



Service brand management model for building brand equity – case study

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Abstract

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<p>In the competitive landscape of service business where the customers' perceptions and relationships with brands shape the competitive advantage, the objective of this research-driven case study was to investigate what is the ideal service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity. The development task of the thesis was to create a service brand management model for the case organisation, which enhances the current practices in the organisation. The objective was to create new knowledge and insights for Company X to enhance its service brand management processes in a structured way to gain competitive advantage and enhance the processes for building brand equity.</p> <p>The research followed a multi-stage research-driven case study process. Starting from defining the research objectives, the study moved to comprehensive data collection with semi-structured interviews with Company X's managerial staff. This phase was an essential part of the research in understanding and analysing the current and visioned states of the service brand management in the organisation. Based on the data collection, the development goals were set, integrating thematic gap analysis with theoretical insights to guide the development process for creating a tangible service brand management model for the organisation.</p> <p>The data analysis indicates a fragmented and unstructured approach to holistic service brand management in the organisation but has high appreciation on customer-centricity and visions transformation towards a holistic customer partnership model. The theoretical validation of empirical findings supports building the model and bridging the gaps in the organisation's service brand management.</p> <p>In conclusion, the organisation seeks to have a more holistically structured approach for the over-arching service brand management, and therefore the development work has focused on connecting the current needs and visions within the organisations to integrate with the current theoretical models in the literature to form a tailored approach for the organisation's service brand management for building brand equity. Due to the considerable concentration on theoretical validation of the model's elements, the research findings are relatively applicable to other organisations and brands.</p>
Keywords service brand management model, brand equity, service brand, co-creation of value

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1 Introduction

Great products and services are at the heart of a strong brand, but the power and the value of a brand is in the hearts and minds of the customers. Customers' buying decision processes include emotional and functional aspects, and strong brands impact both of them. Thus, every brand contact has a big effect on how customers think and feel about the brand. With a strong brand, organisations are more equipped to set expectations and reduce risks for its business – having key benefits like predictability, better engagement and motivation for internal resources, improvements for marketing efficiency and effectiveness, as well as a strong cushion in the brand communications. (Keller 6.4.2018.)

The topic of developing service brand management model for building brand equity is especially important for the Company X, as the organisation commissioning this thesis, but can be seen applicable to other organisations as well, as there have been somewhat siloed mentality in different departments and fragmented understanding and unstructured approached to brand management internally and externally. However, the brand is well-known and has excellent results with Net Promoter Scores, and the organisation sees itself having truly customer-centric mindset and ways-of-working. But understanding how Company X can develop its service brand is crucial for building brand equity in highly competitive markets, which in return creates better internal and external engagement, builds brand loyalty, and makes the service less price sensitive and helps organisations co-create value with customers. For the organisation, creating a model based on the current and visioned service brand management within the organisation along with theoretically proven brand management processes, should help to give a cutting edge in the competition.

For a master's student majoring in marketing, this research is significant as it allows the application of theoretical frameworks in practical context, bridging the gap between academics and business. Also, as a marketing professional, this research gives an opportunity to study branding even further and create new understanding for the organisation. In this chapter, the author has included insights from previous works, such as texts and analyses, which were originally developed for coursework while participating in courses Applied Design Research, Strategic Brand Management, Brand X Development, and Asiakaspolun kehittäminen ja asiakaskokemuksen johtaminen.

Services are separated from goods by the unique features they hold: intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity and perishability. For customers, the intangible nature of services makes it harder to evaluate the service quality – the expected and the perceived behaviour, discussed further in later chapters - and differentiation from the competition. Inseparability of production and consumption means that customers are actively involved in the co-creation of ser-

vice – the production and consumption of services happen simultaneously and involves both parties. Thus, it is also more difficult to control the service quality and to deliver a homogenous service, as the service encounters are unique and depended on the involved individuals. Service brands can try to affect these unique features to make the brand stronger with tangible cues (distinctive identity, personality and image), by controlling the expected service qualities, with marketing communication and by making sure the perceived services qualities and factors are in line with brand's promise. (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1999, 181-183.)

Because service organisations are so highly depended on the individual employees' ability to deliver the service brand, well developed and managed service brands need to focus on the internal aspects as well. Strong brands motivate and engage employees but also help the organisation retain good and valuable employees and recruit new talents (Keller 6.4.2018). Every brand touch point, whether it is directly with front office staff or through digital contacts, impersonate the service brand and the brand promise and thus the internal branding is really important (internal marketing and branding, corporate branding, selecting and training staff, understanding the company strategy and internal communication). (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1999, 182-183.)

As services are co-created with customers due to the inseparability of production and consumption, the external brand contacts are the platforms where value is created and includes all the brand's offline and online touchpoints. A key issue for a service brand is how the customer react and response to a brand contact and how the brand is able to deliver the brand promise (the expected versus the perceived behaviour). When the expected service meets the perceived service, and brand promise is successfully delivered to customer, service brand is able to create brand equity. (Keller 6.4.2018.)

De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1999, 182-183) further explain the more a service brand is able to involve customers in the co-production, the better they are able to tailor the services for individual needs.

Acknowledging that services are co-created with customers and that brand equity can be created within these touchpoints, it is vital for service brands to pay attention to internal brand management and to understand how it influences externally and in customer touchpoints. How are the customers involved in the co-creation of value? How is the service brand implemented and managed internally? How the service brand communicates and deliver its brand promise internally and externally? What factors have to be taken into account when managing and developing service brand? Managing a service brand for building brand equity demands service brand to take a holistic approach on the whole brand management.

Holistically well-managed service brand throughout the organisation and across all the touchpoints enables service organisations to create better connections with all its stakeholders, most importantly customers and employees. The brand management should be a long-term strategic and systemic approach to manage and continuously manage the service brand. (De Chernatony, 2010, 5.)

Shifting the mind-set from short-term tactical measures to long-term strategic measures enables service organisations to create competitive advantage and profitability – building a strong service brand with positive brand equity (Aaker 2014). But without a comprehensible and understandable service brand management throughout the organisation, it is highly unlikely to manage and maximise brand equity (Keller 2014, 702). The risk of not having structured and well-managed service brand management causes many service organisations have latent brand equity, due the inability or the unwillingness to strategically think about the co-creation of brand equity. (Keller 2014, 703.)

When the brand promise and brand values align with the service encounter, a brand is able to create trust, credibility and build emotional connections. Using a clearly defined service brand management model throughout the whole organisation as a strategic approach, organisation is more capable of aligning the intended and actual brand experience (the expected and the perceived behaviour) and the delivery of the brand promise to create brand equity. (Fisher & Vallaster 2010, 124.)

O’Cass & Grace (2004, 265) summarize that it is important for a service organisation to understand all the associations related to services and how to manage them holistically, and “Hence just as in the management of branded goods, developing strong and unique service brand associations and managing overtime is vital. This will allow for the strategic development and management of service for long-term success.”

1.1 Case organisation

The commissioning organisation for this thesis, referred as Company X, is a key player and a well-known brand in Finland’s mobility service sector. Part of a larger, globally connected and industry leading group, Company X is influenced by the global corporation’s strategies and visions, but also insights, resources, and best practices, to form the local entity adjusted for the domestic business environment. Company X and the corporation are an active contributor to the global mobility landscape, shaping the mobility business for almost three quarters of a century. Company X’s mission extends beyond only facilitating global and local mobility. It is also about producing a connected and sustainable travel ecosystem and local ways of developing and modernising the

mobility of people and businesses. Company X's scope is to serve B2C and B2B customers, with a truly customer centric approach.

The local organisation focuses on delivering high-quality customer centric services that are aligned with brand's global standards while tailoring them to the local needs of Finnish market. The research in this thesis focuses on the local Company X's service brand management, with an objective to study and create an ideal service brand management model that would help the organisation to build brand equity locally. This research and development are critical as Company X seeks to strengthen its service brand and position, not only as service provider but also as a brand that resonates with both the B2C and B2B customers, reinforcing loyalty, trust, and collaborative benefits from the co-creation of value.

1.2 Research objectives and research problems

Developing a strong service brand and managing it systematically have extensive and wide-reaching benefits for a service organisation: internal motivation and management of service encounters, involving the customers in the co-creation of value and understanding the creation of brand equity. As described, the case organisation's business is to offer services for its customers in omnichannel environment. To make sure all organisation's departments and employees are working under a unified and well-managed service brand, this research focuses on the internal aspects of service brand management – why and how it should be managed – based on theoretical framework and case study research, taking a local and internal management-level perspective. However, to be able understand how brand equity is created from the co-creation of value with customers and through brand experiences (externally), the research is remarking these aspects as well. Internal aspects of service brand management will lead to various touchpoints (external aspects of service brand management), in which the customers experience the brand, and thus this need to be taken into account, in order to understand the effects and landscape for internal service brand management.

The research is conducted to understand what service brand management is and how it contributes to building brand equity. Case organisation's service brand management is studied to understand how it is done currently and how it could be enhanced according to theoretical framework and research data. For the case organisation, a researched service brand management model should offer valuable insights, new know-how and understanding on how a structured model can help organisation to co-create value with customers and what internal elements should be taken into account when managing a service brand. Understanding brand equity – how it is created

and what benefits it brings – helps the organisation to understand the importance of having a well-managed service brand throughout the organisation.

As discussed, the case organisation's internal service brand management from the management's perspective is in the scope of the thesis. What is service brand management? What elements should take into account and why? What theoretical service brand management models prove? What can organisation learn from previous studies and research? How can the organisation improve their service brand management?

The objective of this thesis is to develop a service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity by studying the literature review on internal service brand management aspects, and partly external, and conducting a semi-structured interview to gather data from the organisation. The process is introduced in more detail in chapter 3.

The above-mentioned service brand management model is created to enable and help the organisation to create systemic approach to manage the service brand throughout the organisation and building brand equity in the long run, thus strengthening the service brand internally and externally.

The main research question is:

Q1 What is the ideal service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity?

Sub-questions for the research are:

Q1.1: What is the current state of Company X's service brand management?

Q1.2: What is the visioned and desired state of Company X's service brand management?

Q1.3: What are gap analysis results between the organisation's current state and the ideal state service brand management and what are the insights from theoretical framework?

Q1.4: How should Company X manage its service brand for building brand equity?

To guide the construction of the theoretical framework, the following questions are studied:

- What is service brand and what are the unique characteristics of it?
- What is service brand management?
- What are commonly known brand management models?
- How can service brand be managed to build brand equity?

1.3 Scope of the thesis

The objective of this research-driven case study thesis is to study what is the visioned service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity and to create a service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity. It is essential to clarify, that the actual implementation of a service brand management model within the organisation is not in the scope.

The research addresses to some fundamental question in service brand management: How service brand management is ideally applied in the organisation in theory and what are the fundamental concepts and models in the field? How service brand is currently being management in the case organisation and how service brand management is present in management level? This research explores what service brand management model aligns best with case company and why, from the management's perspective.

As the implementation of service brand management model is scoped out of this research, the aim is to provide new and valuable insights why managing a service brand is vital for building brand equity and how the organisation could enhance its processes by using a model. Theoretical framework combined with data and gap analysis illustrates and argues the ideal model to be used in the future and leaving room for practical implementation.

1.4 Research matrix - addressing the research problems and the development task

To address the research problem and the development task, the research matrix structures the thesis work and functions as the structural backbone and framework of the thesis:

Assistive and research questions	Key data and theory	Methodology	Outcome
AQ2: What is a brand, service brand and what are the unique characteristics of services?	Chapters: 2.1 & 2.2	Literature review	Theoretical framework
AQ3: What is service brand management? AQ4: What are commonly known brand management models?	Chapters: 2.3, 2.4, & 2.5	Literature review	Theoretical framework

AQ5: How can service brand be managed to build brand equity?	Chapter: 2.6	Literature review	Theoretical framework
Q1.1: What is the current state of Company X's service brand management?	Chapter: 4.2	Semi-structures interviews Gap Analysis 1. Phase	Current state Analysis
Q1.2: What is the visioned and desired state of Company X's service brand management?	Chapter: 4.3	Semi-structures interviews Gap Analysis 2. Phase	Visioned state analysis
Q1.3: What are gap analysis results between the organisation's current state and the ideal state service brand management and what are the insights from theoretical framework?	Chapter: 5.1	Semi-structures interviews Theoretical framework Gap Analysis 4. Phase	Gap analysis
Q1.4: How should Company X manage its service brand for building brand equity?	Chapter: 5.2	Identifying gaps and theoretical guidance Key theoretical aspects of service brand management	Approaches for services brand management. Illustrating the model Model's justifications, expected impacts and approaches to close the gaps

2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework chapter represents the central concepts and elements of service brand management, starting with brand and service brand – first defining and explaining the concepts – and then moving forward to exploring the unique characteristics of service brands, that separate goods branding from service branding. By defining and explaining the key concepts of a service brand, the theoretical framework discusses what is a strong brand.

Having explored the definitions of brands, the key concepts of this research, external (with customer) and internal (amongst employees) points-of-views and models of service brand management, are defined and studied in Chapter 2.3. Central to internal brand management with external perspectives are eventually the co-creation of value with customers, influencing the brand's external perceptions and building the brand equity. The theoretical framework is concluded by looking into the overall brand evolution.

In this chapter, the author has included insights from previous works, such as texts and analyses, which were originally developed for coursework while participating in courses Strategic Brand Management, Brand X Development, and Asiakaspölyn kehittäminen ja asiakaskokemuksen johtaminen.

2.1 Brand

The definition of a brand applies to both goods and services, as a brand is a perception in customers' minds and the key purpose for both is to satisfy customer's needs. When defining what a brand is, one has to take a comprehensive internal and external view on the brand. De Chernatony (2010, 17) defines "A brand is a cluster of functional and emotional values that enables a promise to be made about a unique and welcomed experience". (Dall'Olmo Riley & de Chernatony, 2000, 143.)

2.2 Service brand

Vargo and Lusch suggest that in fact all businesses are in service, as the organisation's success is depended on the intangible nature of the co-creation of value between organisation and customer, and the primary objective for organisation is value creation. In services, brands and brand management have a more comprehensive and important role because service brands include all the internal and external stakeholders who enable the value creation. The organisation is the primary brand in services and the customer encounters is where brand promise is delivered. (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 206-208.)

The intangible nature of services is the key difference compared to goods, and thus the brand's role is emphasized in services. Having fewer tangible attributes in services, communicating and managing brand's values becomes more difficult. Service organisation's employees are a fundamental part of brand's overall communication, especially during the service encounter, since communicating the brand's personality only through marketing communication is not adequate. Service organisation's culture and brand is the most distinctive differentiating factors in intangible service competition. Therefore, managing service brand and understanding co-creation of value throughout the whole service organisation becomes vital. (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 208.)

Goods dominant industrial period emphasizing tangible asset has evolved towards more service-oriented experience age with an emphasis on intangible assets, like knowledge and information. Along with this evolution, brands have shifted the focus towards a more comprehensive brand management, in which customer experience, values and employees' ability to deliver the brand promise are emphasised. It could be said that brand management have become internally more about culture management and externally experience management. (De Chernatony, 2010, 36-37.) Also, Vargo and Lusch argues that "a new dominant logic for marketing has emerged, shifting the focus from tangible to intangible resources, from frozen value to co-created value and from transactions to relationships", highlighting this evolution (De Chernatony, 2010, 6).

2.2.1 Unique characteristics of a service brand

Intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity and perishability are the unique features of services. These features are the differentiating factors that set services apart from tangible goods brands, and the characteristics influencing the most how service brand are managed and perceived. (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1999, 181-182.)

Intangibility, as the first trait, makes it challenging for customer to evaluate the service quality and differentiate the brand from competition. Reputation and the size of the company can have a major effect in customers' choice of the service brand. To mitigate this, service brands can offer tangible cues like establishing distinctive identity, personality and brand image. As services offer intangibility, including tangible cues to the service process makes it safer for customers to buy from – creating a trusted brand and an appealing proposition for the customer (Berry 2000, 129). These tangible elements are crucial in a comprehensive service brand management. (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1999, 182.)

The intangibility is the primary difference between goods and services, but tangibility is not exclusive to goods nor intangibility to services. Although services can't be physically felt or experienced

the same way as tangible goods, there are tangible elements in services that the customers can establish their opinion and evaluate by. These tangible elements in services are the key components for service brands to work on. (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 209-211.)

The second unique characteristic of services is the inseparability of production and consumption. This characteristic is one of the key components in this research, as it means that customers are actually actively participating in the co-creation of service. As customers are actively involved, it makes it challenging for service brand to control the service quality, highlighting the importance of focusing on the expected and perceived service behaviour. Service experiences are unique and heterogenic, being the third unique characteristic of services, in which the customer facing employees and other touch points, like digital, represent and symbolize the brand positioning. The brand promises made through marketing communication and branding should reflect the service encounters and be aligned to the expected service qualities. Thus, the internal and external marketing and communication, internal and external branding, hiring and training, as well as the comprehension of the overall company strategy are significant elements in service brand management. The more service brands are able to focus holistically and systematically on the internal aspects of service brand and involving the customer in the co-creation of service, the better service brands can tailor to individual needs. (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1999, 182-183.)

As discussed, the production and consumption are inseparable in services, making the customers actively contributing to the process. This enables service brands to influence the perceptions during the service delivery as well and not only by creating perceptions through marketing communication and branding for example. This also highlights the importance of the internal service brand management. Making the customers aware of the roles in the co-creation of the service, can also have an effect on the service delivery and eventually equity. (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 214.)

The fourth unique characteristic of services is the perishability. One challenge of services is that they can't be stored, meaning that service brands must attract and retain customers while preventing the competitors promises to have an effect on them, even before the customers have experienced the service. Only during the co-creation of value, the brand is perceived by the customers (customer experience with the brand) and if competitors have been able to lure them before that, no value can be created. This means that service brands are facing a difficult task as De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (2011, 216) describes "first, they need to develop an image and a reputation to attract consumers; secondly, they must then retain these consumers as competitors try to attract them away, even though they have yet to experience the actual service." (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1999, 183.)

For the reasons explained, holistically managing service brand is difficult and complex. Offering more tangible cues for customers make it easier to differentiate from the competition and simultaneously focusing on internal aspects of the brand to align the perceived and expected service – making service more homogenous throughout the various touch points based on clear brand identity. (De Chernatony & Dall’Olmo Riley 1999, 190.)

2.2.2 Strong service brand

Strong brands indicate trustworthiness, authenticity and responsiveness as the key elements with all stakeholders like employees, customers, and owners. Well-developed and holistically managed brand are more capable of establishing and maintaining strong connection with these stakeholders over time. A strong brand provides a big advantage in the competitive landscape, especially in the intangible service business, as discussed. Investing in the construction, development and management a service brand to outperform the competition, a service brand is more able to enhance the revenue and increase overall satisfaction (trustworthiness, authenticity and responsiveness) within the stakeholders. (De Chernatony, 2010, 4-5.)

But in comparison, what do weaker brands lack? And how are these things visible in the organisation that have a weaker brand? It is valuable to also recognize the challenges in branding and how they should be addressed to create a stronger brand.

Some **challenges in brand building** that should be pointed out are listed below. These are originally noted in the financial sector but are applicable more broadly for service brands:

More than a logo	A brand is stuck in the past, and the managers accept employees confusing the brand being the logo and colours, rather than understanding and focusing on the brand promise.
Customer centricity vs. financial focus	Especially in the financial sector, but applicable to other sectors, companies tend to focus on the financial performance rather than focusing on what the customers actually need and want.
Understanding brand management	Lack of competent brand management and leadership’s capability of understanding branding results in weaker brand and thus managers and employees find it hard to find ways to differentiate themselves from the competition.
Rebuilding brand strength	With a weaker brand, it is important to focus on understanding what branding means and in what areas it can and could be improved.

HR and brand misalignment	Practices and policies in the HR department doesn't match the brand goals nor support the brand.
Brand-culture alignment	To be a successful brand, the culture and the values should align with brand.

(De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 217.)

On the other hand, the following **factors contribute to the success of service brands**:

Holistic brand experience	A service brand is a complete holistic experience, in which every touch-point for the customers reflects the brand.
Brand's core identity	Customer service is the core of brand's identity, with exceptional personalised customer service.
Excellence over mediocrity	A strong service brand challenges the existing status and circumstances, as mediocrity is not sufficient to differentiate in the market.
Adaptability	Adaptability and responsiveness are key elements. Organisations should enhance openness and organisational learning.
Brand consciousness	Understanding what brand is within every employee's day-to-day work and becoming more literate on branding.
Brand-culture alignment	Synergy exists between brand and culture, meaning that there should be linking within organisation's values, employees' values and brand values.

(De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 221.)

The importance of the service sector has increased and as companies become more aware of this, the potential of creating and developing services brands are emphasised to create competitive advantage. Services are intangible in their nature, and this presents a considerable challenge for organisations in creating a strong service brand. Although, goods brand and service brands can be developed in broadly similar process, like setting clear brand objectives, defining a clear positioning and selecting appropriate values, the nature of service brands require more tailored approaches and models. (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 217; 234.)

A strong service brand encompasses the what the company claims the brand to be, what others say about it, and how the company delivers the service, all from customer's perspective.

Ultimately, a brand is how it is perceived. (Berry 2000, 129.)

2.3 Service brand management

As studied, service brands present unique challenges and opportunities for brand management due to their intangible nature. Building and sustaining strong brands is a key task in organisation to differentiate in the competitive market and to co-create value.

Developing and managing a brand is crucial especially for services, as the service brands lack the physical differences and have an intensive competition within the market (Berry 2000, 128-129). But the intangible nature of services poses a particular challenge for integrated brand management programme or model (De Chernatony, 2010, 104). Strong brands enhance customer's trust of the intangible purchases, and thus branding plays a major role in service industry. Services are challenging to evaluate before buying, and branding enables to understand and visualise the intangible products, reducing the perceived risks for the customers. (Berry 2000, 128.)

The interactions with the customers are the real test for a brand. All brand contacts in various touchpoints are platforms to deliver the brand promise and to co-create value, and eventually create brand equity. Whether it is marketing communication, word-of-mouth or the actual service experience, it is how the customer response to a brand that matters. Strong brands are able to deliver the brand promise, but they also have a cushion when something goes wrong, as something inevitably does. This can be seen as the brand equity - the stronger and better managed the brand is, the better it can affect the delivery of the brand promise and create mutual value. (Keller 6.4.2018.)

But branding and service brand management should not only focus on the external factors and customer touchpoints. Brands don't die only because of unhappy customers, but sometimes it is the internal frictions and factions that harm the brand's decay. Staff pulling away of each other or against each other can inadvertently create a chaotic brand internally and for customers externally. Without common understanding of the brand or holistic brand management in place, individuals within the organisation may drift away. As an example, marketing communication may say one thing about the brand, while the customer perceives completely different things during the co-creation of the service. The inconsistency can leave customers confused. (De Chernatony, 2010, 104.)

That's why branding and brand management have a strong internal impact as well. As discussed in the Introduction, strong brands can be seen a source of motivation and engagement for employees

and help to retain valuable employees and attract new talent (Keller 6.4.2018). Frontline employees especially, who interact with customers in various touchpoints, symbolize and represent the brand's promise, and thus Internal brand management have wide-reaching impacts in a service brand organisation (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1999, 182-183). But managing service brand holistically and continuously in day-to-day-work is complicated. Managers might have good outlook on few areas of strengths and weaknesses, but managing and developing all things affecting the brand is difficult (Lane Keller 2000).

In services, it is critical to involve the customer in the co-creation of value, and thus service organisation should look at the internal aspects of the brand as well as how they affect the external perception. How the brand is implemented internally and how the customers are involved? How does the organisation communicate the brand internally and externally? How are customers involved the co-creation? De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1999, 182-183) define "The more a service brand is able to involve customers in the co-production, the better they are able to tailor the services for individual needs.", thus highlighting the holistic approach to service brand management.

Holistic brand management enables organisation to establish strong connections with stakeholders like employees and customers. The key elements for a service brand are authenticity and responsiveness should be included in a systemic and on-going process of service brand management. (De Chernatony, 2010, 5.)

Creating brand equity, studied more closely in chapter 2.6, demands service brand to take a holistic approach on the whole brand management. The key for building brand equity is to shift the mindset from quick short tactics to long-term strategy – creating long-lasting competitive advantage and profitability (Aaker 2014). But without a clear brand strategy or holistic approach to brand management, building and maximizing brand equity can be almost impossible, and may even emerge as latent brand equity (Keller 2014, 702-703). Service organisations' inability and unwillingness to focus on the service brand management and have a long-term strategy are the crucial drivers for being incapable co-create brand equity with customers (Keller 2014, 703).

Service brand management is not just a generic phrase used in organisation and many times confused only for the logo and the colours. Brand management is about promise management. Brands can get carried away with focusing only on the flashy marketing communication, and in consequence setting excessively high expectations for the expected and perceived service encounters. For customers, this approach leads to feelings of disappointment and thus not creating value, nor in the long-run brand equity. In these cases, the gap between expected and perceived service experience is too wide. Marketing communication and service level should match to create

a unique and authentic service experience, which associated with the brand. Service brand management plays significant role in closing this gap. (De Chernatony, 2010, 17.)

To close the gap between desired brand identity and the perceived brand, employees play a crucial role. Employees behaviour should align with the desired brand values, and by creating authentic experience for the customers as well. This alignment helps in consistent and compelling brand image and is considered to be one of the cornerstones in brand management. (Vallaster & de Chernatony 2006, 781.)

Service brand management is all about finding balance, managing promises, and not only focusing on the customers. It is important for a brand to pay attention to the internal resources. When staff in aligned with the brand values, they are more likely to deliver the brand promise. On the other hand, if organisations only tell their employees about the desired values without genuine commitment, staff will be less committed, and customers can see thought that act. This will weaken the confidence in brand. (De Chernatony, 2010, 11.)

When the brand's promise and the organisations values are aligned, the provided service creates trust and credibility. This creates emotional connection with customers. With a strategic approach to brand development and management using a model or programme, service brans can help to align the promised and the delivered service experience. Delivering the brand promise in two-way communication with all stakeholders is the to success. Aligned brand promise and brand experience create brand equity. (Fisher & Vallaster 2010, 124.)

As studied, brand management is not only influencing and connecting with customers. It is integrating the brand promise inside the organisation as well. If organisation is able to align the external and internal brand identity, the more likely brand promise can be delivered. Brand management should have a holistic approach thought internal and external touchpoints be thought as a strategic tool to create value. (De Chernatony, 2010, 13.)

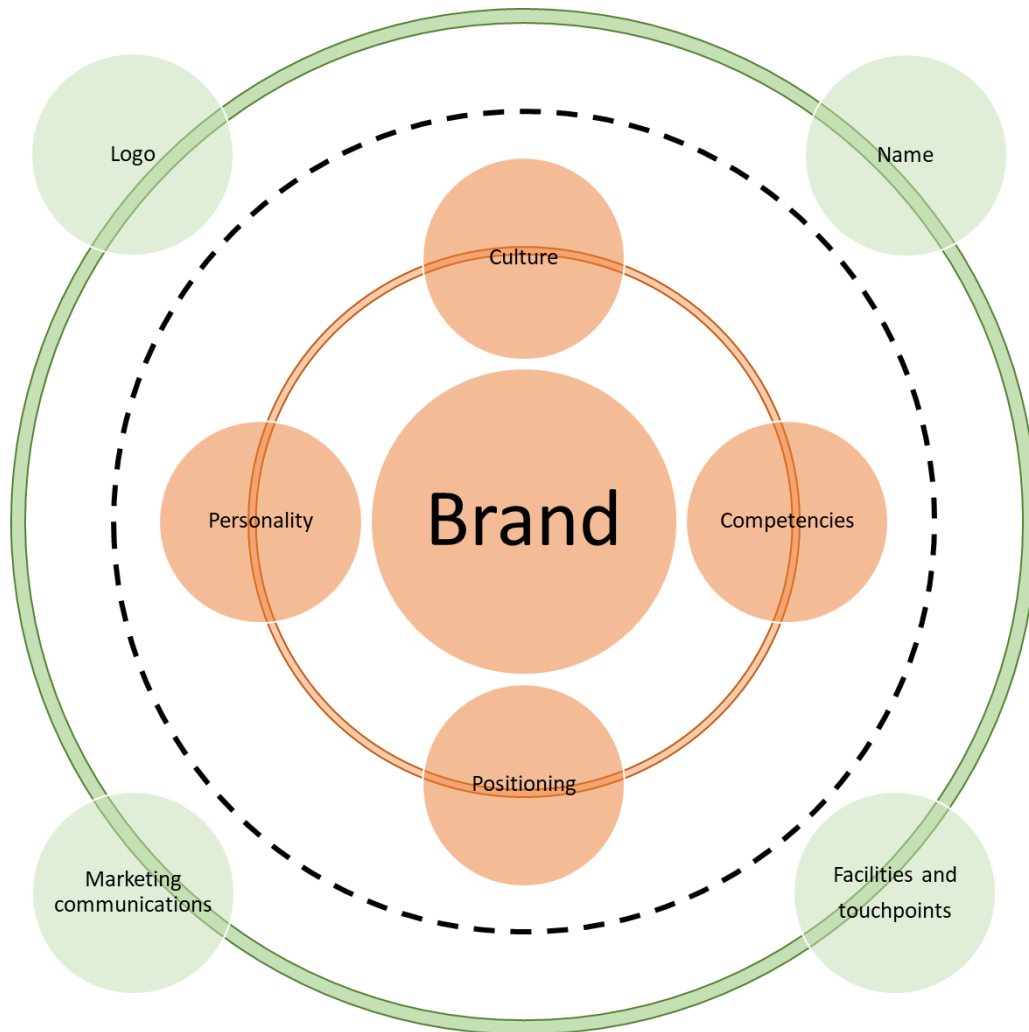


Figure 1. The brandsphere circle (Adapted from De Chernatony's (2010, 15) The brand iceberg.)

Figure 1 illustrates what is a brand and what is included in a brandsphere. As discussed, in many organisations a brand is stuck in the past, and the managers accept employees confusing the brand being the logo, name and marketing communications, rather than understanding and focusing on the brand promise and where the brand core is generated from (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 217). Highlighted on the outer circle of the brandsphere circle in Figure 1, these elements are mainly the external and visible elements of brand like name, logo, colours, marketing communication, facilities, touchpoints and other brand's visible factors.

But beneath the surface are unseen elements that actually give brand their competitive advantage, highlighted in the inner circle of Figure 1. These include staff, organisational culture, strategy, competencies, internal communication and many other elements are the value-adding processes within the organisation. Once again, closing the gap between the expected service (top of the iceberg) and the delivered service (beneath the surface) is the key for success, emphasizing the strategic,

holistic and well-planned approach to brand management. The brand is holistic entity, in which the visible elements are backed by the invisible elements. (De Chernatony, 2010, 15-16.)

This emphasizes the importance of having a balanced perspective in brand management. Customer-facing employees play an essential role in delivery of the brand promise. To ensure employees can effectively represent the brand, they need knowledge, skills and the support from the organisation. But it is also as highly important when hiring new talent, that they genuinely align with brand's values. As examined, brand management is a promise management, and to be capable of delivering the promise, service organisation needs a well-developed brand management system to enable employees' capabilities to align with the customers' expectations. Effective brand management should take advantage of the organisation's values and competences to provide unified and authentic service experience. (De Chernatony, 2010, 24.)

In many organisations, there are various different departments working with different aspects of the brand. Different sources of brand information and focus areas may cause separation and complicate the integration between the departments, which in return may affect the overall brand experience for the customer to be perceived as inconsistent. (De Chernatony, 2010, 82.)

Thus, in light of these considerations, service organisations should take into account at least the two following things:

1. Employees should be able to understand what brand is (values, identity, brand promise etc.) and also commit to supporting the brand and the consistent delivery of the brand promise to customer.
2. Positioning the brand in the strategy to enhance profitability and brand equity. It is important for all managers and executives to understand that the brand is built from within and is highly dependent on the employees.

(Kimpakorn & Tocquer 2010, 387-388.)

Research conducted by Lee, Yong Park, Baek and Lee (2008) confirmed a relationship between well-management brand management system and organisations performance. The discovery indicates that organisations that have structured brand management system and strategic long-term approach to brand management in general, including components like organisation culture, education and implementation and evaluation processes, consistently outperformed organisation without such a system. (De Chernatony, 2010, 22.)

2.4 Service brand management - external-point-of-view

Before discussing the internal brand management, the external service brand management studies the aspects of service brand's where the actual brand equity and brand experiences are made. This chapter focuses on the external dimensions of the service brand management, a crucial aspect in developing a comprehensive model for building brand equity. Although the scope of this research is focused mainly on the internal aspects of brand management, in service brand management, it is crucial to have a balance between the external and internal perspectives. Service brands delivers the brand promised through multiple touchpoints and usually with personal interactions, unlike goods brands, which often focus primarily on the external aspects of brand management. To succeed, service brands must carefully consider the external point of view when managing the brand. (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010, 378.)

To this end, external environment of service brand management, illustrated in the Figure 2, stands as a valuable simplified framework to capture the dynamics and factors in external service brand management. To understand service branding and service brand management thoroughly, it is essential to break down the key elements and their relationships. The components of this model include the presented brand, the external brand communication and the customer experience. The components have a direct or an indirect relationship in creating brand awareness and brand meaning, eventually building the brand equity. (Berry 2000, 129.)

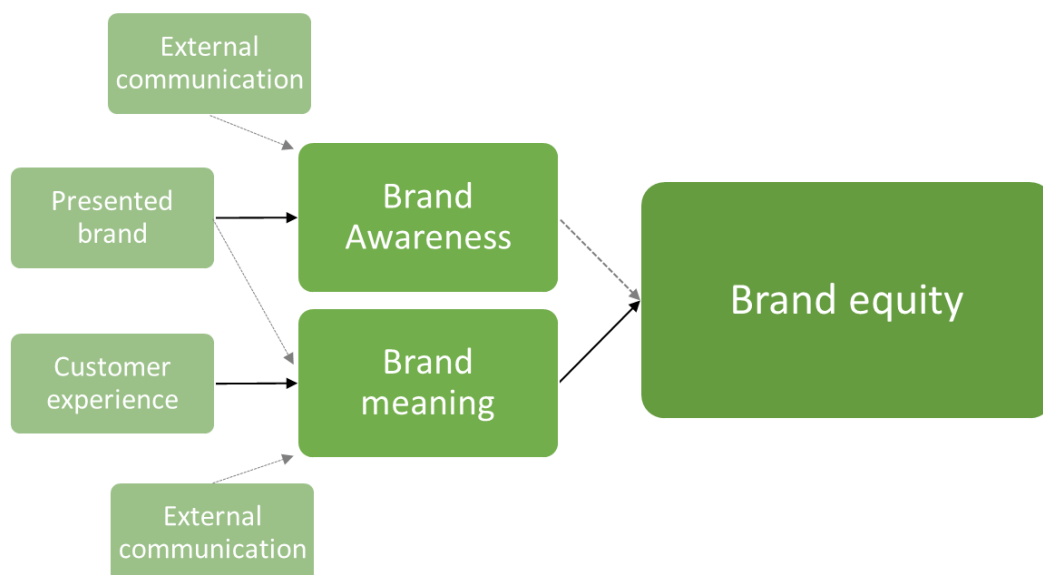


Figure 2. External environment of service brand management. (Adapted from Berry's (2000, 130) A service-branding model.)

The presented brand includes the organisation's controlled communication about its identity and purpose. This includes for example the visual representation of its employees and facilities, advertising, customer communication, name and logo. These elements contribute directly to brand awareness, "which is the customer's ability to recognise and recall the brand when provided a cue" as Berry (2000, 129) describes. (Berry 2000, 129.)

Abstract services present unique challenges in brand management. The intangible nature of services means there are scarcity of tangible cues for customers to evaluate the brands. This also reflects to all different phases in the customer journey, from awareness to consideration and decision-making, and eventually evaluation. This is the most evident compared to goods, in which the physical attributes serve as such cues. For service brands, there is need to bridge the gap by enhancing the level of tangible cues. To address this, service brands need to carefully assess the position of their services on the evaluation spectrum, when designing effective marketing communication strategies. (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 211.)

Although company's presented brand, which contributes to creating brand awareness, is important, the interactions between customers and the brand have the most affect in creating brand meaning – the co-creation of value, highlighted with a darker colour line in the Figure 2. Creating brand meaning is predominantly significant as it contributes the most to brand equity.

The first few customer encounters with service brand's touchpoints determines the level of the relationship between the brand and customer – whether it remains in the acquaintance phase or has an actual potential (Halloran 2014). In essence, brand meaning is the customer's dominant perception of the service brand, what comes to mind immediately when seeing or hearing brand's name or other cues (Berry 2000, 129). The presented brand and external communication thus have substantial influence on the brand meaning as well.

External brand communication encompasses the uncontrolled information and communication that customers absorb about the brand. This includes word-of mouth communication and publicity, often originating from independent sources. But as De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace (2011, 212) describe, especially "Word of mouth acts as a credible source of information". Word of mouth communications are common especially with services due to their intangible core. Publicity can also be highly influential for brand awareness and brand meaning. It is a powerful tool in brand management through its reach and authoritativeness, both critical factors that must be carefully considered. Uncontrolled information overall has substantial weight in shaping customer's perceptions on the expected service, positively and negatively, and thus service brands need to have a strategic approach controlling it. While external brand communication contributes to both brand awareness

and brand meaning, its influence is not as noticeable to brand meaning as the brand experience. (Berry 2000, 129.)

Brand meaning refers to customers' dominant perceptions of the brand. Although both the presented brand and external communications have their roles, the actual service experience with customers engaged directly with the brand is the most influential for creating brand meaning. These experiences have a significant weight in shaping customer's beliefs and perceptions. The presented brand can increase brand awareness and activate consideration with new customers and strengthen the brand meaning for existing customers. However, presented brand can't rescue weak service experience. As Berry (2000, 130) explains: "customers will believe their experiences and not the advertising". In essence, customer's disappointment effectively closed the door brand marketing is trying to open, highlighting the importance of the overall service brand management internally and externally. (Berry 2000, 129-130.)

For service brands, understanding the brand management thoroughly is profound. Service brands are characterised by multiple interactions, involving multiple touchpoints and different individual employees. Some organisations choose to standardize employee performance to ensure consistency, but this can lead to inflexibility. In contrast, organisations that recognise the value in harnessing heterogeneity can better serve individual needs. This approach though, while being more responsive, means there needs to be better alignment and management over the three key components in the external (based on the internal set-up) service brand management: The presented brand, external brand communication, and brand experience. (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 215.)

Service brand are unique in their ways of communication and interaction with customers to deliver the brand promise. External environment of service brand management illustrated in the Figure 2, serves as a valuable tool for understanding complexities in service brand management. Understanding the factors in creating brand awareness and brand meaning, and most importantly the co-creation of value, leads to the creation and building of brand equity.

2.5 Service brand management process – organisational-point-of-view

To build strong connections and relationships with customers, organisations must have a deep understanding the brand. but before any direct interaction with customers, the co-creation of the service, the company should be able to understand to essence of its brand and how it should be communicated to customers. This entity includes the brand's vision and promise, objectives, organisational culture and resources, brand implementation strategies, and the whole internal brandsphere. (Halloran, 2014.)

Strong service brands are derived directly from the business strategy, in which the brand promise is aligned with the company's competitive advantage (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 208). Empirical studies show that when customers choose between intangible services and products, brand's name, size and reputation have a significant influence on the perception of the brand. Customers are also more willing to pay higher prices for brands that exhibit their characters, thus highlighting the importance of building the brand within the organisation. (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1999, 182.)

Elements of internal service brand management, illustrated in the Figure 3, is used as the foundation for this research due its strong emphasis on the organisational perspective. As discussed, when creating strong service brand, the internal brand building and management is key contributor for intangible offerings and in creating value.

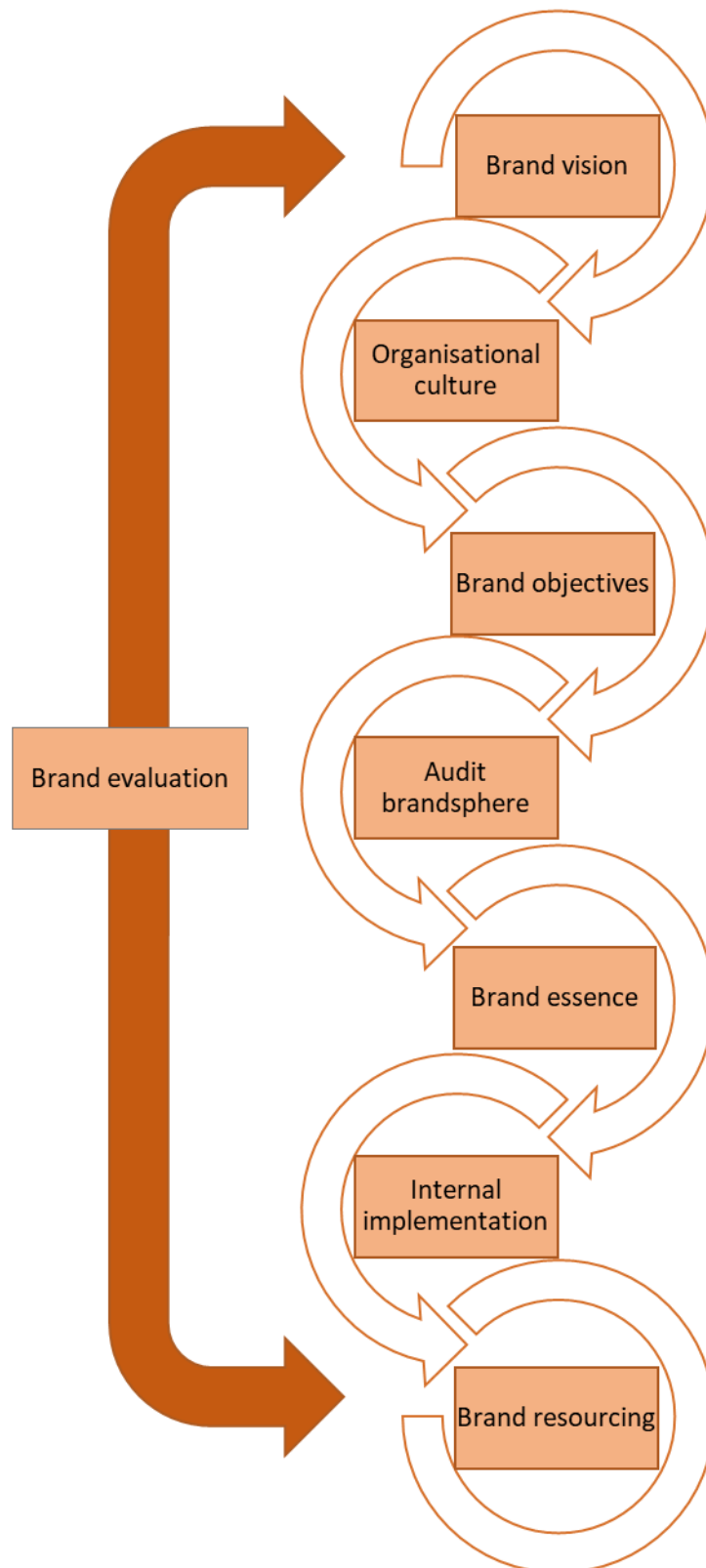


Figure 3. Elements of internal service brand management. (Adapted from De Chernatony's (2010, 100) The process of building and sustaining brands.)

In the following chapters, a more thorough examination will be taken for the Figure 3 Elements of internal service brand management to form a holistic perspective on the internal aspect of managing a service brand.

To promote a holistic approach to service brand management and development in the organisation, the internal team should focus on the different touchpoints the customers interact with the organisation throughout their journey. The critical touchpoints are:

- Pre-purchase touchpoints: Factors that shape customers decision to include the brand in their consideration.
- Purchase touchpoints: Factors that facilitate the transition from consideration to purchase.
- Post-purchase touchpoints: All factors after the purchase have a significant influence on the customer satisfaction.

(De Chernatony, 2010, 85.)

This approach also enables organisation to go through for example The elements of internal service brand management model, Figure 3, not as separate building blocks, but with a holistic perspective on how these individual blocks have an effect in the customer journey.

2.5.1 Cross-company service brand management

When delivering the brand promise, it is important to recognize that every employee in the organisation plays an important role – engaging with employees to deliver the service with effective communication and training (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 208). Integrating the brand's promise and values to organisational culture can have a positive effect on the employees, and in return, enhance the communication with the customers (De Chernatony, 2010, 12).

Brand management is a collaborative effort involving cross-functional teams and different levels of seniority. Engaging with vast amount of people, especially those who work closely with customer touchpoints, is important when creating an integrated brand management model. With a structured approach, all stakeholders, are more likely to understand the brand's objectives and their roles in supporting the brand and in the creation of brand equity. (De Chernatony, 2010, 99.)

With an inclusive approach, organisations can foster greater commitment from the employees in delivering the brand and bridging the gap between different brand objectives and perspectives in various departments or functions. Cross-company teams are crucial in managing and building service brands. (De Chernatony, 2010, 22.)

Reflecting Elements of internal service brand management model, Figure 3, forming a cross-company team serves as the foundational step for brand management and building process. It is crucial to have a well-planned and systematic approach for the process, especially in ensuring that employees and all stakeholders understand their roles in the delivery of the service and the brand promise. (De Chernatony, 2010, 99.)

2.5.2 Brand vision

A brand without a well-defined vision could be in danger of drifting. Without a clear direction, a brand facing difficulties and threats can be diverted from its path. A clear brand vision serves as a compass, not only guiding all employees but also inspiring to strive for greatness. (De Chernatony, 2010, 52.)

But it is important to make sure that the brand vision is comprehensible for all stakeholders. Although having an ambitious brand vision is great, this could lead into gaps between the vision, the culture, and the image. As Figure 4 demonstrates, these three factors are important to take into account when thinking about the brand vision. To maintaining and build brand vision, all stakeholders should be involved, and especially when designing brand management model, all the internal stakeholders are important. If brand vision is overly stretching from the managers side, the vision-culture gap might have negative consequences internally, eventually affecting the brand delivery as well. (De Chernatony, 2010, 87.)

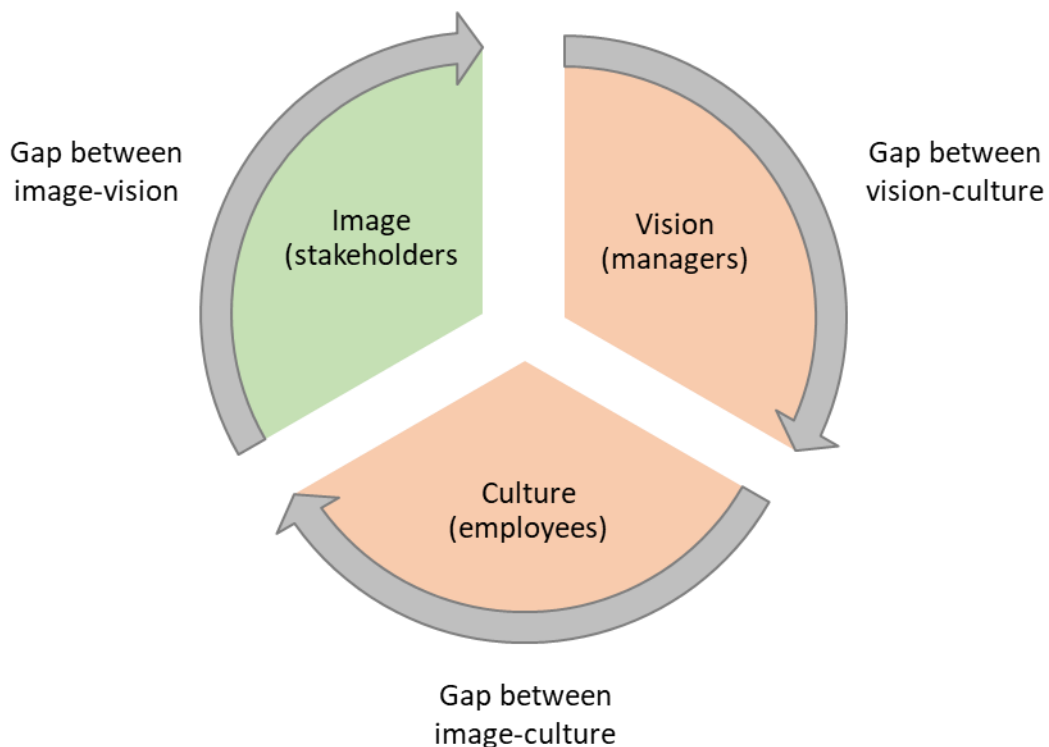


Figure 4. The brand's vision gaps. (Adapted from De Chernatony's (2010, 87) The corporate branding tool kit.)

A collaborative approach to brand vision, shifts the mind-set within the organisation from "management's responsibility" to "collective responsibility. This also mitigates the possible vision-culture gaps and enhances the commitment and engagement with employees. (De Chernatony, 2010, 121.)

The goal for the brand visioning process is to have a statement which is simple to understand and easy to communicate, internally and externally (De Chernatony, 2010, 120). Brand visioning phase is vital for guiding the management and building of brand's direction – ambitious but not excessive. A successful brand visioning includes three key elements: Envisioned future, purpose and values (De Chernatony, 2010, 99).

Envisioned future focuses on the outlook how the world and the business environment might look like in a decade. This enforces the organisation to take long-term view and challenges the short-term thinking, important in brand management. The key is to explore future and search the role the brand must play in shaping the future but also how it can develop to match future state. (De Chernatony, 2010, 124-125.)

Brand purpose is not all about maximizing profits or differentiation, although being a key contributor, but also for a business to have a reason to exist. Brand purpose also has a wider scope to motivate staff and how to make the world a better place. This element can be quite far reaching and incomprehensible, but one concrete way to grasp the brand purpose is to use the five why's method: In this exercise, employees from various levels are gathered to engage and discuss a question "We are all involved in producing and delivering this brand. Why is it important?". As each reply have been given, the practice continues asking "why is it important" for five rounds, to eventually give an indication of the brand purpose. This exercise encourages the participants to reflect on their contribution and purpose for the brand, and vice versa, how the brand purpose motivates them. (De Chernatony, 2010, 131-133.)

The third, and probably the key element in brand visioning, are the brand values. Brand values serve as the guide for expected behaviour within the organisation and from customers, leading to decided outcomes (De Chernatony, 2010, 101).

For brands, values can be divided into functional and emotional. Functional values are attributes like convenience, simplicity, adaptability, and security, while emotional values include integrity, dignity, pride, belonging, and independence. The alignment of these values with customers' lifestyle and needs have a great influence on the choice of brand. Even in business-to-business branding,

emotional values play a big role. (De Chernatony, 2010, 9). As discussed before, especially with service brand, values can have a pivotal impact on the perceived risk customer sees in choosing the service.

When organisation have brand values that support the brand vision, these is a greater likelihood succeeding also in higher level of customer satisfaction. The values importance is also highlighted beyond the customer perception. Firstly, values are driving force for internal behaviour, and secondly, values reflect personality traits, making the customers to choose brands that reflect their actual or desired personality. Identifying the core values for a brand is essential as they separate the brand in competition. (De Chernatony, 2010, 134.)

As discussed, customers are drawn to brands that reflect their own values, but also potential employees are attracted to organisation that share similar values. But to maintain clarity internally and externally, brands should focus on limited number of values, typically five. With a limited number of values, it is easier for employees to reflect on these and thus create consistency in the delivery of the service and brand promise. Also, for internal purposes, with low number of values there is less confusing between different departments and functions. (De Chernatony, 2010, 137.)

Therefore, brands need to have clear set of defined values throughout the organisation and to make sure that all the three key elements of brand visioning phase are taken into account internally and externally, comprehensive brand management is needed.

2.5.3 Organisational culture

The next phase in Figure 3 Elements of internal service brand management is the organisational culture. Values are big part of the organisational culture, and understanding organisational culture provides insights into the values that drive organisation – how the brand values are linked to the organisation (De Chernatony, 2010, 157-158).

In the previous chapter, the conclusion is that brand comprises functional and emotional values. Functional values can be copied by the competitors, but emotional values are harder to copy and thus this is more sustainable way of managing and building brands. As De Chernatony (2010, 159) has stated “it’s not so much what the customer receives, but rather how they receive it.” (De Chernatony, 2010, 159).

Brand values, worked in brand visioning phase, should seamlessly align with the organisational culture, making it easier to maintain and develop (De Chernatony, 2010, 158). Organisational culture has a significant influence on the brand’s competitive advantage (De Chernatony, 2010, 101).

Organisational culture is constructed by values, and as an example, when employee leaves the organisation, the brand's social structure should stay intact and thus the brand identity remain stable (De Chernatony, 2010, 166).

Organisational culture needs acknowledgement and appreciation, as it can strengthen or weaken the brand's development. For this reason, it is vital to evaluate the organisational culture – not only focusing on what customer receive but more importantly how they receive it. Brands with appropriate organisational culture, can create competitive advantage, illustrated in the Figure 5. (De Chernatony, 2010, 101.)

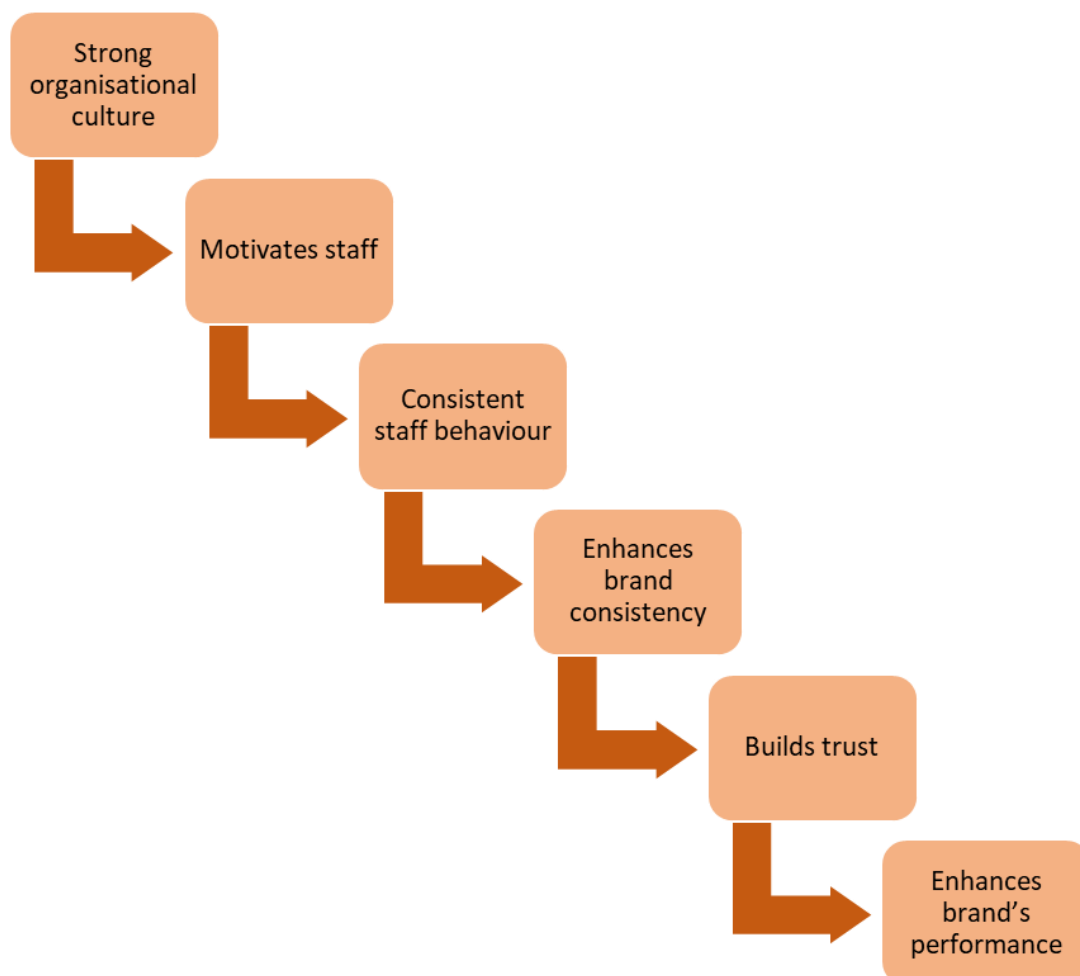


Figure 5. Elements of organisational culture. (Adapted from De Chernatony's (2010, 160) How a strong culture contributes to brand well-being.)

There are factors that facilitate and factors that impede organisations to work cohesively together. Facilitating factors include everything from internal communication to HR processes, but brand-related factors like leadership, cross-functional teams and projects play a big role. Organisations also

face impeding factors like silo-mentality, poor communication and trust issues between departments. To maintain a coherent organisational culture that support the brand values, the barriers must be minimised. (De Chernatony, 2010, 164.)

Although diversity in the organisational culture is natural, brand must thrive for cultural homogeneity to make sure the brand is not underperforming by different cultures pulling it in opposite directions (De Chernatony, 2010, 177). This is why involving a cross-company teams is essential to work on a collectively shared vision, assessing the elements advancing or hindering the brand vision, to ensure that the organisational culture is aligned with values and the brand vision (De Chernatony, 2010, 187).

Front line employee, in particular, can shape the perceptions of the service brand as they represent the organisation in the eyes of the customers serving as critical brand ambassadors (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 234). Thus, achieving high-quality service delivery is crucial, and organisation can influence this by focusing on recruitment, staff training, support systems, and retaining top talent (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 228-229).

Aligning the staff values is crucial for building stronger brands. Traditionally, recruitment has been focused on skills and knowledge to deliver functional values. But the key for a strong service brand is to align the employee values with company's values to build up on the organisational culture. (De Chernatony, 2010, 11.)

Marketing communication has been seen as the way to build functional and emotional values. As the service sector's influence over manufacturing sector has increased, brand impressions are mainly shaped by interactions with employees. Behaviour, appearance, tone of voice, beliefs and attitudes build the picture of the brand's values. This emphasizes today's landscape in building and managing stronger brands – it is not only what customer receive (functionalism) but rather how they receive it (emotional values). (De Chernatony, 2010, 9.)

In companies that have a strong organisational culture, consistent values encourage new employees' behaviour as well. These shared values persist in the organisation even though key people leave, and they motivate and empower employees. And as discussed, strong organisational culture, with shared values, gives the brand a competitive advantage especially on how the service is delivered, which is harder for competitors to emulate. (De Chernatony, 2010, 183-184.)

Gaining competitive advantage is especially hard in services, due to the intangible nature, but developing and managing organisational culture can improve the brand performance. Organisational culture guides employee behaviour and reflects the brand values, and by unique and warm delivery of the brand promise, competitive advantage can be gained. (De Chernatony, 2010, 187.)

2.5.4 Brand objectives

Following up on Figure 3 Elements of internal service brand management model, to transform the brand vision into tangible outcomes, it is important to define clear concrete short-term and long-term objectives to create a direction for the brand. (De Chernatony, 2010, 193;195.)

Short-term brand objectives mainly focus on typical marketing communication goals, like increasing sales within specific customer segment. To define short-term objectives, it is important to explore the broader long-term objectives, and dissect those. This involves analysing the customers, understanding their motivations and context in which the brand is used. (De Chernatony, 2010, 202.)

The starting point for defining a short-term objective is to think of a traditional marketing goal – specifying the expected level of sales for a customer group withing a defined timeframe. But to align this with long-term brand objective, it is crucial to clarify the customer segments who will benefit from the brand. This should align with the customer motivations for choosing the brand. (De Chernatony, 2010, 202.)

Long-term brand objectives should be seen an internal driving force, clear to understand and act upon by each employee (De Chernatony, 2010, 197). These objectives are rooted in the envisioned future, purpose and values, explored and decided in the brand vision phase (De Chernatony, 2010, 201). Strategic and overarching objectives can become very influential when they are collectively embraced and committed to throughout the whole organisation (De Chernatony, 2010, 198). Long-term objectives function as the driving force for brand development as well. They should be revisited consistently as the brand progresses, leading up to new and inspiring objectives (De Chernatony, 2010, 198).

Successful brands' long-term objectives inspire confidence, captivate imagination and increase focus within the organisation. These objectives stretch employees to think beyond their current capabilities, promoting creativity. The collective spirit within the organisation motivates employees and helps overcoming obstacles and achieving goals. (De Chernatony, 2010, 200.)

Long-term objectives can be seen as more strategic and focusing on achieving brand's comprehensive vision. These objectives provide a direction for the brand's growth over longer period of time and should align with brand vision components like envisioned future, purpose and values.

As studied, co-creating value is one of the key objectives for service organisations, and brand value is critical aspect in service brand management. And to understand value, it is important to discuss what is brand value in services.

Brand value signifies the perception that customers have about the benefits they receive from a brand, compared to the sacrifices they perceive to acquire and maintain that brand. These perceptions form the basis how customer sees the brand's value. The concept of brand value goes beyond just financial metrics. It is about what customer appreciate and desire from a brand. Thus, setting long-term objectives only as growing value can be inappropriate. Better approach could be to focus on the brand's values and customers' appreciation of those values. As discussed in the brand vision phase, identifying the brand's core value is essential and how those are consistently delivered. The consistency is important to ensure all stakeholders, internal and external, understand and can connect with the brand. If these brand values are not communicated and managed properly, it can lead to confusion, disappointment and decrease the probability of customers choosing the brand over competition. (De Chernatony, 2010, 207.)

To grow brand's value, constituents of value can be broken down into benefits and sacrifices, as illustrated in the Figure 6. This breakdown provides a clearer understanding of the brand's strengths and development areas. Benefits are categorised as attributes and outcomes, and sacrifices are categorised as monetary and non-monetary. (De Chernatony, 2010, 208.)

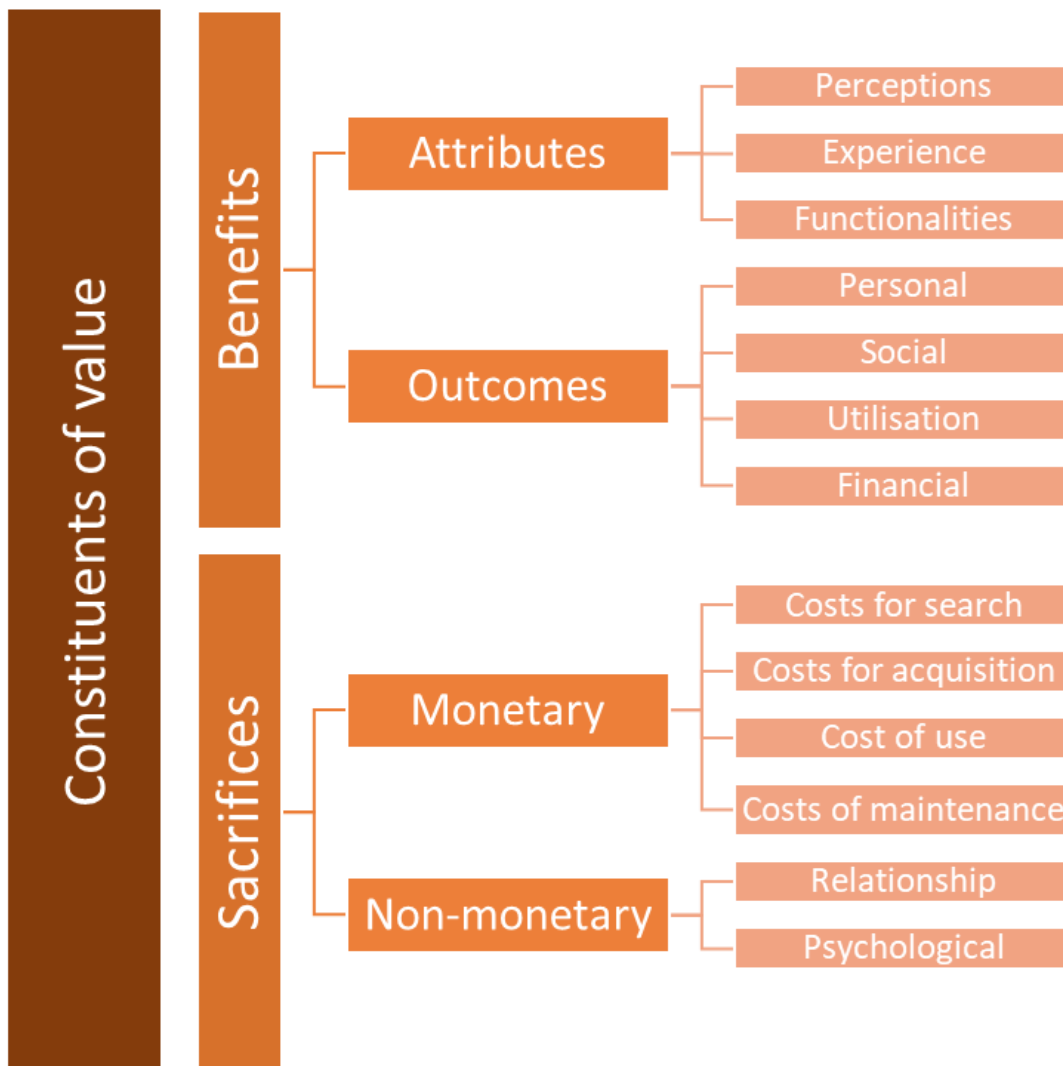


Figure 6. The brand's value – benefits and sacrifices. (Adapted from De Chernatony's (2010, 208) The constituents of value.)

To increase brand's value, organisation can have different strategies and approaches. This is a multifaced journey, in which many aspects from quality to customer experience and monetary sacrifices play a crucial role. On the benefits side, if customer perceives the brand's quality negatively, organisation should address this concern and make necessary improvements on the quality. Or if customers believe that the customer service is not in a good level, organisation should for example take a strategic decision to enhance sympathy and open more support touchpoints to increase brand value. On the sacrifices side, by understanding the customers search cost, brand can increase the value by making the brand more accessible and affordable, or if customer feel there is high monetary sacrifice of acquisition, brand could reduce by justifying the price. Customers perceptions can be shaped by multiple different factors. This requires a comprehensive strategy that takes into consideration wide variety of constituents. The key is to bread down these constituents

to understand which areas the brand can be improved and to make sure it is able to increase perceived brand value. (De Chernatony, 2010, 209-210.)

Long-term objectives can be seen as more strategic and focusing on achieving brand's comprehensive vision. These objectives provide a direction for the brand's growth over longer period of time and should align with brand vision components like envisioned future, purpose and values. These should also include the constituents of brand value as they play such an important role in long-term brand objectives. Short-term objectives should align with these long-term objectives and focus on the near-future goals like increasing sales and market share, improve customer engagement, launching new services or enhancing brand awareness. Both objectives play a crucial role in service brand management.

2.5.5 Auditing brandsphere

Auditing brandsphere comprehensively is an essential part of Figure 3 Elements of internal service brand management. This process serves to identify in which areas the brand might encounter the most significant challenges. Additionally, this phase also is used to re-evaluate brand objectives and the overarching brand vision, to ensure these align with the realities of the market. Illustrated in the Figure 7, auditing brandsphere investigates the five key forces that influence on a brand: the corporation, distributors, customers, competitors, and the macro environment including political, economic, social, technological and environmental factors. (De Chernatony, 2010, 102.)

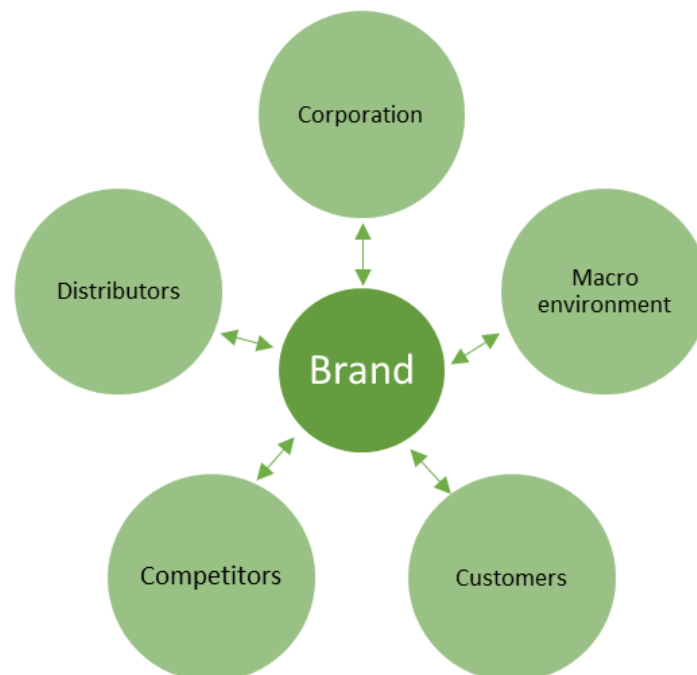


Figure 7. Forces in the brandsphere. (Adapted from De Chernatony's (2010, 215) The five forces of the brandsphere.)

This process explores how the brand can utilise opportunities and how the brand can protect itself from potential threats. Breaking down the long-term objectives into more manageable short-term objectives, supports creating brand strategies. But to have a comprehensive brand strategy, the organisation should conduct an in-depth audit of the forces that can enhance or impede the brand. (De Chernatony, 2010, 213.)

The first key force in auditing the brandsphere is the corporation itself. Auditing the corporation's impact on the current brand and the future brand, several critical factors should be addressed to:

- **Coordination:** The challenge of coordinating activities in large and diverse organisation. If organisation fails in coordination, it can result in underutilisation of brand resources and impede the communication between departments or functions.
- **Values:** Brand success is highly depended on the alignment of employee values with organisation values. To effectively deliver the brand, these values need to align with both the organisation's overarching values and specific brand values.
- **Employees' understanding and commitment:** For brand to thrive, it is critical that employees understand the brand's promise, are able deliver it and are committed to enacting it.
- **Department's culture:** Organisations can have unique cultural characteristics across different departments or countries. This can either promote unity or create countercultures that threaten the brand.
- **Heritage:** In general, people appreciate stability. For brands and organisations that have stood the test of time, can signal greater likelihood of surviving and create confidence for customers. This kind of heritage can also help to create competitive advantage.
- **Communications:** The quality of communication within the organisation should be investigated – Are the brand messages getting through to stakeholders or are they lost in noisy environment? The focus should be engaging in meaningful and effective communication. The brand is being communication in many ways internally and externally the organisation. Advertising, customer service, presentations, are some examples which quality should be explored.
- **Distinctive capabilities and core competencies:** Discovering the competitive advantages, core competencies and capabilities within the organisation that have supported successful brand delivery.
- **Employees Identification with organisation and its brand:** Employees' commitment and pride are crucial to brand's success. If employee relates well to an organisation and its brands, they are more likely to be proud of that as well. Employees are key stakeholders in the desired brand delivery, and thus with better identification with an organisation and its brands is important.

- **Brand citizenship behaviour:** Brand citizenship behaviour describe the employees behaviour that enhance the brand identity. This includes factors like showing positive attitude and empathy towards customers, recommending the brand at work and in social situations, and contributing to the adaption of the brand in changing market.
- **Relationship with stakeholders:** Brands and organisation thrive due the value of relationships with all stakeholders. It is vital to investigate any possible tension between the organisation and stakeholders.

(De Chernatony, 2010, 215-221.)

The second key force is distributors. For this research, distributors are out of scope, as Company X delivers its brand directly to customers. Yet, it is important to acknowledge the importance of the relationship between brand producers and distributors. Just as the brand producers have clear objectives and vision for their brand, so does the distributors. To encourage the mutual prosperity, a shared understanding must exist, for both parties to able to harness the brand for their benefit. (De Chernatony, 2010, 222.)

The third key force to audit are the customers. Understanding how the brand and its B2C and B2B customers co-exist and co-create the value is vital for brand management.

For B2C customers, auditing the patterns in buying behaviour by focusing on the central points:

1. How customers buy the brand and what role does the brand play in their life. Auditing the market by understanding the dynamics customers have with the brand and to consider how that is reflected in the brand strategy.
2. How tightly or loosely does the organisation control the brand. Should the brand have a loose control and let the community affect the brand identity or have a tight control and make sure the brand's identity is kept safe and secure in all touchpoints.
3. Customers' expectations of brands vary highly depending on how much they are involved in the brand buying process. For organisation, it is important to audit how well the brand fits in to customer's buying process.
4. Customers buy and use brands that match their need closest. Thus, it is vital for organisation to audit how well the brand fits for customers' needs.

(De Chernatony, 2010, 227-239.)

As discussed in this research, the assumption that B2B markets are purely based on rational buying behaviour is incorrect. Emotional considerations exist in B2B markets as well, and for auditing the B2B customers is as important as the B2C customers. Emotions are part of the B2B buying process in various ways: prestige, friendship, self-interest, trust, status or security. The key is to

audit B2B customers to understand the emotional influences in the brand selection and understanding the concept of perceived risk. (De Chernatony, 2010, 239-241.)

In highly competitive markets, as services usually are in, comparing brands is normal and important for customers. But it is important for organisations to evaluate their brand against the competitors. This must be done in order to stand out in the competition and in the sea of similarity, especially due to the intangible nature of services. The fourth key force in auditing the brandsphere are the competitors:

- **Defining the competitive set:** Recognising the fact the customers compare brands before they make their purchase decision. So, it is critical to assess the competitive landscape.
- **Differentiation:** Recognising that competitive advantage is more than functional features. The feeling, values and unique identity are key factors to differentiate in the market.
- **Strategic strength of competing brands:** Auditing and evaluating how competitors impact the brand's strength and positioning.

(De Chernatony, 2010, 241-250.)

Finally, the last key force is to audit the macro environment. Organisation should gather valuable information and routinely examine the macro-environment to understand the opportunities and threats brand might phase. This phase covers the political, economic, social, technological and environmental dimension. Brand's ability to anticipate change and having responsive strategies to response to it, supports the brand's capability to face the possible threats and to take advantage of the opportunities in the macro-environment. (De Chernatony, 2010, 250.)

Organisations are considerably better equipped and more educated by auditing the five forces of the brandsphere. In this audition, the original brand vision and objectives can be revisited to see if they align with the brand's environment. For brand management, this offers an important understanding of the brand's playing field, to grasp on the opportunities and to tackle threats – how adaptative the brand is and how it is able to evolve – mirroring the essence of service brand management. (De Chernatony, 2010, 250.)

2.5.6 Brand essence

After careful work of designing the brand vision, aligning it with the organisational culture, setting brand objective and auditing brandsphere, Figure 3 Elements of internal service brand management focus on the brand essence.

Brand essence can have many definitions and thus alternative approaches in building and managing it. This diversity gives flexibility and allows creativity for an organisation to align it appropriately with their business or ways-of-working. (De Chernatony, 2010, 265.)

Barnham (2009) have presented an argument defining brand essence, which challenges the conventional way of thinking. Barnham argues that instead of considering the brand having an essence, it should be viewed as being an essence. Brands evolve and adapt to customers and changing environments, rather than being static entities. When a new brand enters the market, the new positioning often causes existing brands to re-evaluate and potentially re-think their position. The idea of brands being an essence, aligns with the adaptable nature of brands in changing market environments. (De Chernatony, 2010, 268.)

Acknowledging that brand should be recognised as being essences, different ways of gaining insights into the core nature of the brand can be viewed. Brands' can have many essences, unique attributes, which contribute to the entirety. There are different models that can be used to characterising a brand, which gives the brand management a lot of alternatives. (De Chernatony, 2010, 271.)

One way of approaching the brand essences, is the brand essence pyramid, illustrated in the Figure 8, that supports in creating a clear and compact brand promise. Brand pyramid offers a flexible and adaptable framework, which visualises the brand's core characteristics, like brand's core attributes, benefits, emotional rewards, values and personality traits. Brand pyramid is a versatile framework, and as discussed flexible way to accommodate individuals diverse thinking and ideas. The strength of this approach is its capability of linking brand planning to brand positioning and brand personality, to form a unified brand experience. This ensures everyone are aware of the brand's functional and emotional values. (De Chernatony, 2010, 288.)

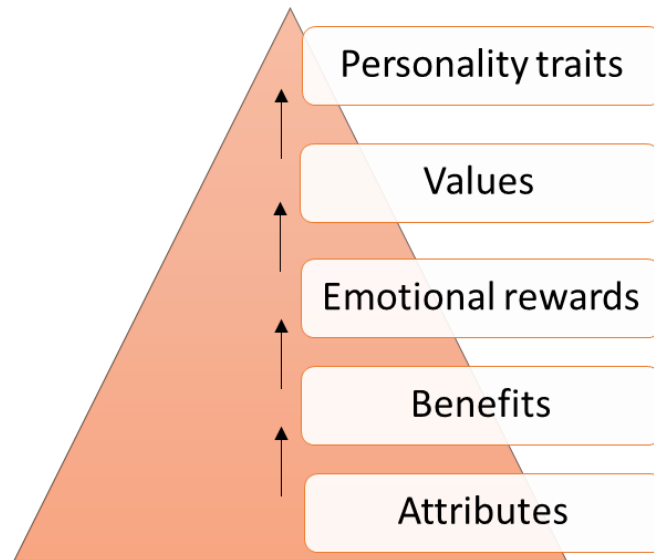


Figure 8. Brand essence pyramid. (Adapted from De Chernatony's (2010, 288) The elements of brand essence using the brand pyramid.)

Jones (2000) has proposed a valuable approach to characterise brand's essence for communication, illustrated in the Figure 9. This model illustrates how brand communicates its messages on different levels. A structured approach gives valuable insights for brand management about the brand's characteristics. This model's strength lies in its ability to inspire creative ideas about the brand's future direction and to analyse how different brands convey their messages. (De Chernatony, 2010, 275.)

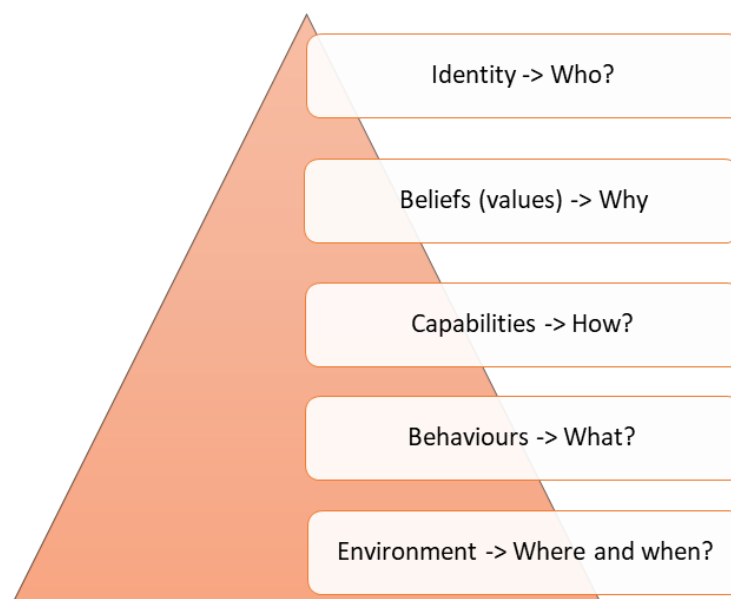


Figure 9. Brand essence communication pyramid. (Adapted from Jones' (2000) Brand identity triangle (De Chernatony, 2010, 274).)

Completing the brand pyramid exercises, with various individual insights, organisations can collaboratively craft a clear and compact brand promise (De Chernatony, 2010, 290).

Brand essence conceptualises the brand core, the central nature of a brand, which can be effectively communicated to all stakeholders. It isn't an abstract concept, but a clear representation of the uniqueness of a brand and how employees can contribute to delivering the brand promise – a single, word, phrase or sentence that captures the most important aspects of a brand. (De Chernatony, 2010, 258-259.)

Brand essence is a diverse concept with many definitions. It is a tool that allows organisations to capture the core characteristics, the essences, of the brand to form a brand promise easy to understand and delivery by employees and perceived attractive by customers.

2.5.7 Internal Implementation and brand resourcing

To employ and utilize the brand essence, internal implementation and brand resourcing are essential steps. These are the two final phases in Figure 3 Elements of internal service brand management. Firstly, this involves structuring the organisation to align with brand delivery – designing the internal processes for capitalising the core competencies. (De Chernatony, 2010, 102.)

As discussed, it is vital to have profound understanding of the brand within all-levels of the organisation. This enables to design right processes and to promote the desired behaviour which bring the brand alive (De Chernatony, 2010, 294). Brand delivery happens in many different forms and touchpoints, and each part delivery system has an influence on the brand's functional and emotional values (De Chernatony, 2010, 295).

When designing the internal delivery system, it is important to take into account that not everyone in the organisation is as aware of the company's strategy as one could assume. Only a minority of companies have managers who can summarise their company's strategy briefly. A clear and understandable strategy foster the likelihood of aligning the brand delivery system with strategy. The strategy should address three components: objectives, scope and competitive advantage. The objective should be to clearly identify what is to be achieved within specific timeframe. The scope clarifies the competitive territory where the brand operates, and the competitive advantage define how the brand differentiate itself in the competition. Competitive advantage includes also the value proposition and the alignment of internal activities to deliver it. (De Chernatony, 2010, 301.)

Implementing brand in organisation, it essential that all employees understand the brand promise, to ensure the brand experience is the same for all stakeholders in all touchpoints (De Chernatony, 2010, 303). For service brands, describing the delivery process is more complex due to its

intangible nature (De Chernatony, 2010, 304). This challenge requires different and unique approaches.

In services, there are wide variety of people adding value to the overall customer experience and brand delivery. Service blueprints help the organisation to break down the service process into four levels:

- **Customer actions:** Understanding all the stages customer go through as they interact with the brand. From consideration, to buying and consuming, and to evaluation.
- **On-stage contact employees' actions:** All the visible interactions employees have with customers.
- **Back-stage contact employees' actions:** All the unseen (for customers) activities supporting the employees.
- **Support process:** The internal support services that are hidden from customers.

(De Chernatony, 2010, 304-305).

Service blueprint provides a clearer understanding of customers' roles in the service delivery process and how employees and support system contribute to that. This helps organisations to evaluate the activities and to how to improve brand experience. As studied, employees should be encouraged to align their behaviour in service delivery with brand values. As an example, if one of brand's core values is sustainability, that value should be present in all parts of the service and employees should make environmentally conscious choices in their service encounter. This behaviour reinforces the brand's core values. Service blueprint helps examining the activities in all four levels of the service process, to identify what needs to be changed or improved for better delivery of service brand promise. (De Chernatony, 2010, 305.)

With service brands, customers have typically more interactions with the brand compared to goods brands. These interactions involve human contacts quite often, but it is important to note that today more digital touchpoints are present, in which many same principles of brand experience apply. With each service encounter, customer engages with the brand and forms perceptions. The service blueprint helps managers to collaborate with customer-facing employees (or systems) to ensure all touchpoints and encounters create the desired impressions and evaluate how well they align with the brand's values. Taking a holistic approach to service encounters, organisations are more capable of making the brand more coherent. (De Chernatony, 2010, 308.)

Implementing the brand pyramid within the organisation, a fundamental aspect is to ensure all employees understand and commit to brand values. This is critical especially with service brands, where the brand has multiple touchpoints to interact with the customers. Delivering an authentic

and consistent brand experience is in heart of brand resourcing. Adopting values-driven approach to employee management, less supervision is needed from the managers. (De Chernatony, 2010, 310.)

Genuine value brands are the ones whose employees embrace the values and translates them to service delivery. Superficial value brands on the other hand are the ones whose employees are less committed to brand values and merely act the expected behaviour. The issue with superficial value brands is, that customer tend to see through the facade. This leads to disconnecting with the brand, and as studied, it is highly harmful for service brands. With genuine value brands, employees selected and retained based on their alignment with the brand values is a significant asset. Recruitment of new talent that seeks harmony with potential employee's values and brand's values in the brand pyramid have a significantly higher likelihood of brand success. (De Chernatony, 2010, 313-314.)

Different departments or functions within the organisation may interpret brand's values in different ways. This can lead to conflicting brand promises given to customers. To mitigate these issues, organisations should encourage bringing employees together from various departments to discuss and the different interpretations. This can be seen as a platform to harmonise brand's values, based on the previous phases in the process, across various departments. This should enhance consistency in brand experience and staying true and authentic to the values. (De Chernatony, 2010, 316.)

2.6 Brand equity

As discussed in the previous chapters, employees' ability to deliver brand values and the brand promise in customer interactions has a major influence in creating strong service brands. The relationship between a brand and customers are based on functional and emotional values, and employees play a key role creating meaning for the brand based on these values. New approaches in marketing literature also recognise and highlight the employees' role in building strong service brands. Successful service brand models don't only focus on the external aspects of the brand, which can be seen as a more traditional marketing communications and branding like in consumer goods, but also the internal, organisational aspects, which together create an optimal delivery system for the brand promise. But the objectives in branding goods and services are quite similar; Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010, 378) describe that: "The focus is on building and leveraging the brand equity in order to build a strong relationship between the brand and its customers". (Kimpakorn & Tocquer 2010, 378.)

There are many definitions of brand equity related to consumer goods or service brands. Most definitions are based on two main perspectives: either financial or marketing. Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010, 379) literature review points out that many of brand equity definitions have some similarities but most of them have been defined using different perspectives (financial or marketing) and constructs (dimensions). For example, branding literature emphasises mainly marketing communication to be the major source of brand equity, taking a clear marketing perspective on measuring and developing brand equity (Kimpakorn & Tocquer 2010, 380).

However, Berry (2000) and Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010) suggest, that service brand equity is based on effective brand communications and interactions between service brand and customers, illustrated in Figure 10 And Figure 11.

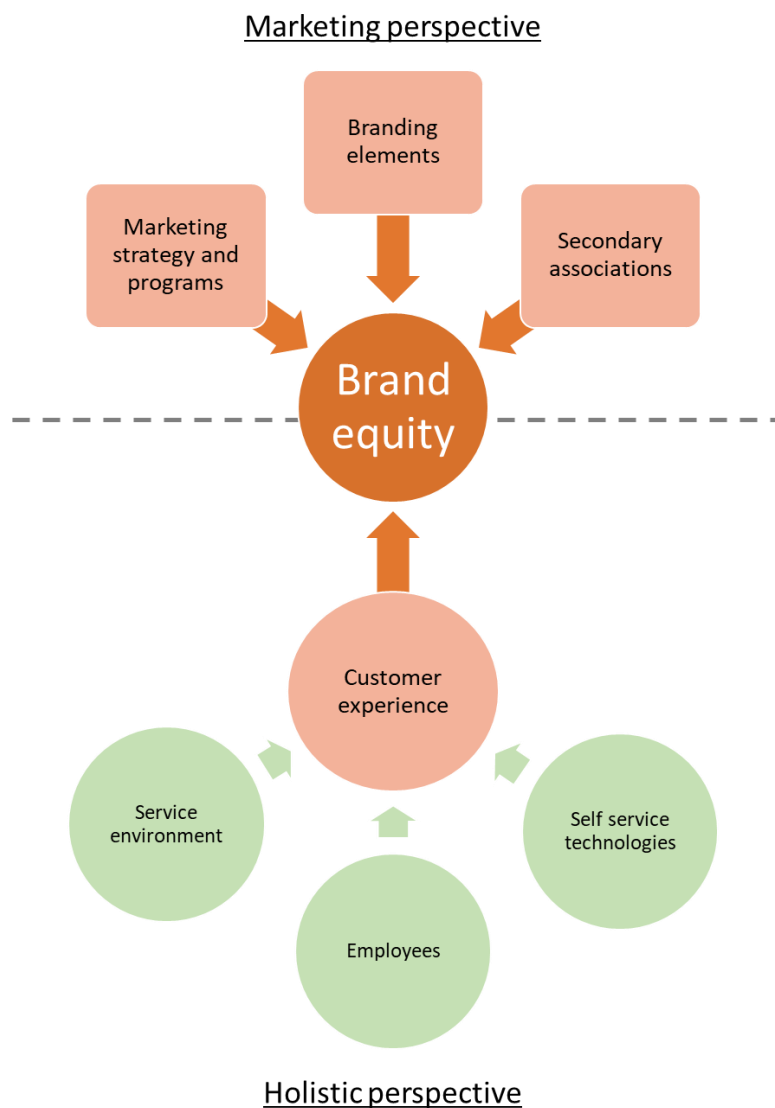


Figure 10. Sources of brand equity. (Adapted from Kimpakorn and Tocquer's (2010, 381) Sources of brand equity in services.)

Explained in the previous chapter, brand awareness and brand meaning both contribute to brand equity and are derived from multiple internal and external factors directly and indirectly. Although brand meaning's contribution can be seen more substantial, brand equity can be defined as the "differential effect of brand awareness and meaning combined on customer response to the marketing of the brand". Brand equity itself can be positive or negative. (Berry 2000, 130.)

Hayes (22.2.2021), for example, describe that with positive brand equity, brands are able to charge more for their services and customers are more willing to pay for it. Thus, a positive service brand equity enables a direct relation to brand's margin and profit. The intangible nature of services means that service brands in the same industry mainly competes on brand equity.

Service brand equity can be represented by combination of four differential attributes, illustrated in the Figure 11. Employing all these attributes service brands are more likely to build and maintain a strong brand, eventually increasing the value in the balance sheet. The attributes are internalising the brand, making an emotional connection, determining your own fame and daring to be different. (Berry 2000, 130-131; De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 233.)

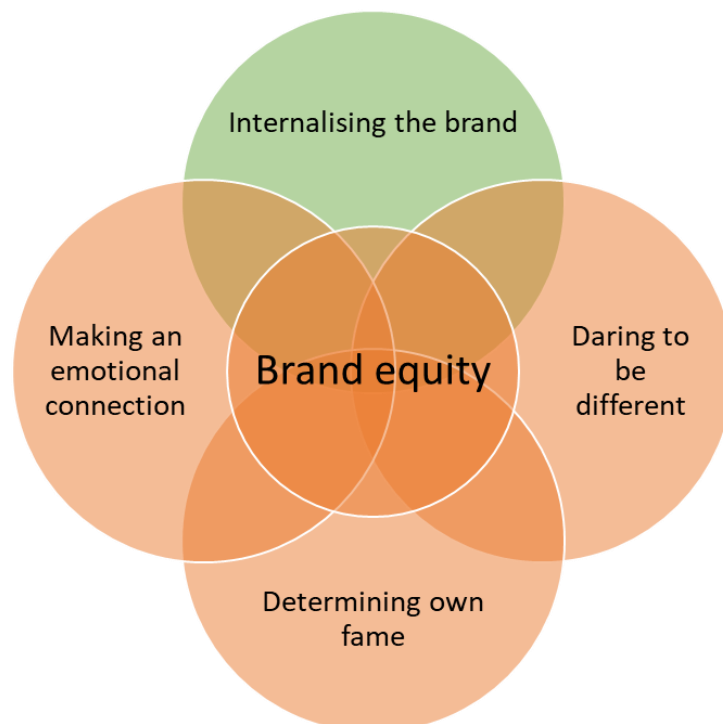


Figure 11. Creating brand equity. (Adapted from Berry's (2010, 381) Cultivating brand equity.)

The Service Brand Management chapter has emphasised the importance of integrating and internalising the service brand throughout the whole organisation. Especially in service brands, employ-

ees are in the key position when the service is co-produced with the customers. The intangible nature of services means it is just as intangible for employees as they for customer. Thus, it is vital to internalise the brand with its values and promises to ensure the brand delivery throughout the customer journey and also to ensure employees ability to perform successfully and consistently. But for a service brand to be successful, the added value from a service has to be relevant to customers and not only to brand's managers (De Chernatony 2010, 53). As discussed, competitors in the service sector are able to emulate the functional values, but emotional values and how the customers receive the service are harder to copy, and therefore internalising the service brand should be a top priority. Also, with negative customer experiences, service brands have a more difficult or even an impossible task to compensate it with marketing communications. On a contrary, competitors are not able to imitate exceptional customer experience, even with exceptional marketing communications. (Berry 2000, 135; De Chernatony et al. 2011, 233.)

Customers' emotions have a big influence on their buying decisions. Great service brands acknowledge this and evoke feelings of closeness, affection, and trust, going beyond the rational and economic level in decision making and service encounters. The true values of the service brand only emerge during the service encounter. Reflecting customers' values enable service brands to connect with them emotionally, but this also means that the brand's internal values must be managed and internalised. (Berry 2000, 134-135; De Chernatony et al. 2011, 233.)

Daring to be different is a conscious attempt of differentiating the brand from competitors and creating a mental picture for customers. This element is controlled in the customer experience and the presented brand blocks in the Figure 2. These blocks are also the ones, in which the brand can impact the creation of the mental picture for the customers. Daring to be different also help to make tangible cues for customers, in an otherwise intangible and homogeneous market. The cues can be the ways the facilities have been designed, employee appearances, marketing communication content etc. Different ways to differentiate the brand from the competition. (Berry 2000, 131-132; De Chernatony et al. 2011, 233.)

Creating valuable and recognisable service offering is in the heart of strong service brands. Differentiating the service brand from competition with better service, creating awareness with effectively telling the brand's story using marketing communications and developing the customer experience through internal and external aspects is to "determine your own fame". The service brand itself should holistically deliver the core reason for being. The service brand should mean valuable for employees and for customer, and eventually create brand equity. (Berry 2000, 132-134; De Chernatony et al. 2011, 233.)

Measuring brand equity is a complex process, with numerous approaches available. Organisations measure brand equity in multiple different ways but Stengel, Lamberton, and Favero (2023) recommends measuring it as structured combination of four key elements: familiarity, regard, meaning, and uniqueness:

- **Familiarity:** Familiarity explores the degree that customers feel they know and understand the brand, beyond mere brand recognition, transforming awareness to genuine understanding.
- **Regard:** Regard measures how much customers like and respect the brand.
- **Meaning:** Meaning assesses the brand's relevance in customer's lives. Meaningful brands connect with the customers in their needs and desires, becoming an integral part of their daily (or other period of time, depending on the service) experiences.
- **Uniqueness:** Uniqueness focuses on the differentiation – how customers distinguish the brand from the competition.

(Stengel, Lamberton, & Favero, 2023.)

Using these four elements together means that organisation can measure how the brand resonate with customers emotionally, a critical driver for decision-making. Emotions like love, commitment, respect, hate, indifference, and contempt have a substantial influence on the customer's purchasing choices, consumption, usage, price sensitivity, repeat purchases and referrals. Emotions account for more than 90 % of customers decision making, which also relates to both B2C and B2B contexts. These four elements serve as the foundation for evoking emotions and making a lasting impact in competitive landscape and contribute to financial growth. (Stengel, Lamberton, & Favero, 2023.)

Positive service brand equity is created from the combined result of brand awareness and brand meaning, as illustrated in the Figure 2, and as Berry (2000, 136) states "Strong brands increase customers' trust of invisible products while helping them to better understand and visualize what they are buying". Service brand's continuous efforts of cultivating brand equity can be achieved by focusing on internalising the brand to enable employees to produce the service, connecting emotionally with the customers, defining the reason for being and to consciously attempting to differentiate the brand from competitors. (Berry 2000, 136.)

By aligning the service encounters and the brand promise, a service brand can create trust and credibility. When the brand values derived from internal service brand management and are linked to brand awareness and brand meaning, emotional connections can be built with the customers. When the brand promise is aligned with the brand experience containing emotional connection, service brands create positive brand equity. (Fisher & Vallaster 2010, 124.)

2.7 Brand evaluation

To improve the service experience, increasing the brand meaning, organisations must narrow the expected and perceived brand experience. Focusing on holistic service brand management, making sure presented brand aligns with the service values, training employees to be more responsive and helping them delivering the brand promise, organisations are more equipped in narrowing this gap. (De Chernatony et al. 2011, 215.)

As studied, the success of service brands is depended on careful and thorough process of brand management, as highlighted in the Figures 2 and 3. Every stage in this proves involves crucial factors on how the brand should evolve and achieve specific objectives.

Measuring and evaluating service brands is not a simple task. It is a multi-dimensional approach with complex entities, which harmonises both business-based and customer-based criteria. This viewpoint aligns with the overall scope of service brand management, in which both internal and external factors influence in brand performance. For evaluating service brands, organisations must have a broad set of metrics, enabling to make necessary adjustment, see where the brand is underachieving and measure the performance. The evaluation should align with the brand management process, as illustrated in the Figure 3. (De Chernatony 2010, 349-351.)

Brand management elements	Internal evaluation	External evaluation
Brand vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the strength and clarity of leadership's communication of the brand's vision. Assess staff awareness and inspiration regarding the brand vision. Evaluate how well staff understands and aligns with brand's values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The brand's envisioned future. The brand's impact on improving the industry/market. External stakeholders' ability to recognise and appreciate brand's values
Organisational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The alignment of organisational culture with brand vision. The diversity and strength of subcultures. The recruitment strategies and alignment with brand values and culture. Culture's strengths and adaptabilities. 	
Brand objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectiveness of objectives for driving change. Staff commitment and awareness. Appropriateness of the objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement of short-term and strategic long-term objectives
Brand essence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff commitment and ability to work as brand ambassadors. Consistencies of brand pyramid across all touchpoints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market recognition of the brand's positioning, personality and promise.
Internal implementation and brand resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to retain key talents and training. Effectiveness of the value delivery system. Employer brand. Team alignment with brand's identity. Quality of relationships with key stakeholders. Empowerment strategies for staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectivity of brand's unique attributes translation to tangible customer benefits. Brand's level of relationship with customers. Consistency and quality of the service. Customers level of trust on the brand and its reliability and credibility. Legally and regulatorily compliant. Recognition and value of the emotional benefits customers associate the brand with. Realistic customer expectations and consistency to fulfil them. Cohesiveness of brand experiences across all touchpoints.

Figure 12. Brand evaluation process. (Adapted from De Chernatony's (2010, 350-352) A holistic approach to brand evaluation.)

Figure 12 summarises this holistic evaluation model, emphasising the need for multi-dimensional approach to evaluate brand's performance. Evaluating and assessing each block of the brand management process, as illustrated in the Figure 3, and aligning with the brand's strategy. (De Chernatony, 2010, 350-351.)

Reviewing the holistic approach to brand evaluation includes a lot of data. De Chernatony (2010, 353-357), Appendix 2, has listed the guiding evaluation questions, summarized into five categories, based on the brand management process: brand vision, organisational culture, objective, brand essence, and implementation and brand resourcing. These questions also include the internal and external perspectives, though mainly focusing on the internal ones. It is important to note, that for external brand studies, there multiple different ways to measure and evaluate the service brand as well. The questionnaire can be answered by scoring each question on five-point scale. This results in an overall evaluation, which can be presented as a bar chart, illustrated in the Figure 13. By analysing the results in each category, organisations are able to find areas that require attention the most. The evaluation process should be regular and continuous, as service brand management in general, to help make comparisons and identify trends for further actions. (De Chernatony 2010, 357-359.)

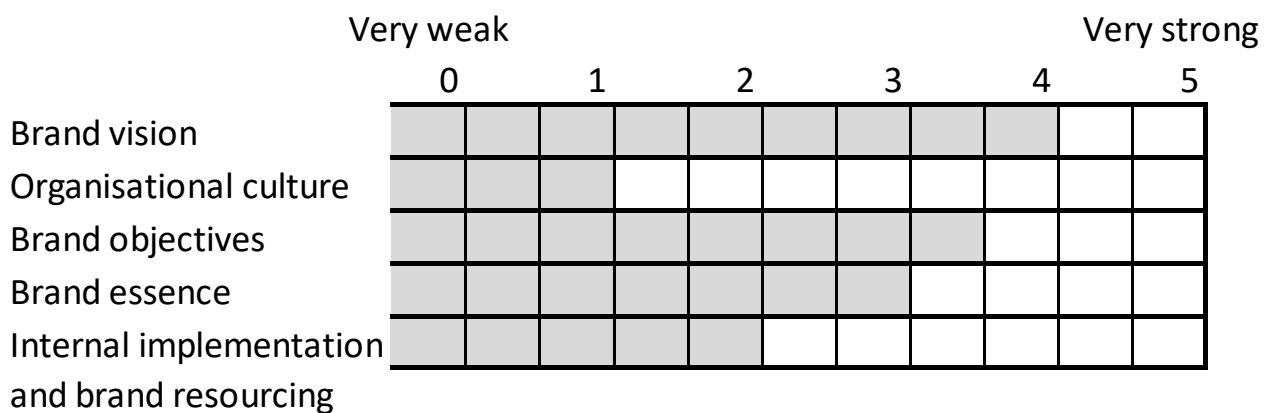


Figure 13. Hypothetical brand evaluation scale. (Adapted from De Chernatony's (2010, 358) A template for the brand health bar chart (hypothetical example).)

3 Research approach

The research framework serves as the structural backbone of the study and to organise the research methods and objectives. This chapter demonstrate the research objectives and problems, and the research framework and methodologies for the thesis. In this chapter, the author has included insights from previous works, such as texts and analyses, which were originally developed for coursework while participating in the course Applied Design Research.

3.1 Research-driven case study

The objective of this thesis is to answer to the main research question: What is the visioned service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity? As the goal is to produce new knowledge and to develop a practical model for the organisation, research-based development approach is selected to guide the research work. In research-based development, the work is guided by practical goals, and to outline, develop and even implement solutions. In comparison, scientific research is guided theoretical goals, thus differentiating the two approaches: “Do we want to produce new theory about phenomena or achieve also improvements or new solutions in practice?” To be able to address the main research problem, the research must have a practical goal to produce new knowledge and to have a practical development task by evaluating both perspectives, the practice and the theory. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti [S.A.], 10-12.)

Research-driven development may not always have a clearly defined specific problem in the beginning but can evolve as the research advances. One clear objective of research-based development is to develop existing knowledge and to generate new knowledge in specific area or problem, seeking to generate new models for example. Research-driven development structures the research journey into eight stages. The process starts with clarifying the target and the goal of the research, by identifying problems or practical challenges that should be addressed to. As discussed, this problem can evolve during the study. The second stage focuses on gathering data and background information from the organisation and from the theoretical framework to gain a deeper understanding on the research subject and the organisation. In the third stage, a more clarified goal for a development task can be defined, based on the findings in data gathering from the organisation and the literature. Typically, the development tasks are a concrete output, as in this case, service brand management model. Stage four connects the previous phases together to form a knowledge base for the actual development task. Combining the data gathered so far, the theoretical framework and the findings withing the organisation, different perspectives can be included for the development task. The fifth stage focuses on selecting the suitable and applicable research approach. The research approach helps aligning the objectives of the research to the

development work. Methods that support the development efforts, like interviews and surveys, are decided in the sixth stage. For development projects, it is common to share to share results while conducting the research. In this seventh stage, the final published report might not be the sole focus, but rather sharing insights throughout the whole research. The last stage, stage eight, centres on the evaluation of the research and the development work. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti [S.A.], 15-27.)

Based on the research-driven development structure, the thesis work can be organised into different stages, demonstrated in the Figure 14.

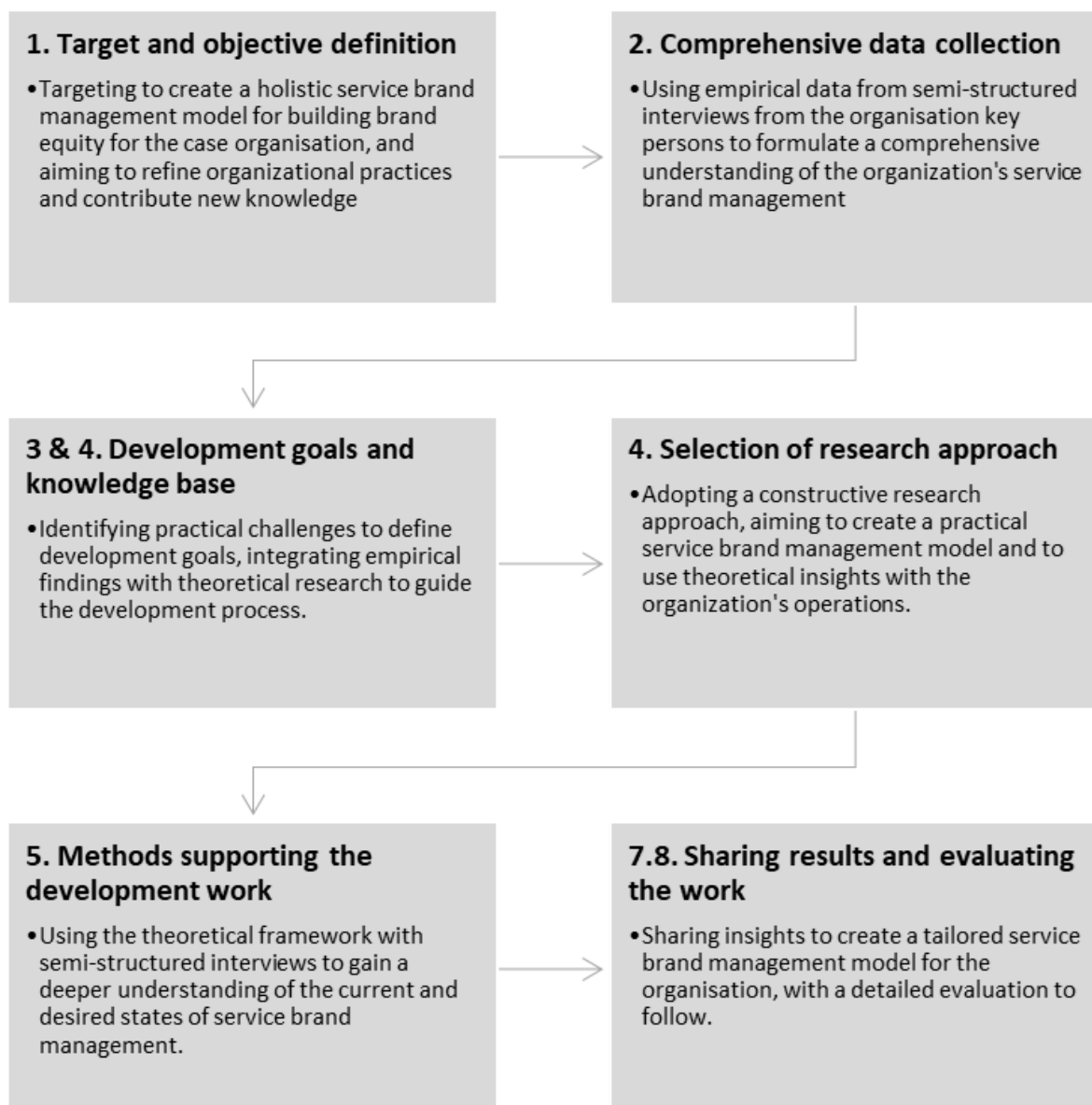


Figure 14. Research-driven development structure.

1. Defining targets and objects: As the case organisation is in the service business, managing the service brand holistically is an essential part in building brand equity for the company and the customer. The object for this research is to study the service brand management in the organisation, and based on the identified practical issues, to develop existing knowledge and to generate new knowledge.

2. Gathering data and background information: To gather a holistic view for the research, background information on the organisation is gathered through empirical data (work life) and semi-structure interviews with the managerial staff in the organisation, and a deeper understanding on the subject matter is collected through relevant research.

3. & 4. Development goals and knowledge base: For this research, defining the development goals have been acknowledged within the organisation by identifying the practical challenges in day-to-day work empirically. To actually study critically where the organisation is currently with service brand management and how the organisation sees it going forward, along with gathering a deeper understanding of the theoretical scope, findings enable to clarify the research problem and bring out new development goals. This phase is important in building the knowledge base, in which the most central theories and literature are gathered. The research problem is studied with the help of research questions, which guide the journey towards the development goal. The development goal for this thesis is to create a service brand management for the organisation. As discussed, the research problem itself can evolve throughout the research with new findings from the data and within the organisation.

5. Research approach: For research-based development, selecting a suitable research approach that helps connecting the research to actual the development work is in essential. When developing a tangible model, as in this thesis, constructive research is the most suitable approach. In constructive research approach the objective is to affect and develop a concrete entity, while in contrast action research approach goal is to change people's action. Discussed more in the Chapter 1.2, the goal of this research is to produce new insights and to develop the existing knowledge by creating an applicable service brand management model for the organisation to use and implement, and thus scoping out the implementation (action research approach). The fundamental element of this research is to tie the theoretical framework and the current operational set-up in the organisation, which is a typical characteristic in constructive research approach. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti [S.A.], 22)

6. Methods supporting the development work: Having a well-established knowledge base requires additional methods for the development work. In this research, background information on the organisation and theoretical framework are not sufficient to develop a holistic model service

brand management. Supporting methods are needed to generate deeper understanding on what is the current state of the service brand management and also what is the visioned state. For this research, semi-structured interviews, discussed more in the chapter 3.2, are used to gather more data to support the development work. The process of analysing the semi-structured interviews is described in chapter 4.1.

7. & 8. Sharing results and evaluating the work: In research-based development, there is usually a strong emphasis in sharing results throughout the process. The goal for this research to create new understanding and a concrete service brand management model for the organisation to implement at a later stage. Although the focus on sharing results is done throughout the process, the sole object for this thesis is to utilise the information gathered within the organisation and theoretical framework to produce the model. Chapter 5 shares the results of the empirical analysis with theory validation and evaluates the development work.

3.2 Interview as a data collection method

To support the development work, interviews can be used to create a well-established knowledge base and to build the data. Although having a profound understanding on the organisation from within, interviews generate a deeper understanding on the subject matter and can be used as the base for the development, especially when studying the gap analysis.

There are variety of options available for interviews, and the interview types can be broadly categorised into three main approaches: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. In structured interviews, the questions are presented in the same order for each interviewee. This approach ensures consistency and unity in the data collection process. Semi-structure interviews allow an opportunity to spontaneous follow-up questions when interesting topics occur. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has a list of predetermined questions, but this approach allows an opportunity to spontaneous follow-up questions when interesting topics occur. Unstructured interviews focus on a more general topic or theme with only a few, if any, predefined questions. (Cassell 2019, 2.)

When selecting the right interview type, it is important to link it to the purpose of the research - what is the object and the goal. Structured interviews stand out in quantitative data gathering, while semi-structured and unstructured interview approaches are more beneficial for qualitative data gathering. Also, the dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee affects the interview approach; structured approach tends to reduce the bias, while the semi-structured and unstructured approaches require interviewer to take a more active role shaping the discussion. (Cassell 2019, 2.)

The primary purpose of the structured interview approach is to create an objective basis for comparison in the data analysis (Cassell 2019, 4). This approach especially minimizes bias and ensures consistency in data collection, which can be significant especially in situations where the interviewer and interviewee have a relationship. However, this approach can also limit the scope and the possibilities to explore the topic, which can prove to be essential for the development task.

Unstructured interviews can be characterized as complex due to its unstructured nature. The conversation could steer off-topic and the approach is highly depended on the interpretations of both parties on the topic. The more structured an interview is, the less bias may occur, thus making this interview approach potential to be less objective. The complexity of unstructured interviews and the potential being less objective is a limiting factor for selecting this approach to support the development work. (Cassell 2019, 2.)

Semi-structured interview approach provides the optimal balance for recognising the key issues in the organisation in service brand management as well as offering a suitable platform to engage in discussions for a specific topic or new finding during the interview. Semi-structured interviews enable the exploration of individual and organisational narratives (Cassell 2019, 9). The ability to follow-up with a specific topic during the interview, could possibly unlock new thinking and discussions, and help the data gathering. Semi-structured interview approach is mostly used when studying change and identity, as is the objective for this research (Cassell 2019, 9).

Interviews play a key role in this research. Studying and understanding different departments perspectives on service brand management and the ways-of-working in managing it. The goal of the interviews is to gather quality data from various sources and combine that to the theoretical and practical knowledge of service brand management. Getting insights and gathering data from managers who influence the service brand management in different departments and how they see the service brand management holistically in future, guides the gap analysis work – describing the current processes and the desired state.

The semi-structured interviews conducted via MS Teams provided a valuable platform to gather in-depth data and a deeper understanding about the organisation's service brand management. The interviews were originally scheduled for an hour, but the flexibility of the format and interviews willingness allowed interviews to extend that timeframe also. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed interviewees to share insights and experiences for the topics. The choice of interviewing six employees, mainly managers from different departments, was made as the interviews progressed. As long as there were new insights to be found, the further interviewees were needed for the data collection. Also, it was important to be able to gather data from various fields and departments within the organisation.

The main reason for selecting semi-structured interviewees for this research is ability that the approach offers to also follow-up on interesting topics or new findings during the interviews. Semi-structured interviews' goal is to gather comprehensive data from various managers who are involved in the service brand management. As the organisation might not be too familiar with a structured service brand management or the concept itself might be too vague, semi-structured interviews also provide an approach in which the interviewer can guide the interview with predetermined questions and still allow discussion to go further. With unstructured interviews, the direction of the interview is quite dependent on the interpretations of the topic from both parties and with structured interview, room for researching the topic further is limited.

Valuable preliminary tools and guidance for structuring the interviews and creating the interview questions: Appendix 1.

3.3 Methods of data analysis

Since the semi-structured interviews are the primary source of data, qualitative approach is used to analyse the data. In qualitative approach, both inductive and deductive reasoning are used. To begin with, inductive process takes place to in which patterns, themes and categories emerge from the data. As the development work progresses with new ideas and additional data, deductive process takes place. In many cases, new additional data is needed to confirm new ideas during the development work. Qualitative research runs simultaneously with data collection and doesn't happen in single phase. The key object for qualitative approach is to find themes and organising data to support the development work. (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 231.)

When analysing multiple interviews, which in semi-structured interview approach can vary, the key is to summarize the data into manageable simplified patterns. Quantitative research tends to have well-defined methods and patterns, but qualitative research thrives for flexibility and openness, which can make it somewhat harder to organise and simplify data. On the other hand, as there are no rigid rules to analyse data in qualitative research, it enables to conduct the research simultaneously and gathering data, giving much needed flexibility to the development work. (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 232.)

As discussed, qualitative analysis is not a straightforward process. It is on-going research along with development work. The diversity of the responses plays a crucial role in analysing the data. The more diversity the responses have, the more complicated it is to find patterns and to simplify them. This can also prove to be a key finding in the data, as a unified service brand management model should help the organisation to have a common template and ways-of-working – managing

the service brand repeatedly throughout the organisation. A systemic approach to record and analyse the data helps find key themes, assist in constructing an overall picture and eventually guide the development work.

As conducting the analysis, each response from the interview data is referenced and examined based on the theoretical key elements of internal service brand management in Figure 3, to guide with thematic analysis. This will assist in finding key themes and connecting answers from various sources, to gather a better overall picture of the current and the visioned states. The objective for this analysis is to create a clear overall picture about service brand management practices within the organisation and identifying strengths and development areas in Chapter 5. The analysis will provide the foundation for gap analysis and development tasks of creating a service brand management model for building brand equity.

4 Research process and findings

This chapter focus on analysis and examination of the current state of service brand management and the visioned state of service brand management. The qualitative data is based on the semi-structured interviews, interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F, conducted by one-to-one interviews with organisation's key managerial employees in service brand management. The purpose of this analysis is to objectively assess the organisation's level of different aspects of service brand management in practice, keeping a close connection to the theoretical framework.

The data includes responses from cross-departmental employees within the organisation for form a comprehensive view on service brand management current and visioned states. As the theoretical framework presents, there are key concepts in service brand management like understanding brand, brand vision, organisational culture, brand values brand objectives, the brandsphere, brand essence, internal implementation and brand evaluation. These elements are critical in understanding the efficiency or service brand management, and how they impact on building brand equity.

As demonstrated in the Figure 15, the research findings are introduced in the Chapters 4.2 – 4.4. Chapter 5 concludes the research findings, with theoretical validation of empirical findings in a six-phase process:

- Gap analysis results and insights from theoretical framework
- Bridging gaps in service brand management: theoretical insights to practical model
- Identifying gaps and theoretical guidance for closing the gaps
- Key aspects of the theoretical service brand management models
- Illustrating the model
- Model's justifications, the expected impacts and approaches to close the gaps.

Answers to research questions are covered in Chapter 6.1.

4.1 Research process

Figure 15 illustrates the overall research process. The research is conducted based on the interview findings of the organisation's current and visioned service brand management. Using gap analysis, the process pieces together the current and visioned state of brand management within the organisation and how that reflects to the literature review to develop a service brand management model for the organisation. Theoretical validation of the empirical data is one of key components of this research, to develop model and to justify its elements.

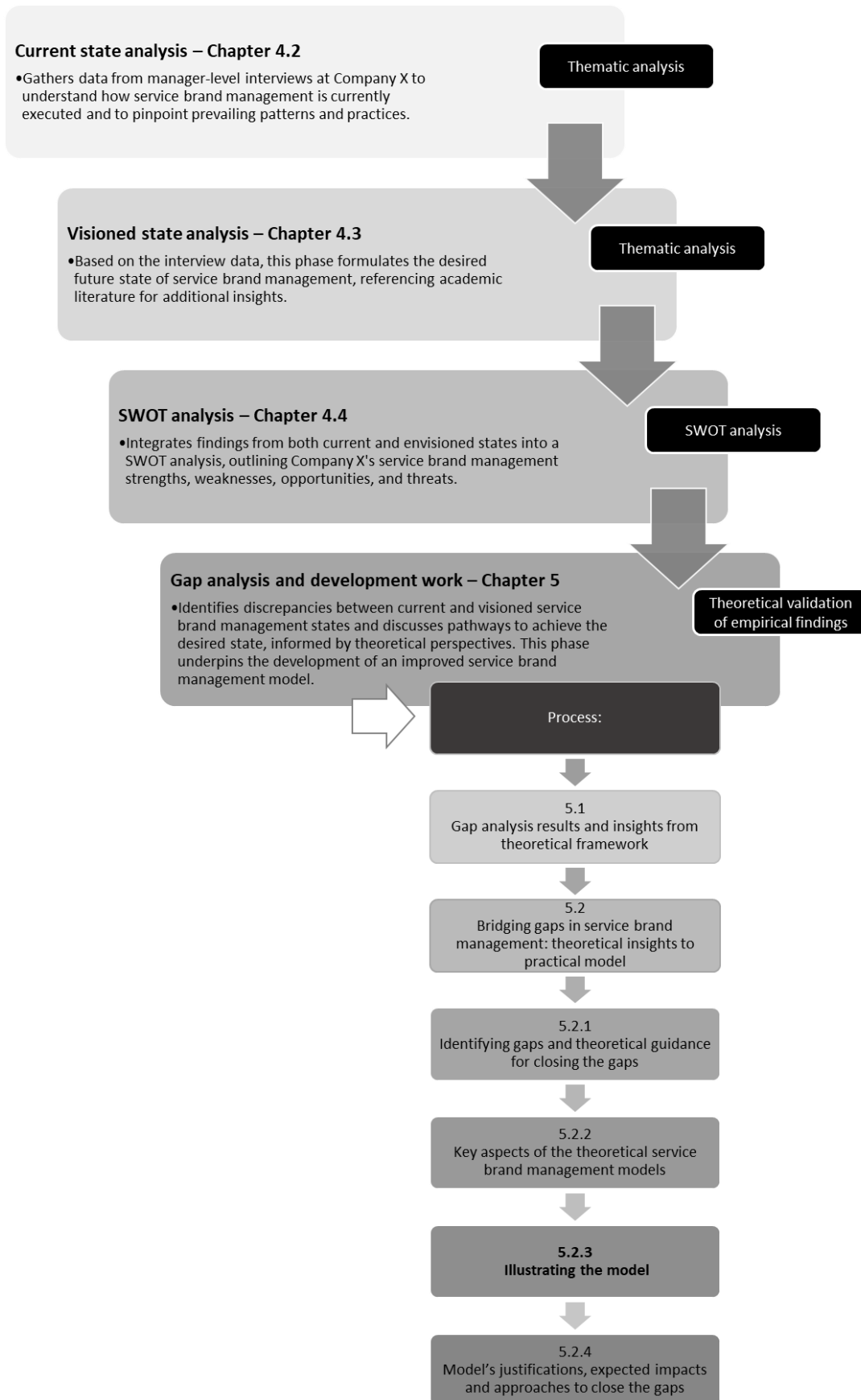


Figure 15. Research process for the development task.

1. **Current state analysis** of service brand management is conducted by collecting the data from semi-structured interviews from the Company X's manager-level employees, who work closely with wide range of customer touch points. The current state analysis studies how service brand management is conducted currently in the organisation. The elements of the current state analysis focus on identifying patterns, themes and current practices.
2. In the second phase, the semi-structured interviews data, define the **visioned state of service brand management**. In this phase the research focus on the organisation's ideas of the future state of service brand management based on the data and discussing the reference data from the literature review.
3. The third phase gathers the finding from the current state and visioned state analyses into a **SWOT analysis**, showcasing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the organisation's service brand management.
4. The fourth phase, **gap analysis results** in Chapter 5, connects the current state analysis and the visioned state analysis, along with the theoretical framework, to support the development task. In this phase, the research defines the gap between current state and desired state and discusses how the organisation is able to reach the visioned state of service brand management based on theoretical insights. For the research, this phase is one of the key components, as it used to support the development task: **creating a service brand management model for the organisation**. Chapter 5 is conducted by a six-phase process, as illustrated in the Figure 15, to find theoretical validation of the empirical findings and justify the model.

4.2 Current state analysis of service brand management

To understand the current state of service brand management in the organisation, the current state analysis focuses on the key elements of service brand management reviewed in the theoretical framework. This chapter takes a multi-dimensional perspective of the brand's operational framework, to understand what is being done and how. The analysis also focuses on the understanding service brand management and its elements in the organisation. The goal is constructing a detailed analysis where the service brand stands currently.

Each response from the interview data is referenced and examined based on the theoretical components of the Figure 3 Elements of internal service brand management. This will assist in finding key themes and connecting answers from various sources, to gather a better overall picture of the current state, and to eventually gather up the findings in organised way to present the results in Chapter 5.

4.2.1 Service brand as a concept

First, let's analyse how the organisation sees and understands the concept of "service brand". This provides a good overall understanding how service brand as a concept is perceived in the organisation, before the research moves on to specific analysis on the elements of service brand management.

Both, interviewees A and D, highlight the concept of service brand being the imagery and customer perception. The answers emphasize the importance of customer's and competitor's perceptions of the service brand. Interviewee A highlight building imagery and creating added value, and interviewee D focuses on the consistency of this imagery and the alignment of expected and actual experience.

Interviewees B and E emphasize the customer-centricity and expectations. It is important to understand the role of customer expectations when defining a service brand. Interviewee B sees the brand evolving through customer involvement, whereas interviewee E thinks it is important to understand and align what the customer thinks and expects from the brand. Both of these perspectives point a service brand being responsive to and shaped by customer needs and perceptions.

Interviewees C and F take holistic approach to the concept of service brand. Both present wide range of elements beyond the core service being the overall concept of a service brand. Interviewee C mentions logos, communication and employees being part a service brand. Interviewee F talks about integrating various elements to serve the entirety of the concept of a service brand.

In summary, all the interviewees see a service brand being a complex entirety, shaped by customer perceptions and expectations, and the organisation's ability to deliver consistent service that adds value to customer.

4.2.2 Brand management practices and elements

Brand vision: Company X's service brand is seen as evolving to a dynamic customer participation model, which aims to exceed expectations and promote highly customer-centric approach (interviewees B and E). This can be seen as a transition from only transactional relationship to relational interactions, towards a partnership model with customer (interviewees B and F). However, the brand vision is not uniformly understood in organisation currently, leading to varying interpretations (interviewees A, B, C, D, E, F). There can be found factors that the overall vision and strategy may not be uniformly understood or communicated across the organisation (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F), and there is indication of "game of broken telephone" (interviewee C). The financial brand goals are somewhat clear in the organisation, focusing on growth (interviewee D), but data does

not clarify other overarching long-term brand vision goals. There is a vision to provide comprehensive service to the customer (interviewee F), but the frequent changes in the leadership have impeded the pursuit for more overarching strategic vision (interviewee F). The need for a unified and documented vision is apparent in the data (interviewee F)

Organisational culture: The organisational culture can be seen as fragmented, with only some respondents embracing and aligned with the brand's values, and others unaware of them (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F). The organisation is experiencing a cultural transition, with growing pains due to new corporation influences (interviewee C) and a need for stronger and better internal communication and training to align with the brand's vision and values (interviewees B and D). Departments are seen to operate in silos, though this has been recognised and efforts for better alignment are acknowledged (interviewees B and D). Organisation is moving towards a more unified culture with a focus on customer service and collaboration, in which professional ethics and exceeding customer expectations are emphasised (interviewees D and F).

Brand objectives: Communicating brand objectives lack clarity at the local level, leaving some employees unaware of the corporate strategy and how that translates into local operations and objectives (interviewees B, C, D, E and F). Sustainability, environmental friendliness, and offering mobility solutions to all customer needs are emphasised, but the integration of these elements into daily operations is not always clear (interviewee C). Financial objectives and customer service expectations are understood, but the consistent communication across organisations is uncertain (interviewees D and F). However, there is also indication, that these objectives may not be consistently understood (nor communicated) across the organisation (interviewees B and C).

Audit brandsphere: There is clear indication in the data, that the organisation lacks unified and integrated service brand management model, which leads to inconsistencies in brand representations across different locations and touchpoints (interviewees A and F). Also, the brand's visualisation and messaging are not seen systematically controlled, potentially affecting customer experiences and perceptions (interviewee A). Net Promoter Score (NPS) is the primary measurement for the service brand, but the organisation recognises a need for better, overarching and structured brand management approach and additional metrics (interviewee C). Respondents view Company X as a strong player and brand in Finland (interviewees B, C, D and F), and also recognise that the brandsphere is getting tougher with the competition (interviewees B and D).

Brand essence: The organisation's brand essence is not clearly defined or communicated, which can be seen from the respondents struggle to express the brand promise (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F). There is a disconnection between the intended brand essence and its operational

presentation (interviewee D). The brand essence is closely linked with customer service and serving customer needs effectively (interviewees B and C), but there is not consistent communication across the organisation (interviewee D).

Internal implementation and brand resourcing: The implementation of the brand strategy is inconsistent, as some areas are better managed while others may lack resources and guidance (interviewee A). Training for new employees and existing employees varies, which has its effect on service delivery and the overall brand representations (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F). Although some areas are well-managed, the organisation acknowledges the resource limitations leading to capability issues and task delegation (interviewee A). However, the organisation also possesses high-level of expertise, which should be harnessed more efficiently (interviewee A). The on-boarding process is seen as comprehensive, yet not all employees understand the brand essence fully (interviewee E). There is a need for a responsible dedicated person with capability to manage the overall service brand (interviewee C).

Brand evaluation: Organisation's main brand evaluation system NPS is acknowledged throughout the respondents (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F), but it might not be uniformly applied across the organisations. However, there is also acknowledgment of the improvement needs in documenting and standardising processes related to overall brand management (interviewee F). The high NPS score in Finland indicates some brand success, but it may not represent the entire organisation and the whole scope of brand management (interviewee F). NPS is heavily relied upon and related to service delivery evaluation (interviewees A and B), but there is recognition that other metrics and a more comprehensive evaluation process are needed to measure the overall scope of service brand management (interviewees C and D). There is also a need for better documentation and process management to ensure consistency and retention of knowledge (know-how) (interviewee F).

Current service brand management model or processes: Based on the data gathered, the organisation has a diverse approach to service brand management, and varying level of understanding and implementation across the organisation. A clear overall commitment to customer-centricity and understanding customer interactions can be found (interviewees D and F), but the organisation lacks standardised or documented processes to take action from insights gathered from NPS (interviewee F). Also, these metrics does not necessarily measure the overall scope of service brand management (interviewees C and D), indicating a gap between measuring the service brand and implementing documented processes that could holistically enhance the brand experience. Conse-

quently, the gap signals that while customer feedback is valued, the organisation has not fully leveraged these insights to consistently and continuously manage the service brand to maintain and improve the competitive edge in the market (interviewees A, B and D).

Informally, the organisation understands service quality and has a cultural appreciation of service management (interviewee F), mainly through the reliance on customer feedback and the Net Promoter Score (NPS) (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F). This informal approach to holistic service brand management is described in data by interviewee F: *“Information is available, but it's fragmented. It's essential to note that I'm not saying that we are entirely bad in this regard. There is unwritten guidance and a way of functioning that maintains a high level of service. There isn't a unified forum or documented information. Processes have started to be structured, and a certain way of functioning. Thus, it can be implemented fairly well at a practical level without any existing guidance.”* This informal approach is not systematically translated into structured brand management actions, processes, or a specific model, which could lead to inconsistencies in the brand delivery across the organisation and in brand experiences throughout various touchpoints (interviewees A, B, C, E and F). Also, there is indication for the need of comprehensive brand management, with structured processes to take action based on the metrics and a controlled approach to brand management across the whole organisation (interviewees C and F).

The benefits for a holistic service brand model or process are acknowledged for its strategic importance in the organisation. This can be seen from the recognition of the brand's strengths and market awareness are based on managing the overall service brand comprehensively (interviewees C and F). However, the implementation of a model is inconsistent and does not follow a unified, company-wide process.

The organisation appears to have the foundational elements of a strong service brand but requires a more structured and documented approach to leverage these elements effectively across all levels of the organisation (interviewees C, E and F). This would help ensuring, that the acknowledged strategic importance of brand management is also consistently executed to deliver a cohesive brand experience. The current state of service brand management is in transition phase with no clear processes (interviewee A), and while there are individual efforts to manage the brand (interviewee C), the organisation lacks a uniformed forum or documented processes (interviewee F). Organisation's training on delivering the brand promise (for new employees and existing employees) is improving but still lacks consistency and standardisation across the whole organisation (interviewees A and D).

4.3 The visioned state analysis of service brand management

To analyse the visioned state of service brand management within the organisation, a closer review of the interview data is taken to reveal the different perspectives in the organisation and how respondents value different elements of it ideally. The data reveals multifaced approach and view for the visioned state, including variety of elements in service brand management. The same thematic analysis is used, as in current state analysis, based on the key elements in the Figure 3 Elements of internal service brand management.

Brand vision: Organisation's envisioned state is to transform from a mere service provider to a holistic customer partner, providing collaborative services in shaping the customer experience (interviewees B and F). In this partnership, organisation seeks direct involvement from customers in shaping the service offering and aiming to exceed customer expectations (interviewees B and F). The organisation has a high focus on financial growth, but the vision and the strategy need for a more cohesive and well-documented strategic plan, which is communicated across all of the of the organisation (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F). Organisation's vision would ideally be to offer comprehensive service to its customers but has seen some drawbacks due to recent changes in the leadership, impeding the formation of an overarching vision (interviewee F). Although the brand's financial goal is clear for the future, the lack of comprehensive communication and understanding overall brand objectives, particularly in the local level, are apparent and would be ideally established (interviewees B, D and F).

Organisational culture: The organisational culture is fragmented, and with only some employees fully embracing the brand's values, as the current state analysis shows. However, the organisation is striving for a culture where service brand values are more embedded into daily operations, including environmental and societal considerations (interview A). There is a need for greater alignment of brand values across all of the organisation, ideally ensuring that these values are not only acknowledged but also actively lived (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F). The organisation is going through cultural shift influenced by the new corporate directions, indicating that better internal communication and training are needed to align and strengthen brand's vision and values (interviewees B, C, and D). Efforts are being made to transition away from siloed departments to drive towards a more unified culture, prioritising customer service, exceeding customer expectations and collaboration (interviewees D and F).

Brand objectives: The data suggests that while the organisation's financial objectives and customer service expectations are generally recognised, the consistency of communication and understanding throughout the organisation is questionable (interviewees D and F). The same inconsistency is apparent in the gap between communicating corporate strategy and translating that to

into local operations and objectives, resulting in some employees being unaware of the strategic objectives (interviewees B and C). Some objectives though are seen to be clearly articulated at the corporate level, like emphasising sustainability and offering service-oriented mobility solutions (interviewees A and C), but the practical implementation lacks transparency and management. The organisation identifies a need for better communication and management of the brand objectives holistically at the local level, ensuring that all employees are aware and acting up on these objectives, aligning with the brand promise (interviewees B, C, D, E and F).

Auditing brandsphere: In the visioned state, the organisation seeks to have a systematic approach auditing brandsphere, especially fixing the inconsistencies in brand representation across various locations and touchpoints (interviewee A). The organisation acknowledges the competitive nature of the market, the external brandsphere, and the need to differentiate itself from the competition (interviewees B and D). The goal would be to establish a brand that is clearly defined and communicated internally and externally, resonating with customer service and effectively meeting customer needs (interviewees B and C). The organisation desires to have a brand strategy that is consistently implemented all around the organisation, with resources and guidance to ensure the brand delivery and brand representation (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F). All in all, the organisation's visioned state for auditing the brandsphere would include a comprehensive evaluation of the internal and external factors influencing the brand.

Brand essence: As the brand essence is described in the theoretical framework as being the central guide for every action and decision within the organisation, ideally this would be implemented into the organisation to ensure what is promised is what is delivered, defining what customers can expect from the brand (interviewee C). The visioned state of brand essence would be to offer exceptional customer service and to fulfil customer needs, and ensuring every brand interaction within every touchpoint would highlight the brand's core values and strengths (interviewee B). The organisation aims to have a brand essence which is consistently communicated throughout the organisation, confirming that all employees from front-line employees to management are able to deliver the brand promise (interviewee D). The visioned state would include training and development programs aligned with the brand promise, making sure all employees would have the knowledge and skills to act as brand ambassadors, increasing brand identity and customer loyalty (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F).

Internal implementation and brand resourcing: Although the data does not cover that much the visioned state of internal implementation and brand resourcing, it is clear that the organisation seeks for documented and implemented processes to holistically implement and manage its service brand. This would mean that all areas are equally well-managed, and resources and guidance

are adequately provided. Some emphasis is put for marketing to take a central role in service brand implementation and management. The structure would ensure that all marketing material are up-to-date, and guidelines are clearly defined and distributed across organisation to ensure consistent brand image. The training for new and existing employees should be addressed to enable consistent brand delivery and unified brand representation across all touchpoints. The organisation would ideally have a controlled and consistent implementation of brand management. (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F.)

Brand evaluation: While the NPS remains a central measure for evaluating the service deliver, the organisation recognises the need for a more comprehensive measurements and metrics to evaluate to the full scope of service brand management (interviewees A, B, C and D).

Service brand management model/process: Discussed already in the current state analysis, the organisation acknowledges the strategic importance of having a holistic brand management model or process. As the organisation have been struggling to consistently implement a holistic service brand management process, a model, or structured and documented approaches, is seen as an important strategic step to manage the service brand across all organisation and its touchpoints. (interviewees A, B, C, E and F).

In summary, the organisation envisions to have integrated and comprehensive processes to manage its service brand as the visioned state. Through these structured processes, the brand promise would be understood across the organisation and delivered consistently, contributing to the growth of brand equity. This cohesive approach is seen to be overseen by marketing, ideally with sufficient resources, to ensure coherent marketing materials and clear guidelines for all brand representations across all locations and touchpoints, to minimise the current fragmented way (interviewee A). Also, resources would need to be strategically allocated to ensure the management and implementation elsewhere as well (interviewee A). A structured process or model would guide the interactions with customers, creating positive brand experiences and not cutting corners, even though resources are limited (interviewee B). Ideally, the organisations see a dedicated responsible employee overseeing the brand management, who can ensure the brand is consistently communicated internally and develop processes to build brand equity (interviewee C). Organisational training is seen as one focus area for development, to ensure the customer interactions and value provided is aligned with the brand's offering (interviewee B). The organisation wants to move away from the siloed structure towards more unified approach (interviewee D), and by having well-documented and well-implemented structures for service brand management the organisations envision to ensure consistent delivery of the brand promise from new and current employee (interviewee F), to build brand equity (interviewee F).

4.4 SWOT analysis

Based on the current state and visioned state analyses of organisation’s service brand management, a SWOT analysis is conducted to present some of the key findings.

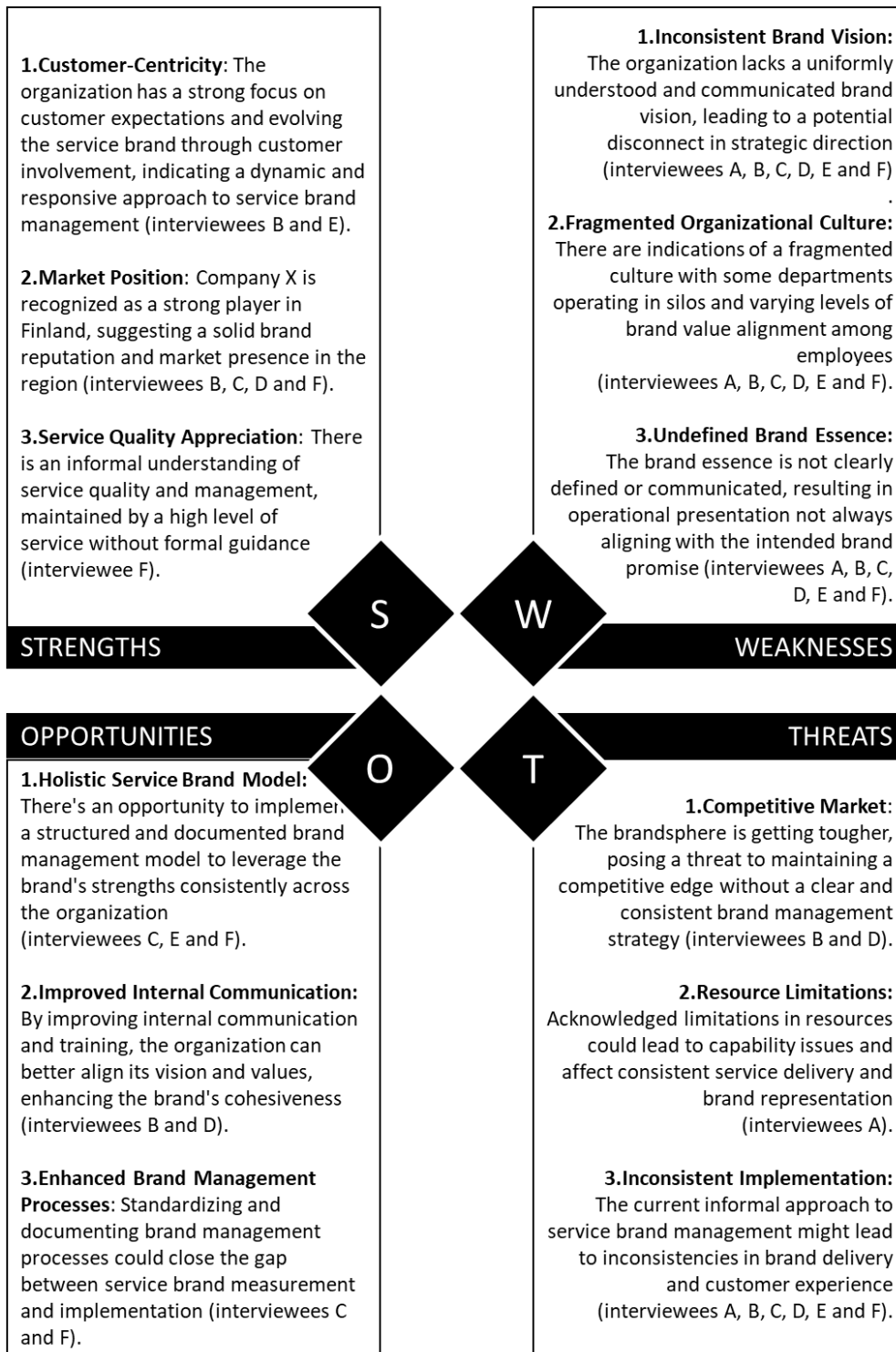


Figure 16. SWOT analysis of the organisations service brand management. (Based on the current state and visioned state analyses of the empirical data).

5 Theoretical validation of empirical findings

The objective of this research is to study service brand management within the organisation and to create a model that strengthens service brand management for building brand equity. The theoretical validation of empirical findings chapter presents the interview data findings from the current state and visioned state analyses, and how these compare to the theoretical framework. The research's focus is centred around concept that a well-managed service brand is significant factor for building brand equity in competitive market.

The current state analysis from the interview data in the Chapter 4.2 exhibits organisation's existing service brand management as a process and how the elements of the thematic analysis are perceived within the organisation. As the SWOT analysis, in the Chapter 4.4, shows there are strengths like customer-centricity, good market position, and appreciation for service quality, which all form a strong basis for the service brand. On the other hand, weaknesses like inconsistencies in brand vision, fragmented organisational culture, and undefined brand essence hinder the service brand. The visioned state analysis, in the Chapter 4.3, focuses on the optimal set-up for service brand management within the organisation, envisioning documented and documented processes for holistic management, and better integrating all employees to the organisation's brand values, vision and objectives. These are seen important for the organisation for moving forward towards an overall customer partner model.

In this chapter, the author has included insights from previous works, such as texts and analyses, which were originally developed for coursework while participating in courses Strategic Brand Management, Brand X Development, and Asiakaspölyn kehittäminen ja asiakaskokemuksen johtaminen.

The gap analysis results and insights from theoretical framework, summarises the gaps and the discrepancies between the current state and envisioned state, identifying the key areas requiring attention, strategic involvement and management. Findings from the theoretical framework is done concurrently with the gap analysis to present theoretical justifications and insights. The theoretical insight focuses on the theoretical framework in this research, mainly based on elements of the two brand management models: Figure 3 Elements of internal service brand management model focusing on the internal aspects, and the Figure 2 External environment of service brand management model focusing on the external factors. The gap analysis and the theoretical insights are important factors in the research findings, as they influence the development the service brand management model, aligning the organisations visions and the theoretically proven methods. This offers a foundation for developing a model that includes best practices in brand management and a guide for aligning the organisational aspects to brand delivery and for building brand equity.

After the gap analysis with the insight from theoretical framework, this chapter engages in the final process of creating the service brand management model tailored for the organisation, chapter 5.2 Bridging gaps in service brand management: theoretical insights to practical model, as illustrated in the Figure 15. The first phase is to identify the gaps and offer the theoretical guidance for closing the gaps. The second phase discusses the key aspects of the studied service brand management models in chapter 2 Theoretical framework. Third phase illustrates the service brand management model for the organisation. The fourth phase reviews the justifications and expected impacts of the model, as well as approaches for the organisation to take to close the gaps.

5.1 Gap analysis results and insights from theoretical framework

The current state analysis of service brand management, within the organisation, analysed in the Chapter 4.2, identifies several critical areas for improvements, although the organisation sees itself having customer-centric approach as one of its strengths (interviewees B and E), as well as a strong position in the market (interviewees B, C, D and F). There are still significant gaps that hinder the brand's development for building strong brand equity. The current state SWOT analysis exhibits weaknesses and threats that include inconsistent brand vision (interviewees A, B, C, D, E, F), fragmented organizational culture (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F), and undefined brand essence (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F), which can lead to a fragmented brand representation and strategic objectives. These factors have a significant threat to organisation's ability to compete effectively in competitive market (interviewees B and D).

The organisation's visioned state analysis envisions the brand to transform towards a holistic customer partner model, providing collaborative services that exceeds customer expectations (interviewees B and E). The organisation sees itself having a culture, in which the brand values are visible in the daily operations and actively lived by all employees ideally (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F). Furthermore, the organisation's visioned state would include consistent brand communication across all levels, clear brand objectives, and comprehensive service brand management processes that also resonate with the customers (interviewees B, C and D).

The gap analysis presents the critical areas and major gaps that need to be enhanced and developed in the organisation's service brand management, based on the interview data (current state and visioned state analyses). The critical gaps and elements to develop, like strategic brand vision, organisational culture, employee engagement, communication, and brand management processes, are compared and justified based on the insights found in the theoretical framework with the elements of holistic service brand management.

Brand vision and strategy

<p>Current state: The brand vision is unclear, lacking cohesive strategic planning and communication throughout the whole organisation, hindering the overall brand development and service offering, and leading to misalignment locally (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F).</p>	<p>Visioned state: Transformation towards holistic customer partnership model with collaborative service offering and a well-documented and communicated strategic plan (interviewees B and F).</p>	<p>Theory: A clear brand vision is essential as it acts as compass for all employees, inspiring and providing direction for a common goal. Overly stretching and poorly communicated brand vision can create vision-culture gap. Thus, brand vision should have simplicity, clarity and consistency when communicating internally. (De Chernatony 2010, 52, 87, 121.)</p>
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Organizational culture and brand values

<p>Current state: The organisation displays fragmented culture with some departments working in silos (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F). The brand values are inconsistently understood and aligned across the organisation, requiring a cultural shift to more unified brand values and improved internal communication (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F).</p>	<p>Visioned state: Organisation's goal is to integrate the brand values into daily operations and create a unified culture prioritising customer service and collaboration (interviewees A and D).</p>	<p>Theory: Brand success is highly depended on the alignment of employee values with organisation values. Strong service brands are built on trustworthiness, authenticity and responsiveness, and should be deeply linked to the organisation. To maintain a coherent organisational culture that support the brand values, the barriers, like silo-mentality, trust issues, and poor communication, must be minimised. Brand must thrive for cultural alignment to make sure the brand is not underperforming by different cultures pulling it in opposite directions. (De Chernatony 2010, 157-158, 164, 177, 215-221.)</p>
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Employee engagement and internal communication

<p>Current state: Organisation has employee engagement and internal communication initiatives but lacks effective systematic approach and structures for these. There has been development of internal training platforms and process documentation, but initiatives currently remain fragmented and are not fully integrated. (interviewees E and F.)</p>	<p>Visioned state: Ideally, the organisation would have internal training and communication fully functional and part of controlled cohesive management. Employees should be engaged to and with the brand promise and its values, operating as brand ambassadors within a structured and consistent internal communication framework (interviewee C).</p>	<p>Theory: Employees are essential in creating authentic brand experiences for customers, and that is why their behaviour should reflect the desired brand values, which can be achieved with effective communication, training and engagement. Managing employee engagement means that the employees are not just informed but actively part of the brand management and committed to the brand. (Val-laster & de Chernatony 2006, 781; De Chernatony 2010, 11)</p>
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Brand objectives and local implementation

<p>Current state: There is a clear disconnection with corporate strategy and its translation to local objectives, resulting in a need to better management and communication of brand objectives in the local level. While the financial objectives are clear, there is a lack of consistent communication and understanding of brand objectives. (interviewees B, C, D, E and F.)</p>	<p>Visioned state: In an ideal state, the organisation would have consistent communication and understanding of brand objectives at all levels, and ensuring there is an alignment with the brand promise. (interviewees B, C, D, E and F.)</p>	<p>Theory: There need to be clear concrete short-term and long-term objectives to create a direction for the brand. Established long-term brand objectives should reflect the brand's envisioned future, purpose and values, and should be seen as internal driving force, clear to understand and act upon by employees. (De Chernatony, 2010, 193,195,197,201.).</p>
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Auditing brandsphere and differentiation

<p>Current state: Currently, the organisation shows need for a systematic approach to auditing the brandsphere, addressing the issues with for example inconsistencies with the brand representation, to establish a brand that differentiate itself in a competitive market (interviewees A, B and D). The brand is recognised as a strong player in the market, but auditing the brandsphere is seen important to due to the competitive market (interviewees B, C, D and F).</p>	<p>Visioned state: A comprehensive evaluation of the internal and external factors that influence the brand is desired. (interviewees B and C.)</p>	<p>Theory: A comprehensive brandsphere audit is necessary to identify challenges, opportunities and aligning brand objectives. This helps to strategize the brand how to mitigate threats and how to utilise opportunities better. (De Chernatony 2010, 102, 213.)</p>
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Brand essence

<p>Current state: The brand essence is currently undefined, affecting the operational presentation and alignment with the brand promise. (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F.)</p>	<p>Visioned state: The visioned state emphasise that brand essence is consistently communicated and present in every touchpoint, and that employees are capable of delivering the brand promise. (interviewees B and D.)</p>	<p>Theory: Instead of considering the brand having an essence, it should be viewed as being an essence, which is adaptable with customers and changing environments. The brand essence is conceptualising the brand core, including the brand's core attributes, benefits, emotional rewards, values, and personality traits. It is a representation of how employees can contribute to deliver the brand promise. (De Chernatony 2010, 258-259, 268, 288.)</p>
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Internal implementation and brand resourcing

<p>Current state: The lack of documented processes and adequate resources for brand implementation and management are apparent. (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F.)</p>	<p>Visioned state: The organisation seeks to have documented and structured processes to implement and manage the service brand holistically. Organisation sees marketing playing a central role in this, updating marketing materials, creating clear guidelines and consistent brand management. (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F.)</p>	<p>Theory: The organisation should be structured to align with the brand delivery and designing internal processes for capitalising the core competencies to deliver the brand promise. There should be profound understanding of the brand (values, promise, core characteristics etc.) in all-levels of the organisation, as brand delivery happens in many forms and touchpoints. Internal implementation and resourcing are cross-departmental responsibility to enhance consistency in the brand experience. (De Chernatony 2010, 102, 294, 295, 316.)</p>
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Brand evaluation

<p>Current state: The organisation relies on limited metrics like NPS for holistic brand evaluation (interviewees A, B, C and D).</p>	<p>Visioned state: There is a recognition of the need and a desire for more comprehensive metrics to evaluate the full scope of service brand management (interviewees A, B, C and D).</p>	<p>Theory: Multi-dimensional and continuous brand evaluation should be integrated within the brand management processes to ensure the holistic development and management of brand for building brand equity. (De Chernatony 2010, 349-359.)</p>
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Service brand management model/process

<p>Current state: Organisation acknowledges the strategic importance of service brand management, but currently does not have documented structured processes, or a model, for holistic service brand management (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F).</p>	<p>Visioned state: Organisation seeks to manage and develop the service brand across all organisational touchpoints effectively, with documented and structured processes (interviewees A, B, C, E and F).</p>	<p>Theory: Research indicates that organisations with a structured approach to service brand management consistently outperforms organisation without such a system. A successful service brand management strategy should integrate both internal and external perspectives. Internally it should include all aspects of the brand, like internal culture with its values, delivering the promise in various touchpoints, engaging and communicating all employees, marketing activities, internal implementation, to ensure consistency externally between brand strategy and delivery in all touchpoints effectively (De Chernatony 2010, 22, 104, 206; Berry, 200, 129).</p>
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In conclusion, the gap analysis demonstrates that the organisation appears to have a requirement for a significant transformation. The visioned state envisions the organisation to have a comprehensive and structured processes, ensuring a consistently understood and delivered brand promise, which contributes for building the brand equity. However, there are critical gaps between the current state and visioned state, which the organisation needs to address by aligning the brand vision, culture, objectives, implementation and management processes. Having comprehensive and detailed outlook of the current state, envisioned state, and how theoretical elements guide and justify the development, helps developing a service brand management model aligning with these perspectives. The theoretical framework emphasises the importance of having a holistic service brand management model, integrating organisational culture and employee engagement with strategic

brand objective and management, co-creation of value with customer, and adaptability and development for building and sustaining brand equity. The development tasks consider these elements and insights, ensuring that the model aligns with both internal and external factors in service brand management.

5.2 Bridging gaps in service brand management: theoretical insights to practical model

Having conducted a thorough research from gathering the theoretical framework to analysing the current and visioned states of service brand management in the organisation, and to conducting a gap analysis supported by theoretical insights, the research culminates for the creation of the service brand management model for building brand equity. This multi-step process bridges the gap between the present and envisioned states of organisation's service brand management, with high emphasis on theoretical inputs.

The process for this chapter and the development tasks of this research, creating service brand management model for building brand equity for the case organisation, is the following as illustrated in the Figure 15:

Identifying gaps and theoretical guidance for closing the gaps: The first phase of the model creation focuses on identifying the gaps found in the gap analysis results chapter and offering theoretical solutions from the reviewed literature on service brand management for this research. This phase is fundamental to undertake in order to justify theoretical ways in closing the gaps.

Key theoretical aspects of service brand management: To lay the groundwork for the model, the goal for the second phase is describing the key internal and external theoretical aspects and elements of service brand management. Internally, the focus is on the strengthening factors in organisational culture like brand's values, employee engagement, internal brand implementation, and aligning the brand vision with the organisational strategy. Externally, the attention is on managing customer experiences, brand communication, market differentiation, and shaping customer relations management - all important aspects in service brand management. And finally, the second phase is concluded with key theoretical aspects of brand equity and brand evaluation.

Illustrating the model: The third phase of the process visualises the findings of the first two phases, to illustrate the service brand management model, outlining the internal and external components and elements, all of which eventually affects the building of brand equity. The illustration highlights the flow from the key internal elements of the service brand management to the influencing factors for the customers experience and how this build brand equity, providing a clear roadmap for the organisation's brand management efforts.

Model's justifications expected impacts and approaches to close the gaps: The fourth phase, justifying the model, includes a review of the key themes in this research and how those are taken into account in the model. This evaluation, revised with theoretical insights, confirm the components involvement in the model and clarify the model's expected role in closing the main gaps in the organisation's brand management for building even stronger brand equity.

This thorough process ensures that the model is rooted in the established theories and best practises, while remaining practical and actionable for the organisation. Combining the theories of service brand management with the organisation's visions, the model aims to transform organisation's current state into structured, strategic and holistic practices, and to make sure building brand equity is not only a goal but reality.

5.2.1 Identifying gaps and theoretical guidance for closing the gaps

The first part of developing the service brand management model for building brand equity focuses on summarising the gap analysis results while offering theoretical guidance to these. The goal is to establish the foundation for the model, as well as to offer theoretical solutions and approaches to close the gaps.

Brand vision and strategy

<p>Identified gap: The brand vision and strategy are unclear and not uniformly understood or communicated, leading to misalignment locally. Meanwhile, the organisation has a vision of well-documented and communicated strategic plan and customer partnership model with collaborative. (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F.)</p>	<p>Theoretical guidance: A clear brand vision serves as a compass, guiding and inspiring all employees. A comprehensive brand vision avoids gaps between management's vision, organisational culture, and image. To ensure alignment and inspiration, brand vision needs to be simple and communicable, and include three key elements: envisioned future, purpose and values. The elements should resonate functionally and emotionally with customers and employees. (De Chernatony, 2010, 9, 52, 87, 99, 120, 134, 137.)</p>	<p>Approach: First of all, it is important for the organisation to localise the corporate strategy and brand vision. Organisation needs to articulate a clear brand vision internally, aligning with the organisational values and communicate this throughout all levels of the organisation.</p>
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Organisational culture (Internal communication, brand values, employee engagement)

<p>Identified gap: Organisation has somewhat fragmented and siloed culture, with varying levels of understanding and alignment of the brand values. The visioned state would include cohesive organisational culture in which values are uniformly understood and lived by. The organisation has employee engagement and internal communication initiatives in place, but they are not systematically integrated, leading to a fragmented approach. The visioned state includes well-structured system for training and communication, ensuring all employees are engaged with the brand and act as brand ambassadors. The organisation seeks to organise these initiatives better, for cohesive culture and communicating brand's values. (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F.)</p>	<p>Theoretical guidance: Strong organisational culture is influenced by deeply integrated brand values, especially emotional, which are crucial for creating a sustainable competitive advantage and unique service delivery, which makes it harder for competition to copy. The culture should be aligned with the brand vision to ensure Cohesive brand identity and emphasise the service delivery employees as brand ambassadors. Structured internal communication and cross-functional teams reinforce the brand delivery and brand values. Employees delivering the service play a crucial role as brand ambassadors, emphasizing the need for value-aligned recruitment and training (De Chernatony, 2010, 11, 157-158, 159, 164, 177, 183-184, 187; De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 228-234.)</p>	<p>Approach: The organisation should actively foster unified culture that reflects the brand's value, encourage cross-functional collaboration and assess the elements that advance or hinder the brand vision. The key elements of organisational culture are illustrated in Figure 5. Aligning the brand values with employee values and focusing on the unique delivery of the brand promise, the organisation can gain competitive advantage in the market. These also help the organisation to dissolve silos and unify the brand experience externally and internally.</p>
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Brand objectives and local implementation

<p>Identified gap: The organisation has misalignment with corporate strategy and local execution. Local financial goals are well understood but broader brand objectives are not consistently communicated and understood in the organisation. The organisation seeks to have uniform communication and comprehensive understanding at all levels of the organisation of these objectives, aligned with the overarching brand promise (interviewees B, C, D, E and F.)</p>	<p>Theoretical guidance: Clear and consistent brand objectives, and the effective internal communication of them, is essential across all levels of the organisation. Long-term objectives serve as the internal driving force that inspire and unifies employees. The objectives should be aligned with the brand vision's envisioned future, purpose, and values elements. Objectives should have a strategic influence on the on organisation, and they should be consistently revisited to encourage overarching brand development and motivation. In brand management, the brand value is more than just financial metrics, including customer and employee objectives, and connections with the brand's values. These need to be managed and localised effectively, especially internally, to align all employees. (De Chernatony, 2010, 193, 195, 197, 198, 200, 201, 207, 209-210.)</p>	<p>Approach: One of key things for the organisation is to align the corporate brand objectives, as well as communicate clearly local brand objectives, which goes beyond the financial metrics. The organisation needs to ensure these objectives are understood and acted upon throughout the whole organisation, aligning with the long-term vision and the brand values. This includes strategic focus on the co-creation of value with customers, understanding brand values and customer experiences. Short-term and long-term objectives need to be aligned (Short-term for immediate goals for sales, marketing, and customer engagement. Long-term for brand's overall growth and brand equity).</p>
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Auditing brandsphere and differentiation

<p>Identified gap: The organisation lacks a systemic and holistic approach to auditing the brandsphere, but visions to take have better evaluation of the internal and external factors that influence the brand. (interviewees A, B, C, D and F.)</p>	<p>Theoretical guidance: Auditing the brandsphere is essential in identifying the micro and macro challenges and opportunities, internally and externally, for the brand. This should be done to align brand objectives with market opportunities, anticipate changes in the market, and to develop responsive strategies. (De Chernatony, 2010, 102, 215-221, 227-250.)</p>	<p>Approach: The organisation should establish a structured process for auditing brandsphere, illustrated in Figure 7. This includes evaluating internal capabilities, values alignment, and brand communication and representation channels. There should also be analysis on the customer interactions, competition (and differentiation in the market), and the macro environment. Based on these findings, the organisation can refine the brand objectives and strategies, to ensure responsiveness to market, customers, and internal dynamic, maintaining and creating competitive advantage.</p>
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Brand essence

<p>Identified gap: The organisation envisions to have a brand essence, which is clearly communicated and visible across all touchpoints, and employees fully understanding and delivering the brand promise. Currently though, the brand essence is not clearly defined, and it hinders the operational representation and alignment with the brand promise, through different touchpoints. (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F.)</p>	<p>Theoretical guidance: The brand essence is crucial as it represents the brand's core nature and representations. It should be seen as dynamic and evolving with the customers and the market. Models like brand pyramid help crafting a brand promise, key element in the brand essence, including brand's attributes, benefits, emotional rewards, values, and personality traits. This approach helps linking the brand planning with brand positioning, strengthening a unified brand experience. (De Chernatony, 2010, 258-259, 265, 268, 271, 288, 290.)</p>	<p>Approach: The organisation should utilise the brand pyramids, illustrated in Figures 8 and 9, in order to have a well-defined brand essence including the brand's core characteristics and the brand promise as the integral parts. The brand promise should be consistently and holistically communicated and promoted across all customer touchpoints. Employees need to be trained and engaged to understand and able to deliver the brand promise in all interactions with the customers, creating a strong and unified brand identity.</p>
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Internal implementation and brand resourcing

<p>Identified gap: The organisation lacks documented processes and limited resources for effective brand implementation and management. (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F.)</p>	<p>Theoretical guidance: Internal implementation and brand resourcing are important for applying the brand essence and ensuring the consistent brand delivery. Deeply rooted understanding of the brand across the whole organisations is essential to achieve desired behaviour and aligning operations with brand values. Service blueprints are a helpful tool in service brand management, as they present the service processes and interactions with all stakeholders, ensuring that every touchpoint is taken care of and integrated with the brand's values and brand promise. Brand's values alignment with employees, brand implementation and brand resourcing are crucial as they reflect directly to service delivery. (De Chernatony, 2010, 294-295, 301-305, 308, 310, 313-314, 316).</p>	<p>Approach: The organisation needs to create and document structured processes for brand implementation and brand resourcing in detailed service blueprints. The blueprint will guide aligning the customer interactions with brand values in every touchpoint and at every level, but also to make sure brand delivery is at the desired level with brand resourcing. Recruiting and retaining employees should include alignments between brand's values and personal values, to enhance genuine brand delivery. Organisation should have a cross-functional approach to internalising the brand and encourage collaborative ways-of-working and communication, to harmonise the brand values and ensuring consistent and authentic delivery of the brand promise at every touchpoint.</p>
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Brand evaluation

<p>Identified gap: The organisation currently relies on narrow set of brand metrics, focusing mainly on the service delivery score of Net Promoter Score, while recognises the importance of having more comprehensive metrics and process to evaluate the brand. (interviewees A, B, C and D.)</p>	<p>Theoretical guidance: In service brand management, a multi-dimensional approach is needed to brand evaluation, which extends beyond Net Promoter Score. The brand evaluation should include both business-based and customer-based metrics to reflect the brand's performance across all elements of service brand management's internal and external parts. (De Chernatony 2010, 349-352, 353-357).</p>	<p>Approach: The organisation should take on a more holistic set of metrics for brand evaluation. This should include developing a comprehensive questionnaire, based on the holistic brand management process and analysing both internal and external (NPS) perspectives. Figure 12 illustrates the evaluation elements of internal and external aspects in service brand management, and Appendix 2 lists brand evaluation questionnaire that can be used as the primary tool for evaluating the brand holistically. The evaluation should be done continuously for the organisation to identify improvement areas, tracking trends, and aligning brand performance with strategic objectives. This ensures a thorough and consistent brand evaluation.</p>
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Service brand management model/process

<p>Identified gap: The organisation seeks to manage and develop the service brand across all organisational touchpoints effectively with structured processes, but currently lacks documented processes, or a model (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F).</p>	<p>Theoretical guidance: Brand management is crucial part of service organisations due the unique challenges and opportunities the intangible nature presents. Research indicates that organisations with a structured and holistic approach to service brand management consistently outperforms organisation without such a system. An effective service brand management should integrate both internal and external perspectives. Internally, this should include elements like brand vision, organisational culture, brand objectives and resourcing. Externally, service brand management includes all touchpoints the customers have with the brand. The key factor in service brand management is to effectively and consistently deliver the brand promise to create brand equity. Thus, employees, especially the on the frontline, must embody the brand values and promise to ensure the consistent and authentic service experience. Service brands need to engage customer in the co-creation of value and have a balanced focus on both external (brand experience and internal factor, to build strong identities and differentiate in a competitive market. (Berry, 200, 128-129; De Chernatony 2010, 5, 22, 104, 206; De Chernatony & Dall’Olmo Riley, 1999, 182-183; Fisher & Vallaster, 2010, p. 124; Keller, 6.4.2018.)</p>	<p>Approach: Utilise a holistic service brand management model as a structured process of different elements to manage the brand holistically at all levels internally and every touchpoint externally.</p>
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Each of these analysed and documented elements of service brand management, ensures the model is based on theoretical insights and tailored to address the organisation's identified gaps and needs. The next step is to view the key aspects of the service brand management models internally and externally, before illustrating the service brand management model.

5.2.2 Key aspects of the theoretical service brand management models

The second phase of developing the service brand management model focuses on defining the key aspects of service brand management models, both internal and external. These aspects are essential additions to the previous chapter's analysis about the gaps, theories, and suggested approaches on the different elements in service brand management. As discussed, the main focus in this research is on the internal aspects of service brand management, but to understand how these internal elements affect externally and how brand equity is created, as illustrated in the Figure 1, it is essential to take into consideration both internal and external aspect.

Collaborative and cross-functional approach: Effective delivery of the brand promise is dependent on the engagement of every employee in the organisation, requiring consistent communication and training to prepare everyone for service delivery (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 208). Brand management is a collaborative effort, requiring coordination of cross-functional teams across all levels, to develop cohesive and structured processes and to nurture a shared understanding of brand's objectives and the creation of brand equity (De Chernatony, 2010, 99). This inclusive approach is essential to encourage employee engagement and commitment, as well as bridging gaps between differing brand objectives across the organisation, to form a collaborative cross-functional service brand management (De Chernatony, 2010, 22). Strategic and structured cross-functional approach to is crucial to ensure all employees understand their roles in the delivery of the brand promise (De Chernatony, 2010, 99).

Internal aspects of service brand management model: As illustrated previously in the Figure 3, the key elements of internal service brand management model include brand vision, organisational culture, brand objectives, audit brandsphere, brand essence, internal implementation, brand re-sourcing, and brand evaluation. De Chernatony's (2010, 100) elements are also used for thematic analysis guiding the research in different phases due their strong emphasis on the organisational perspective.

A clear and understandable strategy is vital for aligning the brand delivery system with the company's strategy, including the objectives, scope and competitive advantage (De Chernatony, 2010, 301). For service brands, it is essential that all employees understand the brand promise and are trained and communicated to deliver it, ensuring a consistent brand experience (De Chernatony,

2010, 303). This highlights the cross-functional and collaborative approach to internal service brand management. Service blueprints provide clarity on the role of the customers in the service delivery process, but also offers valuable information for the organisation, how to implement and resource the brand to improve the brand experience (De Chernatony 2010, 305). Genuine value brands have employees that embrace and deliver the brand's values, whereas superficial value brands do not engage employees effectively, potentially leading to internal and external harmful disconnections with brand (De Chernatony, 2010, 313-314).

External aspects of service brand management model: Illustrated in the Figure 2, external environment of service brand management offers a clear view on the factors affecting the creation of brand awareness and brand meaning. The key components of this model are presented brand, external brand communication, and the customer experience.

The presented brand includes the organisation's controlled communication about its identity and purpose, including all visual representation of its employees and facilities, advertising, customer communication, name and logo. The presented brand contributes most to brand awareness, "which is the customer's ability to recognise and recall the brand when provided a cue" as Berry (2000, 129) describes. The customer experience component is the actual service experience, in which the customers are engaged directly with the brand and contributes the most for creating brand meaning. The external brand communication includes all the uncontrolled information and communication that customers absorb about the brand, like word-of mouth communication and publicity, often originating from independent sources, and has some influence on both the brand awareness and brand meaning. Although brand awareness has also some influence for building brand equity, it is the brand meaning that has the most weight in building brand equity. Brand awareness can't rescue poor service experience, and thus the brand meaning created mainly by brand experiences is the key component on the external aspects of service brand management. Each of these components have different level of influence on creating brand awareness and brand meaning, but eventually the sum of these creates the brand equity. (Berry 2000, 129-130.

With service blueprints, managers can collaborate better with customer-facing employees to ensure that all touchpoints and encounters create the desired outcomes aligning with the brand's values De Chernatony 2010, 308). This can be seen as customer and brand experience management, integrating the internal processes to external touchpoints. To differentiate the brand from the competitors, the brand needs to create unique mental picture for customers, controlled in the customer's experiences with the company and brand marketing activities, by using tangible cues and consistent brand delivery across all touchpoints (Berry 2000, 131-132). Customer's emotions have

a significant role in their decision-making, accounting for more than 90%, and that's why it so important to connect with them on an emotional level, reflecting the brand values with customers' values, creating trust and affection (Berry 2000, 134-135; Stengel, Lamberton, & Favero, 2023).

Brand equity: As discussed, brand equity is created from the sum of the brand awareness and brand meaning illustrated in the Figure 2, but also Berry (2000) and Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010) indicate that brand equity is created based on the effective brand communications and interactions between service brand and customers, illustrated in Figure 10 And Figure 11. Brand equity itself can be positive or negative, and for example with positive brand equity, brands are able to charge more for their services and customers are more willing to pay for it (Berry 2000, 130, Hayes 22.2.2021). Thus, a positive service brand equity enables a direct relation to brand's margin and profit.

Brand evaluation: Brand evaluation should be a multi-dimensional process, harmonising the business-based and customer-based criteria. For service brand, it is important to have a broad set of metrics to use to evaluate the brand's performance and to make necessary adjustments (De Chernatony 2010, 349-351). Brand evaluations are included in both the internal and external service brand management models, illustrated in the Figures 2 and 3, but as highlighted, service brands need both aspects in the multi-dimensional processes to evaluate the brand holistically. Figure 12 demonstrates the evaluation of internal and external aspects of service brand management elements, and Appendix 2 brand evaluation questionnaire can be used as the primary tool for evaluating the brand holistically.

The key aspects of service brand management models identified above – the cross-functional approach, internal elements, external factors and touchpoints, creation of brand equity, and brand evaluation - are used to form the overall perspective on the service brand management model.

5.2.3 Illustrating the model

The service brand management model for building brand, illustrated in the Figure 17, represent a holistic model for the organisation. This model is based on the theoretical internal and external elements of service brand management, and how they contribute for building brand equity.

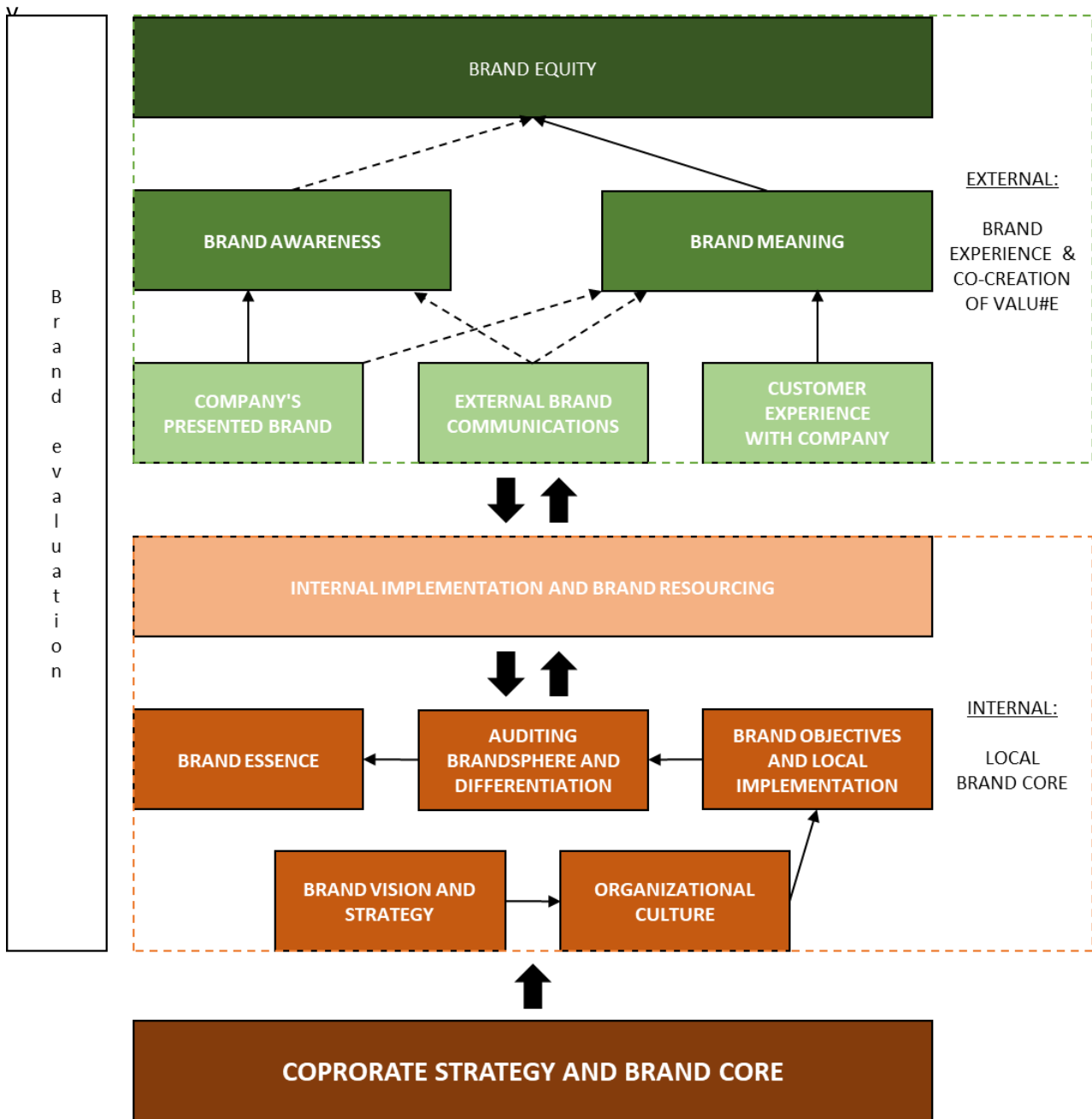


Figure 17. Company X's service brand management model for building brand equity. (Adapted from Berry's (2000, 130) a service-branding model and De Chernatony's (2010, 100) The process of building and sustaining brands.)

As discussed in the previous chapters, 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, the model is created to illustrate a holistic perspective on the organisation's service brand management. The model serves as a guideline and documented process for the organisation to close the identifies gaps in service brand with the-oretical approaches and suggestion, and also to provide new insights and knowledge for holistic

service brand management. References and guidance from the theoretical framework ensure that the model is also theoretically justified.

Starting from the bottom, the **corporate strategy and brand core** has major impact on the local brand core. This influence should be taken into account and localised accordingly through the different elements of internal service brand management. These elements, including the **local brand vision and strategy, organisational culture, brand objectives, auditing brandsphere, and brand essence**, have different approaches within them based on the identified gaps and theoretical guidance, discussed in the chapter 5.2.1. By carefully going through these step-by-step, the organisation can form a strong basis for service brand management, which needs to be revised and acted up in the **internal implementation and brand resourcing** phase. Together, these elements create the local brand core, adjusted from the corporate and brand core.

To operationalise the brand core into the brand experience, the external service brand management part visualises the key factors affecting the creation of **brand awareness** and **brand meaning**. The straight lines signify the direct impact each factor (**the presented brand, external brand communication, and customer experience**) have on the brand awareness and brand meaning, and the dotted lines signify the indirect impact of these factors. Examined in the previous chapter, all the factors are important and need to be taken into account when managing and developing the service brand. Each of the external service brand management factors represents the local brand core in their own ways, but they need to be aligned in all external touchpoints. Both, brand awareness and brand meaning, influence the building of brand equity. As studied, brand meaning has the most impact on brand equity, highlighting the importance of holistic service brand management to ensure consistent and effective delivery of the brand promise.

Brand evaluation should focus on evaluating both the external and internal aspects of service brand management, as Figure 12 demonstrates. Figure 12 and Appendix 2 brand evaluation questionnaire can be used as the primary tools for evaluating the holistic brand. As the gap analysis evidenced, Net Promoter Score has high focus on the external service delivery metrics, whereas in holistic service brand management the evaluation should take place throughout the external touchpoints as well as the internal elements.

5.2.4 Model's justifications, expected impacts and approaches to close the gaps.

Based on the theoretical insights, this last phase evaluates the expected impacts of the model and its ability to close the gaps to help building for stronger brand equity, justifying the model's expected role overall for the organisation.

The first evaluation is regarding the overall model:

Organisational culture and employee engagement:

- **Justification:** The theoretical framework highlights the critical role of organisation culture and employee engagement as essential factors in internal service brand management. This emphasises the fact that a successful service brand management model begins within the organisation. The integration of brand values with organisational culture is critical, as it enhances employee engagement, brand's competitive advantage, and the delivery of brand promise, which are also hard for competitors to copy. (De Chernatony, 2010, pp. 158, 101, 166, 183-184, 187, 215-221.)
- **Expected impact:** Well-established organisational culture built within, with alignment between values and employees, ensures consistent delivery of the brand promise and helping brand identity remaining stable even as personnel changes occur, consolidating the brand's performance and supporting building brand equity (De Chernatony 2010, 24, 101, 166, 313-314; Fisher & Vallaster 2010, 124; Kimpakorn Tocquer 2010, 387-388).

Cross-functional collaboration:

- **Justification:** Involving cross-company teams to work on a shared vision harmonises the brand values and organisational culture and helps assessing the elements that advance or hinder the brand vision. This also ensures the high-quality brand promise delivery and plays a significant role in shaping customer perceptions. (De Chernatony, 2010, 187; De Chernatony & McDonald & Wallace, 2011. 234, 228-229.)
- **Expected impact:** Collaborative cross-company efforts align employee behaviour with brand's core values. This creates authentic customer experience and contribute to consistent and captivating brand image. (De Chernatony, 2010, 11; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006, 781.)

Brand strategy and delivery system:

- **Justification:** Understanding the brand and the strategy at all levels of the organisation is vital for designing the service delivery processes. The brand should be positioned in the strategy that clearly articulates the objectives, scope and competitive advantage. This is critical to align the internal delivery system with the brand promise. Strategic approach to brand objectives offers organisation direction for all brand activities, in which the co-creation of value with customers is emphasised. Berry's (2000, 130) model highlights the importance of integrating external factors, like the customer interactions and experiences with brand, as part of the strategic objectives for the brand. (Berry 2000, 130; De Chernatony, 2010, 294, 295; Keller 2014, 702-703; Kimpakorn Tocquer 2010, 387-388.)
- **Expected impact:** Understandable and easily executed strategy ensures all parts of the delivery system to contribute positively to the brand's emotional and functional values,

enhance customer experiences and build stronger connections with brand, and contributing directly to brand equity (De Chernatony, 2010, 295; Kimpakorn & Tocquer 2010, 378).

Adaptability and responsiveness for building and sustaining brand equity:

- **Justification:** Organisation's need to have adaptability to respond to changing customer and market needs, as well as internal transformations, effectively. Auditing the brandsphere is strategic approach to evaluate the influences of the corporation, customers, competitors, marketings and internal factors on the brand. Holistic development of the brand must be continuous for building and sustaining brand equity. (De Chernatony, 2010, 213, 215-221, 250, 268; De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace 2011, 221.)
- **Expected impact:** Continuously auditing the brand vision, objectives, and brandsphere, the organisation has an evolving and adaptable service brand management model that enables the organisation to maintain its competitiveness and relevance, supporting continual building and sustained brand equity (Berry 2000, 136; De Chernatony, 2010, 250).

The second evaluation discussed the identified gaps, and how the model's internal elements help closing these gaps in the organisations, reviewed in Chapter 5.2.1 and summarised here:

Brand vision and strategy

- **Identified gap:** The local and corporation's brand vision and strategy are unclear at not uniformly understood or communicated, but the organisation visions to have a well-documented and communicated strategic plan, and a new customer partnership model with collaborative approach.
- **Approach:** The corporate strategy and the brand core needs to be localised, in order for the organisation to align itself with the corporation. The brand vision element should be used to create and document a clear brand vision, with alignment between organisational and brand values, refined from corporative brand core. This is the first phase of service brand management process.

Organisational culture

- **Identified gap:** Organisation has somewhat fragmented and siloed culture, with varying levels of understanding and alignment of the brand values, with initiatives in place for employee engagement and internal communication. The organisation's visioned state includes well-structured system for training and communication, as well as values aligned throughout the organisation.
- **Approach:** The second phase of the management process is the organisational culture element of the model. In this phase, the organisation needs to review all the elements that advance or hinder the brand vision. Focusing on the internal communication and aligning

the brand values with organisational values, the organisation can foster a unified culture and ensure consistent brand delivery.

Brand objectives and local implementation

- **Identified gap:** Organisation's financial objectives are quite clear, but the organisation lacks clear local and corporation's brand objectives.
- **Approach:** The model's brand objectives element goal is to design clear short-term and long-term objectives and communicate these clearly and consistently to all levels of the organisation. The short-term objectives include the traditional metrics for sales, marketing and customer engagement, and the long-term objectives focus on more holistic perspectives like the brand's overall growth and brand equity, as studied in chapter 2.6 by Stengel, Lamberton, and Favero (2023).

Auditing brandsphere and differentiation

- **Identified gap:** The organisation does not have a systematic approach to auditing the brandsphere (internal or external aspects) but acknowledges the importance of this.
- **Approach:** The fourth element of the internal service brand management is auditing the brandsphere. The goal for this element is to continuously evaluate the holistic brandsphere from the internal perspective (brand communication, facilities, capabilities etc.) and the external perspective (competitors, macro environment etc.), discussed further in the Chapter 2.5.5 with a list of several critical factors.

Brand essence

- **Identified gap:** Although the organisation shows determination of cohesive brand essence, there are disappearances in the of organisation's brand essence across all touchpoints.
- **Approach:** The brand pyramids, illustrated in Figures 8 and 9, are a great tool for organisation to use in the brand essence element. These tools help the organisation to define and align its brand essence with brand's core characteristics and brand promise, and also plan to train all employees for the brand essence.

Internal implementation and brand resourcing

- **Identified gap:** Internal implementation and brand resourcing are not management in a sense of the theoretical review.
- **Approach:** Internal implementation and brand resourcing, the final element of the internal service brand management, connects all the elements together to enable the brand delivery system in the external part of the service brand management. Service blueprint helps the organisation to create and document structured processes for brand delivery and brand implementation, aligning with the needed organisational resources.

Each component in the organisation's service brand management model for building brand equity, illustrated in the Figure 17, is based on the theoretical insights, and selected for their theoretically proven impact in a successful service brand management. These components along with the justifications, address the identified gaps in the organisation's current service brand management, forming the basis for a structured approach for building brand equity. The model is in line with the theories and models of Berry (2000, 130) and De Chernatony (2010, 100), as well as the practical insights found in the organisation's gap analysis.

6 Discussion

The final chapter reviews the results of the thesis in relation to the research objectives and the theoretical framework, discusses the reliability and validity of the results and concludes the research with recommendation for future development and reflections. In this chapter, the author has included insights from previous works, such as texts and analyses, which were originally developed for coursework while participating in course Applied Design Research.

6.1 Research objectives and research problems

Introduced in Chapter 1, the objective of this research is to understand what holistic service brand management is and how it contributes to building brand equity in the case organisation and according to theoretical framework. The case organisation is studied by conducting a semi-structured interviews to gain knowledge and insight on the current state and visioned state of service brand management within the organisation. The research aims to create a model for the case organisation based on the findings from the interview data with high emphasis on the theoretical insights, to justify the choices and to provide new understanding.

The sub-questions, guiding the research to answer the main research question are:

Q1.1: What is the current state of Company X's service brand management?

Q1.2: What is the visioned and desired state of Company X's service brand management?

Q1.3: What are gap analysis results between the organisation's current state and the ideal state service brand management and what are the insights from theoretical framework?

Q1.4: How should Company X manage its service brand for building brand equity?

These questions are answered below based on the findings in the research, and eventually how these they facilitate answering the main research question: What is the ideal service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity?

Q1.1: What is the current state of Company X's service brand management?

Chapter 4.2 focuses on answering what is the current state of Company X's service brand management, based on the semi-structured interviews (interviewees A, B, C, D, E and F). The current state analysis reveals that the organisation does not structured processes or model for holistic service brand management. There are a lot of individual and somewhat departmental specific efforts made to manage the brand, and the high local NPS score level is clear evidence that the service

brand is looked after and in the focus. The service brand is seen in transition phase currently with new initiatives to strengthen the service brand, but the lack of documented and structured processes, and holistic management, hinders the brand's evolution.

Q1.2: What is the visioned and desired state of Company X's service brand management?

In chapter 4.3 the data from semi-structured interviews are gathered to answer what is the visioned and desired state of Company X's service brand management. As the current state analysis demonstrates, the lack of unified and holistic service brand management process or model in the organisation, and varying level of insights to service brand management in general, presents a challenging task to gather specific ideas on how the organisations vision the service brand management. All in all, there is a significant need to be found in the organisation for dedicated person(s) to oversee the service brand management, as well as to have a structured process. The organisation is moving towards a customer partnership model, in which there would be collaborative co-creation of value with the customer. To achieve this, the organisation sees that it needs more structured approaches to manage brand representations, marketing material, service delivery, training and communication at all levels of the organisation.

Q1.1 and Q.1.2: SWOT analysis, illustrated in Figure 16, is conducted to present some of the key findings from current state and visioned state analyses, for a better view on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Q1.3: What are gap analysis results between the organisation's current state and the ideal state service brand management and what are the insights from theoretical framework?

The gap analysis, in the Chapter 5.1, focuses on researching the current gaps between current state and visioned state in the organisation, while discussing the insights from the theoretical framework to bring perspective. The goal of this question is to summarise the gaps found between the current and the visioned states, and identifying the key areas requiring attention, strategic involvement and management, with theoretical insights. The gap analysis demonstrates that the organisation requires a significant transformation towards holistically managed service brand. Organisation's visioned state include comprehensive and structured processes ensuring a consistently understood and delivered brand promise, contributing to brand equity, while there are critical gaps to current state, with unstructured and undocumented processes and varying level of brand management. The theoretical framework discusses the gap analysis findings in every step of the analysis, confirming the need for a holistic service brand management system, incorporation all the internal service brand management elements contributing to service delivery and building brand equity.

Q1.4: How should Company X manage its service brand for building brand equity?

Chapter 5.2 answers the question on how Company X should manage its service brand to increase brand equity based on the finding in the previous questions 1.1 -1.3 along with theoretical insights. To answer the question, an illustration of the model is conducted through a process, in which the first phase is to identify key gaps in organisations service brand management based on the thematic analysis (of De Chernatony's (2010, 100) model's elements) with theoretical guidance to provide approaches for the elements of the model. These findings are used to form the elements of the illustrated service brand management model. Secondly, the key theoretical aspects of service brand management are reviewed to provide solid theoretical justification for the holistic service brand management model. Figure 17 illustrates to service brand management model for building brand equity, created for the case organisation. The elements of this model are explained in the Chapter 5.2.3 and model's justifications, expected impacts and approaches to close the gaps are explained in the Chapter 5.2.4

Q1: What is the ideal service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity?

The objective for this research is to answer what is the ideal service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity and based on the rigorous process of analysing interview data through various stages, along with extensive emphasis theoretical insights and guidance, the illustration in Figure 17 concludes the research. Especially Chapter 5.2 offers a holistic perspective for the organisation on how it should manage its service brand, what measures it should take, and how each element of the service brand helps the organisation to close the gaps and influences on the Company X's service brand.

6.2 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are some of the factors of this research, and in qualitative research, the question is more about assessability of the methods. The reliability and validity criteria to qualitative research are: assessability/documentation, consistency of interpretation, reliability from the informant's point of view, and saturation. Credibility can be increased through documentation, which in this thesis means clearly documenting the decisions, choices and reasons in different stages of the process – explaining the use of theoretical framework, data collection, and analysis methods. As Kananen (2011, 67) expresses “there are as many interpretations as there are interpreters” and therefore improving consistency of interpretations is important. This can be achieved by thematising the material. Saturation of the interviews are important for qualitative research, and it is advised to find new data as long there are new things turning up for the study. Also, having the research

read by a person involved in the research, gives the research reliability and validity. Generalisation is not the objective for qualitative research, although transferability is a relevant question. (Kananen 2011, 67-69.)

Documenting the decision taken during various stages of the research process, including research methodology, process, research approach, data collection and analysis, enhances the validity of this research. Semi-structured interviews done for the data collection of this study have been conducted with the key employees in the organisation from various departments. Saturation has been a major topic throughout the interview process, but the initial plan for the number of interviews has resulted to be sufficient for gathering new information and yet still enough repetition to justify the findings. The extensive emphasis on theoretical framework, utilising previous studies, and maintaining a close connection to the gathered data contribute to research's reliability. The key thing throughout the research has been thematising the material, mainly based on theoretical framework, to improve the consistency of interpretations. As discussed, generalisation is not the aim for qualitative research, but in the case of this research, the findings can be quite well generalised and thus they are fairly transferability due to the high emphasis on theoretical framework used in the results. The key results in this research are evaluated more closely in the Chapter 5.2.4. This evaluation of the model's justifications, expected impacts and approaches to close the gaps, advance the reliability and validity of the research.

6.3 Recommendation for future development

Discussed in the Chapter 1.3, the implementation of the service brand management model is not in the scope of this thesis. For the initial steps for the case organisation, it is highly recommended to study the field of service brands and how to manage them. This thesis offers a good and through analysis of managing the service brand internally and how its different elements affect to co-creation of value, brand experiences, perceptions and eventually building for brand equity.

For the organisation to operationalise and implement the service brand management model, Chapter 5.2.1 and 5.2.4 offers approaches, based on the gap analysis in organisation and theoretical framework, to take into consideration when. Due to the lack of documented processes and structures, it is highly recommended for the organisation to start implementing the service brand management model to develop its internal brand management process. As the current state and visioned state analyses reveal, the organisation's service experience is doing very well and the high Net Promoter Score results proves that, but there are also issues in the current set-up and major gaps to the visioned state of the holistic service brand and how to manage it.

Reviewed in the Chapter 5.2.4, the suggested cross-functional strategies that could be employed to ensure effective implementation of the service brand model are the following:

- **Localising the corporation strategy and brand core** and involving a cross-functional teams to work on a shared brand vision, which harmonise the values and organisational culture, and strategy.
- Focusing on the **internal communication** that emphasises the brand and organisational values, to create a unified culture.
- Creating **clear and achievable short-term and long-term brand objectives**, which inspire the employees.
- **Auditing the brandsphere internally** (all touchpoints, organisation culture etc.) and **externally** (customer facing elements, competitors and macro environment) to align these with the brand vision and brand objectives.
- Designing the **brand essence** with brand's core characteristics and brand promise and designing a plan to implement this to the organisation (communication, culture, and training).
- **Designing the organisation** for being capable of delivering the brand promise at every touchpoint, to support the high level of brand delivery. Service blueprints are suggested to be used to gain a detailed view of the touchpoints for structuring processes.

Proposals for future research in this topic is to study the implementation of the model and processes needed for it. This could enhance the understanding of operationalising the model itself in the organisation and find the best practices for making sure each element of the model will be active in daily operations. Also, another proposal for future research is to conduct quantitative research to study the outcomes and benefits of fully operational service brand management model in the organisation.

6.4 Reflections

Reflecting back on the research process, it has had a significant influence on the author's development as a master's student and marketing professional. The research process has been a multifaced journey with great findings, times of slow progress, and involved a lot of problem solving with the data analysis.

The research process has contributed greatly to author's personal and professional development. To begin with, conducting a thesis has development the overall critical thinking, ability of comprehensively use of academic sources, and arguing using theoretical framework and empirical research, all of these are very important in the author's personal and professional lives. Ability to

critically evaluate different sources and forming compelling arguments to explain oneself, are important factors in general, and the authors has seen great personal growth throughout the phases of being a master's student, but especially during the thesis process. The thesis process has also proven personal persistence and resilience, as there have been many challenges with the research from analysing data, gathering theoretical framework, thematising the work, and arguing by oneself on the direction the research is taking or should take. Also, the author has pursued to put a lot of effort on the clarity of the work, so it is academically well written, objective, easy to understand, and offers high quality functional results. This has been challenging due to time limits with the research work, professional life, and personal life, which have developed adaptability and flexibility. But due this, the author has also gained a lot of confidence on being able to succeed in all these areas at the same time.

The process has been inspiring and motivating personally but has offered many areas of professional development as well. With this research, the author has gained expertise in the subject matter, which is close to author's professional life as a marketing professional. The author has been able to enhance the knowledge and expertise on the field of service brand management and many of the things learnt can be directly implemented to daily operational work. One of the greatest successes of this process is the final service brand management model, and although created for the case organisation, these findings and learning can be taken to other organisations as well. The process has also developed the communicational skills, having a better ability to articulate complex and multifaced ideas and themes clearly, based on empirical data and theory. With that, the author's personal research skills have developed, which are very important in professional life as well.

The process has been hard and sometimes quite challenging, but the end result is rewarding. The research has changed and shaped author's perspectives on brand management, which are translatable to professional life as well, by managing these fields better and focusing on the development in these areas. The author has gained a substantial amount of new knowledge and understanding on the subject matter, but also been able to produce new knowledge and understanding for others. The hope is that the findings of this research, in terms of results and general understanding, will be useful especially for the case organisation, but also for others, as the results of this research are applicable to other brands as well.

6.5 Evaluation of the research

The main objective for this thesis is to answer what is the ideal service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity, based on the empirical research and theoretical framework. The development task of creating a service brand management model for the organisation is successfully completed.

The created model does not differ from the existing models in current literature significantly. Based on the findings in the empirical data, the organisation does not seem to have documented or structured processes for holistic service brand management, and therefore the focus of the research has been to utilise current models in literature to enable the organisation to reach its visioned state of service brand management. The organisation seeks to have a more holistically structured processes for the overarching service brand, and by using existing theoretical models, the development work has focused on connecting the current needs and visions within the organisations to integrate to current models in literature. However, due to this fact, the research end result is also relatively applicable for other organisations and brands as well. Providing a well-grounded background for the model, based on the empirical data and theoretical framework, support justifying and proven why the research and the creation of the model are necessary for the organisation, how they benefit the organisation moving forward to the visioned state of service brand management.

The organisation seems to have high focus on customer centricity and the internal metrics prove that, but there is also strategic vision for a new customer partnership model, in which the organisation seeks to have a collaborative way of working with the customer. This also reflects with the literature, where the co-creation of value is highlighted. Thus, the research also aligns with broader strategic goals in the organisation. For the organisation to strengthen its service brand holistically, and to structure and documents its process better, tailored service brand management model for creating brand equity enables the organisation to move towards the overarching strategic goals.

The comprehensive evaluation of the research could be done after implementing and operationalising the model in the organisation, discussed broader in the Chapter 6.3, but the developed models offer framework, approaches and news insights to service brand management. The objective for this research is to answer what is the ideal service brand management model for Company X for building brand equity and based on the rigorous process of analysing interview data through various stages, along with extensive emphasis theoretical insights and guidance, the illustration in Figure 17 concludes the research. Especially Chapter 5.2 offers a holistic perspective for the organisation on how it should manage its service brand, what measures it should take, and how each

element of the service brand helps the organisation to close the gaps and influences on the Company X's service brand.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Preliminary tools and guidance for structuring the interviews and creating the interview questions

Moilanen, T. 2008. Network brand management: Study of competencies of place branding ski destinations. Helsinki School of Economics – HSE Print, Helsinki. Pp. 233-234

“Intro

- How would you describe the core meaning of the CASE X brand identity?
- For how long has the CASE X brand been a subject for conscious development? For how long have you personally been involved in the planning and management of the brand?

Planning

- Please describe the process of brand planning. Through what kind of process was it originally developed and what kind of planning processes are used today in ‘fine tuning’ the brand?
- Participants of the brand planning / decision making body? (individuals/companies/their roles)
- What kind of challenges/problematic issues have you been confronted with while planning the CASE X brand?
- Could the present brand planning process be improved? What would the ‘ideal’ be like?

Implementation

- Please describe the process of executing the brand plans. How were/are the brand plans put into practice? Which organization(s) implement the brand plans i.e. put the plans into practice?
- What kind of challenges/problematic issues have you confronted in the implementation of the

CASE X brand plan?

- Could the present brand implementation process be improved? What would the ‘ideal’ be like?

Monitoring

- How is the performance of the CASE X brand monitored? How often are the brand planning/implementation processes being re-evaluated/reformed?
- Could the present brand performance monitoring system be improved?

Performance

- How successful do you consider the CASE X brand is in comparison to competitor brands?
- Which brands do you consider as being the best ones in the industry?
- How should the performance of a service brand be measured? What indicators should or could be used in evaluating one's own performance or to compare with competitors' performance.

Core competencies

- What are the core competencies required in developing and maintaining a successful service brand? What are the cornerstones of success when developing a service brand?
- Process/activities?
- Organization?
- Skills/knowledge?
- Resources?
- Other?

Other

- There are a number of varying definitions for 'a brand'. How would you define the concept of a brand? What is meant by it?
 - In addition to yourself, are there others who may possess valuable insights into to the brand planning and management of CASE X?"
- (Moilanen 2008, 233-234.)

Keller, K. L. (2000). The brand report card. Harvard Business Review. URL: <https://hbr.org/2000/01/the-brand-report-card>

Blazevic, A., Svensson Agevall, A. & Klements, E. 2012. Internal Branding - Understanding Brand Values. Bachelor Thesis. Linnaeus University. URL: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:530176/FULLTEXT01.pdf>. Accessed: 30.3.2022

- "To what extent do you feel you have the knowledge to do your job in a way that supports the brand values?
- To what extent do you feel that you have enough knowledge about the brand values in order to deliver them correctly to the customers?
- Do you know what Company X, as a brand, promises its customers (through their brand values)?
- Do you feel that you can fulfil these promises to the customers?
- To what extent do you feel it is important for you as an employee to understand what has been promised to the customer in relation to the service you provide?

- Do you get knowledge/information from managers about how to act in meeting with customers?
- To what extent do you identify yourself with Company X?
- When was the last time you heard someone within the organization talk about the brand values of Company X?
- To what extent do you feel emotionally attached to the brand Company X?
- To what extent do you talk positively about the brand outside the company?
- To what extent do you feel that you are proud to tell others that you are part of Company X?
- To what extent do you feel that all the employed within Company X works towards the same goal? Are they involved in the brand management process?"

(Blazevic, Svensson Agevall & Klements 2012, 66-71.)

Appendix 2. Brand evaluation questionnaire

Brand Vision - Issues to be assessed internally are as follows:

1. "How strong is the leadership provided either by the most senior influential person (typically the Chairman or Managing Director) or the brand's team?"
2. How involved are staff in brand visioning?
3. What level of awareness and understanding is there among staff about the brand's vision?
4. How committed and proud are staff about the brand vision?
5. How stretching is the current vision?
6. To what extent does the most senior influential person, or the brand's team, inspire staff about their roles as brand builders?
7. How open are the senior management team to having their ideas about the brand vision challenged?
8. To what extent do staff know the values of the brand they support?
9. Do key managers understand the key values of their brand that create a welcome point of difference, as opposed to the category values?
10. How committed are staff to their brand's values?
11. To what extent do the values of the brand concur with the values of staff working on that brand?
12. How closely do the actions of the senior managers and other employees reflect the values being espoused?
13. How confident are staff in translating the values of their brand into actions they should undertake in their daily roles?
14. How difficult is it for staff to make changes in order to work towards bringing about the brand vision?
15. How effective is the feedback of environmental analysis to help refine ideas about the brand vision?

Brand Vision - Issues to be evaluated among external stakeholders are as follows:

16. What progress is being made in bringing about a welcomed envisioned future?
17. Thinking of the domain where the brand seeks to add value to peoples' lives, to what extent is the brand making their world a better place?
18. How accurate are the assessments of stakeholders about the brand's values?
19. When told the brand's values, how much do stakeholders appreciate these values and regard them as contributing to brand differentiation?

Organisational Culture - The internal issues to be evaluated are as follows:

20. How able are employees to describe their organisational culture?
21. To what extent do employees consider their organisational culture helps or hinders brand performance?
22. How well do the artefacts of the organisational culture support the brand vision?
23. How well do the values of the organisational culture support the brand vision?
24. How well do the assumptions of the organisational culture support the brand vision?
25. When considering the subcultures that exist in different parts of the organisation, what proportions are:
 - a. enhancing subcultures?
 - b. orthogonal subcultures?
 - c. counter subcultures?
26. To what extent is the organisational culture:
 - a. appropriate for the current environment?
 - b. adaptable to environmental change?
 - c. respects leadership at all levels?
 - d. attentive to satisfying the needs of staff, customers and shareholders?
27. How do recruitment programmes reinforce the desired culture?
28. How consistent are the brand objectives with the brand vision?
29. How stretching are the brand objectives?
30. Are new mental models needed to help staff appreciate how working practices need to be changed to achieve these objectives?
31. What must be done differently to achieve the brand objectives?
32. How aware are staff of the brand's:
 - a. long-term objectives?
 - b. short-term objectives?
33. How committed are staff to helping achieve the brand's:
 - a. long-term objectives?
 - b. short-term objectives?
34. How appropriate are the catalytic mechanisms in guiding management and employees to achieve the brand objectives?

Organisational Culture - The external issues to be evaluated are as follows:

35. To what extent is the brand under- or over-achieving on its:

- a. short-term objectives?
- b. long-term objectives?

Brand Essence - The internal issues to be addressed are as follows:

36. How well does the brand essence capitalise on the enhancing forces from the audit of the brandsphere and what is being done to protect the brand essence from the impeding forces?
37. How well does the brand essence support the brand vision?
38. How aware are staff of the elements of the brand pyramid and the resulting brand promise?
39. How committed are staff to delivering the promise inherent in the brand pyramid?
40. How coherent are the elements of the brand pyramid?
41. How supportive is the brand citizenship behaviour of employees?
42. How well do staff understand the brand's positioning and their role to deliver this?

Brand Essence - The external issues to be assessed are as follows:

43. How well do customers' perceptions of the brand's positioning match the benefits in the bottom part of the brand pyramid?
44. How much do the brand's target market welcome the brand's functional benefits?
45. To what extent does the brand positioning reflect the customers' key motivators?
46. Does the positioning differentiate the brand from competitors?
47. How well do customers' perceptions of the brand's personality match the personality traits or personality at the top of the brand pyramid?
48. How much do the brand's target market welcome the brand's personality traits?
49. How well do customers associate the brand with its promise?
50. How much do customers welcome the brand's promise?

Implementation and Brand Resourcing - The internal issues to be evaluated are as follows:

51. To what extent are the core competencies underpinning the brand benefiting from organisational learning and being protected against outsourcing?
52. How appropriate is the value delivery system (i.e. either the value chain or the service blueprint) for supporting the brand's relative price against competitors and/or its added value?
53. How effectively are the activities linked in the value delivery system?
54. How attractive is the employer brand?

55. How much do team members confirm each other's self-identities?
56. How appropriate is the policy on empowerment for the brand?
57. To what extent do the employees' support systems facilitate employees' abilities to deliver the brand promise?
58. What systems are in place to ensure that if staff are empowered, they do not significantly change the brand promise?
59. How genuine are staff when building relationships with their stakeholders?
60. How well managed are the terminations of relationships?

Implementation and Brand Resourcing - The external issues to be evaluated are as follows:

61. How well does the brand nomenclature provide rapid recall of the brand's benefits?
62. How strong is the brand's relationship with its external stakeholders?
63. How well rated is the service supporting the brand?
64. How confident are stakeholders with the brand through the organisation's focus on reducing perceived risk?
65. To what extent is the brand able to take legal action against infringers?
66. How well are the emotional rewards correctly recognised?
67. To what degree do stakeholders perceive any conflicts between the brand's promise and their experiences with the brand?
68. To what extent does communication about the brand stress a low number of claims which have high relevance for customer?
69. How well co-ordinated is information to stakeholders about the brand?
70. To what extent do elements of the brand reinforce the brand promise?"

(De Chernatony, 2010, 353-357)