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Lappeenranta **University of Technology**

School of Business

International Business

Bachelor's Thesis

**How a company creates brand personality and how customers perceive the
brand and the brand personality**

Case: CTRL Clothing

**Kuinka yritys luo brändin persoonallisuutta ja miten asiakkaat kokevat brändin
ja brändin persoonallisuuden**

Case: CTRL Clothing

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Attachment 1. The interview questions of the case company's representative

Attachment 2. The interview question of customer

1. Introduction

1.1 The Background of the Study

In today's market the competition is constant and limitless; brands compete with others globally, there are endless lists of brands available and customers are more and more demanding. As the market increase in competitiveness and saturation, companies have to figure out a way to stand out from the rivals. When companies' products and services start to resemble each other more and more, the management has to find out a special attribute that interests and attracts the customers in order to gain success. The need to differentiate from the others has forced companies to go behind their brand and start to focus on the special attributes that appeal to customers. (Keller 2008, 202; Aaker 1991, 7; Samama 2003, 73-88; Suonio 2010, 27)

A starting point for building a distinctive brand is to concentrate on the brand identity and the different elements of it (De Chernatony 2010, 53-55). Especially brand personality can be regarded as a key to achieve a distinctive brand (e.g. Hayes et. al 2008,10-11). Brand personality means "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand", such as personality traits, age or sex (Aaker 1997, 347). The importance of understanding brand personality has been pointed out by many researchers: brand personality is a key element in affecting customer's brand choice, usage and preference in many product categories (Aaker 1991, 139; Freling & Frobes 2005a, 150; Hayes et. al 2008, 10-11). From the basis of brand personality, it is easier to start building a relationship between the consumer and the brand; if brand personality has formed in a way that appeals to a customer, it motivates the customer to favor the brand and build a relationship with it (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 84).

This can be seen as a consequence of the fact that using product with certain brand personality, consumers are more likely to associate themselves with a desired group of people or ideal self-image (Aaker 1997, 347-348). The founding is valuable information to companies since management has an opportunity to affect their brand's personality by managing the brand personality (Hayes et. al 2008, 111).

From this it can be deducted that by managing brand personality, management has a chance to affect the incoming cash flows in the end.

One market area where brand and brand personality are featured prominently in is clothing industry. In the business sector brands are very important as people often make their buying decisions according to the brands (e.g. Kotler & Foertsch 2010, 114). In this study one clothing company will be taken under closer analysis: CTRL Clothing, which designs and sells street wear clothing. The company was founded as a skateboard clothing company and it is one of the first skateboard clothing companies in Finland. The company has reached strong image in the Finnish skateboarding and street fashion scenes. CTRL Clothing has a strong brand personality, which will be discussed more in the empirical part of this study.

1.2. Research Problems, Purpose of This Study, Limitations

This study is divided into the main research questions and sub-questions. The framework of the study has been formed on the basis of these issues. The main research question is:

“How brand personality is created and how do customers perceive this personality?”

In order to get more complex understanding about the issue following sub-questions are used:

“What kind of role brand personality has in brand identity?”

“What factors affect on the formulation of brand personality?”

“How do customers perceive brand and brand personality?”

The purpose of this study is to examine how brand personality is created, and how customers perceive brand and brand personality. Brand is a vast and comprehensive concept. As noted, the concentration of this study is on brand personality, which is a part of bigger brand concept, brand identity. In this paper brand identity is observed with the frame of De Chernatony's brand identity theory (1999, 157-179), and other

brand identity theories have been left out of the consideration. There are different theories considering the drivers or antecedents of brand personality (e.g. Aaker 2010, 145-149; Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer 2013, 207; Hayes et. al 2008, 96). Product- and non-product related attributes as the brand personality building tools are only taken under examination due to the limited nature of this study (Aaker 2010, 145-149).

Customers' perceptions of brand personality were decided to survey through their experiences of brand in general. In this type of study, which is very limited by its nature, concentrating only on the perception of brand personality would not have been sensible or even suitable, as brand personality is only a small piece of experienced brand. In addition, customers perceive brands as entirety, just like person forms a perception of an object as a sum of different factors (Verma 2006, 68; Blake & Sekurer 2006, 2). In the previous studies, where concentration has only been in the perception of brand personality, relatively deep conversance of customers' personality or other more complex phenomena have been done; this depth-level familiarity cannot be achieved in bachelor's thesis (e.g. Parker 2009, 175-184; Lin 2010, 4-17). In other words, concentration only in brand personality was not found convenient in this study.

When getting acquainted with the literature concentrating on brand personality, it was observed that brand, brand image, brand identity and brand personality are often used synonymously. In some cases a bit deeper interpretation was needed to be done when studying the research material used, and some own applications have been made based on the more deeper understanding of writers' idea.

1.3. Literature Review

Even though brands have strong presence in marketing literature, it seems that brand personality has not received as much attention as other concepts related to brand. Brand personality has got more attention in research papers than in books. In the research papers results have been mostly consistent when examining basic issues of brand personality. Different phenomena related to brand personality are

given more attention than the basic research concentrating brand personality. (e.g. Hayes et. al 2008, 65-116; Carlson et. al 2008, 370-384; Kim et. al 2001, 195–206)

Dominating theorists in the field of branding are David Aaker and Jennifer Aaker. The latter theorist has created a break-through theory concerning brand personality: the five dimensions of brand personality (Aaker 1997, 347-356). In this study her theory will not be used, because it was not found suitable to this research frame.

De Chernatony has created a theory concerning the construction of brand identity, which is used as a frame when inspecting the components of brand identity. The theory is chosen because it brings an interesting perspective of brand identity formulation. Consumers' perceptions of brands have been surveyed in numerous researches (Aaker 1996; Breikvik & Thornbjørnsen 2008; Chung et. al 2001; Venkateswaran et. al 2011). Though, as pointed out before, there has not been made simple and basic studies concentrating only the relationship with customer and brand personality. Due to the fact, it was chosen to view brand as a whole, and to examine brand personality as a part of a brand. In this study Keller's model of combining different brand perceptions is chosen to use in modified way, as it was found to be most suitable to the empirical part of the study.

All in all, it seems that brand personality literature and other concepts related to it cause continuing confusion and uncertainty. One reason for this may be the fact that as human personality, brand personality is perceived uniquely by every human being, so clear and generalized results about it is hard to achieve. In brand personality literature there are numerous views concerning the concept, so clear restrictions need to be made in order to produce some kind of understanding about brand personality and factors relating to it.

1.4. Outline of the Study and Theoretical Framework

This study is divided into the theoretical and empirical sections. The theory part is divided to company's and customer's perspective. The theory starts with familiarization with brand identity, where the aim is to get an understanding of the

role of brand personality as a part of bigger concept. The construction of brand identity is studied as well as the relationships between different elements of brand identity. Then the focus is taken to brand personality, and the factors affecting to the brand personality formation are inspected with product- and non-product related drivers. After the understanding of brand personality has been formed from company's point of view, the perspective is changed to the customer. Customers' perceptions of brand are inspected on the basis of Keller's pyramid model (2008, 60), which logically combines different perceptions and experiences. The model has been modified for this study in order to be more suitable for this context.

The empirical part's structure is following the structure of the theory. Case company's head designer's view of company's brand identity and brand personality is presented and analyzed and different factors affecting the case company's brand personality are pointed out and analyzed. Thereafter customers' perspective of the brand is formed and analyzed. Finally, the summary and conclusions are presented, followed by potential future research targets.

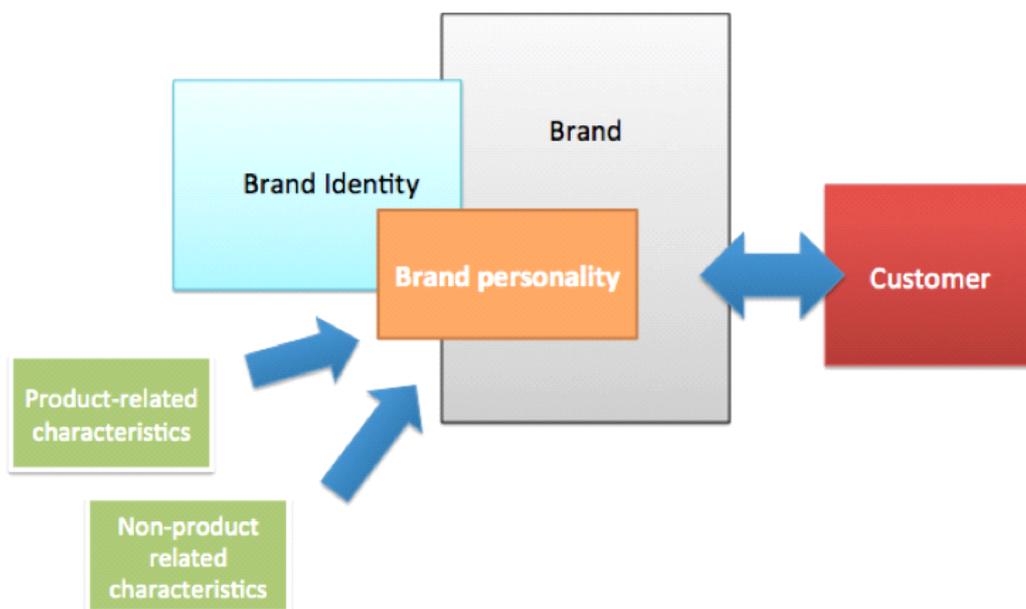


Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework

In the theoretical framework the study's structure is presented in a very simplified way (see Figure 1). Brand personality is a part of brand and brand identity. It consists of product- and non-product related characteristics. Customer is experiencing the brand and brand personality, and he or she is affecting to the formulation of brand personality as well.

1.5. Methodology

The empirical part has been done through interviews. The target is to get perspective from the head designer of the case company and company's customers, who are familiar with the brand. The interviews were done through Internet phone calls. The aim is to get comprehensive understanding of the company's brand personality and the brand as well. The interviews were recorded and notes were made from the interviews. The research method will be under more specific examination in the chapter 4.

1.6. Key Concepts of the Study

Brand = Brand is product or service –related element that distinguishes the product or service from its competitors. It can be any name, term, symbol, sign or design, or combination of these factors. From consumer's point of view brand helps to distinguish certain product or service from its competitors and it makes it easier to recognize. In addition, brand can offer competitive advantage to company. (Hollensen 2010, 622; Tikkanen et. al 2007, 164)

Brand personality = The concept of brand personality will be widely defined, since the concept is abstract and it can be difficult to assimilate. Aaker (1997, 347) defines brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand." Because of the broad definition, brand personality includes characteristics such as gender, age and socioeconomic class as well as classic human personality traits like warmth, sentimentality and concern (Aaker 2010, 141). On the contrary, Bosnjak et. al (2007, 304) have an opposite perception about brand personality: "Contrary to people, brands are inanimate objects and obviously do not in themselves "behave" in a consistent manner". Aaker's (1997, 347) definition has received wide support in literature and journals considering brand personality (e.g. Keller 2008, 369;

Venkateswaran et. al 2011, 22; Mengxia 2007, 36) and it will be used in this study as well.

According to Freling & Frobes (2005b, 405), brand personality is possible to see as a nonconcrete part of certain product or service that shapes perceptions about the object. Brand personality makes the product, and the brand, interesting and memorable from the customer's point of view (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 84). Numerous studies have proved that a strong brand personality affects customers' buying behavior positively (e.g. Louis & Lombart 2010, 126; Rajagobal 2008, 37-38). To set an example, Mengxia proved in her study (2007, 44) that brand personality has a strong influence of customers' brand preference, brand attitude and brand loyalty.

The concept of brand personality is tightly connected other constructs concerning brand, such as brand image and brand identity (Freling & Frobes 2005, 404). Because of the overlapping nature of the concepts, brand personality cannot be strictly separated from the brand image and brand identity (Freling & Frobes 2005, 404). The same fact applies on this study as well; when discussing about brand personality, the concept is tightly tied to brand image and brand identity concepts.

Brand identity = There are many definitions available for brand identity. According to Keller (2008, 174) brand identity is the combination of all brand elements to awareness and image – the things that a brand stands for. Kapferer defines brand identity as a hexagonal identity prism, which consists of personality, reflection, relationship, physique, culture and self-image (De Chernatony 2010, 246).

In this study brand identity refers to Chernatony's idea about brand identity (1999, 157-179). The main idea in the model is that company's desired brand vision can be achieved when organization and its employees do their work in the line of wanted brand image. According to Chernatony's grip brand identity consist of five elements: brand vision and culture, brand relationships, brand presentation, brand positioning and brand personality (see Figure 2). These components influence each other and affect to the development brand personality. (De Chernatony 1999, 157-179

2. Creating Brand Personality

2.1. Brand Identity

Chernatony's theory is used in the inspection of brand identity, because it gives practical view of company's brand identity formation compared to the competitive theories (e.g. Aaker 2010, 79). According to the theory, brand identity consists of brand personality, brand positioning, brand's culture and vision, relationships and presentation of the brand; factors that are constantly affecting to each other and to the brand identity as a whole (De Chernatony 1999, 166). The idea of the theory is presented in Figure 2. The theory bases on the idea that the main factors behind company's brand identity are the employees of the firm (De Chernatony 1999, 167); they are creating brand's culture hence affecting the formulation of brand personality. In addition, employees are conveying the brand culture, as well as the brand personality to customers, as they are typically in closest connection with the customers (Harris & De Chernatony 2001, 444). According to the theory, adaptive, strategically appropriate culture, which is consistently apparent throughout the organization, is likely to be connected to good and healthy brand image (De Chernatony 1999, 167). In addition, brand's vision and culture are the main drivers of brand's personality, positioning and relationships (De Chernatony 1999, 166-167). When presenting these brand identity factors to the brand's stakeholders, those should reflect the real and desired self-images of the interest groups (Foster et. al 2010, 409; Chernatony 1999, 157-179).

Because this study is concentrated on to examine brand personality, and the idea in this chapter is to form a picture of how brand personality is formed as a part of bigger picture, brand identity gets more attention in this study than it does in De Chernatony's original model. As pointed out before, cohesive brand identity is important to company's success (Louis & Lombart 2010, 116-117). In top of that, brand should be somehow special and distinctive from its competitors (Carlson et. al 2008, 381); otherwise brand just becomes a part of the mass. Naturally, it is not enough to merely decide what the brand personality is and create it; the brand personality has to be presented to the crowd as well (De Chernatony 2010, 53-55). In order to create unified brand experience to customers, employees' behavior should

be aligned with brand personality, and brand personality should be reflected in their everyday work (De Chernatony 1999, 169). Unified brand identity tends to lead more favorable brand evaluations from customers (Louis & Lombart 2010, 115; Sirianni et. al 2013, 108-123).



Figure 2. 'Brand Identity' Model (Modified from De Chernatony's Brand Identity Model 1999, 166)

2.1.1. Brand Personality

As defined above, brand personality is “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker 1997, 347). Alongside affecting other elements in brand's identity, firm's core values affect strongly to brand personality (De Chernatony 1999, 168). Brand personality is a part of company's brand identity, and with that the brand is possible to be made one of a kind, unique. With interesting brand personality product can achieve more attractive and outstanding status in consumers' minds and evoke feelings (Kaputa 2012, 28, 139). Brand is often sustained through enrobing it with emotional values, which can be welcomed beyond functional utility from customer's point of view (Keller 2008, 68-69). From customer's perspective, brand personality helps to decrease the information research and processing as brand's

values can be easily recognized through the presentation of personality (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 84; Aaker 1997, 347-348).

Brand personality is passed to customers particularly through marketing communication (e.g. De Chernatony & Riley 1998, 422). Brand personality should be managed carefully, in order to achieve favorable brand image in consumers' minds (Kim et. al 2001, 205). In addition, brand identification can be developed and maintained through brand personality, which also improves the long-term relationships (Kim et. al 2001, 205; De Pelsmacker et. al 2007, 59; 2001, 205; Farhat & Khan 2011, 6). These are important attributes from the company's point of view, as long-term customer relationships are typically desired (Farhat & Khan 2011, 4).

When considering the brand's personality as a part of brand's identity and on organizational level as well, it is essential to put focus on the presentation of the brand through media with supporting and harmonious behavior of employees (De Chernatony 1999, 168; Hayes et. al 2008, 111-112). It is crucial that employees internalize the brand personality, so the message of the brand identity will be right and cohesive to the customers (Harris & De Chernatony 2001, 444). The communication is effecting the customers' perceptions of the brand, in positive or negative way (Hayes et. al 2008, 111-112).

In presented 'brand identity' concept, De Chernatony points out the connection between positioning and brand personality, which is often overlooked by managers (1999, 168-169). Brand positioning is the other important factor in brand identity affecting brand personality alongside brand's culture (De Chernatony 1999, 168). It is not enough to inspect only the connection between brand's value and brand personality planning; the effects from brand's positioning to brand personality have to be considered as well when the goal is to build cohesive brand identity (De Chernatony 1999, 168). Also Freling and Forbes (2005b, 412) accentuate the importance of concerning both brand personality and brand positioning together in actions related to brand: "along with positioning, personality is a vital guide for those seeking to get the brand across to consumers".

2.1.2. Brand Positioning

Positioning means “the act of designing a company’s offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of target market” (Kotler & Keller 2012, 298). In other words, the main idea in positioning is to distinguish the company’s brand from its competitors in consumers’ minds (Bergh & Behrer 2011, 136-137). It can be noticed, that the role of brand positioning resembles the role of brand personality, as brand personality is also aiming to stand out from its competitors. According to De Chernatony (2010, 44), successful brands have positioning concentrating on certain attribute, so the brand is easier to remember. Relying on previous, this kind of special attribute can be brand personality. The difference between brand’s personality and positioning is that while brand positioning defines, what brand can do for a customer, brand personality concentrates on what the brand says about the customer (De Chernatony 2010, 282). To set an example, clothing brand is taken under inspection. The positioning of brand can be that it offers a status symbol by being an appreciated brand. When using the brand, the brand personality can tell that the customer is stylish or brand conscious.

According to De Chernatony (1999, 168), brand's positioning needs to be in line with company’s vision and values in order to create cohesive brand identity. In practice this can mean, for instance, surveying whether employees share the same perception of positioning, as it is desired in the whole company level. For example, do employees regard the brand as pioneer brand that is aiming to conquer the world. If the employees’ views differ from the desired view of positioning, employees should be helped to understand how their views differentiate, and how their views could be changed to match better the desired views. (De Chernatony 1999, 168)

Brand positioning occurs in two levels; in marketing level and in a more specific level. In marketing level, an overall position has to be established. To set an example, clothing store can choose to be a ‘youthful street wear’ company. According to this positioning, the target market is defined. In the next level, more exact positioning needs to be made in order to be distinguished from the competitors. More particular

benefit can be to concentrate on rebellious youngsters, who want to stand out from the crowd. (Rosenbaum-Elliott et. al 2011, 111; Keller 2008, 131)

2.1.3. Brand Vision & Culture

Brand's vision gives the direction to company's brand identity as well as brand personality planning, and the company's actions in the long run (De Chernatony 1999, 166; Urde 2002, 1023). In order to define a good vision, Collins & Porras (1996, 192) claim that company's management should consider brand surroundings at least five years ahead. Vision should be clear and simple in order to be easily internalized, especially by employees, as they are presenting the brand identity (Lamons 2006, 6). On the basis of brand's vision, brand personality is possible to be defined and created (De Chernatony 1999, 163-165; 2010, 51).

In order to achieve the desired vision, company as well as brand's culture has to be in line with the vision (De Chernatony 1999, 167). In other words employees should share similar understanding of patterns of behavior inside the company, so that the mutual goal would be achieved (De Chernatony 1999, 167; Harris & Chernatony 2001, 453). To understand what culture means in this context, the definition of culture is formed by combining the views of Schein (1984, 3) and De Chernatony (2010, 163): culture is a sum of basic assumptions, which certain group of people has invented, developed or found in order to deal with issues, that rises from external changes or inner integration. These assumptions are based on the values of the brand and the company (De Chernatony 1999, 167). The assumptions are considered valid inside the organization and those will be thought to the new members of the group (Kotter & Heskett 1992, 4).

Typically companies want to stand out from the competitors. This can be seen as a vision, where brand personality is affecting behind (Kaputa 2012, 28). The same applies in the case of brand culture: when the brand culture is well defined and internalized, it can also work as a tool of differentiation, such as brand personality. As seen in De Chernatony's model (Picture 2), these brand identity factors are supporting and affecting to each other. The aim for all of these is to take the brand closer to the mutual goal: unified brand identity.

2.1.4. Relationships

When the brand personality is created, the relationship starts to develop, just like in any animate forms (Aaker 2010, 103). The relationship formed is based on the values that affected on the brand personality formulation, creating more cohesion to the brand identity (Fournier 1998, 344–345; Avis et. al 2012, 311). In De Chernatony's model, relationships are defined as relationships between employees, employees and customers and employees and other stakeholders (De Chernatony 1999, 42). After time passes, these relationships develop through communication and the relationships help different parties to understand each other better (De Chernatony 1999, 42). Just like in every relationship, the other party has to be taken into account; a selfish partner can easily wreck a relationship; once trust has been created, it should be treasured in order to maintain commitment (Esch et. al 2006, 105-106). To set an example how the relationship between brand and consumer is constructed, Fournier (1998, 334) found out in her case study, that consumers' relationships with brands are "valid at the level of consumers' lived experiences." This can be seen to mean that the relationships are based on customers' experiences, opinions and feelings related to brand.

When viewing the De Chernatony's model, it can be observed that through employees' actions, brand personality is actually a part of every relationship formed (see Figure 2). In order to achieve balanced brand identity, managers should help the employees to understand, what kind of relationships are advisable to form with different parties based on the brand. These relationships should be based on the brand's values and culture, brand personality, brand positioning and brand presentation. It also has to be pointed out that these relationships should be reviewed regularly. Staff should be taken into this evaluating process, so they could realize in practice, how the relationships are affected by brand's values, personality and positioning. (De Chernatony 1999, 169)

Relationships between customers and brands have received quite a vast interest in the field of brand research (e.g. Aaker 2010, 153-174; Keller 2008, 60-74). In chapter

3, where customers' perceptions of brands are discussed, the customer-brand relationships are taken into closer inspection.

2.1.5. Brand Presentation

When planning the presentation of brand, the starting point should be to understand how the brand identity could be presented in the way that appeals to target group's aspired characteristics (De Chernatony 1999, 169), as appealing brand is an important factor of success. As noted before, appealing brand personality can be a key for that. From the viewpoint of brand personality, it has to be underlined that active communication, especially advertising, has an important role in creation of brand personality (Rajagobal 2006, 58). With communication, brand personality can be made alive and to be more concrete (Rajagobal 2006, 64). For example many older people are appealed with sporty and healthy looks (Kapferer 1997, 103). Many dairy brands are positioned on lightness or fitness based on low fat products as those reflects an image of sporty young female (Kapferer 1997, 103). The images are often found appealing from the perspective of older people, who are often admiring youth (Kapferer 1997, 103). As a consequence, these kinds of products are often bought by older people, as they are presented in appealing way (Kapferer 1997, 103).

Even though De Chernatony's brand identity model (1999, 157-179) gives more practical view of brand identity formulation compared to its rivals, it is still somewhat complex as the model's concepts are multifaceted, and so are the connections between these variables as well. A summary from the model might be found useful. The central point in any brand is its vision; where the brand desires to go to and what does it want to achieve. Whether the aim is possible to achieve, depends on the employees of the company. They are creating the general culture inside the company alongside the managers. Managers have a general idea about how the markets work and how the brand should be developed. These ideas form the core thinking behind the brand, and those give the base to the brand's positioning strategy. The positioning of the brand manifests brand's functional values as well as brand's personality; the factors that make the brand's values alive in practice. All of these different sections have to work coherently together; in other words company's employees have to internalize the main values of the brand and work flawlessly

according to those. At this way strong and successful brand identity can be created. Finally, through presentation the brand identity is passed to the stakeholders. From perspective of brand personality, presentation is in important role as through that the personality can be built, maintained and developed. (De Chernatony 1999, 157-179; 2010, 54; Kim et. al 2001, 204)

All in all, it can be stated that one of the main goals of brand personality is to stand out from its competitors. Also other factors of brand identity, brand's presentation, positioning, culture and values as well as relationships, can be seen supporting the goal.

2.2. Brand Personality Drivers

Creation of brand personality can be seen as a "joint venture" of both a customer and a company. The concept of joint venture refers to a process, where both parties are creating the brand personality from their own perspective: company is building and developing brand personality through marketing, as well as with other various and different tools. Moreover, both parties are affecting to brand personality. (Freling & Forbes 2005b, 412; Aaker 2010, 145-146; Rajagopal 2006, 58)

Customers typically experience the brand personality in dimensions that reflect a customer's personality (Rajagopal 2006, 58). According Freling and Forbes (2005b, 412), brand personality is not created easily, but once created it tends to be long lasting. The environment of brand is not constant, which leads to the fact that brand has to be able to readjust to changes happening (Kapferer 1997, 169-171).

In this study the concentration is on Aaker's theory concerning brand personality drivers and the concentration is mainly on company's point of view. According to his view, there are two different characteristics in brand personality drivers: product-related and non-product-related attributes. In addition, everything that is somehow related to a brand affects to brand's personality formed and experienced. To company, this means that all these affecting characteristics should be in line with the wanted brand personality in order to achieve desired goals and cohesive brand

personality. Since in the theory there are many drivers affecting brand personality, not all of the factors are taken into closer inspection. (Aaker 2010, 145-149)

2.2.1. Product-Related Characteristics

The strongest effect the brand personality has on product-related characteristics, such as product category, package, price and product attributes (Aaker 2010, 145-146). To set an example, the case company of this study is used. The company designs and sells skateboard and street clothing. Customers might have opinions, assumptions or experiences considering this kind of brand's product category. One might regard the product category easy-going, laid-back or even tough. These category characteristics are certainly different if compared for example to clothing brand offering formal business clothing.

Price-related characteristics are often under discussion when talking about brands (Aaker 2010, 102). For example DeVecchio and Puligadda (2012, 465-474) proved, alongside numerous other researches, that a discounted product is associated with a lower product quality; in other words, higher price as a product character can lead to an image of good quality. The price of the product can determine whether the product is upscale, middle-market or downscale (Aaker 2010, 102; De Chernatony & Riley 1998, 423). In the case of CTRL Clothing, the products could be classified between upscale and middle-scale; as the products are somewhat more expensive than in chain stores and quality is better.

2.2.2. Non-Product Related Characteristics

Non-product related characteristics also affect the brand personality. According to Aaker (2010, 146), these kinds of characteristics are user imagery, sponsorship, age, symbol, advertisement style, country of origin, company image, CEO and celebrity endorsers. Rajagobal (2006, 58) underlines the high power that celebrity endorsers have in a brand personality building process; when using a famous person as a means of marketing, brand can lend the personality of the famous person and combine the image on its own. For example CTRL Clothing has used a celebrity-

endorsement for building the brand personality. Company has collaborated with famous Finnish rap artist Gracias. Gracias evokes certain emotions in his audience and fans, and when his personal and public image is combined to CTRL's brand it affects to CTRL's brand personality.

Advertisements and advertising in general are playing an important role in personality building (Aaker 2010, 146). This is a consequence of the fact that advertising offers a practical way for creating associations in customers' minds (Rajagobal 2006, 58). Through advertising, brand managers can control the extent of which a particular personality trait becomes a part of brand's overall image in medium or long-term or at least to some degree (Hayes et. al 2011, 111). In addition to Aaker (2010, 146), other researchers have also underlined the importance of advertising as a tool for creating brand personality. For example Keller (2008, 66) believes that one reason for why advertising is so influential is the customers' tendency to inferences concerning to the situation of usage depicted in an advertisement. Company's way to advertise the brand affects to brand personality as well: for example a strong presence in advertisement channels and advertising frequency do affect how brand's personality is perceived (Rosenbaum-Elliot et. al 2007, 108). The relationship between brand personality and advertising can be seen interactive: brand personality does affect the marketing practices of the company (Freling et. al 2011, 404).

Symbol, or the logo in the other words, forms a really important part of brand and its personality as well (Keller 2008, 2-3; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 62). Even though it is only a picture with one or few words, the power of logo can be enormous (Keller 2008, 2-3; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 62). McDonald's golden arches can be set as an example of a powerful logo.

Aaker's view of non-product related characteristics is supported with other brand personality researches. For example Hayes et. al (2011, 95-116) investigated in their study, whether it is possible to imbue a brand with meanings and give it a personality. They used three types of associations for testing: product attributes, corporate associations and user imagery; all of which are also presented in Aaker's (2010, 146) 'brand personality drivers' model. They found out that user imagery has the strongest

affection to brand personality (Hayes et. al 2011, 113). Other important outcome from the study was that different kinds of brand associations could be combined in order to create a wanted brand personality profile (Hayes et. al 2011, 113).

Kim et. al (2001, 204) are underlining the role of marketing communication, sales promotion, social contribution and public relations as tools of brand personality building process. When considering this result to perspective of Aaker's theory (2010, 145-169), it can be said that they regard non-product related attributes more important to product related ones in process of brand personality build. The role of user image is discussed in the next chapter.

3. Perceiving Brand Personality

Once company has developed a brand and created a brand personality, customers form their own understanding about the brand and its personality through different channels (e.g. Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer 2013, 205-216; Louis & Lombart 2010, 114-130; Albert et. al 2013; 904-909). In the end customers are the ones who decide if the brand is successful or not; in other words do they appreciate the brand enough in order to purchase the product (Biel 1992, RC7-RC8). As companies' goal is to appeal customers, they should concentrate on advertising strategies, which create interesting brand personalities based on personality traits that attract the customer (Rajagobal 2006, 64).

3.1. Customer's Perspective

One of the main goals of a brand, as well as the brand's personality, is to create a relationship to a customer (Aaker & Joachimastahler 2010, 79). There are numerous perceptions and theories through which stages, and how, consumers form their relationship to brands (e.g. Keller 2008, 60-72; Breikvik & Thornbjørnsen 2008, 443-472; Koll & Wallpach 2009, 338-345). Albert et. al (2013, 904) define consumer-brand relationship quite widely as they see that it is a formulation of brand identification and brand trust. When these factors are on a high level in consumer's mind, those tend to lead brand commitment. That means, for example, a willingness to pay a higher price of a product with a certain brand, or tell good things about the brand forward to friends, positive word-of-mouth.

Brands helps to define the lives of consumers, and brands play a vital role in people's consuming behavior (Ahuvia 2005, 182). Consumers tend to form interactive relationships with brands that are attached to a meaningful product category for them (Aaker 2010, 142). In this kind of interactive relationship customers tend to give brand human-like personality traits, give a nickname to a brand or even communicate with a brand like that was human (Rajagobal 2006, 59; Aaker & Joachimastahler 2010, 79-80). Sometimes these relationships develop so close and special, that

consumers start to talk about the product, as if it was human (Aaker & Joachimstahler 2010, 79-80).

To give more practical perspective about the issue, brands can help customers with their daily lives (Rajagopal 2006, 64). Brand is often associated with certain standard of quality and service in consumer's mind, and by choosing a brand that a consumer has noted to fit one's standards, one can avoid risk of failure in purchase (Rajagopal 2006, 64; Hollensen 2010, 409). The simplicity and easiness that brand offers can be detected for example in today's complex market of electricity appliances (Keller 2008, 6-7). For example if one have noticed that Electrolux products are easy-to-use and durable, one might choose to buy all of the electricity appliance from the brand. Brands offer a clear, quick guide to a variety of competitive products, and those help consumers to make better and quicker decisions (Keller 2008, 6-7).

Even though this study is about brand personality, it did not seem sensible to study mere relationships existing between customer and brand personality distinguished from the others brand's elements, such as brand imagery, brand performance, judgments and feelings (Keller 2008, 60). Brand personality is not perceived separately from the other factors as in the end people form their perceptions of entities (Verma 2006, 68; Blake & Sekurer 2006, 2). This chapter is build upon customer-based brand equity pyramid developed by Keller (2008, 60). In this study the model will be used in an applied way, as the point of view is concentrating to customer, not to company. In this study the model is named as customer's brand perception model (see Figure 3). The reason for choosing this model in this study is that the model combines logically and hierarchically different levels of experienced brand personality and combines it in a clear, illustrative way. The highest level of Keller's model is originally 'Resonance', which is changed in this study to 'Self-expression', because it matches better to this study and the brand's nature as well. Self-expression was brought up in many researches discussing brand personality, so self-expression can be regarded to be important when investigating brand personality (Aaker 2010, 158-159; Kim et. al 2001, 195-206; Farhat & Khan 2011, 5).

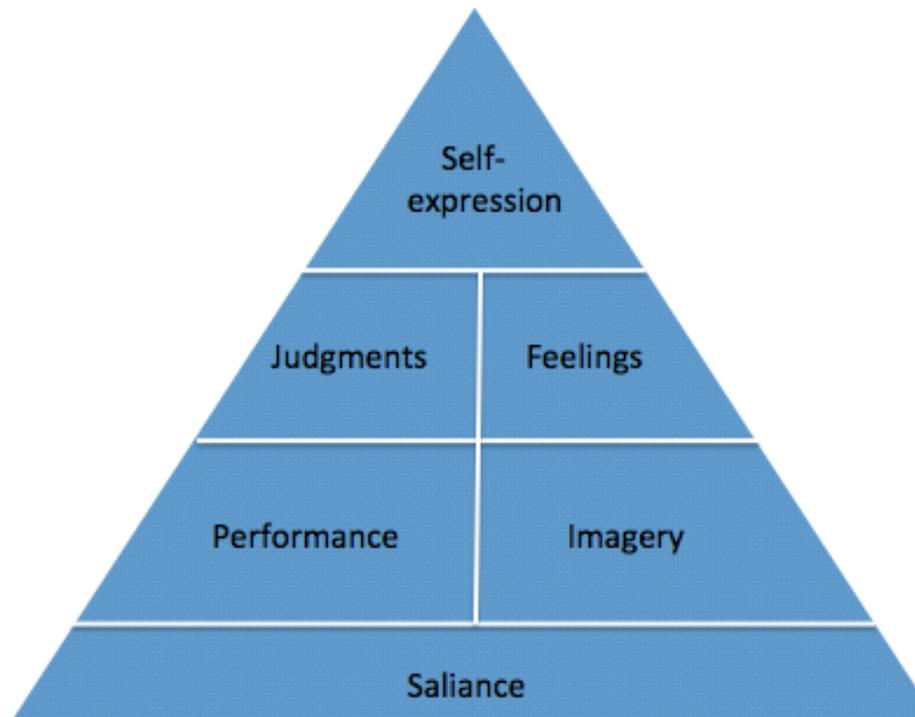


Figure 3. 'Customer's Brand Perception Model' (Modified from Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid 2008, 60)

3.1.1. Saliance

Saliance is defining the customers' awareness of the brand: the ability to recognize or recall the brand in different surroundings. It can be also seen to include the ability of combining the brand name, logo and symbol to the associations in memory. When brand personality is regarded as attractive, brand identification is created. Through maintaining and developing the brand identification through brand personality, consumers start easier to regard the brand as a long-term partner. As it can be noticed, saliance level relationship is a starting point for developing personal and deeper relationships to the brand. However, even this kind of lower lever relationship has a positive effect on word-of-mouth reports, and indirect effect on brand loyalty. (Keller 2008, 60-61; Kim et. al 2011, 195-206)

3.1.2. Brand Performance

Brand performance is defining, how well the product or service equals to customer's functional needs providing functional utility (Keller 2008, 65). In brand performance, customer is estimating at least the following attributes: primary ingredients and supplementary features, product reliability, durability and serviceability, service effectiveness, style and design and price (Keller 2008, 65). According to Aaker (2010, 96), experienced functional benefits are directly linked to customer decision and user experiences.

3.1.3. Brand Imagery

As brand performance is concentrated on the more practical perspective of the product, imagery concentrates the abstract side of the brand. Brand imagery answers the question how well does the brand attempt to meet customers' psychological or social needs. Brand imagery is created through own experiences, advertising and other indirect ways. Brand imagery can be seen as a unique concept, as everyone experiences the brand by oneself. Brand personality, user profiles, usage situations and history related to the brand as well as brand experiences are some examples that affect to brand imagery. As brand personality has been already gone through as a concept, it is not given that much attention in this chapter. (Keller 2008, 65; De Chernatony 2010, 56)

Aaker (1997, 348) defines user imagery as "the set of human characteristics associated with the typical user of a brand". It is possible, that brand's user imagery is also formed on the basis of idealized user; the people who are seen in brand's advertisements (Aaker 2010, 147). User imagery affects strongly to brand personality (Aaker 2010, 147). When considering the case of CTRL Clothing, one may see typical user as a person with attitude and charisma, which on the other hand affects to the brand personality experienced.

Other reason for the strong affection of brand personality in user imagery is the fact that consumers sometimes use brand as a mean of self-expression, and user

imagery related to the brand helps them to select which characteristics they wish to communicate with others around (Hayes et. al 2011, 111). For example, in case of CTRL Clothing the brand might be seen as a laid-back brand. Consumer might choose to use company's products in order to show his or her friends that he or she is easy-going by nature.

3.1.4. Brand Judgments

Consumers' form their perception about the brand, and the brand personality, by combining their experiences, imagery associations, personal opinions and evaluations related to brand performance. These form a basis of judgments made about the brand; how are the brand quality, credibility and superiority or is the brand even taken under the consideration. (Keller 2008, 67-68; Elliot & Percy 2007, 70)

Quality of a brand is one of the most important factors affecting buying behavior as it affects how the brand and the product are judged (Keller 2008, 68). Perceived quality of a brand means customer's perception concerning the overall quality of the product or service compared to its rivals (Aaker 1991, 85). Customer can also form judgments about the quality of the brand basing on the credibility of the company behind the brand (Aaker 1991, 101-103). These kinds of judgments are based on a customer's evaluation of how well company is doing its job in the business field, does the company care about its customers and is the company likeable (Keller 2008, 68). Brand quality and credibility are affecting brand consideration; does consumer regard the brand worth of buying. Lastly, brand superiority is a form of judgment: how much better to the others alike brand is regarded (Keller 2008, 68).

3.1.5. Brand Feelings

Emotions related to the brand add depth and richness to the brand experience, and to the consumers' own lives through that (Aaker 2010, 97; Keller 2008, 388). If brands were just logos, only presented with images and no feeling arousing from anyone's point of view, it can be imagined that the appeal of brands would probably be much lower.

Customers' emotional responses and reactions to certain brand are called brand feelings, which tend to arise related to the usage or buying experience (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 78-79; Aaker 2010, 97). In some cases the feelings may be related to the social currency, that the brand might bring to the person using it (Keller 2008, 68-70). According to Keller (2008, 69-70) important feelings for forming an emotional-based relationship with a brand are warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval and self-respect. To give an example, one may feel socially approved by purchasing a t-shirt from certain brand. When one is using the t-shirt, one might feel to be socially approved; this feeling can be linked to the t-shirt itself.

The stronger the brand identity, and brand personality, the bigger the possibility is to raise emotions and emotion based equities in customers' minds (Aaker & Joachimstahler 2010, 78-79). Over time, customers can form emotional-based relationships with brands that they use and to which they have positive feelings related to (Aaker & Joachimstahler 2010, 78-79; Aaker 2010, 97). To set an example, when one is wearing jeans from certain, well-known brand in the market, one may experience feelings of self-confidence alongside other positive feelings. These emotional experiences may become related to the brand of jeans, which might lead in long-term emotional relationship to the brand. The relationship formed may lead to choosing the brand before others in later purchase situations. As emotions play pivotal role in buying behavior (Bergh & Behrer 2011, 182), the emotions aroused from the brand may become the most important factor in future buying decision.

3.1.6. Self-Expression

Brands can become a part of person's self-concept as brands can be used as a mean of self-expression, when consumer is communicating one's self-image through using certain brands to other people (e.g. Lannon 2011, 14; Aaker 2010, 99; Ahuvia 2006, 171). In this case it is possible to say that brand is used in symbolic meaning (Schembri et. al 2010, 635). To set an example, a person might want to show to

others that one is a laid-back person by using clothes from a brand that is regarded to be easy-going.

One important factor has to apply in order to use brand as a mean of self-expression: brand personality of the used product has to be in line with the self-expression (Aaker 2010, 158-159). In the other words, the brand has to be that kind that person wants to show to the others as well. It is important that customers feel that the brand in question symbolizes who they are: this supports the self-image of the customer and also helps to develop a sense of belonging to something (Loureiro et. al 2012, 24).

The self-expression may also be based on the image of ideal self (Aaker 2010, 153). Schembri et. al (2010, 635) also found out in their research the iconic way to use a brand: consumers use a certain brand, as one desires to be associated to what brand stands for. Especially if the brand personality has high self-expressive value and the brand personality is highly distinctive, the brand personality is perceived more attractive (Kim et. al 2001, 203). Continuing the CTRL Clothing case example, if one wishes to be associated to be laid-back, even though one would not be in real life, one might use a CTRL Clothing hoodie as in iconic meaning.

People may have multiple roles depending on the situation where they are (Aaker 2010, 99, 157). Whether they are in work, at the gym, playing with own children in a park or in a library, to set some examples, people often have different roles. In every role, there is certain self-concept, which is often needed to be expressed (Aaker 2010, 99, 157). Brands give one tool to fulfill this need (Chernev et. al 2011, 68-82). For example, when one goes to the office, one might prefer to look professional and serious, so one might choose to wear an expensive, high-regarded brand's clothing, for example from 'BOSS' brand. After a workday one goes to the gym and wants to look sporty and athletic and demonstrate it with sport outfit from Nike.

4. The Research Methodology and Representing the Company

This chapter discusses about the empirical part, the research methodology and the research method that are used in this study. In addition, the case company CTRL Clothing, is introduced in order to help a reader to form a comprehensive picture of the case company. After this, the research results are analyzed with the help of theories presented in chapters two and three.

4.1. Research Methodology

This study was conducted with qualitative research method. To define the method as the simplest way, it means the portrayal of certain issue, which is not in numeral form (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 13). In qualitative research the main idea is to study the phenomenon as extensively as possible, and form a realistic picture about the phenomenon (Hirsjärvi et. al 2000, 152). The typical characteristics of qualitative research are to use people as the information sources, present unexpected information, portray different aspects of research phenomenon and processing of the cases as unique (Hirsjärvi et. al 2000, 155).

In qualitative research, the researcher doesn't have presumptions about the results or research target (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 19). Of course it is impossible, especially in research concentrating on humans, to build a research on totally blank page. However, the experiences and opinions that are formed in the past can't restrict or limit the research conducted (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 20). The aim of this study is not to achieve universalized results that can be isolated from the individuals, events or dictums related to the study (Metsämuuronen 2008, 48).

The aim of qualitative research is to understand the research target; it is possible that the material of the research consist only of a one case (Hisrjärvi et. al 2000, 168). When the material of the research is limited in only few variables, it is easier to form a comprehensive picture of the case as a whole compared to for example a case of quantitative research, where the list of targets can be almost endless.

The reliability of the research is depending on the researcher, as the qualitative research is based on researcher's interpretation, which makes every qualitative research unique (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 211-212). The fact makes determination of research's reliability more challenging than in quantitative research (Hirsjärvi et. al 2000, 214). Depicting the research process with as much detail as it is possible can increase the reliability (Hirsjärvi et. al 2000, 215). For example in the end of the study, where conclusions are presented, researcher should tell, why and how the conclusions were achieved.

In qualitative research interpretation concerns the study as a whole and it is challenging to separate the phases of the study from each other (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 16). The size of the area of the study is usually relatively small, and the primary stress is about the quality, not the quantity, of the sample (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 18). It is possible, that there is only one object in the study, and like in this case, three objects (Hirsjärvi et. al 2000, 168).

4.2. The Interviews

The aim in the interview is to find out what the interviewee has in mind and the interviewing situation can be seen as a certain form of discussion (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 86). The distinguishing part compared to normal, daily conversation, is that interviewer leads the discussion and the dialogue starts from interviewers initiative (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 86). In qualitative research, the interviews include presentation of more or less structured questions to selected individuals or groups (Metsämuuronen 2008, 14).

The interview method used can be determined to be between half-structured interview and theme interview (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 86-87). The questions are different to the company's representative and customer, because they have different perspective of the brand and its personality: company is creating the brand personality, whereas customer perceives the personality in one's unique way. Questions used are related to brand and brand personality from different perspectives, as the idea is to form large-scale view of the issue. The questions were formed on the basis of this study's theory part. In addition, in the interview situation

the discussion had a chance to wonder related topics as well. Though, all the wanted subjects were discussed through in the interviewing situation as the interviewer was leading the conversation. The decision to end up doing the interviews with this structure was regarded as a best in order to form most realistic, deep and comprehensive understanding about views of both parties. The interview forms are as attachments in the end of this study.

The interviews were done via Skype –conversation in Finnish, and the interviews were recorded in order to utilize the answers in this study. Even though the interviews weren't done face-to-face, there were no other people in the same room with the interviewer and the interviewee during the interview. The interviewed had the opportunity to ask before, during and after the interview, whether there was something unclear about the questions given or something else they weren't sure about.

4.3. Qualitative Research Data Analysis

The hardest part in qualitative research is the analysis of the data achieved. Typically analysis part in the research method is descriptive, like in this study as well. The main idea in analysis is to concentrate on similarities, differences and diversities prevailing between the theoretical and empirical sections. (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 138-140)

The aim of this the empirical part is to form understanding how the brand personality is affecting under bigger conception, brand identity, how brand personality is created, how it can be perceived and what kind of relationships customers have with the brand and the brand personality. It has to be underlined that the conclusions resulting from this study are unique; those only apply to this single brand and are based on the opinions and views of the interviewed persons.

4.4. The Background of the Case Company

CTRL Clothing is a street wear company from Finland. The company is the oldest one in its market sector, and the roots are as deep as in the year 1995, when company was founded as a skateboarding clothing company. It can be said, that company's brand is quite well known in Finnish skateboarding and street clothing circles, as it can be determined to be pretty much one-of-a-kind in small Finnish markets. The company doesn't have a concrete store; it is doing it's selling via web stores and retailers around the globe. At the current moment (2013) there are three persons working regularly for the company.

First the clothes were made only for boys, but when years passed hoodies and t-shirts among other things came available for girls as well. During the years, company changed its concentration from skateboard clothing more to street clothing style. During the busiest years, company started the internationalization through retailers in Europe, USA and Japan and by putting up pop-up stores. The company has been quite popular especially in Japanese markets.

Company was very popular in Finland between 1997-2012, but last few years have been quieter. Recently the company has started to sidle back in business by launching a collection and updated their web-store. Many things inside the company are changing, for example full focus is put to online retailing.

4.5. Backgrounds of the Interviewees

The head designer of the company, who has worked in the company since company's early ages, represents the case company. He has been designing all of the collections and managed the transform from a skateboarding brand to a street wear brand.

The interviewees are two old customers of CTRL Clothing. When they were chosen to the study, the idea was to interview people who have knowledge as well as experience behind, in order to analyze their views about the brand and its

personality. If interviews would have been done for random people, it is possible that deep-level analysis of brand would not have been possible to be made, if the interviewed did not know the brand. Customers are named in the research as “Customer A” and “Customer X”.

As expected, doing interviews related to a brand was quite a challenge, from both the interviewers and interviewees point of view. Main reason for this is that the brand is very abstract as a concept, and people form their own, unique understanding about the brand as a whole. This became a challenge in some questions, as some concepts didn't open to the interviewees as the same way as theory determines those. This is of course natural, but in some parts it was hard to combine the theory with the practice.

5. Creation of Brand Personality

In this chapter the results of the study are presented. The analyses of the company's head designers and customers' answers are divided to their own chapters in order to form a cohesive picture about the issue, as the company is creating the brand personality and consumers perceive it.

The framework of the theory part is followed with one exception. The analysis of the company's head designer's answers starts with a preface section, where the aim is to give a basic understanding how the designer perceives the brand in general. After the preface part, the company's understanding of its brand identity is taken under closer inspection. The part is followed by the analysis of company's representative's perception about the creation of brand's personality.

After forming the picture of brand and brand personality from company's perspective, the point of view is changed from the company to the customers. Customers' perceptions about the brand are surveyed on the basis of Keller's pyramid model of brand building blocks, where different elements of their brand view are presented. Customer's perceptions are analyzed with five different sections: brands performance, brand imagery, brand judgments, brand feelings and using brand as a tool self-expression.

5.1. About the Brand

Company's representative defines the brand of CTRL Clothing as a progressive youth clothing brand, aimed to be sold around the world. In general, the brand is representing the products and the whole company. The brand is creating the general feeling about what the company is doing and what does it offer to the markers. The brand is in a central role in the company's different operations; everything that is done in the company is done based on the brand, according to the head designer.

When considering the brand's success in general, brand has played an important role in company's achieved status. One of the most important thing in brand management is to make sure that the brand is "in shape", in order to achieve

customers' attention. The plain logo without any associations doesn't take a brand far. The brand has to have a story, associations or some other important element behind it, in order to be meaningful and interesting for a customer. Just seeing the logo of CTRL doesn't give a lot to a customer, there has to be some associations behind.

As one can expect, there is not a single answer for the question how brand has been formed. It is the mutual amount of single things done; what the employees have done and how they have done it, and how the people outside of the company, customers, perceive and experience that.

5.2. Brand Identity

5.2.1. Brand Personality

According to the head designer the most important factor in CTRL Clothing's brand is the charisma that the brand has. He compares charismatic brand to a person with charisma: one knows exactly who he or she is, so one is self-confident in other words. Charismatic person can wear whatever and still look cool. According to his opinion, being charismatic is a certain ideal presence for a brand. This is what CTRL Clothing is: charismatic brand that is not "a sheep following the others". Self-confident brand determines its own way by itself. When comparing this to the theory, self-confidence and charisma can be determined as the main part of CTRL's brand personality.

He adds that the brand is also self-confident and unique; there are no similar brand personalities. Other personality traits of CTRL Clothing are, according to his view, bisexual and urban city dweller, with maybe a hint of nature. The head designer is also characterizing CTRL as a forerunner, who is doing its own thing. When comparing these to the definition of brand personality, these characteristics mentioned are certain that could be used to depict human personality as well.

The brand personality of CTRL is more a sum of coincidences than a result of strict planning. Things have been done under inspiration and with “every day is a new” mentality. The brand and its personality have formulated through small and big actions, and he sees that everything that is somehow in connection to the brand, has affected to the formulation of the brand personality. To set some examples, CTRL’s collections have affected to the brand’s personality. The collections determine concretely, what CTRL is at the moment. More recent example is in company’s business development, where more input is put to the web store, which will probably bring its own effect to the brand personality in a long term.

Company’s customers have also a strong affection to the personality of the brand; CTRL Clothing’s operations are built on the bases of the target market. In brief, the head designer sees customer as the core and essence of the brand: “It is all the same what we really think, because in practice it [brand] is what customers think.”

5.2.2. Brand Positioning

CTRL Clothing is a company who does its own thing and plays by its own rules. It doesn’t mean that it would not keep an eye on others in the market. It is important to follow what others are doing as they’re affecting the market as well. As noted in the theory part, strong brand has good positioning behind: brand is distinguished from the competitors by some way, brand has certain things they are standing for and their positioning is supporting that. CTRL is a self-confident brand with charisma, and its positioning can be interpreted to be the concentration to its own thing by trusting to its own taste, initiative and feeling. In addition, being interesting and credible in the market sector can also be seen as a part of positioning.

According to the theory part, brand positioning occurs in two levels; in marketing level and in a more specific level, where the special attribute distinguishing the brand from its competitors is determined (Rosenbaum-Elliott et. al 2011, 111; Keller 2008, 131). When analyzing the company’s representative’s interview, it can be interpreted that positioning is done in two levels, even though that it is not brought out in exact words. In marketing level, where an overall position is established and whereby target market is determined, CTRL is concentrating on designing street wear clothing to

young people. In order to be distinguished from competitors, more specific positioning needs to be done. The head designer defines CTRL as progressive brand doing its own thing, which can be determined as a special attribute distinguishing the brand from the other street wear companies. CTRL is not a “line brand” compared to the many others in the market. The target market can be characterized quite vast though.

5.2.3. Brand Vision & Culture

In addition to customers, employees are creating the brand and determining what the brand is. Employees are building the brand’s culture with their actions, and the company’s head designer is keeping all the wires in his hands. He coordinates the main actions and takes care of how the brand is presented to the stakeholders through different activities where CTRL can be seen. The role of employees and management in CTRL Clothing matches to De Chernatony’s theory in these levels.

It is possible to deduce, that brand’s vision is not regarded as specifically important at least in this context, as the term didn’t come up in the answers when interviewing about brand’s identity. On the other hand, there was no clear question concentrating only to brand vision. It has to be remembered, that as the company is quite small, there might not be clearly defined vision at all. The company’s head designer brought up, that brand personality has been build based on feeling and intuition, which may be apply to company’s other actions as well. When analyzing the interview, at least a part of the vision can be interpreted between the lines: expanding the business wider in global markets can be seen at least as a component of brand’s vision.

5.2.4. Relationships

It has to be noted that employees are not the only ones creating the brand; customers and other stakeholders are naturally playing a crucial role as well. In the end stakeholders are the ones who determine if the brand is attractive or not. As De Chernatony (1999, 169) pointed out, relationships between employees and

customers, as well as other stakeholders are important in brand's identity. For CTRL Clothing, relationships between staff to other stakeholders are important, as CTRL does not have an own concrete store but only a web store. CTRL is selling its clothing to retailers, who also take a part in building the brand's identity, and personality, as they are in face-to-face connection with the final customer.

In the interview, the discussion did not focus on relationships between the employees. This is not surprising, as the company is very small and it can be assumed, that it goes without saying that everyone in the company has to stick together.

5.2.5. Brand Presentation

Company's brand personality is presented to the stakeholders through various activities. Advertising, exhibitions, pop up stores and different events and parties organized by CTRL are conveying the brand's personality, and identity as well, to the stakeholders. Alongside this, as brought out in theory, internal self-image of the brand should be presented to the brand's stakeholders, so the customers could identify to the brand and long-term relationships could start to evolve (Hogg & Mitchell 1996, 630-631; Lee 1990, 389; De Chernatony 2010, 386-393). Brand's personality should also somehow reflect stakeholder's self-images (Foster et. al 2010, 409; Chernatony 1999, 157-179). It can be said that this has been done in CTRL Clothing. Before, when company's main target group was skateboarders, company's identity alongside with their products was clearly targeted for them, and advertising alongside with other marketing activities were done based on the target group. When the concentration changed to street wear clothing, company's personality, identity and marketing activities can be seen to have changed alongside the change in the target group.

When comparing De Chernatony's theory to the head designer's interview, it can be said that practice follows the theory in surprisingly many way. Opposite to the first impression, De Chernatony's model was noted to be too theoretical and complex in practice, especially when there is a small company in question. In the model there

are many factors included, and some of them may not be perceived as a part of brand identity in everybody's minds. So it is not surprising that a manager from the field does not see the brand identity of his brand in such a theoretical way. When the complexity and abstractness of the concept of brand and brand identity is added, it is not surprising that things are understood in different ways. As a whole, according to the head designer, brand's identity factors are mostly aligned, but inside the brand there may sometimes be some contradictory factors. This can be seen as a positive thing, as unexpected stuff can bring attractiveness from customers' point of view.

5.3. Brand Personality Drivers

5.3.1. Product Related Characteristics

Product and collections are in important role in affecting the brand's personality. Collections are signaling quite clearly what CTRL is at the moment. Head designer regards quality of the product as a crucial factor for CTRL, and product as well as the quality of a product should equal the image that has been created to the customers. Product category is an essential factor in the formation of CTRL's brand personality. In the category, to where CTRL can be classified, brand has to be credible, exciting and arouse interest in consumers' minds in order to achieve success. As company is not a brand targeted to the big crowd and it is not a "chain brand", it has to have important attributes to stand out from the competitors. To set an example brand's product attributes, washing instructions have some surprising and fun stuff written alongside with the instructions, which probably affect to the experienced brand personality.

Company's representative brings up packaging as a future brand personality driver. When the web store is becoming more important for the company, it is vital to put effort to the packaging of the clothes. Product, its attributes and quality have been classified as brand personality drivers.

5.3.2. Non-Product Related Characteristics

Especially in the case of CTRL Clothing, the brand's symbol, or in the head designer's words "print", is an important part of personality of the brand. For customers of the brand, the symbol can represent a certain lifestyle. In some cases buying the product with the brand, one even has a chance to be a part of this invisible community. This phenomenon can be linked to user imagery, which is also determined as a brand personality driver by Aaker (2010, 146-147). As defined, user imagery means a "the set of human characteristics associated with the typical user of a brand" (Aaker 1997, 347). The head designer defines target customer as person aged between 13 and 30 years, urban person living in the city. As noted from the definition of brand imagery, it is personal as everyone can define it by oneself. Later in this study, customers' user imagery is taken under closer inspection.

Advertising style is important brand personality driver for CTRL. It differs a bit from the other drives as it can be very easily controlled and changed as time passes. Company's representative tells that CTRL aim is to do its advertising in an interesting and memorable way. He gives an example of advertising campaign that is soon to be launched, where posters of catalogue pictures of new collection of CTRL are placed around Helsinki. The posters go without any text and there is an idea to put numerous posters in one spot. This will probably affect on perceived brand personality of CTRL Clothing.

CTRL has also used celebrities in the brand's advertising. The celebrities affect how customers perceive the brand, and how they are experiencing the brand personality as well (Rajagobal 2006, 58). To give an example, CTRL has used well-known Finnish rap artist Gracias in its catalogue photo-shoots. As aforesaid in the theory part, when using celebrity in advertising, a celebrity's personality can be combined to brand's personality from consumer's perspective, which can be seen to affect to the perceived brand personality (Rajagobal 2006, 58).

CTRL's company image is formed via Internet visibility, interviews, different fairs and exhibitions; parties organized by the company and globally launched pop-up stores,

to set some examples. For example CTRL had an exhibition about the company's old collections in Design Museum of Helsinki a while ago, which probably has affected to perceived brand personality, as customers get more perspective and knowledge related to the company. In addition, employees can also be seen to be a part of formulating the brand image. They are the ones, alongside with retailers, who are on the field confronting the brand's customers.

When discussing brand and customer relationships, the head designer brought up the importance of the selection of retail stores for the brand's products. This can be classified as non-product related attribute, as retailers can be seen to affect to the brand personality through their customer service, to set an example. All in all, brand's symbol, advertising style, celebrity endorsement and company image are non-product related brand drivers. Based on own interpretation, selection of retail stores can be classified as some kind of non-product related activity.

All in all, according to the head designer the entirety of all small factors are determining what the brand and its personality is in the end. He points out that in the end brand lives its own life; many things that happen related to brand are out of company's control. When surveying the results with Aaker's theory (2010, 146), there are surprisingly many same brand personality drivers observed: both product and non-product related drivers.

6. Perceiving the Brand

Both interviewees are familiar with the brand as they both have followed the brand for many years, they own brand's clothes and they have formed certain relationship with the brand. Due to this fact, the first level of Keller's pyramid, salience, won't be dealt with, as it depicts only superficial customer-brand relationships.

6.1. Brand Performance

When the case company is a clothing company, it is not surprising that both customers bring up the style and design as an important factor of brand performance. Customer A is appreciating that CTRL has designed that styled clothing for girls as well, as typically there are only that stylized clothes designed for boys. She also likes that the design can be mostly regarded as "unisex"; both girls and boys can use the clothes, and the clothes looks good no matter the sex. Both interviewees like a unique, cool and fun style of CTRL's clothing in general with various and interesting prints. Clothing comes with good quality, which is important. Customer X mentions the brand's ability to keep up bringing something new and unexpected to the design of the clothes, without losing the brand's continuous style in collections. She brings up an example of cleaning instructions attached to the clothes: instead of just telling how to wash or iron your clothes, there is something unexpected and entertaining text added. This can be regarded as a certain supplementary feature (Keller 2008, 65).

6.2. Brand Imagery

Based on the interviews it can be said that brand imagery plays a very important role in CTRL Clothing's brand. Brand imagery answers to the question, how well the brand attempts to meet customers' psychological or social needs. In case of CTRL Clothing, both interviewed agreed that the brand is a sign of some bigger concept than just clothes. To set an example, customer X tells, that when she is buying or wearing CTRL's t-shirt she is not only wearing t-shirt. There is something bigger behind it.

Both interviewees have started to form their user imagery through their circle of acquaintances; customer A had older siblings using the brand's clothes, whereas customer X got her influence from friends. These influencers can be regarded to making the base for the formulation of user imagery of the brand. This affection can be seen as combination user profiles, where psychographic element may be one of the important effectors and experiences from Keller's classification of brand imagery.

The history and heritage are playing an important role in user imagery in both interviewees case. Firstly, the brand is from Finland and a first-mover Finnish skateboard-clothing scene, making it unique and special in the opinions of both interviewees. CTRL Clothing was highly popular in few years ago, when both customers where in the age where others' opinions and respect can be seen almost as vital and to play a critical role in clothing buying decisions.

6.2.1. Brand Personality

As brand personality is the main topic of this paper, it is given an own chapter. Customer A defines the brand personality traits of CTRL as under 40-years-old, young or young-minded, a tattooed beanie head, who appreciates visuality and is open-minded by nature. The personality includes the mentality, where one is who he or she is, and doesn't care about what others think. Customer X defines the brand personality as young, funny, exuberant, easy-going and "wonderfully creative". There can be seen similar characterizes in interviewees brand personality definitions. The perceptions are not exactly the same, which is not surprising at all as brand personality is formed by every individual personally.

Both customers' understanding about the brand's personality has been formed through advertising and the brand's collections. Advertising has been perceived as interesting, different and inspirational. Advertising has affected the customers' experienced impression through the people performing in the advertisements and advertising style in general. Especially for customer A it has been important that there have been girls in advertising, which has been important for her as it is easier

for her to identify with the brand. A certain rebel mentality in advertisements was also pointed out by customer A. Customer X likes the easy-going and surprising advertising style and “other hype” related to the brand. Brand’s unique style to design clothes with personality and “cool prints” have been also played important role in forming the perception about the brand.

6.3. Brand Judgments

Both interviewed customers were emphasizing the good quality of CTRL as well as the credibility. As customer A put it: as a brand, CTRL got attitude, the brand has its “own, original stamp”. She sees the mentality behind the brand to be following: “We are who we are, if you are interested, you are welcome to join.” This view could be seen to be a result formed from experienced brand performance as well as brand imagery. According to her view, CTRL is “pretty deep in the scene”, as it has been in the market for many years and the company has adapted to the past market changes. The credibility is also supported in consumer A’s mind with the image that CTRL designs its clothing with care and there is real input behind every t-shirt or hoodie designed.

When considering the superiority of the brand, customer X says that she doesn’t have such a relationship formed with any other brand. From this statement it is possible to come with a conclusion that there is no such brand as CTRL in the markets in her opinion. Customer A does not find the brand absolutely superior, but she counts CTRL in her “top 3 of Finnish brands”. Though, she sees the brand’s design very advanced compared to the competitors. To put it short, appreciation is high towards to the brand according both interviewed. As interviewee X puts it: “It is amazing that they are doing their own thing.” She also compares the CTRL brand to a basic, vacant Finnish department store as its opposite.

Customer X tells that when she is buying CTRL Clothing’s t-shirt, for example, she is buying more than just a t-shirt. She is buying an entirety, where the primary stress is on the brand and the added value the brand brings, and the price is not important.

6.4. Brand Feelings

The interviewed customers had differing relationships to the brand of CTRL Clothing. Customer A characterizes the prevailing relationship a bit distant, since company has been out of the markets for a while and because of that there haven't been recent interaction between the brand and the customer. When considering the previously existed relationship, there were deeper feelings involved.

Customer X depicts the prevailing relationship "deeper than with other clothing brands". She really likes the brand, and the emotion can be even defined as a certain form of love. This emotional relationship has lead loyalty towards the brand, and customer tells to that she is open-minded to pretty much everything the company produces. When asked what emotions the brand evokes in her, she is speaking about freedom, joy, happiness and to be carefree. At the end she adds, that the brand brings encouragement to her as well: "I am who I am and I am great just like I am, maybe then." When combining this to the theory, this experience can be classified as usage experience arousing emotions.

Being socially approved was familiar to both interviewed. When they were younger, it was more important what other people thought, and CTRL was regarded as a socially approved brand. As discussed in theory, brand can bring a customer social currency (Keller 2008, 68-70).

6.5. Self-Expression

Customer X tells that she uses the brand's clothing mainly for two reasons: firstly, for her own sake as she likes and appreciates the brand and the clothing style. Another reason is related to emotional experience when using the brand: "I am cool, open-minded, daring and innovative as well when I am using those clothes." Customer X also sees that when wearing the brand's clothes, the characteristics of the brand get connected to the person herself. When she is wearing the clothes of CTRL, she is communicating this combination of her and brand's characteristics to others.

Previously, when customer A had a deeper-level relationship with the brand, she used the clothes as a certain way of self-expression as well. Now, when there have not been new collections for a while, she does not find the self-expressive value of the brand in the same way as before. The brand personality has lost its importance and the role of concrete clothes has become more important as decision effector.

7. Summary and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to survey how the company is building its brand personality and how consumers perceive the brand and the brand personality. This main research question was surveyed through sub-questions, which were set in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of brand personality. The research questions were investigated with the basis of scientific journals and literature, related to the topic. In addition, the case company's head designer and two customers of the company were interviewed. On the basis of the results it can be said that the case company and the customers are sharing relatively similar understanding of brand personality and the brand in general.

The first sub-question was: *“What kind of role brand personality has in brand identity?”* CTRL Clothing's head designer, who has been involved in the creation the brand and is still in charge of it, regarded the brand personality as the most important thing of the brand. He brought up the brand's personality as a first thing when asked: *“What determines the identity of the brand?”* Brand personality can be seen to be the core of brand identity of CTRL. There is a certain discrepancy to be seen between the theory and practice: in De Chernatony's theory (1999, 157-179), brand vision and culture are highlighted, whereas the brand personality was regarded as the most important part of brand identity, vision was not brought up in the answers that clearly. Though, practice was following the brand identity theory surprisingly well.

Second sub-question was: *“What factors affect on the formulation of brand personality?”* Brand personality formulation was investigated with brand personality drivers classified by Aaker (2010, 145-149). In the theory, drivers are divided to product- and non-product related attributes. Head designer brought up product and collections, quality, product attributes as well as packaging as product-related attributes of CTRL's brand personality. Non-product related attributes of CTRL's clothes were symbol, advertisement style, company image, user image celebrity endorsements and selection of retailers. These drivers follow very clearly Aaker's theory (2010, 145-149). Aaker's theory can be regarded quite valid, but not exhaustive. All in all, it can be noted that brand personality is a combination of many

things, when putting these small factors together the brand personality is formed. The classification of the factors is quite challenging, as creative director pointed it up: “Everything that is related to brand is effecting to the brand”.

“How customers perceive the brand?” was the last sub-question of the study. Both interviewed customers regarded the quality as well as design important factors in brand’s performance. The result is not surprising, as CTRL is a street wear clothing company offering original styled clothing with good quality. Based on the interviews it can be said that brand imagery plays very important role in CTRL Clothing’s brand; especially strong brand personality was important factor determining the customer’s brand perception. Brand personality is a factor that makes the brand unique, interesting and attractive. Basing on the results, customers seemed to form emotional bonds to CTRL’s brand. When combining this information to the fact that customers are playing an important role in company’s brand personality building, positive result can be achieved from both parties point of view: customers have a change to influence the brand personality whereas company have emotionally commitment customers. Customers regard CTRL as a brand with high credibility, which is also a sign that company has done things in a right way. Both customers were familiar with using the brand as tool of self-expression, which tells about high-level commitment. However, both customers brought the “quiet life” that CTRL has been living in few years: it has affected to their perception of a brand, so it can be concluded that brand personality doesn’t last forever but it has to be taken care of as well.

Company’s representatives’ and customers’ perception of the brand personality of CTRL Clothing reminded each other. Both parties brought up uniqueness, self-confidence and urbanity as a brand personality traits of CTRL. Both parties defined the brand as forerunner as well. It can be concluded that created brand personality has been conveyed well to the target group. Advertising was regarded as a very important brand personality builder, and both customers highlighted company’s way to advertise. Head designer brought out the importance of the additional value that brand can bring to a customer: the symbol together with the concrete product can be seen as a sign of certain lifestyle, or invisible community, to which one can

participate in by buying and using the clothes. Both customers noted the social appreciation achieved with wearing the brand's clothes as well.

All in all, basing on the results of this study it seems that CTRL has succeeded to build a brand personality and a brand that appeals to customers. CTRL seems to be more than just a clothing brand. It represents a certain way of living and it can be regarded to bring additional value in customers' lives.

7.1. Further Research

Comparing the brand personalities of brands doing business in the business sector would be an interesting topic. When doing deep-level analysis of how companies build their brand personality, and how their customers perceive that, it might be possible to form a list of good and bad brand building methods. It would also be interesting to study the consequences of brand personality building actions. This type of study could bring valuable information to companies.

This research topic could have been investigated through studying customers' personalities first, and then combining the results to the analysis of brand personality. In addition, the customer-brand relationship could have been investigated much more widely, as there are numerous theories available with different kind of perspectives.

In addition, a potential research topic could be to study, how the importance of brand's personality develops through person's lifetime; on which age and which brands are important. Also which brand personality traits are important on which age class would be interesting to study.

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Interviewes

Customer A. Skype Interview 22.11.2013.

Customer X, Skype Interview 24.11.2013.

Head designer, CTRL Clothing. Skype Interview. 25.11.2013.

Attachments

Attachment 1. The interview questions of the case company's representative

Yleistä

- Miten määrittelisit yrityksenne brändin?
- Millainen rooli brändillänne on yrityksenne toiminnassa?
- Kuinka tärkeä osa brändillänne on saavuttamaanne menestystä?
- Mitkä tekijät ovat vaikuttaneet yrityksenne brändin muodostukseen?

Brändi-identiteetti

- Miten määrittelisit yrityksenne brändin identiteetin?
Brändi-identiteetillä tarkoitetaan tässä yhteydessä brändin persoonallisuuden, positioinnin, brändin vision ja kulttuurin, viestinnän sekä suhteiden muodostamaa kokonaisuutta, jossa eri muuttujat ovat vuorovaikutuksessa keskenään.
Tässä yhteydessä on tarkoituksena tarkastella sellaista brändi-identiteettiä, jota yritys tavoittelee asiakkaan mielessä.
- Miten brändi-identiteettiä rakennetaan ja kehitetään yrityksessänne?
Millainen rooli työntekijöillänne on brändinne identiteetin rakennuksessa ja ylläpidossa?
- Minkälaiseksi arvioit brändi-identiteetin vaikutuksen yrityksenne saavuttamaan maineeseen?

Brändin persoonallisuus

- Miten kuvailisit brändinne persoonallisuutta? Brändin persoonallisuudella tarkoitetaan inhimillisiä piirteitä, joita voidaan liittää johonkin tuotteeseen tai palveluun, kuten ikä, sukupuoli tai persoonallisuuspiirre.
- Vastaako brändinne tämänhetkinen persoonallisuus tavoiteltua brändin persoonallisuutta?

- Kuinka tärkeä osa brändinne persoonallisuudella on osana brändinne identiteettiä?
- Miten näet brändinne persoonallisuuden vaikuttaneen yrityksenne toimintaan? (Esimerkiksi tapaanne harjoittaa markkinointia)
- Kuinka tärkeäksi osaksi arvioisit brändinne persoonallisuuden osana brändinne menestystä?
- Mitkä tekijät ovat vaikuttaneet brändinne persoonallisuuden muodostumiseen?
- Voitteko kertoa brändinne persoonallisuuden luonnista?
- Miten yrityksenne ylläpitää ja kehittää brändinsä persoonallisuutta konkreettisesti?

Suhde asiakkaaseen

- Millaiseksi luonnehtisit brändinne pääasiakasryhmää?
- Miten viestitte brändinne persoonallisuutta asiakkailleen?
- Minkälainen rooli asiakkaillanne on brändinne persoonallisuuden muodostumisessa?
- Mitkä tekijät uskotte olevan asiakkailleen tärkeimpiä brändinne persoonallisuudessa?
- Millaisia tunteita tai tuntemuksia uskot brändinne persoonallisuuden herättävän asiakkaisissa?
- Minkälaisia suhteita luulet asiakkaidenne muodostaneen / muodostavan brändinne kanssa?
- Mitkä tekijät arvioit vaikuttavan asiakkaan ostopäätökseen, jos hän päätyy ostamaan brändinne vaatteen?
Kuinka tärkeäksi arvioisit brändinne persoonallisuuden ostopäätökseen vaikuttajana?

Lopuksi: vapaa sana

Attachment 2. The interview question of customer

Yleistä

- Miten määrittelisit CTRL Clothingin brändin?
- Mitä brändi sinulle merkitsee?
- Mitkä syyt ovat vaikuttaneet siihen, että olet valinnut ostopäätös –tilanteessa kyseisen brändin tuotteen/tuotteita?

Brändin persoonallisuus

- Miten kuvailisit CTRL Clothingin brändin persoonallisuutta?
Brändin persoonallisuudella tarkoitetaan inhimillisiä piirteitä, joita voidaan liittää johonkin brändiin, kuten ikä, sukupuoli tai persoonallisuuspiirre.
- Miksi CTRL Clothing brändi on sellainen kun juuri kuvailit? Miten käsityksesi tästä brändistä on muodostunut?
- Kuinka tärkeässä roolissa CTRL Clothingin brändin persoonallisuus on ostopäätöksessäsi?

Kuluttajan ja brändin välinen suhde

- Miten kuvailisit suhdettasi CTRL Clothingin brändiin?
- Miksi luonnehtisit suhdettasi edellä esitetyllä tavalla?
- Mitkä tekijät ovat vaikuttaneet mielestäsi brändin ja sinun väliseen suhteeseen?
- Miksi käytät / olet käyttänyt brändin vaatteita?
Haluatko mahdollisesti viestiä muille jotain valinnallasi, ilmaista itseäsi vai onko käyttöpäätöksesi ollut ennemminkin ei harkittua?
- Onko sinulla vastaavanlaista suhdetta muodostettuna toiseen brändiin?
- Minkälaisia tunteita ja/tai tuntemuksia brändi ja sen persoonallisuus sinussa herättää?

Lopuksi: vapaa sana