

Development of sustainable BtoB multi-branding strategy

Case: Company X

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<p>The focus of this study was to define the needs of BtoB multi-branding strategy to the company X for international business accounts. The aim was to investigate the need for multi-branding approach in international level and what steps should be taken into consideration before putting in action multi-branding approach.</p> <p>There were different approaches used in theory section of this study. One was concentration on the brand architecture in BtoB from the manufacturer point of view. This approach mainly concentrates on different brand portfolios and management of them on corporate level with and how they can be used in BtoB sales. Another approach was concentrating on Brand architecture management from the customer point of view and how the customer risks related to the BtoB branding can be managed.</p> <p>The empirical study was targeting international partners of Company X from the different market areas. Partners for interview were selected based on their turnover, location, their experience in brands of Company X. Interviews were following in-depth semi structured format and the research was following qualitative and exploratory structure.</p> <p>The findings from the research revealed that there is a need for BtoB multi-branding strategy in some market areas but not in all of them. On the more mature markets multi-branding strategy is needed already now but on less developed market areas the situation needs to be followed and studied again after some years. However, there were also risks involve in multi-branding approach and as the study reveals the biggest risk for Company X might be lack of human resources in sales and marketing department to put in action multi-branding strategy even if it is required by market situation.</p> <p>The study reveals several development suggestions. One is that there are following brand elements that needs to be strengthen and developed further on each market. Most popular of the element is country of origin that can be branded more effectively. Another important development part is to define the similar need and level of importance of the brand elements of each market and combine them in BtoB multi-branding approach. It will save some critical human resources of Company X.</p>	
Keywords BoB branding strategy, multi-branding, brand architecture, brand	

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1 Introduction

1.1 Case company

The sponsor company is small Finnish manufacturer of agricultural equipment. The Company X manufactures electric fence energizers and portable moisture testers. There are 16 people working in the company now including Country Managers, Sales and Marketing team, R&D and warehouse facilities. The Company X is mainly known for its premium quality brands and not that much by company name. In present time Company X is owned by American company which is operating with similar product range in US. Finnish company is exporting the goods over to 100 countries and the products are known worldwide as high-quality products. In most cases Company X is operating with local dealers and distributors worldwide, despite some exceptional areas majority of the sales comes for BtoB side. The special focus of this study is to concentrate mainly on moisture testers brands and create multi-branding strategy for the future.

Company X is manufacturing moisture testers under three different brands and offers OEM options of all three brands in exceptional cases. Brands have different history, and they were added to the product range of Company X for different reasons in the history. The table below illustrates brief history of each brand (Table 1).

Table 1. Brand history of Company X

Brand	History of the Brand
Brand A	Original most known best seller Brand world wide of Company X. Manufactured since 1964.
Brand B	Company X bought the right of this brand in the beggining of 2000s. Mostly known in Mid-Europe.
Brand C	The Brand was added into product range in late 90s when US comapny bought Comapny X. Originally the brand is American, known well locally in US but not that know worldwide compared with Brand A.

All three brands are nearly the same despite slight technical changes and design, but the purpose of all models under each brand is the same, to define moisture of the product.

Distributors play key role in the international sales structure of Company X. Naturally they need to be taken in multi-branding-strategy processes as well.

1.2 Needs and objectives and my personal interest

Company X is small organization, and it is handling several brands without proper strategy for brand portfolio. In past 7 years the company have launched new products that have been branded under Brand A but we are still struggling to decide if it is worth to brand under some other brand as well. During 7 years of working as Export Sales Manager I have realized that our multi-branding-strategy is missing and in the long term it might cause misunderstanding and confusion among our distributors worldwide as well. From the conversations with the other salespeople in the organization I feel that they are struggling and thinking about the same issue as I do that are related to confusion with the brands and acts that should be taken in the future.

As Export Sales Manager I am responsible for many sales areas including Russia, Ukraine, CIS, Baltics and Turkey. All these areas have different history with our different brands and naturally I am dealing with all the situation and brands that are presented in these regions. In last 7 year I have seen many times that our customer is confused about our products and brands and they do not know even the reason why we keep so many brands for nearly the same products. There is also misunderstanding and misleading information among our customer regarding the quality of the testers under each brand.

The main research question of the study is:

How to build sustainable multi-branding B to B strategy for Company X?

Sub-questions are following:

- What are the most important elements of the brand/brands for our partners?
- What is the reason to work with our brands over competitors?
- How are our brand appreciated on their market area in general compared with competitors?
- What will be the concrete steps for prioritizing brand value in each sales region?
- Is it worth having multi-branding strategy in all sales regions?

1.3 Scope of the study and limitations

The study concentrates on answering the research questions in the scope of all Company X's all 3 moisture tester brands and define sustainable BtoB multi-branding-strategy for the Company X. The literature review focuses on brand theories with closer scope of brand architecture, dimensions, and evaluation together with theories of BtoB branding strategy. However, taking into consideration the limitations placed on this thesis, it has been deemed by far too extensive to cover the entire topic of branding management strat-

egy. Therefore, only the critical components of the branding management theories have been selected to fully support the empirical analysis.

Branding is closely related to marketing tools and the whole picture and image of the product among end-consumers. However, this study concentrates only on BtoB side to build proper multi-branding-strategy for Company X to build better sustainable future together with international distributors.

Because of limitations of the thesis, it is impossible to scope the study to all regions and even main distributors of each region, because company X is exporting to over 100 different countries. The interviews presented later in this study were done with the distributors from following areas: Turkey, Baltics, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. I am responsible for all the areas mentioned previously which makes it easier to set the meetings and interviews with the distributors that I am currently leading in the company. These regions also reflect well the whole picture of international market, because these distributors are different in size and cultural aspects as well as present different turnover with Company X.

1.4 International aspect of the study

Company X is not exception in Finnish limited business market. As many others, Company X has started international business in early 80's and reached significant growth internationally in the 90's. Finnish owner also sold the company to US in late 90's. In current time almost 75% of the turnover comes from International sales and the largest customers in Russia, Ukraine and other CIS territories together are almost 50% of the yearly turnover. International business plays core role in the success and growth possibilities of Company X and relationship with the local distributors are the main contacts for Company X in each region. Multi-branding-strategy is needed for both Organization X and its distributors to see and lead their business better.

1.5 Structure of the study

This study consists of 7 chapters, excluding references and appendix. There is a short introduction of each chapter presented below. It shows how the chapters are organized and what is the purpose and content of each chapter.

Chapter 1 concentrates in outlining the study objectives and introduces the case company. It describes the main research question and its sub-questions, as well as the scope of the research and limits are defined in this chapter.

Chapter 2 gives the definition for word “brand” and takes short glance at historical development of the term. Brand relevance equity and complex in terms of BtoB are inspected in this chapter as well as academic challenges of studying BtoB branding over BtoC approach.

Chapter 3 provides deep understanding of brand architecture as part of brand strategy definition. BtoB branding approach is also studied from both point of views: the seller and the customers.

Chapter 4 research methodology and methods to support the empirical analysis of this study. As well as the research philosophy, approach, design, strategy and data collection methods and analysis are presented.

Chapter 5 inspects the replies of the interviewees. This chapter follows the format of semi structured interviews.

Chapter 6 gives a summary of the results and delivers the list of improvement suggestions for the case company to improve multi-branding-strategy approach for BtoB side and gives ideas of the new topics to be studied.

Chapter 7 shows the researcher’s personal reflections on learning from conducting this study.

2 What is a brand?

This chapter takes glance to the history of branding and how it was shaped through the years to the current understanding of the term and why it is found that BtoB branding research is still challenging despite its the importance. It will be inspected how BtoB branding is different from BtoC and what type of challenges BtoB branding carries. It also shows the benefits of BtoB branding and how to approach and build proper BtoB strategy as well as the things needed to be taken in into consideration while building it.

2.1 History of branding and definition of a brand

Branding has a long history; the first illustrations were simple as stone drawings, which were meant to give short and simple message for as shelter from enemies, storage, or ritual. The history of branding goes far away to Viking era and the word “brand” means “to burn” on the language of that time. It was used for metal burning mainly. (Gabay 2015,14.)

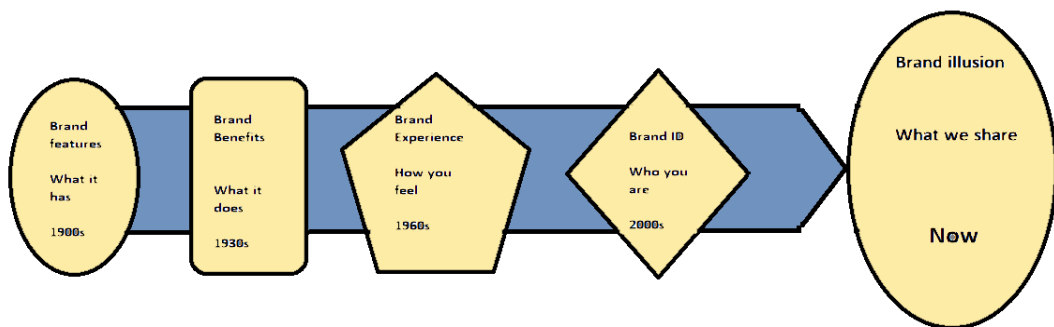


Figure 1. From Brand features to brand inclusion (Gabay 2015,14.)

Modern brand history has started as a symbol of a cattle ownership and has evolved into a sign of social, political, or commercial inclusion. Originally brands reminded and reassured consumers of quality, availability, price, and service. In present time most of this is left for potential customers because of technology and other information sources. Today’s brands need to provide more than simplistic mental shortcuts. Brand mix includes production, service management, media choice, content, public relations, logistics, IT, and many other aspects together build the brand reputation, creativity and personalization. (Gabay 2015 ,15.)

Brand can be also defined from different perspectives; customer perspective and financial perspective, usually these two fulfil each other. As example brand in the eyes of customers means that he or she wants to buy it more that competitor's product based on the beliefs end emotions, which effects positively on financial approach of measuring brand. (Kapferer 2012, 9-10.)

Legal perspective for brand means that the trademarks have "Birth day"-their registration day. After this they become a property, which needs to be defended against infringements and counterfeiting. Launching a product or service does not mean it have reached a brand status before its name will start influence buyer becoming a purchase criterion. (Kapferer 2012, 11.)

2.2 Brand equity

One of the brand definitions is strongly related to the brand equity. Equity is defined as brand assets or liabilities that are linked to brand's name and symbol that add to a product or service. These assets can be grouped into four dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 17.)

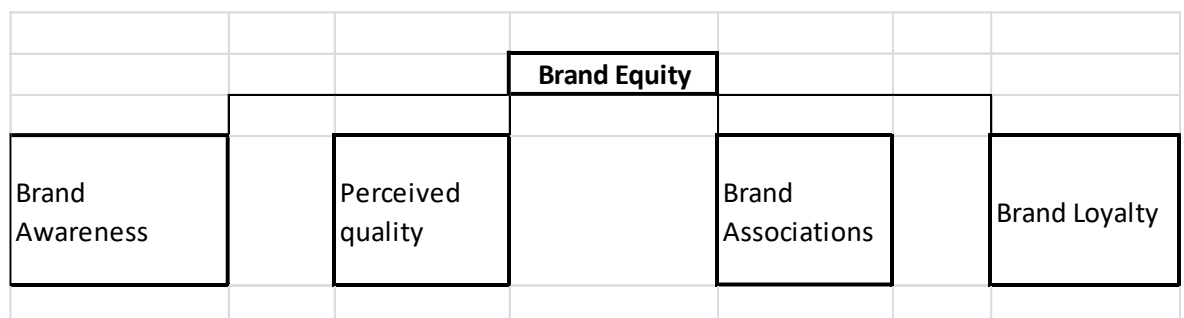


Figure 2. Brand equity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 17.)

Brand awareness is often under valuated asset, but it has been shown to effect perceptions and even taste. People are prepared to ascribe all sorts of good attitudes to items that are familiar to them. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 17.)

Perceived quality influences brand associations in many context and effects profitability measured by ROI and stock return. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000,17.)

Brand associations can be anything that connects the customer to the brand. Things like product attribute, use situation, user imagery, brand personality etc. can be related to

brand association. Brand management involves much of determining the importance of these accusations and how they can be linked to the brand itself. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000,17.)

Brand loyalty is the hearth for any brand's value. The concept is to strengthen the size and identity of each loyalty segment. Brand can have significant equity with a small but intensely loyal customer base. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 17.)

2.3 Six key brand elements to build brand equity

Brand element also called brand identities are trademarkable devices that identify and differentiate the brand. The main element of brand are names, website addresses, logos, symbols, characters, spokespeople, slogans jingles, packages and signages. (Aperia & Georgson & Keller 2008, 153.)

There are six criteria for choosing brand elements:

1. Memorability
2. Meaningfulness
3. Likeability
4. Transferability
5. Adaptability
6. Protectability

(Aperia & Georgson & Keller 2008, 153.)

One of necessary conditions for building brand equity is achieving a high level of brand awareness. To achieve that goal brand element can be chosen that are memorable. (Aperia & Georgson & Keller 2008, 155.)

Meanings enhance the formation of brand association therefore meaningfulness is one of key criteria in terms of brand elements. Elements may take all kind of meaning: descriptive and persuasive and varieties of both. It can provide general information about the nature of product or service and dig in specific one. (Aperia & Georgson & Keller 2008,155-156.)

Likeability can play key role the equity of brand especially if the other elements are existing. Therefore, this element is depended on the other ones strongly but is wort to mention and pay attention at. (Aperia & Georgson & Keller 2008, 156.)

Transferability may be important criteria of brand equity criteria. Companies must review all their brand elements for cultural meaning before introducing it into a market. (Aperia & Georgson & Keller 2008, 157-158.) This one is one critical in BtoC field but might be important in BtoB field as well in some cases.

Adaptability is important element in terms of time. We are living in fast moving world and values and opinions of the people and businesses are changing fast. The more adaptable and flexible is the element the easier it is to update it. (Aperia & Georgson & Keller 2008, 158.)

It is important to choose brand element that can be protected in legal and competitive sense. In terms of legal consideration is important to have elements that can be protected internationally. Patents, trademarks, and copyrights are important in terms of legal rights. In competitive way it is also important to think about the uniqueness of the elements that can't be imitated by competitors easily. (Aperia & Georgson & Keller 2008, 158-159.)

2.4 Branding changes its shape with time

In last 40 years the world has changed dramatically and technology plays big part in this change. Traditional signals are changing the shape as well. No doubt traditional signals such as logo, colour, package, product design plays significant role in branding mix as well as advertisement but branding signals are more and more expressed through direct telemarketing, online and toll-free customer services and online and toll-free ordering. Nowadays it takes a lot more to get a consumer to know you exist. (Adamson 2006, 45.)

The Internet and other technological thing play a key role in the branding signals. There are several aspects that makes branding change its shape:

1. It is about the individual
 2. World is moving faster
 3. Consumers are in charge how they consume marketing and media
 4. We operate globally
 5. Big economies like US is aging
- (Adamson 2006, 46.)

Individual approach has changed the consumers. In the past people were trusting institutions, banks, government etc. they dealt with. In present time technology allows us to get information from the Internet and other sources and put under questions traditional knowledge sources we have trusted in the past. (Adamson 2006, 46.)

The world is moving faster partly because of the technology like internet and wireless devices. There is no time to think anymore. People are forced to process and respond very fast. The messages are getting shorter in peoples communication manners via ethnological devices compared with rational mail in the past. (Adamson 2006, 47-48.)

Partly because of the fast speed of the world consumers have no patience for long stories and deep understanding. Since the reaction time got shorter consumer attend to choose short messages and abbreviated content of what is happening around. It means that just the key elements are enough, and consumer can choose ones they like. At this point there is still a gap between marketing and consumers because marketing is still trying to use traditional approach too much when customers like to have more tailored marketing information and are even ready to pay for it. (Adamson 2006, 48-49.)

Basically, by having your brand in Internet means that you are seen globally. However, the global scope brings some issues to be taken into consideration. How your brand strategy can be applied for the whole world or will you need to differentiate your message, name and even purpose country by country or by regions. All these are good questions that sometimes can be answered only by experience and time. (Adamson 2006, 50.)

There also big economies such a US and many other that are facing dramatic aging of population in the nearest future. These can effect on many brands and branding strategies as well. (Adamson 2006, 50.)

2.5 Challenges of academic world to research BtoB branding

At it can be seen from the previous chapter that the branding was more inspected from BtoC point of view than BtoB. Naturally, the history of branding has started more consumer orientated and partly the same theories and approaches can be used for BtoB branding as well.

According to researchers BtoB branding is still not researched enough. It does not make BtoB branding not important, the situation is quite opposite and the economic value of BtoB transactions is significantly greater than that of consumer transactions, but traditionally a preponderance of branding research has been conducted in the context of consumer products. (Keränen & Piirainen & Salminen 2012, 404-417.)

There are many reasons in academic world that explains the phenomena that are makes BtoB branding significantly more challenged to inspect from the researching point of view. The challenges can be divided on two major issues conceptual and methodological. Conceptual means that there is lack of systematic theory development, and the transference of consumer concepts. The methodological issues are the dominance of quantitative research, the lack of longitudinal research, and the focus on single industries over the wider approach. (Keränen & Piirainen & Salminen 2012, 404-417.)

2.6 BtoB market complexity

Before it is possible to define proper strategy for BtoB branding for service, product, or business it is worth to understand that BtoB market has different relatives compared with BtoC market. The main differences of business markets compared with consumer markets are found in the nature and complexity of industrial products and services, the nature and diversity of industrial demand, significantly fewer customers, larger volumes per customer and closer and longer-lasting supplier-customer-relationship. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 20-21.)

Due the complexity and huge variety of industrial products and services it is impossible to make universally valid statement about them. In general markets can be broken down as follow:

- Material and parts (e.g. raw materials, manufactured materials, parts)
- Capital items (e.g. buildings/equipment used in buyer's production/operations)
- Supplies and services (e.g. operating supplies, repair/maintenance item)
- (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 21.)

Because of this enormous complexity of industrial products purchasing process requires often qualified experts on both sides. Industrial products and services tend be individual solutions that require high levels of fine-tuning. In many cases they can be integrated in into larger systems with specific requirements for certain product or service specifications. All these facts have great impact on the way industrial products and services must be marketed. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 22.)

We can't deny the importance of Kotler's view on BtoB market complexity that consist of many facts which makes it difficult to build. However, his approach seems to be concentrated strongly on factory industries. In this case it is wort to inspect the other views as well because the products of company X are distributed through the local partners which

are BtoB customers for company X, but actual end customers of the products of all brands can be used by both consumers and businesses.

There is also other type of view that inspects BtoB market and BtoC market as fulfilling elements of each other and therefore marketing and branding elements can be also used simultaneously for both groups of customers. According to Advertising Age Trade Journal article BtoB advertising is increasingly aimed at consumers as well. Today's BtoB marketers cannot treat their corporate accounts just as a buyer for their product, they need to approach their business target as a person with a story to tell. The creative approach pushes BtoB marketers away from traditional approach of selling nuts and bolts and they are more likely to emphasize emotional reasons for buying their products. The phenomena do not mean that BtoB marketing has morphed into consumer marketing. It just indicates that business prospect is now engaged on all types of content channels and there is a need for business communications to be relevant "anywhere, anytime." Any interaction be a two-way conversation and word-of-mouth is now much faster and potentially larger because of social media channels. In the past industrial advertising was distinct from consumer advertising. These days the same products often serve both BtoB users and consumers, so advertising often plays dual roles as well. (Crain & Rance 2012, 16.)

2.7 BtoB Brand Relevance

BtoB branding has become as important as BtoC. The industrial marketing environment is changing rapidly and business that is not able to adapt into new circumstances will drop out of the race. A tepid global economy and exchangeable market offering are driving competitive forces and it is not enough to offer just a great product and service. By the brand establishment and gaining a favourable competitive position on the market, businesses can set themselves apart from the pack. There are many forces that are making BtoB brand a crucial factor. Many factors that are leveraged the importance of brand in BtoC are also quite evident in BtoB. Three main factors in BtoB branding:

- Prolifiraiton of similar products and services
- Incereasing complexity
- Incredible price pressure
- (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 34.)

There are general market trends and most important BtoB branding factors illustrated in Figure 3.

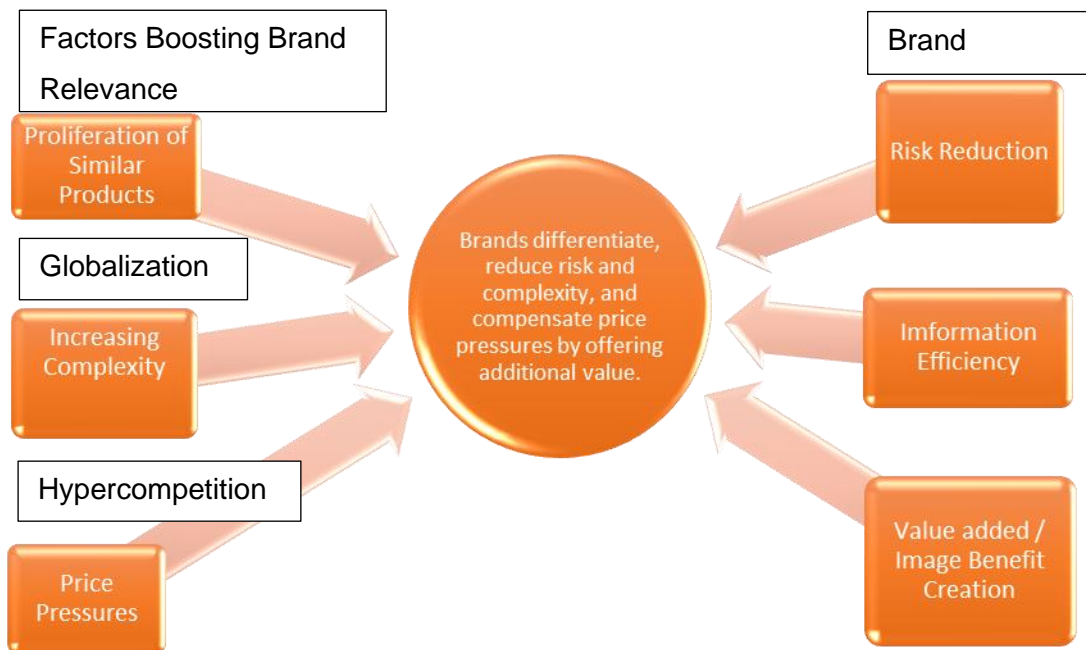


Figure 3. Brand relevance and brand function in BtoB environment (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 45.)

2.7.1 Globalization

Global transportation and logistics networks are constantly improving their importance in globalization driven sales and procurement markets. Cargo consolidation and containerization enable companies to reach foreign markets efficiently and cheaply. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 35.)

Another important result of globalization trend is the worldwide assimilation of technical norms and standards. This one is especially important in BtoB context. World Trade Organization is mainly responsible for reduction and elimination of trade barriers. Restraints of the competition are decreased by the liberalization of the trade areas which makes small and midsize companies' possibilities greater to sell their products worldwide and increasing the competition. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 35.)

The number of mergers and acquisitions and strategic alliances have increased in recent years. The liberalization of trade is driving consolidation in many industries which enables businesses progressively break into new markets. The cost differences in labour and resources have major importance when it comes to the choice of new production or development locations. Brands have become highly desirable properties for their durability, quality of earning power and their widespread appeal. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 35-36.)

However, globalization be one of core complexity aspects. The origin of the brand is important part of the image and different countries of origin are carrying positive or negative impact. The structure and the way how the brand is seen varies on different markets, positive or negative stereotypes and feeling might be coming from cultural, historic or some other reasons and therefore the same brand can be more successful in one market are over the other. Because of globalization impact and increased sub-contractors in manufacturing processes the border of acknowledgement of brand origin and the actual country of manufacturing can be difficult to define or at least it can be arguable. (Ranchhod & Gurău & Marandi 2011, 21.)

2.7.2 Hypercompetition

Hypercompetition is another factor that increase the importance of BtoB brands. It is mainly the result of ongoing globalization. It is characteristic for hypercompetitive marketplaces to have rapid and intense competitive moves. Competitors must be quick and constantly trying to erode any competitive advantages of their rivals to stay ahead of them. It can be attributed to appealing substitute products, more educated and fragmented customer tastes, deregulation, and the invention of new business models. Such a fast and dynamic competitive environment, even faster business, and production processes together with continuous technology development leads to ever shorter product life cycles. Product life cycle is extremely short in high tech industries, taking sometimes only some months from product development to market saturation. The importance of this trend is that increasing costs for research and development must be amortized in ever shorter period. It makes product differentiation even more difficult to base just on features or functionalities. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 37-38.)

Proliferation of Similar Products and Services and Increasing Complexity

An overabundance of choice is no longer prevalent in BtoC. The situation on BtoB markets is almost equal in present time. The proliferation of similar products and services leads to increasingly interchangeable offerings across industries. Recently innovated product or service may not achieve long term sustainable competitive advantage because

it will be quickly imitated by the competitors. Technical superiority is no longer the only crucial factor to success. In market where products and services are more and more conformed to each other and almost identical, strong brand may be the shingle that differentiates a product or services from competitive offerings. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 40-41.)

Today almost all companies are not selling single products or services anymore. Majority of the companies are offering complex solutions. The solution may have a whole bunch of different products and services and due to their complexity; they tend to be quite the opposite of self-explanatory. For this reason, brand can be helpful tool in reducing the complexity involved and for communicating pivotal and relevant information. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 41.)

2.7.3 High price pressure

Businesses are confronted with enormous price pressure in a hotly contested environment. As it is known businesses cannot realize the higher price just by offering functional advantaged for their products. Brand can provide an additional value for the customers, for they incorporate and communicate both tangible and intangible factors. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 43.)

Brands must be recognized for the great potential they can offer for BtoB marketers. They differentiate market offerings, reduce the associated complexity, and offer an additional value. Holistic branding strategy support the idea that brand should support companies' actions in market environment changes and increasing competition circumstances. The brand should be the thread and marketing the subject that surrounds it. Then the branding will be one of the best solutions to counter the market changes and increased competition. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 43.)

The most important brand functions with the respect of their importance and relevance in a BtoB environment are: Increase information efficiency, risk reduction and value added/image benefit creation. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 43-44.)

Branded products make customers' work easier to gather and process information about the product. For this reason, the function of increasing information efficiency is important

part of the brand. If the customer can find information easily about the manufacturer and origin of the product in the form of brand it helps them navigate in a new or confusing product environment. Brand products also have recognition value: customer can repeatedly find trusted brands quickly and easily. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 43-44.)

Risk can be also reduced by having branded product. Usually, customers rely on branded products to reduce risk of making wrong purchasing decision. Brand creates trust in the expected performance of the product and provide continuity in the predictability of the product benefit. These factors are especially important in BtoB sector, since BtoB buyers have a real penchant for avoiding risks. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 44.)

Value added/benefit creation in BtoB world is not that simple compared with BtoC sector where it lies on consumers' self-expressive value that certain brand provides them. Nonetheless, it can be important on BtoB side as well. In BtoB environment the additional brand value is not anchored in self-expressive values. Usually, a brand is not only present your employees to the world but also the whole corporation. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 44.)

The corporate culture becomes the very foundation of the corporate brand. Defining fundamentally what an organization is, the corporate culture must encompass corporate values. These values are necessary to an organization, but a corporate brand also is contingent on the promise made to external stakeholders (Balmer & Gray, 2003). At this point, a corporate brand involves values that distinguish it from competitors, assuming those values are congruent with the corporate culture. (Vallastera & Lindgreenb 2011, 1133-1143.)

These factors mentioned above approves that the brand is very effective tool in BtoB environment. Sometimes the brand can be only thing that allows you do differentiate your products from the competitors in complex solution offering market environment. Brand cannot be imitated as the product or services can be. It can be also the only thing that can break through the clutter and get companies to be recognized and heard by prospective customers. But it can be applied positively only for the companies that invest in their brand and keep promises and develop their functions to serve the customers according to the brand image creation. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 44.)

2.8 Power of the business brand

There are many BtoB brands with successful stories and the whole perspective about building long term BtoB brand strategy is not new phenomena. There are many companies that have invented strong strategy with long term BtoB brands, but having history is

not necessary to build successful BtoB brand with holistic strategy. Despite the fact the history itself does not guarantee to have successful BtoB brand, it might help to build one if company is concentrating on having holistic brand strategy. However, it is crucial to understand that these BtoB success branding stories are not easy if not impossible to imitate. Even in the hyper speed online world we live there is no brands that can be built overnight. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 51-52.)

The successful brand can last time less and unique where the products and services can be imitated and outdated. It can also afford the opportunity for premium price. The reason alone should pay attention of the management to build BtoB branding strategy. The reason why branding has been overlooked by many suppliers is because in majority of BtoB organizations top management consist of engineers that have spent almost their entire life in that sector. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 51.)

The power of a business brand can be one of the most important assets a company owns. However, brand development can be considered as marketing expense only which is huge mistake made by management. Brand development should be investment aimed at creating long-term intangible assets thereby ensuring the future success of the company. The business will achieve its long-term growth not only more quickly but also in more profitable way if the strong brand facilities are capitalized correctly. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 51.)

Often brand management literature focusing on the contributions of the CEO or top management team in influencing what the branding strategy means, how it is enacted, and how its associated processes might be managed (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 30-38; Davis & Dunn 2002, 213; Vallaster & Chernatony 2006, 761-784). However, top management cannot be only actors who give sense and middle managers—who mediate between the organization's internal and external environments—should strongly influence brand-related processes. (Vallaster & Lindgreenb 2011, 1133-1143.) Brand are more than what company just sells, they represent what company does and what company is. Most brand are the reasons why company exists not the other way. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 51.)

Enduring brand can give business more leverage than any other asset. It can build emotional and rational bridge from customers to company service or product. A brand's personality and reputation for performance can differentiate it from the competition, engendering customer loyalty and growth. Successful brands often occupy unique position in the customer's mind and sometimes it can be elevated above the feature and price competition. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 51-52.)

Despite all facts there are still a few successful BtoB brands that prove the potential in that area. There are many industries that are leaving a huge gap in terms of BtoB branding strategy and unrealize the brand potential in their business strategy. Future orientated companies may set new standards with their brands. The role of brands in BtoB is summarized in Figure 4. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 52.)



Figure 4. The role of BtoB brands (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 52.)

Brand is powerful tool in differentiation, branding can be used effectively in commoditized approach especially with the product or services being highly undifferentiated. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 52.)

Secure future Business aspect is important as well. It is important to establish the brand to secure the product or services to prepare for the future. There are many business areas where only brand orientated companies survived in matter of time because branding strategy and branding power was presented in their business model since day one. The strong brand makes it easier to withstand any kind of crisis and the brand is moreover appealing to financial and investor markets. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 53.)

Brand play key role in assisting companies in transaction from a transaction-based selling model to relationship-based one. Therefore, creating brand loyalty is important. The cus-

customer comes always first and brand loyalty is created only if constantly delivered brand promises are achieved by the business itself. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 53.)

Business with strong brands can benefit from increased communications effectiveness and marketing efforts will be more readily accepted compared with no-names products and services. Differentiation of marketing effort is important for the reason mentioned above. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 53.)

In best case scenario brand preference can lead into rejection of the competitors. It happens more often in BtoC sector but applies to BtoB field as well. A strong brand will act as a barrier from switching to competitor's product. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 53.)

Well branded product can command price premium. It is normal for well-known brand to ask premium price for their product or services. The fact that BtoB brands are valuable resources is also reflected in the acquisition prices and the prices can be ballooned in case of the well-known brands. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 53.)

Brands enable companies' value propositions to be more emotive and compelling. Positive brand effects all stakeholders and makes recruiting and talent a lot easier. Therefore, creating brand image is beneficial and deserves its place as one of a key roles in BtoB branding strategy. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 53.)

The main goal of nearly all businesses is to make money. Therefore, sales increasing proposition is important in brand aspect. It is easier to earn more money by adding higher profit margin on branded products or service as well as grow the sales by having greater reputation on the market compared with competitors. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 54.)

3 Brand architecture to help define the strategy

“Branding Strategy is often used synonymously with the terms “brand architecture” or “brand structure” and has been empirically shown to have a strong impact on market share, marketing efficiency, profitability and firm value.” (Strebinger 2014, 1782)

This chapter takes glance into the brand architecture and how brand strategy can be defined by using the architecture. The main alternatives and needs of brand are studied in this chapter as well as six main architectures of brand strategy.

3.1 The need of brand and main alternatives of the brand

The brand has one need only; it is to grow while maintaining its reputation and profits. At the same time the extension of the brand raises several strategic questions which need to be answered to decide the brand strategy. What kind of name should be used, how it will fulfil the other brands and levels and many other things needs to be taken into consideration at the extension process of the brand? Brand architecture helps to answer those questions and decide proper strategy for the brand. (Kapferer 2008, 347.)

Brands can be divided on two major alternatives: branded house or house of brands. Strategic decisions like how many brand levels there is and is there any linkage between them and what visibility should the corporate brand have made the difference in which alternative brand strategy is. There are in total six main different brand architectures that can be divided by alternatives as shown in Table 2. (Kapferer 2008, 351-352.)

Table 2. House of brands or branded house (Kapferer 2008, 353.)

House on Brands	Branded house
Product-Brand	Source brand
Line Brand	
Range Brand	
Maker's mark	
Endorsing Brand	
Flexible umbrella brand	Master brand

It can be seen from the table above that house of brands does not relate solely to the product-brand architecture but also applies to umbrella-type strategies where the decisions made downstream in contact with the market are very free and seek only to reach

the objectives linked to that specific market without coherence at the image level. (Kapferer 2008, 353.)

The choice of companies who want to leverage the identities of different target markets should choose house of brands strategy. The reputation of high-prestige brand is tarnished by-products targeting less affluent consumers with the same brand. (Kirmani 1999, 88-101; Kapferer, 2012, 289.; Keller 2013, 414.)

Where the branded house expresses desire to give coherence to the whole under the auspices of a brand with central values embodied at the market and product level. It brings together the master brand and dominant source brand strategies by giving a strongly normative structure to the daughter brands on the second level. (Kapferer 2008, 353.) On the other hand, functional brand concepts enable consumers detecting more abstract attributes across a diverse set of products even if there is a lack of fit on the level of concrete attributes. (Dacin & Smith 1994, 229-242; Meyvis & Janiszewski 2004, 346-357) Concepts like brand trust and corporate social responsibility are readily transferable between diverse product and service categories (Delgado-Ballester 2004, 573-592.; Henderson & Arora 2010, 41-60.) which makes a branded-house strategy the strategy of choice to leverage brand trust across product categories and target groups. (Strebinger 2014, 1787).

3.2 Branding strategy and brand architecture cohesion

Branding strategy should be a matter of deciding on the value flows to be created between the different parts and products of a company rather than a formal design problem. The valuation of the offering through the agency of the company itself becomes a central issue of the process. (Kapferer 2008, 354.)

In some field house of brands can be valued at six times the profits, while a branded house enjoys an overvaluation that brings Price-Earnings ratio up to 8. This applies for cosmetic business especially. If company is quoted on the stock exchange all internal separatist such sub-brand logos must cease. Consequences become unacceptable because all the value must converge on a stock brand and the whole organization including branding strategy contributes to this. Industrial organizations are just beginning to appreciate the importance of brand in terms of profitability. (Kapferer 2008, 355.)

There cannot be any master brand or source brand without brand master who ensure the needed coherence. Therefore, brand architecture has strong influence on the functioning

of the company. In fact, the more company moves towards the branded house type of architecture, the more coordination and power structures needs to be installed. (Kapferer 2008, 355.)

3.3 Six main brand architectures

Six main brand architectures are brought together under the terms “House of brands” and “Branded house” as it was shown previously in Table 2. All strategies have own individual characteristics:

“House of brand” category allows great freedom in term of product and communication: the link between the company values and those of the divisions, activities product is lax. (Kapferer 2008, 356.)

“Branding house” is more restrictive downstream, because the latter should reflect central values and concrete expression of the brand. (Kapferer 2008, 356.)

Figure 5. Illustrates all 6 brand architectures and gives better understanding of each approach with own pros and cons.

		High degree of freedom (house of brands)			High degree of coherence (branded house)		
One branding level	Product Brands				Umbrella Brand		
		Brand A	Brand B	Brand C	Brand or Corporate		
	(Hidden corporate) P&G	Product	Product	Product	Product	Product	Product
Two branding levels	Marker's Brand	Corporate Brand A			Endorsing Brand		
		Brand A Corp			Brand B Corp		
	Ferrero	3M			I'Oreal Paris		

Figure 5. Six main brand architectures (Kapferer 2008, 354.)

3.3.1 Product brand strategy

“The name to one” expression describes the best Product brand strategy. It gives name to only one product or product line as well as one exclusive positioning. As a result of this strategy each new product receives its own name that belongs only to it. The strategy effects the lifetime of the brand as well, the brand extension is possible only by renewing the product. (Kapferer 2008, 356.)

The biggest advantage of the product brand strategy is the possibility to occupy the whole market by including the practices of multiple brand entries in the same market. It helps to become category leader of the market. It also allows companies to take the risk on the new markets because the brands are not related to each other and can be tested separately on new market without the influence on each other. Actually, separate life cycle of each brand can be as positive as the negative aspect, because the success one particular brand won't have any effect on the other brand which will still require the same afford from the company to make them famous and successful. (Kapferer 2008, 356-358.)

As negative side of product brand strategy it needed to be mentioned that the core brand of the company or manufacturer sinks into the brand names of each product or product line. Because of the large variety of the names copy issues comes also relevant and it is more difficult and more expensive to secure copyrights. The product management also become expensive because of the large number of items that all requires own design, production and logistics, R&D, sales and marketing strategies etc. This strategy requires strict cost management policy and constant ROI following of each brand. (Kapferer 2008, 356-358.)

Product brand strategy can have several variants such as line brand strategy and range brand strategy. Line brand strategy is effective in term of cost in terms of expansion of the brand line. Products can be linked by a single central concept that reduces packaging and marketing cost for instance. It also facilitates distribution for each line extension and “reinforces the selling power of the brand and creates a strong brand image “(Kapferer 2008, 352 and 360).

Range brand strategy is commonly used in the food industry. It bestows “a single brand name and promotes through a single promise a range of products belonging to the same era of competence” (Kapferer 2008, 361). In this strategy products guard their common name. In this structure the brand communicates in a generic manner by developing

unique brand concept. It also avoids the random spread of external communication by focusing on a single name of a brand which is seen as the brand capital that can be shared by other products. The brand can easily distribute new products that are consistent with its mission and can be categorised together. (Kapferer 2008, 361.)

3.3.2 The maker's mark strategy

Makers mark strategy can use sealing of corporate brand, but product can carry their own brand as in previous strategy. This is the main difference between maker's mark and product brand strategy. If in product brand strategy the corporate brand is completely absent in maker's mark strategy characterised by discreet corporate logo, giving pre-eminence to the commercial brand. (Kapferer 2008, 362.)

3.3.3 Endorsing brand strategy

There is a wide diversity of a products grouped under product brands in endorsing brand strategy; such as line brand or range brands. Each brand can have own name and product range with own promises to the consumers, but all of these brands are guaranteed by the endorser that stand behind them. The endorser's emblem is revealed, and it stands beside the brand name. This structure allows greater freedom of movement of all brands that are cover by the endorser. Unlike the source brand the endorsing brand profits less from its products because each "product name evokes a forceful image and has a power of recall for "(Kapferer 2008, 362) the consumers leaving a little image transfer to the endorser. (Kapferer 2008, 362.) Figure shows closer how endorsing strategy model is built.

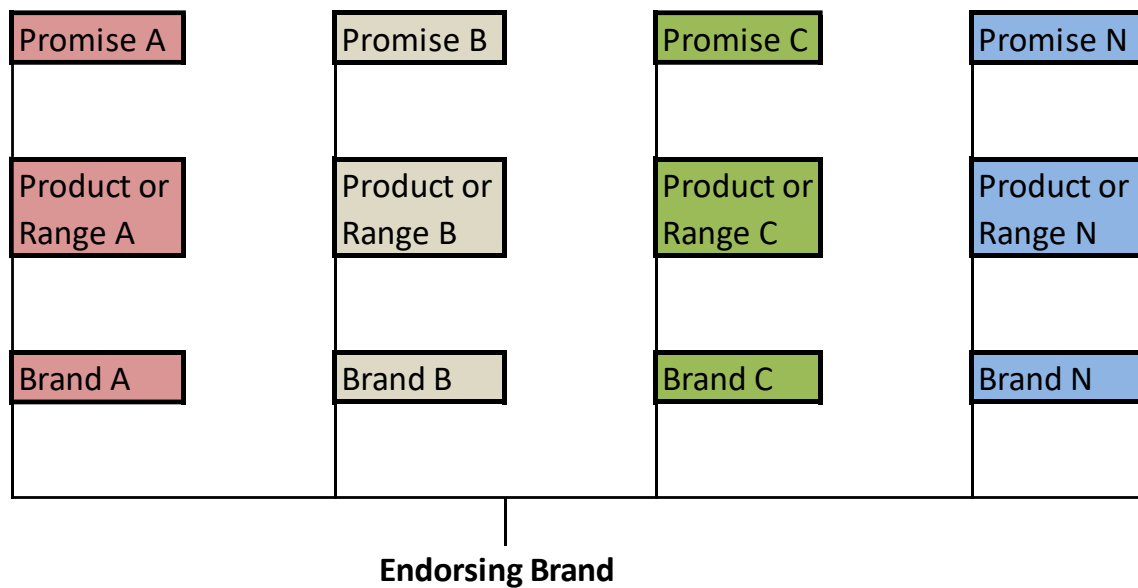


Figure 6. Endorsing brand strategy (Kapferer 2008, 363.)

This structure allows to the product brands to devote more time to express the facets of their personality leaving many core responsibilities to the endorsing brand. Endorsing brand carries the guarantees of all brands under it covering aspects such: quality and scientific expertise, civic responsibilities, ethics, and environmental concerns. (Kapferer 2008, 363.)

The case Company X belongs to Endorsing strategy model in general. It has three different brands with own story, identity, and history. The success or poor reputation of one does not relate to another brand as well.

3.3.4 Umbrella brand strategies

There are two modes of implementation can be found under the term of “Umbrella strategies, the first relatively liberal towards products and subsidiaries and belong under “house of brands” category, the other exercising real control and belong to “branded house” category. (Kapferer 2008, 364.)

Under flexible umbrella brand is assumed to have a single brand that carries the same name for highly diversified products. This model is especially popular among Asian electronic manufacturers. Despite the same brand name, the sales subsidiaries have high degree of freedom under this model. This type of model allows cutting costs in marketing because it gives opportunities and freedom for subsidiaries to versatile their marketing approaches regionally country by country. Among many useful and effective elements this

strategy has one single negative side which is mostly emotional, there is no emotional content of the brand delivered through this strategy model. Products are good quality or at least with some level of known or assumed quality but there is no emotional content that can be delivered to the consumers which makes some product and brands faceless in term of emotional side of marketing. (Kapferer 2008, 364-365.)

Masterbrand or the aligning umbrella brand strategy is the second version of umbrella brand. There is no difference from the previous model regarding the brand philosophy, both accept only a single brand for the whole but in this we can find sub-brands. In aligning umbrella strategy, the parent brand is mistress: it provides a whole frame of reference behind everything that should align, in order eventually to become the embodiment of it, the living spokesperson. The brand is the surrounding framework of everything, and it is the clearest example of “branded house” approach. Cosmetic manufacturer Nivea can be classic example of this strategy. (Kapferer 2008, 366.)

3.3.5 Source brand strategy

This strategy is almost identical to umbrella brand strategy except one key element – this strategy assumes the products to have their own brand name. Source brand strategy is two-tier brand structured is known as double-branding. It is often confused with endorsing brand strategy. But the core difference between these two strategies is that in endorsing brand strategy the endorser brand is mentioned as the quality provider and it is taking back position if front of actual brand of the product that is affecting the consumer to make purchase decision. Nestles chocolate bars are classic example of this endorsing brand strategy approach. In case with source brand, it is completely opposite, in this strategy it is the source brand that is affecting to make the purchase decisions over the brand of the product. Perfumes are classic examples of this theory where the source brand like BOSS or Este Lauder are affecting the purchase decision of the customer over the specific brand of the product itself. However, it is more and more difficult to make a clear difference between these two theories in current world with a big number of different brands. (Kapferer 2008, 367-368.)

3.3.6 Mixed approaches

Typically, these branding strategies are the most used models in defining a branding strategy of a company. It is also increasingly common to find firms whose brand architectures do not fall cleanly into one of the architecture categories. (Kotler & Keller 2007; Ra-

jagopal & Sanchez, 2004). Companies adopt the strategies according to the market needs and mixed approach of the strategies can be used. Mixed approach is nearly compulsory if company is planning to get new market share in different segment. As example luxury brand can have low-budget brand in different segment, but still want to protect the original luxury brand from being related to low-budget one, in this case the company will need to mix the strategies to be present in both market segments and avoiding brand image damages. (Kapferer 2008, 371-372.)

3.4 BtoB brand architecture

BtoB market with smaller numbers of customers with more specialized knowledge and complex needs, managers tend to believe that personal selling trumps brand building. While attention and resources are directed toward recruiting, training, deploying, and managing an effective sales force, the planning and building of a sound brand architecture gets relatively short shrift from management. Branding and personal selling should not be substitutional, but rather as complementary. It is too often underestimated by managers how powerful brands can be in non-mass markets. (Dawar & Muylle & Rangarajan 2012, 58-59.)

Brand architecture is its collection of brands and their interrelationships, and it is shaped by and subject to numerous forces such as market segmentation and targeting imperatives; mergers and acquisitions; competitive positioning; and cost-driven consolidation or rationalization of brands. Identifying constant principles that can guide brand architecture design makes brand architecture responsive to these forces. (Dawar & Muylle & Rangarajan 2012, 59-60.)

Typically, brand architecture consists of umbrella, line, and modifier brands. Umbrella brand is used across multiple product and service categories, a line brand is confined to only one category, and modifier brands designate specific versions within a category. (Dawar & Muylle & Rangarajan 2012, 59.)

Figure 7. on the next page shows five phases of evolution of the BtoB relationship, the corresponding customer risks the seller needs to address in each phase, and the specific customer questions the seller's brand architecture must answer. (Dawar & Muylle & Rangarajan 2012, 60.)

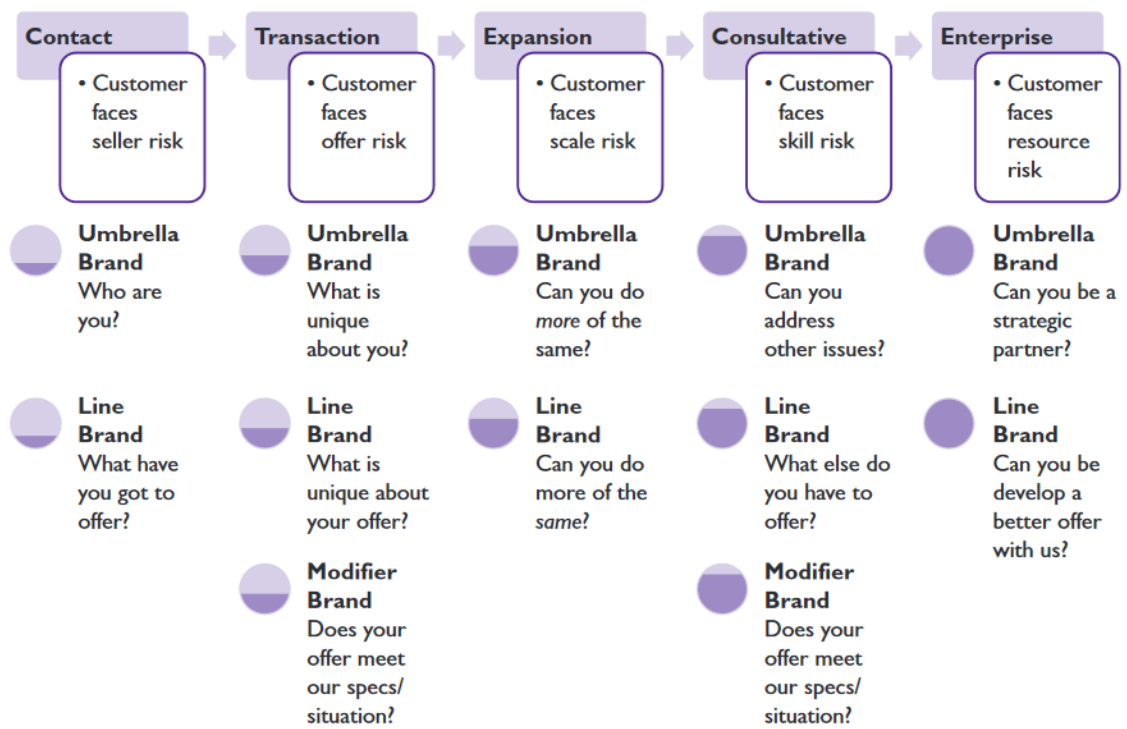


Figure 7. BtoB brand architecture (Dawar & Muylle & Rangarajan 2012, 61.)

Brand architecture can be designed for customers' risk alleviation in each phase. The Contact phase consists of the evaluation of the seller risk by the customer. In addressing seller risk, the customer is simply asking "Who are you?". Naturally the answer to this question must unequivocally demonstrate the credibility of the seller. (Dawar & Muylle & Rangarajan 2012, 60-62.)

In the transaction phase, the customer decides to tentatively engage with the supplier and might place test order and offer risks appears from the customer point of view. From the seller point of view is important to deliver promises in terms of quality and reliability and other cooperation conditions that were agreed. Brand captures other customers' accumulated experience with the seller's ability to deliver on these promises. Transaction phase is critical step toward the next phase. (Dawar & Muylle & Rangarajan 2012, 62.)

Expansion phase shows naturally shows the ability of the seller toward the cooperation and ability to deliver the same quality and reliability and other commitments of the cooperation with the larger ordering quantities. The customer faces scale risks. "The umbrella brand conveys corporate size, scale, and capability, while the importance of the line brand begins to kick in: it denotes capability in the specific field of application, and differentiation from competitors." (Dawar & Muylle & Rangarajan 2012, 62).

Consultative phase is important part of the brand image for the seller. At this stage of co-operation things like product training, service and other long term cooperation issues and difficulties appears. By handling this phase properly, the seller bounds with the buyer and establish fundament for long term customer relationship on BtoB level. The customer is facing skill risks at this point of cooperation. Skill risk is alleviated through a combination of the roles of the umbrella, line, and modifier brands. (Dawar & Muylle & Rangarajan 2012, 62.)

Enterprise relationship phase sees significant investments of resources by both parties into the joint development of longer-term opportunities for increased revenues or costs savings. Resource risks are likely to happen in this phase of cooperation from the customers point of view. Both the umbrella and line brand serve to reduce resource risk. Sometimes partners consider fusing their brand architectures through co-branding. (Dawar & Muylle & Rangarajan 2012, 63.)

3.5 Choosing proper branding strategy

There are several advantages and disadvantages in each type of brand strategy. However, it might be difficult to define one by creating simple list of pros and cons. Brand strategy choice is strategic decision aimed at promoting individual products and ranges and capitalizing the brand in the long term. It must be considered in three factors: product or service, consumer behaviour, and the firm's competitive position. Brand policy reflects the chosen strategy by company in specific content. (Kapferer 2008, 372.)

The revolution has started through the realisation that brands are the real capital of the company." By capitalising on fewer brands companies had to sustain their equity by nurturing them through constant innovations and line or range extensions." (Kapferer 2008, 375). Questions like "what name to choose?" or "which new product we put under which existing brand?" became more relative and required more strategic approach. (Kapferer 2008, 375.)

There are several parameters need to be taken in to account when choosing a brand strategy:

1. Corporate strategy – "symbol" for brand strategy
2. Business model – brand policy is often reflection of business model
3. Cultural – company's culture defines brand strategy and policy
4. Pace of innovation – how do you develop product brands in a sector that updates its offer on an annual basis?
5. Added value lever – defines relative positioning of different branding strategies
6. Resources – lack of resources are limiting multi brand options

7. Brand vision – impacts on the choice of architecture
(Kapferer 2008, 372-374.)

Brand strategy is strongly depended on corporate strategy and business models of the company. Both are kind of reflections or symbols for definitions of branding strategy. Together with companies' cultural aspect the build and fundament for branding strategy definition. Pace of innovation is also critical for brand strategy definition; it is important to know how you develop product brands in a sector that updates its offer on an annual basis. Pace of innovation is extremely important for technology industries. Added value lever also helps do define proper branding strategy. There are different value levers between brand and corporate level. Some industries preferring to choose certain value lever based on their need, competitors, or general same field habits. Resources can affect as well on brand strategy possibilities. Especially lack of resources can lead company for certain brand strategy. Brand vision has impact on architecture of brand strategy. Different scenarios of brand vision can lead to certain brand strategy as itself. (Kapferer 2008, 372-374.)

4 Research methodology and methods

This chapter covers the research methodology and methods, which have been utilized to support the empirical analysis in this study. The research philosophy, approach, design, strategy, and methods of data collection and analysis are introduced in order to answer the question of case study: How to build sustainable multi-branding B to B strategy for Company X?

4.1 Important elements of research philosophy in business study

After business and management raised as academic discipline in the twentieth century, it drew its theoretical base from a mixture of disciplines in the different type of sciences. “In drawing on these disciplines, it absorbed the various associated philosophies dividing and defining them, resulting in the coexistence of multiple research philosophies, paradigms and approaches and methodologies we see today.” (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 126.)

There are decades spent by business and management scholars debating whether this multiplicity of research philosophies, paradigms and methodologies is desirable, and have reached no agreement. To develop own philosophy and designing your research project, it is important to recognise that philosophical disagreements are an intrinsic part of business and management research. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 126.)

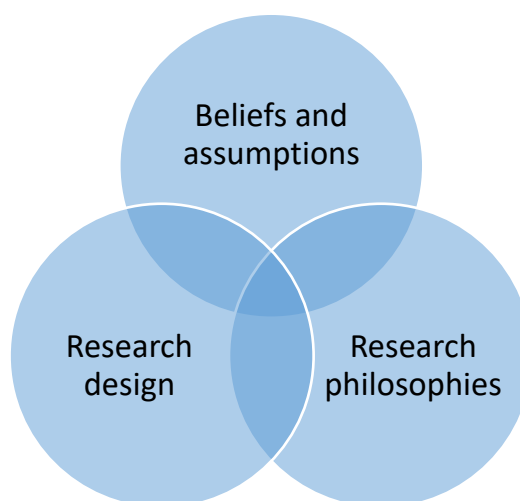


Figure. 8 Illustration of pendency of different elements of the research (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 126.)

There is illustration in Figure 8. how beliefs and assumptions are shaping research philosophies and affects research design of the study.

Philosophy can be described as a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge. The researcher is developing knowledge in a particular field. The knowledge development embarked up by researcher may not be as dramatic as a completely new theory, but even answering a specific problem in a particular organisation is developing new knowledge. Every stage in the research will make several types of assumption. These include assumptions about human knowledge (epistemological assumptions), the realities of the research (ontological assumptions) and the extent and ways researcher's values influence the research process (axiological assumptions). These assumptions inevitably shape how the research questions is understood, what methods are used and how findings are interpreted by the researcher. A well-thought-out and consistent set of assumptions lead to credible research philosophy, which will underpin the methodological choice, research strategy and data collection techniques and analysis procedures. This will allow to design a coherent research project, in which all elements of research fit together. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 124-125.)

Research methodology can be also described by research onion as shown in Figure. 9. The illustration shows the whole research process as complete onion with multiple layers where each layer is representing importance of each element in the research process and making each layer pendant of each other giving the shape and direction to the research.

- Philosophies: Assumptions about the way in which you see the world, nature of knowledge (positivism, realism, interpretivism, objectivism, subjectivism, pragmatism, functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist, radical structuralist)
- Approaches: How theories are used. (deductive, inductive)
- Strategies: How the researcher is going to find an answer to research problem (experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, archival research)
- Choices: Number of methods used (mono method, mixed methods, multi-method)
- Time horizon: Length of the time needed (cross-sectional, longitudinal)
- Techniques and procedures: Practical steps in data collection and data analyses

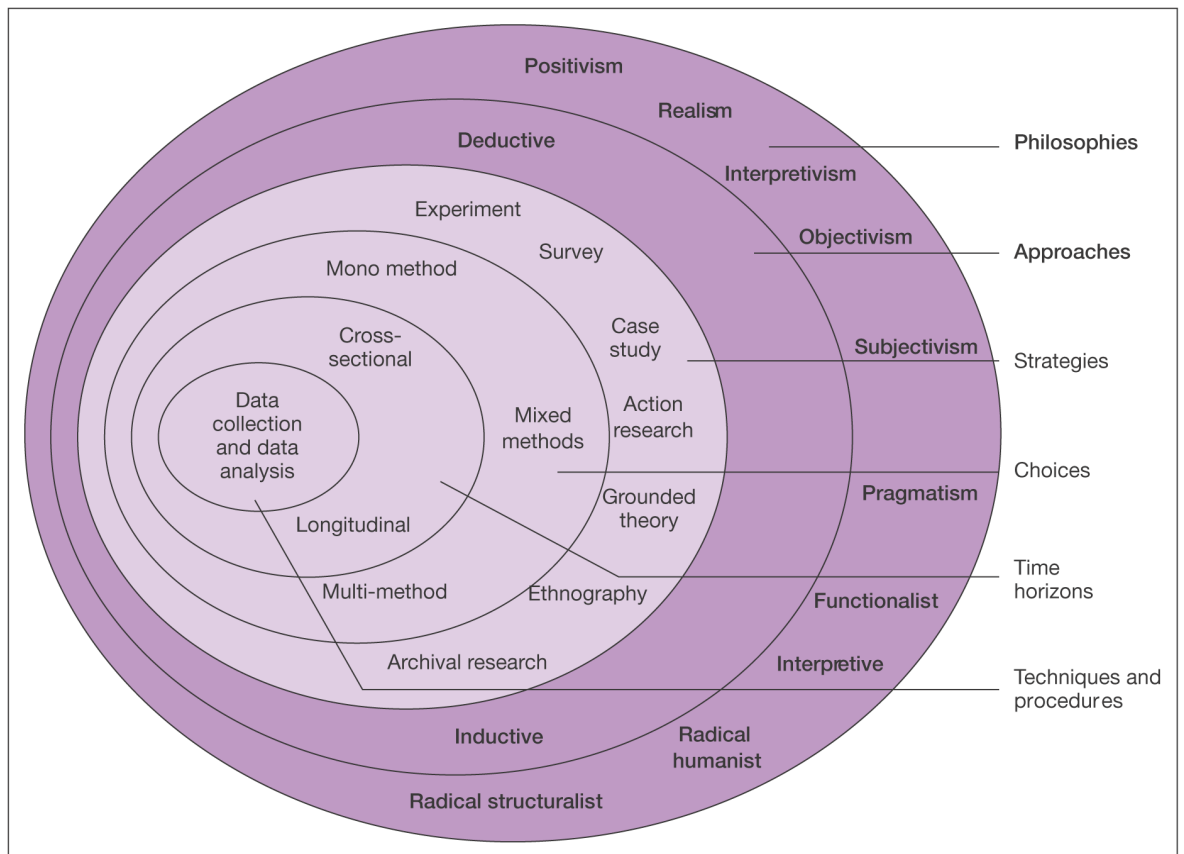


Figure. 9 Research Onion (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 102.)

Research methodologies and methods of my study are based on research onion approach and are more closely described below in this chapter.

4.2 Research philosophy and approach

Ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions of the study are shaping the research philosophy and are important part of every research philosophy and approach. All three can be studied from objective or subjective point of view.

Objectivism incorporates the assumptions of the natural sciences by arguing that the social reality that we research is external to us and others. Ontologically it represents realism in its most extreme form. Interpretations and experiences of social actors do not influence the existence of the social world, an objectivist in the most extreme form believes that there is only one true social reality experienced by all social actors. Objective point of view, social and physical phenomena exist independently, being universal and enduring in

character. It makes sense to study them in the same way as a natural scientist would study nature. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 128-129.)

Epistemologically, objectivism discovers the truth about the social world by studying medium of observable, measurable facts, and try to generalise the universal social reality. Axiologically, objectivists seek to keep their research free of values, which they believe could bias their findings. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 128-129.)

Subjectivism incorporates assumptions of the arts and humanities if social reality is made from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors. Ontologically it leads to nominalism, which in its most extreme form, considers that the order and structures of social phenomena we study (and the phenomena themselves) are created by us as researchers and by other social actors through use of language, conceptual categories, perceptions and consequent actions. In subjectivism the researcher is interested in different opinions and narratives that can help to account for different social realities of different social actors. Subjectivists believe that as they actively use these data they cannot detach themselves from their own values. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 130.)

It is perfectly shown on the picture in Figure. 10 how ontology, epistemology and axiology can be studied through objective and subjective approach.

Assumption type	Questions	Continua with two sets of extremes		
		Objectivism	↔	Subjectivism
Ontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the nature of reality? • What is the world like? • For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are organisations like? - What is it like being in organisations? - What is it like being a manager or being managed? 	Real	↔	Nominal/decided by convention
		External	↔	Socially constructed
		One true reality (universalism)	↔	Multiple realities (relativism)
		Granular (things)	↔	Flowing (processes)
		Order	↔	Chaos
Epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we know what we know? • What is considered acceptable knowledge? • What constitutes good-quality data? • What kinds of contribution to knowledge can be made? 	Adopt assumptions of the natural scientist	↔	Adopt the assumptions of the arts and humanities
		Facts	↔	Opinions
		Numbers	↔	Narratives
		Observable phenomena	↔	Attributed meanings
		Law-like generalisations	↔	Individuals and contexts, specifics
Axiology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of values in research? How should we treat our own values when we do research? • How should we deal with the values of research participants? 	Value-free	↔	Value-bound
		Detachment	↔	Integral and reflexive

Figure. 10 Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology from subjective and objective approach (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 129.)

Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality. Ontological assumptions shape the way in which research objects are seen and studied by researcher. In business and management these objects include organisations, management, individuals' working lives and organisational events and artefacts. Ontology determines the world of business and management is seen by researcher. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 127.)

My study is concentrated to find out how to build sustainable multi-branding B to B strategy for company X. This is the core purpose of this study. Therefore, ontology of my study is subjective, because I am studying concrete phenomena of our organization, which is reality that our organization is missing sustainable B to B multi-branding strategy. This phenomenon is formulated and build by organization and people within that organization, I find it opinion related and socially constructed as well.

Epistemology concerns assumptions about acceptable, valid, and legitimate knowledge, and how it can be communicated to other. The relevance of epistemology is more obvious compared with more abstract ontology. Different types of knowledge – ranging from numerical data to textual and visual data, from facts to interpretations, and including narratives, stories and even fictional accounts – can all be considered legitimate. Different business and management researchers adopt different epistemologies in the research, including projects based on archival research and autobiographical accounts, narratives, and even fictional literature. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 130.)

In my study epistemology is subjective because in my research I will interview my clients and the results of the study will be based on their feelings, answers and our cooperation during the interview process. Despite the facts that our organization needs multi-branding strategy which is real fact that is seen in our organization by my colleagues and some key accounts as well, which makes topic of the study more objective the research methods of study chosen by me are clearly more subjective.

Axiology of my study is subjective. The study is based on face-to-face interviews with my key accounts from different areas and their answers will be studied in terms of theories that are brought in this study. This makes the approach of the study subjective form, because as the researcher I will study subjective answers of interviewees that will be biased because we know each other well. Biases, ethics and validity and reliability of my findings of the research are presented more closely presented in chapter 6.

4.3 Research method and strategy

Research method can be quantitative or qualitative or combination of these two methods. Quantitative is used as a synonym for any data collection technique, e.g. a questionnaire or data analysis procedure e.g. graphs or statistics that generates or uses numerical data. As opposite qualitative is often used as a synonym for any data collection technique such as an interview or data analysis procedure by categorising data “that generates or uses non- numerical data “(Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 165).

Quantitative approach is generally associated with positivism, especially used with predetermined and highly structured data collection techniques. It examines relationships between variables, which are measured numerically and analysed using a range of statistical and graphical techniques. It incorporates controls to ensure the validity of data, as in an experimental design. Because of standardized data collection manner, it is important to ensure that questions are expressed clearly and are understood in the same way by each participant. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 166.)

Qualitative approach relates to interpretive philosophy, because researchers need to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed about the phenomenon being studied. The researchers need to operate within a natural setting, or research context, to establish trust, participation, access to meanings and in-depth understanding. Many varieties of qualitative research commence with an inductive approach to theory development. However, some qualitative research strategies start with a deductive approach to test an existing theory using qualitative procedures. Practice shows, much qualitative research uses an abductive approach to theory development where inductive inferences are developed and deductive ones are tested iteratively throughout the research. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 168.)

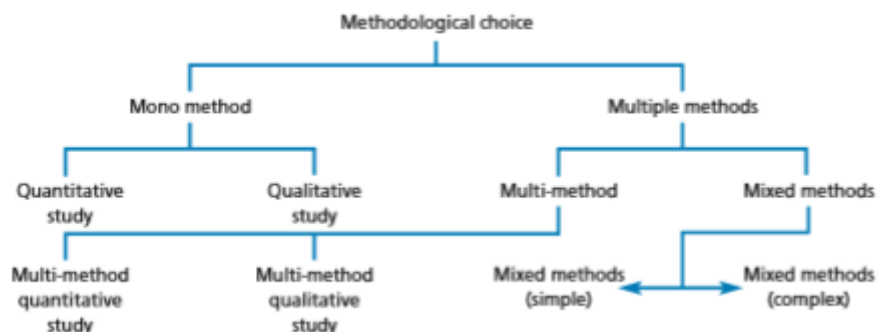


Figure. 11 Methodological choice of research (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 167.)

Figure 11. on previous page shows how methodological choices for research can be chosen and applied in different cases with mono or multiple methods applied together with different approaches and combinations of them.

My study follows mono method with qualitative research applied only. The reason for this choice was obvious, because I am studying strategical part of our brands and how much knowledge our key accounts in different regions have about our brands to get better understanding for multi-branding strategy. At this point it was not logical to give any options or try to lead the research by giving option to choose for interviewees. As the researcher I try to get as much information about our brand from our key account with the minimum leading purpose of the research. Such type of atmosphere in the research can be applied only with qualitative approach. In other hand there is no purpose to test any existing theory, theoretical framework of this study was applied to get better understanding of how important branding strategy is for any organization. The core purpose of study is to define multi-branding strategy for Company X, not to test any existing theory existing on this topic.

An exploratory study asks open questions to discover what is happening and gain insights about a topic of interest. Research questions that are likely to begin with 'What' or 'How'. An exploratory study is particularly useful if to clarify the understanding of an issue, problem or phenomenon, such as if the researcher is unsure of its precise nature. Exploratory research can be conducted in many ways including a search of the literature; interviewing 'experts' in the subject; conducting in-depth individual interviews or conducting focus group interviews. Interviews of exploratory research are relatively unstructured and rely on the quality of the contributions from those who participate to help guide the subsequent stage of the research. As advantage the research form it is flexible and adaptable to change. If new data appear during the research process, there must be room for changing the research direction. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 174-175.)

My study follows exploratory structure. There is concrete phenomena that needs to be studied, but the structure of the study and interview is quite unstructured and open for the new data that might appear from the interviews.

A case study offers deep inquiry into a topic or phenomenon within its real-life setting which may refer to a person, a group, an organisation, an association, a change process, an event and many other types of case subject. The case to be studied and the boundaries of the study is a key factor in defining a case study. Case study research sets out to understand the dynamics of the topic being studied within its setting or context. Dynamic

of the topic and understanding of it refers to the interactions between the subject of the case and its context. The study of a case within its real-life setting or context helps to distinguish this research strategy from others. Case study research is often used when the boundaries between the phenomenon being studied and the context within which it is being studied are not always apparent. Context understanding is fundamental to case study research. Case studies have been widely used in business and management but have been criticised as well because of 'misunderstandings' about their ability to produce generalisable, reliable and theoretical contributions to knowledge. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 184-185.)

Case study can be structured with single case or multiple cases. The first one is often used where it represents a critical case or, alternatively, an extreme or unique case. A single case may be selected purposively because it is typical or because it provides researcher with an opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon that few have considered before. If there are more than one case presented in the research, then multiple case study is used. Multiple cases focus on whether findings can be replicated across cases. Cases are carefully chosen on the basis that similar results are predicted to be produced from each one. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 186-187.)

The second dimension of case study is holistic versus embedded, refers to the unit of analysis. If the research is concerned only with the organisation as a whole case, the research is treating the organisation as a holistic case study. Conversely, if the research is about sub-units within the organisation and case will inevitably involve more than one unit of analysis and the research is called an embedded case study. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 187.)

My research is treating the organization as the whole single case and core aim is to build multi-branding strategy for the organization X. My study is not concentrated on single units of the organization or people, it is concentrating on one single phenomenon. For the reasons mentioned above and approach that is chosen by me as the researcher my study follows single case holistic study approach.

Time dimension of my study is cross sectional because it concentrates on certain phenomenon on certain time. The topic itself is not giving any limitations and can be approached in longitudinal study way but due lack of time and resources for this study it is limited for cross sectional period only. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 200.)

4.4 Data collection and sampling methods

My study is based on primary data collection from the in-depth semi structured interviews that were planned to be face-to-face. Due the current situation and limitations caused by Covid-19 there was a need for changes into interview process. Originally it was planned to make interviews by visiting each partner but naturally I could not follow my plan because of International quarantine. For these reasons all interviews were kept by skype video call which I considers as face-to-face interview, because I was able to see each person and his/her reactions on the questions as well as emotions were also transferred via video conversations. Naturally, interviews were recorded for analysing purposes. Video phone call have also provided almost equal time for preparation for the interview for each participant which could not be possible in the situation of physical visits.

Interviewees have received the questions by email, and they had around one week to study the questions and prepare for the interviews. Questionnaire was made in Russian and English languages and interviewee could choose in which language they would like to have interviews. Estonian and Turkish partners were interviewed in English and the rest ones were interviewed in Russian.

In total five distributors from: Estonia, Lithuania, Turkey, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan were interviewed. This is considered as minimum sampling quantity for semi structured or in-depth interview. Despite the fact of internationality of the group I consider this group of people as homogeneous and purposive in the aspect of this study, because they are our distributor and either the owners or leading product managers or directors of the company who have enough knowledge and competency to be interviewed for this study. Purposive sampling is often used in very small samples such as in case study research and when you wish to select cases that are particularly informative. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 297-301.)

Interview was structured from eight open questions that support the research question and the sub questions of the study shown in Figure 12. It was natural to have semi structured approach provides the specific topic to learn about with the sub questions that support it and only follow up question asked during interview. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 31.)

Semi structured form provided that all the interviews will follow the same structure but still will have possibility to have some level of differential because of follow up questions which were made case by case in different situations with each interviewee.

There was enough challenge for handling multilingual and international approach for the interviews and for this reason it was more natural to make semi structured interviews over unstructured ones, even though the previous one provides more open questions and less control over the process. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 31.)



Figure 12. Eight open questions of the interview

4.5 Secondary data

There was no secondary data used for this study. The topic of Branding was not studied before in the company X and there was not any previous data available that could be valuable for the findings of the structure of this research. It was important to get the feedback and ideas from the interviewees and try to avoid of limiting the idea flow which can easily happen with extra material available that takes too much concentration from the interviewees. In this case any secondary data appearance could have more negative impact than bring any valuable additions.

4.6 Language impact in international research

Language question and issues and opportunities involved with the topic arises when interviewing international field. Many companies might use English as the corporate language but if it is used for international studies and survey it cannot be taken as granted that the results of the survey would be the same if people had possibility to answer the questions on their native language instead of English. Neglecting or misusing of international languages in multinational field may be interpreted as unprofessionalism if the researcher has completely ignored interviewee. (Marchan-Piekkari & Welch 2004, 224-230.)

According to the academic studies languages has the impact on the output of the research and needs to be taken in the planning of international research. In this study interview was designed in English because the thesis is made in English and business theories and approaches that have been used in this study were also studied in English language. The questionnaire was translated into Russian by the researcher because Russian is native language of the researcher.

Table 4 shows how the international background of each interviewee meets the interview process. As it can be seen from the table that in some cases Russian language in unfair position compared with English, because both interviewees from Kazakhstan and Ukraine speaks it as native language and their interviews were also help in Russian. Moreover, Russian language is also native language for the researcher. When English language was not having native status for anyone in this study. In this case it could be fair to interview all interviewees in English but unfortunately it was not possible because of the lack of English language skill of the interviewees in some cases. It was possible to have interview with

Turkish partner only in English language, but his skills are good enough to understand the questions and reply in English. For Kazakhstani and Ukrainian partners Russian language was the only option for interviewing. Estonian and Lithuanian partner could choose the language based on which is stronger one for them and the choice was made as shown in the table 4.

Table 4. Native languages of international interviewee and languages used for interview

Country of the partner	Native language of the interviewee	Language for interview
Turkey	Turkish	English
Kazakhstan	Russian	Russian
Ukraine	Russian	Russian
Estonia	Estonian	English
Lithuania	Lithuanian	Russian

The benefits of internationality were used in best possible way in this study. Interviewees had possibility to use most comfortable language for interview process which provides the most reliable answer and excludes the danger of misunderstanding. The researcher has enough skill to translate Russian interview into English for further analysing. All analysing is made in English language and for this reason it does not carry any misleading terms or expressions and ideas that can impact the outcomes of the study.

4.7 Cultural impact on interview process

It is known that cultural impact can play its role during physical interaction between the people from the different cultures. Things like clothes and human physical actions and behaviour and tone of speech could carry and mean different thing in different cultures. Naturally, this impact has to be understood in international studies as well because usually interviews involve physical interpretation between the people. For this reason, it is recommended to learn about the basics of the cultures and their general habits to be aware of the phenomena and possible impacts on the interview process. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 181-185.)

The researcher of this study knows all interviewees and their cultures because we have met several times and we work together on monthly basis by communicating by phone, emails and having online meeting and physical meeting couple time per years. For the reason mentioned above there were no cultural differences affecting the outcome of this study, because the researcher could not behave in unacceptable way during the inter-

views process. Physical interviews were not possible for pandemic reasons and all interviews were held by Skype video calls which also exclude many cultural impacts that have to be taken in physical interaction.

5 Findings

This chapter discusses the findings of the interviews carefully. The replies of each interviewee are studied carefully, and the chapter is following the structure of the interview process.

5.1 Definition of Brand on the local markets of interviewees

According to Kazakhstani partner (later KP) their local understanding of brand is not necessarily wide enough. The first thoughts after studying through the questionnaire KP thinks that their market has poor knowledge of branding and what relates to branding. Majority of people are using the word without having clear idea of what it is or what it means. He thinks that their market is many decades behind the modern world in terms of branding and pictures involved with the corporate branding. As he is the director of the company and he works with many foreign suppliers he understands the importance of brand, but he also points out that his understanding is different and BtoC understanding of branding is clearer than BtoB on their market. People use this term more in context of consumer products like phones, cars, and clothes rather than in professional equipment especially in agricultural field. KP think that the name of brand plays big role in international aspect, long and hard pronounced foreign name are difficult for Kazakhstani people therefore he thinks that company X has right approach of naming the products in simple way. KP also is pointing out the importance of quality elements that are usually strongly involved around brand image.

The understanding of Ukrainian partner (later UP) of brand consists of symbolism like logo, the name itself and the story behind the brand. According to UP the products of company X are having brand status on their local market compared with some other competitors on the market. In farming industry people might not understand fancy word brand and the meaning behind it, but UP think that if people can remember the name, the colour or the logo it gives them the sight that the equipment of company X is carrying the brand product status on the market.

According to Turkish partner (later TP) there might be as many brand definitions as there are companies and markets and industry fields. Anyhow TP defines brand as the trust and find it is the most important definition in terms of professional equipment in measurement technology in Turkey. By trust they mean the trust between suppliers and their customers because only by trustful relationship is possible to achieve the results in business and grow and expand the sales and get more partners standing behind the brand.

Lithuanian partner (later LP) thinks that branded product is known well and appreciated among users. Well-known brand works for itself and makes work easier for the distribution because they can rely on the brand and stand behind it together with the manufacturer and build local reputation for the brand in Lithuania even stronger.

Estonian partner (later EP) shares mainly the same thoughts with the other partners regarding the brand description and he points the core ones which are important for him and his market in terms of technology of company X: Quality in product, service and technological approach are crucial elements in his opinion for building a brand in Estonia among professional users.

5.2 Important elements of the brand in sales

KP thinks there is big variety of understanding again on their market. Usually, people who have worked with the equipment of company X naturally also appreciate the brand more and might be ready to get new model of equipment of the same brand but totally new customer are mostly cold to the brand itself and might be more interested in price only. KP thinks that despite the name and simple model range names it is also positive that company X is using different colouring for each model. Especially older people who are struggling with the names remember more easily the colour of the front sticker of the moisture tester.

Ukrainian market is full of different equipment and for this reason UP thinks that visualisation is one of the core aspects of the brand for the sales. Typical colour of the equipment and logo and certain shape of the product is something that people remember, and it helps in differentiation and naturally affects positively the sales also. They also put a lot of effort on the story telling. By using the story of the brand of company X they try to get consumers' interest on the local market by showing that the brand has long history and experience and knowledge on this field.

Turkish market is also big and interesting for many suppliers and there is a tough competition on the market like on Ukrainian market. As TP mentioned the trust as the definition of the brand and the trust of the customer can be achieved by quality products. Despite the fact of challenged market there is always a space for quality products and TP thinks that quality is very important in terms of sales. If certain brand relates to quality, it means that customers will want to have it and appreciate it more over the other products and brands. The understanding between the buyer and the seller is born when the expectations of both meet and the brand can be successful if both parties think the same way about it. TP

mentions also the technical part being important in terms of quality of brand definition. There are many different suppliers and product on Turkish market but not all of them can give technical support which is important part especially in professional industry of measuring equipment.

LP thinks that regional origin of the brand plays huge role in their market. He mentions that Mid-European brands and Scandinavian brands are carrying already significantly better reputation of quality in case of the professional equipment and technology compared with Italian or Chinese brands as example. Naturally in clothing or fashion industry Italians are stronger than many Scandinavian brands. Depended on the field different brand is appreciated differently. In this case the users on Lithuanian market appreciate quality and they believe that Finnish company will make always precise calibrations and stable high-quality manufacturing through the years, these are crucial facts for measurement device industry. Even though the customer is not familiar with the brand itself the fact of having Finnish origin will make it automatically respected and ranked as high-quality product.

Estonian market is small as well as Lithuanian for this reason the reputation and the trust are important. The trust is one of significant elements of the brand because if the brand will lose the trust among the users or the actual product will be different from the branding message it will cause trust gain which is dangerous and very costly and time-consuming process to rebuild and put on track again. EP thinks that only by having trustful brand that meets the expectations of the user has the future on Estonian small market in which all core players know each other well.



Figure 13. Most common words about important brand element in sales.

Figure 13. Shows the most used word by interviewees during the interview process for describing most important brand elements in sales. The data was collected by counting each word or closely related word from each interview.

5.3 The reasons to work with company X brands over competitors

At early stage of cooperation almost 20 year ago KP did not have any privileges for company X and their products. His goal was to find European partner with the good quality products. Image of European companies on Kazakhstani market has always been good and there for he was searching for European manufacturers only. It just happened so that Finnish company responded him fast and cooperation started rapidly. In general, he thinks that the partnership with company X is one of his biggest success as the businessman, because during the years he thinks of company X brands as his own kids, that have been growing up through the years and developing at the same time. In terms of current situation, he is more than happy with the quality, the response of company X on their needs and close relationships and understanding of cooperation of both sides. The trust for company X is high, and cooperation have been developed not only in terms of sale but also in terms of service, calibration, and common marketing. For all the reasons mentioned above KP does not even having ideas of changing the partner and he is patriotic for the products and brand of company X. KP is sure for quality when he is working with the products of company X.

Ukrainian market has also long history with the equipment of company X. The brands built by company X were one of the first in its class on Ukrainian market. Majority of users has some product from company X product range. Farmers in Ukraine knows well the brand and the brand is market leader despite the competition that has grown during the last 10 years.

In terms of psychological behavior Turkish market relates partly to Kazakhstani ones. Both appreciate European manufactures and relates European brands and products to quality. It is also known on Turkish market that it is easy to work with European companies and solve the issues when there are any. Therefore, TP was aiming for the partners from Europe. It happened so that company X have reacted faster than the others and offered the best terms for working at the early stage of cooperation. At this stage of cooperation TP knows the products and high quality of the products and trust the relationship between them and company X. They also feel that company X has treated them well and it tries to get deep in their market and the situation with Turkey where political changes effects the business in some cases. TP believes that having common understanding and the plan of developing the market between manufacturer and distributor is crucial for success in long

term plans. They also try to transfer that common understanding and trust to their customers. For these reasons they believe that the scheme of cooperation: Manufacturer-Local Distributor-End user is working perfectly on Turkish market with the brand of company X. Pricewise brands of company X also meets well Turkish market and TP can sell them a lot with a good profit which motivates their salesmen to work harder with the brands of company X.

LP thinks that from the distributor perspective there are many different facts affecting the cooperation possibilities with the different manufacturers and brands. One of the most important is the brand awareness because if the brand is already known it means they do not need to invest that much money and other resources on marketing at the beginning. The other important thing is the quality and reliability of the product which will reflect warranty claims and cooperation between local distributor and the manufacturer in long term perspective. Naturally, the physical distance between manufacturer and the distributor plays also big and gives advantages to geographically closer partners. Having Finnish or Scandinavian partners makes work easier because there are no bureaucracy issues, we work with the same currency or at least stable Scandinavian currencies and there is no time difference and cultural issues as well and logistic costs are reasonably smaller compared with the rest of the world.

EP shares majority of thought with LP in this case. Finnish products are having strong reputation of well-made and reliable products in general which makes the many thing easier for the local distributor. As addition from the other partners EP is more specific in technical approach and point out that Finnish product was designed for Finnish market back in history and geographically Estonia is so close to Finland that all the measurement and accuracy parameters of the devices suits Estonian farmers as well as Finnish.

5.4 The appreciation of the brand on local market compared to competitors.

The brand of company X is a market leader in Kazakhstan. KP thinks that in majority of cases people are ready to buy the product but there are always those who are not satisfied with the price. But he never hears anything from the customers that they prefer another brand as it happens with some other products they are also working with. The quality of product is known well especially among the users of the products.

The brands of company X are known on Ukrainian market as well. UP thinks that in majority cases users know the product for its unique shape, short and soundly name color differentiation. As example many customers can explain verbally the equipment of competi-

tors but they do not remember the name but that nearly never happens with the equipment and brands of company X. In that sense the brand is known and positioned highly in respect of local consumers compared to the competitors.

In Turkey, the brands of company X are appreciated well among the customers for many different reasons. On price sensitive market, it is important that the price is reasonable which seems to be so for the whole product range of the brand of company X compared to the competitors. According to TP the products behind the brand are also standing for Scandinavian simplicity and practicality in use which is important for Turkish users. TP thinks that loyalty of the Turkish consumers for the brand of the company X is constantly growing because they see many happy customers and local sub dealers on the shows, seminars and another agricultural events who wants to get more products after their positive experiences.

The most known brands and the competitors of company X are presented on Lithuanian market, but LP believes that the brand is having high respect form the users and they are ready to pay for it which means that in general the brand of company X might have slightly higher respect on the market compared to competitors. This might be partly built through the history because the company X was one of the first brands from the western world on Lithuanian market after Soviet Union collapsed.

Because of close location and partly the same history in the past the thoughts of EP meet again. Mainly the same reasons affect the user to choose the brand of company X over the competitors and rely more on it. However there is difference in distribution and promoting channels if Lithuanian market has tuff competition between the different brands and manufacturers Estonian market is more concentrated on the products of company X and user know it better than other brands because the distribution and marketing is stronger compared to the competitors which can be seen on local agricultural shows, some of the competitors are not taking even part in the shows and naturally are suffering from the phenomena of being unknown in general among the users.

5.5 The positioning of the brand/s on local market and how it matches with the positioning strategy of company X

KP always positioning the products of company X as top quality of its range because it is the way he feels about them. As his sales statistics shows majority of users are happy with the price and those who are searching for the cheap usually Chinese equipment will never be their customers and the is no point get those. They also see that Kazakhstan

market is still strongly price orientated and for this reason the simple products of company X are still more popular compared with the new advanced models. KP feels that company X is positioning their brands the same way as he does on his market.

According to UP the brands and product of company X are positioned as top quality and similarly to situation in Kazakhstan they feel that each product has the customer. They are not chasing the customers who are trying to get the cheapest product they go for the customers who understand quality and long-term using of the professional equipment. Despite the top-quality ranking and higher price that average of equipment has UP knows they are market leaders, and they work hard to get people aware of the brands of company X and according to them their positioning match with the strategy of company X.

On Turkish market the brands are positioned as price friendly top-quality devices. The whole product range is not the most expensive one but not the cheapest either, majority of the product behind the brand are meeting the midrange pricewise on the market. In terms of the quality of the product it is positioned as the top quality of its class. TP also mentions the packing material and the way the goods are packed satisfies many customers and it is easy to position the brand as top or luxury because the packing relates to that strongly in case of the brands of the company X.

LP has no choice of positioning the brand of company X as anything else than premium class. As he mentioned previously that having Finnish origin, good cooperation between them and manufacturer and facing the fact that the brand is known on Lithuanian market it must be positioned as premium high-quality brand. They know that there is no other way of positioning that brand on Lithuanian market and suits the idea of branding approach of the manufacturer as well. Actually, they are happy in terms of positioning and the fact that their market is ready to accept the brand as high-quality product and there is no misunderstanding between them and the company X as there is with some other brands they are working with.

In terms of positioning the brand Estonian market is different partly because of lack of competition compared with the other regions. According to EP Estonian farmers are not putting any categories for the brand in this segment and more traditional premium or mid-range classification of the brands is used among fashion end user segments such as clothes, phones, and cars rather than in farming field. It is important to have product in different pricing segments and EP points that the range of company X is large enough to suit the needs of average farmer in Estonia. For the reasons mentioned above EP cannot really categorize the brand so clearly of being premium or any other segment, it is more

like known available brand that carries the wide product range and can be used by the majority of professional users. EP does not have any issues with the company X but he listens and develops the brand constantly according to the wish of the company X but with local possibilities and local tailoring. He knows that in other market the brand is ranked more clearly as premium one or as some other segment compared with Estonian market.

5.6 Does company X manager give you enough knowledge about opinion of brand positioning on your market?

KP thinks that in terms of branding and positioning he has enough information from company X and he feels that both thinks the same way about the positioning. They need more technical support in terms of service which is partly relating to the quality of brand. By having strong service organization locally, it provides the brand higher reputation on the market as well with this type of equipment. Brand is nothing without quality and quality behind professional equipment involves accessible service and warranty repair and support according to KP.

Ukrainian market is popular and full of competition because the country is strongly agricultural. It means that brand element of the product and marketing in general are playing core role and visibility is important. UP does not need any help from company X in terms of positioning of the brand but they would like to have more ideas and help for the visibility improvement of the brand on the local shows, advertisements, and the fresh approach for long term marketing building of the equipment.

In Turkish market the positioning is slightly different compared to Ukrainian and Kazakhstani markets. The brands are positioned as budget friendly and top quality which gives them opportunity to get customers with midlevel budget into the better products. This approach has given TP the opportunity to grow and conquer the market from the more expensive competitors. They know that company X is positioning mostly all the products in high price category elsewhere, but it will work negatively in current situation on Turkish market. TP gets enough information from the company X in terms of positioning the brands on the market and so far, the common understanding of the developing has worked well in their opinion.

LP has common understanding with the company X about the positioning and majority of branding strategy approaches. They feel that every time they need any support, they can get it and it is easy to work with company X in every case related to the products. Things like training, warranty claim and repair, logistic and personal contact works well and in

majority of cases it is easy to get contact and prompt replies which helps building the brand locally in Lithuania and promote it as prestigious products.

The brand of company X dominates in Estonia in own category and in terms of distribution, service and cooperation in general there is no issues between EP and the company X. however EP needs more support in marketing because he feels that the brand is famous through the supply chain and easy availability in Estonia but it can be more appreciated as the brand or even as a premium brand by having more local marketing and he needs clearly more support from the company x in order to build and develop marketing strategy for the brand.

5.7 Advantages and disadvantages of multi branding approach on local market of the partner

What comes to Kazakhstani market KP thinks that multi branding in general is not good in this case. For example, in more know products like car brads as example the brands and related quality for each brand is so commonly known that multi branding strategy might be helpful but with the professional equipment and specific user group multi branding will cause confusing. Major issue will be that users will not be able to make enough difference between different brand as they do with the case with car brand, and it will cause that the cheapest brand will be the most popular because the market is strongly price sensitive. KP strongly think that by concentrating on one brand and developing the image around it will be more simple and more understandable for the users in Kazakhstan.

On Ukrainian market the case with multi branding is not that simple. In the past company X was almost having monopoly situation on the market but in present time the market is full of different brand and competition but on other hand the sales were constantly growing despite the competition and multi branding approach of company X and the competitors. In general, local customer might be searching for competitor's brand but end up having the brand of company X or vice versa. UP feels that it is more simple and easier to handle the sales with the single brand approach but multi branding helps to get more customers and bigger number of users get information about the equipment even though the sales process is more difficult and requires more effort.

Turkish situation with multi branding approach is challenged. TP thinks that at this stage it is too confusing because it is hard for the users to remember different brands and make the difference between them. It is simpler to work with the one brand and have product range under it than trying to cover the segment of user with the nearly the same product

with the different brands. TP thinks it might get more relevant in Turkey in the future when the users will be more educated and advanced in terms of measuring technology but not under current situation.

According to LP their market is small but is full of different products and small things might have big impact on the purchasing decision. In terms of multi branding he sees a lot of potentiality and positive impact and there is no need to make products different in technology or from engineering point of view but physical design like shape and colour be positive adding's of multi-branding approach. It will give the choice for the user to have different tester but technically it might be equal to existing ones, but the sales will grow in general because both items will be sold the original and new one. Lithuanian market is ready for differentiation which can be done by multi branding approach and might cause growth in long term period.

EP cannot see any benefit of having multi branding approach on Estonian market because majority of the user can get everything under current brand and through more advanced marketing and scoped target marketing to the different channels, he could achieve more sale with the current brand and all the new ones will just confuse the market than bring any benefits. He points out that marketing wise there is huge work to be done with the existing brand specially to get the information of wide product range of the brand to the target customers and get their interest.

Table 5. How partners see branding approach on their market in current situation.

Partner	Supporting single brand approach	Supporting Multi Brand approach
Kazakhstani	X	
Ukrainian	X	
Turkish	X	
Lithuanian		X
Estonian	X	

The table above shows the current situation of each partner regarding their thought of branding strategy.

6 Discussion of findings of the interviews

This chapter discuss the outcomes of the interviews and how the replies meet the needs of Company X and presented theories of this study. It is also inspected how the outcomes can be implemented in the real situation. Ethics, reliability and validity of the study are presented in this chapter as well as the suggestions for implementation of the study and further research.

6.1 How brand definition can be used for the strategy developing

The definition of brand given by the interviewees are complementary to each other. It is easy to see that some elements of the brand are more important over the other in each market area of the interviewees. By combining, the replies given by the partners we can basically get the academic definition of the brand. However separately the replies are not giving the wide enough definition of the term in terms of modern business world. There are many reasons for that. Things like business education on the market and people's awareness of the terms of the business world are simply on the different level. The markets in general are on different level. Ukrainian and Baltic markets are more mature and closer to western understanding of the business world where Turkish and Kazakhstani markets are more different. Acknowledge of his phenomena gives better tools for the future developing of the branding strategy.

Company X must understand the needs of each market and develop especially important elements of the brand on each market, not forgetting all critical elements of the brand. The replies of interviewee help to define the base of each market in terms of branding. The next step could be planning together with the local partner how to develop already important and critical element of the branding strategy and how to apply new elements.

6.2 Important brand elements in sales and appreciation of brand that make partners working with company X over competitors

Cultural differences and different market situation made interviewees concentrating on different elements of the brand that support sales locally. However, there were some common thoughts as well, Figure 13. on page 45 shows most common word that were used in the interviews to describe the brand elements. The quality, reliability, colour, and trust are clearly most important elements for all markets and the other elements like the shape of the product and the story behind the brand are coming right next but are carrying different level of importance for each market.

Ukrainian market and Lithuanian market appeared to be more mature at this stage compared with the rest ones. Both interviewees from Ukraine and Lithuania were pointing the same elements and important impact as the combination, where the other were concentrating more specifically just on some part of the elements of the brand. Quality was clearly the dominating answer among the interviewees and image of quality was strongly correlating with the origin of the brand and the fact that it comes from Finland. This phenomenon was also supported in the theory section in chapter 2. The origin of the brand is carrying huge imagination of the quality of the brand and products behind it which naturally puts some brands in more favourable positions than the other just based on their origin. Kazakhstani partner did not know much about the brand but the fact of being Finnish origin drew his attention and had huge impact at the very early stage of partner searching process. The same situation appeared to be with all the interviewees at some point of cooperation.

In terms of the replies, it seems that company X has all the tools of positive branding elements to develop each market in the future. All three brands of company X are carrying positive image of origin of the brand which give already huge benefit in terms of competition. The origin of the brand and products can be more clearly brought in the marketing material and marketing in social media because the quality and reliability image of Nordic countries is known almost all around the world. Company X should also concentrate more on the package of the products and bring more clearly the origin of the brand to the consumers and partners.

6.3 Local brand positioning and how it meets the requirement of the company X and how company X shares the expectations of positioning with the partners

Positioning of the brands also appears to be on the same level and the brand is positioned as premium among all partners. However Turkish partner point out that they are not charging the premium price because the market is price sensitive and requires budget friendly approach for some models of the product range. According to the other partners there is no need to position the brand as budget friendly because the customers are aware of the brand well and are ready to pay for it and the element of the brand image are pushing them to position it as premium.

Mostly all partners have enough information about the positioning of the brand from company X. However, according to them even with having the information from manufacturer does not always allow them acting according to the official branding positioning strategy of

the company X on their local markets. The clearest example is Turkey and Estonian market as well. In both cases the brand is not clearly presented as premium because of the specifics of their markets.

In general, the positioning of the brands meets well the expectations of the company X and the policy of brand positioning locally. However Turkish situation requires more cooperation because they are the newest partner, and they grow rapidly and might be second big in terms of sales in this group right after Ukrainian partner in the next 3-4 years. Customer's evaluation of local brand positioning does not meet completely requirements of Company X but on other hand there is no other information available from Turkish market that can be as reliable as the one from local partner. Naturally, it makes considering of more strategic planning together with the Turkish partner and requires more visiting of the partner which is difficult under current situation.

6.4 How current is multi-branding on the local market of the interviewees.

In terms of replies it might be asked if there any sense to have multi-branding approach at all on majority of the markets of this study. Well, there is, because clearly can be seen the facts from replies of the partners that can be recognized as the need of multi-branding approach despite the fact, they might not recognise them.

Lithuanian partner was only one who clearly sees and feels the need of multi-branding approach as the benefit because of the differentiation possibilities. The other ones were more sceptical about the need of multi-branding approach. Ukrainian market is at the same point or even more advance compared with Lithuanian and for this reason it was surprising to find out that they cannot see the benefits of the multi-branding approach. However, it makes me think base on my experience that they were not completely honest answering this question because multi-branding strategy requires big effort from them as well and they might not have resources now. This can be easily seen by partner as the thread, and they might think that Company X will search for the new partners for the other brands.

Turkish partner was also not enthusiastic about multi-branding approach on their market. It might be true that there is no need for it yet. If the situation of having multi branding approach is clear in Ukraine and Lithuania it might be arguable on Turkish market. However once again it needs more evaluation and information from the market.

Kazakhstani partner and Estonian were clear about their position and both had facts to support their view. I am also complementing them at this point, my experience of their markets meets their thoughts well and there is no need to build multi-branding now. Naturally, the situation might change in the future because of the competitors and their will to expand on these markets.

6.5 Important element for evaluation before building BtoB multi-branding strategy

The finding of the interviews is giving several important core elements that are worth to be studied and evaluated by Company X in the process of building BtoB multi-branding strategy.

First of all no matter if multi-branding approach is already current or will be soon it is clear that origin of the brand will play big role and therefore it must be taken more seriously in strategic planning of the marketing nearly on all levels. Now company X is facing customers who does not know the origin and therefore there are space for development.

Another important element is that BtoB branding needs to be evaluated also from the customer's point of view and how our brands can cover their risk in different stages of cooperation. There was 5 path of risk evaluation approach presented in chapter 3 and the fifth risk from the customer point of view was lack of resources from the seller. Based on the replies I can feel clearly that our Turkish partner is in danger to face these risks from Company X. there is huge potential for Turkish market and brand developing but clearly Company X is not having enough resources for that. If I could agree or disagree with the replies of the other partners, I just had to admit that in Turkish case I do not have enough information to construct own opinion clearly.

Lack of the resource at this stage must be taken into consideration before expanding brand portfolio into the next level. By having one brand on the market in Ukraine and Lithuania might be possible in terms of current resources of Company X but adding more brands will require more resources naturally and Turkish market might fall behind as consequence of that decision. This type of risk must be evaluated clearly before adding multi-branding strategy otherwise the other markets might suffer too much and fall more aggressively into the group of facing lack of resources from the seller even though the market is worth well for developing as Turkey is now for company X.

There were similarities revealed in replies of the partners from the different regions. One of the core development suggestion revealed from this study is that these brand elements that are mutual for the market areas should be combined in multi-branding strategy approach. In this case the strategy will work for several market areas despite their location and cultural background and save human resources in sales and marketing forces of Company X.

6.6 Implementation and areas for further research

Multi-branding strategy is needed, and it must be applied first in Lithuania and Ukraine simultaneously because both markets are ready for it and the customers are having the same expectations from the brands of company X. However, the risks need more evaluations, and more resources will be needed to make sure the other markets won't fall behind and start degradation because of lack of attention from the Company X.

The information that appears theory of this study and the outcomes of the interviews is worth to be implemented in the multi-branding strategy for BtoB customer of company X. This study gives the idea of core issues and strategic steps to be taken in BtoB branding strategy approach on each market. As it can be seen it requires resources from Company X and currently there is not enough of them to implement multi-branding approach without risking the partnerships in big picture.

There is no need to study this topic any deeper, but branding can be studied from the other point of views. Company X has recently renovated the whole webpage segment and it is worth to be studied in the future how it effects the image of each brand and how it helps sales developing in terms of multi-branding approach.

6.7 Validity, reliability, and ethics of the research

As the researcher I was following the university's ethical guidelines for research. Thesis follows HAAGA-HELIA's (2016), ethical principles of plagiarism fabrication, falsification, and misappropriation of outcomes of research and, therefore, it does not:

- (1) present material produced from elsewhere as one's own,
- (2) present invented observations or findings,
- (3) modify original observations or distorted findings, or omitting essential information, or
- (4) present someone else's findings, an idea, or a plan as one's own.

The researcher is main contact person for the interviewees and for this reason it is worth to look through the reliability of this study from this point of view. There were no issues appeared during the interviews because of the relatively close relationship on daily working task between the interviewees and the interviewer. The replies of the interview were professional and did not suffered from the relationship phenomena. However, there could be too positive picture given by the interviewees especially in terms of information sharing of branding strategy between Company x and them, but on other hand it is hard to say if the situation will be different if the researcher was the outsider, because the partners were aware that this study will be inspected by Company X.

Especially Ukrainian partner was giving sometimes too much information I want to hear instead of the real situation. Despite the fact my personal experience from their market is different it did not affect the study because I was aware of that cultural aspect and phenomena and partly, I was expecting it. Naturally, outside researcher could get the different conclusion of the interviews in this situation because of the lack of market knowledge but I do not think it could be equally valuable in terms of strategic decisions for Company X.

This study was partly biased by the fact that the researcher is contact person for the interviewees, but it did not affect the outcomes because biases were recognized and with the help of personal experience of the researcher of each market area it was easy to concentrate in this research on the core topic instead of biased elements.

7 Reflections

In the reflection section I would like to go through the need of this projects and the outcomes of the study from different point of views:

Naturally the most important approach is to look the study through the perspective and needs of the Company X and how research helps to achieve better understanding for sustainable BtoB multi-branding strategy and plan and concentrate on the more beneficial elements of branding. I think that semi structured interview process was correct approach for this study because there was certain structure that gave the interviewees possibility to follow the topic through the whole interview process but on the other hand the interviews were not strictly guided which made possible for idea sharing between the researcher and interviewees. As the whole this study will help Company X to concentrate on certain element of the branding strategy and it gives good ideas in both theory and practical sections of this study. The study shows that multi-branding strategy is need in some markets more than on the others now but in the future, it will be needed nearly in all market areas at least on some level. Therefore, the finding of this study will help Company X to approach each market in most effective way and evaluate the need and the risk involved with multi-branding strategy.

From academic point of view also find this study equally important as for Company X. During the process of writing, I have realized that there is significantly less studies made for BtoB branding compared with BtoC approach. At this point this study will gives its benefit for academic world and might be useful for further research in this field. It was also important for me as for researcher to research something that can be beneficial for academic world and have chance to make the research that follows Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences ethics and academic principles.

For my personal interest and development this study was at least equally beneficial as for previously mentioned parties. This study was done under unexpected circumstances that had pressure on the whole world including business of Company X and their partners. As one of the leading sales managers of Company X I had a lot of pressures at work and there were many challenges involved in working life during the research process. The implementation of the interview process was replanned because of Covid-19 impact and the interviews were transferred into video calls over primary planned face to face meetings with each of interviewees. Despite the changes and challenges I am satisfied with the

outcomes and concrete help of this study for Company X. I had huge personal development as researcher and as the professional sales manager during this study. It helped me develop planning skills and be flexible in terms of implementation of planned tasks.

In general, this study is actual in many directions and I hope that the students and sales professionals and marketing people will find it useful for their purposes and it will encourage people for researching BtoB branding more deeply.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questions of the interview with support letter in English

Dear Partners

I am finalizing my studies of Master Degree in Haaga-Helia University of Applied sciences.

For this reason, I am approaching you to take a part in my thesis study which covers following topics: How to build sustainable multi-branding B to B strategy for Farmcomp?

The finding of my study will be based on your answers of interview questions below and all the findings will be studied only for thesis purposes and handle anonymously without revealing your name or company. This study will cover Farmcomp's distributors in following areas Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania, Turkey and Kazakhstan. Interviews will be held on English or Russian language based on abilities of interviewee to understand the language. I will inform you later about publication of my thesis and how to get access to it.

The main research question of the study is:

How to build sustainable multi-branding B to B strategy for Farmcomp?

Sub-questions are following:

- How you define term Brand. What does it mean for you, please describe?
- What are the most important elements of the brand/brands for you in sales?
- What are the reasons to work with our brands over competitors?
- How is our brand appreciated on the market in general compared with competitors in your sales region?
- How are you positioning our brand/s on your sales market? Is it positioned as premium quality, standard product or budget version? Describe, please.
- Is your opinion of brand position of your market similar to Farmcomp's one? Share your thoughts.
- Does Farmcomp's managers give you enough knowledge about opinion of brand positioning on your market?
- How you see multi branding approach in your sales region? Does it help to grow sales of Farmcomp products and increase inters for the products or not? Please describe.

Appendix 2. Questions of the interview with support letter in Russian

Дорогие Партнеры

Я заканчиваю обучение в магистратуре университета Naaga-Helia University of Applied sciences. Я обращаюсь к вам с просьбой принять участие в моей дипломной работе по теме: Как построить устойчивую мульти брендовую стратегию для компании Farmcomr в области «B to B»*? Результаты моего исследования будут основаны на ваших ответах на вопросы интервью ниже, все результаты будут изучены только для целей диссертации и будут обрабатываться анонимно, не раскрывая вашего имени или компании в которой вы работаете. В данном исследовании примут участие дистрибьюторы компании Farmcomr из следующих стран: Украина, Эстония, Литва, Турция и Казахстан. Интервью будут проводиться на английском или русском языках с учетом способности собеседника понимать язык. Я сообщу вам позже, как ознакомиться с моей работой после ее публикации.

Основным вопросом исследования является:

Как построить устойчивую мульти брендовую стратегию для Farmcomr в области «B to B»?

Подвопросы следующие:

- Что по вашему является брендом, как вы это понимаете? Опишите, пожалуйста.
- Какие элементы бренда / брендов более важны для вас в продажах?
- Каковы причины работы с нашими брендами, а не с конкурентами?
- Как наш бренд оценивается на рынке в целом по сравнению с конкурентами в вашем регионе?
- Как вы видите вами представленный бренд/ы на рынке в целом и как позиционируете его/их на рынке? Как продукцию класса премиум, как стандартный продукт или бюджетный вариант? Опишите.
- Совпадает ли ваш взгляд позиции бренда на рынке со взглядом Farmcomr, ваше мнение.
- Доносят ли до вас сотрудники Фармком свое мнение достаточно хорошо по поводу грамотной позиции бренда на рынке?
- Как вы рассматриваете мульти брендовый подход на вашем рынке? Увеличивает ли это продажи в целом и вызывает ли больше интереса к продукции Фармком или нет? Опишите вашу точку зрения.

**Термин «B to B» используется в англ. язычной литературе. B2B — это модель предпринимательства, расшифровка которой звучит как business to business. В ней товар или услуга предлагаются одним юридическим лицом, а покупаются другим.*

Заранее благодарю Вас за участие!

С уважением, Павел Мулло