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**COMPANY'S PERCEPTION OF BRAND IDENTITY IN BRAND VALUE CO-
CREATION**

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ABSTRACT

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In this hyper-informed time that we are living in, digitalization has shaped our day-to-day life drastically during the past two decades. Digitalization has enabled customers more power over the products and services they consume. This notion of customers' increased power has changed business models in the past decades. Companies want to empower their customers and encourage them to participate in the value co-creation. Brands are identified as the companies' differentiating factors that distinguish their offerings from their competition providing same customer's needs fulfilling solutions. Brands represent characteristics that customers can, and hopefully want to, identify with – take it is as a part of their own identity. Brand identity is the establishing factor for strong brands, and it defines the differentiating aspects the brand will present. Although, as the customers' power over businesses have increased, their impact on brands' development has been identified in the literature. Customers want to shape the brands they consume, and make it more suitable for their own identities. This understanding has prompted companies to open their brands' development processes to customers and the concept of personalized brand experiences have emerged. The adopted research methodology is qualitative research as a multiple-case study on two companies. The case studies study how companies perceive the elements of brand identity and how it is integrated in the brand value co-creation. The results indicate that companies utilize elements of brand identity, but they don't identify them as elements of brand identity. This study provides relevant discussion to bridge the theoretical gap between brand identity and brand value co-creation.

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Tässä hyper-informaation ajassa digitalisaatio muokkaa päivittäistä elämäämme merkittävästi. Digitalisaatio on luonut asiakkaille enemmän valtaa vaikuttaa heidän kuluttamiinsa tuotteisiin ja palveluihin. Havainto asiakkaiden vallan kasvusta on muuttanut yritysten liiketoimintamalleja. Yritykset haluavat voimaannuttaa ja kannustaa asiakkaitaan osallistumaan arvon yhteisluontiin. Brändit ovat yritysten erilaistavia tekijöitä, jotka erottavat ne samoja asiakastarpeita täyttävistä kilpailijoistaan. Brändit edustavat erilaisia ilmentymiä, joihin asiakkaat voivat samaistua – ottaa osakseen heidän omaa identiteettiään. Brändi-identiteetti on perustava tekijä vahvoille brändeille ja se määrittelee brändin erilaistavat tekijät. Asiakkaiden vallan kasvusta johtuen heidän valtansa myös brändien kehitykseen on tunnistettu kirjallisuudessa. Asiakkaat haluavat vaikuttaa kuluttamiinsa brändeihin ja tehdä niistä sopivampia heidän omiin identiteetteihinsä. Tämä havainto on kannustanut yrityksiä avaamaan heidän brändien kehitysprosessejaan asiakkaille, josta yksilöllisen brändikokemuksen käsite on noussut esiin. Tämä tutkielma on laadullinen tutkimus kahdesta tapaustutkimusyrytyksestä. Tapaustutkimusyrytysten kautta tutkitaan kuinka yritykset mieltävät brändi-identiteettiensä elementit ja kuinka brändi-identiteettiä integroidaan brändiarvon yhteisluontiin. Tulokset osoittavat, että yritykset hyödyntävät toiminnassaan brändi-identiteetin elementtejä, mutteivat miellä niitä brändi-identiteetin elementeiksi. Tämä tutkimus luo relevanttia pohdintaa kuroakseen umpeen teoreettista rakoa brändi-identiteetin ja brändiarvon yhteisluonnin välillä.

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In Helsinki, 21.06.2021

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1 Introduction

Brands are considered as the companies' most valuable assets (Kapferer 2008, 3-5). Brands can be perceived as multidimensional living entities, whose success requires their managers to identify the balance between the company's functional and emotional values with consumers' needs for performance and psychological needs (Kapferer, 2008, 173). Brands are difficult to be imitated by competitors, at least in an honest nature, which provide companies competitive advantage. The key for a brand success, is that the brand differs in an aspired manner from its competitors fulfilling the same customer needs. (Kotler & Keller 2016) The brand differentiation makes the brand unique, and is the factor that makes the customer choose specific brand over competing services or products. Many scholars have pointed out that brand identity's importance as the essential tool to efficiently differentiate and manage brands (Aaker 1996; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000; Kapferer 2008; Keller 2008)

In psychology, identity is defined accordingly: "Identity is the anchoring concept of thinking about difference and sameness in our time." (McLean & Syed 2014, 11). The competitive nature of brands favours the difference factor, which makes them to stand out in a positive light among their competitors on the market (Kotler & Keller 2016). In brand building, the strong brands are built up from their identity, by answering the question "Who are we?" (Keller 2008, 59). Brand identity should be established with the perception that it depicts the wanted brand image (Grönroos 2015, 386).

Due to digitalization, the value co-creational functions have become increasingly more common as way for companies to serve their customers. This hyper-informed and globally connected time has shaped the business environment increasingly into more dynamic state, and consumers are increasingly interested in participating companies' value creation process, that they experience themselves (Ramaswamy & Prahalad 2004). This co-creational notion has also reached the brand development processes as well. As companies' brand identities represents the wanted brand image that is formed in the customers' minds (Grönroos 2015), brands

include customers into brand creation process to aim for a better and individualized brand experiences for their customers (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016) This process is called brand value co-creation.

The increasingly dynamic environment favours the brand value co-creation, and in the past decade brand identity's co-creation has gained attention among scholars. Brand identity needs to be dynamic and open to the influence of brand managers and consumers to adjust to its market environment changes while maintaining a stable sense of self (da Silveira et al., 2013, 34). In other words, a flourishing brand identity must be co-created (Kennedy & Guzman 2016, 315).

This thesis has both theoretical and managerial aspirations. Theoretically, this thesis will discuss notions of brand identity, brand value co-creation, and how these concepts are connected to each conceptually and in the way, that they are developed. This study hopes to broaden the understanding and to provide deeper knowledge of the presented themes. The contribution of this thesis revolves around the practicalities of how companies perceive their brand identities and how they perceive brand identity's role in the brand value co-creation.

Two case companies were chosen to research these themes. Both companies utilize brand value co-creation, which was important factor for them to be chosen. Companies preferred to stay anonymous due to brand management sensitive matters. The main purpose is to create understanding of the phenomenon of brand identity in brand value co-creation context.

1.1 Research questions

The co-creation of brand identities has been studied in the brand management literature, yet further research is hoped for, since the concepts for the interviewed informants have been confusing (Kennedy & Guzman 2016). Brand identities in service context has been studied lately and wider research has been called for (Paree & Harrison 2020). Brand identity has also been studied in the context of dynamic environment (da Silveira et al. 2013). These studies embody many elements of brand value co-creation. Although, the concept of brand identity in the

context of value co-creation hasn't been studied in the brand identity literature. This thesis aims to create understanding of how companies perceive their brand identity in their brand value co-creation, and what's brand identity's role in brand value co-creation. Thus, this thesis' research question (RQ) is formulated:

“How companies perceive their brand identity in brand value co-creation?” (RQ)

The brand identity literature has various interpretations of elements that build companies' brand identities, and overall 17 brand identity elements have been identified in the literature (Aaker 1996; Kapferer 1994; Burmann et al. 2017; de Chernatony 1999; da Silveira et al. 2013; Pareek & Harrison 2020). The focus in brand identity research has been mainly goods-dominant (Aaker 1996; Kapferer 1994; Burmann et al. 2017; de Chernatony 1999), and the more service-dominant and co-creational approach has emerged later in the literature (da Silveira et al. 2013; Pareek & Harrison 2020). The first sub-question (SQ1) of this thesis aims to clarify the elements of the brand identity, and to support the answer to the research question. Sub-question 1 (SQ1) is formulated accordingly:

“What does brand identity consist of?” (SQ1)

One of the main reasons these specific companies were selected for this study, was their essence of enabling brand value co-creation between the company and its customers. To learn why they utilize it and what their specific brand value co-creation processes consist of, the sub-question 2 (SQ2) aims explore the context for this thesis and supports the research question. The sub-question 2 (SQ2) is formulated as follows:

“Why companies utilize brand value co-creation?” (SQ2)

The concepts of brand value co-creation and brand identity share similarities, such as a dynamic aspect (da Silveira et al. 2013; Ramaswamy & Prahalad 2004; Kennedy & Guzman 2016), a cyclical dialogue between the company and customers (de Chernatony 1999; Burmann et al. 2017; da Silveira et al. 2013; Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Merz et al. 2018), a view of the company as an enabler

(da Silveira et al. 2013; Burmann et al. 2017; Pareek & Harrison 2020; Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Grönroos & Voima 2013), and a perception of customers as active participants (da Silveira et al. 2013; Burmann et al. 2013; Grönroos 2008; Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Merz et al. 2018). To research how brand identity and brand value co-creation link up with each other, the sub-question 3 (SQ3) is formulated as follows:

“How companies’ brand identities connect to their brand value co-creation?” (SQ3)

1.2 Theoretical framework

To help guiding the interpretations and observations made in this thesis, the theoretical framework (figure 1) presents this study’s explicit point of view.

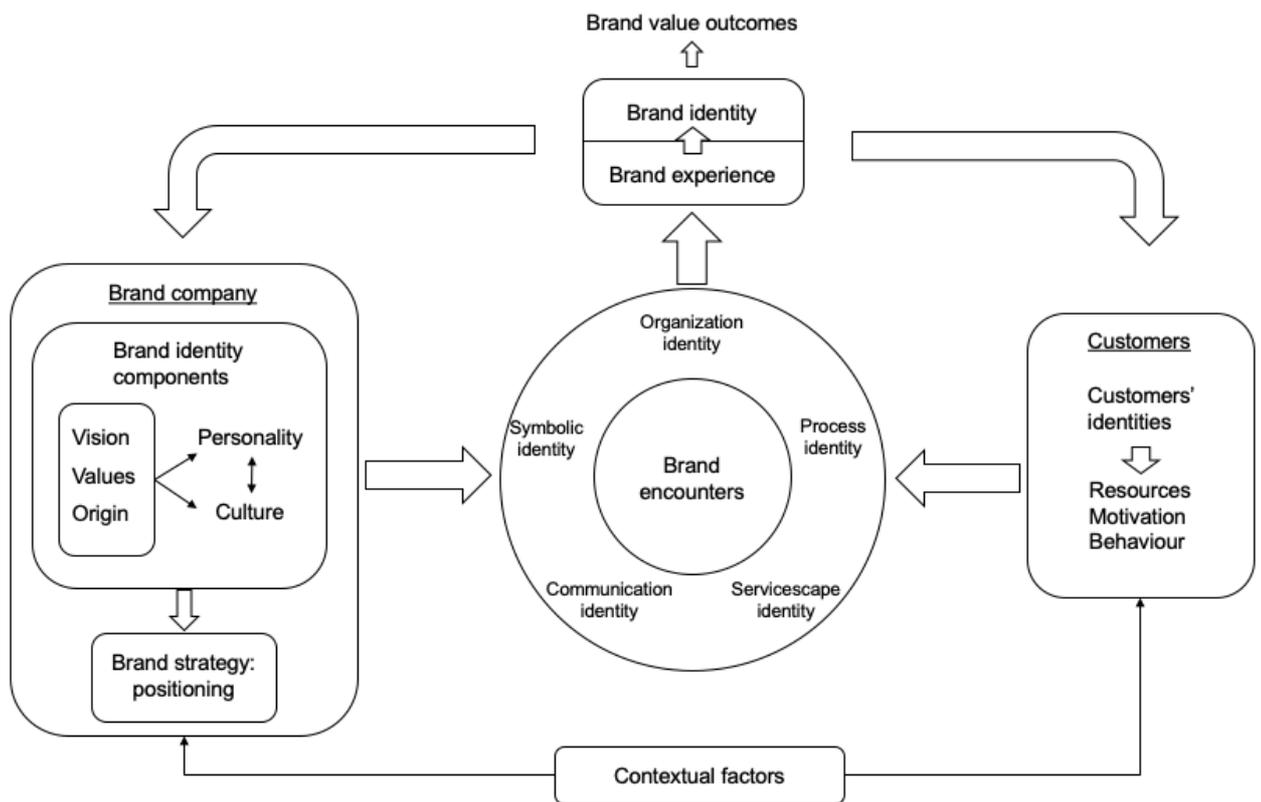


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

Figure 1 explains the themes and agenda of this study. This thesis uses theories mainly from two different marketing management’s fields: brand identity, and brand value co-creation. The brand identity is the dominant phenomenon compared to

brand value co-creation. The elements and process flows present in figure 1 are formulated and assessed according to findings from the literature review. The choices for these specific elements are reasoned thoroughly later in this study.

This thesis aims to clarify elements and process flows of this framework. The SQ1 explores the 'Brand company' box and its contents. SQ2 aims to provide understanding on the elements in the center of figure 1, and why this theoretical framework is valid. SQ3 researches for explanations of the process flows of figure 1. RQ explores how companies perceive their own system compared to figure 1.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured as follows. This thesis starts by presenting the literature review of the relevant theories. Literature review is divided into three parts. The first part presents insights of brand identity, by starting from emergence of the concept in marketing literature. Then the concepts, elements and dimensions are presented. The second part explores the brand value co-creation, by starting from service-dominant logic and definitions of brand value, and ultimately present brand value co-creation as concept including its elements and dimensions. The third part of literature review presents brand identity's co-creational attributes present in the literature, and what similarities they share with brand value co-creation's concepts.

After literature review, this thesis' research methodology is presented, which consists of justifying the chosen research method, research design, description of the empirical context, explanation of how data was collected and analysed, and assessment of this research's reliability and validity. After research methodology, results and empirical findings are presented, that divided into three categories by research questions. Then discussions are presented in the discussion chapter to connect the empirical findings with literature, and to show researcher's own deduction. Finally, the theoretical and managerial implications of this thesis are presented, and followed by limitations and future research directions.

2 Brand identity

Brands have become a major player in our modern society, and today, every organisation wants to have a brand. In the 1980's, due to multiple articles, management came to realise that the essential asset of a company is its brand, in contrast to the previous conception of measuring the company value in terms of its lands, buildings and other tangible assets. (Kapferer 2008, 3-5) The American Marketing Association conceptualizes brand as follows: "A brand is a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers." (AMA 2021). Inspecting it from a more strategic perspective, a brand is a product or a service whose attributes differentiate it in some way from competing products or services designed to fulfil the same needs (Kotler & Keller 2016, 322).

Brand equity is the added value provided to products or services with consumers (Kotler & Keller 2016, 324), and higher brand equity has a positive impact on consumers' preferences and purchase intentions (Cobb-Walgren, Beal & Donthu 1995, 25). Marketing communication enables the formations of brand awareness and a positive brand image. These then form the brand knowledge structures, which produce the differentiated responses that constitute brand equity. (Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan & McDonald 2005, 70) As brand awareness and brand image represent the brand equity, brand value is about brand's value-in-use (i.e. brand experience) from customer's perspective (Keller 1993, 2-4). Brand value is subjective and varies as a function depending on consumer's co-creational experiences of brand value outcomes (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 103).

In the context of building strong brands, Keller (2008) proposes a pyramid model (figure 2) to conceptualize the steps needed to be made when building a strong brand. In this customer-based brand equity model, identity is what creates the basis for a strong brand, which eventually enables the company to focus on the relationships between the company and its customers. Without establishing a clear identity, the next stages of brand development are on an unstable basis, which can create divergent communication of the brand. (Keller 2008, 59-60) An ideal outcome of this strategy is that the consumer-held brand image is congruent with the intended

brand identity (Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan & McDonald 2005, 70). Keller's customer-based brand equity pyramid model (2008) indicates the brand identity's remarkability and importance in developing a successful brand, which supports the focus of this thesis in the brand management context.

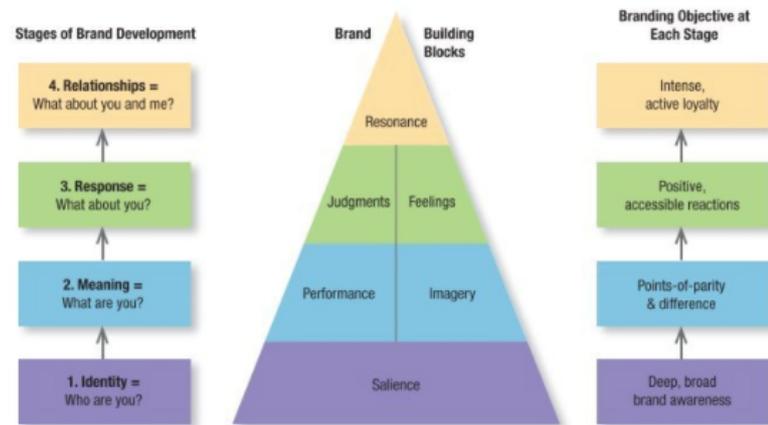


Figure 2. Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid (Keller 2008, 60)

Many researchers recognize the role of brand identity as an essential tool to effectively differentiate and manage brands (Aaker 1996; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000; Kapferer 2008; Keller 2008). The growing competitiveness emphasizes the importance of differentiation, and therefore, the importance of brand identity (da Silveira, Lages & Simões 2013, 28). Grönroos (2015, 386) proposes that brand identity is a depiction of the wanted brand image. Brand's evolution spectrum (figure 3) creates understanding on why and how managers tend to have diverse interpretations of brands. It indicates that the emphasis may at first be placed on functionally oriented values, which then become amplified with emotionally oriented values, as brand management sophistication increases, driving a visionary promise that adds value to all stakeholders. (de Chernatony 2009, 104)

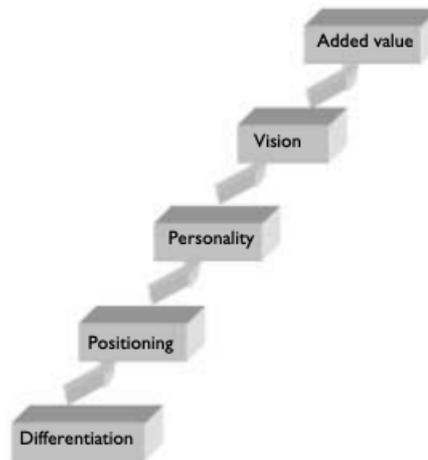


Figure 3 Managerial evolving interpretations of 'brand' (de Chernatony 2009, 102)

In identity-based brand management literature, brand is viewed as a bundle of functional and non-functional benefits which, from the target groups' perspective, differentiate the brand sustainably from competing offers. Identity-based brand management introduces a cause and effect mechanism as the enabling structure for communication between the internal and external brand perspectives through brand touch points. (Burmam, Riley, Halaszovich & Schade 2017, 26) Managers need to consider what type of relationship they want build with their external stakeholders through their communication, in efforts to develop their brand identity. These relationships need to be monitored, and managers should adjust the brand identity if these do not reflect the desired outcome. (de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo 1998, 1087) The internal target groups of the institution that owns the brand's trademark create the brand's self-perception, which represents the brand identity, that determines brand's character from internal target group's perspective. (Burmam et al. 2017, 27) In order to implement a successful brand identity strategy, employees of the firm need to have an open and informative communication so they can agree on the specific brand identity (Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan & McDonald 2005, 77).

In summary, brand identity helps brands to achieve high equity (Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan & McDonald 2005, 76), as it provides the framework for overall brand coherence (Kapferer 2008, 178). Brand identity needs to be dynamic and open to the influence of brand managers and consumers to adjust to its market environment changes while maintaining a stable sense of self (da Silveira et al.,

2013, 34). In other words, a flourishing brand identity must be co-created (Kennedy & Guzman 2016, 315), and co-creation necessitates efficient communication (Gustafsson, Kristensson & Witell 2012, 311).

2.1 Brand identity compared to similar concepts

Brand personality

Brand personality is widely recognized as key dimension of brand identity (Aaker 1996, 83; Kapferer 2008, 183; Burmann et al. 2017, 53; de Chernatony 1999, 168). Azoulay and Kapferer (2003, 153) define brand personality as “the set of human personality traits that are both applicable and relevant for brands”. In goods-based context, contributing to product’s functional benefits, brand personality serves as ‘a vehicle’ for customers’ self-expression and makes the product more relatable (Aaker 1996, 82-83). Brand personality can be viewed as an answer to the question “How are we communicating?”, whereas brand identity represents the self-image of the brand’s internal target groups (Burmann et al. 2017, 53). As this is a focal dimension of brand identity, it will be discussed further in this thesis.

Brand image

Brand image is a multidimensional attitude-based construct that represents the perceptions of the brand in the minds of external stakeholders. It is based on all individually and subjectively perceived and interpreted signals emitted by that brand. Therefore, it reflects the brand’s ability to fulfil the consumers’ or other stakeholders’ needs. (Burmann et al. 2017, 56) Brand image together with brand awareness form brand knowledge. Brand image, according to Keller (1993), composes of brand associations that can be measured in terms of their strength, favourability, uniqueness, and types (benefits, attributes, and attitudes). (Keller 1993, 5-7) Brand image is measured based on statements of how consumers feel toward a brand or what their impressions are of it (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 603).

Compared to brand identity, brand image is consumers’ perceptions of a presented brand identity (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 603). Brand identity is communicated to customers through brand messages and brand behaviour via brand touchpoints, which then is experienced and interpreted by customers who form the brand image in their mind (Kapferer 2008, 174; Burmann et al. 2017, 28). Brand management’s

task is to match the proposed brand identity and the perceived brand image, which will strengthen the brand loyalty (Nandan 2005, 270). Brand image is a remarkable factor in the creation of brand value, yet this thesis focuses on brand identity and its functions in brand value co-creation.

Brand reputation

Like brand image, brand reputation is built in the minds of consumers, but reputation forms over time, and it represents the estimation of consistency of company's willingness and ability to perform activity repeatedly in similar fashion (Herbig & Milewicz 1995, 5). As brand reputation occurs mainly through marketing signals, it is a sum of the brand identity output that the company proposes, the brand promises the company makes and the extent of how consumers experience them (Veloutsou & Moutinho 2009, 315). For brands to be successful and hence profitable, they must have developed a positive reputation. Mixed marketing signals can affect negatively on reputation, and it may take multiple positive transactions to restore the caused negative impact. Therefore, constant attention to product, service, and customers must be given to maintain the established reputation and maximize the profit in long term. (Herbig & Milewicz 1995, 9-10) Having a clearly communicated brand identity helps to maintain the promised quality of product or service, which supports brand reputation in long term.

Brand positioning

Brand positioning is present in various brand identity concepts and they are closely related to each other. Brand positioning can be viewed as an objective of brand identity, deriving from the planning and execution of brand identity (Aaker 1996; Kapferer 1998), or as a component of brand identity proposing the brand's functional benefits (de Chernatony 1999, 168). Positioning is designing the company's offering and brand image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of consumers to maximize the potential benefit for the company (Kotler & Keller 2016, 297).

The presented branding concepts are related to brand identity, and depending on perspective, some of them are seen as a part of brand identity. This showcases the holistic characteristic of branding and brand identity. These branding concepts represent connectivity to each other and to brand identity, and their perspective-

dependent attribute proposes that their role in branding is affected by the type of marketed product/service and its environment.

2.2 Brand identity definitions

Brand identity has many views in the branding literature. Comparing existing views in an attempt to elaborate an overall understanding of brand identity appears to be complex since brand identity definitions and brand identity frameworks do not always mediate the same meaning. (da Silveira, Lages & Simões 2013, 29) In this chapter, the arguably most known and the more contemporary brand identity definitions will be studied, and their relevancy for this thesis will be assessed.

Table 1 Brand identity definitions

Author	Definition	Consists of
Aaker, D.A. (1996)	Brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from organization members.	Twelve dimensions organized around four perspectives: (1) brand-as-product, (2) brand-as-organization, (3) brand-as-person & (4) brand-as-symbol.
Kapferer, J-N. (1994)	Brand identity is the vision that drives the creation of products and services under the brand's name. It is the source of brand positioning and it precedes brand image.	A hexagonal brand identity prism identifying six facets: brand's physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, self-image.
Burmann C., Riley, N-M., Halaszovich, T. & Schade, M. (2017)	Brand identity is those characteristics of a brand which sustainably define the character of the brand from the perspective of internal target group.	Brand identity as the self-image of the brand's internal target groups consist of six constitutive components: origin, competences, values, personality, vision and offer.
De Chernatony, L. (1999)	Emphasizes staff's role in building a brand identity, which needs to be compared against the brand's reputation.	Six brand components: vision, culture, positioning, personality, relationships and presentation.
da Silveira, Lages & Simões (2013)	Brand identity is a dynamic process developing over time through mutually influencing inputs from brand managers and other social constituents.	Brand identity develops in dynamic environment through five dimensions: brand identity, brand face, consumers' face, encounters and contextual factors.

Pareek & Harrison (2020)	Conceptualized brand identity from services perspective. Define brand identity as the sum of various attributes that define the brand, that give it distinguishable features and make it recognizable.	Developed a scale to measure service brand identity (SERVBID). It consists of process identity, organization identity, symbolic identity, servicescape identity and communication identity.
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David A. Aaker’s (1996, 68) brand identity research originates from the observation that an identity provides direction, purpose and meaning, and just as people, brands also have identities. Aaker defines brand identity accordingly:

“Brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from organization members.”

Brand identity helps to establish relationships between the brand and the customers by creating a value proposition that comprises functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits. According to Aaker, brand identity consists of twelve dimensions around four perspectives on how a firm views its brand. To help to clarify, enrich and differentiate a firm’s own identity, it should view its brand as: a product, an organization, a person and a symbol. (Aaker 1996, 78).

Jean-Noël Kapferer’s research of brand identity is cited to a large extent in the literature of brand identity (Black & Veloutsou 2017; Essamri et al. 2019; Iglesias et al. 2019). Kapferer’s brand identity perspective is formed from a goods-dominant paradigm, in which brand identity is created internally within the company, and through marketing signals and market situation, it establishes brand image (1994, 37-38). Later in his studies, Kapferer broadened the perspective, and defines brand identity currently as the vision that drives the creation of products and services under the brand’s name. It is the foundation for brand positioning and it precedes the forming of brand image. Having an identity means being your true self, driven by a personal goal that differs from others and is unchangeable. (Kapferer 2008, 171-172) Kapferer (1994, 39) comments on brands:

“We cannot expect a brand to be anything other than itself.”

Kapferer (1994, 43) suggests that brand identity should be inspected and interpreted via hexagonal brand identity prism, which consist of six facets which define the identity of a brand as well as the boundaries within which it can freely change or develop. It also proves that the facets are all connected and form a well-structured entity where content of one facet resonates with another. The six identified facets of the identity prism are brand's physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection and self-image.

Burmann et al. (2017) define brand identity as the self-perception of the brand which is determined by the internal target groups of the organization that owns the brand. It comprises all prevailing homogenous characteristics that determine the character of that brand from the internal target groups' viewpoint. (Burmann et al. 2017, 22) In their research, to form a comprehensive description of brand identity, six constitutive components are identified, which are referred as the dimensions of brand identity. These dimensions are inspected within the concept of brand identity as the self-image of the brand's internal groups. (Burmann et al. 2017, 45)

In de Chernatony's study (1999), the approach to create understanding of brand identity urges to point out the organization's culture and the staff's role in the building and shaping of corporate brand, which weren't examined in the previous literature of brand identity. A proposed model suggests that stronger brands are a result of a homogenous brand identity with congruent identity components. The internally focused model consists of six components: the brand's vision, culture, positioning, personality, relationships and presentation. (de Chernatony 1999, 162-170)

To monitor the gap between the brand identity and the stakeholders' perceptions of the brand, the brand reputation is more suitable alternative than the brand image, because it builds over time and is more stable than the brand image. Comparing the reputation against the brand identity provides insights of urgency and direction for adjusting the identity internally. (de Chernatony 1999, 170-171)

da Silveira, Lages & Simões (2013) reconceptualised brand identity in terms of increasingly dynamic environment, and due to the notion of rising role of consumers as co-contributors to brand construction and development. Their study relies on the previous brand identity literature, as well as on sociology and strategy literature (da Silveira et al. 2013, 29-33). da Silveira et al argue that brand identity is a brand management's built function to interact with target audience (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33). They propose that "brand identity is a dynamic process developing over time through mutually influencing inputs from brand managers and other social constituents (e.g., consumers)". The dynamic characteristic of brand identity poses the importance of being flexible to contextual changes while preserving a stable sense of self – enduring the brand identity. This means that brand identity supports brand and consumers' faces within changing environment. (da Silveira et al. 2013, 35) Their study of identity in the field of sociology and social psychology proves that identities are social constructed and they are dynamic (da Silveira et al. 2013, 32), which questions the interpretations of brand identity as a static concept (i.e. Aaker 1996; Kapferer 1994; de Chernatony 1998) in the earlier brand identity literature.

Pareek and Harrison (2020) conceptualize brand identity as "the sum of various attributes that define the brand, that give it distinguishable features and make it recognizable." Their study focuses on brand identity from the service perspective, in a contrast to the dominant goods perspective in the previous brand identity literature. In their study, Pareek and Harrison developed a scale to measure service brand identity (SERVBID), which comprises of five dimensions: process identity, organization identity, symbolic identity, servicescape identity, and communication identity. (Pareek & Harrison 2020) Understanding brand identity helps to create more efficient positioning, segmentation and communication strategies. The SERVBID scale can help managers to understand the impact of the scale's dimensions on brand strategy and communication, which contributes to brand-building strategies. (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 610)

2.3 Brand identity elements

To understand better the elements of brand identity, table 2 represents the elements of brand identity that are proposed in the previously introduced brand identity

definitions. By having these elements gathered together, it's clearer to analyse which elements recur in different concepts of brand identity, and which elements overlap each other or share a lot of similarities. Studying the contexts and characteristics of the presented elements will provide deeper understanding of their nature and necessity for this thesis. With this decipher the most relevant elements of brand identity for the brand value co-creation context can be examined and formed in a needed assembly to carry out this thesis.

Table 2. Identified brand identity elements from literature

	Components	Dimensions	Propositions	Objective
Aaker, D. A. (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product scope Product attributes Quality/Value Uses Users Country of Origin 	Brand as product	Value propositions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional benefits Emotional benefits Self-expressive benefits Credibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support other brands 	Brand-customer relationship
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization attributes Local vs. global 	Brand as organization		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personality Brand-customer relationship 	Brand as person		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imagery Metaphors Brand heritage 	Brand as symbol		
Kapferer, J. N. (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salient objective features Emerging objective features Functional added value 	Physique	Brand essence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What it is What is the key value it proposes and stands for 	Express values and positioning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human personality traits Type of communication 	Personality		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sources Fundamental ideals Sets of values 	Culture		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mode of conduct Represented and relatable attributes 	Relationship		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How customers perceive the brand 	Reflection		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How customers perceive themselves 	Self-image		
Burmamann C., Riley, N-M., Halaszovich, T. & Schade, M. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geographic origin Company origin Industry origin 	Origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brand promise Brand behaviour 	Enhance the brand attributes that are assessed and interpreted
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-term development trend 	Vision		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation for working and purchasing behaviour 			in the minds of customers – brand positioning. Effects on brand image
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refinement competences • Market supply competences • Customer acquisition and retention competences 	Competences		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental beliefs 	Values		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated human traits 	Personality		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role and function it fulfils in the society 	Offer		
De Chernatony, L. (1999)	Brand vision		An appealing brand for stakeholders by reflecting the aspired characteristics and self-images	Create a positive reputation and adjust the brand identity by it over time
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well-defined sense of direction 			
	Culture			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artifacts • Core and peripheral values • Mental models 			
	Relationships			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff to staff • Staff to customers • Staff to other stakeholders 			
Personality				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional values • Indicates firm's values 				
Positioning				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional values • Indicates performance characteristics 				
Presentation				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect aspired characteristics • Reflect internal self-image of the brand's stakeholders 				
da Silveira, Lages & Simões (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand performs through marketing and communication strategies, and actions • Consumers perform through building their individual and collective identities 	Brand identity	For brand identities to be enduring, the brand identity should be dynamic and flexible so that brand and consumers' faces are supported within the changing environment.	To clarify and rekindle the notion of brand identity and its management in an increasingly complex market context.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct or indirect occasions between the brand and consumers • Initiatives of the brand (e.g. advertising) • Initiatives of consumers (e.g. blogs) • Initiative of both (e.g. product co-design) 	Encounters		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unintentional brand expression (i.e. ungovernable dimensions) • Intentional brand expression (Brand 	Brand Face		

	positioning, and marketing and communication programs)			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumers' individual and collective identities Emerged attitudes and behaviours 	Consumers' Face		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competitors' actions Industry/Environmental conditions Partners' actions (e.g. media and distribution) 	Additional Dimensions		
Pareek & Harrison (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff's behaviour and expertise Quality of the interaction and service Consistency of service 	Process identity	Measure brand identity from services perspective.	"A deeper and more complete understanding of the theoretical construct of brand identity through a service-dominant lens."
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision Relationship with customers Social responsibility 	Organization identity		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name Logo/symbols Associated colours Country of origin 	Symbolic identity		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery environment Appearance Ambience 	Servicescape identity		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Means of communication Distinctive channels 	Communication identity		

Brand can be viewed from product-related associations perspective, which includes six dimensions: *Product scope, product attributes, quality/value*, associations with use occasion and users, and origin. The brand-as-organization perspective focuses on the organization's attributes, such as innovation and concern for the environment. Brand-as-person suggests that brands have recognizable personality traits that people can identify with. Brand-as-symbol inspects brand from the perspective of the intangible assets, such as visual imagery, metaphors and brand origin. (Aaker 1996, 78-85)

The six identified facets of the identity prism are brand's physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection and self-image. Brand's physique is made of a combination of either significant objective features or emerging ones. Physique can be viewed as the brand's backbone and its tangible added value. Personality

indicates that by communicating brand's build a character. Brand should have its own culture, from which all of its products and services derive. The product/service is not only an embodiment of culture, but a medium of communication. Brand's culture is in a focal role in differentiating from competitors. The relationship facet describes the mode of conduct that most affiliates with when interacting with the brand, such as how the brand acts, delivers services and relates to its customers. Brand is a customer reflection, because it always tends to build a reflection or an image of the customer. Brands also speak to our self-image. The reflection facet defines what the customers reflect outward and the self-image facet is the interpretation of how the customers feel themselves. The identity prism derives from one basic concept – that brands have the gift of speech. Brands can only exist if they communicate. (Kapferer 2008, 182-187) The brand identity prism allows companies to examine the brands in detail in order to detect its strengths and weaknesses (Kapferer 1994, 49). This model also provides an efficient tool to inspect and understand the main differences between a brand and its competitors.

Burmann et al. (2017) perceive brand origin forming the basis of the brand identity, by answering the question: "Where do we come from?" Brand origin is closely connected to brand history, but unlike brand history it can be modified or reconstructed by brand management. Brand origin is built upon three facets: the geographic origin, the company origin and the industry origin. The geographic facet examines the connection between the brand's country of origin and the consumers' associated quality perceptions with the brand. As the prevailing time, companies set up their activities in an international manner, so for a consumer it is difficult to identify the country of origin of a brand, and therefore they tend to interpret "cultural cues" instead when identifying the geographical origin of a brand. The company origin facet is more relevant for organisations with various brands, since the facet encompasses the attribution to an organisation. The industry origin can often be chosen if the company is active on multiple industries. By emphasising individual facets of brand origin, brand management can shape the perceived origin in the long term. (Burmann et al. 2017, 45-48)

The second dimension in this theory is the brand vision, that determines the brand's long-term development trend. It's an "ideology" that offers all employees collection

of shared values and notions to believe in and to identify with. It should be an essential source of motivation for the working and purchasing behaviour for all internal and external target groups. Brand vision is set for long-term purpose within a time scale of five to ten years. Short-term objectives are brand targets and they are more concrete. The brand vision has a coordinating role and it is to ensure that all the company's activities are in compliance with the brand targets. (Burmann et al. 2017, 48)

Burmann et al. (2017) propose the competences of the organisation managing the brand, along with the origin, are the primary establishing facets for brand identity. The competences can be divided into three different categories: refinement, market supply and meta competences. (Burmann et al. 2017, 49-50) Competences don't appear as an element of brand identity in other of the concepts studied in this thesis, and they refer more to the operative capabilities of the brand company. Therefore, competences don't qualify as a relevant element for this thesis.

Brand values represent the brand's executives' and employees' fundamental beliefs. They express brand identity's emotional components and take into account the target groups' expectations. Brand values aim to state what the brands believe in and to display the non-functional benefits of the brand. (Burmann et al. 2017, 51-52)

Brand personality is the set of human personality traits that are both applicable and relevant for brands. These personality traits are relatively consistent ways and styles of thinking, feeling and acting. Universal brand personality scales tend to have their problems due to the diversity between countries and product categories. Therefore, brand personality scales are tailored for specific products or services. (Burmann et al. 2017, 53-54)

A brand also needs to decide which functional benefit it is to provide to the consumer. The brand offer represents the way in which the brand becomes useful for the consumer. Just as a person decides which role and function they want to fulfil within their society, brand's need to do the same, but within the market context. (Burmann et al. 2017, 55)

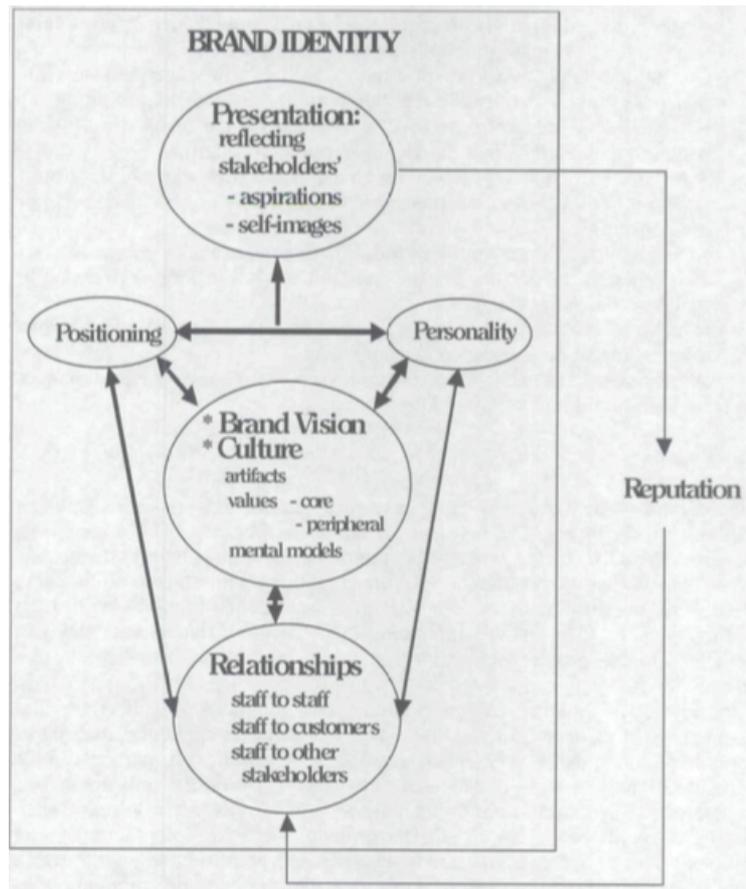


Figure 4 A process for managing brands (de Chernatony 1999, 171).

de Chernatony depiction of brand identity's role in the process of managing brand is a cyclical process between brand management and brand's reputation (figure 4). Brands need a clear vision that gives the organization a well-defined sense of direction. It should be defined at least five years ahead and consider how the brand is going to make the futuristic world better. To create a strategy to achieve the desired vision, organizations need to audit their culture, which consist of artefacts, core and peripheral values and mental models. By auditing these cultural elements, organizations can survey their culture's suitability with the desired vision and identify the gaps between them. (de Chernatony 1999, 166-167)

Brand's intended positioning's suitability should be considered against the vision and core values. Positioning helps stakeholder groups to understand what the brand can do for them. Staff's mental models of the brand's positioning usually differ from each other, yet they should be all aware of how the other brands' teams view the

brand's positioning. (de Chernatony 1999, 168) This awareness within the staff can be achieved for example with a cognitive card sort technique, where staff members are shown their own positioning map and then compared to the desired positioning map, to help them understand its differences and the need for change (de Chernatony, Daniels & Johnson 1994, 231-235). With modern technology, this mapping technique could be carried out with an online survey.

Brand's personality is also influenced by the organization's core values, and it reflects them through personality metaphor which reduces the time needed for information search and processing. The challenge for companies is to blend the presented brand personality with the staff behaviour. The personality and positioning interact with each other. (de Chernatony 1999, 168-169)

In de Chernatony's model, the brand, through the staff, is perceived as an active participant in any relationship between the brand and the stakeholders, in contrast to the previous brand image studies. Managers need to ensure that employees are able to recognise from their core values the appropriate relationships between employees and other employees, between employees and customers and between employees and other stakeholders. These relationships should be assessed regularly, and evaluate that they are aligned with the brand's values, personality and positioning. (de Chernatony 1999, 169)

On the top this model, and as an emerging outcome of the interaction between the brand's personality and the brand's positioning, is the brand's presentation. In brand presentation phase, companies should consider how to present their brand identity as appealing to its different stakeholder groups for their aspired characteristics. A coherent understanding of the brand identity within employees is crucial to avoid conflicting messages. Employees need to identify their stakeholders and appreciate their buying behaviour. Besides stakeholders' aspirations, how the brand reflects stakeholders' self-images needs to be considered. The brand needs to speak to the stakeholders and make them feel comfortable with it. Advertising plays a substantial role in creating the symbolic meaning for a brand, but it also emerges from the interactions between customers and staff and brand users interacting with each other. (de Chernatony 1999, 169)

To monitor the gap between the brand identity and the stakeholders' perceptions of the brand, the brand reputation is more suitable alternative than the brand image, because it builds over time and is more stable than the brand image. Comparing the reputation against the brand identity provides insights of urgency and direction for adjusting the identity internally. (de Chernatony 1999, 170-171)

da Silveira et al. propose a brand identity framework that focuses on already established brands, and consists of five dimensions (see Figure 5). In this framework, brand identity management is portrayed as a dynamic process to which brand managers and consumers contribute. Brand encounters are contacts between the brand and consumer, that can occur at the initiative of the brand management (e.g. advertising), consumer (e.g. blogs), or both (e.g. co-designing). (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33) Brand face exhibits the impressions of the brand that management wishes the target audience to perceive, in association with the brand management performance. Consumers' face presents the positive expression of consumers, as contributors in the consumer-brand interaction. Consumers' face includes consumers' individual and collective identities, which are activated through their relationship with the brand, and eventually attitudes and behaviours arise to build and express their identities. The fifth dimension comprises contextual forces that the both company and consumers are affected by, and therefore it has an impact on the brand identity construction. (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33-34) This framework takes the aspect of dynamic environment in consideration as it impacts on brand identity indirectly through consumers and the company, and raises brand identity's co-creational nature in discussion. Yet, it doesn't cover brand identity components comprehensively, but focuses more on the process and on the forces, that shape it.

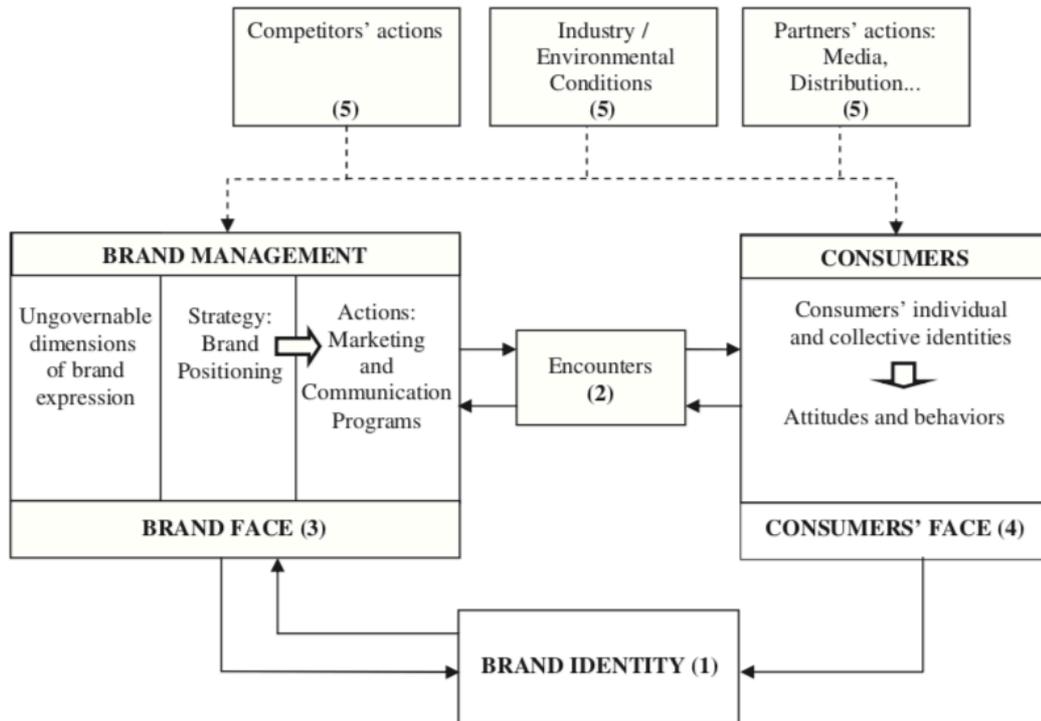


Figure 5 Brand identity framework (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33).

Process identity typifies how the service is delivered/produced for consumers and the behaviour of or interaction with staff in the process. This dimension emphasizes the staff's role as brand representatives and their significance in brand positioning in every customer touch point. It is suggested, that companies should develop their employees into "brand champions", whose self-concepts are aligned with the company's brand. (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 607-609)

Organization identity refers to the organizational values, visions or ethos that epitomize the brand and make it strategically recognizable. Identifying and sustaining the values of a service brand is the key to its success. If the brand identity isn't consistent with the company vision, it can create confusion within the consumers and weaken the brand identity. (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 609)

Symbolic identity encapsulates the signs and symbols that represent the brand and its appearance. In addition to traditional elements of brand name, logo/symbol and colour associated with the brand, the brand's country of origin is also considered as a key symbol factor. (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 609)

Servicescape identity refers to the identity of the delivery environment, and its atmosphere. Servicescape is the environment where the service is produced and consumed. Servicescape communicates cues to consumers of the company's capabilities and quality, and the purpose of the company. This, in turn, effects on consumers in their overall experience with the company, their satisfaction and brand loyalty. (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 609)

Communication identity refers to how the identity is communicated and what distinctive communication channels are used for it. Communications play an important role in building a brand identity and the nature of the communications impacts on the brand identity. (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 609-610)

Understanding brand identity helps to create more efficient positioning, segmentation and communication strategies. The SERVBID scale can help managers to understand the impact of the scale's dimensions on brand strategy and communication, which contributes to brand-building strategies. (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 610)

2.4 Separating brand identity components from dimensions

The elements of brand identity are a complex spectrum of overlapping and contradicting concepts. Table 3 represents the identified dimensions of brand identity in the concepts studied in this thesis. The notion of brand identity dimension is rather vague in the literature, as it can refer to a fundamental factor (e.g. vision) (de Chernatony 1999, 166; Burmann et al. 2017, 48), or an assemblage of various factors (e.g. servicescape) (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 609). Therefore, the distinction between a fundamental factor and an identity expressing dimensions needs to be made. In this thesis, the fundamental factors are called components, and they are included in the dimensions that express and communicate these components to co-creational consumers.

Table 3. Table of identified brand identity elements

	Aaker, D. A. (1996)	Kapferer, J. N (1994)	Burmann C., Riley, N-M., Halaszovich, T. & Schade, M. (2017)	De Chernatony, L. (1999)	Pareek, H. & Harrison, T. (2020)
Personality	x	x	x	x	
Origin	x		x		
Culture		x		x	
Reflection		x			
Relationship		x		x	
Self-image		x			
Physique	x	x			
Competences			x		
Values			x	x	x
Vision			x	x	x
Offer (d)			x		
Positioning (d)				x	x
Presentation (d)				x	
Servicescape (d)					x
Communication (d)		x			x
Symbolic (d)	x				x
Process (d)					x

The elements of brand identity are a complex spectrum of overlapping and contradicting concepts. Table 4 represents the identified dimensions of brand identity in the concepts studied in this thesis. The notion of brand identity dimension is rather vague in the literature, as it can refer to a fundamental factor (e.g. vision) (de Chernatony 1999, 166; Burmann et al. 2017, 48), or an assemblage of various factors (e.g. servicescape) (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 609). Therefore, the distinction between a fundamental factor and an identity expressing dimensions needs to be made. In this thesis, the fundamental factors are called components, and they are

included in the dimensions that express and communicate these components to co-creational consumers.

The brand identity components' roles in the literature vary notably, and their relations to each other contradicts between the academics. There's a "chicken-and-egg" problem with the components. To clarify their roles for this thesis, they are perceived as follows. Values, vision and origin are fundamental and defining components for brand identity (Burmam et al. 2017, 45; de Chernatony 1999, 166-167), and they epitomize the brand and make it strategically recognizable (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 609). Personality and culture are also in the core of brand identity, yet they are shaped by the values, vision and origin (Kapferer 2008, 184; de Chernatony 1999, 167-168). In this thesis, values, vision and origin are considered as fundamental components of brand identity, and personality and culture are considered as intermediary components of brand identity.

For brand identity dimensions to be applicable for this thesis, they need to be able to express and communicate one or more of the selected brand identity components. In Table 3, the brand identity dimensions that express one or more of the other dimensions in the literature, are marked with '(d)'. These dimensions are, what is considered truly a dimension in this thesis – an assemblage of brand identity components. Servicescape identity, communication identity, symbolic identity, process identity, and organization identity are relevant dimensions for this study, as they are designed for the service context (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 609-610), and positioning is also relevant since it helps customers to understand the proposed value (de Chernatony 1999, 168). These dimensions are also supported by the concept of company's brand face, which is to exhibit positive impressions of the brand to customers to perceive (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33). These six dimensions are selected for this thesis and they are referred as dimensions to distinct them from the components. The offer and presentation dimensions are more suitable for product-related context, and their purposes for brand identity are included in the selected dimensions (i.e. servicescape identity).

2.5 Brand identity communication

Marketing communications enable companies to create a connection from their brand to other people, places, events, brands, experiences, feelings and things. Marketing communications establish brand awareness and create brand image, which contribute to brand equity and drive sales (Kotler & Keller 2016, 580). In brand communication, an idea or image of a product or service is marketed distinctively that it's identified and recognized from its competitors by many consumers (Chinomona 2016, 126). Originally brand communication's objective has been to expose the audience to a brand to increase brand awareness, and to achieve higher recall, so the customer will buy the brand with the highest recall. The effects of exposure to the brand communication on consumer's response can be measured by analyzing brand awareness in terms of recall and recognition, favourability, strength and uniqueness of the brand associations in the consumer memory. (Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı & Özşahin 2011, 1219) Brand communication has been found to have a positive effect on consumers' brand attitudes (Kempf & Smith 1998, 336) and brand associations by influencing the brand expectations (Keller and Lehmann 2006, 733-734), and by creating a trust-based platform between brand and consumer, brand communication has a positive effect on brand trust as well (Zehir et al. 2011, 1226-1227).

Brand communication is the main integrative component in managing brand relationships with customers, employees, suppliers, channel members, the media, government regulators, and community (Zehir et al. 2011, 1219; Duncan & Moriarty 1998, 1). Brand communication should include all the brand's stakeholders – internal and external. The external brand communication's aim should be set in enhancing brand loyalty to strengthen consumer's brand relationship in the long term (Zehir et al. 2011, 1219). Internal brand communication's purpose is to strengthen the employees' brand citizenship behaviour (BCB), which is built of staff's brand understanding and brand commitment, and it's also affected by the congruence of external communications (Piehler, Schade & Burmann 2019, 454-455). The external stakeholders' effect to internal stakeholders' behaviour is also present in brand identity literature and the congruency of messaging is emphasized (de Chernatony 1999, 169).

Brand identity should influence integrated marketing communications (IMC) in creating and maintaining synergistic and effective messages for the target groups (Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan & McDonald 2005, 73). Madhavaram et al. (2005, 70) define IMC strategy as “a set of processes that include the planning, development, execution, and evaluation of coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communications programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, employees, associates, and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences”. Kotler and Keller (2016, 599) summarise IMC as “a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan”. This indicates that IMC is an essential part of a brand equity strategy. Furthermore, effective IMC potentially enhances the effectiveness of the company's portfolio of brands, which could increase brand equity. (Madhavaram et al. 2005, 70)

In summary, brand communication can be perceived as the tool to manage consumers' attitudes towards the brand (Kempf & Smith 1998, 336) and it plays a significant role in shaping the internal brand understanding and brand commitment (Piehler, Schade & Burmann 2019, 454-455). Communications role is remarkable in maintaining a congruent brand identity.

3 Brand value co-creation

Co-creation of value has become widely researched concept in the marketing literature. The catalyst of this trend was Vargo and Lusch's (2004) observation that marketing is shifting towards more service-centric logic, from which they proposed the service-dominant (S-D) logic. The S-D logic suggests that value is always co-created between stakeholders, and the beneficiary determines the value through perceived value-in-use (Vargo & Lusch 2008, 8-9). Brand value has been conceptualized as the value that is solely attributable to a brand, and like value, it's determined by the beneficiary through perceived value-in-use (Merz, Zarantello & Grappi 2018, 80) Brand value's delivery process requires brand managers to strategically understand the needs of customers, and match them with the attributes of the brand to create and deliver brand value (Gupta, Gallear, Rudd & Foroudi 2020, 210). Brand value co-creation happens when a firm and its customers interact

to co-create the actual value-in-use that is solely attributable to the brand (Merz et al. 2018, 80).

This chapter's focuses on creating understanding on brand value co-creation process and how it has emerged from the shift of perspective in marketing literature.

3.1 Service-dominant logic

In the last decades, businesses have been transforming from product manufacturers into service providers in increasing amounts. The service industry's importance for industrialized countries' economies is fundamental, as the service industry produces the highest growth in the gross domestic product (Kuester, Schumacher, Gast & Worgul 2013, 533). The difference in the characteristics between products and services has been surveyed extensively in the academic literature (e.g. Lovelock & Gummesson 2004; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1985). An established way to distinguish services from products are the characteristics of intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability of production and consumption, and perishability (Zeithaml et al. 1985, 43).

Businesses have found service providing more lucrative than product manufacturing, and therefore, manufacturers have started to create business models focusing on the customer's end of the value chain. (Wise & Baumgartner 1999, 133) Other presented reasons for this transition are that services create additional financial opportunities, marketing opportunities and strategic opportunities. Services have higher margins, they are more stable source of revenue, they offer better opportunity for additional sales and they have a stronger market entry barrier for competitors. (Gebauer & Friedli 2005, 70) Vargo and Lusch (2004) proposed service-dominant logic to replace product-centered dominant logic in marketing. Service-dominant logic emerged as the focus of marketing functions was shifting away from tangibles towards intangibles, such as knowledge, skills, interactivity and relationships. Instead of a manufactured product, service-dominant logic suggests that the appropriate unit of exchange is the application of competences, or specialized human knowledge or skills, for and to benefit the service receiver. (Vargo & Lusch 2004, 15)

Service-dominant logic perceives consumers as operant resources capable of causing benefit by directly acting on other resources in co-production of service (Vargo & Lusch 2004, 13). Relationships, customer knowledge and communication create value and augment service-dominant logic as enablers in customer experience (Ballantyne & Varey 2006, 346). In service-dominant logic, goods and service are not alternative forms of products. Goods are tools that serve as alternatives to direct service provision. Service represents the general and universal case of the exchange process; service is what is always exchanged. Goods act as aids to the service process – they help to get the value created. For example, computer software and hardware are only valuable to the extent they are aids in value propositioning and value co-creation. (Lusch & Nambisan 2015, 158-159) Service-dominant logic emphasizes the potential of co-creation, where value is derived from the service experienced by the actors (e.g. customers, suppliers and other market actors) in interaction with the company (Ballantyne & Varey 2006, 336).

As most of the manufacturing companies have adopted a servitization strategy, building a digitalization capability comes naturally, as it enables efficient data gathering and processing for R&D (Parida, Sjödin, Lenka & Wincent 2015, 41-42). Manufacturing companies can leverage this knowledge to improve their own processes and customer's processes, by providing guidance. And service providers can create new types of customer interaction, which enable an open dialogue between the provider and customers, that contributes to better understanding of customers' value creation process. (Coreynen, Matthyssens & Van Bockhaven 2017, 44) This implies that companies who utilize digital services are most likely looking for ways to develop their offerings to serve customers better, and create enhanced solutions that mutually serve both the company and customers through value co-creation.

3.2 Value co-creation

In the marketing literature, value has various definitions, as it depends on from whose perspective is it interpreted from (Woodall 2003, 1). Value formation can be divided in two types: interactive and non-interactive. Non-interactive value

formation, value-in-exchange, is the more traditional and previously dominant in marketing research. In this view, value is embedded into products or services by the production company during the production process separately from the customer, and the price that the customer pays for the product or service determines its value. (Echeverri & Skålén 2011, 353; Grönroos 2008, 299) The interactive view of value formation emerges from S-D logic, and implies that value production can't be separated from its consumption (Vargo & Lusch 2004, 15). This view emphasizes that value is co-created, realized and determined in the social context of the simultaneous production and consumption process, and the value is subjectively assessed from the customers' or the providers' points of view (Echeverri & Skålén 2011, 353). The value-in-use view takes the concept of value formation even further away from the value-in-exchange view, as it proposes that customers are the value creators and the service providing companies can involve themselves as facilitators and supporters into the customers' value-generating process (Grönroos 2008, 310). Grönroos and Voima (2013, 146) concludes that "Value is uniquely experientially and contextually experienced and determined by the customer"

S-D logic introduced the aspect that service is a process where the value is created and that the consumer is an active participant in this process. Today's consumers are increasingly seeking ways to influence business systems and wanting to interact with companies to co-create the value they experience and ultimately define (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, 6). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) propose that the consumer's co-creation experience has become the very basis of value and it's a highly individual experience. According to Grönroos (2015), customers experience the value within their own processes, in which they are in interaction with the supplier or the service provider through their provided services, products, information, network or other offerings. He continues by concluding that value as a concept is difficult to understand and manage. (Grönroos 2015, 193) This study's perception on value is based on the concept of value-in-use, where value's production and consumption is a collaborative process in which the consumers ultimately assess and determine the value.

Value co-creation is joint creation and evolution of value with stakeholders, intensified and enacted through platforms of engagements, virtualized and

emergent from ecosystems of capabilities, and actualized and embodied as experiences, expanding wealth and welfare (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2014, 14). Capsulizing this, value co-creation is a joint problem-solving, where the supplier's and customer's resources are integrated in collaborative interaction process to achieve the optimal value-in-use (see Fig. 6) (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola 2012, 17) The social, business, natural and civic communities form ecosystems of capabilities (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2014, 83), which in this thesis are noted, but in order to research the brand identity's elements in co-creational process, the ecosystem dimension of value co-creation isn't further studied.

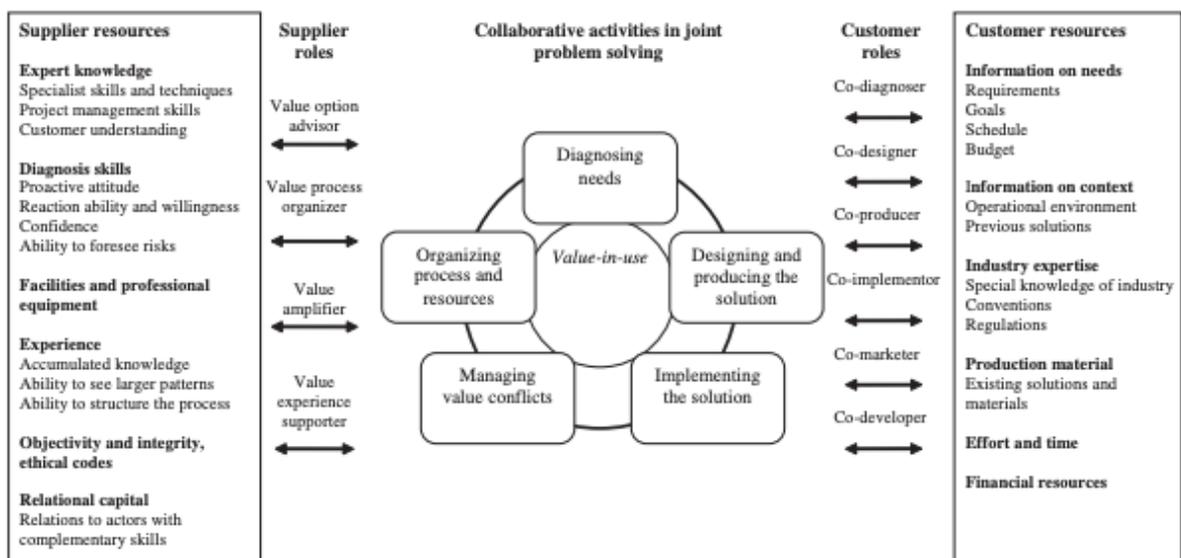


Figure 6 Joint problem solving as value co-creation in knowledge intensive services. (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola 2012, 23)

Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola (2012) proposed a value co-creation framework for knowledge intensive business services (KIBS), which according to them, is probably generalizable to solutions context as well (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola 2012, 23). This dyadic problem-solving process consists of five key activities: diagnosing needs, designing and producing the solution, managing value conflicts, organizing the process and resources, and implementing the solution, from which the former three can impact negatively or positively on the construction of value-in-use. These activities don't necessarily occur linearly. (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola 2012, 23) In contrast to S-D logic's premise that "the enterprise can only make value propositions" (Lusch & Vargo 2008, 8), in KIBS context, the customers were found to influence the value proposition through negotiation and the contribution of their

own resources (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola 2012, 23) As this framework is created in and for KIBS context, it focuses more on the functional value and don't take brand-related elements in consideration in value-in-use, yet it provides a holistic view on value co-creation process and proposes the resource based perspective on value co-creation.

3.3 Brand value

As value, brand value also has various definitions depending on the logic and perspective from which it is perceived, and it's sometimes interpreted the same as brand equity. Kapferer (2008, 14) defines brand value as "the ability of brands to deliver profits". This definition is derived from a company's financial perspective, where brand value is the profit potential of the brand assets, mediated by brand market strength (Kapferer 2008, 14). Kapferer did not distinguish the conceptual differences between brand equity and brand value.

Raggio and Leone (2007) conducted a theoretical separation between brand equity and brand value. In their research, they defined brand equity as the perception or desire that a brand will meet a promise of benefits. Raggio and Leone continue to conceptualize the brand equity's operational function as a moderator of the impact of marketing activities (e.g. products and advertising messages) on consumers' actions (i.e. consumer behaviour). They argued, that brand equity is a potential driver of a brand's value, which they define as the sale or replacement price of a brand. (Raggio & Leone 2007, 382-385) Within this concept, with leveraging brand equity, brand's value can be increased from its current level to appropriate level where all existing brand equity is leveraged. The leveraging of brand equity is dependent of the company's strategies, capabilities and resources. (Raggio & Leone 2009, 249-250) Like Kapferer's, Raggio and Leone's definition also focuses on pursuing the maximum profit by optimizing company's assets to gain the highest potential of brand value. In these perspectives, customers are perceived as passive actors who consume the company-provided value of the most attractive brand to them. Due to this, the customers' perceived value isn't noted. This indicates that the profit driven brand value conceptualization isn't customer-centric and it's likely to be more suitable for goods rather than services.

The logic of brand and branding has shifted from the conceptualization of brand as a company-provided property of goods to more of brand as a collaborative, value co-creation activity of companies and their stakeholders (Merz, He & Vargo 2009, 328) – brands are viewed as social processes involving multiple stakeholders (Iglesias, Ind & Alvaro 2013, 670). This shift in brand logic brought up a new understanding of brand value, which can be defined by the perceived use value determined collectively by all of the stakeholders. (Merz, He & Vargo 2009, 329)

3.4 Brand value co-creation

From an organic view of the brand (OVB), brands are perceived as organic entities because they are created together with various stakeholders and the organisation doesn't have the entire control of the process. According to OVB, brand value is co-created conversationally with multiple stakeholders which suggests that managers need to provide a direction for the brand, but the meaning of the brand is constantly negotiated with stakeholders. This calls for brand leadership to be humble, open and participatory. (Iglesias, Ind & Alvaro 2013, 671) Figure 7 depicts the conversational space between the organisation and individual customer where both parties interact through brand interfaces and employees (Iglesias, Ind & Alvaro 2013, 677). The S-D logic favours the co-creational concept of brand value, in which brand value can be defined as perceived use value of a brand co-created and determined collectively by stakeholders (Merz et al 2018, 80).



Figure 7 The conversational space (Iglesias, Ind & Alvaro 2013, 677)

A joint agencial experiential brand value co-creation framework was proposed to understand more of the brand value co-creation process and its co-creational elements (Fig. 8). This framework emphasizes brand engagement platforms involving both relational activities and offerings, at the intersection of joint agency of experiential co-creators (e.g. customers, employees, partners, or other stakeholder) and co-creational enterprises as organizing the practice of brand value co-creation (e.g. innovating or marketing offerings, or managing network relations) (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 93). This logic suggests engaging stakeholders personally and collectively in creating brand value together, expanding how companies connect brand value creation opportunities with brand resources, and generating brand engagement platforms as purposefully designed collections of persons, artifacts, interfaces, and processes. These platforms enable interactional environments to intensify joint agency of experiential co-creators and generate mutually valuable outcomes for all participants and stakeholders in the brand value co-creation system. (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 102)

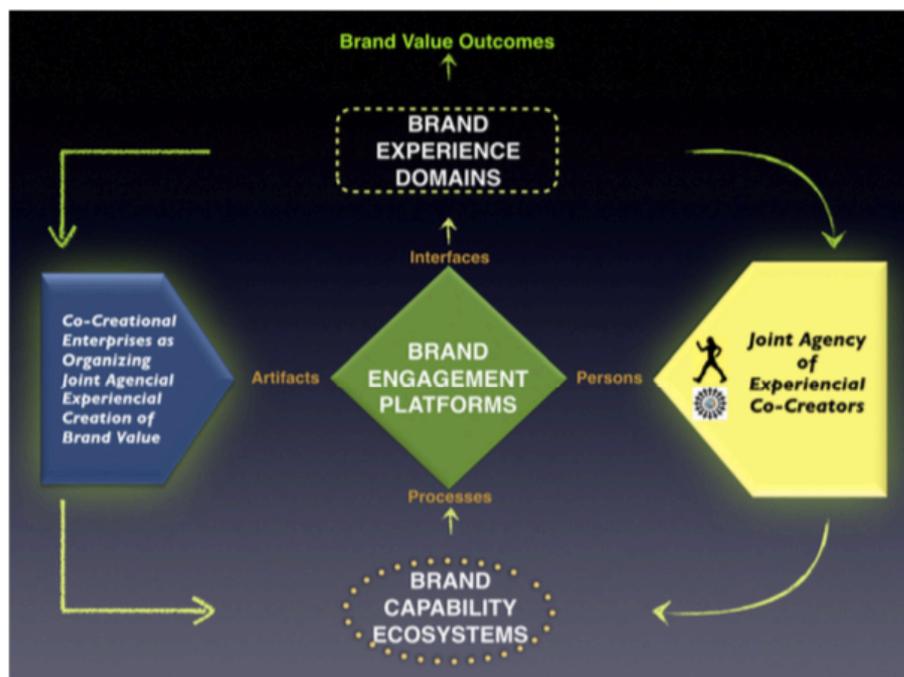


Figure 8 Integrative framework of brand value co-creation (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 95)

In the Figure 7, the brand capability ecosystems consist of the joint capabilities of both stakeholders and enterprises, from which brand engagement platforms emerge, and are enabled and supported, as individuals of experiential co-creators

and enterprises engage through these platforms in different creative ways. The brand engagement platforms can be divided into two different platforms through which both sides interact to create meaningful brand experience: brand offerings as engagement platform and brand relations as engagement platform. (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 96) As this study focuses on the brand value co-creation between the company and their customers, the scope of inspection of brand value co-creation is limited to company's and customers' co-creational attributes and actions. This limitation is supported by Grönroos and Voima's (2013) argument that brand value co-creation only emerges from direct interactions between the company and customers.

Brand offerings as engagement platform is in line with Grönroos' (2015) view on customer's value experience, in which the customer interacts with the company's provided services, products, information or other offerings (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 97; Grönroos 2015, 193). In a digitalized world, offerings now include technology-enabled augmentation of physical goods and retail environments, along with pure digital services, purposefully designed as brand engagement platforms. Through brand offerings platform companies can gain insights of how the customer's use the offerings and how their value-in-use is generated. Customers, on the other hand, can learn about the offerings and process the offerings' relevance for their value-in-use experience. (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 97-98)

Brand relations as engagement platforms consist of a composition of systems designed around company or brand related activities, for example connecting with customers, employees, partners, or any other stakeholders, innovating offerings, customer support/service, and brand communities, whether they're company-organized or not. (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 96) In order to include stakeholders to participate in the brand value co-creation, companies need to create an environment of trust, where participants feel free to be creative and create shared brand value. (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 97)

3.5 The co-creators of brand value

The co-creational enterprise's (left side of the Fig. 3) task in the brand value co-creation is to conceptualize and design brand engagement platforms to enable different types of individualized experiences and co-evolve the environments generated by them, together with actions of co-creating individuals (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 99). For companies to be able to provide new individualized experiences and co-evolve their value co-creational environments, they need to design their knowledge management activities and infrastructure around identified value co-creation processes, which enables organizational learning (Payne, Storbacka & Frow 2008, 90). Brand engagement platforms can be any physical or digital interactional assembly of persons (other consumers, employees, partners, and other stakeholders), physical or digital artifacts (including data), interfaces, and processes designed to intensify individuals' engagement (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 96).

The joint agency of experiential co-creators (right side of the Fig. 3) includes customers, employees, partners, suppliers, and other stakeholders. Together with the co-creational enterprise, they determine the brand capability ecosystem. (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 95-96). Like in Figure 1, the counterpart to the enterprise in value co-creation, the experiential co-creators can be interpreted to have their limited and varied resources for the brand value co-creation. Merz et al. (2018) identify four customer owned resources that effect on the brand value co-creation: brand knowledge, brand skills, brand creativity, and brand connectedness. They are valuable to companies and also conceptually distinct, but exhibit many synergies between each other (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold & Carlson 2017, 317).

Brand knowledge captures customers' accumulation of knowledge of the brand. Customers' personal experience with the brand and deep knowledge of their needs make them optimal source of brand and usage knowledge. (Harmeling et al. 2017, 317). Brand knowledge helps companies with marketing communications by relevant content (e.g. blogs and reviews) shared by customers, developing brand innovations and enabling customer-to-customer support (Merz et al. 2018, 81).

Brand skills refers to the extent of which the customers are stimulated by the brand within their own capabilities, which includes the customer persuasion that indicates the degree of influence that a customer has on potential or existing customers. (Merz et al. 2018, 81) Customer persuasion is valuable capital for companies, since customers trust more on the information coming from other customers (word-of-mouth) than the information from company (marketing communications) or sales representative. (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels 2009, 98)

Brand creativity is a customer's "production, conceptualization, or development of novel, useful ideas, processes, or solutions to problems," which can generate competitive advantage in terms of creative marketing communication and/or product innovation (Kozinets, Hemesberger & Schau 2008, 341). Creative customer-generated content can motivate idea generation and provide unique insights into meaningful product or service innovations, which help ensure innovation success (Harmeling et al. 2017, 317)

Brand connectedness represents customers' interpersonal connections within their social network. Through customers' networks, companies can broaden their audience beyond existing customers and also diversify their audience (Merz et al. 2018, 81), which, by leveraging, can provide a source of competitive advantage to firms (Harmeling et al. 2017, 316).

As brand value co-creation depends on the stakeholders' ability and willingness to co-create (Payne, Storbacka, Frow & Knox 2009, 383). The customer-owned resources can be seen representing their ability, and willingness can be described as the customer motivation. The degree, by which the customers utilize their resources is affected by their motivation. Customers' motivation comprises brand trust, brand passion and brand commitment. (Merz et al. 2018, 81) Brand trust enhances stakeholders' attitude and loyalty toward the brand and their willingness participate in open innovation projects (Füller, Matzler & Hoppe 2008, 615). Besides brand trust, brand passion and brand commitment motivate customers to interact with the brand value co-creation. Brand passion is a strong feeling customers develop toward brands, and it can be utilized to strengthen the customer-brand relationship, as well as, help achieving a larger audience by positive word-of-mouth.

Brand commitment refers to the extent of which customers are willing to work for the brand and its success. Committed stakeholders are more likely active in brand communities and to participate in co-creative innovation projects. (Merz et al. 2018, 81)

Customers co-create brand value within the previously mentioned engagement platforms of brand offerings and brand relations (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 97) by utilizing their owned resources within their degree of motivation and capabilities. Brand trust, brand passion and brand commitment together, form brand motivation that along with customers' brand resources determine customers' degree of willingness to engage with brand (Harmeling et al. 2017; Merz et al. 2018). Companies need to identify customers' brand value co-creation activities (Marz et al. 2018, 88), and design their engagement platforms so that the joint agencial co-creators are willing and able to utilize their resources into the brand value co-creation. The building of optimal brand engagement platforms to gain the pursued and wanted brand experience is studied next in this thesis.

3.6 Towards brand experience

Managers and employees, as brand co-creators from within the co-creational enterprise, need to consider the embeddedness of engagement platforms in the daily experiences of customers (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 100). Digital services in particular, enable companies to establish an open two-way communication that guides the design and development of customer experience management (Klaus 2014, 314). This offers a deeper understanding of the involvements of people, but also their contexts of engagements, the events that enhance their brand experiences through engagement platforms, and what is meaningful to people. Critical to this is that co-creational enterprises build the configuration of brand experiences with their stakeholders through organizing principles of dialogue, access, reflexivity, and transparency (DART). (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 100; Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2014, 56) By establishing the principles of DART into value co-creation process, companies can strengthen their relationship with customers, and understand what is truly valuable for customers and redesign their platforms to support it better (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2014, 55-56). This is supported by Iglesias,

Ind and Alfaro's (2013) research, in which it is suggested that managers need to share information with individuals to create an attractive environment for individuals to participate in the co-creation process (Iglesias et al. 2013, 685). In other words, DART enables companies to gain insight of and enhance collaboratively the customer-owned resources and customer motivation in brand value co-creation, and to capitalize it into constantly co-evolving product or service development (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 100). Brand engagement platform can also be a key opportunity to competitive advantage, therefore companies should keep in mind its feature to be difficult to imitate by competitors (Frow, Nenonen, Payne & Storbacka 2015, 473).

Customers can rarely describe before-hand what the desirable and meaningful experience for them is, but visualization of the experience and dialogue help them assess its meaningfulness for them. Co-creational enterprises have to give individuals appropriate creative tools in light of their co-creational capabilities. An optimal engagement platform design integrates both the "lived" experiences of participants and their creativity, stimulated by the tools and knowledge provided by company designers, for example by incorporating aspects of open innovation, user toolkits, and virtual customer environments. (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 101) Also the required level and duration of engagement should be defined clearly and communicated to customers (Frow et al. 2015, 473).

To research the brand identity's elements in the brand value co-creation, this study approaches brand value's concept from the value co-creational perspective, because it takes the stakeholders in consideration as value creating actors. The brand identity literature emphasizes employees' role as active participants in any relationship between the brand and stakeholders (de Chernatony 1999, 169), and argues that brand identity must be co-created (Kennedy & Guzman 2016, 315). Therefore, it can be stated, that the co-creational attribute of brand identity indicates strongly that the creations of brand identity and brand value are connected to each other.

4 Brand identity concepts in brand value co-creation

In order to shift brand identity's and brand value's creations closer to each other, their similarities and their possible conjoining dimension need to be identified. In this thesis, the brand value co-creation serves as the phenomenon into which the most relevant found brand identity elements will be implemented in a way that helps the co-creations of brand value and brand identity.

In this hyper-informed and globally connected time, the business environment is increasingly dynamic and consumers are increasingly interested in participating companies' brand identity shaping process, as well as into the value creation process, that they experience themselves (Ramaswamy & Prahalad 2004; Kennedy & Guzman 2016). This notion instantly narrows down the number of valid and relevant brand identity dimensions and components, as the focus needs to be set on brand identity frameworks and concepts that include a dialog between the company and customers and/or notes the customers as active participants. Yet, all of the frameworks in the brand identity literature may include components that are relevant for brand value co-creation. These aspects will be researched next in this thesis.

Aaker's (1996) and Kapferer's (2008) concepts of brand identity emphasize the company's role as planning, designing and outwards communicating organization. In both of these concepts the brand-customer relationship aspect is included, yet it is presented as an external component that aims to strengthen the brand image, and it doesn't include a dialog between the company and customers. Contextual factors are taken in notice, but they are taken as static factors, which implies that brand identity is a given matter and not an evolving one. (Aaker 1996, 79; Kapferer 2008, 183) Due to these aspects, neither of these frameworks are valid for this thesis.

de Chernatony's (1999) framework incorporates the aspect of evolving brand identity with external influences. It suggests that through relationships between staff and stakeholders, the brand identity is shaped by brand reputation. (de Chernatony

1999, 171) Brand reputation forms over time (Herbig & Milewicz 1995, 5), which might cause problems in maintaining an aspired brand identity in a highly dynamic environment. This view on managing brand identity doesn't make this framework incompetent for this thesis, but it doesn't present the customers' co-creational needs and capabilities in branding. The cyclical course though implies that customers are listened and the company is a learning organization.

Burmann's et al. (2017) concept and framework proposes comprehensively the dimensions they perceive brand identity consisting of, and the co-creational elements are present (Burmann et al. 2017, 110). Customers are also seen participating in the brand identity shaping through feedback, which is then considered in the management's strategic brand positioning process (Burmann et al. 2017, 112). The co-creational aspect of this framework focuses on the value that is created simultaneously for both the customers and the company, and the customers' participation in the brand identity co-creation occurs indirectly through the company management.

da Silveira et al. (2013) emphasize substantially the dynamic aspect in the brand identity's creation. They argue that brand identity is a dynamic process developing over time through mutually influencing inputs from brand managers and other social constituents, such as consumers (da Silveira et al. 2013, 35). In their concept of brand identity management, besides the dynamic essence, the consumers' role is in the core of the construction of brand identity, and the contextual forces are seen affecting both the brand's and the consumers' side (da Silveira et al. 2013, 34-35). The observation of dynamic environment, in which the brand identity is constructed, clearly suggests companies to utilize a co-creational layout and mindset to manage their brand identity. The consumers' identities shape their attitudes and behaviours towards the brand (da Silveira et al. 2013, 34), which are similar to the customer-owned resources and customer motivation in the brand value co-creation (Merz et al. 2018, 80). Due to its co-creational and dynamic features, this framework is remarkable for this thesis. As this framework focuses solely on brand identity, it doesn't address brand identity's role in the brand value co-creation, although the elements are quite congruent to brand value co-creation.

In Pareek and Harrison's study (2020), a measurement tool, SERVBID, is proposed to assess brand identity in service context. The SERVBID divides service brand identity into five dimensions: process identity, organization identity, symbolic identity, servicescape identity, and communication identity (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 607-609). Pareek and Harrison's study inspects brand identity from process orientation perspective in contrast to pure output orientation that's present in the goods-dominant perspective (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 602). They argue that customers' brand trust and brand loyalty are built by the service brand identity (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 602), but the customers' role as contributors to brand identity isn't considered. This conceptualization of brand identity proposes dimensions, through which companies enable customers to experience the planned brand identity. They represent the same function as the brand promise, brand behaviour and brand offer in the Burmann et al. (2017, 110) framework – they are the dimensions that enable companies to express their planned assemblage of brand identity components. For this thesis, this concept lacks co-creational features, but it proposes deeper understanding of the company's input into brand identity's creation.

To summarize, compared to Ramaswamy & Ozcan's (2016) concept of brand value co-creation, an applicable concept of brand identity for this thesis needs to have a dynamic aspect (da Silveira et al. 2013), a cyclical dialogue between the company and customers (de Chernatony 1999; Burmann et al. 2017; da Silveira et al. 2013), a view of the company as an enabler (da Silveira et al. 2013; Burmann et al. 2017; Pareek & Harrison 2020), and a perception of customers as active participants (da Silveira et al. 2013; Burmann et al. 2013). To create a deeper understanding of how brand identity is connected to brand value co-creation, the identified dimensions and components of brand identity need to be revised and assessed by their compatibility into the brand value co-creation context.

4.1 Compatible brand identity elements for brand value co-creation

As the compatible brand identity creation characteristics have been discussed, this thesis turns to examine the brand identity components that can be included into brand value co-creation. Comparison is to be made against brand value co-

creation's engagement platforms, platform components, company's capabilities (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 95), and customers' capabilities (Merz et al. 2018, 81).

The functions of brand engagement platform (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Frow et al. 2015) and the brand encounters dimension (da Silveira et al. 2013) are vastly congruent. Both of these concepts occur in interaction between a company and its customers (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; da Silveira et al. 2013), like in the conversational space (Iglesias et al. 2013, 677). In the brand identity literature's brand encounters dimension (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33) and brand touch points (Burmam et al. 2017, 28) conceptually overlap one another.

In brand value co-creation context, the individualized brand experience emerges from engagement platforms (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 99) via direct interaction between the company and the customer (Grönroos & Voima 2013, 146), which then forms the perceived use value of brand that's determined by customer (Merz et al. 2018, 80). The brand encounters can occur directly or indirectly, and they have an indirect impact on the brand identity through consumers' identities and the company's brand strategy (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33). In this light, the brand encounters can be viewed to include the engagement platforms, and therefore, the brand encounters are more viable for this thesis.

Consumers' individual and collective identities shape their attitudes and behaviour towards the brand, which have a direct impact on the brand identity co-creation (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33), and brand identity then contributes to brand trust and brand loyalty (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 607), which increases consumers motivation to participate in brand value co-creation (Merz et al. 2018, 81). This indicates that through participating in interactions with a brand, consumers shape their willingness to interact with the brand and participate in its brand value co-creation. Consumers' behaviour (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33) resonates with customers' resources (Merz et al. 2018, 81), as they both represent how the customer interact with a brand. In this light, the customers' capabilities in brand identity co-creation and brand value co-creation are the same resources and motivation. As customers utilize their resources with their level of motivation into brand value co-creation, it can be

deduced, they simultaneously participate into the brand identity's co-creation, and vice versa.

The company's contribution to brand value co-creation depends on its ability to learn from brand experiences, capability to adapt to changes in a dynamic environment, and ability to provide individualized brand experiences (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 99). In brand identity literature, the brand management's role consists of same functions: create a co-creational marketing strategy that's shaped by the dynamic environment and customer insight, and provide aspired marketing and communication programs for customers (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33). In this thesis, the brand strategy is perceived to be formed from the fundamental components (vision, values, and origin) and the intermediary components (personality and culture).

The engagement platform components persons, artifacts, processes, and interfaces (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 95) are conceptually similar with the chosen brand identity dimensions for this thesis (servicescape, communication, symbolic, process and organization identity) (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 609-610). Brand positioning also has the essence of a dimension as it should be constituted in an alignment with brand's values and vision (de Chernatony 1999, 168), it has strategical importance in establishing and enduring a congruent communication (Pareek & Harrison 2020, 610; da Silveira et al. 2013, 33), and it effects on brand image (Burmam et al. 2017, 107). In this thesis, positioning is considered as a company's internal strategic brand identity dimension, that steers and supports the other dimensions. The other the chosen brand identity dimensions are viewed as the dimensions that build the brand encounters for brand value and brand identity co-creation, and enable customers to participate in the co-creation.

Brand identity is co-created between the brand company and customer, which has an impact on customers' brand motivation and brand behaviour, and it enables companies to gain customer insight to shape their brand strategy and actions (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33). The emerging brand experiences from brand interactions (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 99), provide customers the needed experience to shape their own contemporary identities based on the brand (Black & Veloutsou

2017, 424), which then lets customers to reassess their brand motivation and brand behaviour (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33). This co-creational process ultimately generates mutually valuable outcomes for the company and the customer (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016, 102). This supports the perception of brand identity emerging from brand experiences, and both of them to have an impact on both sides of the co-creation.

As it has been pointed out, brand identity co-creation and brand value co-creation vastly resemble to one another, yet their desirable outcomes are different. Considering all the studied characteristics, elements and processes, a conceptual framework can be proposed. This thesis proposes an integrative framework (Figure 1) to bring together these two branding concepts.

Next in this thesis, the proposed framework's elements, their influences on each other, and the directions of the proposed co-creational flows will be studied in the empirical part.

5 Research methodology

This study's empirical research's purpose was to create understanding on how companies think of and manage their brand identities' in brand value co-creation. The empirical part was conducted by interviewing representatives of the chosen companies to gain insight of how they perceive and manage brand identities in brand value co-creation processes. This qualitative study doesn't aim to provide wide generalizations of the subject matter, but to create understanding of how the theoretical aspects are represented in practice.

In the literature, brand identity's elements, and the proposed concepts to manage it, vary quite a lot. Besides the vagueness of brand identity's concepts in the literature, the research of brand identity's role in the brand value co-creation is scarce. This study aims to broaden the knowledge of this phenomenon, and to create understanding of how companies perceive their brand identity and how they view its role in the brand value co-creation. Wide generalizations from this phenomenon aren't expected nor pursued, yet, they will be discussed if there's a concrete evidence to suggest them.

5.1 Qualitative research

The methods of conducting an empirical research are generally divided into quantitative and qualitative. In quantitative analysis, the arguments are based on numbers and the systematic statistical causalities between them (Alasuutari 2011, 36). Qualitative research is seen as an approach to clarify a structure of an internally logical entity that's assumed as a singular (Alasuutari 2011, 39), and its objective is to thoroughly understand a real-life phenomenon or situation (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2004, 152). Qualitative analysis consists of simplifying data and only analysing it from the perspective set in the theoretical framework and concluding the analysis by finding causalities and binding the conclusions to the previous theories (Alasuutari 2011, 39-45). Outcomes of qualitative research are usually composed of essential representations and presentations of salient findings from the analytic synthesis of the data and can include new insights and understandings of individual and social complexities. (Saldaña 2011, 4). A well-executed qualitative

research has the theoretical part in a dialogue with the empirical part of the study (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 74).

Qualitative research method is criticized for its small size of sample groups, which causes the data to be highly subjective and vastly dependent on researcher's interpretation. Still, qualitative research provides the possibility to analyse in-depth motivations and feelings of the interviewees, thus, it differs from the purpose of quantitative research. (McDaniel & Gates 2013, 80-82) Generalizations has a limited role in qualitative research but they aren't completely excluded, and a researcher may try to generalize findings from their study (Yin 2011, 98).

5.2 Research design

This thesis is a qualitative research, because of the objective, that is to clarify and gain deeper understanding of a complex social process that can't be measured in numbers. The chosen research strategy was a multiple-case study. Case studies' answer research questions when they are in form of "how" or "why", and the aim of them is to investigate the temporary issue within their real-life context (Yin 2003, 9). A multiple-case study is chosen when two or more occasions are seen to be similar, which offers better opportunities for generalizations by analysing the similarities between the cases (Yin 2011, 226). The studied companies operate in different industries, yet they both are brand-oriented service companies to an extent, the generalizations in this study need to be process based in-depth interpretations.

Qualitative manner is often favoured in marketing research over quantitative methods, as the aim is to explain the chosen phenomenon through social processes (Koskinen, Peltonen & Alasuutari 2005, 15). This is as well this study's aim. The tenacity and practicality of the researched theories found in the literature will be explored in a real-life context. The aim is to broaden the knowledge and to create understanding of how companies perceive their brand identity and how they view its role in the brand value co-creation in the service context.

The research approach for this study is deductive, which means that existing theory has been studied before collecting data, and the research questions and objectives

are designed according to the findings in the existing literature (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 569) Due to the complexity of the concepts of brand identity and brand value co-creation, the deductive manner was necessary for this research to gain understanding of what are the components and the objectives of these concepts. This approach is debated to have issues in qualitative analysis, because the theoretical framework may be too restrictive in relation to the findings from the data. This is taken in consideration in the analysis part and in the interviews of this study. The strategic approach in this thesis is a multiple-case study on two respectively large companies in their own market, through which, the companies' genuine thoughts of brand identity's relation to brand value co-creation will be researched. As the case companies operate on different industries, their efforts in marketing activities may vary quite drastically, which will be taken in consideration in this study.

5.3 Research context and description of the case companies

To create better understanding of how companies perceive their brand identity and its role in the brand value co-creation, two case studies were conducted of these particular brands. On a revenue scale, both case companies are considered as large companies (Company A annual report 2020; Company B annual report 2020; Tilastokeskus 2021). Both companies' businesses are focused on the Finnish market (Company A annual report 2020; Company B annual report 2020). Companies operate in different industries, both of them utilize co-creational aspects in their business, and they're both brand-driven companies in their competitive markets. The qualitative data was gathered via two separate interviews and it is anonymous due to the delicate company specific information. Table 4 represents the case companies' basic information. Companies' revenues and operating industries are presented to get a better understanding of the companies.

Table 4. Basic information of the case study companies (Company A annual report 2020; Company B annual report 2020)

Company	Revenue (EUR, in millions)	Industry
Company A	5 700€	Retail
Company B	980€	Healthcare

These companies were chosen for this study due to their aspects of being enablers for a value co-creation, their large size and being known brands in their own markets. Brand value co-creation theories were studied before choosing the companies, therefore the choices were reasoned against the literature. Even though the companies are vastly different, they both serve end consumers and they both utilize digital services as a part of their value co-creational process. This taken in consideration, and putting the external factors aside, both companies' strategic approach to serve their customers are quite similar, which makes them suitable for this study. For a qualitative research to be more generalizable, it is suggested to explore companies from different industries (Creswell 2013, 100).

As a researcher of this study, I had known both of these companies for a long time before the start of this study, and used their services. Yet, the observing manner in this study limits to the choosing of the case study companies and depicting of the case companies. The requirements for the chosen companies were that they serve the end consumers, enable value co-creation between the company and its customers, utilize digital services, and that they are known brands in their respective markets. Due to the complexity of the studied matter, many companies declined for an interview, which indicates something about the subject. Having personal contacts in the chosen companies helped remarkably to arrange the interviews. Some companies declined the interview request even though the discussion with them included a mutual contact person.

5.4 Data collection

This research utilizes primary and secondary data. Primary data is based on two separate interviews with a representative from a studied case company. Both companies' websites and annual reports serve as the secondary data for this research. The interviews were conducted via video calls, which were preceded by short e-mail messaging to arrange a suitable time for the interviews and to introduce the topics of this study.

Case studies are common in qualitative researches. In case study, the researcher examines one specific case closely, and therefore, the data collection is usually rather extensive, including interviews, observations and documents (Creswell 2007, 75). Case studies are valuable for testing current theories and making comparisons between existing theories and contemporary real-life occurrences. Case studies embody the essence of specific problem solving. In case studies, the theory and the stated research problems dictate how and where the data is collected. The researched topics of case studies usually emerge from the researcher's personal interests. (Koskinen et al. 2005, 154-156)

Primary data for qualitative analysis is usually collected through interviews or observations, from which the interview technique is much more common (Saunders et al. 2016). Interviews are about asking purposeful questions and carefully listen to the answer to be able to ask further questions to gain in-depth knowledge from the interviewee (Saunders et al. 2016, 388). The interviews can be divided into four different types: structured, semi-structured, theme and open or unstructured interviews. A structured interview doesn't enable free discussion, because the questions and answers to choose are given to the interviewee. A semi-structured interview differs from structured by excluding the answer options. A theme interview dictates the discussion themes for the interview without formed questions and enables an open discussion. An open interview resembles a normal discussion between the interviewer and interviewee. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 85-86)

For case studies, there are six different ways to gather data: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artefacts (Yin 2003, 85). In this study, the primary data was collected through semi-structured theme interviews, and documentations were utilized to collect secondary data. The interview questions were formed by the findings in the literature, and to make the data more comparable and generalizable, the same questions were sent to both interviewees. According to Eskola & Suoranta (1998, 88), open-ended questions create more room for interpretations. The semi-structured theme interviews consisted of three themes, that included several "how" and "why" questions to clarify the companies' specific processes. The themes of the interview and the interview questions were sent to the interviewees week before the

interviews took place, but the interviewees were not required to familiarize themselves with themes and questions. As this research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were held via video calls and they lasted around 40 minutes. As the interviewees the both Finnish natives, the interviews were held in Finnish to enable more natural expression. The interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards to help the data analysing process. Appendix 1 shows the interview questions.

In order to gain insight of the case companies' brand identity, the theme interview technique was necessary because it leaves more room for the interviewees to discuss their perspectives and feelings, and it allows the interview to flow in its natural course. As the brand identity is often mixed with brand image in the everyday conversations, it is more likely the that inner identity-related aspects emerge from more open conversation. The semi-structural part was presented as guiding questions under the introduced themes, and their aim was to clarify the more brand value co-creation related processes and matters, since they are processes and easier to explain. The interviewees from the chosen companies work in different roles within their companies; one manages their brand and consumer-insight, and the other works at digital service design and consumer-insight.

The secondary data in this study is documentations that are public information, which were collected from the companies' websites, including the contents of the websites and annual reports. These documents were gathered before the interviews were conducted. The secondary data's purpose in this research is to help describing the companies, and it doesn't contribute directly to answering this study's research question, but rather to depict the context for reader.

5.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis' purpose is to clarify the data, and through it, produce new information of the research phenomenon. The scattered data needs to be condensed into clear and meaningful form without excluding any relevant information. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 140) Yin (2011, 177) identifies five phases for qualitative analytic process: compiling, disassembling, reassembling,

interpreting, and concluding. In case studies, the collected data is compared to theory, and the research questions can be edited to if the data doesn't serve them. The case is then analysed thoroughly and the research questions may be edited again if needed. (Koskinen et al., 2005, 166)

When analysing qualitative data, the next step after the data collection is to identify different themes or patterns from the data (Miles & Huberman 1994, 45). Coding data into different categories helps to find patterns from the vast array of data (Saldaña 2011, 92). In this study, the data source was the interview transcripts. The data was coded into different categories based on the themes of this study, and then divided under narrower topics that had emerged from the literature. The two main themes, brand identity and brand value co-creation, were highlighted in the transcripts with different colours as they were identified during the coding process. This helped to process the data more efficiently, and enabled more systematic manner to find patterns and similarities between the data and theory. The coding used in this study is presented in table 5.

Table 5. List of the codes used in this study

BRAND IDENTITY IN BRAND VAUE CO-CREATION	Code
Brand identity	BI
Awareness	BI_A
Elements	BI_E
Formation	BI_F
External factors	BI_EF
Measuring	BI_M
Controlling	BI_C
Components	BI_Cp
Communicating BI to customers	BI_CC
Positioning	BI_P
BI's role in business	BI_RB
Brand value co-creation	BVCC
Interactions between the company and customers	BVCC_I

Encounters	BVCC_E
Customers' role	BVCC_CR
BI dimensions in BVCC	BVCC_BID
Customers' individual needs	BVCC_CI
Brand experience	BVCC_BE
BVCC shaping BI	BVCC_BI
Brand value in use	BVCC_BVU

As the questions were the same in both interviews, the course of the themes emerging from the interviews is very similar. This helped the coding process, when the interview transcripts were processed with the interview question template beside them. As the themes of interviews were based on the theory, the coding of the themes makes the comparison between theory and data more streamlined.

5.6 Reliability and validity

The research's reliability and validity need to be assessed to prove its trustworthiness. Reliability indicates if the research was to be repeated, the same results would emerge. Validity refers to the suitability of the used measures, accuracy of the analysis' results, and the generalisability of the findings. (Saunders et al. 2016, 202). These measurements are often considered irrelevant for qualitative studies where the results are interpretative and subjective assumptions of the researcher (Saunders et al. 2016, 204-205). Yet, for all kinds of research, the key quality control issue deals with the study's validity and its findings. In a valid study, the data is properly collected and interpreted, so that the conclusions represent accurately the real world that was studied. (Yin 2011, 78).

The concepts of reliability and validity has been taken from quantitative research and planted into the context of qualitative research. Due to the vastly different objectives and ways to conduct the research between quantitative and qualitative research, it has been argued that reliability and validity are not appropriate measures for qualitative research's trustworthiness. (Golafshani 2003) Stenbacka (2001, 552) argues that reliability is a misleading concept in qualitative research, and if it's measured with the same criterion as quantitative research, the conclusion

is usually that the study is bad. She continues, that thorough description of the whole research process indicates a good quality in a qualitative research (Stenbacka 2001, 552).

In context of qualitative research, to achieve validity, it's argued to be as simple as conducting non-forcing interviews with strategically well-chosen interviewees. This necessitates from the researcher the ability to understand the researched problem, and identify the relevant people that in contact with the problem. (Stenbacka 2001, 552) As the qualitative research is vastly subjective and interpretative, the trustworthiness depends on the researcher themselves and their capability to enable transparency (Saunders et al. 2016, 204).

In this study, the matters of reliability and validity have been considered though out the whole study, and the aim is to provide trustworthy data and results that answer the research questions. In this light, the generalization of the results can be made to some extent, yet final decision has to be made by the reader. The context includes large companies operating in different industries and sharing similarities in their ways of providing service to the end consumers. The multiple-case study element also advocates for reliability and possible generalizability.

In this study, these issues with reliability and validity have been understood and the study aims to provide a data set that is trustworthy and provide results that can be generalized, at least in a certain context. This context is limited to larger companies, which operate in international markets and aim to respond to the changing market environment. This study uses multiple data sources, even though the main data source is the interview data, and provides analysis by using different techniques, the QCA and the descriptive data analysis. This study is a multi-case study which itself is a good proof for reliability, if and when the findings indicate similarities among the cases.

The people interviewed in this study were contacted via mutual contact, which the interview answers more reliable. The interviewees were not pressured, the communication was sincere, and the interviews took place in the most suitable time

for the interviewees. The study could be repeated on various other companies that represent the value co-creational aspects and are brand-driven.

6 Results and empirical findings

In this chapter, the empirical findings are discussed and analysed in comparison against the integrative framework (figure 8) based on the literature. At first, the case companies are introduced to create deeper understanding of the empirical context. Then the empirical results are discussed and compared against the theory formed by existing literature. The structure is divided into three categories to create reasoned answers for the research questions, and themes are discussed in same order as they were in the literature review.

The first theme discusses the perception of brand identity that companies have, and how do they manage and utilize it. The second theme considers the case companies' dimensions and flows of their brand value co-creation. The third theme discusses the findings of how the two previously mentioned themes link up with one another, and what effects do they have on each concept in practice.

This study explores how the theories of brand identity and brand value co-creation occur in real-life companies' functions. Therefore, a constant dialogue is conducted between the literature and empirical findings. The case company descriptions are based on interviews conducted in June 2021, companies' latest annual reports, and observations from their websites.

6.1 Case companies

To create understanding of the studied companies, this section of this study introduces them. Due to the sensitive subject matter, the case companies preferred to be presented anonymously, which limits the depiction of the companies.

6.1.1 Company A

Company A is grocery trade division of a large Finnish corporation that operates mainly in the Finnish market. Company A's revenue for 2020 was over 5,7 billion euros, and it employed over 6000 personnel. As the industry in Finland is a rather narrow, consisting of only several companies, further depiction of the company's

history nor attributes can't be made in order to respect their choice to stay anonymous in this research. Company A utilizes digital services and has three different grocery store concepts to serve their customers. (Company A annual report 2020, 2021)

Company A's researched brand is an enabler for brand value co-creation, and it can be considered as an umbrella brand that includes three brands that operate separately, yet they have shared brand characteristics. Company A is a grocery trade division of a larger corporation, and its brand role is to guide the three brands underneath its umbrella. The three brands are different types grocery stores, mainly varying by their size, and they sell third party brands as well as company A's corporation owned brands. (Interviewee A 2021) The researched brand of company A helps customers to use the services of the three other brands and communicate with the company A (Company A website 2021).

This case company was found by researcher's own observation and by having been using the company's services for a long time. The enabler aspect is what made this case company interesting and relevant for study, as its mentioned in the literature that companies should be enablers for the value co-creation (da Silveira et al. 2013; Burmann et al. 2017; Pareek & Harrison 2020). Company A's strong brand-driven way to conduct business is also what made this choice relevant (Company A website 2021).

The person that was interviewed from the company A works as insight, brand and content director. The interviewees position at the company is highly relevant for this study, and the interviewee was contacted via mutual contact person.

6.1.2 Company B

The other case company in this study is a Finnish private healthcare company. Company B's revenue for 2020 was one billion euros and it employs 13 000 personnel directly or indirectly. Like the company A, Company B also operates in an industry with only several competitors, and therefore the company B's other attributes won't be discussed to respect their choice to stay anonymous in this study. Company B utilizes digital services as a part of their provided services, and they

have invested into digitalization heavily in the last two years. (Company B website 2021; Interviewee B 2021)

Company B works in a highly competitive market in Finland and their brand is well established in it (Interviewee B 2021). Company B provides private healthcare services to individual customers, B2B-customers, and public-sector customers. Company B utilizes a digital platform to serve all of their customers, in which they can be served directly through digital receptions, or book a doctor's appointment from one of the company B's health centers. (Company B annual report 2020, 2021) Like the company A, company B's digital services serve as an enabler for the brand value co-creation, and it is an actual digital platform to connect the customer with a company B's healthcare professional for the customer's needed expertise (Interviewee B 2021; Company B website 2021).

This case company was as well found via own observation and having been using the company's provided services before. In the highly competitive market, company B differentiate and pursue visibility with brand activities (Company B annual report 2020, 2021). This indicates that the company B invests in their brand, and the brand management concepts exist within the company, which makes it valid for this study besides enabler aspect.

The company B representative, that was interviewed for this research, works as a head of digital services development. The interviewee's work relates closely to customer insight and the company's brand activities, which are utilized in the development of their digital services. Compared to company A's representative, the interviewee B's job is a bit more operational on the company level.

6.2 Empirical findings from the interviews

This section of this chapter introduces the findings from the interviews and they compared and assessed against the theory that was previously discussed in this thesis. The empirical findings are mainly based on the interview transcripts that were coded in order to find patterns more systematically. The findings are interpretative and assessed by the researcher only, which makes them highly subjective.

Qualitative studies are commonly known being subjective (McDaniel & Gates 2013, 80-82). This section includes a constant dialogue with the theoretical part of this study, which is suggested for qualitative researches (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 74).

The course of the findings presented follows the same order that was utilized in the literature review. Starting from brand identity, followed by brand value co-creation, and the third part discusses how these two concepts link up with each other in the studied case companies. The data from both companies are analysed separately, yet in an emergence of similarities, they will be assessed and discussed.

The semi-structured theme interviews started by asking the interviewees to shortly introduce their position in the company and what does their work consist of. After that, to create a short understanding of how do they perceive their company's brand, it was asked for them to explain what is their brand. After this the interviews followed the themes of the interview questions in their presented order. Yet, some findings occurred as the conversation moved forward.

6.3 Brand identity according to case companies

Both case study companies' interviewees stated that brand is an essential element of their business strategy (Interviewee A 2021; Interviewee B 2021), and interviewee A emphasized that brand is their way of managing business (Interviewee A 2021). These brand-centered ways of managing business have become more popular, as the brands have been identified as the companies' most valuable assets (Kapferer 2008, 3-5).

Brand identity has various interpretations and proposed constructs in the brand identity literature (e.g. Kapferer 1994; Aaker 1996; De Chernatony 1999; Burmann et al. 2017; da Silveira et al. 2013; Pareek & Harrison 2020), which indicates that the concept is rather interpretative, and it's easily mistaken with brand image and its elements. Therefore, the defining of a company specific brand identity is a difficult task even for company's brand manager. Next in this section, both companies' representatives' perceptions of their brand identities are presented.

6.3.1 Company A's perception of their brand identity

In the beginning of the interview, interviewee A (2021) explained the nature of the researched brand: *"This brand is actually not a brand on our scale. Instead, it's a so-called enabler."* *"Brand is something you can detach from the company as its own identity, and that's not what this brand is"*, the interviewee A (2021) continued. The enabler aspect has been discussed in the theoretical part of this study as an element of brand identity (da Silveira et al. 2013; Burmann et al. 2017; Pareek & Harrison 2020) and brand value co-creation (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Frow et al. 2015). In this light, the aspect of being an enabler doesn't exclude the possibility of being a brand, it can be interpreted as quite the opposite.

Interviewee A mentioned that the literature's terminology of brand identity is contradictory with their perception of brand identity, referring to the interview questions sent before the interview. Based on the interview questions considering brand identity (Appendix 1), the subject matters are considered in company A as brand's differentiating factors and special characteristics. Interviewee A's views that their brand identity consists of *"more operative"* and visual elements, and perceives that the brand identity is shaped directly by the three other brands operating underneath this brand. Later in the interview, interviewee A mentions that brand is a living entity. Interviewee A also emphasizes the complexity of their brand, and how the traditional brand management concepts are not suitable for managing it. (Interviewee A 2021)

Pareek & Harrison (2020) defined the brand identity to be "a sum of various attributes that define the brand, that give it distinguishable features and make it recognizable". The visual aspect of brand identity is also present in the literature (e.g. Pareek & Harrison 2020; Burmann et al. 2017). Brand identity is argued to be a living entity shaped by the actions of the company and its customers (da Silveira et al. 2013, 33). And in this study's theoretical framework, the visual identity is present in the brand identity dimensions surrounding the brand encounters. This confirms that the visual element of brand identity is more operative and a dimension of brand identity.

Company A's brand is lead with values, which are responsibility, being a forerunner, customer-centrism, entrepreneurship and inspiration. These values are conveyed across the whole corporation, and are the main principles that all of the corporation's brands are built upon. Entrepreneurism is mentioned as a value that shape their brand culture. The brand origin is also brought up several times during the interview, and seen as an element that is a strong part of the company A's brand. In building the of company A's brand, interviewee A says that customers are listened carefully, yet their vision is what steers the brand. Still, interviewee A mentions: "...*brand is customer's subjective interpretation...*". Anticipation of the future is also mentioned as an extensive part of building a brand, and it has to made that it's aligned with the company's values. (Interviewee A 2021) In the brand identity literature, values (Burmann et al. 2017; De Chernatony 1999; Pareek & Harrison 2020), culture (Kapferer 1994; De Chernatony 1999), origin (Aaker 1996; Burmann et al. 2017), and vision, (Burmann et al. 2017; De Chernatony 1999; Pareek & Harrison 2020) are all identified as brand identity elements. In this research, and in the proposed theoretical framework, they are categorized as brand identity components.

Company A's three sub brands, grocery store concepts, are shaped by the values of the company, yet their positioning strategies are different to serve their customers in different ways to fulfil the specific needs of different customers. The varying themes between the sub-brands are effortless, easy to use, gastronomic orientation, friendly and intimate customer service. Their positioning strategy aims to create complementary brands that serve different needs mainly based on the grocery stores' sizes, locations and product range. Company A's brand positionings are developed from the customer insight. (Interviewee A 2021) Positioning is identified as a brand identity element in the theory (De Chernatony 1999; Pareek & Harrison 2020).

Brand's visual identity is the company A's identified dimension of brand identity. They measure their visual recognisability with their logos and colours utilized in their services, and Interviewee A emphasizes the importance of brand to have recognisable visual elements that are not dependent of context they're seen by customers. (Interviewee A 2021) Visual aspects of brand identity, are linked to the brand identity's symbolic dimension (Pareek & Harrison 2020).

For brand communication, interviewee A states, that their communication has to be congruent with the brand strategy and the company's values. And it's preferable for the communication content to be generalizable to an extent it can serve all their sub-brands. The main communication channels company A utilizes are marketing communications and advertising, and their aim is to make promises of a differentiating brand experience. Brand communication, for company A, is also an important feedback channel for them, through which they shape their service. (Interviewee A 2021) Communication is identified in the brand identity literature as a brand identity dimension (Kapferer 1994; Pareek & Harrison 2020), and it's argued to have a positive effect on brand trust (Zehir et al. 2011).

6.3.2 Company B's perception of their brand identity

Interviewee B describes that their brand originates from, and typifies company B's strategy. In the center of their strategy, three values are identified: customer-centric development, medicine-orientation, and social responsibility. Other values that company B assumes that customers associate with them are quality, reliable, and domestic. (Interviewee B 2021) Values are identified as an element of brand identity multiple times in the literature (e.g. Burmann et al. 2017; De Chernatony 1999; Pareek & Harrison 2020). The domestic aspect represents the origin aspect which is also an identified element of brand identity (Aaker 1996), and even argued to be an establishing element of brand identity (Burmann et al. 2017). Company B's vision is also precisely defined and publicly stated, and company B aim to be a partner for a lifetime for their customers (Interviewee B 2021) Vision is a brand identity element identified in the literature (Burmann et al. 2017; De Chernatony 1999; Pareek & Harrison 2020). Interviewee B mentions that brand identity forms in the minds of the consumers, and it's shaped by the consumer's comprehensive brand experience (Interviewee B 2021), which is aligned with Da Silveira et al. (2013) research.

Company B uses positioning to differentiate themselves from their competitors, one differentiating factor is their origin factor. Company B's industry is rather limiting for drastic differentiations, which dictates majority of their positioning and effects on their brand as well. (Interviewee B 2021) Positioning is identified as a part of brand

identity, and its purpose is to differentiate company's brand from competitors in the minds of consumers (De Chernatony 1999; Pareek & Harrison 2020).

Interviewee B's speaks of their brand identity: *"Brand identity is created in the interaction between customers and the experiences we provide"*. Interviewee B also emphasizes the roles of *"seamless digital customer experience"* and the *"multi-channel customer experience"* (Interviewee B 2021). Da Silveira et al. (2013) argue, that brand identity is always created within the inputs of brand company and the actions of associated social constituents, such as customers. Company B's brand identity is also shaped by the industry they operate on, and by their competitors as well (Interviewee B 2021). Besides customers, identified company external dimensions shaping the brand identity in literature are industry/environmental conditions, competitors' actions, and partners' actions (Da Silveira et al. 2013), and also through relationships with the stakeholders (de Chernatony 1999). Company B's customer interactions are constantly supported by their communications, and interviewee B summarizes their brand identity:

"It's the sum of all the surrounding factors around all of our brand encounters."

(Interviewee B 2021)

This type of dynamic and comprehensive interpretation of brand identity has become more researched in the brand identity literature, mainly because of servitization and digitalization (Da Silveira et al. 2013; Pareek & Harrison 2020). Company B has invested heavily into digitalization of their services, which has created problems with communicating their brand and values congruently to their customers, due to the fast pace of implementing digital services. Interviewee B also says that their brand identity is well established, and changing it would necessitate lot of work for a long period of time. (Interviewee B) In comparison to brand image, brand identity is argued to be more stable, therefore, a change in it requires more time (de Chernatony 1999).

Interviewee B perceives that their vision is dominant to their values. Values guide company B's actions, and vision is their strategy's direction to conduct their customer-centric business. In literature, it has been argued which brand identity

element is more dominant and dictates the other, values or vision (Burmam et al. 2017; de Chernatony 1999; Pareek & Harrison 2020).

6.4 Brand value co-creation in case companies

Both case companies' business models are services serving end customers (Company A annual report 2020; Company B annual report 2020). The enabler aspect of company A's brand was discussed in the previous section (Interviewee A 2021), and company B utilizes digital platform to serve their customers (Interviewee B 2021). These aspects are noted in brand value co-creation literature to create relevant premises for brand value co-creation between a company and its customers (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Grönroos & Voima 2013).

6.4.1 Company A's brand value co-creation

Company A identifies their brand value co-creation, and it's noted as their way to conduct business. Company A's brand is a "*channel*", that consists of an online store, a website, a mobile application, and a monthly published industry related magazine. Through their website, mobile application and the magazine, company A directs their customers into company A's sub-brands' environments. Customers make their own decisions of which sub-brand will they continue with in their value creation process. (Interviewee A 2021) The inclusion of customers into brand value co-creation is arguably the most important requirement for co-creational process (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Merz et al. 2018; Grönroos & Voima 2013). The literature identifies the concept of brand engagement platforms, where customers make the decisions of how they'll interact with the company provided inputs (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016).

Company A produces industry related content and offerings to their brand platform for customers to interact with. These inputs are shaped by industry trends, environmental aspects and customer feedback. (Interviewee A 2021) The theory suggests that brand leadership needs to humble, open, and participatory (Iglesias, Ind & Alvaro 2013), because customers ultimately define the brand value (Grönroos & Voima 2013), and they are increasingly looking for ways to influence to the value

experienced by them (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004). Interviewee A emphasizes multiple times the importance of listening to the customers (Interviewee A 2021)

Company A's offerings on their brand platform can be individualized or generalized. Customers make the decision themselves which manner they prefer. Individualized offerings require customer's consent for company A to collect data from the customer. (Interviewee A 2021) Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2016) argue that company's task in brand value co-creation design engagement platforms to enable different types of individualized experiences for customers. Other brand engagement platforms provided by company A are R&D test groups, feedback channels, and the sub-brand grocery stores. Interviewee A says: "...customers' needs need to be foreseen, before they have to tell us about them". (Interviewee A 2021) Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2016) proposed, that customers rarely know before-hand what the desirable and meaningful brand experience for them is.

Company A perceives, what the customers value the most in their brand experiences, is that the brand is a match for their own personality. To support this, company A's brand positioning is always created with "*the terminology that customers use*".

According interviewee A, company A defines brand experiences as of all the memories of and encounters with the brand, and customer experiences under the brand. Brand experiences are measured by the customers' feedback. Feedback is divided into two categories, matters that created customers satisfaction, and matters that created customers dissatisfaction. These feedbacks are taken into consideration, and the needed adjustments for future brand experiences are to be made. (Interviewee A 2021) Successful companies are able and willing to redesign their platforms based on the insight from customers' experiences, by utilizing principles of dialogue, access, reflexivity and transparency (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2014). This enhances the platforms attractiveness for a customer to interact with the brand again (Iglesias et al. 2013).

6.4.2 Company B's brand value co-creation

Like company A, company B also identifies their brand value co-creational aspect. As mentioned earlier in the findings of their brand identity, they focus extensively on providing and developing the best customer experience in the competitive market, to gain a stronger market position. Company B's customer experience development includes developing digital services among all other processes and services they provide. (Interviewee B 2021) Brand engagement platforms are viewed in the literature as a key opportunity to create competitive advantage, because the system and its features are difficult to imitate (Frow, Nenonen, Payne & Storbacka 2015). To maintain the competitive advantage, companies must constantly co-evolve their services with their customers (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016).

Company B's approach service development is customer-centric, and customers are included in the development process. In this light, interviewee B mentions that in an ideal situation customer has affected on the value co-creation before the actual experience process starts. Company B research extensively how their brand positions in the market against competitors, and how and what customers think of company B's brand. Company B measures their customer experience with NPS metric, and they are constantly developing new ways to identify the steps in their customer experience to enhance their brand image. (Interviewee B 2021) Brand experiences are customer-centric (Grönroos 2015), and the brand value co-creation needs to be a constantly co-evolving service development (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016).

Digital platform enables company B to create individualized experiences for their customers. Individualized experiences occur in their other services, but digital platform enables customers to express more efficiently what they want and what they don't want. This then provides unique customer experiences. (Interviewee B 2021) One of the company's tasks in the brand value co-creation is to conceptualize and design brand engagement platforms to enable different types of individualized experiences (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016). Company B segments their customers, as an example by their age, to provide more relevant content for them. Interviewee B brings up an example of how their service appears differently to child customers compared to adult customers. In their digital reception, child customers are shown

a cartoon character that is on the customer's screen through the whole reception, and at the doctor's office, doctors are instructed to kneel down on the child's eye-sight level and say "hey". According to interviewee B, company B's brand is experienced differently depending on the customers' needs and the service that they need. (Interviewee B 2021) The theory suggests that customers co-create brand value within engagement platforms by utilizing their owned resources within their degree of motivation and capabilities (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016). Companies need to identify customers' brand value co-creation activities, and design their engagement platforms so that the customers are willing and able to utilize their resources into the brand value co-creation (Merz et al. 2018).

6.5 Linking brand identity into brand value co-creation

Brand identity and brand value co-creation, as concepts, share identified similarities in literature (e.g. elements, process flows, and co-creational aspect) (Pareek & Harrison 2020; da Silveira et al. 2013; Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Kennedy & Guzman 2016). Previously in the findings have been identified, that both companies utilize brand value co-creation, and their brand is a living entity shaped by its surrounding factors (Interviewee A 2021; Interviewee B 2021). Next in this chapter, the connections between brand identity and brand value co-creation from both case companies are presented.

6.5.1 Company A's perception of brand identity in brand value co-creation

Company A's brand is identified as an enabler, that enables brand value co-creation and serves as platform to communicate and represent their brand identity. Customers can use the platform to find the most suitable experience proposition for them. These propositions follow the same values, vision and origin, yet they differ from each other to serve customers in different manner to fulfil different types of needs. Company A listens carefully their customers to make the necessary adjustments, to provide better experiences for the customers, and to match their personalities. (Interviewee A 2021) According to literature, Brand identity is co-created between the brand company and customer, and it enables companies to gain customer insight to shape their brand strategy and actions (da Silveira et al. 2013). The emerging brand experiences from brand interactions (Ramaswamy &

Ozcan 2016), provide customers the needed experience to shape their own contemporary identities based on the brand (Black & Veloutsou 2017), which then lets customers to reassess their brand motivation and brand behaviour (da Silveira et al. 2013).

Company A's customer can encounter the brand and interact with it in their loyalty program, in their grocery stores, websites, mobile application, feedback processes, customer surveys and via dialogue in third party medias. Company A's user experience (UX) design philosophy is to be as inspiring as possible and easy to use. Besides their digital platforms, the being inspiring aspect is present in all of their brand touch points. In the grocery store dimension of company A's brand, servicescape is brought up as an important factor to differentiate themselves from competitors, and to provide different types of service, depending for example the size of the grocery store. Interviewee A also mentions that the service process could be more valuable for the customer than the product they bought from the store. (Interviewee A 2021) In the brand value co-creation literature, identified engagement platform components are persons, artifacts, processes, and interfaces (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016). In the brand identity context, the brand identity dimensions are quite similar, including servicescape, communication, symbolic, process and organization identity (Pareek & Harrison 2020).

Interviewee A (2021) describes their brand management construction as brand strategy being the most dominant component, which represents the pursued ideal customer experience. Under brand strategy is the customer experience, and under that is the brand visual identity, which then guides their marketing communications and store concepts. (Interviewee A 2021) Da Silveira et al. (2013) proposes in their research that brand strategy is the brand positioning, which shaped by the brand identity, and based on the positioning, the marketing actions are conducted towards customers. Company A listens their customers carefully and want to hear about their experiences, yet interviewee A describes their vision is more influential to their brand management's development than the brand experiences. Company A perceives brand as a rather permanent concept in the minds of customers, but customers have varying perceptions of the company's brand.

6.5.2 Company B's perception of brand identity in brand value co-creation

Company B's brand is guided by their vision, values and origin, and eventually it's formed in the minds of their customers through their brand experiences. Company B utilizes various ways for customers to encounter their brand, such as digital services, company B's health centers, advertising, word-of-mouth and search engine optimization (SEO). During the era of COVID-19 pandemic, the company B's digital services have grown drastically, and the company has invested heavily into SEO. Brand value co-creation comprises all the brand expressions that customers associate with the brand (Merz et al. 2018). The brand identity's literature argues, that brand encounters can occur directly or indirectly, and they have an indirect impact on the brand identity through consumers' identities, which shape their attitudes and behaviour towards the brand and have a direct impact on the brand identity co-creation (da Silveira et al. 2013).

Company B perceives that their brand identity is created through value co-creation, and the customers' experiences is what forms it eventually. Company B has researched and find a clear positive correlation of customers that have used their service, to continue to use their services in future. (Interviewee B 2021) Da Silveira et al. (2013) argue that customers' behaviours and attitudes effect on the likeliness of customers to interact with the brand again. Closely related concept in the brand value co-creation literature, customers' motivation, is shaped by the brand experience (Merz et al. 2018)

Interviewee B describes the industry company B operates on: "*No one goes to a hospital looking for sensations*". The brand experience company B wants to provide to their customers is based on their company's vision. (Interviewee B 2021) Brand vision is considered as the long-term sense of direction, and an element that people can identify with (Burmann et al. 2017). Company B considers their brand identity to be something that they want to control, but it ultimately forms in the minds of their customers. Company B perceives their role in the brand identity's formation as providing the guidelines to the brand experience.

7 Discussion

This part of this thesis discusses the results of the interviews conducted. This part divided into four different parts to answer the research questions that were stated previously in this thesis. The results of the interviews are compared and assessed against the theories in existing literature. As the sub-questions support the main research question of this thesis, the sub questions are discussed first to create a coherent and reasoned answer for the research question.

7.1 The elements of brand identity in the empirical context

The brand identity literature has various interpretations of elements that build companies' brand identities, and overall 17 brand identity elements have been identified in the literature (Aaker 1996; Kapferer 1994; Burmann et al. 2017; de Chernatony 1999; da Silveira et al. 2013; Pareek & Harrison 2020). The focus in brand identity research has been mainly goods-dominant (Aaker 1996; Kapferer 1994; Burmann et al. 2017; de Chernatony 1999), and the more service-dominant and co-creational approach has emerged later in the literature (da Silveira et al. 2013; Pareek & Harrison 2020). The first sub-question of this thesis aims to clarify the elements of the brand identity: *"What does brand identity consist of?"*

The results showed, that for both companies, the defining of their brand identity is rather difficult and the companies have not clearly stated what their brand identity is. Company A identifies their visual brand identity, yet the other 16 elements identified in the brand identity literature were not mentioned as a part of their brand identity. To research the companies' brand identities, the interview questions were sent to interviewees before-hand, and the themes of the questions were thought to be more related to brand's differentiation according to interviewee A. As the questions were made based on brand identity literature, the reaction suggests that brand identity's elements provide a way to differentiate brands from their competitors.

Both studied companies were unable to tell the exact elements and components of their brand identity, which suggests that, to an extent, they were unaware of what

the elements and components could be. This could be explained with the rather large variety of brand identity elements found in the literature. Also, both companies sell their services and products to their customers, which may cause their brand efforts to be more focused on their brand image.

Although, both companies were unable to point out their brand identity elements, the identified brand identity elements started to emerge as the interviews moved forward. This indicates that brand identity as a concept is a company's subconscious way to lead their brand. Values, vision and positioning emerged various times during the interviews, and their importance for both companies' brands was emphasized. Values and vision are noted in the literature multiple times as elements of brand identity (Burmam et al. 2017; de Chernatony 1999; Pareek & Harrison 2020), and positioning is seen as a brand identity element that's shaped by values and vision (de Chernatony 1999; Pareek & Harrison 2020). Company B also utilizes their origin aspect in their positioning. Origin is considered to be an establishing element of brand identity in the literature (Burmam et al. 2017). This thesis identifies values, vision and origin as the fundamental components of brand identity, and positioning to be company's brand strategy shaped by the core components. In the light of these results, these components are identified important for managing and differentiating a brand, yet they aren't thought of as brand identity elements. As company A didn't mention their origin and company B noted it as their key differentiating factor, the origin's importance can be considered industry and context dependent.

Values and vision were discussed during the interviews, and their relation to each other stayed rather vague. Both companies described that their values guide their activities, and vision provides them the sense of direction. Vision was also mentioned to be something they want their customers to identify with. Company B suggests that their vision is subtly more dominant factor to their brand identity than their brand values. The reasoning behind the vision being more dominant over values was quite faint, and the company's values' importance for their brand identity was previously stated in the interview. Vision and values seems to be close to one another in companies' activities, but which narrates the other can't be deduced. This interpretation of vision and values taking a place side by side as fundamental values of brand identity was also proposed in this thesis' theoretical framework.

Company A has three sub-brands which differ from one another with their positioning to fulfil different types customer needs. Although, the company A's brand values and vision flow as the same through all of the three sub-brands. The sub-brands differ themselves with themes of effortless shopping, easy to use, gastronomic orientation, friendly and intimate customer service. Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) define brand personality as "the set of human personality traits that are both applicable and relevant for brands". The brand personality is perceived to be an answer for "How are we communicating?" (Burmann et al. 2017), and these sub-brand themes are seen as suitable answer for the presented question. Considering the themes that make these sub-brands different from each other, they vastly typify the brand personality element.

Brand culture also emerged from the data analysis, and company A perceives that at least one of their values affect directly on their brand culture, which is present throughout their sub-brands. This indicates that the brand culture does not impact on the brand positioning as much as the brand personality. And as the vision is the same for their brand and sub-brands, a companywide sense of direction, it can be deduced that the brand vision effects on their brand culture as well.

The empirical findings produced the same brand identity elements that were found and assessed in the literature review previously. The impacts they have to have to each other differ slightly from the perception made based literature. The brand identity elements emerged from empirical findings qualify to be named as brand identity components. Figure 9 describes the brand identity components and their relations to each other. The figure 9 answers the sub-question 1 (SQ1).

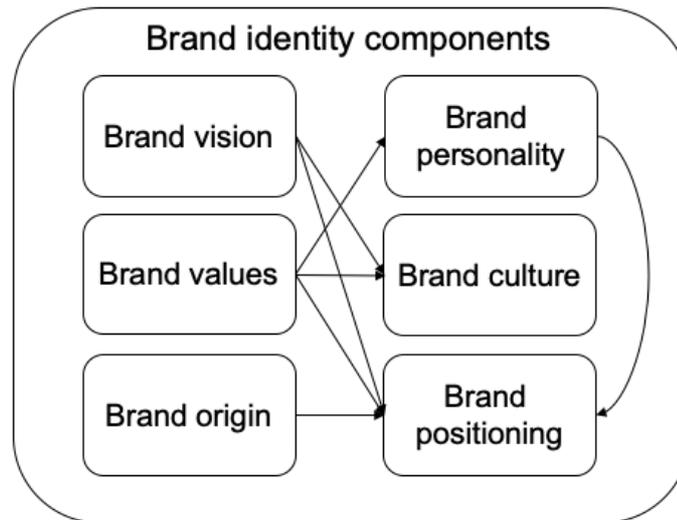


Figure 9 Brand identity components and their relations to each other

7.2 Brand value co-creation in the empirical context

One of the main reasons these specific companies were selected for this study, was their essence of enabling brand value co-creation between the company and its customers. This section of the discussion answers the sub-question 2 (SQ) “*Why companies utilize brand value co-creation?*”

Company A perceives their brand as an enabler, and company B utilizes a digital platform. In brand value co-creation literature, brands are required to be capable of enabling customers to participate in the co-creation (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016). Both companies’ interviewees described that the co-creational aspect is their way of conducting business. Both companies possess various brand engagement platforms, that enable the brand value co-creation. Brand engagement platforms can be divided into brand offerings and brand relations (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016). Brand offerings include company’s provided services, products, information or other offerings (Grönroos 2015), and brand relations consist of a composition of systems designed around company or brand related activities, such as connecting with customers, employees, partners, or any other stakeholders, innovating offerings, customer support/service, and brand communities, whether they’re company-organized or not (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016). Companies can maintain control over brand offerings better than brand relations, and customer insight can be more efficiently gathered (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016). Both companies named

their brand engagement platforms and they mainly consisted of brand offerings, such as companies' physical buildings, digital platforms, advertising, feedback channels and R&D test groups. Company B identified their word-of-mouth process as a brand engagement platform and company A mentioned third party medias as their brand engagement platforms, these are brand relations engagement platforms. The favourability of utilizing brand offerings as brand engagement platforms, may be result of having more control over the brand and collect customer data more streamlined.

The customer inclusion into brand value co-creation was highlighted in both companies' digital platforms. These platforms shared similarities of giving customers the choice to decide at which level they want personalize their brand experience. By giving a consent for the company to gather their data, customers receive more personalized offerings based on their interests. Choosing not to give a consent, can also be considered as personalized experience, since the decision is made by the customer.

The development of their brand engagement platforms is seen impacted the most by customers' experiences. External factors also shape their brand engagement platforms, for instance industry trends and environmental aspects. In the literature, contextual factors effect on the development of brand engagement platforms, yet brand experiences are perceived to be more remarkable in developing more compatible brand engagement platforms for customers to interact with (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016). Company B operates on an industry where the characteristics of the industry dictate vastly the brands of the companies on it. This indicates that the level of impact that the contextual factors have on development of brand engagement platforms, depends on the context itself.

The aspect of customers not knowing what they want before-hand surfaced from the interviews. This is argued in the literature as well, as the customers can rarely describe before-hand what the desirable and meaningful experience for them is (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016). Companies research their customers behaviour and preferences to understand better what they could want, and to develop their engagement platforms proactively. By utilizing brand value co-creational aspects

into their brand engagement platforms, the both case companies are able to provide more flexible service to their customers and let the customer choose what elements of the provided service they want to use. This speaks of the companies' role as the enabler. The more the brand experience has different dimensions to choose, to more likely it is to be providing personalized service the co-creational customer.

The empirical findings propose that the brand experience consists of all the memories of and encounters with the brand. Through their engagement platforms, companies gather data of these experiences and make adjustments to their brand engagement platforms as needed. These occur as a new feature, that presumably can be taken as a part of the customer's brand experience or not. The customer's freedom of choice seems to be the key for providing the desirable brand experiences, to which companies can provide the guidelines, tools and the options to choose from. The answer to sub-question 3 (SQ3) has many dimensions and it should be considered dependent of the context. The empirical findings propose that companies utilize their brand value co-creation to gain customer insight for their brand development, to communicate with their customers, and to enable individualized brand experiences for their customers.

7.3 Integration of brand identity into brand value co-creation

The concepts of brand value co-creation and brand identity share similarities, such as a dynamic aspect (da Silveira et al. 2013; Ramaswamy & Prahalad 2004; Kennedy & Guzman 2016), a cyclical dialogue between the company and customers (de Chernatony 1999; Burmann et al. 2017; da Silveira et al. 2013; Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Merz et al. 2018), a view of the company as an enabler (da Silveira et al. 2013; Burmann et al. 2017; Pareek & Harrison 2020; Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Grönroos & Voima 2013), and a perception of customers as active participants (da Silveira et al. 2013; Burmann et al. 2013; Grönroos 2008; Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016; Merz et al. 2018). This section of discussion chapter discusses how brand identity and brand value co-creation link up with each other. The answer for the sub-question 3 (SQ3) "*How companies' brand identities connect to their brand value co-creation?*", will be discussed and reason next.

The empirical findings showed that companies utilize their brand engagement platforms to include customers into the brand value co-creation, to gain customer insight for their brand development, to communicate with their customers, and to enable individualized brand experiences for customers. As previously proven in the literature review of this thesis, brand engagement platforms (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016) and brand encounters (Pareek & Harrison 2020) conceptually are the same. The empirical findings showed that only company owned and controlled brand engagement platforms are perceived as brand engagement platforms, and the other platforms, where customers interact with the brand, are perceived as brand encounters. However, their brand identities are the same in both.

Company A recognized their servicescape as an important factor to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Servicescape is the environment where brand value is co-created, and differentiating factors for companies were found to be their brand positioning directly, and brand vision, values and personality indirectly. Thus, it is deduced that companies embody their brand identity in the brand value co-creation through their servicescape. The service process is also mentioned to be an important factor within the servicescape. Through their personnel both companies' process identity typifies their personality, which may vary depending on the customer, which indicates that brand experience is personalized in the service process. Company A's communication is based on their brand management's guidelines, which are formed by their values and vision. This leads for their communication to be constructed by the brand identity components, values and vision. Brand engagement platforms are enable a dialogue between customers and the company, which indicates that companies communicate their brand identity into brand value co-creation. Companies' desirable brand experiences are based on their vision, and they see it as something that customers can identify with.

Brand experiences are seen as the ultimate outcome of the brand value co-creation, and company B perceives their true brand identity building within brand experiences. Unlike brand engagement platforms, companies don't perceive it possible, nor necessary, to change their brand identity components based on individual brand experiences. Brand is perceived more as a permanent image in the minds of their customers, that may change or not. In companies' brand

management, their vision is considered more influential to brand management’s development than the customers’ brand experiences. Company B considers their brand identity to be something that they want to control, but it ultimately forms in the minds of their customers. To an extent, companies’ role in the brand identity’s formation is to provide the guidelines for the brand experience.

To answer the sub-question 3 (SQ3), the discussed findings from the empirical research shows that companies communicate their brand identity through their brand encounters and brand engagement platforms. Brand identity can be considered to be present throughout the whole brand value co-creation, even if the companies aren’t aware of it. Brand identity can be experienced in brand experiences through processes, communication, platform design, servicescape, and it’s considered to be ultimately decided by customers’ interpretations.

By providing answers to this thesis’ sub-questions, the answer for the research question (RQ) *“How companies perceive their brand identity in brand value co-creation?”* is reasoned and it consists of the sub-questions’ answers. Companies subconsciously perceive their brand identity as a guideline for and something that customers can identify with in the company enabled brand value co-creations.

Table 6. Answers to research questions

Research question	Answer
SQ1: <i>What does brand identity consist of?</i>	Brand identity consists of six components brand vision, brand values, brand origin, brand personality, brand culture and brand positioning. They affect to each other, and are the basis for brand strategies.
SQ2: <i>Why companies utilize brand value co-creation?</i>	Companies utilize their brand value co-creation to gain customer insight for their brand development, to communicate with their customers, and to enable individualized brand experiences for their customers.

<p>SQ3: <i>How companies' brand identities connect to their brand value co-creation?</i></p>	<p>Brand identity can be considered to be present throughout the whole brand value co-creation, even if the companies aren't aware of it. Brand identity can be experienced in brand experiences through processes, communication, platform design, servicescape, and it's considered to be ultimately decided by customers' interpretations.</p>
<p>RQ1: <i>How companies perceive their brand identity in brand value co-creation?</i></p>	<p>Companies subconsciously perceive their brand identity as a guideline and something that customers can identify with in the company enabled brand value co-creations.</p>

8 Conclusions

This thesis aimed to clarify how companies perceive their brand identity in brand value co-creation context. This study includes theories from two different fields of marketing literature: brand identity, and brand value co-creation. The theoretical framework was designed to include the key elements and process flows from brand identity and brand value co-creation, in order to show their similarities and to combine these two concepts as a whole.

Brand identity's literature has experienced a notable shift in the past decade, mainly due to the emergence of servitization and co-creational perspective to manage businesses. The identification of brands' value as the companies' most valuable asset in brand management literature, makes the thorough understanding of brand's construct remarkable factor for companies' success.

8.1 Theoretical implications

Brand identity has been studied by many scholars (e.g. Aaker 1996; Kapferer 1994; Burmann et al. 2017; de Chernatony 1999; da Silveira et al. 2013; Pareek & Harrison 2020). The premise for these studies has mainly been a goods-dominant context. Only in the past decade, brand identity has been studied from the service-dominant logic's perspective, due to it being the dominant logic at the time. Due to digitalization, the customers have gained more power and they want to influence increasingly on the service they experience. Through service-dominant logic, the potential of value co-creation was identified (Ballantyne & Varey 2006).

The co-creation of brand identities has been studied, yet further research is hoped for, since the concepts for the interviewed informants have been confusing (Kennedy & Guzman 2016). Brand identities in service context has been studied lately and wider research has been called for (Paree & Harrison 2020). Brand identity has also been studied in the context of dynamic environment (da Silveira et al. 2013). These studies possess many elements of brand value co-creation, yet the subject of brand identity in the context of value co-creation hasn't been studied in the brand identity literature. These previous studies provided a firm base for a researching brand identity in the brand value co-creation context. This study

provided support to the previous studies and answered questions emerging from an unexplored context for brand identity. The empirical findings indicate theoretical contributions that are presented in the table 7.

Table 7. Theoretical contributions

Theoretical contribution 1	Brand identity is a subconscious concept within companies.
Theoretical contribution 2	Brand identity serves as guideline in brand value co-creation, and as a factor that brands hope their customers can identify with.
Theoretical contribution 3	Brand identity is communicated to customers throughout the whole brand experience.
Theoretical contribution 4	Brand identity is not controllable entirely by companies in brand value co-creation.
Theoretical contribution 5	Based on brand experiences, brand engagement platforms are more relevant to adjust than brand identity.

Theoretical contribution 1 implies the issue Kennedy and Guzman (2016) noted in their research. Brand identity as a concept is confusing for companies, and mixed with brand differentiating factors. The literature suggests that brand identity's purpose is to be the source of brand differentiation (Aaker 1996; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000; Kapferer 2008; Keller 2008). The conducted semi-structured theme interviews proved that the elements of brand identity are identified in the companies, and even considered important for their brand. Although companies don't associate them as brand identity elements. This indicates the importance of the brand identity elements for companies' brand management. The difference for companies' brand success, compared of being aware of their brand identity and not being aware of it, is not concluded in this thesis.

Theoretical contribution 2 suggests that brand identity serves as guideline in brand value co-creation. This contribution is supported by the notion of company's role in brand value co-creation is to enable the brand experience (Ramaswamy & Ozcan

2016). Company can only offer different paths for its customer to choose. These paths are designed to embody brand identity elements, such as brand values, brand vision, brand origin and brand personality. Companies aim to provide inputs into the brand value co-creation in a way that customers can and want to identify with.

Related to theoretical contribution 2, theoretical contribution 3 proposes the brand identity's presence through the whole brand experience. Customers may interact with one or multiple brand encounters in their brand experience. The empirical findings showed that the brand identity elements are included in the brand encounters. Pareek & Harrison's (2020) study proved the same in the context of services. Brand value co-creation considers the company as the enabler, which differs from the perspective of offering services to customers.

Brand identity is experienced differently based on the customers unique brand experience. Theoretical contribution 4 explains the relation of brand identity and customer's experienced brand identity. Companies can and should provide guidelines for the brand experience, yet the customers ultimately choose what they want to experience and what not. This restricts the companies' control over the experienced brand identity, and companies need to provide common brand values and brand vision, which form the different brand personalities and brand positioning from which the customers can decide the most suitable for their experience.

Brand identity's brand vision, brand values and brand origin are perceived rather permanent, and individual brand experiences don't create a reason to change them. On the other hand, brand experiences are more likely to effect on the company provided brand engagement platforms. Brand engagement platforms enable customers to co-create their aspired brand experience, therefore it's necessary to adjust them if they are not fulfilling the customers' needs.

8.2 Managerial implications

This thesis serves practical value as well, in the form of managerial implications. First implication is that companies should inventory their brand identity. Establishing a specific brand identity for a company isn't the most important action to take, but

the identification of brand identity elements and understanding effect on each other is important for brand management. Brand identity's components provide customers values and vision to identify with, which makes them more committed to the brand. Especially for a company that utilizes brand value co-creation, it is important that customers experience brand identity throughout the whole brand experience.

Second implication, for brand value co-creational companies, is to enable customers to choose the most suitable experience for them. Companies' brand vision and brand values should be present in all the possible brand experience outcomes. Companies can offer different types of brand personalities and brand positionings to serve their customers with vastly different needs and preferences. As an example, company can represent ecological values, yet the customer can choose to experience the brand quick and quietly or as a relaxing experience with constant dialogue with the company.

Third implication for companies is that by creating a roadmap of their possible brand experiences, companies can identify which elements of their brand identity is communicated in which step, and ensure that every step includes an element of their brand identity. This secures that customers are always in contact with their brand, and rules out the possibilities of having non-brand identity related associations made with their brand. This serves as well as an indicator for possible brand engagement platform developments.

8.3 Limitations and future research directions

To regard the limitations of this thesis, few important factors need to be considered. First of all, this study was qualitative case study on two companies, which means that the generalizations of the results need to be considered carefully. Due to the phenomenon of the researched subject, qualitative was more suitable approach than quantitative. Qualitative studies aim to explain a specific real-life phenomenon in its specific context. This limits the researches validity for broad generalizations. To improve this study's generalizability the case companies were chosen from different industries. Although they both operate mainly in Finland, which reduces the generalizability of the results.

This thesis was also made during the historic era of COVID-19 pandemic, which may have effected on companies' perception of their business, and as well onto data collection, which were conducted via video calls due to prevalent guidelines. Other limitations considering the gathered data, are the researcher's capabilities to conduct the semi-structured theme interviews gain the best possible outcomes from the interviews. As the concept of brand identity turned out to be quite confusing and complex for the interviews, a more experienced interviewer might have achieved different set of data of the researched phenomenon. The results are the researcher's subjective interpretations of the gathered data.

Brand value co-creation includes the customers' perspectives and emphasizes their role as co-creators. To create a more holistic understanding of the brand value co-creation process, quantitative data collected from customers could have had an impact on this thesis' results. The customer data's collection would've been problematic in this study, since it should have been consisting only of the specific company's customers, and then compared to the company's qualitative results. Therefore, studies researching brand identity and brand value co-creation from the customers' perspective could provide valuable insight to create more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

For future research, it is suggested to study the customer perspective of brand value co-creation and how they perceive and experience brand identity. Researches considering this thesis' topic should be made with a wider sample of case companies, and from various countries. But for the generalizability aspect, the industry diversity is suggested. Also researches of multiple case companies on a specific industry are called for.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. The semi-structured theme interview questions

Haastattelukysymykset:

Kertoisitko lyhyesti brändistänne?

Brändi-identiteetti:

Miten luonnehtisit brändi-identiteettiänne?

Miten koet brändi-identiteettinne muodostuvan?

Miten hallitsette brändi-identiteettiänne?

Mistä osista brändi-identiteettinne koostuu ja mitkä ovat sen ytimessä?

Ohjaavatko jotkin brändi-identiteetin komponentit toisia?

Kuinka hyödynnätte brändi-identiteettiänne tai sen komponentteja positioinnissanne?

Kuinka huomioitte asiakkaanne brändi-identiteettinne kehityksessä?

Reagoitteko markkinoiden muutoksiin (toimiala, ympäristö, kilpailijat ja yhteistyökumppanit) muuttamalla brändi-identiteettiänne?

Miten ja kuinka usein kartoitatte brändi-identiteettinne?

Brändikohtaamiset:

Millä eri tavoin kuluttajanne ovat vuorovaikutuksessa brändinne kanssa?

Millä tavoin pyritte mahdollistamaan kuluttajalle optimaalisen roolin brändiarvon yhteisluomisessa?

Kuinka sisällytätte brändi-identiteettinne elementtejä kuluttajan koettavaksi yhteisluonnin ilmentymiin?

Millä tavoin pyritte välittämään brändi-identiteettinne komponentteja kuluttajalle

- Palveluprosesseissanne,
- Organisaatio-tasolla,
- Symbolisesti,
- Palvelun kulutusympäristöllisesti (servicescape) ja
- Viestinnässänne?

Kuinka huomioitte kuluttajien yksilöllisten identiteettien yhdistämisen brändi-identiteettinne brändiarvon yhteisluonnissa?

Brändikokemus:

Miten kuvaillet onnistunutta brändikokemusta?

Millä tavoin yksittäiset brändikokemukset vaikuttavat kuluttajienne brändimotivaatioon ja –käyttäytymiseen?

Koetteko yksittäisten brändiarvon yhteisluontien vaikuttavan brändi-identiteettinne?

Muokkaatteko brändi-identiteetin komponenttejaanne ja brändipositiointia perustuen brändikokemuksiin?

Miten brändi-identiteettinne vaikuttaa koettuun brändiarvoon?

Koetteko brändi-identiteetin olevan enemmän yrityksen johdon suunnittelema vai brändin ja asiakkaan vuorovaikutuksesta syntyvä ilmiö?