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Master's Thesis
**CONSUMER COMMUNICATED BRAND EXPERIENCES ON FACEBOOK AS A
REFLECTION OF A CORPORATE BRAND PROMISE CREDIBILITY
OF A RETAIL COMPANY**
Case Kesko

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ABSTRACT

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Consumer communicated brand experiences on Facebook as a reflection of a corporate brand promise credibility of a retail company.

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This study reviews how consumer communicated brand experiences on Facebook reflect retailer's corporate brand promise credibility. Through this, the study arises understanding about the roles of brand promises and brand experiences today in the digital age. All the brands are promises about a unique experience and brand experiences reflect the credibility of those promises. If the brand experience meets the made promise, the brand promise can be seen fulfilled and viewed credible. The theoretical part of the study links the term brand promise strongly to other branding literature and ultimately to brand experience discussion. The empirical part in turn provides in-depth analysis of Kesko's, one of the biggest retailers in Finland, brand promise credibility. Social medias like Facebook enable companies to acquire feedback from consumers. In this study, qualitative web content analysis is utilized to analyze the content provided on Facebook.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Joanna Andonov

Kuluttajien Facebookissa kommunikoimien brändikokemuksien arviointi vähittäismyyntiyhtiön brändilupauksen uskottavuuden mittarina.

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Tämä tutkimus käsittelee kuluttajien Facebookissa kommunikoimien brändikokemuksien arviointia vähittäismyyntiyhtiön brändilupauksen uskottavuuden mittarina. Tämän avulla lisätään ymmärrystä brändilupauksien ja brändikokemuksien rooleista digitaalisella aikakaudella. Kaikki brändit ovat lupauksia uniikeista kokemuksista ja näin brändikokemukset heijastavat uskottavuutta näistä lupauksista. Jos brändikokemus täyttää lupauksen, brändilupaus on täyttynyt ja sen voidaan katsoa olevan uskottava. Tutkimuksen teoreettinen osa linkittää termin brändilupaus vahvasti muuhun brändi kirjallisuuteen ja lopulta keskusteluun brändikokemuksesta. Empiirinen osa puolestaan tarjoaa perusteellisen analyysin yhden Suomen suurimmista vähittäismyyntiyhtiöistä Keskon brändilupauksen uskottavuudesta. Sosiaaliset mediat, kuten Facebook, antavat yrityksille mahdollisuuden hankkia arvokasta palautetta kuluttajilta. Tässä tutkimuksessa on hyödynnetty kvantitatiivista web-sisällön analyysia Facebookin sisällön analysoimiseksi.

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In Helsinki, February 2017

Joanna Andonov

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1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of the thesis is to study consumer communicated brand experiences on Facebook as a reflection of a corporate brand promise credibility of a retail company. However, the ultimate goal is to arise understanding about the roles of brand promises and brand experiences today in the digital age. The theoretical part of the study focuses on combining knowledge about previous discussions related to brand promises and consumer communicated brand experiences online. The empirical part in turn is based on a case study of a leading Finnish retail company Kesko. This introductory chapter explains the background of the study, defines the research gap and research questions, introduces the main concepts, presents shortly the literature and the research methodology and describes the limitations of the study. Lastly in this chapter the structure of the thesis is clarified.

1.1 Background

For a while now we have been living in an experience economy where delivering just the goods or services has no longer been enough (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, 17). Although the experiences as such are not a new phenomenon, the way we see them in business today is, not just as core experience products, like theatre or movie, but also everything around every single product that creates experiences (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008, 1-6). In fact, nowadays almost all consumers not just the millennials are constantly seeking experiences and are a lot more willing to spend money on experiences that enhance their lives, than on material things (Schultz, 2015). This really puts its burden to retailers that are primarily selling material goods, not the typical experience products. Although the main offering in retail is delivering material goods to customers, the created brand equity depends on rich consumer experiences (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). Delighting customers in the physical location is priceless and retailers can no longer be seen as a business-to-client (B2C) warehouses (Ngo, Northey, Duffy, Thao & Tam, 2016). Thus, the big question in retail today is how to enhance that shopping experience.

In Finland like in many other European countries the weak financial situation has affected the consumer behavior and has had dissuasive effect on growth of the retail industry (Tilastokeskus, 2015). This in turn has led to an intense price wars especially between the leading grocery stores, that however settled a bit in 2015 when the three leading groupings (K-group, known as Kesko, S-group and Lidl) acknowledged and expressed the importance of other critical factors like the variety and quality of the products and the physical store appearances (Hs.fi, 2015). All these factors that are known to have an impact to the store image, are also critical factors affecting the consumers purchase experience (Deepa & Chitramani, 2013, 11). Hence many retail companies today are putting more effort to enhance the purchase experience. Consumer and brand experiences are the key in marketing today and many successful companies are transforming to be more brand-lead, putting consumer experience and the brand purposes in the heart of everything that they do (Minek, 2016). Consumers are demanding more and more from the brands and the consumer experiences should be in the heart of every marketing decision. These factors are some examples of the ways the digital era has changed the marketing landscape (Cress, 2016). Whilst the landscape changes all companies must change their actions in order to survive and meet these new demands.

As Kesko conceded that having the lowest prices is not their game to win because it is not driven from the heart of their brand and its purpose, they redirected their focus back to quality and customer orientation. In that process in the end of 2015 Kesko launched their renewed corporate brand and brand promise "K - for shopping to be fun". (Ropponen, 2016). Brand promises that communicate the promise about the unique experience go beyond traditional advertising and can be used as powerful tools to differentiate companies and products (Reed, 2005, 146). With a brand promise companies can inspire people and let them know why they do what they do (Sinek, 2009). After all, "great brands don't tell us what they do, they tell us why they do it" (Sinek, 2008, 21). With the new brand promise Kesko took into consideration the importance of experiences, set it on a tripod and made promise about a welcomed experience to their customers; within the K-group shopping will be fun. This way they also tried to affect the corporate brand image

in consumers' minds. Nonetheless it is not enough to make a concrete promise to affect the image, but actually invaluable to fulfill it and create the promised experience (Waldron, 2009).

As the importance of experiences has grown in marketing, storytelling, that allows companies to inspire, motivate, educate, shape, engage and drive customers (Love 2008, 27), has been on everyone's lips and also a topic of many marketing related studies. However, the discussion of the brand promises that also have a strong relation on the experiences has been surprisingly neglected field of study. Especially the corporate brand promises have been nearly unexplored concept. This paper covers this exact research gap by studying the corporate brand promise credibility. As the brand promise only has an effect on the brand image if it is fulfilled and that is how it has a strong relation to the consumer and brand experience, are those two themes studied together in this paper.

The digital era has changed the means how people are communicating. The current technologies have made it possible for the consumers to share their experiences instantly to a multiple people, but also enabled consumers to communicate more easily with brands (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004, 238). This way the current technologies have also created new platforms to study and analyze those opinions. Analyzing the discussion online is really important because the internet has raised the bargaining power of consumers and it works as a media for consumer communities and consumerism and gives more impact for consumer boycotts and inverse boycotts (Paavola, Ainasoja, Vulli & Rytövuori 2009, 205). Therefore analyzing the discussion on social medias does not only illustrate the credibility of the brand promise but actually gives an image how the customers are trying to influence on each other's opinions.

1.2 Research objectives and questions

The ultimate goal of the thesis is to arise understanding about the roles of brand promises and brand experiences in the digital age. This understanding is added through studying the main objective of the thesis; find out what has been said about Kesko and its sub K-brands on Facebook and analyze how it reflects the

credibility of the corporate brand promise. As the aim is to analyze what the consumers are willingly saying and communicating about their experiences, the study focuses on studying already produced content on Kesko's Facebook sites.

The primary research question that can be derived from the objectives of the study is:

How consumer communicated brand experiences on Facebook reflect on the credibility of Kesko's brand promise?

To be able to understand how credible the made brand promise is, different factors needs to be analyzed and considered. The valence of the discussion provides us insights of whether consumers relate positive associations to Kesko's brands and the stated promise "K –for shopping to be fun". The argumentation of the experiences in turn provide us information of whether arguments reflect deeply on the credibility of the brand promise or not. The brand image and other critical factors affecting brand experiences needs to be analyzed to be able to understand on which factors Kesko fulfills its brand promise. By analyzing the different brand levels, we get crucial information of how the total corporate brand experience is created.

The sub-questions that are used to answer the primary research question thoroughly are following;

What is the valence of the discussion on Kesko's Facebook pages?

How are the brand experiences augmented?

On which elements does the corporate brand promise reflect on how consumers experience the brand?

How do the experiences differ on different brand levels?

1.3 Key definitions

The key concepts of the study are defined to help the reader to keep up with the study. Most of the concepts are defined based on the existing academic literature that are presented later in chapters three and four.

Brand promise

Brand promise describes the reason why a company does what it does (Reed, 2005; Rowley, 2004). Brand promise should be driven from the core of the brand and it can be summarized into a specific statement to communicate the promise about the unique experience (Rowley, 2004; de Chernatony, 2001).

Brand image

The brand image on is the perception of how consumers understand the identity of the brand and how consumers signifies the associations linked to the brand (Smith & Zoo 2011, 39; Ross & Harradine, 2011).

Brand experience

Brand experiences are sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses evoked by brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments (Brakus et al. 2009). The term brand experience spans across consumption experiences, product experiences, service experiences, shopping experiences, aesthetic experiences and customer experiences (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010).

Consumer touchpoints

Consumer touchpoints refer to all interaction points between a company and a consumer (Jenkins 2007; Meyer & Schwager 2007; Dhebar, 2013; Homburg, Jozić & Kuehnl, 2015; Stein & Ramaseshan 2016).

Consumer brand experience communication

In this study with the consumer brand experience communication is referred to computer aided many-to-many communications on Facebook. In other words, to

all the commenting the consumers are making relating their brand experiences on Facebook.

1.4 Literature review

The value of a brand comes from a combination of emotional and rational values that evoke when consumers recognize a promise about a unique and welcomed experience (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004, 239). The ultimate purpose of all brands is to create concrete value, brand equity, that is built by brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty (Aaker 1996, 8-9). When consumers are familiar with the brand and hold some favorable, strong and unique brand associations in memory, consumer-based brand equity is created (Keller, 1993). Thus the power of the brand and its promise lies in the minds of consumers (Leone, Rao, Keller, Luo, McAlister & Srivastava, 2006).

Strong brand identities guide brand associations and thus brand images (Aaker 1996, 25). Brand identities, that come from the brand essence, can be verbally presented in a short statement that summarizes the distinctive essence of the brand (de Chernatony 2001, 204-205). In crowded and competitive markets those brand promises, that go beyond advertising, can be used as powerful tools to differentiate companies and products (Reed, 2005, 146). People have always connected more easily with brands that distinguish themselves by expressing an emotional motivation to support their message, rather than solely relying on facts and figures (Adamson, 2008, 16-17).

Retailer brands can be used as powerful tools to differentiate companies from competitors in consumers' minds but also as important tools for brand extensions (Berg, 2012, 1). Consumer behavior studies have revealed that consumers' positive retail brand perceptions better consumers' behavior towards retailer (Ailawadi & Keller 2004; Pan & Zikhan 2006). Retail brands attract consumers as well as enhance store loyalty which in turn is a core predictor of consumers spending (Macintosh & Lockshin, 1997). In retail, the brands are relevant and take place at multiple levels (Berg, 2012; Burt & Davies, 2010). Depending on if a retailer is diversified or not, customer may have perceptions about the retailer at

the organizational, chain level or customers might perceive a brand at a fairly local store level (Ou, Abratt & Dion, 2006). The associations related to retail brands and especially stores as brands are a lot more complex and dynamic than associations related to product brands (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003). Retail brands usually depend highly on rich consumer experiences to create the wanted brand equity (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

Hence the retailers are in ideal position to create experiences as they are responsible of the total purchase experience from location to post purchase experience (Abril, Gavilanand & Avello, 2009). Store shopping experiences emerge when consumers are in interaction with stores physical surroundings, personnel and customer-related service policies and practices. Store shopping experiences have strong correlation to the patronage decisions, satisfaction with the store visit and purchase intentions (Kevin, Jain & Howard, 1992) and ultimately customer loyalty (Yoon, Hostler, Guo & Guimaraes, 2013). The total purchase experience is in turn effected by location, store image, assortment, offerings, advertising, delivery, customer service and post purchase experience (Abril, Gavilanand & Avello, 2009; Deepa & Chitramani, 2013).

In todays' retailing retailers are not only focusing on traditional commercial attributes but also putting more value to the corporate features in creating richer and more differentiated store identities (Beristain & Zorrilla, 2011). Through corporate communication activities corporate identity is transferred into corporate image and ultimately into corporate reputation (Dowling, 2001). Ultimately the value of the brand comes from brand experience that is affected by brand associations (Lundqvist et al. 2013).

Experiences are defined in various of different ways (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008). Experiences are now referred as the fourth economic offering after commodities, goods and services and seen as distant from services as services are from products (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Experiences are "inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level" (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 99). In marketing literature, experiences have been studied through consumption experience,

product experience, service experience, shopping experience, aesthetic experience and customer experience perspective (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010).

Brand experiences are in turn all the sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses evoked by brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments (Brakus et al., 2009). The concept brand experience spans across consumption experiences, product experiences, service experiences, shopping experiences, aesthetic experiences and customer experiences (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). The strength and the level of brand experiences can vary (Ha & Perks, 2005). Some brand experiences are stronger and more intense than others, some positive and some negative, some brand experiences happened spontaneously and are short-lived whilst others happen more deliberately and last longer, some brand experiences are in turn expected and some unexpected (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999; Zarantonello et al., 2010). Brand experiences occur when consumers are searching, purchasing or consuming brands (Brakus et al., 2009). In today's digital era there are various of digital channels where marketers can influence consumers' experiences in all the purchase stages; before the actual purchase (pre-purchase), during the purchase and after the purchase (post-purchase) (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). The brand experiences can happen directly but also indirectly in the form of advertising, marketing communications, word-of-mouth, news reports, reviews and etcetera (Brakus et al., 2009). The marketing information processing of consumers is strongly affected by past experiences (Berry, Carbone & Haeckel, 2002). Positive brand experiences play a key role in improving brand familiarity and creating brand trust (Ha & Perks, 2005). Customer satisfaction, brand loyalty and brand identity are strongly created by brand experiences (Brakus et al., 2009; Meyer & Schwager, 2007).

The internet has really changed the means of how consumers are engaging with brands and companies (Edelman, 2010). The new technologies have enabled new communication formats and channels like social medias (Straker et al., 2015). Straker et al. (2015) stated that in digital channels, like social medias, customers can voice their concerns, give their personal input to design ideas, inform if there is a problem, or look for help and express and publish both positive and negative

experiences. Social medias are not only usable for consumers but also powerful tools for companies to keep in touch with customers or acquire valuable feedback from their customers (Ungerman & Myslivcová, 2014).

1.5 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework describes the theoretical perspectives of the study. This framework (figure 1.1) presents how the key topics and concepts are related to each other and how they are viewed in this study.

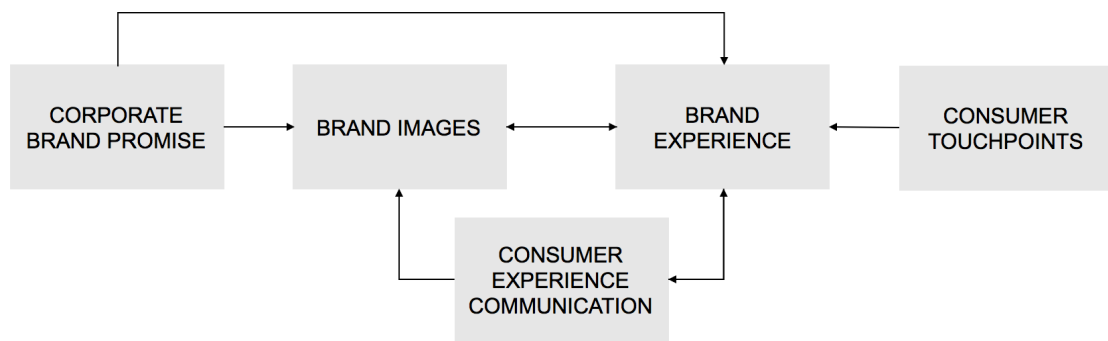


Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework of the thesis

The brand promise should frame the brand image, as it is a tool to communicate the purpose of the brand to all consumers. However, the brand image is not only build by what has been communicated by the brand but also consumers first hand experiences and what others have said about the brand. As presented above, the brand experience is not only affected by the actual interaction with the brand, but primed by the corporate brand promise, the brand images and the communication of other customers. In other words, the previous image effects on what the consumers are expecting from the interaction and this way they are affecting on the feeling of whether the brand promise is unfulfilled, fulfilled or exceeded. The brand experience in turn has a relation on what is communicated to others about the brand but also on the consumer's image about the brand.

1.6 Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative case study where web content analysis is used as a research method. As in qualitative researches typically also in this study the focus is on a quite small amount of cases that are analyzed in-depth. The point of convergence is not on the scholarship of the data but its coverage of conceptualization. (Eskola & Suonranta 2000, 18, 85). Case studies inquiry to investigate a contemporary phenomenon on within its real-life context (Yin, 2003, 83), which is also done in this study. In this study the in-depth analysis of the consumer communication is reflected to the brand promise credibility by relating it to the themes previously identified as factors effecting the purchase experience. The method used in the study, the content analysis, is one form of the observational research methods where the symbolic content of recorded communication is systematically analyzed (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991, 243). The web content analysis extends the traditional elements of the content analysis taking into consideration the dynamic nature of the internet and the various types of information online, like web documents, including themes, features, links and exchanges, which all communicate a meaning (Herring, 2010). More detailed the research methodology is handled in chapter four.

1.7 Delimitations

This study examines consumer communicated brand experiences on Facebook as a reflection of a corporate brand promise credibility of a retail company. However, as a case study this is only limited to concern one company in one market. Thus, the consumer communicated brand experiences on Facebook is limited to concern communication about Kesko in Finnish market.

In the study with the term brand experience is referred to all sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses evoked by brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments as Brakus et al. presented them (2009).

Kesko's own Facebook sites have been chosen as a platform to study the consumer communicated experiences. The consumers commenting on Kesko's

own Facebook sites have been in some interaction with the brand and this way have more likely been influenced by Kesko's branding efforts. The consumer communication on Facebook has been limited to concern the communication on Kesko's own Facebook sites. The sites have been also limited to the chosen nine brand sites based on their correlation to the corporate brand.

1.8 Structure of the study

This study is originated from two main parts; the theoretical and empirical part. The theoretical part includes chapters two and three and the empirical part chapters four and five. In the end of the study discussion and conclusions of the topic are provided.

The first chapter introduces the topic, provides justification for the thesis idea and gives an overall picture of the thesis. The chapter two reviews more in-depth what a brand promise means and what is its role in a retail sector today. The chapter three explains the concept brand experience, specifies the features of many-to-many communication that Facebook enables and presents how communicated brand experiences can be conceptualized. The chapter four provides information about the case company Kesko and the orientation of the empirical research. It also presents carefully the research design and the data collection method.

The fifth chapter discusses the results of the qualitative research. The findings are analyzed and the connections between the findings of the data and the theoretical part are made. Finally, in chapter six the conclusions of the thesis are given and thereafter theoretical contributions as well as managerial implications presented. The study ends by identifying the limitations of the study and suggesting future research directions.

2 THE ROLE OF A CORPORATE BRAND PROMISE IN RETAIL

This chapter reviews more in-depth what a brand promise actually means and what is its role in a retail sector today. Due to the fact that the concept corporate brand promise per se is limitedly studied, the paper utilizes strongly other branding literature to form the overall image. First the role of brand promises in branding are explained to utilize this information further. Then this knowledge is combined with the retail branding literature and ultimately all of this is combined with the knowledge of a corporate brand communication.

2.1 The role of brand promises in branding

In the digital era, the era of information overload, brands can help consumers to reduce their searching costs by saving their time (Rowley, 2004, 131). For companies' brands are inimitable superior value-creating resources and they play a key role in achieving a sustained competitive advantage over rivals (Ponsonby-McCabe & Boyle, 2006). Thus branding has raised its importance and survival of many companies, including retailers, lies within their brand building efforts (Deepa & Chitramani, 2013, 9). What has to be duly noted is that brands are not just names, position statements or marketing messages but actually promises made by companies to their customers (Rowley, 2004, 131). The value of a brand to a consumer is actually a combination of emotional and rational values that comes from recognizing a promise about a unique and welcomed experience (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004, 239). With a concrete brand promise companies can help the consumers to understand that specific value. In today's experience economy customers unquestionably desire experiences and more and more companies are focusing on designing and promoting them (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 97). Branding is a really mosaic subject with a lot of different elements and concepts. The term brand promise can be used as a concept to describe the reason why companies do what they do driven from the core of the brand, that can be summarized into a specific statement to communicate the promise about the unique experience (Reed, 2005; Rowley, 2004; de Chernatony 2001).

2.1.1 The components of a credible brand promise

A common factor for enduringly successful brands is the fact that they all have a clear and fixed core values and purposes, that remain unchanged while business strategies and practices adapt to the changing world (Collins & Porras, 1995, 65). A brand purpose, that is a component of a brand's vision (see figure 2.1), should always be motivating and go beyond just making a profit, it should be concerned with answering the question "How is the world going to be a better place as a consequence of the brand." (de Chernatony 2001, 88-95).

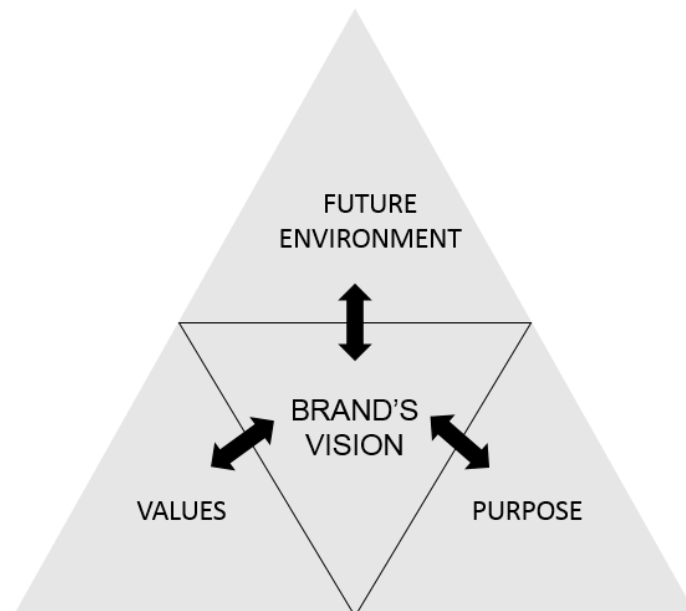


Figure 2.1 The three components of a brand's vision (source: de Chernatony 2001).

Brand purpose describes the reason why a brand should exist (Collins & Porras, 1995, 68) and it starts the process of forming a brand essence and this way building a brand promise. With a concrete brand promise, companies can define why customers should buy the products not only just now but also tomorrow, in other words brand promise is "the big idea" behind the brand (Reed, 2005, 146-148). The figure 2.2 that describes the process of building a credible brand

promise, that extends de Chernatony's (2001, 76) "*The process of building and sustaining brands*", illustrates how the different components in branding are linked to each other and how these components should ultimately lead into forming the brand promise.

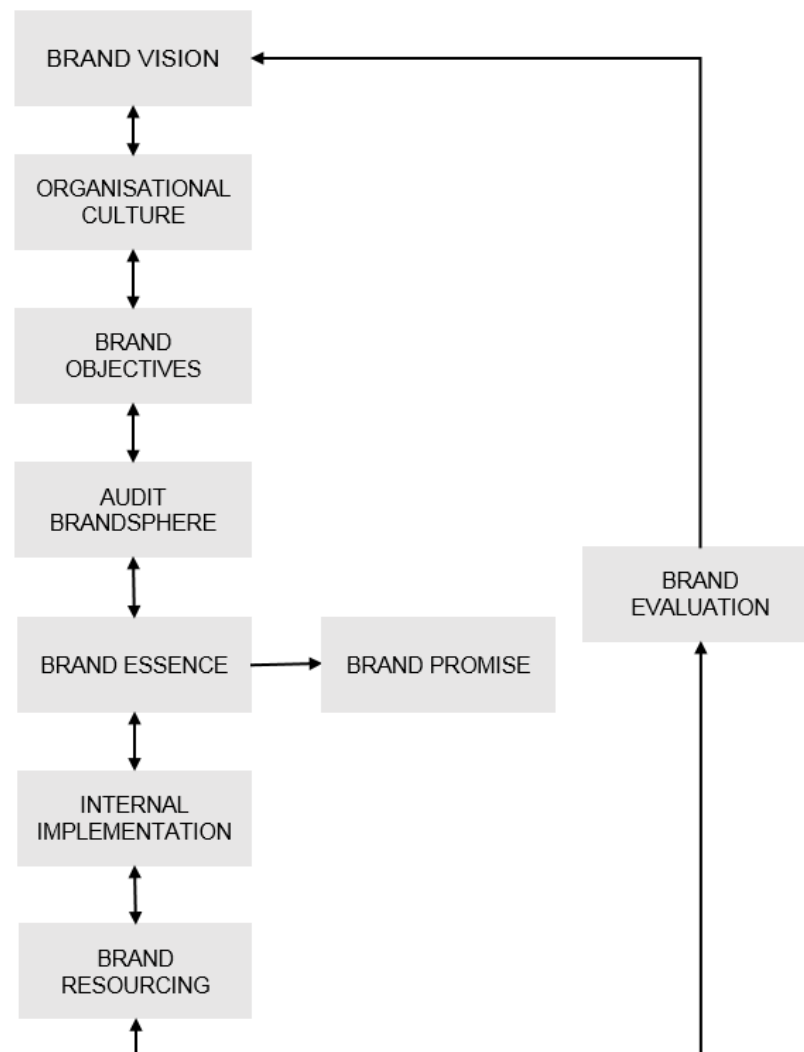


Figure 2.2 The process of building a credible brand promise.

All of the blocks in figure 2.2 are linked to each other and ultimately to a credible brand promise. The process of building and sustaining brands and this way also the process of building a credible brand promise starts with having a clear purpose and vision for the brand (de Chernatony 2001, 88). Organizational culture that is

an important organizational variable shows the pattern of shared values and beliefs and provides performance norms for the employees (Deshpande & Webster, 1989, 4). Ultimately organizational culture can reflect how the brand promise is delivered by the staff (Barett, 1998; de Chernatony 2001, 147). To be able to implement well-conceived strategic plan and to succeed in any business specific, long term goals and operational, measurable and actionable objectives should be set according the vision that is based on a reasonable set of assumptions (Tibergien, 2013). The brand auditing in turn enables reconsidering the original brand vision and brand objectives through providing understanding and insights about what forces will work for and what against the brand (de Chernatony 2001, 199). The brand essence can be viewed from many different perspectives. The brand essence can be seen as the DNA of the brand, the thing that sets out what the brand stands for (Kelly, 1998, 390). Hence the brand essence can be also seen as the spiritual center, the soul of the brand (Upshaw, 1995). Brand essence has also been defined as the characteristics that are the strongest traits of the brand and that are the cause of most number and strengths of the brand (Kapil and Kapoor 2014, 186). However the essence is defined it is important to stay true to it in everything that the brand does (Kelly, 1998, 390). Thus a brand promise needs to be derived from the brand essence to be credible and successful.

The term brand identity can be used as alternative perspective on a brand essence to characterize a brand (de Chernatony 2001, 218). A brand identity triangle, that adapts Gordon's (1999) the hierarchy of communication model, visualizes the different levels that a brand communicates messages about itself (see figure 2.3.). In this model the focus is on communication and that is why it is harvested in this paper.

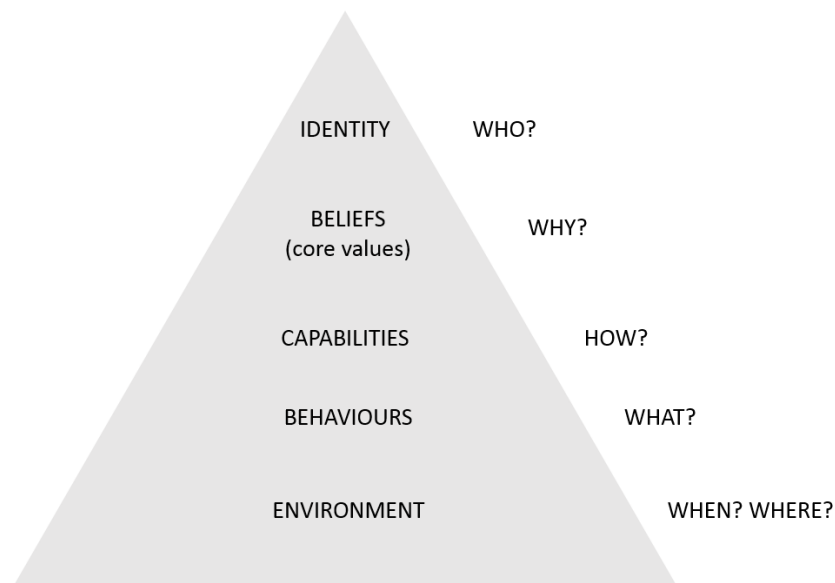


Figure 2.3 Brand identity triangle (source: Jones 2000)

As a brand promise is derived from a brand essence that is ultimately built by brand's purpose and values (beliefs as Jones, 2000, presented them) brand promise should answer the question why a company does what it does. In fact, today it is not enough to communicate what you do, but to inspire people and let them know why you do it (Sinek, 2009). From a meaningful brand promise the reason why a company does what it does should be clearly discovered.

As in *"the process of building and sustaining brands"* also in *"the process of building a credible brand promise"* the components internal implementation, brand resourcing and brand evaluation play a critical part. The internal implementation component is built by mechanic implementation and humanistic internal implementation. The mechanic implementation includes value chain analysis, strategic outsourcing, core competences, critical incident technique and service blueprints. (de Chernatony 2001, 235). By analyzing the value chain activities, companies can define how effectively each activity contributes to the buyers needs (Porter, 1985). With strategic outsourcing the company can in turn identify what activities it should and should not outsource based on the potential of gaining competitive advantage and degree of the vulnerability the organization exposes

itself to by outsourcing the activity (Quinn & Hilmer, 1994). Especially with the service brands, service blueprints become really important as they take into account the critical incidents that can negatively affect the customer experience (Bitner, 1993). The critical incidents are extraordinary events which are perceived or recalled negatively by customers before purchase, during purchase or during consumption (Roos, 2002). The humanistic internal implementation includes the impact on brands from employee values, employee empowerment and relationships (de Chernatony 2001, 235). As in the experience economy customers are more aware of the values of the brand, the shown employee values also raise their importance (Goyer, 1999). The employment empowerment and the relationships in turn affect on those employee values (de Chernatony 2001, 255). In all of the mentioned components the brand promise should be fulfilled, and taken into account when designing them. In addition, all the needed resources should be required to be able to fulfill the made promise. Ultimately the brands health and the promise credibility should be evaluated in order to see their success and to make corrective actions if needed.

2.1.2 Brand promise as a statement

Although there is an assumption that all brands have clearly articulated their purpose, this is not necessarily the case (de Chernatony 2001, 97). The core nature of the brand, the brand essence, should at least be communicated to everyone inside the organization so that all employees could contribute on building the brand and fulfilling its promise. Thus the brand essence, and the promise inside of it can be verbally presented in a short statement that summarizes the distinctive essence of the brand. (de Chernatony 2001, 204-205). This statement, can also be transformed into concrete brand promise that states why customers should buy the products, which can be communicated also outside the organization to all the consumers. Hence to a greater extent, companies and brands are making direct promises to consumers and celebrating the customer experience in the heart of the brand strategy (Reed, 2005, 146). In crowded and competitive markets brand promises, that go beyond advertising, can be used as powerful tools to differentiate companies and products (Reed, 2005, 146). Telling

the consumer the specific reason why the brand exist you also give them a reason why they should choose the brand. As Simon Sinek's (2008, 21) states it "Great brands don't tell us what they do, they tell us why they do it".

2.1.3 The value of a brand promise

As mentioned previously brands are actually promises about unique experiences, that customers have with a product or a service, which can be verbally presented in a specific statement. When those promises are credible and successful, they can be really valuable assets to the company in differentiating company and its products from the competitors. Hence the financial professionals have noted that brands have equity that exceeds their conventional asset value (Hong-bumm, Woo & Jeong, 2003). When consumers are familiar with the brand and hold some favorable, strong and unique brand associations in memory, consumer-based brand equity is created (Keller, 1993).

Consumer-based brand equity has been divided into four dimensions by Aaker (Aaker, 1996; Hong-bumm et al., 2003). All of the dimensions are required to build a brand equity and each of them create value in a variety of different ways (Aaker, 1996, 8-9). The dimensions in Aaker's (1991) model leading up to brand loyalty are;

1. *brand awareness*
2. *brand associations*
3. *perceived quality and*
4. *brand loyalty*

The first dimension of brand equity, brand awareness, refers to a recognition of the brand and the presence of the brand in consumers' minds often referred as "top of mind" (Keller, 1993, 3). Consumers often prefer products that they have previously

seen over the ones new to them, why the brand recall is so important. A brand is said to have a recall when consumers think of the brand when the product class of the brand is mentioned. (Aaker, 1996, 10-16). Brand awareness also affects the formation and strength of brand associations in the brand image and this way leads into the next dimension of consumer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993, 143).

Understanding the difference between brand identity and brand image is essential when talking about the consumer-based brand equity. Brand identity refers to the reality and how the brand looks, including logo, graphics and colors. The brand image on the other hand is the perception of how consumers understand the identity and how consumers signifies the associations linked to the brand. (Smith & Zoo 2011, 39; Ross & Harradine, 2011).

Keller (2009) has separated the second dimension of the brand equity, the brand associations, into two parts: brand performance and brand imagery. Brand performance measures how the brand meets the functional needs of the customers and brand imagery in turn how the brand meets customers' psychological or social needs (Keller 2009, 143). Brand identities which drive positioning, personality and subsequent relations consist of vision and culture as mentioned earlier (de Chernatony, 1999). Strong brand identities guide brand associations and thus brand images (Aaker 1996, 25). The brand images in turn reflect the brand associations in consumers' memory (Keller, 1993). Concrete brand promises are powerful tools when trying to affect the image and associations related to the brand.

Perceived quality, the third dimension of consumer-based brand equity, is the only one among the other brand associations shown to drive financial value. The perceived quality and consumer's perceptions of the brand are strongly related to each other. The strongest trail to measure the impact of brands identity is actually perceived quality as it is at the center what customers are purchasing. (Aaker 1996, 17-19). The consumers are not always rational and can do brand decisions also based on emotions. Consumers perceptions can be built by brand judgements which are the personal opinions and evaluations based on previously mentioned brand performance or imagery or based on brand emotions which reflect the consumers' emotional responses and reactions with respect to the

brand (Keller, 2009). All in all the actual power of the brand and its promise lies in the minds of consumers (Leone, Rao, Keller, Luo, McAlister & Srivastava, 2006).

Brand loyalty is the last dimension of the consumer-based brand equity and thus the ultimate goal of a brand is to form loyalty and this way brand equity that creates monetary value (Keller, 1993). Brand loyalty indicates the degree of commitment that a brand has over its customers (Koetler & Pfoertsch, 2006, 166). The loyalty has a real impact on marketing cost, as it is much less costly to retain customers than attracting new ones. The loyalty of consumers can also create entry barriers for the above-mentioned reason. Loyalty can be enhanced by developing and strengthening the customers' relationship with the brand for instance with loyalty programs. (Aaker 1996, 21-23)

Instead of creating a brand loyalty companies can try to manipulate people which surprisingly often works but has only a short-term effect and gains as it does not breed loyalty (Sinek, 2009). Simon Sinek (2009, 13) states that loyal customers are more valuable as "they'll turn down a better product and a better price to keep doing business with you". He also states that the only way to create real loyalty is to inspire it. People have always connected more easily with brands that distinguish themselves by expressing an emotional motivation to support their message, rather than solely relying on facts and figures (Adamson, 2008, 16-17). The concrete brand promises are powerful tools to inspire people by letting consumers know why a company does what it does or why a specific product or service exists.

The brand image in customers' minds is not only formed by a product or a service and its attributes or values but also by the total experience that they associate with the brand including all sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses induced by the brand-related stimuli (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus & van Riel, 2013; Rowley, 2004). The brand promise can work as a strong tool to evoke certain brand experiences and thus needs to be communicated clearly. Lundqvist et al. (2013) in their study about the impact of storytelling on the consumer brand experience talked about how stories can help consumers to understand the benefits of a brand and add favorable and unique associations to a brand. As brand promises work as similar tool to help consumers to understand the benefits

of a brand, the model of the effect of storytelling on a brand experience by Lundqvist et al. (2013) can be modified to concern brand promises. The effect of a brand promise on brand value is illustrated below in figure 2.4.

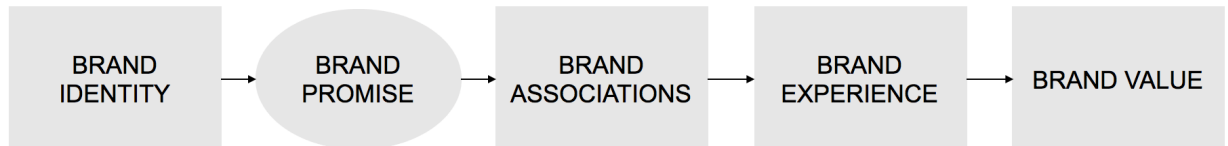


Figure 2.4. The effect of brand promise on brand value

2.2 Retail branding and brand promises

Brands are a strong intangible asset, not only for manufacturing companies but also for retailers (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). The retail branding started to raise its interest among the retail scientist and practitioners in the mid-nineties, when it was already a topic of interest among manufacturing brands (Ailawadi & Keller 2004). Retailer brands as manufacturer brands can be used as powerful tools to differentiate companies from competitors in consumers' minds but also as important tools for brand extensions (Berg, 2012, 1). Today, along with branding, consumers' behavior and thus consumer research has raised its importance in retail (Puccinelli, Goodstein, Grewal, Price, Raghubi & Stewart, 2009). Consumer behavior studies have revealed that consumers' positive retail brand perceptions better consumers' behavior towards retailer (Ailawadi & Keller 2004; Pan & Zikhan 2006). Retail brands attract consumers as well as enhance store loyalty which in turn is a core predictor of consumers spending (Macintosh & Lockshin, 1997). Thus successful retail brands work as a strong generator for the sales volume. Retail brands that increase the loyalty towards a retailer can really enhance retailers' performance (Brown, Dacin, Pratt & Whetten, 2006). Nowadays consumers tend to make psychological assessments of where to spend and where to save their personal currency, why the retail companies need to take up the brand building strategies seriously (Deepa & Chiramani, 2013). Although the focus in retail branding has been limited Ailawadi and Keller (2004, 340) underlined that

“branding and brand management principles can and should be applied to retail brands”.

The old mantra “location, location, location” has long been seen as the key to the success in retail (Grewal, Levy & Kumar, 2009). However the relevance of only the location as a consumers’ store choice has been decreasing and the importance of brands, brand equity and brand loyalty increasing (Bell, Ho & Tang, 1998). Berg (2012) made findings that although both location and brand have strong relations to the brand loyalty, the importance of the brands can be seen nowadays even greater than the accessibility. The competitive situation has a strong relation to the importance of the retailers’ brand (Berg, 2012).

In retail the brands are relevant and take place at multiple levels (Berg, 2012; Burt & Davies, 2010). Depending on if a retailer is diversified or not customer may have perceptions about the retailer at the organizational or chain level and in addition to that customers might perceive a brand at a fairly local at the store level (Ou, Abratt & Dion, 2006). Retailer’s store brands (private labels) can also be seen as a perceptual level for brands in retailing (Martenson, 2007). The levels where customer may have perceptions about the retailer are visualized in a figure 2.5.

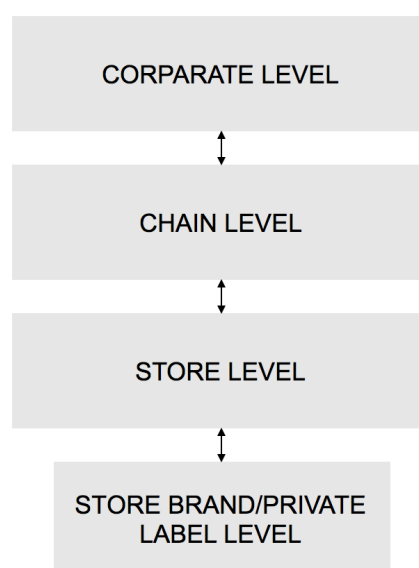


Figure 2.5. The levels where customer may have perceptions about the retailer

As presented above customers might have perceptions about retailer in multiple levels. In addition to previously mentioned levels, the scope can be expanded to include the perceptions of retailers executed formats for instance discounters, supermarkets and hypermarkets that are traditional retail formats in grocery retailing (Levy & Weitz, 2012). Usually the retail formats chosen by a retail corporation transport retailers intended brand meaning (Berg, 2012). The store brands, often referred as private labels, can be viewed as an extension of the brand name of the store itself, especially when including the store name or logo in the brand and represent an extensive and highly complex umbrella branding strategy (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003). Thus retailers are a lot more multi-sensory in nature than product brands (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

Especially when managing the multi-brands system company must formulate its basic strategic brand principles on both brand architecture and brand portfolio (Chailan, 2008). Brand architecture refers to the way in which a brand signs a product, and whether it does so independently of another brand (Douglas, Craig & Nijssen 2001; Rao, Manoj & Dahlhoff 2004). A brand portfolio in turn goes beyond the question of a hierarchical or competitive relationship between one brand with another and examines ways of coexistence and the balance between several brands that are incorporated within a single company in spite of what the brand architecture may be (Chailan, 2008). A brand portfolio allows a company to reach critical mass more easily and rapidly, to have a presence within different distribution circuits and to have shared research costs as well as optimizing a market placement for technological innovations, which can be made available in very different ways by very different brands (Chailan, 2008). In the comprehension and development of companies' competitive advantage brand portfolios management plays a huge part (Sharma, 1999; Slater and Olson, 2001). Successful brand portfolio management necessitates a long-term vision for every brand, where roles and relationships between brands are carefully defined (Keller, 1998). As Dawar (2004, 34) states, "brands are not superstars but members of a team". As retailers are by nature multi-sensory and usually include more than one

brand and perceptual level the brand portfolio management can be seen to play a huge part in retail.

Retailers are not only perceived at multiple levels but the perceptions at one level have also an effect to the others. Reciprocal relations between retail corporations' reputations and individual store images have been early noted already by Atkin (1962) and by Stanley and Sewall (1976). Later the study of Berg (2012) took that matter into account and found evidence about the positive reciprocal relation between retail corporate reputation and retail store equity. The retail store equity in turn was found to be the strongest trail to the brand loyalty (Berg, 2012, 68). Thus corporate reputations and positioning of the stores as strong brands are raising their importance among retailers (Berg, 2012, 27). Corporate reputations, or corporate images, are primarily determined by firms corporate communications, and they refer to the consumer's perspective of companies overall evaluation and include among other factors the corporate responsibility (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007; Walsh & Beatty, 2007). The store equity in turn refers to consumers' perceptions of a strong brand that is determined by local store attributes (Hartman & Spiro, 2005; Yoo, Donthu & Lee, 2000). The topic of reciprocity between the more general corporate-related associations and the more specific store-related association is really important for retailers because the effect needs to be taken into account when allocating resources like promotional investments across corporate and store levels (Berg, 2012, 27). The reciprocal relations need to be taken into account also when designing and promoting brand promises in retail.

The ultimate purpose of all brands, including retailer brands, is to create brand equity that is built by brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty (Aaker 1996, 8-9). Concrete brand promises can be used as strong tools to guide the associations of a brand in consumers' minds. Brand images in turn reflect the brand associations in consumers' memory (Keller, 1993) and thus brand promises can be used to affect retailers' brand images. The associations related to retail brands and especially stores as brands are a lot more complex and dynamic than associations related to product brands (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003). As brand promises are tools to guide perceptions about brands are the factors effecting retailers image critical to understand when talking about retail

brand promises. Retail brands usually depend highly on rich consumer experiences to create the wanted brand equity (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). Delighting customers during the purchase is priceless and retailers can no longer be seen as a B2C warehouses (Ngo, Northey, Duffy, Thao & Tam, 2016). Thus concrete brand promises communicating promises about unique and welcomed experiences can be viewed as an especially interesting topic in retail. Retailers brand images and total purchase experiences are important concepts to understand when talking about brand promises in retail and thus shortly handled next.

2.2.1 Retailers image

Retailers can create their brand images by attaching unique associations to the quality of their services, their product assortment and merchandising pricing and credit policy. Different authors have named slightly different attributes affecting the retailers overall image, for example the variety and quality of products, services, and brands sold; the physical store appearance; the appearance, behavior and service quality of employees; the price levels, depth and frequency of promotions. (Deepa & Chitramani, 2013; Ailawadi & Keller, 2004) Lindquist (1974) and Mazursky and Jacoby (1986) categorized the attributes effecting the retailers overall image into smaller set of location, merchandise, service, and store atmosphere related dimensions. Ailawadi and Keller (2004) utilized this categorization further to create five different dimensions that affect the retailers overall image. In this paper the Ailawadi's and Keller's (2004) categorization including access, in-store atmosphere, price and promotion, cross-category product/service assortment and within-category brand/item assortment is utilized to describe retailers brand image.

Access

The store location was for a long seen as the most important thing in consumers store choice decisions and as the key in success for retailers (Grewal, Levy & Kumar, 2009). However today the location no longer explains the most variance in consumers store choice decisions (Bell et al. 1998). Although the importance of

location has diminished it can be still seen as an important dimension affecting the retailer image (Berg, 2012; Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). The location plays also a key role in getting a substantial share of wallet from fill-in trips and small basket shoppers (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

In-store atmosphere

Baker, Parsuraman, Grewal, and Voss (2002) categorized the elements of in-store atmosphere into physical features; design, lighting, and layout, ambient features; music and smell, and social features; type of clientele, employee availability and friendliness. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) in turn divided the store atmosphere into three dimensions; pleasantness, arousal, and dominance. All the mentioned factors and dimensions can influence on consumers' perceptions of a store's atmosphere and whether they like to visit a store, how much time they want to spend in it, and ultimately how much money they spend in there. Nice in-store atmosphere provides consumers a substantial hedonic utility and actually encourages them to visit more often, stay longer and ultimately buy more. (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

Price and promotion

Price always represents the monetary expenditure that the consumer must transact in order to make a purchase. Ailawadi and Keller (2004) highlighted three areas from the pricing literature affecting consumers' image and choice of retailers; store price perceptions, retailer pricing format and price promotion induced store switching. Store price perceptions are not always influenced only by factors like variance in prices over time, the frequency and depth of promotions, and retailers pricing format, but also by non-price related cues like service offerings and quality levels as Brown presented already in 1969 in his paper about price image versus price reality. Retailers pricing formats are typically divided between Every Day Low Price (EDLP) and High-Low Promotional Pricing (HILO) that can also be seen to have a strong relation to consumers' store choice and shopping behavior. Bell et al. (1998) have shown that in HILO the average prices are higher and the average purchase quantities lower than in EDLP where the shopping frequency in turn is lower than in HILO stores. Large basket shoppers

tend to prefer EDLP shops and small basket shoppers HILO shops. Consumers typically develop favorable price image to retailers who offer frequent discounts on a large number of products over the ones who offer steeper discounts less frequently. The promotions seem to have higher impact in a pleasant atmosphere, where customers tend to spend more time. (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

Cross-category product/service assortment and within-category brand/item assortment

The breadth of different products and services a retailer is able to provide to a consumer on one-stop significantly influences the retailers' image (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). Among today's time-constrained consumers the one-stop shopping convenience enabled by a broad product assortment increases its value (Messinger & Narasimhan, 1997). Although it is risky to extend too far too soon, staying too tightly with a specific assortment and image may limit the retailer's range of experimentation (Danneels 2003). Also the perceptions of the depth of assortment within a product category, that enable customers to feel like they have more flexibility in their choices, are an important dimension of store image and a key driver of store choice (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

According to Ailawadi and Keller (2004) perceptions of access, in-store atmosphere, price and promotion, cross-category product/service assortment and within-category brand/item assortment that strongly affect the retailer image can help to develop strong and unique retail brand associations in the minds of consumers. They can also help to justify the price premium, because the loyal customers feel that they gain more from retailer patronage. The relative importance of the different image dimensions may vary in different retail formats, customer segments or purchase occasions for the same consumer. Different dimensions provide a great opportunity for retailers to differentiate themselves from the others. (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

2.2.2 Total purchase experience

Ghos and McLafferty (1978) have stated that the value of shopping in a particular store for consumer comes partly from price and partly from the quality of the

shopping experience. Shopping experiences are strongly related to the retailer's store images and they are extremely important in forming value perceptions of a retail store. Perceptions of shopping experiences at a store can affect the price and value perceptions that are also affecting the total retailer brand image. Kevin, Jain and Howard (1992) have stated that shopping experiences differ from consumer images by excluding the merchandise price and quality considerations. Store shopping experiences emerge when consumers are in interaction with stores physical surroundings, personnel and customer-related service policies and practices. Store shopping experiences have strong correlation to the patronage decisions, satisfaction with the store visit and purchase intentions. (Kevin, Jain & Howard, 1992). Along with the shift to the digital era the interaction with stores physical surrounding have changed its forms and the shopping experiences are happening also online. Yoon, Hostler, Guo and Guimaraes (2013) have stated that online shopping experiences, as other shopping experiences, have a strong correlation to customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The total purchase experience is effected by location, store image, assortment, offerings, advertising, delivery, customer service and post purchase experience (Abril, Gavilanand & Avello, 2009; Deepa & Chitramani, 2013). Per Abril, Gavilanand and Avello (2009) the retailers are in ideal position to create experiences as they are responsible of the total purchase experience from location to post purchase experience.

2.3 Retailer's corporate brand promise communication and its value

Corporate communication is the multitude of ways of expressing corporate mission, vision and philosophy (Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007, 421). Through corporate communication activities corporate identity is transferred into corporate image and ultimately into corporate reputation (Dowling, 2001). In todays' retailing retailers are not only focusing on traditional commercial attributes but also putting more value to the corporate features in creating richer and more differentiated store identities (Beristain & Zorrilla, 2011). Clearly communicated corporate brand promises can be seen as tools to transfer the corporate identity into corporate image and put more value to the corporate features in all of the retailer's brand levels. Todays' advanced information technology has made it easier for

corporations to express all the elements of a brand (Topalian, 2003) including a promise about a specific experience.

de Chernatony (2002) have stated that corporate branding has raised its importance and organizations have noticed the huge role that the staff plays in creating brand value. The new focus on marketing is not just how to define an externally-centered promise but to orchestrate the staff to deliver the promise (Barrett, 1998, 105). When consumers are familiar with the brand and hold some favorable, strong and unique brand associations in memory, a superior value is created (Keller, 1993). Thus the power of the brand and its promise lies in the minds of consumers (Leone, Rao, Keller, Luo, McAlister & Srivastava, 2006). Ultimately the value of the brand comes from brand experience that is affected by brand associations (Lundqvist et al. 2013). The brand promise in turn can be seen as a tool to affect those associations, but valuable only if clearly communicated to all consumers.

3 CONSUMER COMMUNICATED BRAND EXPERIENCES ON FACEBOOK

This chapter explains the concept brand experience, specifies the features of many-to-many communication that Facebook enables and presents how communicated brand experiences can be conceptualized. First the chapter presents the beginnings of the academic research on experiences and describes the concept of experience and its categorization. Next the concept brand experience is presented more in-depth also providing understanding about the consumer touchpoints and the effects of brand experience on other brand constructs to justify the importance of the phenomenon. After this the features of many-to-many communication are shortly explained and lastly the ways to conceptualize communicated experiences are presented.

3.1 Understanding experiences

Experiences are defined in various of different ways. Some of them affiliate experiences to the past knowledge and accumulated experiences over time and some to ongoing perceptions, feelings and direct observations. Thus experiences are really manifold and they can be seen to include many different levels. (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008). The concept experience is utilized in multiple different scholars including in the business and especially in the marketing vocabulary. (Schmitt, 2010). Experiences that are now referred as the fourth economic offering after commodities, goods and services were first in business only connected to the “entertainment” industry and lumped up with services but now seen as distant from services as services are from products (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Pine & Gilmore (1998,99) who started the discussion about the shift to the experience economy described experiences as “inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level”. This definition of experiences is extremely wide and though presented in business literature can be utilized in many different scholars. Schmitt (2010) in turn in his paper about experience marketing has described an experience as an integration of perceptions, feelings and thoughts that consumers have when interacting with products and brands in the marketplace or engage in

consumption activities or the memory of such experiences. When talking about branding Schmitt's definition, although still is rather broad, can be viewed more descriptive.

Depending on the context experiences are defined and categorized in infinite amount of different ways. In consumer and marketing research the experiences have been a special field of interest as they occur when consumers are searching, shopping, receiving or consuming products (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009). Holbrook & Hirschman (1982) talked about the portion of the consumption experience, Hoch (2002) about product experience and its seductive nature and O'Cass & Grace (2004) in turn about the importance of shopping and service experiences. In marketing literature, in addition to the previously mentioned consumption experiences, product experiences, service experiences and shopping experiences the concept of experience has also been studied from aesthetic experience and customer experience perspective (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010).

The concept consumer experience has been extensively studied in consumer and marketing research regarding to experiences. By different authors the customer experience has gotten slightly different definitions but actually many of them are complementary, or add to the previous one. LaSalle and Britton (2003), Shaw and Ivens (2005) and Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007) have stated that the customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction. According to those authors customer experiences are strictly personal and imply customers' involvement at rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual levels (Schmitt, 2010; LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Shaw & Ivens, 2005; Gentile et al. 2007). Meyer and Schwager (2007) have defined customer experience as an internal or subjective response that a customer has in any direct or indirect contact with a company. The direct contact is usually initiated by consumer and occurs in the course of purchase, use and service whereas the indirect contact involves unplanned encounters with representation of company's products, services or brands and takes the form of word-of-mouth recommendations or criticism, advertising, news reports and so on (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros and Schlesinger (2009) add to that discussion

that customer experience construct is holistic by nature and encompasses the total experience including the search, purchase, consumption and after-sales phases and may involve in multiple retail channels.

Only recently the concept of brand experience, that covers all previously mentioned contexts, has been presented (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). The term brand experience can be seen similar with the term customer experience used in the same field of study; experiential marketing. Although in some studies the concepts customer experience and brand experience has been used interchangeably, the concept brand experience can be seen to have slightly different perspective and spanning across various previously used contexts (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2010). Brakus et al. (2009, 52) define brand experience as “sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments”. The conceptualization of brand experience by Brakus et al. (2009) is derived from Pine & Gilmore’s (1998) “four realms of an experience” and Schmitt’s (1999) “strategic experiential modules”, which are fundamental to be able to understand brand experience and thus are shortly presented next.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) categorized experiences into four realms depending where they fall along a spectrum of two dimensions; customer participation and connection spectrum. The customer participation describes the degree of how much the customer takes part in creating the performance or event that yields the experience (active-passive participation). The connection spectrum dimension in turn describes the connection that unites customers with the event or performance (immersion-absorption). This spectrum forms the four realms that are entertainment, education, escapist and esthetic. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998) in entertainment type of experiences, such as watching TV or theatre play, customers tend to participate passively and their connection to that specific event is more absorptive than immersive. Educational experiences, like language lessons, tend to involve customers actively and also be rather absorptive. Escapist experiences can in turn be either educational or entertaining, but these experiences have greater customer immersion than entertainment or educational

experiences and require active customer participation. Acting in a play can be seen as an example of the escapist experiences. The final realm of experiences presented by Pine and Gilmore (1998) is esthetic experience which is immersive and where customer does not actively participate. A gallery visit can be seen as a one example of esthetic experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1998) have stated that the richest experiences include aspects of all the realms and form “sweet spot” for the experiences. (Pine & Gilmore, 1998)

Schmitt (1999) in turn categorized experiences in five different groups by presenting framework “strategic experiential modules”. The framework describes different type of experiences companies are able to create to their customers through their marketing activities: sensory experiences (SENSE), affective experiences (FEEL), creative cognitive experiences (THINK), physical experiences, behaviors and lifestyles (ACT) and social identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture (RELATE). Thus marketers can seek to create experiences by utilizing human senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell (SENSE). Experiences can also be created through appealing to consumers’ inner feelings and emotions to create affective experiences that vary from mildly positive moods linked to a brand to strong emotions of joy and pride (FEEL). Another way to create experiences is to influence consumer intellectual ways by providing problem solving experiences that engage consumers creatively and affect their cognitive aspects (THINK). This can be done by stimulating consumers convergent and divergent thinking. In addition to these experiences can be created by showing the customer alternative ways of doing things, giving options for lifestyles and interactions (ACT) or by relating the individual to a broader social system (RELATE). According to Schmitt (1999) the experiences that possess simultaneously all of the above mentioned qualities can be viewed to effect consumers the most. (Schmitt, 1999)

As presented above experiences are conceptualized and defined in multiple different ways in the business literature. However, all of the definitions include similar dimensions, modules or concepts which number varies depending on the definition. This study focuses on the overall experience related to brand and thus the term brand experience is utilized in this study and further explained.

3.2 Brand experience

Brand experiences are sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses evoked by brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments (Brakus et al. 2009). According to Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) the concept brand experience spans across consumption experiences, product experiences, service experiences, shopping experiences, aesthetic experiences and customer experiences. The figure 3.1. visualizes the contexts that the concept brand experience seals in.

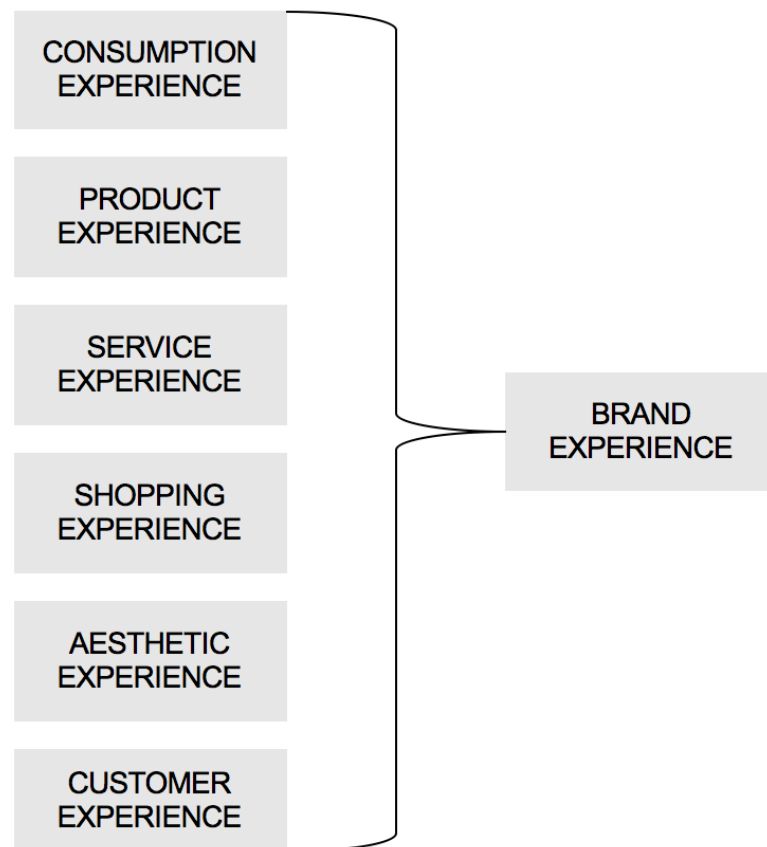


Figure 3.1. The contexts the concept brand experience includes.

Keller (1993) emphasized that brand experiences are distinct from brand associations and brand images, although can strongly affect each other. Brakus et al. (2009) constructed clear dimensions for brand experience and a brand

experience scale to measure the strength in which brand evokes experiences on each dimension. The four dimensions of brand experience presented by authors, sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral, are driven from Schmitt's (1999) strategic experiential modules, but do not view them as strategic devices but as internal and behavioral outcomes.

The strength and the level of brand experiences can vary (Ha & Perks, 2005). Some brand experiences are stronger and more intense than others, some positive and some negative, some brand experiences happened spontaneously and are short-lived whilst others happen more deliberately and last longer, some brand experiences are in turn expected and some unexpected (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999; Zarantonello et al., 2010). Brakus et al. (2009) remarked that brands that consumers are highly involved with are not necessarily brands that evoke the strongest experiences. Brand experience does not either necessarily require consumptions as it can happen also in indirect contact with the brand (Brakus et al., 2009).

Brand experiences occur when consumers are searching, purchasing or consuming brands (Brakus et al., 2009). Schmitt and Zarantonello (2013) pointed out that experiences created when searching, shopping or consuming brands can take place either offline or online. In today's digital era there are various of digital channels where marketers can influence consumers' experiences in all of the purchase stages before the actual purchase (pre-purchase), during the purchase and after the purchase (post-purchase) (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). The brand experiences can happen directly but also indirectly in the form of advertising, marketing communications, word-of-mouth, news reports, reviews and etcetera (Brakus et al., 2009). All of the above mentioned encounters with a brand can be called customer touch points which in this chapter are handled next.

3.2.1 Customer touchpoints

Touchpoints refer to any interaction between a company and a consumer (Jenkins 2007; Meyer & Schwager 2007; Dhebar, 2013; Homburg, Jozić & Kuehnl, 2015; Stein & Ramaseshan 2016). Touchpoints have various of slightly different

definitions and there are many synonyms to describe the interaction between a company and a consumer. Khan and Rahman (2015) have defined interactions between company and a consumer as brand contacts and Payne, Storbacka, Frow and Knox (2009) in turn as encounters. According to Jenkins (2007) also the terms moments of truth, media, service point, service encounter, interaction, and customer experiences have been used as synonyms for touchpoints. Dhebar (2013, 200) defines touchpoints as “points of human, product, service, communication, spatial, and electronic interaction collectively constituting the interface between an enterprise and its customers over the course of customers’ experience cycles”. Thus the customer touchpoints comprise the total journey a customer takes when receiving or looking information about a product or when purchasing a product (Stein & Ramaseshan 2016). The total brand experience is created through all the different touchpoints (Meyer & Schwager, 2007).

As previously mentioned the touchpoints can be linked to the company directly or indirectly (Brakus et al., 2009) and they can occur either online or offline (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). Straker, Wrigley and Rosemann (2015) presented the typologies of digital touchpoints; functional, social, community, and corporate, and provided inception for comprehensive theory of digital channels. Functional touchpoints are one way online communications from the company to a consumer, like emails, websites, internet search or advertisements that serve as initial triggers. Social touch points are extremely interactive and enable communications real-time, they are managed by an administrator that is a representative of the company and has a power to delete unfavorable messages and block users. Community touchpoint are in turn run by a group of user and they serve as a platform for recreational and social activities. Corporate touchpoints are one-way communication, either from company to customer, or vice versa. The purpose of these touchpoints is to gain customer feedback, offer support and information, promote, revenue and by loyalty programs support the commitment to the company. Digital feedback forms and advertisements can be seen to belong to corporate touchpoint typology. (Straker et al. 2015)

Stein and Ramaseshan (2016) in turn identified different elements of customer experiences at different touchpoints. The authors categorized those into

atmospheric, technological, communicative, process, employee–customer interaction, customer–customer interaction and product interaction elements. Atmospheric elements are defined as the physical characteristics and surrounding customers observe when interacting with any part of the retailer. This aspect exists both in physical and in digital settings. Technological elements are crucial in some touchpoints and actually might be the core components of those. The communicative elements include promotional and informative messages and are formed from the one-way communication from the company to a consumer. Process elements include the actions and steps customers are required to take in order to achieve particular outcome with the company. Employee–customer interaction elements include all the direct and indirect interactions customers have with employees when interacting with any part of the company for example face-to-face encounters, emails, phone discussions. Customer–customer interaction elements the direct and indirect interactions customers have with other customers when interacting with any part of the retailer like reviews and word-of-mouth. The product-interaction elements in turn include both direct and indirect interactions customers have with the core tangible or intangible product offered by the company, and takes place both off- and online. According to Stein and Ramaseshan (2016) not all the elements emerge in every touchpoint, but different touchpoints comprise from different above mentioned elements. (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016) Further the brand experience touchpoints can be broken down into brand-related stimuli, like colors, shapes, typefaces, designs, slogans, mascots, brand characters (Brakus et al. 2009). In this study the term consumer touch point is referred to include all the above-mentioned interactions and thus Dhebar's (2013) definition used to define the concept.

3.2.2 The effect of brand experience on other brand constructs

The marketing information processing of consumers is strongly affected by past experiences (Berry, Carbone & Haeckel, 2002). Thus brand experiences have also an effect to other brand constructs like brand familiarity, brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand loyalty and brand attitudes to name few. Positive brand experiences play a key role in improving brand familiarity and creating brand trust

(Ha & Perks, 2005). Customer satisfaction and brand loyalty are also along with brand identity strongly created by brand experiences (Brakus et al. 2009; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Actually to be able to create loyal customers companies must put efforts on the affective dimension of their communications and to the whole brand experience to create those emotional relationships with customers (Iglesias, Singh & Batista-foguet, 2011). Ultimately brand experiences have correlation to the brand awareness and brand image that are critical factors in forming a brand equity (Cleff, Lin & Walters, 2014).

Zarantonello & Schmitt (2010) studied the correlations between brand attitudes and purchase intention by identified different types of consumers by utilizing the brand experience scale of Brakus et al. (2009). The authors profiled five type of customers with different experiential appeals. The extremes of the typology are, holistic consumers, who seem to be interested in all aspects of experience and utilitarian consumers, who do not attach much importance to brand experience. The authors also identified hybrid consumers; hedonistic, action-oriented and innerdirected consumers, having tie to some specific type of experiences. Hedonistic consumers seemed to raise attention to experiences evoked by sensorial gratification and emotions. The action-oriented consumers focused on experiences created by actions and behaviors. And the innerdirected consumers in turn focus on internal processes such as sensations, emotions, and thoughts.

Cleff et al. (2014) utilized Schmitt's (1999) definitions of five experiential modules (SENSE, ACT, FEEL, RELATE and THINK) when studying the impact of brand experience on brand equity and its sub factors brand awareness and brand image. The authors presented that SENSE and ACT experiences had effects on brand equity in its entirety ie. on all levels of brand awareness, constructed by brand recall and brand recognition, and brand image, constructed by brand attributes, brand benefits and brand attitude. All of the experiences effected the brand equity at some levels, but only SENSE and ACT experiences in all of the levels. The SENSE experiences were the ones to have the biggest impact on brand equity. Overall according to the findings of Cleff et al. (2014) the experiences have higher impact on brand image than on the brand awareness. (Cleff et al., 2014)

3.3 Conceptualizing communication on Facebook

Throughout the history the communication has been researched from multiple perspectives and thus there exist multiple communication theories and conceptualizes. One of the first models to describe and conceptualize the communication processes was presented in 1948 by Lasswell. The Lasswell's (1948) communication model divided the communication into functional parts to describe the process; communicator (who), message (says what), medium (in which channel), receiver (to whom) and effect (with what effect). Later Duncan and Moriarty (1998) presented a model that added up to the discussion and made the process two way by adding the feature of feedback in to it. Duncan and Moriarty (1998) divided the communication into source, message, channel, noise, receiver and feedback, which acknowledged that the receiver's response to the message might be sent back to the source. Later multiple other determinations have been used to describe the communication between consumers and companies, brands, products or services. The communication between consumers about products, services and brands has been described with the term word-of-mouth (wom) (Arndt, 1967; Brown, Barry, Dacin & Gunst, 2005), and later that discussion online characterized as electronic-word-of-mouth (ewom). Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler (2004, 39) have described ewom as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or a company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet". The internet has really changed the means of how consumers are engaging with brands and companies (Edelman, 2010). The new technologies have enabled new communication formats and channels like social medias (Straker et al., 2015). Straker et al. (2015) stated that in digital channels like social medias customers can voice their concerns, give their personal input to design ideas, inform if there is a problem, or look for help and express and publish both positive and negative experiences. Social medias are not only usable for consumers but also powerful tools for companies to keep in touch with customers or acquire valuable feedback from their customers (Ungerma & Myslivcová, 2014).

Social medias have become an important communication channels in all countries where the Internet is freely accessible. And thus also both good and bad reputation of a company spreads through social media real quickly. (Ungerma n & Myslivcová, 2014). Facebook is a form of social media where consumers can have profiles and share with their friends and families what is going on in their life's. In Facebook businesses, brands and organizations can create a presence by creating a page and connect with the Facebook community (Facebook, 2017). Social medias like Facebook enable companies to talk to their customers, customers to talk to one another and customers to talk to companies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Facebook along with other social medias is one of the consumer touch points that have the highest rate of use across all the industries (Straker et al., 2015). In Facebook and other social medias companies are expected to engage with their customers and their 'fans' (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012).

The new technologies have made it possible for the consumers to share their experiences instantly to a multiple people as well as enabled consumers to communicate more easily with brands (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004, 238). Stevens (1981) and Pfister (2011) have used the term many-to-many communication to describe the computer aided social networking that can be seen more formal and generally faster than its older forms. Written communication can often be seen as more formal than verbal communication as it allows the sender to reflect and edit the content of the communication, also in Facebook many users self-censor at least some of their post before sending it (Das & Kramer, 2013; Berger, 2014). The new online medias and computers enable the interactive many-to-many communications (Stevens, 1981). Computers and telecommunications networks enable the composing, storing, delivering and processing the communication and they can provide sufficient speed and volume for effective communication flow within and between groups and organizations (Hiltz & Turoff, 1985). This is all done by using computer memory and branching capabilities to organize communication flows, satisfying both senders and receivers on a more collective basis than previously possible (Stevens, 1981). For many people nowadays the Web is the center of virtually all communications (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). The messages transmitted through social

networking websites have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

3.4 Conceptualizing communicated brand experiences

As mentioned brand experiences, can vary in strength and level. Brand experiences can either be positive, neutral or negative, and some may be more intense than others. (Ha & Perks, 2005). To be able to conceptualize these communicated experiences further categories to conceptualize the communication from word-of-mouth discussion can be utilized. The communication frequency, valence and diagnosticity are used to conceptualize the communicated experiences.

3.4.1 Communication frequency

Harrison-Walker (2001) presented a classification to measure communication activity based on the frequency of WOM taking place, number of people WOM being transmitted to, and the quantity of information provided from a sender to a receiver of WOM. This approach to measure communication activity can be also used to categorize the communicated brand experiences. Per Lind & Zmud (1991) the more communication there is the richer the communication exchanges among communication parties can be. However the authors state that it is communication richness, rather than frequency, which has the strongest influences convergence of the parties (Lind & Zmud, 1991).

3.4.2 Communication valence

Harrison-Walker (2001) enhanced the WOM valence (positive, negative, or neutral) also known as “WOM praise” as an important moderator of WOM. Thus the valence of the communication is important to study when conceptualizing communication. Ha and Perks (2005) stated that experiences vary from negative to positive and this might be also seen in the brand experience communication.

According to Berger (2014) people tend to share their negative emotions with others to make themselves feel better and reduce the negative emotions but also share positive emotions to re-consume or extend the positive affect. The communication valence can be seen as an important categorization when talking about brand experience communication.

3.4.3 Communication diagnosticity

The adequacy of information for a given choice task can be referred as information diagnosticity (Nagpal, Khare, Chowdhury, Labrecque, & Pandit, 2011). Consumers tend to rely on informational cues to judge quality but when external information is not diagnostic, people rely less on external information and more on inferences and intuitive reasoning (Tsai & McGill, 2011). The communication diagnosticity is especially important in referencing but can be also seen as a great tool to categorize the communicated brand experiences.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

In this chapter the research design and data collection method of the empirical part of the study are explained. Firstly however the case company Kesko and the orientation of the empirical research is presented more carefully.

4.1 Case description

Kesko Corporation is a Finnish limited liability company that works as a parent company for the whole K-Group. Kesko handles the duties and responsibilities of management bodies and thus is also in charge of the K-Group's branding activities. Kesko's subsidiaries are operating in the grocery trade, the building and technical trade, and the car trade and together with the K-retailers Kesko forms a unified K-Group. (Kesko, 2016d). K-food stores form the grocery trade division, VV-Auto Kesko's car trade and Kesko's building and technical trade division is in turn formed by multiple companies providing selections of building and home improvement products, as well as electrical and HEPAC products, coupled with a wide store network, online stores and digital services (Kesko, 2016a). As the study of consumer communicated brand experiences is delimited to concern Finland also the case company is presented concerning the operations in Finland. In Finland Kesko has more than 1,300 stores and operates in all of the above mentioned divisions (Kesko, 2016b). Kesko is really a house of brands and has dozens of successful chain and product brands (Kesko, 2016c). Kesko is a provider of a multiple international brands but it has also its own private labels like Pirkka and K-menu in the grocery trade division (Kesko, 2016e). In the picture 4.1. the brands in which Kesko operates in Finland are presented by divisions. The orange K is a brand logo for the company and stands as a Kesko in the picture. In all of the brands (see picture 4.1.) the K-Group's structure and business models have been taken into account and they are built and managed according to customer needs (Kesko, 2016c).

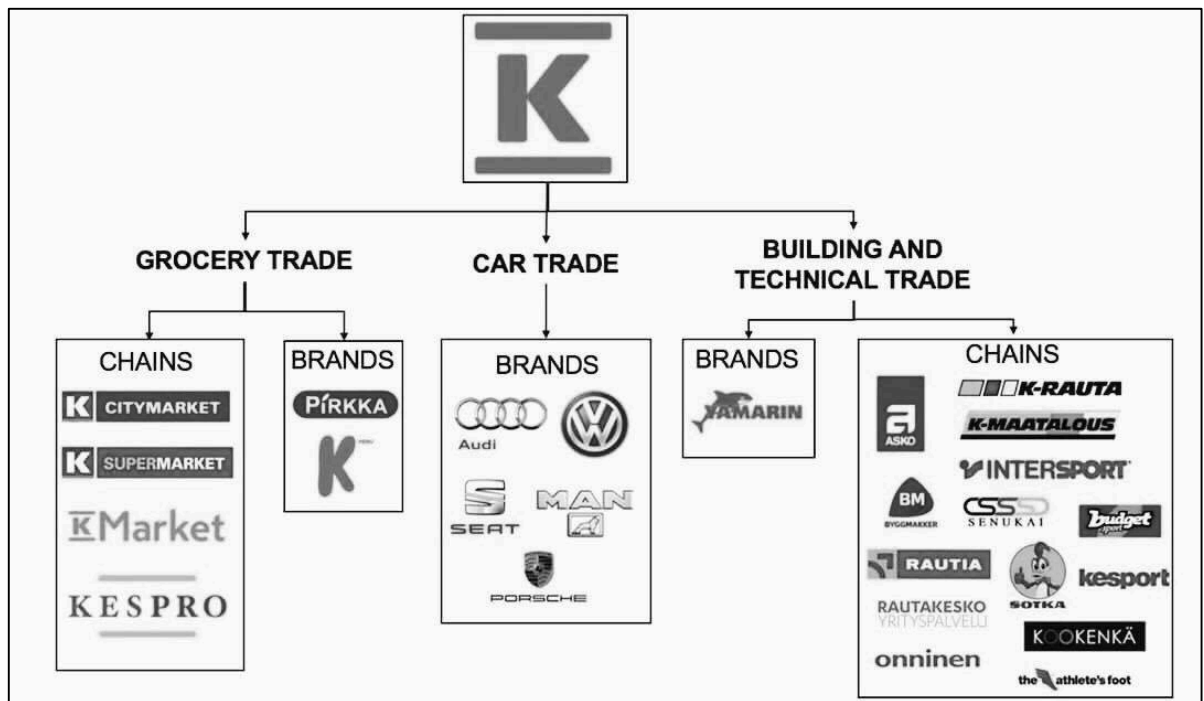


Figure 4.1. The brands in which Kesko operates in Finland (Adapted from Kesko, 2016c).

Kesko is huge player in the Finnish retail sector, and plays a significant role both in food and grocery sector as well as in the non-food sector (Paavola et al 2009). The trade Industry is one of the most important industries in Finnish economy (Santasalo & Koskela, 2015, 15) and thus Kesko as a huge player in that industry is well known among Finnish consumers. All of the Finnish consumers might not recognize all of Kesko's brands belonging to it, but the K-branded chains are strongly linked to Kesko in consumers' minds.

Few years back Kesko recognized that the corporate image and activities had a huge effect on Kesko's sub brands. Thus Kesko started the process of renewing their corporate image and in the end of 2015 Kesko launched their renewed corporate brand with the new brand promise "K - for shopping to be fun". For the first time Kesko made significant efforts on building their corporate brand and really tried to effect the corporate image. Kesko with their renewed strategy stated "We respond to competition in the trading sector by putting the customer and quality first in all three divisions of Kesko... Our vision is to be the customer's

choice and the quality leader in the European trading sector.” (Kesko, 2016d). Kesko’s new brand promise was carefully build up form the core of the renewed brand. Kesko thought that the best way to message that the customer is in the heart of everything that Kesko does is to make the K stand for “for shopping to be fun” or in Finnish “jotta kaupassa olisi kiva käydä” which even extends the meaning of fun into nice/pleasant/neat as there is no direct translation for the Finnish word “kiva”. Thus with the new brand promise Kesko made actually a direct promise about a “fun/kiva” shopping experience. In the spring of 2016 Kesko started the process of renewing their chain brands according to the corporate brand form the K-market chain (see the logo from figure 4.1.). (Ropponen, 2016, see description of Phone discussion with Mia Ropponen in Appendix 1.). Later in the end of 2016 Kesko also started to renew the logos of some other K-branded chains according to the corporate brand (see renewed K-rauta and K-citymarket logos in figure 4.2.).



Figure 4.2. Renewed K-rauta and K-citymarket logos.

Kesko wants to improve their corporate image to be able to have positive spillover effect also in Kesko’s sub brands. With help of the new brand promise in turn Kesko wants to create united positive K-brand experience in consumers’ minds, have synergy benefits and this way positively effect on all of the brand images. According to Kesko’s internal studies one percent increase in the preference of the brand can lead up to one percent increase in the market share and this way has a huge effect on sales. (Ropponen, 2016). One of Kesko’s most important objectives is profitable growth in all of its three strategic sectors and improving the brand images is one of the ways to reach this objective. By working as more united K-group Kesko is able to offer customers ever better services and to operate

efficiently. Branding works as an important mean to create this united K-group in consumers' minds. According to Kesko's new strategy Kesko differentiates itself from the competition with quality and customer orientation. Strengthening the customer experience for consumers and businesses at both stores and on digital channels is an important strategic objective. The mission of the "new Kesko" is in turn create welfare responsibly for all their stakeholders and the whole society. (Kesko, 2016g).

Kesko has made multiple image surveys since launching the renewed brand and brand promise in the end of 2015. However, Kesko wants to collect as much data as they can to evaluate the success of their new brand. (Ropponen, 2016). The digital era has changed the means how people are communicating and made it possible for the consumers to share their experiences instantly to a multiple people as well as enabled consumers to communicate more easily with brands (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004, 238). As the digital channels work as an important mean also for a brand advocacy and consumerism, analyzing the data available on social media channels is invaluable. Even in Kesko's new strategy Kesko has stated the importance of enhancing the customer experience (Kesko, 2016d). Kesko has a multiple social media channels for multiple brands (Kesko, 2016f). Most active Kesko is on Facebook, which is also the most used social media channel in Finland (MTV White paper, 2015). Facebook was chosen as the analysis platform because Facebook can be seen as the most active and reactive channel of the social media channels in Finland. With their new brand promise Kesko has made a direct promise about a specific experience. This promise does not only allow to enhance the image but also has a priming effect on what consumers are expecting from a brand. It is absolutely invaluable to fulfill and create the promised experience (Waldron, 2009). By analyzing the credibility of the new brand promise based on consumer communicated experiences on Kesko's Facebook channels the insights about the credibility and success of the brand promise and image of how the customers are trying to influence on each other's opinions are provided.

As the promise is to have a pleasant shopping experience understanding about the different brands is important since the slight differences in the positioning of

the chains might have effects on the expectations of the experience. Thus next the different K-branded chains and the ideas behind K-ruoka and K-Plussa, which are strongly effecting the purchase experience are shortly presented.

K-Plussa is K-Groups customer loyalty program in Finland. Customers can use their Plussa cards to collect Plussa points, which have real monetary value, and benefit from an extensive range of Plussa offers in K-Group's Plussa stores. Though K-Plussa program local K-retailers and the K-Group chains are able to offer individually targeted special benefits and services to their K-Plussa customers. (K-Plussa, 2012) K-Plussa has as a customer loyalty program a significant effect on the prices, customer service and post purchase experience and this way a makeable effect on the total purchase experience.

K-ruoka is a combination of tasty recipes, newest trends and usable tips served with passion and professionalism (K-Plussa, 2012). K-ruoka is created to support and better the shopping experience within K-food stores (Ropponen, 2016). Thus K-ruoka has its effect on the overall purchase experience in all the K-food stores.

K-citymarkets are hypermarkets that offer Finland's the most versatile and the most extensive variety of grocery products. The goods departments in K-citymarkets offer current and updated selections quickly and affordably. K-supermarkets are bigger supermarkets that aim to offer always the best to their customers: versatile fresh and high-quality food. K-supermarkets selections are comprehensive and they are constantly being complemented with seasonal delicacies and new and local products according to customer wishes. K-markets are smaller supermarkets, convenience stores, where the freshness is the key for the whole business and is visible in the renewed stores. From K-markets customer can expect to have bread straight from the oven, interesting new products and good fruits and vegetables. (K-Plussa, 2012).

K-rauta is a place for the best construction, renovation, interior decoration, as well as yard and garden ideas and solutions, and a place where you can get the needed products reliably and professionally. Kookenkä in turn is a shoe shop with a great selection of well-known brands of shoes, professional traders and staff who will help you to find yourself a suitable shoes for every occasion. K-maatalous

stores help agricultural entrepreneurs efficiently to produce the safe and pure foodstuffs that are valued by consumers. Together Maatalouskesko and the K-maatalous stores form the K-maatalous chain (K-Plusa, 2012).

4.2 Research method

This research is a qualitative case study where web content analysis is used as a research method. In qualitative researches the focus is usually on a quite small amount of cases that are analyzed in-depth. The point of convergence is not on the scholarship of the data but its coverage of conceptualization. (Eskola & Suonranta 2000, 18, 85). Case studies are the most commonly used method of qualitative research and they inquiry to investigate a contemporary phenomenon on within its real-life context (Yin, 2003, 83). In this study the in-depth analysis of the consumer communication is reflected to the brand promise credibility by relating it to the themes previously identified as factors effecting the purchase experience.

The method used in the study, the content analysis, is one form of the observational research methods where the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication is systematically analyzed. (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991, 243). Content analysis belongs to a family of systematic and rule-guided techniques where the informational contents of textual data is studied (Mayring, 2000). In content analysis the language is examined intensively in order to classify the content into categories representing similar meanings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, 1278). The categories that are formed from the data are at least partly generated inductively and applied to the data through close reading (Morgan, 1993). With the subjective interpretation of the content of the text data, the data is systematically classified with the process of coding and identifying themes and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, 1278). The potential of the content analysis as a qualitative research has been recently widely utilized increasing its applications and popularity. Content analysis techniques has also been increasingly used to analyze the contents online (Herring, 2010, 234). In this study the researcher subjectively categorizes the data online utilizing the previous research findings as a base.

Deductive content analysis, also known as directed content analysis, is based on the previous theory on the research subject. Elo and Kyngäs (2008) have divided the process of deductive approach into three phases: preparation, organizing and reporting. The preparation phase includes selecting the unit of analysis and making sense of the data and whole. The Organizing phase includes developing structured analysis matrices, coding the data according the categories and comparing this data to previous studies. The reporting phase in turn includes modeling, conceptual map or categories. (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The web content analysis extends the traditional elements of the content analysis taking into consideration the dynamic nature of the internet and the various types of information online, like web documents, including themes, features, links and exchanges, which all communicate a meaning (Herring, 2010). All of these elements can be seen in the study in the data collection and analyzing.

Qualitative research is characterized by researcher not having hypothesis about the research or the results of the study. Learning new things in qualitative research however requires that the researcher is aware of the presumptions formed from the topic of the study and takes them into account. (Eskola & Suonranta 2000, 18 - 20, 85) The researcher doesn't have any pre-set hypothesis on how the brand experience communication reflect the credibility of the new brand promise. However, the researcher has acknowledged her own presumptions on the topic and been careful not to allow them to influence the analysis of the data.

4.3 Data collection

In qualitative studies discretionary sampling is often used in data collection, which means that the analyzed data is not chosen randomly but based on a specific characteristic (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 18). This is often the case when analyzing the content online where the dynamic nature and the multitude of units of internet analysis makes the random analysis infeasible, which is also the case in this qualitative study.

Kesko's own Facebook channels were chosen as a platform to study the consumer communicated brand experiences as the consumers commenting on

Kesko's own Facebook channels have been in some interaction with the brand and this way have also more likely been influenced by Kesko's branding efforts. Almost every of Kesko's brands has their own Facebook sites (see Appendix 2 the list of Kesko's Facebook sites). In addition to the brand sites also many individual stores have their own Facebook sites. These are however left outside of the survey since not all the stores have their own active Facebook sites and not too much importance wants to be set on an individual store. Hence the objective is to study the corporate brand promise based on the consumer communicated experience, the pages chosen to the study are the corporate page (Kesko/K-Group) and the brand pages of the K-branded chains strongly related to the corporate brand (K-citymarket, K-supermarket, K-market, K-rauta and K-maatalous and Kookenkä) and pages strongly related to the shopping experience in the K-branded chains (K-ruoka and K-Plussa) (see the appendix 2. for the internet addresses of the pages used in the analysis). The time frame chosen for the analysis is a full calendar year after the launch of the new brand promise. The full calendar year was chosen as a time frame so that the communicated experiences do not only reflect the experiences of a specific time of the year but actually takes them all into a consideration. The data of 451 visitor page post, 23 post were Kesko's sites were mentioned and 155 705 comments on 3 416 page post on Kesko's Facebook channels, were analyzed during 1.1.-31.1.2017.

The data from Kesko's Facebook pages was first collected and analyzed in three different sectors. The comments posted on Kesko's Facebook pages, the comments made on Kesko's Facebook posts and the consumer posts that had Kesko's Facebook channels mentioned on them and were visible on Kesko's Facebook channels. All of these comments were carefully read through and analyzed further. Herring (2010) states that the analysis of the new medias online cannot always be identified with prior establishing a coding scheme and that the channels of communication on websites may require novel coding categories. Thus this can be seen in the organizing phase of the content analysis process. All the comments were first divided into categories to analyze which of them were reflecting the brand experience by using the knowledge from previous studies and based on researchers' subjective analysis; the comments were divided into three

categories 1) comments about actual experiences, 2) comments about themes affecting the brand experience and 3) comments that have no real connection to brand experience and this way no connection to Kesko's new brand promise credibility. All of these comments were further categorized into three categories: 1) comments related to positive brand experience, 2) neutral comments not specifically related to positive nor negative brand experience and 3) comments related to negative brand experience. These categorization was made based on the previous theory of the brand experiences and shopping experience which relate to Kesko's brand promise "K-for shopping to be fun". Thought this information the data was further categorized based on the communication theories. The frequency of communication related to the brand experiences and the brand promise credibility along with the valence of the discussion was surveyed from the categorized data. One among the most useful units of content analysis is theming as usually issues, values, beliefs and attitudes are discussed in themes (Kassarjian, 1977,12). Thus communication diagnosis was themed reflecting to the previous discussion related to purchase experience and the factors behind Kesko's brand promise.

4.4 Reliability and validity

In qualitative researches the main source of reliability is the researcher her/himself and thus the reliability evaluation covers the entire research process. A thorough description of the research methods and –processes further the reliability and the validity of qualitative research. In addition, the success of a conversation with the theory and reflection of own assumptions and commitments will increase the reliability (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 208 - 212).

Due to the nature of qualitative research and dynamic nature online environment the study contains significant complications. As the purpose of this research is to study how the consumer communicated brand experiences on Facebook reflect the brand promise, both the quality of and the objective analysis of the data are valuable. The data however might have been influenced due to the fact that companies can alter their Facebook pages and remove valuable data. The decisions on the process and the analysis of the data in turn might have been

influenced by researchers own interpretations. Added with the fact that the research doesn't take into consideration the brand experience communication on consumers own Facebook pages, which can be seen to reduce the reliability. However consumers willingly commenting on themes related to specific brands can mention brands on their post, to reach wider audiences, when they become visible on brands website and are included in the study.

The researcher has throughout the research reflected her own assumption to reduce the complication of researchers own interpretations influencing the data. The research methods and –processes are also carefully presented to increase the reliability of the study. Triangulation that means the usage different types of materials, theories and/or methods in the same study, can be said to reduce the reliability risk of the study (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 68). In this study, researchers used a material triangulation, which means the usage of multiple material sources in the study. The researcher utilized content from Facebook, previous literature of retail, branding and psychology to increase the reliability.

The validity means the extent to which an instrument measures what it is purposed to measure (Kassarjian, 1977,159). The conclusions reached solely demonstrate the reflection of the communication to the brand promise in year 2016. However the theoretical contributions can be utilized to duplicate the study based on the same themes.

5 CONSUMER COMMUNICATED BRAND EXPERIENCES ON FACEBOOK AS A REFLECTION OF KESKO'S BRAND PROMISE CREDIBILITY

The brand evaluation is one of the critical points of building sustaining brands (de Chernatony, 2001). Thus the evaluation of the brand promise is really critical to be able to form a credible brand promise that generates value to a company. The actual power of the brand and its promise however lies in the minds of consumers (Leone, Rao, Keller, Luo, McAlister & Srivastava, 2006). The personal opinions and evaluations on brand performance form brand emotions which reflect the consumers' emotional responses and reactions with respect to the brand (Keller, 2009). The strongest trail to measure the impact of brands' identity and tools aiding to affect it is perceived quality as it is at the center what customers are purchasing (Aaker 1996, 17-19). As all the brands are actually promises about a unique experience (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004, 239), the brand experiences can be seen as a counterpart to brand promises. Thus ultimately the brand experiences reflect the credibility of the brand promises. All the experiences, sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses, evoked by brand related stimuli can be called brand experiences (Brakus et al., 2009). Brand experiences include all consumption experiences, product experiences, service experiences, shopping experiences, aesthetic experiences and customer experiences (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010).

If the brand experience meets the made promise, the brand promise can be seen fulfilled and viewed credible. To be able to find out how consumers are experiencing the brand, the consumers must be listen. This can be done either by interviewing the consumers or analyzing what they are self-directed saying in different channels. The new technologies have made it possible for the consumers to share their experiences instantly to a multiple people as well as to communicate more easily with brands (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004, 238). These new technologies have enabled the interactive many-to-many communications. In social medias like Facebook companies are able to talk to their customers and customers able to talk to one another as well as to the companies (Mangold &

Faulds, 2009). Computers have aided new means for social networking that is more formal and generally faster than its older forms (Stevens, 1981; Pfister, 2011). The composing, storing, delivering and processing the communication computers and telecommunications networks enable, provide speed and volume for effective communication (Hiltz & Turoff, 1985) and eases analyzing the communication afterwards. The written communication allows the sender to reflect and edit the content of the communication, which is also the case in Facebook where many users self-censor at least some of their post before sending it (Das & Kramer, 2013; Berger, 2014). Thus social medias like Facebook are powerful tools for companies to acquire valuable feedback from their customers (Ungermaun & Myslivcová, 2014). Facebook can be used as a channel to acquire information about brand experiences, and the brand experience communication in there can be utilized in the evaluation of the brand promise credibility and success.

Kesko has communicated in multiple medias that K stands “for shopping to be fun” and this way they have made a direct promise to their customers about a specific experience. More specifically Kesko made a promise about fun shopping experience. Shopping experiences are extremely important in forming value perceptions of a retail store and they are strongly related to the retailer’s store images (Kevin et al., 1992). Kevin et al. (1992) stated that shopping experiences emerge when consumers are in interaction with stores physical surroundings, personnel and customer-related service policies and practices. The authors also enhanced that those experiences have a strong correlation to the patronage decisions, satisfaction with the store visit and purchase intentions (Kevin et al., 1992). The total experience of customers includes the search, purchase, consumption and after-sales phases (Verhoef et al., 2009) and thus all those phases need to be analyzed to evaluate the success of the brand promise.

5.1 Conceptualizing brand experience communications on Kesko’s Facebook channels

The categories; communication frequency, communication valence and communication diagnosticity, from the word-of-mouth literature can be utilized to analyze the communication. Analyzing the quantity of information provided from a

sender to a receiver might provide some interesting insights. Usually the more communication there is the richer the communication exchanges among communication parties can be, which in turn might influence convergence of the parties (Lind & Zmud, 1991). The communication valence can be seen as an interesting moderator for communication. Brand experiences can either be positive, neutral or negative, and some may be more intense than others (Ha & Perks, 2005) and thus the communication about those experiences can also vary on those levels. Information diagnosticity that is the adequacy of information for a given choice task (Nagpal, Khare, Chowdhury, Labrecque, & Pandit, 2011) can be used both in analyzing the adequacy of the communication to the brand experiences and analyzing how other consumers can rely on informational cues of the communication to judge quality.

The consumer's communication on Kesko's Facebook channels has been divided into communication related to brand experiences (communication about actual shopping experiences and communication about the expected shopping experiences) and into communication that cannot be seen to have immediate connection to shopping experiences. All of the comments were further divided based on their valence into negative, neutral and positive communications. The categorization of the communication was made based on the type of the communication on Facebook that is presented next.

Consumers are able to communicate on Facebook with a specific company and other consumers simultaneously in three ways. Consumers can write a post on company's Facebook wall, when the company gets a notification of the post and the other consumers are able to see the post on the company's Facebook wall (if accepted by the page administration). The quantified visitor page post on Kesko's selected Facebook pages can be seen in the table 5.1. The consumers on K-citymarket Facebook site were posting on the page wall most actively. The least actively people were posting on Kookenkä page. The consumers seem to be posting more frequently on the K-food site pages than on the other pages which reflects that consumers are more engaged with K-food retailer brands than with others. The valence of the communication based on the visitor page posts were

negative in every Facebook page except on the K-market page where the valence was slightly positive.

Table 5.1. Visitor page post in Kesko's Facebook pages in 2016

FACEBOOK PAGE	VISITOR PAGE POSTS IN 2016	POSTS ABOUT ACTUAL SHOPPING EXPERIENCES	POSTS ABOUT EXPECTED EXPERIENCES	POSTS NOT IMMEDIATELY RELATED TO SHOPPING EXPERIENCES	NEGATIVE POSTS	NEUTRAL POSTS	POSITIVE POSTS
KESKO	82	19	42	21	41	37	4
K-PLUSSA	33	9	23	1	16	16	1
K-RUOKA	35	3	4	28	11	19	5
K-CITYMARKET	122	51	29	42	45	67	10
K-SUPERMARKET	73	26	9	38	19	38	16
K-MARKET	44	17	7	20	11	19	14
K-RAUTA	36	17	10	9	17	14	5
KOOKENKÄ	10	8	2	0	5	2	3
K-MAATALOUS	16	1	0	15	1	14	1
ALL	451	151	126	174	166	226	59

The consumers can also make a post on their own Facebook wall and mention the company in the post when, it becomes visible to all the consumers in the company's Facebook page (if accepted by the page administration). In these cases, the company can only sensor the visibility of the post in their own Facebook page, not on the consumers' own page. The consumer page post where Kesko's Facebook pages were mentioned and that were visible on Kesko's own Facebook pages are quantified in table 5.2. Kesko's corporation page was mentioned most frequently on consumers own Facebook posts. The valence of the posts where Kesko's Facebook site were mentioned was negative. Only K-ruoka was positively mentioned in consumers own Facebook post. However, Kesko's Facebook pages were not frequently mentioned in consumers Facebook pages.

Table 5.2. Kesko's Facebook pages mentioned in consumer posts and visible in Kesko's Facebook pages.

FACEBOOK PAGE	MENTIONED IN CONSUMER POSTS IN 2016*	POSTS ABOUT ACTUAL SHOPPING EXPERIENCES	POSTS ABOUT EXPECTED EXPERIENCES	POSTS NOT IMMEDIATELY RELATED TO SHOPPING EXPERIENCES	NEGATIVE POSTS	NEUTRAL POSTS	POSITIVE POSTS
KESKO	9	2	4	3	7	2	0
K-PLUSSA	4	3	1	0	3	1	0
K-RUOKA	2	1	0	1	0	1	1
K-CITYMARKET	5	2	2	1	2	3	0
K-SUPERMARKET	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
K-MARKET	2	0	2	0	2	0	0
K-RAUTA	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
KOOKENKÄ	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
K-MAATALOUS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ALL	23	8	9	6	14	8	1

In addition to the previously mentioned ways consumers can communicate on Facebook simultaneously with the company and other consumers by commenting on the posts that a company makes on its Facebook walls. The quantified comments on Kesko's page post on selected pages can be seen in the table 5.3. Commenting on Kesko's Facebook post was quantitatively the most ruling way to communicate. Consumers were interacting both with the content of Kesko's Facebook post and with other consumers. Different type of competitions were the cause of the most comments. These comments were not immediately related to the brand experience and thus the number of comments not related to the purchase experience in this categorization was really high. The valence of communication on comments on Kesko's Facebook post was remarkably positive on two pages negative or slightly negative on five pages and neural in two.

Table 5.3. Comments on Kesko's page post on different channels

FACEBOOK PAGE	PAGE POSTS IN 2016	COMMENTS ON POSTS IN 2016	COMMENTS ABOUT ACTUAL SHOPPING EXPERIENCES	COMMENTS ABOUT EXPECTED EXPERIENCES	COMMENTS NOT IMMEDIATELY RELATED TO PURCHASE EXPERIENCES	NEGATIVE COMMENTS	NEUTRAL COMMENTS	POSITIVE COMMENTS
KESKO	177	153	3	17	134	44	87	23
K-PLUSSA	43	757	0	21	736	22	705	30
K-RUOKA	670	8132	5	19	8108	21	8097	14
K-CITYMARKET	744	69360	19	49	69292	29	69302	29
K-SUPERMARKET	615	29296	13	29	29254	4	29234	58
K-MARKET	331	9209	5	3	9201	2	9205	2
K-RAUTA	272	36106	3	3	36100	3	36101	2
KOOKENKÄ	252	2447	1	2	2444	1	2446	0
K-MAATALOUS	312	245	6	58	181	26	198	21
ALL	3416	155705	55	201	155450	152	155375	179

As can be seen from the tables 5.1-5.3. the consumers were communicating about their actual shopping experiences on Kesko's Facebook pages mainly by posting on company's page walls. The frequency of the communication was highest in comments on Kesko's Facebook post, but these comments on posts were a lot less diagnostic than visitor page post or consumer's own Facebook post. The comments on post seemed to be more reactive and spontaneous whereas in the other two types the possibility to reflect and edit written content was more visible. The valence of the communication was overall slightly negative. In comments on Kesko's page post the valence was however slightly more positive than negative. Thus Kesko's the content on Kesko's Facebook post has likely primed the valence of the communication to be more positive. Competitions seemed to be powerful tools to engage customers and create positive brand experiences. All competition aroused a lot of communication but this communication was poorly diagnostic.

Social touchpoints as Facebook are managed by an administrator, a representative of the company, that has a power to delete unfavorable messages and block users. (Straker et al., 2015) However deleting content and blocking users seem to arise even more negative experiences than however negative

comment and create frustration and negative brand experiences among consumers. This can be seen on multiple comment on Kesko's different Facebook walls including the example below.

"Why is Kesko blocking writings ? Is it too embarrassed to hear about its own shops?"

People seem to be more understanding when getting a direct response from the company. People tend to share their negative emotions with others to make themselves feel better and reduce the negative emotions (Berger, 2014). Thus getting a response might make them feel respected and reduce those negative emotions. It is not surprising that the valence of the communication is slightly negative as people tend to share negative experiences more easily than positive. People however also share positive emotions to re-consume or extend the positive affect (Berger, 2014). This can be seen from an exemplary comment about a specific shop.

"K-Rauta Oulunkylä cares about its clients, and from there you can get an excellent service. I have a long period of good experiences. And there even dogs are welcome. The other service companies should really learn from them!"

The themes that stood out from consumer communication in all of the pages in both positive and negative ways were service quality ie. the attitudes and expertise of the employees, prices overall and in promotions, quality of the products and responsibility. The contacts with the employees were the source of many negative but also positive experiences. It seemed to be one of the strongest trails of pleasant shopping experience. For the most clients the pre- and post purchase experiences seemed also to be important factors affecting the purchase and brand experience. Most client that were used to having something complementary were

very disappointed when that stopped, either suitable discounts or other loyalty program benefits. The quality of the products was one factor strongly effecting the experiences. A lot of new products got embracement and problems with products caused great frustration in clients.

5.2 The elements where Kesko's brand promise correlates to the consumer communicated brand experiences

Kesko made a promise about a fun and pleasant shopping experience. As the total purchase experience is effected by location, store image, assortment, offerings, advertising, delivery, customer service and post purchase experience (Abril, Gavilanand & Avello, 2009; Deepa & Chitramani, 2013) valuating communication on those dimensions gives an image if the brand experience fulfills the made promise. The critical incidents that are extraordinary events which are perceived or recalled negatively by customers before purchase, during purchase or during consumption (Roos, 2002) can also be recognized from these themes. Customer experiences can occur in rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual levels (Schmitt, 2010; LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Shaw & Ivens, 2005; Gentile et al., 2007) and thus the communication can reflect those different levels.

Location

The location plays a key role in getting a substantial share of wallet from fill-in trips and small basket shoppers (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004) as it determinates the accessibility. Kesko has a large network of stores in all over the Finland. Even though some consumers are commenting the frustration of not having the K-store in their neighbor, most of the clients are pleased with the accessibility of the K-stores. Kesko's accessibility is great and thought this dimension Kesko is fulfilling its promise "for shopping to be fun".

Store images

Favorable strong images can help to justify the price premium, because they create loyalty and make customers feel that they gain more from retailer patronage. One of the factors effecting the retailer's store images but not categorized as dimension of the shopping experience is pricing and promotions. (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). Kesko's shops can be categorized as HILO stops. Consumers typically develop favorable price image to retailers who offer frequent discounts on a large number of products over the ones who offer steeper discounts less frequently (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). Although Kesko offers multiple discounts on all of it's brands all K-stores are preserved expensive. This can be seen from the selected comments of different K-stores chains.

"The prices went up although Siwa wasn't cheap either"

"If only the prices were more reasonable the pensioner could also buy more frequently"

"..unbelievable pricing and exploitation of the Finnish people.."

From most of the comments can be interpreted that Kesko is not completely able to justify the price premium they have on some categories. Perceptions' about Kesko's prices seems to be even higher than the actual prices. Thus Kesko seems to struggle a bit with its image. Most of the consumers on Kesko's different channels relate all of the different K-chain brands strongly to the corporate image.

Assortment, Offerings and Advertising

On Kesko's Facebook channels consumers are not complaining lot about the assortment which gives an image that the consumers seem to be pretty happy with Kesko's assortments on different chains. Some are even commenting

positively about the assortments. Consumers are however communicating about their negative experiences about run out of products. Below one exemplary comment about positive experience created by assortment width.

“K-market Vehmainen is absolutely wonderful nowadays, the assortment is great and fresh outlook pleases the eye”

Kesko's advertising seems to create both positive and negative emotions. Surprisingly many consumers are communicating about their pleasant experiences with Kesko's advertising.

“Thank you for the effective and lovely ads.”

“Thank you K-rauta for the lovely new ads, even though they have their downsides because they are so touching they make me cry..”

Kesko's offerings however seem to create a lot of frustration as many consumers have experienced problems with the offerings on stores. The problems people have experienced with offerings are; discounted prices haven't shown on the cashier, discounted products have run out or the discounts are so insignificant that consumers feel fooled.

Delivery and Customer service

Organizational culture reflects how the brand promise is delivered by the staff (Barett, 1998; de Chernatony 2001, 147) and thus employees and also service blueprints play a significant role in fulfilling brand promises. The customer service and delivery are one of the themes mostly commented on Kesko's Facebook

channels. They seem to be the strongest factors to guide the quality of the shopping experience. Different K-chain brand have gotten all both positive and negative comments.

“10/10 for quality customer service at K-market at Tikkurila. Please keep up with the good work Tomi and the stuff.”

“..the staff swears and grunts to greet.. Now days I only go there in an emergency although the assortment in the store is better than average”

“..I left the purchase there because I didn't get any help.”

Post purchase experience

The consumers have communicated about their post purchase experiences both on Kesko's Facebook channels mainly negatively. For the most clients, the pre- and post purchase experiences seemed to be important factors affecting the purchase and brand experience. The quality of the products was a theme raising discussion. The outdated or broken products raised strong negative feelings.

“The one-week old PlayStation broke down, no refund and it takes over a month to get it repaired”

Most client that were used to having something complementary were very disappointed when that stopped, either suitable discounts or other loyalty program benefits. For example Pirkka magazine seemed to be really valuable for many clients.

5.3 Communicated brand experiences on different brand levels

In retail the brands are relevant and take place at multiple levels (Berg, 2012; Burt & Davies, 2010). Consumers might have perceptions about the retailer at the organizational or chain level and they might also perceive a brand at a fairly local at the store level (Ou, Abratt & Dion, 2006). Retailer's store brands (private labels) can also be seen as a perceptual level for brands in retailing (Martenson, 2007). Retailers are not only perceived at multiple levels but the perceptions at one level have also an effect to the others. Analyzing the experiences on retailer different levels helps to identify the sources of the critical incidents and positive perceptions.

5.3.1 Corporate level

In today's retailing retailers are not only focusing on traditional commercial attributes but also putting more value to the corporate features in creating richer and more differentiated store identities (Beristain & Zorrilla, 2011). Clearly communicated corporate brand promises can help to transfer the corporate identity into corporate image and put more value to the corporate features in all of the retailer's brand levels. Corporate reputations, or corporate images, are primarily determined by firms corporate communications, and they refer to the consumer's perspective of companies overall evaluation and include among other factors the corporate responsibility (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007; Walsh & Beatty, 2007).

Kesko

Kesko differentiates itself from the competition with quality and customer orientation. Kesko wants to create welfare responsibly for all their stakeholders and the whole society. (Kesko, 2016g). In Kesko's Facebook pages Kesko is however associated fairly negatively. Although Kesko has communicated to put efforts into social responsibility, consumers on Kesko's Facebook pages are

highlighting the issues. This may be due to the fact that Kesko is a huge player in Finnish retail industry and such an important company in Finland.

“Responsibility? Kesko? A total joke except nobody is laughing”

Although there are many negative comments about Kesko. Some consumers still want to chair and praise Kesko for it's good work. Below an exemplar comment on Kesko's post about its responsible actions. Some people also enhance Kesko as a finnish company as they want to support Finnish businesses.

“Responsible actions, great!”

K-Plussa

K-Plussa is Kesko's loyalty program that provides Kesko's customers K-Plussa points, which have real monetary value, and benefit from an extensive range of Plussa offers (K-Plussa, 2012). However many consumers feel that the loyalty program does not provide as good benefits as Kesko's competitors. The renewal of the loyalty program has also raised a lot of frustration as can be seen from the comment below.

“The post delivered the Plussa uudistuu notice, in future the customers can't get the plussa points in cash but they have to be used in K-group's stores. This is stupid, I don't like it at all.”

K-ruoka

K-ruoka is a combination of tasty recipes, newest trends and usable tips served with passion and professionalism, to support and better the shopping experience within K-food stores. (K-Plussa, 2012) K-ruoka as a service is perceived positively enhancing the shopping experience. The most negative comments on K-ruoka page are related to the new app not working. Over all the K-ruoka is perceived really positively and the other comments really positive as the comment below.

“What a great tip, I have to try it one time.”

5.3.2 Chain level

Local store attributes affect consumers' perceptions of a store (Hartman & Spiro, 2005; Yoo, Donthu & Lee, 2000). In Kesko's case the stores under the same chain brand should be and usually are characterized with similar features.

K-market

K-markets are smaller supermarkets or convenience stores where the freshness is the key for the whole business and should be visible in the renewed stores. From K-markets customer can expect to have bread straight from the oven, interesting new products and good fruits and vegetables. (K-Plussa, 2012). Based on the consumer communication on Facebook the freshness is visible on the stores but there are often problems with the availability of the products.

“I'm really disappointed to the K-market convenient store that replaced the Valintatalo Möysä. I used to get small groceries' nearby but not anymore. At this time at 21.6.2016 klo.11:00 the store doesn't have mincemeat or corn-pepper-pea mixter. Oh well deploring doesn't help. That is why I'm a member of S-group. ”

The renewed logo has gotten negative comments, but those mainly reflect negativity towards Kesko as a corporation. The K-entrepreneurs and their actions have gotten a lot of gratitude on K-market's Facebook page.

K-supermarket

K-supermarkets are bigger supermarkets that aim to offer always the best to their customers: versatile fresh and high-quality food. (K-Plussa, 2012). K-supermarkets have gotten a praise and consumers have communicated about pleasant experiences with the brand. However consumers have communicated about unpleasant shopping experiences in K-supermarket stores due to the negative atmosphere between employees.

"If I cannot find a product from elsewhere I will go to K-supermarket and I know I can find a product from there. ALWAYS: "

K-citymarket

K-citymarket hypermarkets aim to offer Finland's the most versatile and the most extensive variety of grocery products. The goods departments in K-citymarkets aim to offer current and updated selections quickly and affordably. (K-Plussa, 2012) Consumers have mainly communicated about their negative experiences in K-citymarkets and hence the valence of the communication has been really negative. K-citymarkets are characterized expensive and thus in K-citymarkets the price premium has not been able to justify based on other features. Also the fact that K-citymarkets have been communicated to be affordable might be related to the matter that K-citymarkets are perceived expensive and experienced negatively. The consumer also feel that the offers in K-citymarkets are always the same and that the assortments are not as wide as expected as can be seen from the exemplary comment.

“What good does more squares and renewals if the assortment only decreases?”

K-rauta

According to Kesko, K-rauta is a place for the best construction, renovation, interior decoration, as well as yard and garden ideas and solutions, and a place where you can get the needed products reliably and professionally. (K-Plussa, 2012) In K-rauta Facebook page consumers have communicated both about really good and really bad experiences. K-rauta employees have gotten a praise about their expertise and customer service. K-rauta homepage has gotten most of the bar comments and it is not preserved as pleasant place for shopping.

“Your online shop is really cumbersome and for example these products can not be found from your online store.”

Kookenkä

Kookenkä is a shoe shop with a great selection of well-known brands of shoes, professional traders and staff who will help you to find yourself a suitable shoes for every occasion (K-Plussa, 2012). The frequency of the communication by consumers has not been high but the valence of the discussion has been mainly positive. Consumer have communicated about broken products, but all of those comments were very neutral.

K-maatalous

K-maatalous stores aim to help agricultural entrepreneurs efficiently to produce the safe and pure foodstuffs that are valued by consumers. Together Maatalouskesko and the K-maatalous stores form the K-maatalous chain (K-Plussa, 2012). K-

maatalous have preserved really negatively and valence of the communication on K-maatalous Facebook page has been negative. K-maatalous has been strongly linked to Kesko and the issues related to corporate responsibility are strongly present in the consumer communication. On the K-maatalous Facebook page K-maatalous and Kesko is preserved as a soulless corporation. However the overall difficult situations among agricultural entrepreneurs in Finland might affect on these perceptions.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the thesis is study consumer communicated brand experiences on Facebook as a reflection of Kesko's corporate brand promise credibility and so arise understanding about the roles of brand promises and brand experiences in today's the digital age. This is done by studying what has been said about Kesko and its sub K-brands on Facebook and by analyzing how it reflects the credibility of the corporate brand promise.

All brands are promises made by companies to their customers (Rowley, 2004, 131) and brand promises can be used as concepts to describe the communicated promises about unique experiences (Reed, 2005; Rowley, 2004; de Chernatony 2001). With a concrete brand promises companies can help consumers to understand the value of their brands. Brand promises go beyond traditional advertising and in competitive markets they can be used as powerful tools to differentiate companies and products (Reed, 2005, 146). In all the components of the process of building a credible brand promise the brand promise should be fulfilled, and considered when designing them. Thus the new focus on marketing is not just how to define an externally-centered promise but to orchestrate the staff to deliver the promise (Barrett, 1998, 105).

The actual power of the brand and its promise lies in the minds of consumers (Leone, Rao, Keller, Luo, McAlister & Srivastava, 2006). The personal opinions and evaluations on brand performance form brand emotions which reflect the consumers' emotional responses and reactions with respect to the brand (Keller, 2009). Perceived quality is at the center what customers are purchasing and it is the strongest trail to measure the impact of brands' identity. (Aaker 1996, 17-19). The total experience that customers associate with the brand including all sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses induced by the brand-related stimuli have a strong relation to brands' image in consumers' minds (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus & van Riel, 2013; Rowley, 2004), the clearly communicated brand promises in turn can work as a strong tool to evoke certain brand experiences.

The retail industry brings its twist to branding as the associations related to retail brands and especially stores as brands are a lot more complex and dynamic than associations related to product/manufacturer brands (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003). Brands in retail are relevant and take place at multiple levels (Berg, 2012; Burt & Davies, 2010). Depending on if a retailer is diversified or not customer may have perceptions about the retailer at the organizational, chain level or at a fairly local at the store level (Ou, Abratt & Dion, 2006). Retail brands usually depend highly on rich consumer experiences to create brand equity (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). Shopping experiences in retail have a strong correlation to customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Yoon et al., 2013) and the value of shopping in a particular store for consumer depends on the quality of the shopping experience (Ghos and McLafferty, 1978). The total purchase experience in turn is effected by location, store image, assortment, offerings, advertising, delivery, customer service and post purchase experience (Abril, Gavilanand & Avello, 2009; Deepa & Chitramani, 2013). According to Abril, Gavilanand and Avello (2009) the retailers are in ideal position to create experiences as they are responsible of the total purchase experience from location to post purchase experience.

Brand experiences are defined as “sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments” (Brakus et al., 2009, 52). The concept brand experience spans across many other experience concepts like consumption experiences, product experiences, service experiences, shopping experiences, aesthetic experiences and customer experiences by taking them all into consideration (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). Brand experiences occur when consumers are searching, purchasing or consuming brands (Brakus et al., 2009) ie. they can happen in different consumer touch points. Brakus et al. (2009) have stated that the touchpoints can be linked to the company directly or indirectly and Schmitt & Zarantonello (2013) added that touchpoints can occur either online or offline.

Facebook is a form of social media where consumers can communicate with each other’s but also with businesses, brands and organizations that have created

pages in Facebook and connect with the Facebook community. Social medias are social touch points that happen online and that are extremely interactive and enable communications real-time (Straker et al., 2015). Social medias are not only usable for consumers but also powerful tools for companies to keep in touch with customers or acquire valuable feedback from them (Ungerma & Myslivcová, 2014). Thus Facebook can be used as a channel to acquire information about brand experiences and can be utilized in the evaluation of the brand promise credibility and success.

Stevens (1981) and Pfister (2011) have used the term many-to-many communication to describe the computer aided social networking. With the new technologies consumers are able to share their experiences instantly to a multiple people as well as communicate more easily with brands (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004, 238). Facebook is one of the channels that enable that kind of many-to-many communication. The categories, communication frequency, communication valence and communication diagnosticity, from the word-of-mouth literature can be utilized when analyzing the many-to-many communication on Facebook.

6.1 Summary of the findings

How consumer communicated brand experiences on Facebook reflect on the credibility of Kesko's brand promise?

Kesko has communicated in multiple medias that K stands “for shopping to be fun” and this way they have made a direct promise to their customers about a specific experience. More specifically Kesko made a promise about fun shopping experience. The quality of the shopping experience affects the value of shopping in a particular store (Ghos & McLafferty, 1978) Kesko as a retailer is in ideal position to create experiences and responsible of the total purchase experience from location to post purchase experience (Abril, Gavilanand and Avello, 2009). Brand experiences, that include all consumption experiences, product experiences, service experiences, shopping experiences, aesthetic experiences and customer experiences (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010) can be seen as a

counterpart for brand promises. When the brand experience meets the made promise, the brand promise can be seen fulfilled and viewed credible. Social medias like Facebook enable companies to acquire valuable feedback from their customers (Ungermaun & Myslivcová, 2014). The brand experience communication in Facebook can be utilized in the evaluation of the brand promise credibility and success. The total purchase experience is effected by location, store image, assortment, offerings, advertising, delivery, customer service and post purchase experience (Abril, Gavilanand & Avello, 2009; Deepa & Chitramani, 2013) and valuating communication on those dimensions gives an image if the brand experience fulfills the made promise. Thus evaluating communication frequency, valence and diagnosis on those dimension in different brand level forms an overall image of the credibility of Kesko's brand promise.

What is the valence of the discussion on Kesko's Facebook pages?

Brand experiences can either be positive, neutral or negative, and some may be more intense than others (Ha & Perks, 2005) and thus the communication about those experiences can vary on those levels. Most of the communication on Kesko's Facebook pages was neutral and didn't reflect particularly positive nor negative brand experiences. However the overall valence of the discussion on Kesko's Facebook pages was slightly negative and multiple of the negative comments were reflecting fairly strong negative experiences.

How are the brand experiences augmented?

The consumer communication varies in information diagnosticity. The consumers were communicating about their actual shopping experiences on Kesko's Facebook pages mainly by posting on company's page walls. The frequency of the communication was highest in comments on Kesko's Facebook post, but these comments on posts were a lot less diagnostic than visitor page post or consumer's own Facebook post. The comments on post seemed to be more reactive and spontaneous whereas in the other two types the possibility to reflect and edit

written content was more visible. Competitions seemed to be powerful tools to engage customers and create positive brand experiences. All competition aroused a lot of communication but this communication was poorly diagnostic.

On which elements does the corporate brand promise reflect on how consumers experience the brand?

Kesko has made a promise about a fun and pleasant shopping experience. As the total purchase experience is effected by location, store image, assortment, offerings, advertising, delivery, customer service and post purchase experience (Abril, Gavilanand & Avello, 2009; Deepa & Chitramani, 2013) valuating communication on those dimensions gives an image if the brand experience fulfills the made promise. Kesko's store accessibility is great and thought this dimension Kesko is fulfilling its promise "for shopping to be fun". All K-stores are preserved expensive and Kesko is not completely able to justify the price premium they have on some categories. Thus, from the image dimension Kesko is not able to completely fulfill its promise. Fulfilling the promise from the customer service and delivery perspective seems also to be bit challenging. Mainly the communicated experiences related to assortments and advertising are positive but there still occurs some challenges with offerings.

How do the experiences differ on different brand levels?

In retail the brands are relevant and take place at multiple levels (Berg, 2012; Burt & Davies, 2010). Consumers might have perceptions about the retailer at the organizational or chain level and they might also perceive a brand at a fairly local at the store level (Ou, Abratt & Dion, 2006). The experiences differ a bit on different brand levels, and between different retail chain brands. However, the corporate role seems to play a critical part in consumers' minds when interacting with K-brands as expected. From Kesko's food stores, K-market and K-supermarket seem to have fairly positive image in consumers minds, but K-citymarket seems to evoke some negative perceptions. Kookenkä doesn't seem to

evoke strong experiences among consumers. Whereas K-maatalous seems to evoke negative brand experiences. Kesko's image is strongly affecting all of its sub-brands. K-ruoka seems to enhance experiences among K-food stores, but K-Plussa does not enhance positive experiences as strongly. Kesko seems to evoke strong feelings among Finnish consumers, both negative and positive.

6.2 Theoretical contributions

As mentioned multiple times in the study brand promises are limitedly studied and incoherently defined. This study combines knowledge from different branding literatures to form coherent description of the term brand promise and of the factors which it is strongly related to. Thus the paper takes crucial part to the discussion about brand promises and extends Rowleys' (2004), de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004) and Reed's (2005) descriptions of the topic. The topic brand promise is underlined from de Chernatony's book "From brand vision to brand evaluation" and combined to de Chernatony's "the process of building and sustaining brands". The value of brand promises are in turn enhanced by linking them to the Akers (1991) consumer-based brand equity model and ultimately the brand promise is linked to brand identity and brand experiences (see figure 2.4).

Retail branding has been raising its interest and the paper highlights the value of retailers' images and brand promises as tools to affect those. The strongest theoretical contribution of the paper is however the linkage between brand promises and brand experiences. The study presents detailed the multifaceted concept brand experience and presents it as a reflection of the brand promise credibility.

6.3 Practical implications

The paper provides insights of the consumer communication of chosen Kesko's Facebook sites. The analyzed content can be utilized further for Kesko's branding activities. The analysis implies that in order to fully fulfill the brand promise "K-for shopping to be fun" Kesko should justify more carefully the price premium that is seem to hold in the minds of many consumers. Kesko should put more emphasis

on justifying the price premium and overall take care of having more competitive prices. Corporate responsibility seems to be important factor effecting the brand experiences, thus it could be used as an important resource when justifying the price premium.

The analyze does not only provide information of the consumer communication but also summarizes numerically the content of the chosen Facebook sites to easily comparable formation. This information can be utilized when comparing the effectiveness of different Kesko's Facebook sites.

Overall the study highlights Facebook content analysis as an important mean to study public opinion. It provides insights of the ways content from different Facebook sites can be analyzed and compared. The needed technical information of the Facebook's current communication forms is provided in order to analyze the public opinion and to form comparable data.

6.4 Limitations and future research

Due to the nature of qualitative case study the research contains some limitations. As the research only studies the topic from perspective of a one company the scholarship of the data can be seen limited. The data collection also contains some limitations as it is only collected from one channel and it does not take into account the consumer communicated experiences form other channels.

Hence brand promises are per se limitedly studied many interesting research areas arise from the correlation between clearly communicated brand promises and brand experiences. More evidence and research, on how credible and successful brand promises can be formed and measured, should be made. Adamson (2008, 16-17) has stated that people tend to connect more easily with brands that distinguish themselves by expressing an emotional motivation rather than solely relying on facts and figures. It would be interesting to research the adequacy of that statement to brand promises. This could be done by studying whether the promises about sense, feel, think, act or relate experiences seem to be most successful. The previous studies have found evidence that employees play a critical role in the delivery of the brand promise, what was also evident and

confirmed by this study. Thus it would be interesting to research the relation of clearly communicated brand promises and employee commitments to deliver that value.

Another interesting perspective to study the correlation between clearly communicated brand promises and brand experiences would be to study the priming effect of the clearly communicated brand promises to brand experiences. It would be interesting to find evidence on whether the clearly communicated brand promises have more positive effect by priming the image or negative effect by raising too high expectations to consumers brand experiences.

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INTERVIEWS:

Ropponen, M. (2016) Kesko Oyj, Phone discussion 7th of June 2016. Duration 60 minutes

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Phone discussion with Mia Ropponen

The phone discussion with Mia Ropponen took place in 7th of June 2016. The phone discussion was an unstructured interview where Ropponen provided valuable insights of Kesko's branding activities to initialize the possible research areas. The duration of the interview was approximately 60 minutes. In addition to the verbal information Ropponen provided presentation material related to Kesko's branding activities. With the provided materials the researcher was able to form a comprehensive image about Kesko's brand related activities. The provided information is utilized in the case description to provide the reader an overall image about the case.

During the discussion in 7th of June 2016 Mia Ropponen worked as a VP Brand and Identity at Kesko. Ropponen started working at Kesko in July 2015, when Kesko wanted to have more brand experienced professionals to develop their new brand identity. Mia took over Kesko's branding responsibilities and was involved in the development of Kesko's new brand identity and brand promise.

Appendix 2. The list of Kesko's Facebook sites

Kesko has 32 Facebook pages for different brands and purposes. In addition to that multiple store-specific sites are held by K-store retailer entrepreneurs. In K-Group's Facebook pages information about brand activities, career possibilities, stores and services to customers and other stakeholders are provided (Kesko, 2016f). Below the list of Kesko's Facebook sites are listed by name. The internet addresses for the pages used in the analysis; K-citymarket, K-Group, K-maatalous, K-market, Kookenkä, K-Plussa, K-rauta Finland, K-ruoka and K-supermarket, are also provided.

- Asko
- Audi Finland
- Budget Sport
- Byggmakker
- Cello
- Intersport
- Jobe Finland
- K-citymarket
<https://www.facebook.com/citymarket/>
- K-Group
<https://www.facebook.com/Kryhma/>
- K-instituutti
- K-maatalous
<https://www.facebook.com/Kmaatalous/>
- K-market
<https://www.facebook.com/KMarketSuomi/>
- Kookenkä
<https://www.facebook.com/kookenka/>
- K-Plussa
<https://www.facebook.com/kplussasuomi/>
- K-rauta Estonia
- K-rauta Finland
<https://www.facebook.com/KRautaSuomi/>
- K-rauta Latvia
- K-rauta Sweden
- K-retailer's Association
- K-ruoka
<https://www.facebook.com/KRuokafi/>
- K-supermarket
<https://www.facebook.com/Ksupermarketketju/>
- Marine Life
- Niksi-Pirkka
- Onninen

- Pirkka
- Porsche
- Rautia
- Seat Finland

- Sotka
- Volkswagen Finland
- Yamaha Finland
- Yamarin