Factors affecting buying behavior of hairdressers. Case Kao Finland Oy

Laakkonen, Johanna

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Johanna Laakkonen
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Abstract

Johanna Laakkonen

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Understanding buying behavior is key to successful and long customer relationships. Companies who supply goods and services for professional use must understand the influences driven by purchase decisions, buying patterns and classifications.

The aim of this thesis was to determine the most influential characteristics of business-to-business buying behavior of hairdressers. The subject was requested by KAO Finland Oy, case company that markets and supplies one of the best-known professional hair care supplies in Finland. KAO Finland Oy represents the brands GOLDWELL and KMS California. The case company is the subsidiary of the Japanese conglomerate KAO Corporation.

The theoretical backgound of the thesis was based on business-to-business buying behavior. Organizational buying influences and business buying procedures were studied. Additional information was collected through the interviews with the case company personnel, supported by the online resources and familiarization of the market condition. Theoretical framework was adapted to the empirical research by construction and analysis of the research. KAO Finland Oy's requests determined the content of the survey questions in addition to the theory.

The research was conducted in spring 2015. Quantitative and qualitative methodology was used and the collection of data was executed through an online survey. The survey consisting of 17 questions was addressed to hairdressers. The respondents were asked to measure, compare and inform their opinions and routines regarding the purchase involving criteria, risk involvement, customer retention and training. The survey was sent by Google Forms to up to 200 hairdressers all over Finland. 53 responses were received and the estimated answering rate was 27%.

The findings of the research concluded that the wholesaler companies who supply hair care goods to hairdressers must pay attention to their activeness and locality. Suppliers should address their clients by providing an innovative service and forerun the trends by providing "Just-In-Time"- tools and techniques.

Keywords buying behavior, b-2-b, wholesale business, customer loyalty

Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu
Unit
Programme

Tiivistelmä

Johanna Laakkonen

Kampaajien ostokäyttäytymiseen vaikuttavat tekijät. Tapaus KAO Finland Oy.

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Ostokäyttäytymisen ymmärtäminen on avain pitkiin ja menestyksekkäisiin asiakassuhteisiin. Yritysten jotka toimittavat tuotteita ja palveluita ammattilaiskäyttöön täytyy olla perillä asiakkaan ostopäätökseen vaikuttavista tekijöistä, organisaation ostotapahtumasta ja erilaisista business-to-business ostomalleista.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli määrittää kampaamoyrittäjien tärkeimmät ostopäätökseen vaikuttavat tekijät. Opinnäytetyön tilasi tukkurifirma KAO Finland Oy joka myy ja markkinoi Suomessa eräitä alan suosituimmista ammattilaisten hiustuotesarjoista. KAO Finland Oy edustaa Suomessa kahta hiustuotebrändiä, GOLDWELLia sekä KMS Californiaa. KAO Finland Oy on japanilaisen monialayrityksen KAO Corporationin tytäryhtiö.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettinen tausta perustuu yritysmarkkinoiden ostokäyttäytymiseen. Alan kirjallisuuteen tutustuttiin muun muassa organisaation ostokäyttäytymistä määrittävien vaikutteiden ja ostopäätöksen vaiheiden näkökulmasta. Empiirisen tutkimuksen taustatietona toimi osallisuus firman toiminnassa työharjoittelun aikana. Yrityksen profiilia tukivat julkiset lähteet, yrityksen verkkosivut ja kampaamoalan ekonomiseen tilanteeseen perehtyminen. Empiirisen tutkimuksen tutkimuskysymykset rakennettiin sekä yrityksen mielipiteiden että teoriataustan avulla, jotta tutkimuksen indikaattorit kohdistuisivat oikeisiin alueisiin ja mittaisivat haluttuja osa-alueita mahdollisimman tarkasti.

Tutkimus toteutettiin keväällä 2015. Kvantitatiivisia ja kvalitatiivisia tutkimusmenetelmiä käytettiin ja tutkimusryhmäksi valikoitiin kampaamoalan yrittäjiä joka puolelta Suomea. Kampaajia lähestyttiin Google Forms-työkalulla rakennetulla kyselyllä, joka sisälsi 17 kysymystä. Kysymyksissä vastaajia pyydettiin mittaamaan, vertailemaan sekä kertomaan mielipiteitään ja rutiinejaan koskien ostopäätökseen vaikuttavia tekijöitä, riskinhallintaa, asiakastyytyväisyyttä sekä tukkurien tarjoamaa koulutusta. Kysely lähetettiin yli kahdelle sadalle kampaamoalan työntekijälle. Kysely sai 53 vastausta ja arvioitu vastanneisuusprosentti oli 27%.

Tutkimuksesta kävi ilmi, että kampaamoalan tarvikkeita myyvien tukkureiden kannattaa pyrkiä parantamaan toiminnallisuuttaan erityisesti pienillä paikakunnilla. Tukkurit jotka onnistuvat vastaamaan muuttuvien markkinoiden muutoksiin nopeiten ja tarjoavat asiakkailleen ajan hermolla kulkevia tuotteita ovat vahvimmissa kilpailuasemissa.

Avainsanat ostokäyttäytyminen, yritysmynti, tukkuribisnes, asiakasuskollisuus

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1 Introduction

The size of the hair care industry in Finland is hard to measure since majority of the hair salon owners are small business entrepreneurs. The estimated amount of all hairdressers operating in Finland is over 10 000 according to the findings published by the newspaper Karjalainen in 2013 (Karjalainen 2013). The situation at the hair care industry at the moment is unstable due to high competition of wholesale providers. As a result of poor economic situation, hairdresser entrepreneurs are facing a difficult era in order to maintain their business profitable. Many hair care tool-selling companies have extended their marketing campaigns and product innovations by releasing their professional tools to be sold at easy-access retailers such as supermarkets and department stores. The products established as salon-only products are hence expanded to wider customer pool in order to gain more profit and to reach more customers. However, in hairdresser's point of view, the expansion of professional tools is a severe threat to their entrepreneurship. As markets offer more and more "do it yourself"- conceptual tools to change hair at home, less clients turn to professional hairdresser (Helsingin uutiset 2012).

KAO Finland Oy is a part of the Japanese conglomerate KAO Corporation. The subsidiary, KAO Finland Oy is responsible for marketing GOLDWELL and KMS California hair care products to professional use in Finland.The clientele of KAO Finland Oy consists of hairdressers as business-to-business clients. The customers are primarily entrepreneurs who purchase hair care products in order to practice their profession, sell the company's products for retail and use the products on their clients. Wholesale business consists of multiple pieces that must combine a favorable service for the hairdresser. The crucial parts of effective business are customer service, sales representatives, product development, product assortment, logistics and training (GOLDWELL & KMS California 2016).

1.1 Purpose of the thesis

The purpose of the research is to define the influental factors of business-to business buying behavior. Buying behaviour of hairdressers is determined by assessing the characteristics of buying behaviour by several quantitative and qualitative ctiteria.The outcome is to increase the company's expertise in potential clientele and to provide new aspects of knowledge to convey to all areas of business from product evolvement to customer management. The better the company is aware of the client's expectations and qualifications, the more they will be able to produce and customize their services and products to their needs. The results will provide the case company recommendations for future improvent of service though findings can be utilized by all professional hair care tool wholesalers and other suppliers with similar customer groups.

1.2 Research approach

The main source of data assessed by research approach comes from the findings of an online survey conducted. The survey is designed to study the factors affecting buying behavior. A part of the empirical research is conducted with a partner Jasmin Kariniemi, a fellow student and trainee from KAO Finland Oy. The partner participates in designing the content of the survey and the data inquiry process throughout. Jasmin Kariniemi is authorized to utilize the findings of the survey as a reference of her thesis. However, the content of this thesis report is solely written by the author of the thesis Johanna Laakkonen. All observations, conclusions and analysises included in this thesis are written by the author. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used. The data is collected from participants via Google Forms. The outlining of the research is conducted in collaboration with KAO Finland Oy according to their wishes for the survey.

1.3 Knowledge base

The knowledge base of the thesis involves theory of businesss purchasing behavior and concentrates on factors affecting the decision to purchase. The differences of consumer selling and business-to-business selling are discussed. Characteristics that influence organizational buying are defined. Moreover, the stages of the buying process are determind. Personal interviews with the company personnel offered orientation to the hairdresser business and the future aspects of the field generate a broader view of the industry.

1.4 Framework of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the background of the thesis, the company profile and the research approach. The second chapter focuses on theoretical background and links the theory of business-to-business buying behavior to the empirical research. The third chapter concentrates on methodology and execution of the research. The fourth chapter covers in-dept description of the case company KAO Finland Oy. The market conditions and the future aspects of the company are discussed. The results of the empirical research are analyzed. The chapter five introduces the conclusions of the study in addition to recommendations to KAO Finland Oy. Chapter six discusses the linkage of the theory and the empirical study. The thesis finalizes with a summary of the study conducted.

2 Knowledge base

2.1 Concept of buying behaviour

To understant the buying process of any client, the factors influencing buying behavior must be addressed. According to Kotler and Keller (2012, 173), consumer behavior studies how individuals or groups purchase, utilize and dispose of goods, services, ideas or experiences in order to satisfy their needs and interests. In order to gain a whole abstract of the concept of buying behavior, one must understand that buying behavior consists of three separate dimensions that are the study of culture, the study of the social groups and the study of the individual (Kotler et al. 2012, 173).

2.2 Differences of B2C and B2B buying behaviour

Behaviours & characteristics	Consumer buying	Organizational buying
Number of buyers	Normally large	Normally small
Size of orders	Small	Large
Value of orders	Normally low	Normally high
Evaluating criteria	Social, ego, & utility	Price, value, & utility
Purchase initiation	Normally self	Normally others
Level of risk	Low to medium	Medium to high
Complexity of decision	Low to medium	Medium to high
Information search	Normally short	Normally long

Illustration 1: Broad differences between B2C and B2B buying behaviors (Ellis 2011, 39)

Illustration represents the differences between business-to-consumers and business-to-business buying behavior. Illustration 1 provides “the big picture” of how industries vary depending on clientele. The consumers purchasing goods mostly for personal use evaluate the purchase based on emotional and socio-economical reasons. Business-to-business clients’ criteria and measurement policies for purchase are mostly rational. However, as all customers are individuals, the same factors impact both parties whether their position as a buyer is a consumer or a business client. Consumer markets’ customer groups are wide, multinational and moreover expanding. In organizational business there are less buyers and thus the competition over customers is high, as it also is in consumer market but since suppliers target their goods and services to businesses that are not usually the end users themselves, the constitution of business is different. The suppliers must adjust and customize their services and tools to match the business owners’ needs perfectly. Feedback and continuous evolvement are essential in order to improve the suppliers' productiveness and attain new customer relationships (Ellis 2011, 39).

Risk involvement must be highlighted when viewing business-to-business relationships. From KAO Finland Oy's clientele perspective, the supplier of goods has a very remarkable share in business. The goods and the services provided by the supplier impact highly on the end customers and the reputation of the salon. Trainings provided by the supplier also influence the hairdressers' awareness of new trends, cutting and styling technics and coloring fashion. Keeping up on trends in beauty business is an essential in terms of innovativeness. The role of the supplier in hairdressers' business is substantially higher than in most business-to-business customer relationships. The wholesaler provides various services to the profession more than just tools for hairdressing. The supplier also delivers knowledge, expertise and fashion. Since the provider has such a high impact on the hairdressers' business, the risk level in selection of the supplier is naturally very high. The information search and the measurement by comparing the suppliers to another commonly last long, as the outcome of the selection has a high involvement in business (Ellis 2011,39; Employee B 2015. Personal communication).

2.3 Influences on Organizational Demand

2.3.1 External influences

Ellis (2011,40-41) describes the four different subcategories influencing the organizational purchasing decisions. As all marketers are derived by demand, the socio-economic situation that determines the current status of supply and demand has a large impact on business. Economic depression has had a negative impact on the purchasing power of end-customers. Moreover, the socio-economic changes effect on companies' competitiveness. Causal connections can always be found when one industry weakens. For example, when the price of oil increased and consequently fuel surcharges were added to passenger tickets, the airline industry had a significant setback and many operators got out of business. Similar causal connections can be found in any industry (Ellis 2011, 40-41). The increase of value added tax has forced hairdressers to increase prices as the tax inflated from 9% to 23% in 2012. Simultaneously, the prices of tools, electricity and rent have also increased (Karjalainen 2013). This topic will be further discussed later this report.

Manufacturers' changes in price, quality, reputation or any other valuable criteria always have their impact on consumer market. When customers withdraw from market or purchase products or services less frequently than before, the demand of suppliers' goods decrease. Moreover, the globalization of business has an important role in purchase decision, especially if the client company is operating overseas. The importance for customers is that the supplier is able to deliver the same goods and services despite of the operating area and that supplier's delivery channels are globally active. Customer power is explained by the requirements of business-to-business customers. The customers are becoming continuously more demanding in their expectations of quality, innovativeness and productiveness. The supplying organizations are easily compared to each other as the reliability and the reputation of the company are measured and contested (Ellis 2011, 40-41).

Market stagnation is a consequence of many outbound businesses, overcapacity and high competition on the market. High value and cost-effectiveness are expected from purchase or service despite the conditions of market stagnation. This elevates pressure, forces the companies to adapt to the difficult situation and innovate new marketing strategies and customer attributes in order to survive. Finally, process mentality refers to the trend of how companies are currently approaching the client by different methods than before. Previously, the supplier organizations reached for the clients with ready-made services. Currently, the customers commit to the supplier with the highest skills in problem solving and the ability to assure the most critical clients of adjusted and innovative services (Ellis 2011, 40-41).

2.3.2 Internal influences

The types of the business organization can be divided into three categories: unit production, mass-production and process production. The types of businesses supplied by KAO Finland Oy are unit businesses. Majority of clients are sole proprietors or small businesses (Employee B 2015. Personal communication). The structure of purchasing is influential on purchasing decision especially in larger organizations where separate departments handle organizational purchases. Basically, a company can decide whether to have a centralized buying department or to address purchases of each department in decentralized manner. Both structures have their pros and cons. Centralized buying is more cost-effective and offers more control and consistency. However, decentralized buying patterns enable buyers to adjust the purchases to the needs of the end-users more specifically (Ellis 2011, 42-44).

Moreover, purchasing policies of companies differentiate depending on the purpose of the sale and the significance in buyers' turnover. Business-to-business marketers must always appreciate what the counterpart is expecting to gain from the relationship. Discussion with the financial manager is advised in order to gain a view of the company's purchasing values and the desired outcome of the collaboration. Purchasing ethics can provide a large influence on how, why and where the companies buy. Different organizations support different values and set their own priorities as their response to socio-economical, environmental, moral and individual standards. Business-to-business marketers must be alerted by the variability of the clients' values and respectfully come in terms of providing goods matching the ethics followed by the customer. Purchasing systems refer to speed and technology of delivering goods from supplier to customer (Ellis 2011, 42-44). From KAO Finland Oy's point of view, forerunning the field of launching and delivering new products is an essential asset to provide for business-to-business customers. If the supplier can help the customer to respond faster to the changes on the market, the supplier delivering Just-In-Time production techniques differentiates from competitors beneficially. Just-In-Time production refers to products that are lauched to match the needs of the latest discoveries of the market (Employee A 2015. Personal communication).

2.3.3 Individual influences

Perception of consequence describes the level of responsibility. The more the participant in the buying process feels in charge of the outcome, the more there are attempts to influence and familiarize the colleagues with the presumed correct solution (Ellis 2011, 45). In the case of this study, the clients of KAO Finland Oy are mostly entrepreneurs or employees of small businesses. Consequently, the responsibility of small business is given in large proportions to mostly one person, the business owner (Employee A 2015. Personal communication).

Downsizing of businesses and unstable economic era are resulting that large decisions are made with high pressure and uncertainty of business. Wrong solutions may lead to unemployment. Under these threatening circumstances decision-making process is long and carefully pre-considered. The extent of personal influence determines how power is shared by the members of the Buying Center, which is discussed in detail later in this chapter. In large organizations, there generally are managers and employees from various units or departments who contribute in the decision-making process of purchase. Nevertheless, how power is distributed inside the organization is difficult to identify by a salesperson. Social relationships in this case discuss the impact of relationships between the suppliers and the customers. This relationship can include activities outside the workforce extent or the relationship could have emerged through a business consultation. In some cases, social relationships can overpower other selection objectives. An acquaintance supplier might win the rival of the hardest bargain by "score points" given by the customer (Ellis 2011, 45).

2.3.4 Relational influences

Relational influences refer to relationships between the clients and the other stakeholders of the same business. The nature of the exchange relationship and the style of communication are influential to the purchase decision. There are two different general approaches of exchange relationships that are relational approach and transactional approach. Relational approach is based on a long-term commitment, trust and mutual support. Relational approach is nurtured by the members of the Buying Center, which will be introduced later on this chapter. Transactional approach is short-term and built by distant, even suspicious behavior. In the case of the hairdresser clients, business-to-business relationships built by suppliers and entrepreneurs are mostly and foremost targeted by relational approach. The supplier aims to provide personalized support and build a mutual trust in order to commit long-term customer relationships (Ellis 2011, 46).

The nature of the relationship is the most highly affected by the manager in charge of inbound purchases. Leadership styles differentiate from transformational leaders to transactional leaders. Whereas transformational leaders implement in raising awareness and promoting the changes of the personnel and the organization, transactional leaders focus on maintaining the standards by market trades (Ellis 2011, 46).

2.4 The Buying center

According to Ellis (2011, 47-48), there are six different roles that implicate the decision of purchase. Varying upon the size of the decision-making unit of the company (DMU), these roles can be shared by all the members of DMU. In the case of small businesses and entrepreneurs, the buying center roles contribute to buying decision of the key person in purchase, the decision maker. The roles displayed consist of the buyer, the user, the influencer, the adviser, the gatekeeper and the decision maker (Ellis 2011, 48).

The buyer refers to the purchase manager of the company. The buyer searches for the suppliers available and supervises the overflow of all the company's purchases. However, this person isn't necessarily the decision maker. The user receives the goods purchased. This person requires the tools to be purchased as they are used in his/her profession. The influencer has an impact on the final decision as a colleague from the same business unit or an outside influence, for example as a client of the same supplier or the sales representative of the supplier company (Ellis 2011, 47-48).

The adviser is a less visible role monitoring the end decision that has dominance over products and suppliers to be selected. The gatekeeper consults between the members of the buying center and the suppliers involved. The gatekeeper isn't necessarily authorized to finalize the decision of purchase, but one has the power to blacklist a supplier from the selection category. The sixth and the most important role in the buying center is the key person, the decision maker. The decision maker commits the company and the supplier. However, especially in larger corporations the decision maker can be hard to identify for the supplier, as there is a difference between the technical decision and the financial commitment (Ellis 2011, 47-48).

2.5 Organisational factors

The smaller the company, the more commonly the roles mentioned above are shared by less members of the buying center. The individuals who participate in the purchase decision have their own characteristics that impact their perception and focus. Different interests of contributing members have high impact on their decision criteria. Interests vary upon authority and status, as for example by the salon owner and the hired employee (Kotler et al. 2010, 278).

2.6 Interpersonal factors

The buying center often consists of many counterparts influencing each other. However, interpersonal factors are often assessed as group dynamics since the value given to certain participant is hard to identify by an outsider. Influence can be attained by various reasons such as expertise, special connections or favorable personality (Kotler et al. 2010, 275-278).

2.7 Individual factors

Moreover, Kotler & Keller (2012, 237-251) highlight that also business buyers have their own motivations, points of view and personal preferences that are influenced by age, gender, residence, occupation, income, education, personality, risk awareness and culture. Individuals exhibit their own patterns of buying such as “keep-it-simple” buyers, “want-the-best” buyers and “want-everything-done” buyers. For example, “want-everything-done” buyers aim for a quick and effortless solution to a problem and aren’t keen on spending a long period of time on comparing, screening and consulting. They settle for the easiest alternative to fulfil the request (Kotler & Keller 2012, 237-251).

It is disclosed that the computing skills of the buying center participants may have dominant features on buying behavior. Computer masters are able to acquire and measure information by bidding the suppliers effortlessly. The key participants with less IT expertise often disregard competing sellers against each other and might be easier to commit into long-term relationships as they are less informed by themselves. By and large, the computers and the social media marketing have emerged through the years and become a crucial part of the daily business of any field. The digital media establishes the company’s recognizability, provides a stage for innovations and new services and enables a platform for easy communication with the customers (Kotler & Keller 2012, 237-251).

2.8 Organizational buying classifications

The buying processes of the organizational buyers can be divided into three categories varying upon the nature of the sale. The categories determine the repeatability, the content and the purpose of the sale (Ellis 2011, 49; Kotler & Keller 2012, 217-223). The categories are described below.

2.8.1 Straight rebuy

The first category is straight rebuy, which refers to a routine purchase of buying the identical goods repeatedly as they are constantly needed for the business (Ellis 2011, 51). In the case of this thesis, the business-to-business clients targeted by KAO Finland Oy primarily buy goods from suppliers by this routine (Employee A 2015. Personal communication). Straight rebuy is the fastest form of business purchasing as it surpasses many of the normal buyphases of organizational buying (Kotler & Keller 2012, 217).

2.8.2 Modified rebuy

As companies continuously release new products and evolve new technologies in order to boost the productivity of their goods, the customers become target markets for new products. As a result, the new goods are marketed to customers and depending on the measurement of importance of the product, the client may choose to purchase new products (Ellis 2011, 50; Kotler & Keller 2012, 217). Especially in beauty business, staying updated by the latest market offerings and ongoing trends is vital to success. As a consequence, the hairdressers expand their offerings as beauty professionals and purchase new goods in order to deliver different solutions to the end consumer (Employee A 2015. Personal communication).

2.8.3 New task

The third classification of organizational buying is the new task related buying process. In this category, the company is establishing for example a new service or a new product assortment. Larger expenditures for business require negotiation. The measurement of cost-effectiveness of the new task elongates the buying process before the closure of the sale (Ellis 2011, 49-50; Kotler & Keller 2012, 217).

2.9 Stages of the Business Buying Process

Ellis (2011, 51) has named the eight stages of the business buying process. The stages describe the normal overflow of the business-to-business buying process. Each step has its own purpose for the selection of the supplier. The stages are shown and futher discussed below.

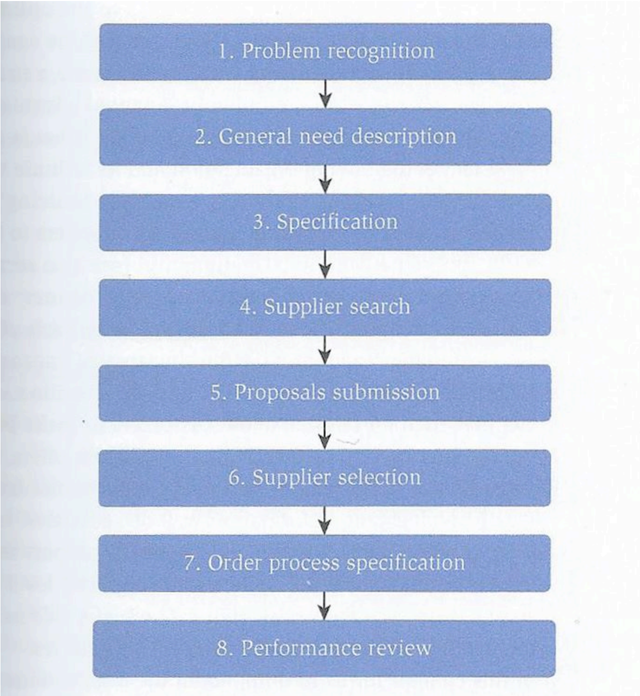

Illustration 2: Potential stages in the organizational buying process (Ellis 2011, 53)

Illustration 2 shows the eight stages of the business-to-business buying process. The process begins with problem recognition, which identifies the need of the product. This stage differentiates depending on the company's business. For example, a hotel that provides strawberries at breakfast is less evaluated by the quality of their strawberries than the complete service provided (features of higher importance are primarily measured such as hotel room appearance, sanitary features, peacefulness etc.). From the perspective of KAO Finland Oy, the importance of provided and used goods is remarkably higher due to differentiation of business. Hairdressers are primarily evaluated by their skills and the effectiveness of their tools. The profession is tied to possessing the goods required for the business. As a result, the tools to be used are selected carefully in order to attain the best service possible (Ellis 2011, 51).

General need description is tied to the need of the purchase. This procedure consequently offers the solution to the problem discussed in the stage one. For example, the scanning machine of the office has been broken and consequently there appears the need to either purchase new machinery or to hire a service transmitting the scanning procedures to outside provider. This stage also submits differently to a service that requires constant "machinery" in order to stay enabled, as for example hairdressers constantly need their tools as requirements of their business (Ellis 2011, 52).

Specification discusses the features and the differences of qualified suppliers. These qualifications include measurable criteria such as price, quality, delivery of products, assortment etc. The suppliers who fulfill the company's needs the best proceed to the next stage. In supplier search the candidates are compared by information gathering and networking with the company representatives (Ellis 2011, 52). From the perspective of KAO Finland Oy, the hairdressers receive information by professional databases, colleagues, marketing material and wholesaler representatives who visit the salon personally in order to exhibit the supplier company. Marketing material and sales representative are crucial tools of information that affect the final selection of supplier (Employee A 2015. Personal communication).

Proposal submission is where the company decides which suppliers are qualified for closing a sale. Business proposals are solicited from the selected suppliers. From the wholesaler's perspective, the supplier has to convince the client by establishing as enhancing agreement of business as possible. The suppliers are dependent on customers and long-term deals are the most favorable as they maintain the relationship for a long scale benefit (Ellis 2011, 52). Commonly, the companies utilize different variations of inducement in order to endorse engaging into long-term agreements. Inducements can be for example product discounts, free shipping costs, gifts or special offerings. Moreover, especially for building new customer relationships, commitment and trust are crucial bonds that ensure the customer that the supplier will operate by its best ability to deliver the customer excellent performance and hence maximize the profitability of the customer company (Employee A 2015. Personal communication).

The stage six is about evaluating the business proposals from the suppliers. The buying center counterparts are negotiating with each other and the supplier. The end solution of this stage will be the selection of the supplier. In order process specification, the order contract details and other fulfillment procedures are agreed by both parties, the buyer and the seller. The customer relationship is confirmed. This is the stage where the agreement of business is established. The final stage of the buying process is performance review where the company's buying center members evaluate the supplier and decide whether to endorse, edit or discontinue the relationship. Both relational and rational criteria apply when the members of the buying center review the suppliers' performance. Every company strives for engaging the existing client over and over again, in other words prolonging the business relationship as long as possible. In order to succeed in maintaining the customer, the supplier has to fully contribute to each step of their offered service. This happens by providing the clients the service and the products worth their money and effort, and by all means exceeding their expectations by enabling an outstanding return on investment (Ellis 2011, 52).

3 Research approach

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009, 4-5), research is determined as an activity conducted in order to define facts, patterns, observations, figures and other recordable data. Based on the findings of the research, conclusions and recommendations can be made for future development. The most common research methods used are quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Quantitative research is assessed by numerical data and is easily converted into figures. Quantitative data is commonly gathered by a questionnaire. However, the responding criteria are unable to cover personal interpretation or behavior (Saunders et al. 2009, 414). Controversely, quantitative data assesses all non-numerical data. Qualitative research includes the behavioristic patterns of the study group (Saunders et al. 2009, 480).

3.1 Methodology and execution of research

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used during this study. The primary source of information from the reseach group was gained from a survey conducted. The survey was designed to provide both numerical and behavioral data. The survey questions were carefully planned in collaboration of the sales representative, the artistic director and other staff members of KAO Finland Oy. The survey form included 17 questions. The inquiry consisted of multiple choice and open questions. Most of the questions were answered by announcing the opinion by choosing from the response alternatives. These questions were quantitative research questions (Saunders et al. 2009, 414). In question 10 (Appendix 1), the respondents were given “a scale 0” (meaning: I cannot respond) to use if they were unable to comment on given criteria. However, the scale 0 was only used when measuring colleagues’ opinions importance to purchase decision in question 10 (Appendix 1) by justfiable reasons. The respondents were also requested to evaluate the importance of singular factors in contrast to decision of purchase. As a result, the strengths and the weaknesses of several wholesale businesses associated with hair care products were evaluated. The survey also included several open questions, (Questions 1,2,9 & 17, Appendix 1). These questios studied the individual interpretation and behavior of hairdressers (Saunders et al. 2009,480).

The data inquiry method of the research had multiple variations of execution.
The research partners had primarily considered telephone inquiries as a research tool as telephone is the primary connection tool of the study group. Telephone questionnaire would administer the survey in the form of an interview. However, as a result of the unavailability of usable mobile devices, this information inquiry method was deleted. The email survey was chosen as the information inquiry tool of the research. Self-administered survey was consid-

ered as the best alternative for the research due to easiness to reply and effortlessness (Saunders et al. 2009, 363-364). Moreover, the survey was easy to distribute to a large group of study group members. However it must be notified that due to the data inquiry method, the survey did not reach all the hairdressers qualified for the research. Not all hairdressing salons announce a public email address in their site, nor all salons even have a web page of their own. The hairdressers with no eletric contact details online were removed from the survey.

The target group was collected via Google. 25 cities were selected in order to narrow the search of suitable hairdressers. The cities included in the research were selected based on the population and the geographic location (ICT Magic 2015; Appendix 2). KAO Finland Oy had a high interest in collecting the data from as wide operating area as possible in order to perceive a larger perspective in the results. The targeted study group was aimed to cover entire Finnish territory (Employee A & B 2015. Personal communication). Over 200 hairdresser saloons were contacted by email and sent an online survey provided by Google Forms. The survey was open for responses from 26.3.2015 to 31.5.2015. The collected data was analyzed with Google Forms by using quantitative analytics. The survey obtained 53 responses. The answering rate was on average 27%. In order to simplify the analysis of the results, the key questions discovered as the most valuable to the research were converted into figures. The majority of the survey questions (13/16) were measured by quantitative criteria.

3.2 Validity and reliability of the research

Vehkalahti (2008, 41) describes validity as an indicator of how specifically the research problem was measured during the research. In other words, validity describes whether the correct issues in contrast to the subject were measured. Validity also connects to the repeatability of the research. Reliability of the research is measured by defining how accurately the study measured the indicators of the research (Vehkalahti 2008, 41-42). In the case of the study conducted, reliability and validity of the survey results must be viewed with perspective. The survey responses were received from 25 different cities in Finland, which have been put into two categories based on the population. There was no remarkable majority from any particular region (Appendix 2). Reliability and validity of the research are foremost tied to the survey questions (Vehkalahti 2008, 41-42). The survey questions were considered and viewed from the perspective of the theory of business-to-business buying behavior. The theoretical background of the thesis is considered as reliable. Information was acquired from reliable sources to support the understanding of market conditions of the study. All information acquired created a base for the analysis of the survey results.

4 Empirical study

4.1 KAO Finland Oy

KAO Finland Oy is responsible for marketing and representing GOLDWELL and KMS California hair care products, which are sold on professional use in Finland. KAO Finland Oy also conveys representative products to Estonian importer. Moreover, the company represents German Olymp-hair care utensils and hairdressing tools. KAO Finland Oy belongs to the notable Japanese conglomerate KAO Corporation. KAO Finland Oy's annual sales revenue is approximately ten million euros, whereas there are only 45 staff members. The sales field covers entire Finnish territory. There are thirteen sales fields in total, each with an own sales representative (GOLDWELL & KMS California 2016).

The main office and the warehouse are situated in Stockholm, Sweden. KAO Finland Oy's Finnish office is situated in central Helsinki, addressed in Unioninkatu 24. The unit compunds office premises and a training space for hairdressers' advanced training and KAO Finland Oy's representative products usage familiarization. The training station is called GOLDWELL & KMS California Academy. Moreover, a pick-up wholesale inventory is located on the ground floor of KAO Finland Oy's office. The biggest producing corporation of GOLDWELL products is situated in Germany and KMS California's head production center addresses in California, USA. GOLDWELL operates globally in 42 countries. High quality GOLDWELL and KMS California products are sold for professional use exclusively at hair salons and barber stores (GOLDWELL & KMS California 2016).

GOLDWELL is a German hair care brand. GOLDWELL offers multiple tools and services for hairdressers; an assortment of trainings, wide product selection and as a forerunner of trends and creativeness, GOLDWELL hosts an annual global hairdressing competition called Color Zoom Artistic Event. The contest is open to all GOLDWELL artists and it has three contestant categories: New Talent for hairdressers with less than five years of professional experience, Creative for contestants active as professionals for up to five years and Partner for all GOLDWELL trainers. The event was participated by approximately 3000 hairdressers in 2015. In addition to Color Zoom competition, the Color Zoom Artistic Event also consists of workshops, training sessions and festive activities. Color Zoom Artistic Event is one of the biggest hairdressing fields' professional events. As a social media manifest and a brand celebration, Color Zoom has a high value in strengthening the brand image and popularity (GOLDWELL & KMS California 2016; Employee A & B 2015. Personal communication).

KMS California is a selective retail brand that is only sold in professional salons or authorized department stores. Selective retail series are commonly available at the salon as surplus sales products and home treatments requested by hairdressers. As KMS California belongs to same corporation as GOLDWELL, the brands are often displayed with both logos. KMS California series are commonly supplied to GOLDWELL customers as GOLDWELL's selective retail series (GOLDWELL & KMS California 2016; Employee A 2015. Personal communication).

4.2 Company history in short

German Hans Dotter founded the hair care product company GOLDWELL GmbH in 1948. The Finnish Marttinen Oy started importing GOLDWELL products in 1982. Japanese corporation KAO purchased GOLDWELL in 1989. The German purchased Marttinen Oy's business as they founded a subsidiary in Finland in 1991. The subsidiary was named GOLDWELL Oy. In 2003, the Japanese chemistry conglomerate KAO Corporation purchased a new brand KMS California and founded a hair care division. GOLDWELL Oy's name was transferred to KAO Finland Oy (GOLDWELL & KMS California 2016).

4.3 Market situation

Economical situation at the hair care professional market has been poor for decades due to economic depression. In Finland, the hairdresser market has suffered from increased value added tax rates that have diminished the competitiveness of hairdressers. Currently the value added tax is 24%. In 2007, the European Union started an experiment operating in EU region decreasing the value added tax of hairdressers to 8%. The experiments' aim was to increase the demand of the services, create new workplaces and diminish the share of black market by lower prices. However, the experiment was discontinued in 2010 due to unavailability to reach the given objectives. In 2012, the value added tax for hair care industry was increased from 9% to 23 %. The increase instantly affected the pricing policy of hairdressers. The prices of hair care services increased by 7-14%, as estimated by the hairdressers of the interviews published by a newspaper in Helsinki called Helsingin Uutiset (2012).

As a consequence of economic depression, also the prices of electricity, rent and business tools have increased. The purchasing power of consumers has decreased by higher prices, unstable market conditions and fear of unemployment. Moreover, as the social media has become the ultimate tool of daily functions, comparing and buying goods online is effortless and easy. Consumers are hardly asserted and cost-conscious. As competitors release inexpensive alternative tools for home use targeting to similar results as professionals would perform in their salon, the consumers decrease. The remaining clients of professional hairdressers may visit the salon less frequently than before the alternative tools were as visible and available at the market. As stated by hairdresser Nieminen, the probability that existing clients limit their needs to attend to professional salon is high. Nieminen suspects that hairdressers will lose client visits to do-it-yourself hair dyes and other self-used tools. Hairdresser Perttu estimates that the situation complicates especially the young entrepreneurs chances to fend in the field. The fresh faces of the industry are newly starting to construct their own customer relationships. However, without gaining the contacts rapidly, the hairdressers will become unable to cover the costs. As a consequence, highly demanding market conditions decrease positions in the hairdressing field and set forbidding challenges for newcomers. Hairdresser Hellstén stated that the entrepreneur must increase one's labor input as equivalent to two and a half person's productiveness in order to maintain the output received in the years of low VAT rates (Helsingin uutiset 2012).

4.4 Importance of business relationship

As challenging economic era is faced in business, partnership between wholesaler and hairdresser grows more important. In order to construct a business profitable for both counterparts, the wholesaler and the hairdresser must function as a team targeted to success. GOLDWELL, represented in Finland by KAO Finland Oy, emphasizes the importance of partnership by providing a wide assortment of trainings and consultation. GOLDWELL provides services developed for strengthening, advancing, informing and teaching the clientele the latest global trends, technology and techniques. Moreover, GOLDWELL provides business consultation, salon specific trainings and business education. Business education consists of sales and marketing strategies to for example surplus sales and services. The aim of training is to educate the GOLDWELL hairdresser to maintain competitiveness in the field and to provide the skills of how to acquire additional value in business revenue (GOLDWELL & KMS California 2016).

4.5 Competitor analysis

The biggest competitors of KAO Corporation (parent company of KAO Finland Oy) are conglomerates L'Oréal, Henkel (owner of Schwarzkopft) and Wella (A subsidiary of Procter & Gamble Corporation, an American conglomerate of consumer goods). All the competitors are remarkably larger enterprises by size and distribution channels compared to Kao Co. However, since all four named companies are conglomerates and operating globally, they were selected as the closest reference groups for KAO Corporation/KAO Finland Oy. All four companies are also foreign as their headquarters are not located in Finland. Their situation at the market is substantially different to for example the Finnish supplier competitor Sim Finland, which is a brand primarily operating only in Finland (KAO Corporation 2016; L'Oréal 2016; Henkel 2016; Procter & Gamble Corporation 2016; Sim Finland 2016).

KAO Corporations' operating income (earnings before interest and tax) was 1,3 billion euros in December 2015. The company owns both chemical and cosmetic brands. In 2015, beauty care products' share of operating profit amounted 236,1 million euros (KAO Corporation 2016). As a comparison, Henkel's operating income of 2015 was announced 2,8 billion euros. In addition to beauty brands, Henkel owns laundry and home care brands and adhesive technologies. Beauty brands' share of company's operating profit was 561 million euros. In addition to professional hair care brand Schwarzkopft, Henkel also owns a hair care brand Syoss (consumer sales only) and a deodorant brand Dial which are included under the same subcategory. The amount of EBIT accounted by only Schwarzkopft remains unknown (Henkel 2016).

Beauty conglomerate L'Oréals' EBIT of 2015 amounted 4,4 billion euros. L'Oréal's operating profit from professional hair care products amounted 678.5 million euros in 2015 (L'Oréal 2016). Procter & Gamble's annual operating profit of 2015 was 10,8 billion euros. P&G owns multiple brands from various product groups. In 2015, beauty, hair and personal care products amounted 24% of company's net sales. Operating profit received from beauty, hair and personal care products was 3,1 billion euros. However, P&G owns various brands under the subcategory of beauty, hair and personal care. The amount of EBIT accounted from solely professional hair care products is unknown (Procter & Gamble Corporation 2016). The data presented above provides an understanding of the market conditions and competitiveness in hair care industry.

KAO Finland Oy's notable rivals are also Finnish founded suppliers such as Miraculos, Cutrin, ID Hair and Sim Finland. Since Finland's economical decrease has been ongoing for several years, presumably Finnish hairdressers want to support Finnish suppliers in order to contribute to Finnish economy. Finnish suppliers provide hair care tools specified for Finnish hair types and Finnish consumers' needs (Cutrin 2016; Sim Finland 2016; Miraculos 2016, ID Hair 2016). As a conclusion, KAO Finland Oy is suggested to focus their product and service development customized for each customer group, in this case the Finnish clients.

4.6 SWOT

The aim of SWOT analysis is to acquire "the big picture" of the company's current status as it describes different strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a company, in this case for KAO Finland Oy/GOLDWELL & KMS California. The observations are based on personal information, market conditions and the survey results.

Strenghts	**Weaknesses**
Strong brand image	Higher prices

Brand has been on the market since 1948> has gained years of expertise and credibility	Economic depression
Long and loyal customer relationships>successful customer retention	Main competitors: Finnish companies
Forerunner of trends; organizer of Color Zoom Artistic Event	Main competitors: Other foreign conglomerates
Large globally functioning organization with sufficient capital to expand and evolve tools and services	Less training activities in small populated areas
Opportunities	**Threats**
Training: providing forerunner expertise and competitiveness>customer retention and brand awareness	Wholesalers selling cheaper professional goods or retail hair care tools
VAT deduction: prices decrease, positions increase, consumers' interest in professional hair care services increase> more frequent customers	Black market "steals" clients from both suppliers and hairdressers
Economic situation improves: prices decrease, competitive situation eases	Economic depression continues
More innovative service patterns	High VAT prolongs to weaken the market conditions of hairdressers
More effective selling and marketing strategies leading to more new customers from all operating areas	Less new hairdressers, less new clients for suppliers
Focusing training and sales representatives' attention to northern Finland	Less market for hair care tool and service suppliers> reduction of supply and demand>dismissing positions

Table 1: The results of SWOT analysis for KAO Finland Oy

Concluding the findings of SWOT, KAO Finlad Oy is recommended to pay attention to training, locality, product assortment, development and sales contributing actions. Training should be diversily available all around Finland. Continuous improvement and innovation of product assortment aids KAO Finland Oy to stand out and provide the customers the latest "Just-In-Time" products. It is also important that the company supports the client's produciveness in business and contributes efficiently to end results by encouraging and uplifting the clients by all means. There are many crucial ways to support the client. Sales training encourages and educates the client in active and efficient sales management. Visual marketing enhances the consumer's attention. Banners, flyers and other visual marketing stimuli help creating and building an efficient brand image and distribute information to bypassing crowd. KAO Finland Oy can also motivate and boost its clients by arranging montly campaigns, sales competitions, new product launch offerings and other activities that consolidate sales. Tackling black market is difficult, but KAO Finland Oy can contribute by simply providing the most efficient, professional and personalized service possible. There will always be consumers who pick the cheapest alternative dispite of the quality, assortment, reputation and other criteria. KAO Finland Oy's main focus remains in its product concept and loyal customers. Reaching for the entire customer field is not even possible due to consumers' differentiating standars and purchasing habits. When the company doesn't aim to reach the entire potential of hairdresser professionals, the company doesn't lose its promises; quality, brand and expertise.

4.7 Survey results

4.7.1 Gender and location of the respondents

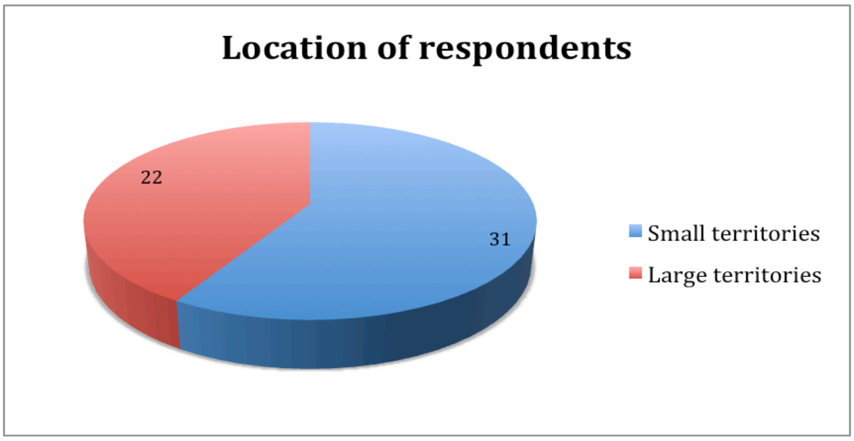

Figure 1: Location of the respondents (n=53)

Out of the 53 respondents, the majority of 58,5% was from little populated geographic locations. The remaining 41,5% of the respondents was from large cities that counted as Helsinki, Espoo, Tampere, Vantaa, Oulu and Turku. Cities populated with up to 150 000 citizens were counted as large cities. The sex of the respondents was 95% female. The remaining 5% consisting of three respondents were male.

4.7.2 Line of business

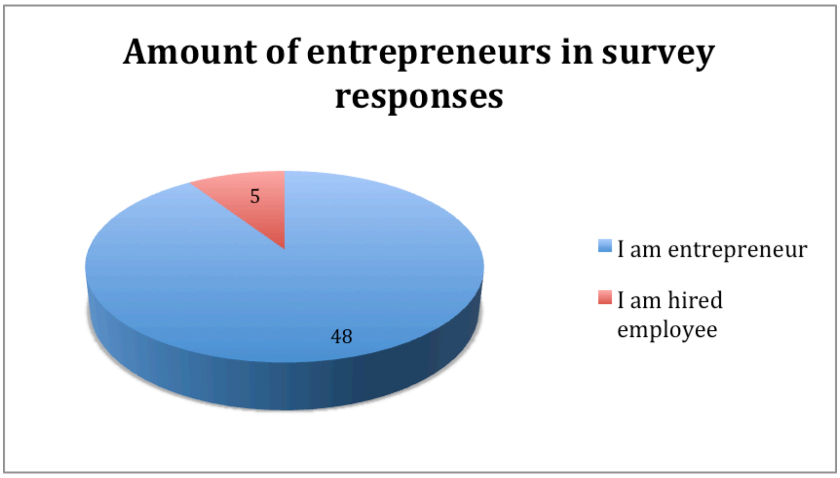

Figure 2: Number of entrepreneurs (n=53)

Figure 2 indicates the respondent's current position in business. As it appears from the figure, 90,6% of the respondents was entrepreneurs. Remaining 9,4% of the respondents was hired by entrepreneurs or businesses.

Figure 3: Quantity of employees (n=53)

The respondents were inquired the number of employees at their workplace. This question was entitled to measure the capacity of business. The highest percentage of the respondents (81,1 %) was working at a hair salon with 1-5 staff members. The second largest group of the respondents was working at a salon with 6-10 employees. Only 5,7 % of the respondents were working in a larger salon. As a conclusion, the responses were received majorly from small businesses and entrepreneurs.

4.7.3 Wholesaler selection and interest in changing a supplier

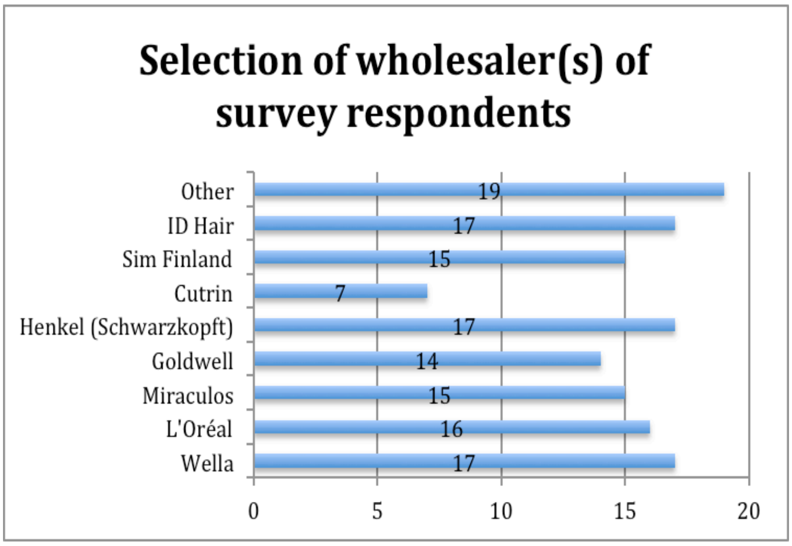

Figure 4: Wholesaler selection (n=53)

Figure 4 discusses the variety of wholesalers selected by the respondents. There is no clear majority, but the largest percentage of the respondents (35,8%) used neither of the wholesalers mentioned in the options given in the response alternatives of the survey. 32,1% of the respondents used at least one of the three following wholesalers; Wella, Henkel and ID Hair. When analyzing the content of figure 4, the fact to be notified is that the respondent was qualified to pick as many wholesalers as he/she orders from. Screening of survey replies revealed that the majority of the respondents (30%) were using two wholesalers simultaneously. However, 26% of the respondents were using four or more suppliers simultaneously. The third largest pool of the respondents (23%) was using only one wholesaler. Remaining 21% of the respondents was using three suppliers simultaneously. Moreover, only 32% of the respondents didn’t use any Finnish wholesaler companies. Finnish hair care suppliers featured in response alternatives were Miraculos, Cutrin, ID Hair and Sim Finland. In addition to the alternatives mentioned in the survey, the respondents announced that they were using Finnish hair care supplier KInnunen Oy. As a conclusion, the majority of the respondents supported at least one Finnish hair care product supplier.

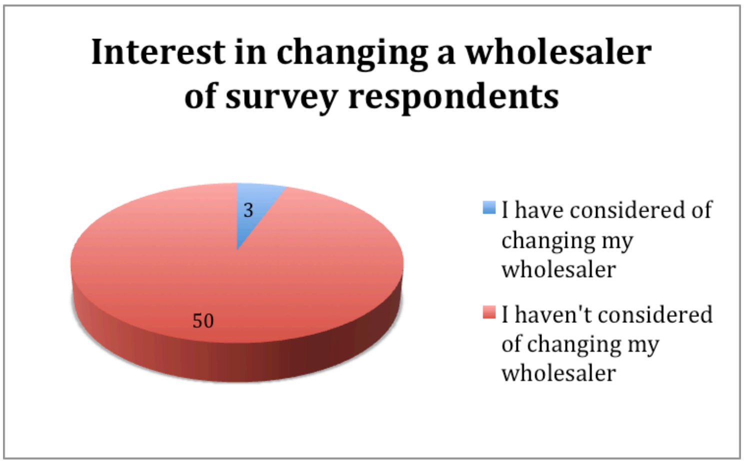

Figure 5: Interest in switching a supplier (n=53)

Next the respondents were asked whether they were considering of switching to another wholesaler. Majority of the respondents weren't considering of changing their wholesaler at the moment. The remaining 5,7% were considering of switching a wholesaler. Discussion over risk involvement as one of the most vital characteristics of business-to-business buying behavior was addressed (Ellis 2011,39). The findings of the survey imply that the three respondents considering of switching a wholesaler were all entrepreneurs and owners of their own business, which provides them the organizational authority over the decision. Moreover it was discovered that two out of three of these respondents considered the opinions of colleagues (Question 10, Appendix 1) as less important than the respondents who were not considering of switching their wholesaler. As a conclusion, the respondents who were willing to execute decisions with high risk involvement were less influenced by interpersonal factors (Kotler et al. 2010, 275-278).

The comparison of replies of the three (5,7%) respondents also revealed that 2/3 of them were from smaller populated territories. Moreover, one of the respondents commented to open feedback form (Question 17, Appendix 1) that the training selection in one's operating environment is continuously decreased. Reasons behind the dissatisfaction of current suppliers remained unsolved. However, it was speculated that the limited activeness of the suppliers was partly behind the discontentment. Consequently, all the respondents (5,7%) who announced that they were considering of changing their wholesaler were asked to define which wholesaler would they switch into. The three respondents who were considering of changing a wholesaler selected Miraculos, GOLDWELL and ID Hair. However, due to very small quantity of the respondents, the validity of the selection of the alternative wholesaler is limited.

4.7.4 Customer loyalty

Figure 6: Loyalty customers (n=53)

The respondents were inquired whether they are loyal customers to some wholesaler. In other words, the question measured customer retention of hairdressers. According to the survey, 83% of the respondents were loyal customers or had loyalty contracts with their wholesalers. The fact that majority of the respondents (77%) were using more than one wholesalers simultaneously must be taken into account when screening the results viewed on figure 6. As a conclusion, the majority of hairdressers have loyalty contracts with wholesalers and since functional business-to-business customer relationships are essential for both counterparts, they aren't easily dissembled.

4.7.5 Customer loyalty of the respondents

Respondents who announced to have loyalty contracts with wholesalers were asked to define with which wholesaler they have loyalty contracts. The respondents were able to announce existing loyalty contracts between one or more wholesalers. Out of the 44 respondents (83%) who announced that they have loyalty contracts with wholesalers, 24 respondents (55%) announced their loyalty contract supplier(s). The dispersion of wholesalers was the following. The highest percentage of the respondents (26%) had loyalty contracts with ID Hair. There were two wholesalers, Henkel and SIM Finland that had 15% of the respondents as their loyal customers. The third largest group of the respondents (12,5%) had loyalty contracts with either L'Oréal or GOLDWELL. Moreover, 12,5% of the respondents was a loyal customer to two suppliers. The rest of the respondents had loyalty contracts with just one supplier. Long-term contracts are agreed with partners that have proven themselves as trustworthy and offered the client favorable benefits.

4.7.6 Factors of involvement in purchase decision

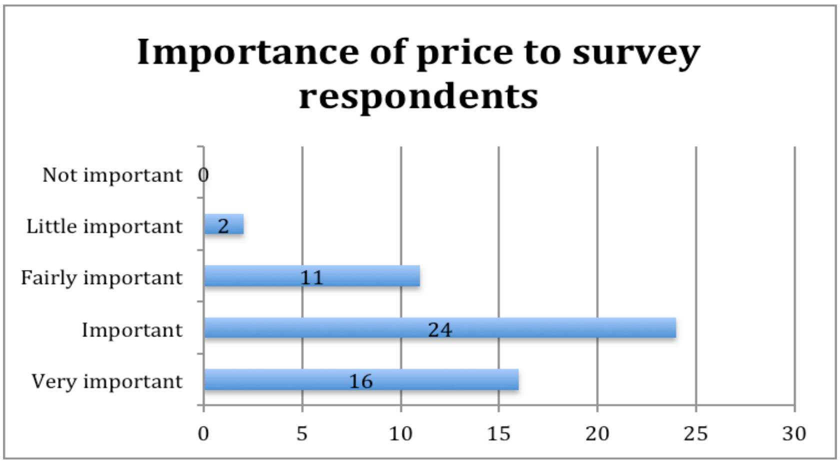

Figure 7: Factors of involvement in purchase decision: Price (n=53)

The respondents were asked to measure the involvement in purchase decision by several criteria (Question 10, Appendix 1). The inquiry implies to mirror the effect of specification stage (3/8) of the business buying process by Ellis (2011, 52) as described in detail on chapter 2. Figure 7 indicates the impact of price in purchase decision. The results appoint that 30,2% considered price as highly important factor in decision of purchase. 45,3% of the respondents considered the price as an important factor of decision.

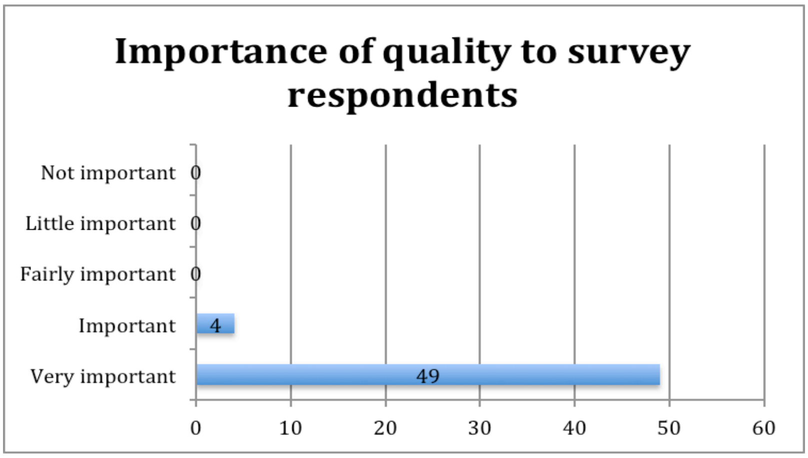

Figure 8: Factors of involvement in purchase decision: Quality (n=53)

Quality was considered as highly important factor by 92,5% of the respondents. Therefore quality was considered as one of the biggest impacting factors of purchase. Quality was addressed as a vital factor of successful business.

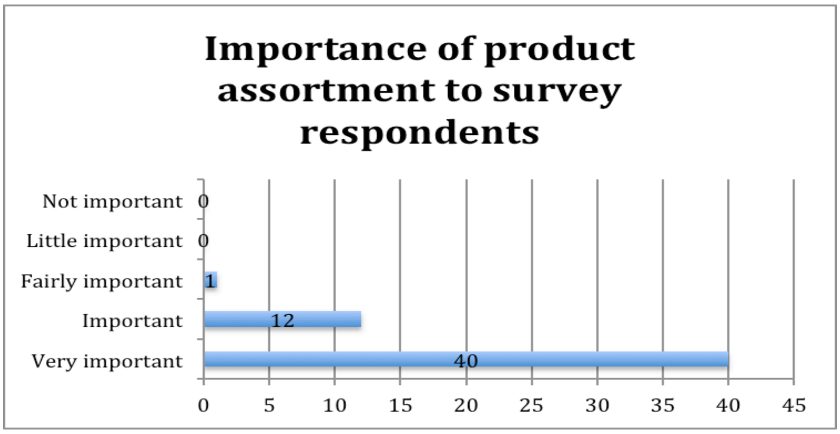

Figure 9: Factors of involvement in purchase decision: Product assortment (n=53)

Figure 9 discusses the impact of product assortment in decision of purchase. 75,5% of the respondents considered that this was a highly important factor of purchase. Hairdressers' profession is about accomplishing the customers' visions and following the latest trends of the industry. Consequently, product assortment must provide a wide variety of tools needed to execute different looks, techniques and styles.

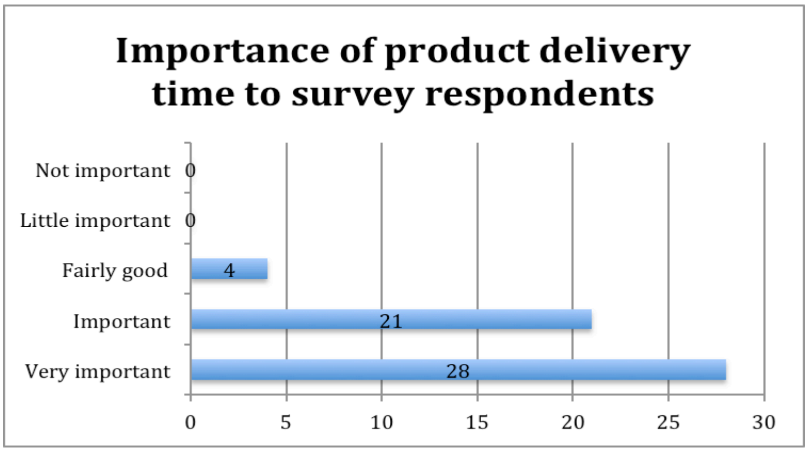

Figure 10: Factors of involvement in purchase decision: Product delivery time (n=53)

Product delivery time was considered as highly important issue by 52,8% of the respondents. Since the tools supplied by the wholesaler are essential to business and constantly needed, the speed of delivery carries high importance. A hairdresser can't run out of hair dye colors, shampoo or other tools. Every customer is an individual and a hairdresser can never certainly tell which products he/she is going to need during the day. Consequently, as discussed in the chapter 2, the hairdressers' purchases are mostly classified as straight rebuy and modified rebuy (Ellis 2011, 50-51). Products proven their merit are constantly repurchased. Repeatability of the purchases fastens the overall process of business buying (Kotler & Keller 2012, 217).

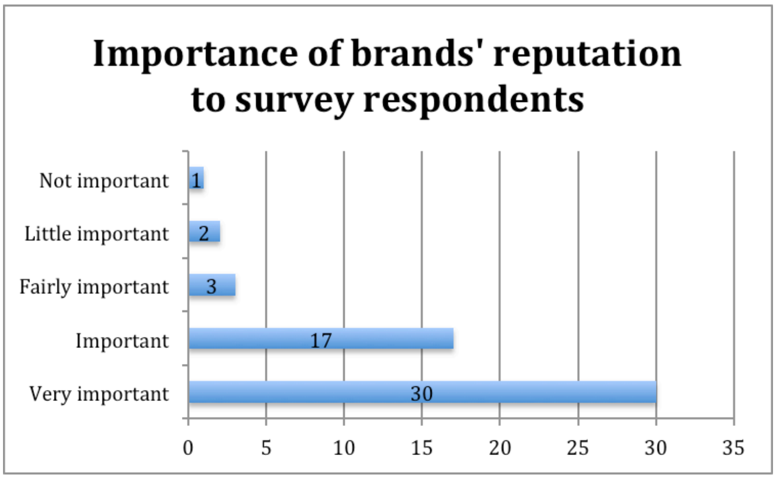

Figure 11: Factors of involvement in purchase decision: Brand reputation (n=53)

Figure 11 discusses the impact of brand reputation in purchase decision. Wholesalers' represented brands' reputation was considered as highly important issue by 56,6% of the respondents. The same issue was considered as important by 32,1% of the respondents. As a conclusion, this issue was considered as one of the highest factors of importance in buying behavior.

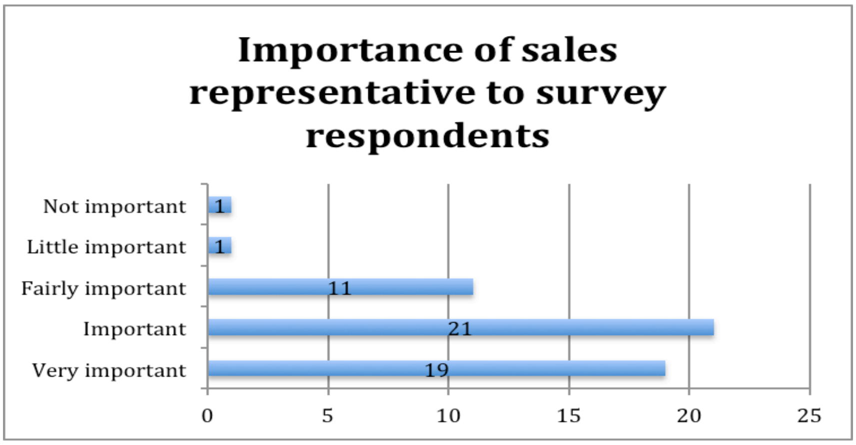

Figure 12: Factors of involvement in purchase decision: Sales representatives (n=53)

Figure 12 illustrates the respondents' concerns about the importance of sales representatives' activeness and personality. 39,6% of the respondents considered this as important. Moreover, 35,8% of the respondents considered this matter as very important. According to the results, the sales representatives' position as an influencer in purchase decision was remarkably high. Moreover, the relationship between the sales representative can acquire even higher importance if the buyer and the seller are bond with social relationships (Ellis 2011,45).

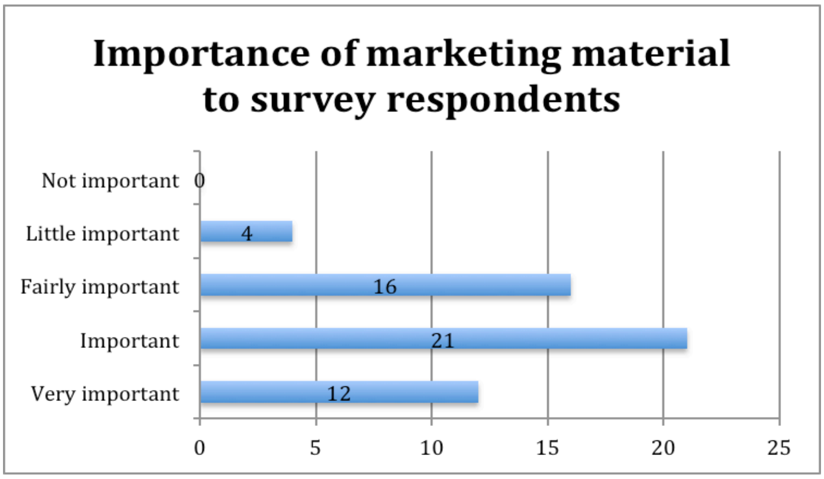

Figure 13: Factors of involvement in purchase decision: Marketing material (n=53)

Figure 13 indicates the results of measuring marketing material as a factor of decision of purchase. Marketing material was regarded as important by 39,6% of the respondents. Dispersion of replies indicated remarkable changes in opinions of the respondents. 30,2 % of the respondents measured the importance of marketing material as fairly important, as 22,6% of the respondents highlighted this issue as very important. As a conclusion, marketing material was considered as an important factor in decision of purchase to most respondents. Marketing material provided by the supplier allows the buyer to compare and explore the assortment of the company without being highly affected by social influences.

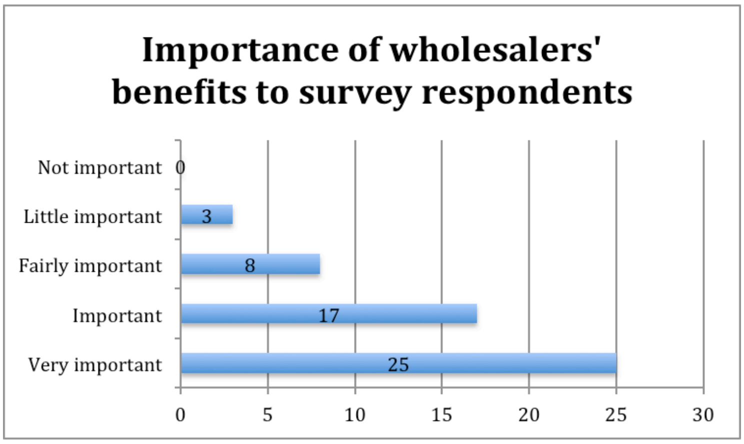

Figure 14: Factors of involvement in purchase decision: Wholesaler’s benefits (n=53)

47.2% of the respondents agreed that the wholesaler’s benefits were a very important factor in decision of purchase. The supplying chains from wholesaler to buyer are aimed to maintain as long as possible. In order to successfully commit a long customer relationship, the exchange relationship must be acquired by relational approach and mutual benefits (Ellis 2011, 46). The supplier functions as a fostering unit, which receives income as exchange. The buying center participants must be asserted that they obtain the highest possible value for their money and their business (Ellis 2011, 52).

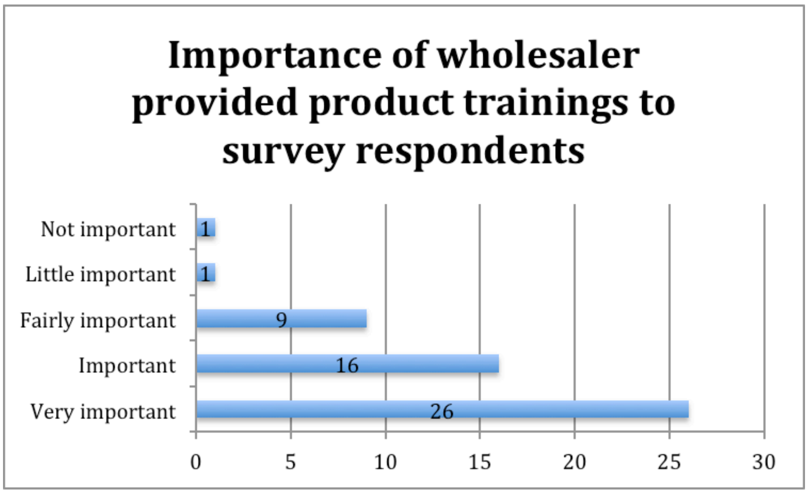

Figure 15: Factors of involvement in purchase decision: Training (n=53)

Figure 15 indicates the importance of product trainings provided by the wholesaler in purchase decision process. This was considered as highly important issue by 49,1% of the respondents. The second biggest respondent group defined this issue as important.

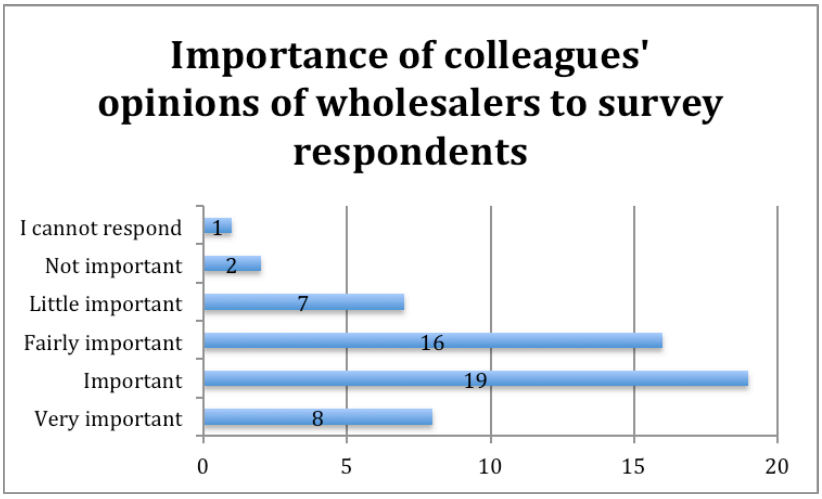

Figure 16: Factors of involvement in purchase decision: Colleagues' opinions (n=53)

Figure 16 illustrates the share of colleague's opinions in decision of purchase. When analyzing the results, it must be taken into account that the question primarily considered the opinions of colleagues who worked in the same hardressing salon (Question 10, Appendix 1). The dispersion of replies was high in this question. The biggest respondent group of 35,8% considered the colleagues opinions as important. However, 30,2% of the respondents considered colleagues' opinions as somewhat important and 15,1% of the respondents measured the importance as highly important. Minority of 15,2% of the respondents measured colleagues' opinions as little important. 3,8% of the respondents considered the opinions of colleagues as not important. However, when analyzing the results, the size of the salon of the hairdresser has to be concerned. Majority of the respondents announced that they worked in a salon with 1-5 hairdressers. The respondent unable to comment his/her opinion regarding to colleagues' opinions was presumably sole entrepreneur in his/her salon.

4.7.7 Selective retail series

The respondents were inquired whether they sell selective retail series in their salon. The variability of the replies was wide. The highest group of the respondents (22,6%) announced that they sell L'Oréals selective retail brands in their salon. The second largest group of 18,9% sold Wellas products in their salon. 17% of the respondents announced that they do not sell selective retail series in their salon. Moreover, 15,1% of the respondents announced that they sell selective retail series not listed in the alternatives given in the survey.

Consequently, the respondents who announced that they do not sell selective retail series in their salon (Question 11, Appendix 1) were asked whether they had considered of providing selective retail series (Question 12, Appendix 1). However, 14 respondents replied although the follow-up question was requested only for persons who announced that they do not have selective series in their salon (9 persons replied that they do not provide selective series at the moment). As a consequence, the validity of responses concerning the acquiry of selective series were limited until the results were carefully screened and the deserted responses were eliminated from the results. Out of the nine persons who replied that they do not have selective retail series in their salon (Question 11, Appendix 1), only two persons (22%) replied that they were considering of acquiring selective series.

Consideration of acquiring selective series involved discussion over risk management. For a small business, attempting a new task, in this case expansion of product variety to selective series, involves a risk. Providing selective series requires confidence in sales skills and careful familiarization to the concept of the series' assortment in order to enable successful investment. Moreover, as market stagnation has an influence on consumers' buying behavior, the expansion of services is more highly considered than before (Kotler & Keller 2012, 217; Ellis 2011, 49-50).

4.7.8 Interest in selective retail series

The respondents who agreed to consider of providing selective series were directed to announce which selective series would they consider to purchase. However, nine responses were received to the question determining the selection of selective series (Question 13, Appendix

1) although the preface requested that only the persons who replied “Yes” to the question measuring the respondents’ willingness to consider of acquiring selective series (Question 12, Appendix 1) would determine their selection of selective series (Question 13, Appendix 1). The aftermath of misinterpretation was that out of the nine responses received, only two were accepted as they were received from the persons who replied adequately to the previous questions concerning the selective series (Questions 11-13, Appendix 1). As a result, GOLDWELL and Miraculos were the selective retail series each selected by one person.

4.7.9 Training frequency

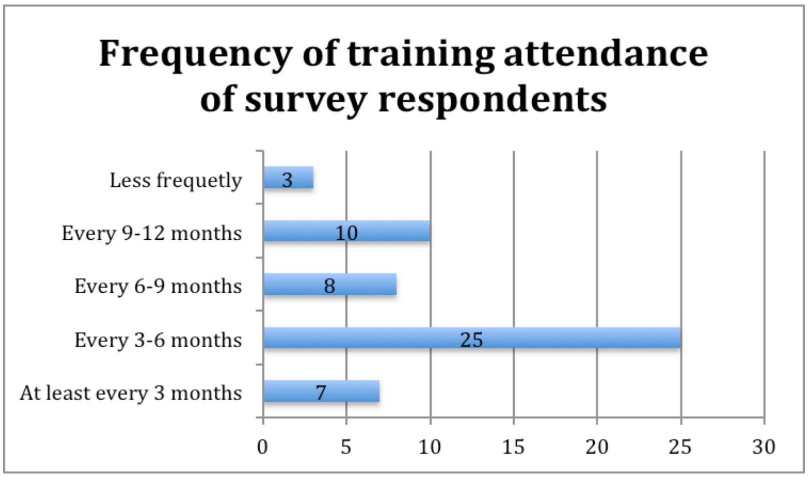

Figure 17: Frequency of training (n=53)

Figure 17 illustrates the frequency of the respondents’ participation in product training. 47,2% of the respondents announced that they attend to training sessions every 3 to 6 months. 18,9% of the respondents replied that they attend to product training every 9 to 12 months.

4.7.10 Quality of training evaluation

The respondents were asked to measure the quality of trainings provided by different wholesalers. The validity of this analysis is limited due to high percentage of the respondents announcing that they were unable to validate the training by the requested wholesaler. The wholesalers measured were the ones featured in the survey response alternatives: Wella, L’Oréal, Miraculos, GOLDWELL, Henkel (Schwarzkopft), Cutrin, Sim Finland and ID Hair.

The first wholesaler to be measured was Wella. 30,2% of the respondents measured the quality of training as good. However, the percentage of the respondents unable to measure the training requested was 49,1%. The next wholesaler regarded was L’Oréal. 52,8% of the respondents was unable to comment on the quality of training. 22,6% of the respondents reviewed L'Oréals' trainings as good. Miraculos' trainings were not measured by 47,2% of the respondents. However, 32,1% of the respondents evaluated their training quality as good. GOLDWELL's trainings were unevaluated by 45,3 % of the respondents. The majority of evaluating respondents (26,4%) measured the quality of GOLDWELLs' trainings as good. 43,4% of the respondents was unable to evaluate the training provided by Henkel (Svarzkopft). 20,8% of the respondents measured the quality of training as good but 18,9% of the respondents also reviewed the training quality as very good. Cutrin's training was only evaluated by 24,5% of the respondents. Majority of evaluators regarded Cutrin's training as fairly good. Sim Finland's training was evaluated by 32,1% of the respondents. The most awarded grades for training were fairly good and good. Both grades were awarded by 13,2% of the respondents. Finally, ID Hair was evaluated by 50,9% of the respondents. The most awarded grade for training was fairly good.

As a conclusion, the responses provide a narrow review on wholesaler trainings by given wholesalers. The respondent quantity is low and in the case of most wholesalers, remarkable percentage of the respondents was unable to review the training. As a conclusion, the most attended trainings according to the responses of the survey were by Henkel (56,6% of the respondent attended), GOLDWELL (54,7% of the respondents attended) and Miraculos (52,8% of the respondents attended). Out of these three wholesalers, the quality of training was ranked as highest in Henkel. The runner-up was GOLDWELL and the third based on evaluation given by the respondents of the survey was Miraculos. Also Wellas' and ID Hairs' trainings were attended by more than 50% of the respondents. Trainings by Wella were regarded as good by 30,2% of the respondents. ID Hairs' training were measured as fairly good by 18,9% of the respondents. A notable fact was that out of four Finnish wholesalers featured in the survey, only Miraculos' and ID Hair's trainings were attended by majority of the respondents. As a conclusion, large corporations such as Henkel and GOLDWELL were more resourced to provide trainings than smaller companies such as Cutrin and Sim Finland.

4.7.11 Importance of training

Different subclasses of training were evaluated by their importance to the respondents' business. There were six subclasses: cutting, coloring, fashion, styling, hairdos and business. The first subclass was cutting. 56,6% of the respondents evaluated the importance of cutting as very important. Coloring was also a very important subject of training to 73,6% of the respondents. Trainings related to fashion were measured as very important by 47,2% of the respondents. Fashion trainings were considered as important by 37,7% of the respondents. The importance of styling training was evaluated as important by 43,4% of the respondents. However, 41,5% of the respondents thought that styling training was very important to their business.

Majority of 47,2% of the respondents agreed that hairdo trainings were very important to their business. 32,1% of the respondents thought that the hairdo trainings provided an important significance to their business. The final subclass measured was business training. 43,4% of the respondents considered business training as very important. The second largest pool of the respondents thought that business trainings were important to their business. As a conclusion, the trainings with the highest importance according to the measurements of the survey were cutting, coloring, fashion and hairdos. However, every subclass of training was considered as remarkably important.

4.7.12 Feedback and improvement ideas

The survey involved an open feedback form reserved for the hairdressers' comments and improvement ideas (Question 17, Appendix 1). The comments involved critism, suggestions and personal preferences. Table 2 presented below illustrates the most crucial information gathered from the feedback.

Training	Information	Other
More Finnish hair type specific trainings	Monthly newsletters containing information of training reminders, sales campaigns, head trainers' regards and previews of upcoming products	More innovative service, outstanding offerings and new perspectives
Hair models should cover all age groups and body types	Meetings with sales representatives are hasty and quick	
Expensive ticket prices		
Trainings reduced in northern Finland		

Table 2: Summary of feedback by survey respondents

The respondents' feedback can be categorized into subclasses based on the subject of commentary. The subclasses named are training, information and other requests. Improvement ideas based on the feedback are presented. Wholesalers investing on training in the northern territories of Finland (County of Lapland) would reach a locally competitive status. Montly newsletters enhance the relationship between the seller and the buyer and maintain information flow, mutual trust and interest. Hair models in the shows must represent all consumers. Since the training tickets are costly, it is suggested that group discounts would be provided to larger parties. Meetings with the sales representatives must be well prepared by the company representative in order to sufficiently cover all the information required. Especially in beauty business, innovativeness is important because consumers get bored rapidly and global trend influences bypass and differentiate continually. New innovations must be brought to public as fast as possible and moreover, passed on from suppliers to hairdressers.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

The study indicates that in the future, the industry holders should primarily focus on improving the measured fields with highest importance to purchase. The conclusion of the survey responses is that an average user of hair care suppliers' services is a female sole proprietor working in a small salon with less than five hairdressers. Hairdressers choose their supplier primarily based on product quality, assortment, delivery time, represented brands' reputation, wholesaler's benefits and training provided by the supplier. Hairdressers commonly use two or more wholesalers simultaneously, which refers to willingness to compare and race the suppliers. Moreover, using multiple suppliers refers to unattached activity and transactional approach. However, a majority of the respondents were loyalty customers to one or more wholesalers. Long-term customer relationships, on the contrary than transactional relationships, are bond with mutual trust. Long-term relationships emerge as fostering relationships whereas suppliers' services are customized into clients' needs and targeted for entrepreunial success (Ellis 2011, 46).

New operative tasks, such as extending services by purchasing a selective retail series to be sold at salon, were carefully committed. Only two out of nine respondents (n=53) who had not expanded their service as selective series provider yet were considering of expansion of services. Reasons behind the risk involvement can be found in socio-economical changes, unstable market conditions and in high level of competitiveness. On average, the respondents of the survey attended training sessions every three to six months. However, the hairdressers did not attend actively to trainings provided by various suppliers. Respondents of the survey were given eight best-known suppliers of the hair care industry in Finland to measure in respect of trainings, but only five suppliers' trainings were attended by more than 50% of the respondents. L'Oréals', Cutrin's and Sim Finlands' trainings were attended by less than half of the respondents of the survey.

However, the reference group of the survey is small and therefore no "big picture" assumptions can be created with the survey results. Rough conclusions suggest that the three wholesalers with the least attendance do not provide trainings as locally as the ones attended by the majority. Moreover, Cutrin and Sim Finland are Finnish hair care tool wholesalers and the size of their business is enormously smaller than competing conglomerates' share at the global market. Finnish hair care suppliers are competitive in terms of clientele, but in terms of providing training they remain unresourced in comparison to the competitors. Exceptions according to the survey results were the Finnish wholesalers Miraculos and ID Hair whose trainings were attended by the majority of survey respondents. The final topic discussed in the research was to investigate, which training categories are considered as the most influential and important in regards to hairdressers' work. The categories voted as most important were cutting, coloring, fashion and hairdos. However, the respondent group implicated high interest to styling and especially business trainings. Business education was also requested in the feedback.

The research succeeded in providing an overveaw of hairdressers' buying charasteristics and assessing the most vital buying behaviour influences. The researchs' repeatability is satisfactory due to hairdresser-specified assessing criteria and the responding alternatives used. However, the given response alternatives of the survey were not sufficient to cover all the wholesaler brands used by the respondents. This was acknowledged especially when the respondents were requested to announce their existing wholesaler choices (Question 5, Appendix 1). Moreover, the response rate was relatively low and the survey would provide wider and more realiable perspective of hairdressers' buying behaviour if there were more respondents. Filter questions in the survey (Questions 12-13, Appendix 1) were misintrepreted by some respondents. Futher adjustment on filter questions would be addressed in case the reseach would be repeated. The theory and the themes of business-to-business buying behaviour were adequately executed in survey questions.

My recommendations for the client company focus on three subclasses: Training, information-flow and overall service. My suggestions considering training are that the company would add business related education to boost the client's sales skills and to teach them more about leadership. Majority of hairdressers are sole proprietors; they are their own bosses as they are solely responsible for the profit of their business. Business classes would contain crucial information regarding entrepreneurship, marketing skills, bookkeeping and economic surveillance. It is suggested that effective business training would both increase the clients' competitiveness in the market and create fostering bonds of commitment. The construction of trust leads to long-term business relationships and successful exchange rates. Another recommendation is localizing training activities as widely as possible. The customer group consists of over 10 000 hairdressers (Karjalainen 2013) and in order to maximize KAO Finland Oys' capacity on the market, the company is advised to operate actively in all geographic regions of Finland (Appendix 2).

The second subcategory is information flow. The respondents of the survey regarded the importance of marketing material and sales representative's activeness and personality as important characteristics influencing the decision of purchase. Marketing material must be carefully constructed in order to reply to every question the client may have. Information must be easily accessed and continuously edited as the supplier evolves and launches new services, products, campaigns, training sessions etc. An information tool requested by a survey respondent was a monthly newsletter addressed to customers. The newsletter would maintain and increase the clients' awareness of sales campaigns, trainings and new product launches. The head trainer of the company could also convey ones' regards and the latest tips to successful, innovative hair styling. Sales representatives, who are responsible for acquiring new customers in their operating area, must be continuously updated by the company's latest offerings. Effective marketing material supports sales representative's work and aids the client to measure and compare the company to competitors. Sales representatives' confident attitude is far more convincing than the uncertainty of imperfect acknowledgement.

The third subcategory was recommendation for overall service. GOLDWELL and KMS California are well known and respected brands on the hair care market. The current image of the brands is favorable to customer commitment; KAO Finland Oy maintains the reputation and status of its brands to excellence. The new office and the cash-and-carry located in the central Helsinki strengthen the brand and provide visibility and easy access. Dignified location and premise incorporate high standards. KAO Finland Oy delivers its promise as the representative of innovative, trend creating, trusted and committed hair care brands. Branding is one of the key elements behind the success of GOLDWELL and KMS California and the elegance as the trademark must be seen in every detail of KAO Finland Oy's undertakes. Notable fact also is that unlike many of KAO Finland Oy's competitors, GOLDWELL has not changed its original product concept. From the foundation of GOLDWELL in 1948 till today, GOLDWELL products have only been sold to professionals, by professionals (GOLDWELL & KMS California 2016).

6 Theoretical linkage

The theory provided an important aspect in analyzing and understanding the results of the survey. The empirical research matched relatively well with the theory in contrast to the survey questions, the company background and the purchasing environment of the business-to-business buyers. Theoretical background matched the client company's business and buyers.

Conclusions of the empirical study were found by mirroring the empirical results with the theory of business-to-business buying behavior.

7 Summary

Buying behavior describes how customers measure, compare, consume and purchase goods in order to satisfy their either personal or professional needs. Understanding the procedures leading to satisfactory purchase decision is essential for companies and goods suppliers. Business-to-business buying behavior illustrates the influences of the decision-making unit members of the buying company. The stages of purchase and the organizational buying classifications determine the steps of the buying process and the type of inbound purchase.

The subject of this study was established by KAO Finland Oy, which is a supplier company representing the respected hair care tools GOLDWELL and KMS California.The aim of this thesis was to determine the most affective factors regarding business purchase decisions of hairdressers. Determination of risk involvement in business-to-business relationships was studied. Moreover, the importance of training to hairdressers' profession was also interpreted as requested by KAO Finland Oy. The desired outcome of the thesis was to clarify which characteristics commit to long-term business relationship and customer satisfaction. The target group of the research consisted of mostly private entrepreneurs.

The study was conducted by literature, familiarization of the company profile, the market situation and the research. The research was conducted as establishment of an online survey. The research group consisted of hairdressers operating in Finland. The research methodology used was both quantitative and qualitative. The surveys were sent to up to 200 hairdressers via Google Forms. The survey was open from 26.3.2015 to 31.5.2015. 53 responses were received. The estimated replying rate of the survey was 27 %.

The results of the survey indicate that the most important evaluation criteria in terms of business purchase were the quality of products, product assortment, delivery time, reputation of brands represented, agreement benefits and training. Loyalty contracts were common and customer retention was high. Risk involvement of the exchange relationship was considered as high and due to market stagnation, the respondents were not willing to commit new tasks to business. Trainings had substantial differences of attendance depending on the provider. Conclusions of the study implicate that the hair care tool suppliers must focus their business activity to all reagons of Finland and convey trust trough information and innovative services.

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Illustrations

Figures

Tables

Appendixes

Sivu 1/1

Parturi-kampaajien ostokäyttäytymistä tutkiva kysely

Lomakkeen kuvaus

1. Kerrotteko nimenne, yhteystietonne ja edustamanne organisaation nimen?*

2. Millä paikkakunnalla yrityksenne sijaitsee?

3. Työskentelettekö omistamassanne firmassa vai vuokratyöntekijänä?*

- Olen yrittäjä
- Olen vuokratyöntekijä

4. Kuinka monta työntekijää toimipisteessänne on?*

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- yli 20

5. Mitä kampaamoalan tukkuria käytätte tällä hetkellä?*

- ☐ Wella
- ☐ L'oréal
- ☐ Miraculos
- ☐ Goldwell
- ☐ Henkel (Svarzkopft)
- ☐ Cutrin
- ☐ Sim Finland
- ☐ ID Hair
- ☐ Muu:

6. Oletteko harkinneet tukkurin vaihtoa?*

- ◯ Kyllä
- ◯ Ei

7. Jos vastasitte "kyllä", niin kehen seuraavista tukkureista vaihtaisitte?

- ☐ Wella
- ☐ L'oréal
- ☐ Miraculos
- ☐ Goldwell
- ☐ Henkel (Svarzkoptf)
- ☐ Cutrin
- ☐ Sim Finland
- ☐ ID Hair
- ☐ Muu:

8. Oletteko jonkun tukkurin kanssa keskittäjäasiakas? *

- ◯ Kyllä
- ◯ Ei

9. Jos olette, niin kerrotteko kenen keskittäjäasiakas olette?

10. Miten tärkeitä seuraavat tekijät ovat tukkurin valinnassa asteikolla 1-5?*

	1 Ei lainkaan tärkeä	2 Vähän tärkeä	3 Jonkin verran tärkeä	4 Tärkeä	5 Erittäin tärkeä	0 En osaa sanoa
hinta	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
laatu	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
tuotevalikoima	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
tuotteiden toimitusaika	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
tukkurin edustamien tuotteiden/brändin maine	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
myyntiedustajien aktiivisuus ja persoona	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
markkinointimateriaali	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
tukkurin edut	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
tukkurin järjestämät tuotekoulutukset	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
valintaan vaikuttavien kampaamon työntekijöiden mielipide	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

11. Onko toimipisteessänne myynnissä selektiivisiä jälleenmyyntisarjoja (mitä)? *

- ☐ Wella (SEBASTIAN)
- ☐ L'oréal (REDKEN & KERASTASE)
- ☐ Miraculos
- ☐ Goldwell (KMS California)
- ☐ Henkel
- ☐ Cutrin
- ☐ Sim Finland
- ☐ ID Hair (LANZA)
- ☐ Ei ole
- ☐ Muu:

12. Jos vastasitte ei, oletteko harkinneet selektiivisen jälleenmyyntisarjan hankkimista?

- ○ Kyllä
- ○ Ei

13. Jos vastasitte kyllä, kerrotteko minkä selektiivisen jälleenmyyntisarjan hankkimista harkitsette?

- ☐ Wella
- ☐ L'oréal
- ☐ Miraculos
- ☐ Goldwell
- ☐ Henkel (Svarzkopft)
- ☐ Cutrin
- ☐ Sim Finland
- ☐ ID Hair
- ☐ Muu:

14. Kuinka usein käytte tuotekoulutuksissa?*

- ○ vähintään 3kk välein
- ○ 3-6kk välein
- ○ 6-9kk välein
- ○ 9-12kk välein
- ○ harvemmin

15. Miten arvioisitte eri tukkurien tarjoamia koulutuksia asteikolla 1-5?*

	1 Erittäin huono	2 Melko huono	3 Melko hyvä	4 Hyvä	5 Erittäin hyvä	0 En osaa sanoa
Wella	○	○	○	○	○	○
L'oréal	○	○	○	○	○	○
Miraculos	○	○	○	○	○	○
Goldwell	○	○	○	○	○	○
Henkel (Svarzkoptf)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Cutrin	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sim Finland	○	○	○	○	○	○
ID Hair	○	○	○	○	○	○

16. Miten arvioisitte koulutuksen aiheen merkitystä yrityksellenne asteikolla 1-5?*

	1 Ei ollenkaan tärkeä	2 Vähän tärkeä	3 Jonkin verran tärkeä	4 Tärkeä	5 Erittäin tärkeä	0 En osaa sanoa
Leikkaus	○	○	○	○	○	○
Väri	○	○	○	○	○	○
Muoti	○	○	○	○	○	○
Muotoilu	○	○	○	○	○	○
Kampaus	○	○	○	○	○	○
Business	○	○	○	○	○	○

17. Oliko vielä jotain mitä haluaisitte tuoda esille: kehittämisideoita, toiveita, palautetta...

Appendix 1: The survey

Cities that were used to narrow the hairdressing salon search in Google are addressed in Appendix 2 (for example hairdresser barber Oulu). The Appendix 2 indicates the researchers' share of responsibility in acquiring data and distributing the survey. There were 25 geographic locations in total.

Johanna	Jasmin
Helsinki	Vantaa
Espoo	Turku
Jyväskylä	Lappeenranta
Tampere	Kuopio
Seinäjoki	Tornio
Oulu	Kemi
Vaasa	Rovaniemi
Hyvinkää	Porvoo
Hämeenlinna	Riihimäki
Kokkola	Lahti
Mikkeli	Joensuu
	Kouvola
	Pori
	Kerava

Appendix 2: Regions included in the survey & share of responsibility