brand equity. The service providers considered brand awareness to be the most important contributor to brand equity. In other words, they believed that the more a brand is recalled, recognized, purchased and consumed, the greater the brand's brand equity. The service provider's customers, on the other hand, viewed brand image to be the factor of most relative importance when it comes to contributing to brand equity.

Given that these results are transferable to other B2B settings than logistics service providers, it has important implications for how managers in B2B companies should allocate their resources. Rather than spending large amounts on advertising in order to build brand awareness, efforts may be better spent on building a positive and robust brand image. The money that normally would be spent on an expensive TV commercial might be much better spent on training the sales persons and other employees in direct contact with other businesses, teaching them how to build, preserve and improve their business' brand image.

In our model based on Keller (2008), we have therefore modified the links, using the term brand image instead of brand associations, and making brand image the more important attribute.

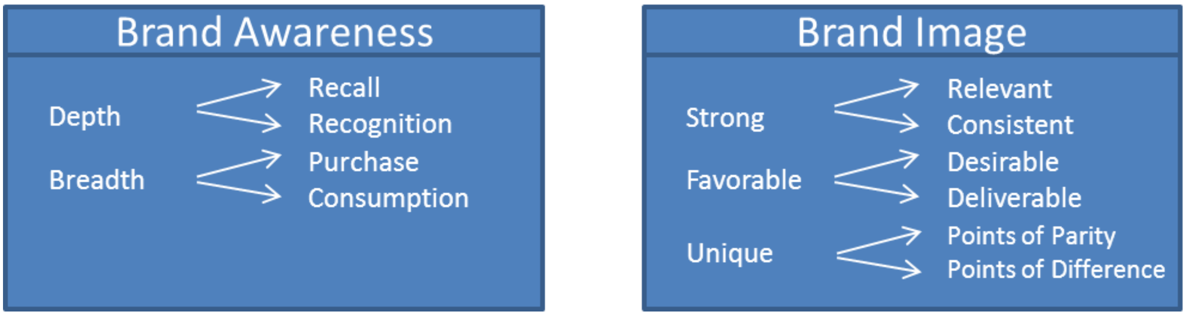

Figure 10: Brand Awareness and Brand Image

3.4 – Expected Outcomes

The last part of our framework describes the different outcomes that can be expected when the two previous steps have been successful.

3.4.1 – Keller's Possible Outcomes

The expected outcomes you may gain from the original model, we expect to gain in a B2B context as well. If the brand equity is built acceptably through the first two stages, there are several outcomes that can transpire.

Greater loyalty towards the company is one of the key aims in building brand equity. Brand loyalty can reduce marketing costs, as existing customers do not need to be persuaded once more that the service is suitable for their needs (Keller, 2008). The brand loyalty also gives a company more time to respond to threats, as the existing customers will give the company more time to adjust and counter new services. Building greater brand equity can also help with facing competition from other brands, i.e. when a crisis occurs.

Strong brand equity contributes to new pricing strategies, as the response can be either more elastic or inelastic, depending if the price is decreased or increased (Keller, 2008). The idea is not to let customer draw on internal frames of reference, prices they remember, and external frames, or what is considered to be normal price in the market. Having strong brand equity, a company can justify demanding a price premium on their service which is one of the ultimate goals of a profit seeking company (Keller, 2008). Achieving a price premium leads to larger margins, which in turns helps gaining greater flexibility and prowess in a competitive market.

Through strong brand equity, greater trade cooperation can be achieved (Keller, 2008). If the brand has a positive image, the sales force and the middlemen are more likely to respond to the demands of the costumers, and actively promote and work even harder for the brand.

One of the most important expected outcomes is increased efficiency in relation to marketing communication. The more efficient marketing communication, the better effects (Keller, 2008). It also leads to reduced costs, and the resources can be allocated to better use in other parts of the company.

Strong brands also have an opportunity to license their name, logo and capitalize on it (Keller, 2008). This is rarer in the B2B context than in B2C, but it is still a viable outcome in certain settings. An example of this is Intel, a company that provides PC manufacturers with processors. The logo has reached household fame, and by this intangible benefit, Intel has created strong brand equity.

As we have touched upon stated in the first stage, strong brand equity can lead to greater brand alliances and brand extensions evaluations (Keller, 2008). If a company achieves this, they have a better opportunity to expand and ensure their existing market.

3.4.2 – Expected Outcomes

Our expected outcomes in the B2B setting are very similar to the possible outcomes Keller lists in his model. We have added two outcomes that we see as potential beneficial outcomes from our model: improvement of sales force and versatility to different cultures.

3.4.2.1 – Versatility to Different Cultures

We have argued that the brand values, both functional and emotional, should be implemented internally in the organization, and then externally, in the communication. Further, we have argued that when entering a market in another culture, their dimensions should be analyzed on beforehand, to see how the brands' own values can adapt. This means evaluating the organizations symbols, heroes, rituals and values, and then possibly trying to change this into something more desired. The same evaluation should be made on the external culture.

This analysis prepares the organization for what they can expect when entering into another culture and cultural clashes may be avoided. Many companies will appreciate that outsiders take their culture into consideration, and might interpret it as a token of respect. In addition, adapting the company's communication of their values to the new culture can also cause the brand to fit in more easily. If the company is accepted into the new culture, a possible outcome is a positive reflection in the company's bottom line.

3.4.4.2 – Improvement of Sales force

By choosing a brand profile, communicating the brand and creating associations and incentive to buy, as described in our model, hopefully the brand equity will increase. This, in turn, can give the employees a strengthened belief in the company they work for, and a sense of pride. This is particularly important for the sales force and their motivation. Trying to sell a product or a brand that you do not have any faith in yourself can be a difficult task, and the seller's conviction might be difficult to hide from potential buyers.

Another element we have added to the model, is training of the sales force, based on the research of Lynch and de Chernatony (2004). The sales force continues to be the most important contributor to B2B sales, and they are often the only link between the corporate seller and the corporate buyer. Naturally they can have a great impact on how the brand they are representing is perceived, and thus create brand equity for the company they are representing.

The most common form of sales force training in the B2B segment is a combination of on-the-job training and being trained in both internal and external courses. The sales training focuses mainly on knowledge of the product, company and market, in addition to sales negotiation techniques (Lynch and de Chernatony, 2004). With successful training the sales force will improve their performance. Not only can this lead to better communication of the brand values, and thus brand equity, but training of sales forces can also turn out to be a profitable investment in form of increased sales (Lynch and de Chernatony 2004).

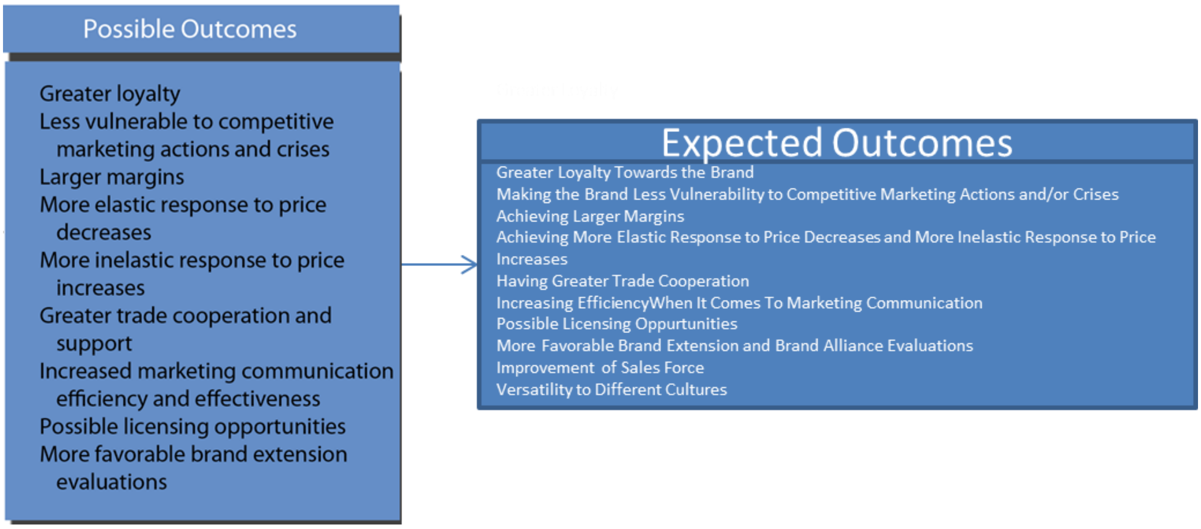

Figure 11: Our Expected Outcomes

Figure 11 shows how several elements from Keller's 2008 model have been adjusted to fit the B2B setting, also when it comes to the outcomes of a successful implementation of the model.

3.5 – The Complete Model

We have denominated our model the B2B Brand Equity Building Model, as the emphasis is solely on placing a company in the best position to compete in the B2B market place. In this chapter we have reviewed of the different stages of the model to describe what the model is trying to achieve. The model is sequential in that the outcomes hinge on the success achieved in the first stage where the brand building tools and the objectives are set and the second stage where corporate knowledge effects manifest themselves. The third and final stage lists the expected outcomes if the model is performed adequately.

Even though several of the outcomes in the final stage of the model are the same as Keller's outcomes in his B2C model, the process of getting there is somewhat different as we have explained throughout this chapter. The model is very specific to the B2B context, which has been our intention.

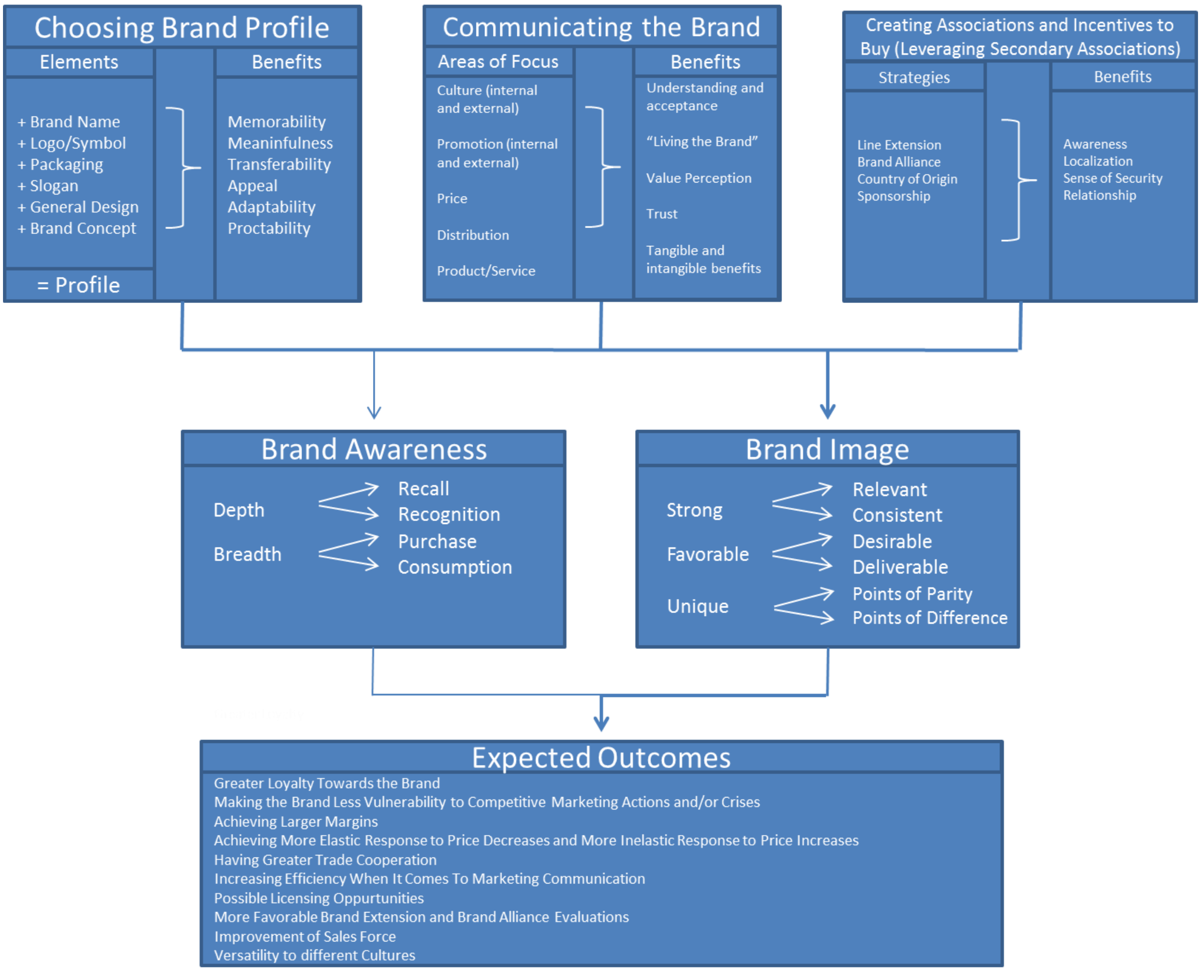

Figure 12: The Fully Proposed Model, the B2B Brand Equity Model

Chapter 4 – The Marketplace

4.0 – Chapter Introduction

As the intention of our thesis is to apply the model we have constructed on a company in the internet streaming business, the need to familiarize with the marketplace is essential. This chapter will focus on the streaming market as a whole, as well as the focus of our thesis, Vimond, as well as its two closest competitors, KIT and Brightcove.

4.1 – Overview of the Streaming Market

Streaming sites like Hulu, CBS, ABC, and others have proven that savvy audiences are turning to their computers for entertainment, and they are making business models to profit from it. The viewer prefers to watch video content on their own terms. This underlines the need for technology providers to offer solutions to make video content available online and on demand. Even though streaming services are more than a decade old, many television companies and similar entities have not optimized on their opportunities in an online environment. This makes the streaming market a field with rapid growth, both in terms of technology and users. One example of a great success in the online market is the streaming of Major League Baseball (MLB) games. According to Dagens Næringsliv (Dagens Næringsliv Morgen, June 2011), MLB has currently more than 1.5 million subscribers. With prices at 160 USD for a season (mlb.tv/subscribe), this is a product that is worth hundred millions of dollar for MLB. Considering that MLB own the rights for the games, the only additional expense they have on this revenue source, is the cost of acquiring and maintaining the technology used to stream the games. It is quite interesting that this source of revenue did not even exist a decade ago.

Netflix is another company which has proven the viability of streaming services. The service that started out as video rental through mail order now provides almost 1 million movies and TV shows through its online platform. As of April 2011, the service had over 23.6 million unique users (seekingalpha.com), making Netflix a mainstream service. With growing subscription numbers every year, Netflix reached all-time revenue highs in 2011 with an income of 1.5 billion USD (paidcontent.org). The popularity of the service has even made it viable for the streaming site to make original programming. In March 2011 Netflix bought the rights to the show «House of Cards» and committed to make 26 episodes estimated to cost between 4-6 million USD per episode (wallstreetjournal.com). The show is to be broadcast exclusively through Netflix on-demand service. This investment has been regarded by industry experts to be the start of watching original programming on-demand, and challenging the TV industry to adapt to users.

There are a number of technology providers in the streaming market, as the barriers for a startup are limited. However, the quality, infrastructure and support the providers put forward vary in quality, and these are all important criteria for what make them successful and viable as a technology provider. As many of the big media companies use the same provider for all their subsidiaries, a small group of companies count for a big share of the market. The two most influential providers in the market are Brightcove and KIT, and both have agreements with several of the most important media groups in the world. In general the market is quite competitive and difficult to overview. The different competitors are not eager to share details about their technology as it is a vital part of their competiveness. At the same time technology is difficult, but not impossible to imitate.

4.2 – The Three Competitors

4.2.1 – Company Information Vimond

Vimond is a subsidiary of TV 2 Norway and provides all-encompassing media online streaming solutions for companies that want to have their video content online. The company is a spin-off of TV 2. What started in 2000 as a side project seeking to distribute TV 2's content online, eventually became both a successful technical solution and a monetizing business solution, carrying the name TV 2 Sumo. Their success resulted in several other media organizations starting to show interest in their concept. In 2011 collaboration with TV 2, ultimately led to the creation of Vimond. It is currently a daughter company owned by TV2 and led by the originators behind TV 2 Sumo. The company is in its infant stages, but has already secured deals with the Nordic Canal+, TV4 Sweden and Finnish MTV3.

4.2.2 – Company Information Competitor Brightcove

Brightcove, formerly known as Vidmark, was founded in 2004 by current CEO Jeremy Allaire and started with their IPO process to be listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange in August 2011. Currently, the company has 150 employees, and is one of the two market leaders, the other being KIT. The streaming solutions which Brightcove provide are quite similar to what Vimond provide and are to our knowledge, state of the art. They have several important clients/partnerships like Reuters, The New York Times Group and Sony BMG, to mention only a few (Capital IQ, 2011).

In Norway they recently signed a contract with Dagbladet to provide several media solutions for their content (Dagens Næringsliv Morgen, September, 2011).

4.2.3 – Company Information Competitor Kingston Interactive Television

Kingston Interactive Television (KIT) is part of the KCOM Group which originates from a telephone provider in Hull, founded in 1902. KIT itself was founded in 1998, and has 770 employees. As its closest competitor Brightcove, KIT is listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange. The technologies they offer are similar to those of both Vimond and Brightcove and we also assume that they are state of the art. The company has offices throughout the world, including Scandinavia, more specifically Stockholm. According to their website they have more than 2300 clients which include The Associated Press, BBC and Google which are big media conglomerates (Capital IQ, 2011).

Chapter 5 – Tailoring the Framework to Vimond's Needs

5.0 – Chapter Introduction

In chapter 3, we developed a framework on how to build brand equity for businesses operating in the B2B segment, and in the previous chapter we described the market place in which Vimond Media Solutions operates. Our model shows how brand equity can be built in a general B2B setting, but it does not take into account the differences that can be present within the different branches of the B2B segment. Where the country of origin might be meaningless to communicate in one branch, it might be the key to success in another branch. Thus, in this chapter we will tailor Keller's positioning framework presented in chapter 2 to fit Vimond's strategy in building brand equity

5.1 – Vimond's Positioning Model – Points of Parity

The POP associations are not unique to Vimond, but shared with other institutions in the same industry (for example, KIT and Brightcove). For Vimond to achieve a point of parity on a particular attribute (adequate technology, being trustworthy, having competitive terms), a sufficient number of corporate customers must believe that Vimond meet the minimum requirements.

Adequate technology is a necessity every streaming provider in the market place need to offer. Corporate clients might and probably will not consider Vimond truly as a capable streaming provider unless it offers a certain level of up to date technology. This is also important for the corporate clients' impression of Vimond as a whole. Being proud of and believing in the product is also important for the employees of the company, as we have previously discussed in this thesis, especially for the sales forces. The technology is the key component, and if it is sufficiently flawed or lacking, Vimond will not be a viable suitor for any company interested in the services they provide. Being both innovative and ensuring that the technology is state of the art, is of the essence as a technology provider, thus we considered adding *adequate technology* as POD. But every player in this market needs to focus on these elements, so this is an aspect every provider is working hard on, and that makes it harder to stand out. This is why we added the term *adequate* to *technology* to indicate that it needs to be at a certain level for Vimond to be able to compete, and also why we eventually decided to classify *technology* as a POP.

A streaming provider also needs to be considered *trustworthy* and serious. A corporate client would hesitate to use Vimond or other similar providers if they do not perceive the company as trustworthy and credible. The employees also need Vimond to be trustworthy and seen as a serious company. To sell the product, the sale force needs to believe that the product will deliver and that any deadline is met. On the other hand, Vimond needs the sale force to be trustworthy as well, and not promise more than they can deliver. The content builders and providers need to be aligned with the sales force to create trustworthiness and a serious image. Considering that this is a market where a company has relatively few clients compared to a traditional B2C context, not breaking the confidence and trust of a client is paramount. The reputation of a company is one of its key assets, and damaging it will effectively make them less competitive. Damaging it severely enough, and the company will lose its competitiveness. As every company needs to be *trustworthy*, this is a POP.

Competitive terms are a necessary condition for competing in any industry. Competitive terms are terms that do not differ too much from the brand's competitors. As a streaming provider you need to be able to offer terms that are at the level of the competitor's terms. If the discrepancy is too big, the clients might choose a competitor and one might lose market shares. Different providers in the streaming industry operate with different revenue models and this can skew the perception of what the corporate customer is paying for the streaming technology and service. Still, this does not discount the fact that potential customers will probably survey potential suitors before deciding from which company to buy the product from, thus disclosing the terms. This is why *competitive terms* are a POP. One thing to note, if the solution Vimond provides fits a client better than what the competitors are able to provide, Vimond can perceivably demand a price premium. This would deem the POP void.

5.2 – Vimond's Positioning Model – Points of Difference

Points of difference are the associations that are found as desirable for the clients, and the company is believed to have the capabilities to deliver on these associations.

As stated on their web page, Vimond is a growing company with a few key customers in the Nordic market already. They are regarded as one of the leading streaming providers in Norway, and we believe that becoming the *Nordic market leader* would be a suitable goal in in the introductory and the elaborating stage. This positioning is vital in an environment where they are not only competing with direct competitors such as Brightcove and KIT, but also with the emergence of potential new vendors that appear from other media companies. For corporate clients, engaging in cooperation with a market leader awakens trust for their own customers, as well as for their own brand, signaling that they are offering the technology from what might be considered the best institution. Working for a market leader will also be an important factor for the employees and potential employees. Success is important because most of us like being associated with winners (Dowling 2001). This is why *Nordic market leader* is a POD. It is important to note that Vimond is only aiming to be leader in the Nordic Market; hence they need to play on advantages that are given with geographically proximity and knowledge of the local culture.

Before, during and after the implementation of the streaming technology it is important for Vimond to receive and process *feedback* from the client to give them the best product possible. Having a dialogue between the provider and the client is important. Vimond offers not only technology, but a customized solution for how to bring content online. In that sense, Vimond is a service provider whose goal is to satisfy its client. Therefore achieving customer satisfaction is of the essence and why *feedback* is so vital. If Vimond can achieve a higher level of satisfaction from an excellent responsiveness to *feedback*, they can achieve a competitive advantage. Focusing on achieving superior feedback ratings could create a reputation which would attract more clients. That is why we consider *feedback* a POD.

5.3 – Vimond's Positioning Model – Points of Inferiority

As well as the POPs and PODS, it would be an advantage for Vimond to choose an association to negate which does not make financial sense or if it simply does not fit the company profile. As Vimond is a relatively small and new company moving from the introduction to the elaboration phase, the focus of their POI should be their awareness of their relatively small size. Several smaller companies in their startup phase have made great success being the underdog, and using the advantage of being smaller and more flexible than bigger companies. Given the small size of Vimond, trying to steal clients from bigger competitors, should not be in the forefront of their strategy. It is quite often costly trying to sway customers from competitors, and in a market that is yet to be exhausted, it does make financial sense to do so. Hence, giving up on clients with existing providers is a POI.

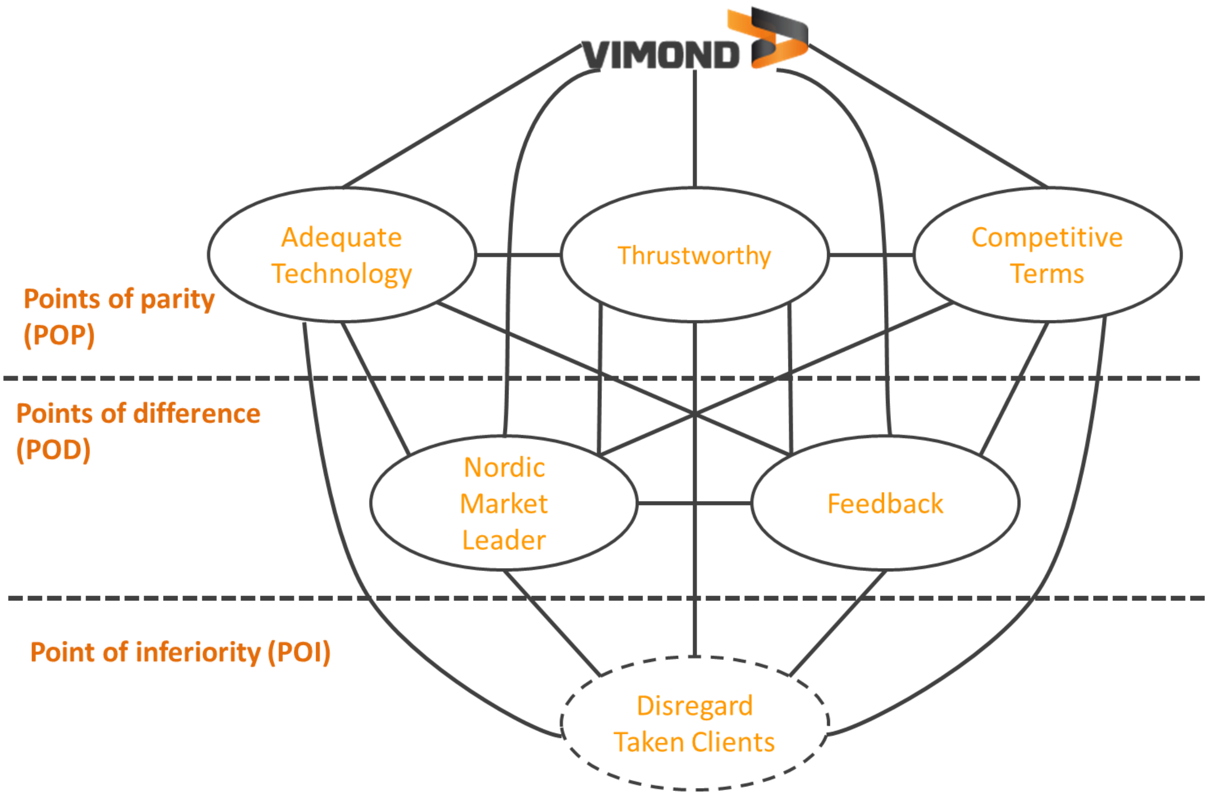

Figure 13: After Supphellen (2010), Our Suggested Positioning of Vimond

Following our argumentation, a suggested positioning for Vimond can be seen in Figure 13.

Chapter 6 – How to Measure B2B Brand Equity

6.0 – Chapter Introduction

In this chapter we aim to create a methodological tool that measures the effectiveness on brand equity built in a B2B setting with the model we proposed in chapter 2. Firstly, all the relevant drivers from our model will be identified and categorized. Secondly, we will elaborate on qualitative research in B2B market research, and suggest an approach. Thirdly, a recommendation as to whom, what and how to sample will be made. Subsequently, we will start elaborating on the actual schema and its content. The main aim of the tool is to measure the desired perception versus the actual internal and external perception. The deviation of the desired and actual perception will then be subject to what necessary measures are needed to fulfill the desired perception.

While other methods measure brand awareness and brand image directly, such as those proposed by Aaker (1991), our method measures the drivers that create brand awareness and brand image. In that way, the idea is that identifying the areas in which the brand performs well, and which areas the brand does not perform well, will be easier. Thus, taking measures in order to address eventual problems can be tailored to a larger extent.

6.1 – Measurable Drivers

There are a number of variables in our model, but not all of them will be measured as independent drivers. In part 6.1 we will discuss the different aspects of the drivers we intend to measure.

6.1.1 – Choosing brand profile

The *profile* as a whole consists of various different elements, such as brand name, logo and slogan. Handling these elements separately will not be expedient, as they are numerous and have little variation. Asking the respondents about each individual element may therefore make them tired and lead to indifference.

When asking about the brand profile, the company should ask questions that give an indication on how cohesive the brand profile is, how appealing it is, how congruent it is compared to the company's vision and goals. A typical question could be «In your opinion, how does Brand X's perceived brand profile match with their stated vision? »

6.1.2 – Communicating the Brand

Culture can be an instrumental part of how a brand is communicated, both *internally* and *externally*. Therefore, when carrying out the interviews, the employees should be asked about both how they experience the communication of the brand internally and externally. Similarly, clients and potential clients should be asked the same, although a client's knowledge of how cultural values are being communicated internally is of course limited.

We have argued that *promotions* of the brand should first be done internally, then externally. When interviewing the respondents, the aim should be to extract the employees' and the clients' experience of how, and how well, the brand has been promoted, both internally and externally. Again, it will be much simpler for the employees than the clients to answer questions regarding internal affairs, but this may not always be the case. This should be evaluated on a case-to-case basis by the interviewer.

The p*rice* a company sets to its product and services is a way of communication on its own. While a low price can indicate inferiority and low value, a high price can indicate high quality, making clients willing to pay a price premium for the product or services of a particular brand. The interviewer should investigate whether or not the respondents are willing to pay such a price premium, and if they believe others are willing to do so. They should also be asked if they feel that the current price level represents the value of the product or service, and why that is.

Communication comes in many different forms, and *distribution* is one them. Quick, safe and reliable deliveries can signal that the company actually represents all of these values. The clients should therefore be asked what they think of the brand's distribution, regarding the speed, frequency, reliability and quality of delivery, as well as the ease-of-ordering, payment solution and lead times.

The interviewer should also make the respondents share their beliefs on the benefits of the *products* or *service*, whether they are tangible or intangible. A goal should be to reveal why the clients buy the product or service, or why they choose not to.

6.1.3 – Creating Associations and Incentives to Buy

Line Extensions and *Brand Alliances* are both strategies to attract business in a B2B setting. The purpose of these strategies is to project secondary associations among potential and existing clients. Having favorable associations is the aim of such strategies. The interviewer should through questioning try to elicit the associations, favorable or unfavorable, that the employees and clients have towards the line extensions and the partnerships the company may have. Some companies have more partnerships than other, and weight of the questioning should be done accordingly. The more extensions and alliances, the more important it is to reveal the effect of these.

A company's *country of origin* can create both favorable and unfavorable associations. While some geographic locations signal quality, others signal inferiority. The interviewer should try to elicit what kind of associations the employees and clients have towards the brand's specific country of origin and location, and whether or not they feel that it is relevant for the product or service. Additionally, geographic proximity can be vital for both employees and clients. Therefore, the interviewer should also how important and relevant the location of the company is to the employees and clients.

Finally, the interviewer should ask about how any *sponsorship* the company may be involved in affects their opinion on company itself, and how they feel about it. Often the degree of goodwill depends on the category of the sponsorship. It is important that the sponsorship is regarded as sincere, and not something that the company does exclusively for profit.

6.2 – Qualitative Research

6.2.1 – In-depth interviews

There are three main types of qualitative research; in-depth interviews, focus groups and creative brainstorms. As both focus groups and creative brainstorms usually are done in groups with up to ten people, it can be difficult to conduct in a B2B setting, especially if the company conducting the research is relatively small with customers spread over a large geographical area. Due to this, and keeping in mind that our study is intended for a small business streaming service provider, our methodological tool is based on the use of in-depth interviews.

In-depth interviews are normally conducted either in person or by telephone, and usually done individually and «one on one», with one interviewer and one respondent. However, this can also be done paired, with two respondents. An advantage with the single-person approach is that the sense of trust and confidentially may be reinforced, and the respondent might be more outspoken. In a B2B setting, on the other hand, a variant with a paired approach might be an advantage in some cases (McNeil, 2005). This applies for situations where the respondents' decision making process at work is joint, making it beneficial to have both views at the same time.

It can also be an advantage to have a paired approach to highlight different views on a problem and initiate a discussion. For instance, a senior executive might have a broader view on an issue than one of his subordinates, while the subordinate has a specific and more detailed knowledge about the issue. The discussion on the issue might prove useful and reveal new insights.

6.2.2 – Interview Techniques

There are a number of interview techniques that can be applied when conducting an interview, and there is a substantial literature on the subject. McNeil (2005), however, has identified two techniques that are particularly effective when conducting qualitative research in a B2B setting. These techniques are *direct questioning* and *projective techniques.*

Direct questioning is by far the most applied approach in B2B research. As the name implies, the question is asked straight out. The respondents in B2B research are often specialists in their field, and very knowledgeable. Time, and the lack of it, is also considered an important factor, and therefore the more specific the question is, the better (McNeil, 2005). The questions in our guideline will mostly have a direct approach.

Another qualitative interview technique that can be useful in B2B settings, are *projective techniques*. These are methods that are used to overcome communication barriers with the respondents, and help them describe meanings and feelings that are difficult to put into words. Without using these techniques the respondents may keep information that they initially are willing to share, but cannot articulate (Supphellen, 2000). For these reasons, projective techniques are also called «enabling» techniques. Another advantage is that these techniques applied in a B2B setting may vitalize an otherwise technical and perhaps somewhat tiresome discussion. This may be the reason for the increased use of such techniques in B2B settings, although it is still not as commonplace as in consumer research (McNeil, 2005).

The three main projective techniques we will use in our schema are personification, hypothetical situations and *person-projective techniques*. When using personification the respondents are asked what kind of animal, car, drink etc. the company would be, if it were such a thing (McNeil, 2005). The answer may reveal underlying associations towards the brand that the respondents were not consciously aware of having.

In hypothetical situations, the respondents are asked how they would react and what would happen if certain situations were to occur (McNeil, 2005). An example of this could be how the respondents company would be affected if the principals business were to cease existing tomorrow.

Person-projective technique is a technique where the respondents are asked to describe associations on behalf of a person or figure, real or imaginative, belonging to the same group as the respondent. This removes the attention from the respondent, who in turn would be more likely to give an objective answer to the question, instead of consciously or unconsciously giving answers that will put him in a brighter light. The respondent might also be more likely to report sensitive associations (Fisher, 1993). A drawback in applying this technique is inaccuracy. It is impossible to know who the respondents think of when they answer (Supphellen, 2000). We believe that this technique may be particularly effective in a B2B setting, where the respondents might have a close relationship to the principal. In such situations, it may be difficult and uncomfortable to give criticism. By presenting the criticism as something that is the opinion of others, this may be avoided.

6.3 – The Qualitative Process

The various stages of qualitative research in a B2B setting is not necessarily very different from that of a B2C setting, although elements such as eligibility, sample sources, pre contact, confirmation and follow-up may be of more significance when dealing with businesses (McNeil, 2005).

First of all, the business and their research objectives need to be discussed. By clarifying what the research need to achieve, why that is, and how it intends to be done, the road ahead will be easier to follow.

Secondly, a research plan should be developed, describing the methodology intended for use. The methodological tool that we are developing outlines the use of qualitative depth interviews, either «one to one» or in pairs.

Thirdly, aspects in regards to the sampling must be considered. The optimal sample size, the amount of time that should be spent on reach respondent and stratification are all issues that need to be addressed. For the methodological tool we are developing the respondents are the principal’s employees and its clients. However, it is still important to clarify several aspects; such as the number of layers or areas within the organization need to be interviewed in order to shed light on all the desired areas, and whether individuals play different roles at several of these layers or areas within their company.

In addition, it may be wise to give the respondents an incentive to take part in the interviews. Incentives vary from money, a bottle of wine, or a dinner at a restaurant to a charitable donation or a prize draw, although the latter is more common in quantitative surveys. The necessity of giving varies from culture to culture, as does the incentive itself. Therefore the incentive given should be chosen in light of the culture in which the interviews take place. In some cultures, receiving some types of gifts may be considered unethical, or even illegal, and it is important to avoid any accusations of corruption. In other cultures or situations a gift can be fully legal and ethical, yet still be inappropriate. Receiving money as compensation for an interview might be seen on as offensive by some, and maybe especially by business managers and others with a «high-end» job, perhaps feeling that the cash offer implies that they need the money. However, this may vary from culture to culture (McNeil, 2005).

When the incentives are in place, the focus should be shifted to the selection of respondents and questions. If there are a lot of potential interview objects to choose from, a screener questionnaire can be designed in order to selects the most relevant ones and have an appropriate selection of respondents. If the business is small and there are not many to choose from, this is of course not necessary.

After the respondents are selected, an interview guide should be developed and refined. It should contain the series of question areas that the company is interested in, but it should also have room for questions that occur during the interview, and allow for detours if the interviewer sees it fitting. It should also be considered what, if any, projective techniques are to be used, as described in 6.2.1 – In-depth Interviews. Those who wish to contribute to the guide should be consulted in order to receive inputs on possible topics that might be beneficial for the company to enlighten. The questions and topics should also be reviewed for quality assurance.

When the interview guide is completed, pre-contact with the respondents should be initiated. Appointments to where and when the interview is to take place should be made, and these appointments should be re-affirmed on the day before the interview. This is an essential part of qualitative research, as the interviewers are highly dependent of the respondents.

After the interviews have been conducted, the material, such as notes and recordings, should be reviewed and transcribed before the analysis can begin. This should be done shortly after the interviews have taken place, to ensure that everything is remembered. After a while, the memories can become more diffuse and imprecise, and the transcription will be significantly more difficult. Depending on what information the principal is looking for, the information should be sorted and analyzed according to the major themes that emerge. The interviewer should note what is emphasized most often and at what frequencies before visualizing the information in charts, diagrams and slides, reported on and communicated to the principal.

6.4 – Methodological Tool Schema

In this part we will present the five different elements of our methodological tool; *desired perception, actual internal perception, actual external perception, deviation* and *necessary measures.* The purpose of this schema is to identify the deviation between a business' desired perception and its actual perception, both internally and externally. Once the deviation is identified, necessary measures needed to eliminate the difference should be produced.

6.4.1 – Desired perception

In our methodological tool, the first information we are interested in, is the principals' desired perception, both internally and externally, of the drivers we describe in-depth in 6.1 – Measurable Drivers. The management should have a clear understanding of how they wish their employees to perceive the company they work for, and also how they want their business clients to perceive them. This desired perception should be shaped in light of the theoretical framework developed and presented in chapter 3.

The principals' desires may vary among different businesses, according to the type of product or service they provide. While a high-end service uses price as an indicator of quality, and thus wants to be perceived as expensive, a low-cost service competes on price, and has the opposite desired perception on that particular driver. An example of this is the high-end service Marquis Jet and the low-budget airliner Ryanair. Marquis Jet, which is a private aviation service, tries to attract the high-end businesses as clients. On the other end of the scale, Ryanair is most attractive to those business clients who try to minimize their expenses. How their business is perceived in the public can be an important factor in what airline they would choose in this case. For a governmental agency it can be detrimental to their reputation if the public had knowledge of frivolous spending, while a CEO of a Fortune 500 company might try to avoid being seen on a Ryanair flight.

Similarly the weighing of the different drivers may also vary accordingly. The individual principal therefore needs to determine what their desired perception is on each of the individual drivers, based on their own line of business. A small, newly started company with only a few employees should of course not have the same emphasis on line extensions as a mature, million-dollar company.

6.4.2 – Actual Internal Perception

In the next stage of the schema, the findings of how the company internally actually is perceived along the different drivers are presented. The in-depth interviews will show how the employees perceive their company and its actions in regards to: profile, culture, promotions, price, distribution, product/service and different strategies. The more respondents, the easier it will be to form an opinion of how the true and actual picture really looks at the moment. However, not all B2B companies are large of size and have a lot of respondents to choose among. Yet, still only a few respondents can give useful insights to the questions sought answers to. The principal will of course hope for as few differences as possible compared to their desired perception.

6.4.3 – Actual External Perception

After the interviews with the employees have been analyzed, the same process should take place with the feedback from the external interviews carried out with the principal's clients. The client's perception of the brand on each of the drivers must be categorized and systematized, clarifying how the brand actually is seen in general by outsiders. As the case often may be with small companies and their lack of numerous internal respondents, it may also be difficult to obtain a large number of external respondents. Not all businesses have the time or resources to lend out their manpower to other businesses on a voluntary basis.

When such argumentation occurs, the principal should argue that giving them access to the client's employees may be in the client's best interest. The more external respondents the principal has, the more accurate the analysis will be, and thus the more probable it is that the principal will gain knowledge of their most relevant and important issues.

Yet, it should be kept in mind that also a small number of respondents may give an important indication as to how the brand is perceived externally.

6.4.4 – Deviation

Deviation between the actual and desired perception is our suggested method of measuring the efficiency in building brand equity. The actual and desired perception has two dimensions: internal and external. Both dimensions are important while building brand equity. It is important that the two dimensions should also reflect each other, one building upon the other to ultimately achieve the desired perception.

If the actual perception deviates significantly from the desired perception internally, it is a sign of lack of cohesiveness between management and employees. The values of the company should work inside-out, as it helps the culture and improves the long term strategies. However, a small company with few employees should have the flexibility and have an excellent opportunity of making the desired perception into the actual perception internally. There are many examples of companies that have achieved success through the internal culture. An example is Skagen Fondene, which is a Norwegian hedge fund. The employees receive important bonus agreements if the company achieves success. For the last ten years, the company has been largely prosperous. This incentive laden way of motivating the employees has made the desired perception of being prosperous easy to believe, as the financial rewards have been beneficial for and greatly appreciated by the employees. The desired perception of prosperity has been transferred through an internal perception to an external perception, which is ultimately what any company building brand equity wants.

In many cases it is harder to achieve the desired perception externally than it is internally, as the external market is much more fragmented and harder to control. This underlines the importance of tracking the difference between the desired and the actual perception to measure the success of building brand equity. However, the desired perception has in some instances not been right for a given company, and when the desired perception has been achieved externally, it has proven detrimental to the brand equity. Therefore it needs to be a congruency between the desired perception and what external forces actually want.

Some deviation from the desired perception might be desirable, as it keeps the company focused on improving and solidifying their brand image. Still, in many instances companies achieves the desired perception and has to work hard to maintain it regardless. External perception is ever changing and is hard to control.

Conducting in-depth interviews is our preferred method of choice of tracking the deviation.

6.4.5 – Necessary Measures

In most cases, the analysis will probably identify a deviation between the desired and actual perceptions, both internally and externally. The more important the discrepancy is the more work is needed to establish equilibrium. What is beneficial, however, is that identifying what and where the deviations are makes it less demanding to address them. If conducted successfully, the analysis will reveal exactly where there are insufficiencies, thus providing the principal with an opportunity to tailor a solution for the problem. Instead of rebuilding their brand completely, the analysis will perhaps reveal that the only measures necessary are a few adjustments in the communication of a product's benefits.

However, a deviation between desired and actual perception does not indicate that measures should be taken into action at all costs, trying to obtain a shift towards the desired perception. There may be cases where the most profitable solution will be simply to adjust the desired perception. This needs to be evaluated in every case. A clothing line e.g. may be seeking to be a high-end brand, being sold in exclusive stores at high prices. If the public perceives the brand as ordinary – a better strategy would be to shift the clothing line for the common man. That is similar to what happened to the Norwegian water brand Voss. At first it was only sold at exclusive and fancy restaurants and clubs, but after a while it became available at regular grocery stores at considerably reduced prices.

6.5 – Ensuring the Quality of the Interview Guide

To ensure the quality and success of the interviews we are conducting, an interview guide is required. In general an interview guide is a plan of how to precede, what questions to ask and in what order to ask them (Dalland, 2002). The basic purpose of the guide is to function as a help for the researcher. Developing an interview guide should be tailored to the subjects and theme of the interviews. The most important difference between different interview guides is the use of exact and detailed questions versus using the theme as a starting point and letting the interview flow from there. We have chosen to use a half structured interview guide (Dalland, 2002), where the interview has a clear structure, but still allows for follow up questions relevant for our objective. There are no answer categories; the respondents are free to customize their answer to whatever extent they want, which makes the interviews less structured. This also allows us to make follow up questions if we find an answer particularly interesting, and we might be able to find themes that might be interesting for our research.

A more structured interview guide also facilitates the analysis of the interviews (Kvale, 1997). According to Dalland (2002) one’s own prerequisites and experiences should be a factor in the development of the interview guide. Structure is crucial for the inexperienced interviewer, to ensure the quality of the research and not to overlook central themes. At the same time the interviews should have the character of a conversation in order to reveal the respondents’ more unconscious opinions. Therefore the preparation is crucial to establish this environment during the interviews.

According to Thagaard (2003) the order of the themes can be decisive for the outcome of the interview. Subsequently the easier questions should be asked first, then following up with more and more complex questions. This should be kept in mind when following up on the questions in the interview guide.

6. 6 – Example of Interview Guide

The following guide is developed for the B2B streaming service provider Vimond, exemplifying how a depth interview can be conducted, focusing on the drivers in our framework.

Introduction

1. Can you please state your title and your main responsibilities at Vimond
2. Can you briefly state your previous work experience?
3. Do you have any training/education in brand management or marketing?
4. Do you have any previous experience in starting up a company?
5. Are you familiar with company's strategy?

Brand Profile

By brand profile, we mean the brand's overall profile that is made up by brand elements such as brand name, logo/symbol, packaging, slogan and general design.

What do you think Vimond's desired brand profile is?

If internal respondent:

What is your perception of Vimond's brand profile?

How do you think Vimond's brand profile is perceived externally?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond's brand profile is perceived internally?

What is your perception of Vimond's brand profile?

Internal Culture

By internal culture, we mean the corporate culture, and the symbols, heroes, rituals and values that exist within it.

What do you think Vimond's desired internal culture looks like?

If internal respondent:

What is your perception of Vimond's internal culture?

How do you think Vimond's internal culture is perceived externally?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond's internal culture is perceived internally?

What is your perception of Vimond's internal culture?

Internal promotions

By internal promotions, we mean how the brand is marketed within the organization.

What do you think Vimond's desired perception of their internal promotions is?

If internal respondent:

What is your perception of Vimond's internal promotions?

How do you think Vimond's internal promotions are perceived externally?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond's internal promotions are perceived internally?

What is your perception of Vimond's internal promotions?

External Culture

By external culture, we mean how the corporation adapts to the symbols, heroes, rituals and values that exist within the different cultures of which the corporation operates.

What do you think Vimond's desired external culture looks like?

If internal respondent:

How do you think Vimond's external culture is perceived externally?

What is your perception of Vimond's external culture?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond's external culture is perceived internally?

What is your perception of Vimond's external culture?

External Promotions

By external promotions, we mean how the brand is marketed outside the organization.

What do you think Vimond's desired perception of their external promotions is?

If internal respondent:

What is your perception of Vimond's external promotions?

How do you think Vimond's external promotions are perceived externally?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond's external promotions are perceived internally?

What is your perception of Vimond's external promotions?

Price

By price, we mean the relative price level of which the company sets for its product or services.

What do you think Vimond's desired perception of their price levels are?

If internal respondent:

What is your perception of Vimond's price levels?

How do you think Vimond's price levels are perceived externally?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond's price levels are perceived internally?

What is your perception of Vimond's price levels?

Distribution

By distribution, we mean how well the company performs on such variables as delivery speed and lead times, reliability, payment, ease-of-ordering and availability.

What do you think Vimond’s desired perception of their distribution is?

If internal respondent:

What is your perception of Vimond’s distribution?

How do you think Vimond’s distribution is perceived externally?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond’s distribution is perceived internally?

What is your perception of Vimond’s distribution?

Product/service

By product or service, we mean the actual products or services that the company offers to their customers.

What do you think Vimond’s desired perception of their products and services are?

If internal respondent:

What is your perception of Vimond’s products and services?

How do you think Vimond’s products and services are perceived externally?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond’s products and services are perceived internally?

What is your perception of Vimond’s products and services?

Line Extension

A line extension is a form of brand extension, which takes place when a brand is applied to a new product that targets a new market segment within a product category the parent brand currently serves.

How do you think Vimond desires to be perceived when it comes to line extensions?

If internal respondent:

How do you perceive Vimond when it comes to line extensions?

How do you think Vimond is perceived externally when it comes to line extensions?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond is perceived internally when it comes to line extensions?

How do you perceive Vimond when it comes to line extensions?

Brand Alliance

A brand alliance takes place when two or more brands form an alliance in their marketing strategy, presenting their products or brands together.

How do you think Vimond desires to be perceived when it comes to brand alliances?

If internal respondent:

How do you perceive Vimond when it comes to brand alliances?

How do you think Vimond is perceived externally when it comes to brand alliances?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond is perceived internally when it comes to brand alliances?

How do you perceive Vimond when it comes to brand alliances?

Country of Origin

Country of origin is a structure of associations about a geographic area. These associations can create a sense of security as well as a relationship between brands i.e. because of geographical proximity.

What do you think Vimond's desired perception of their country of origin is?

If internal respondent:

What is your perception of Vimond's country of origin?

What do you think is perceived as Vimond’s country of origin externally?

If external respondent:

What do you think is perceived as Vimond’s country of origin internally?

What is your perception of Vimond’s country of origin?

Sponsorship

By sponsorship we mean is aligning the company with events or other benefits that can reflect positively on them.

How do you think Vimond desires to be perceived when it comes to sponsorships?

If internal respondent:

How do you perceive Vimond when it comes to sponsorships?

How do you think Vimond is perceived externally when it comes to sponsorships?

If external respondent:

How do you think Vimond is perceived internally when it comes to sponsorships?

How do you perceive Vimond when it comes to sponsorships?

6.7 – Illustration of Methodological Tool Schema

We have presented five activities, here presented as four different steps, seeking to reveal the differences between the desired and actual perception of a company, and identifying measures that can be taken into action in order to minimize the deviation. Figure 14 gives an illustration of this process.

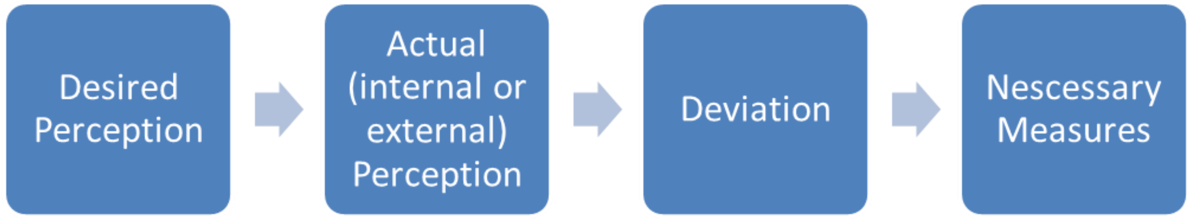

Figure 14: Illustration of Methodological Tool Schema

Chapter 7 – Summary and Further Discussion

Throughout this thesis we established that building brand equity in a B2B context is different from building it in a B2C context. Even though the differences between the two contexts are slight, they are still significant enough to warrant a model specific to this type of marketing. The framework we have presented that is based on Keller's Brand Equity Model (2008) is modified and tailored to a B2B context to contribute to a research field which is not exhausted. The modifications we have made throughout this process are based on theoretical articles, books, newspapers and lectures. Thus, some of the alterations are made on our interpretation of translatability. The validity of our suggestions and interpretations has not been tested and in that respect may be incorrect or imprecise. Partly using Vimond as an illustration for a company in the introduction phase has been helpful to demonstrate how the model would work. Still, the framework should help any B2B company build brand equity in a purposeful way. The model is intended to be logical and easy to understand, and is our answer to the research question «How can brand equity be built in a B2B context? ». The answer is not a definite one, as there are several ways to build brand equity, but it is in or minds the most purposeful way of doing it.

To answer our second research question, «How can brand equity in a B2B context be measured? », we have developed a methodological tool schema, based on our modified brand equity building model. The methodological tool schema's intention is to help reveal the differences between the desired and actual perception of a company, and identify measures that can be taken into action in order to minimize the deviation. We suggest that this can be done by interviewing both internal and external resources concerning the drivers identified in our modified model. The schema also gives an overview of the respondents' answers, and helps systemizing it. To assist the interviewers using the schema, we have created an interview guide, containing all information and questions that should be presented and asked to the interviewees. The methodological tool schema itself is presented in Attachment 1.

Our interview guide and belonging methodological tool schema, including the illustration of it, are based on the modified model, and may therefore be affected with the same imperfections as the modified model itself. Nor has the interview guide or the methodological tool schema been scientifically tested in any way.

It has never been our intention to test the framework or the methodological tool schema as part of the thesis. At the same time, it is written, therefore a brand or a researcher may test the validity of both the framework and the schema. Even though we cannot vouch for the validity of our model, it is designed carefully, seeking to make it applicable in a practical setting.

We have discovered that B2B research field is not anywhere close to be exhausted, and that there are many avenues for further research. At the same time we also discovered that one of the reasons why there is still being conducted so much B2C research is the ever changing field of brand management. We are pleased to have contributed to showing links between B2C and B2B marketing, as well as the nuisances between the two.

Attachments

Respondent:	**Desired Perception**	**Actual Internal Perception**	**Actual External Perception**	**Deviation**	**Necessary Measures**
Brand Profile					
Internal Culture					
Internal promotions					
External Culture					
External Promotions					
Price					
Distribution					
Product/service					
Line Extension					
Brand Alliance					
Country of Origin					
Sponsorship					

Attachment 1: Methodological Tool Schema

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