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THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL BRANDING

– Case study: Vision Equipment Limited Liability



BACHELOR'S THESIS | ABSTRACT

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THE PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL BRANDING

- Case Study: VEC

Abstract

The main objective of this thesis is to deliver some key principles in order to brand successfully. Also, at the beginning of literature review, author will provide the definition of branding since branding is changing from products centric to customer centric. Therefore, it is essential to understand what branding is about. In order to make this research be more applicable, a case company is chosen. Specifically, it is not only the key principles of branding but also the importance of digital platform in branding will be provided to case company to improve its brand-building program. Besides, this research will also focus on answering these research question:

1. What are key characteristics in forming a good brand? How case company will be able to apply some of those?
2. What tools or solutions will make VEC be more reachable in digital space? What action VEC should take to be more visibility?
3. What is the importance of communication between customers and VEC, especially in digital marketing?

In order to make this thesis be applicale, author employs quantitative method as research method. By this method, the outcome is the importance of digital platform in brand-buiding campaign which is be able to apply to case company.

KEYWORDS:

Branding, Emotinal, Business philosophy, Consitency, Building strong brand.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation

For many years, I always wonder why people willing to pay a lot of money to buy an item from a famous brand. The issue is that similar item can be easily found from other brands at a lot cheaper price. One of explanations of this circumstance: not quality, brand is the factor that influences to customers' purchase decision. Moreover, a brand is not only a name of business but also represent a value of that business. As a result, these questions motivate me to understand more about branding,

Moreover, I have a deep passion for marketing as after graduation, I plan to be a involved in marketing field. Therefore, doing a research about branding is not only for my thesis but also to improve my marketing knowledges and skills. Additionally, according to Bill Gates who is the founder of Microsoft and one of the world richest man, beside sciences and math skill, basics knowledge of economic help us out tremendously in the future job market (Elkins, 2018). In order to be competence in job hunting, a good foundation of knowledge, specifically branding, will increase the success possibility in future labor market.

Having spent three months for internship in Vision Equipment Cooperation as a Marketing Assistant, I realized the significance of branding in a tough market where there are a lot of competitors.

In short, for all of the facts above, I decide to choose branding as my thesis topic.

1.2 Objective of the Thesis and research question

As shown at the title, the objective of this thesis will be providing tools for case company VEC to be recognized as a brand rather than a basic generic products. Also, in order to make this thesis be more applicable, I will apply branding on Vision Equipment company (VEC). VEC is an automated machine company. As Viet Nam is of the emerging markets in the world, VEC has a lot opportunity to develop its business, especially in the fourth industrial revolution high enhancing computers and automation with smart and

autonomous systems fueled by data and machine learning (Marr, 2018). However, difficulties in revenue is caused by ineffective branding strategy. Therefore, this situation posing the need of branding strategy improvement. However, at the beginning, it is essential for VEC to truly understand what branding is about.

My research questions are:

- I. What are key characteristics in forming a good brand? How case company will be able to apply some of those?
- II. What tools or solutions will make VEC be more reachable in digital space? What action VEC should take to be more visibility?
- III. What is the importance of communication between customers and VEC, especially in digital marketing?

1.3 Thesis structure

The most significant chapter of this thesis will be literature review. In this chapter, by my research, i will provide to readers all of the most essential and interesting theory about branding. Moreover, there will be not only theory but also realistic example about branding of famous brands of the world so that readers will be able to figure out the answer for my second research question:” why branding is more important than quality of products and services?”. Also, a brief introduction about VEC and the situation that it is facing with will be also mentioned.

In the following chapter, I will explain his research methodology. Then an analyzation of the result will be given in order to raise the significance of branding.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is Branding?

To begin with, we are living in an age of information overload every minute, every hour and every day. With or without purpose, a brand appears in every corner of our life such as television, traditional and modern newspapers, in a bus, on streets, or even inside a rest room. In fact, it can be anywhere, anytime. This leads to a question “What is brand?”. According to AMA (American Marketing Association), brand is the name, logo, design, symbol, or any feature that can help one seller to be distinguished with the others (American Marketing Association, n.d.). On the one hand, brand is simply the promises of firms to their customer which allow customers have the right to expect about quality of products or services (Williams, n.d.). According to (Jay, 2013): “branding is not about one’s products offering or marketing effort. It is more about the customer, and how to develop a meaning full relationship with the customer”. Indeed, as same as the evolution of our human kind from gibbon, branding has an evolution for itself. Specifically, different from the past. Today, people don’t make a purchase rationally. They make purchase by heart which is emotional reasons (Magids, 2015). Therefore, it is significant for marketers to remember that a product or a service can be easily copied but a brand is unique which contains not only the name, logo but also the value that a firm wants to deliver to its customer by branding. In the other words, the value is the main reason why customers choose a specific brand over the others although products or services could be the same (Smith, 2017).

According to BD (business dictionary), branding is the process of constantly creating a memorable and unique name and products or services imagine in customer mind within a specific theme (Business Dictionary, n.d.). Also, BD clarifies that the objective of branding is to differentiate the presence of a brand to the other in order to attract and gain customer loyalty. With the same thought, Aaker, states that “*a brand thus signals to the customers the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical*” (Aaker, 1991). Indeed, as the development of the free trade market, what make a specific brand be the most impressive and memorable one in the world of brands? The

answer is being different. For instance, sale promotions can be easily copied by competitors, not branding strategy. Therefore, it is essential that company will invest in its brand strategy. Moreover, in my opinion, branding is also about being unique. Being different will make a brand be memorable, being unique make a brand be stand out from the crowd. Besides, being unique is about to think and treat a brand as a person (Patel, 2015). As brand is a person, it will have personality and characteristic. As a result, customer will remember about brands as a person and talk about it as person also which will make brand to be placed deep inside customers' mind.

In order to understand what branding is really about, managers need to recognize that brands are asset. As assets, brands contain a lot of values such as brand equity which will have the ability to drive the success or failure of business. Therefore, it is significant for managers to understand about this idea. Specifically, management will need to focus on brand equity. Brand equity is the ability to gain power from the good view and name recognition which lead to achieve higher sale quantity and higher profit margin than competitors (Business Dictionary, 2018). Thus, one of the primary goals of brand-building is to build, enhance or leverage brand equity (Aaker, 2014). According to Aaker, brand equity will be divided into 3 main categories. They are brand awareness, brand associations and brand loyalty (Aaker, 2014). Brand awareness is the buyer's ability to recognize the brand in sufficient detail to make a purchase (Rossiter, 2014). In the other words, brand awareness will be able to affect perceptions, linking, even behavior (Aaker, 2014). Normally, customers feel more secure to purchase familiar brands than new one. Also, they tend to give to positive feedback and all kind of positive attributes such as recommendation to the items that are familiar to them (Aaker, 2014). That's why brand awareness is the foundation of brand equity. One of valuable benefits that positive brand equity will deliver to business is higher prices due to higher perceived value. In order to achieve this, brand associations are the second element that need to be focused on. Basically, brand associations are anything that help connecting the customers to the brands (Aaker, 2014). Brand association has a tight supportive relationship with brand awareness. Specifically, if brand awareness makes customers recommending their familiar brands, brand associations will be the reasons why they recommend it (Juneja, 2018). With the same thoughts, Aaker state that, "*they can be the basis for a customer relationship, purchase decision, use experience and brand loyalty*" (Aaker, 2014). For years, Apple is famous for its products' design. it is also the main reason why make

customers want to buy it. Thus, design is Apple brand's association. For the case company, they want to be more than just another tech company which is very common in the market. Therefore, they are trying to establish their own brand associations by branding. The final category in Aaker's brand equity model is brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is the most important key elements for 2 reasons. It is the heart of the brand's value and once achieved, brand loyalty is persistent (Aaker, 2014). Brand loyalty is also the act of selecting one or more brands out of a group of brands. (Jacoby, 1973). More specifically, for a certain type of products, there will be a group of brands which have the same offer. Then brand loyalty, with its function, will create an acceptance-rejection by choosing the brand that familiar to customers (Jacoby, 1973). Therefore, one of the ultimate goals of business which is also linkable to case company is that to strengthen the size and intensity of each loyalty segment (Aaker, 2014). The simple method to achieve this goal is to make consistently happy relationship with customers.

2.2 Branding and customers

Comparing past and present, we are witnessing a very open yet close world economy than ever. In fact, this phenomenon is very beneficial to consumers as their power and influence will be increase. In the other words, business has changed from product centric orientation to consumers centric orientation in which customers will be the center of business' strategy. In order to adapt and survive, a brand must always remember that the relationship between them and customer should be a "win-win" one. It means that the quality of products that a brand offer should be worthy of money that customers will pay. Therefore, it is wise that a brand should establish a statement about the quality of the products (Nedeljković-Pravdić, 2010). It will give customers the rights to expect quality of what they buy.

Additionally, with products' quality statement, brands will be able to provide the confidence to consumers as well as achieve brand association which is mention earlier in this chapter. It is true that a product or a service can be easily copied by competitors. However, it is also true that it is impossible for competitor to copy intangible value of a successful one such as brand culture and brand essence. Brand culture is the DNA of a brand (Hitesh, 2018). It is the guidance for staffs in how to work together, how the work with customers and how to provide the best experience to customers. Therefore, in order to keep and develop brand culture, it is significant to educate the staff about it. Brand

culture is impossible to copy because it is not created by names and logos and designs. Without brand culture, they are simply just material markers of the brand (Holt, 2013). Brand culture needs time and a lot of patient to be formulated and defined. It is created by the products' experience that company offer to customers (Hitesh, 2018). It is created by the working method of the employee, especially when they work with customer (Content Marketing Institute, 2009). Brand culture is in the conversation between colleges and from customers to customers (Liquid Agency, 2018). Over the period of time, the unique brand culture of company is created and accepted by its employees and customers (The Story Tellers, 2018). Moreover, these brand material markers will be no longer empty since they are fulfilled with meaning stories about the brand. Therefore, when brand culture is already established, every time customers pick up a brand, they not only purchase it because of names or logos but also because there is a brand culture behind it (UnderScore, 2017). Another element of branding is brand essence. Brand essence is intangible value which make a brand be different from its competitors (Rose, 2018). Brand essence is not something physical that competitor will be able to see it. In addition, it is also not commodity or product that can be produced in a factory by any machine. It is a tangible value. In the other worlds, it is the first thought and first feeling of customer whenever they hear about a specific company brand. It contains the unique feature and unique benefit to distinguish with competitors. Thus, usually, brand essence is stated into one or two words. For examples, my personal first thoughts and personal first feeling of some brands in couples of words are:

- Apple = expensive
- DHL = fast
- Lamborghini = luxurious car
- Beckham = handsome

To understand more about brand essence, it is important to remind that branding is not a selling tool. Branding is the process of educating customers about company principles (Petersen, 2018). One of those principles is brand essence. It is the goal that company want to achieve in customers' heart. In fact, it affects a lot on firms' reputation and on consumers' purchasing decision making.

2.3 Building Strong Brand - *Emotional Value Funnel*

No matter it is a product or service, customers always have emotions when they engage in commercial transaction (Barlow & Maul, 2000). More specifically, when products or services are provides, there will be consumers experience which is filled with emotion (Barlow & Maul, 2000). Usually, depends on the quality of products or services, there will be positive and negative emotion which decide the next purchased will be made or not. In the other words, customers think by their emotion, not channel (Ismail, 2017). Therefore, in order to strengthen brand's power, a brand need to create a positive emotion value for its customers. There is difference between regular customers and loyal customers. Regular customers purchase a brand's product regularly since there is no better choice in the market yet (Tatiana, 2015). In my opinion, they can change and they will change. In contrast, loyal customers will keep choosing a brand as their most favorite one no matter there is better brand or not (Bern, 2018). In the other word, they will stick to a brand. Branding is about establishing a worthy relationship with customers. To gain customers' loyalty, great brands will not use contracts to prison their customers, they will use emotional connection (Yohn, 2014). No matter it is products or service, customers always have emotions when they engage in commercial transaction (Ismail, 2017)Therefore, in order to strengthen brand's power, a brand need to create a positive emotion value for its customers. *Brand will should go through the emotional-value stream funnel which consist of affiliation, validation and identity by Jeminah Gardner.*

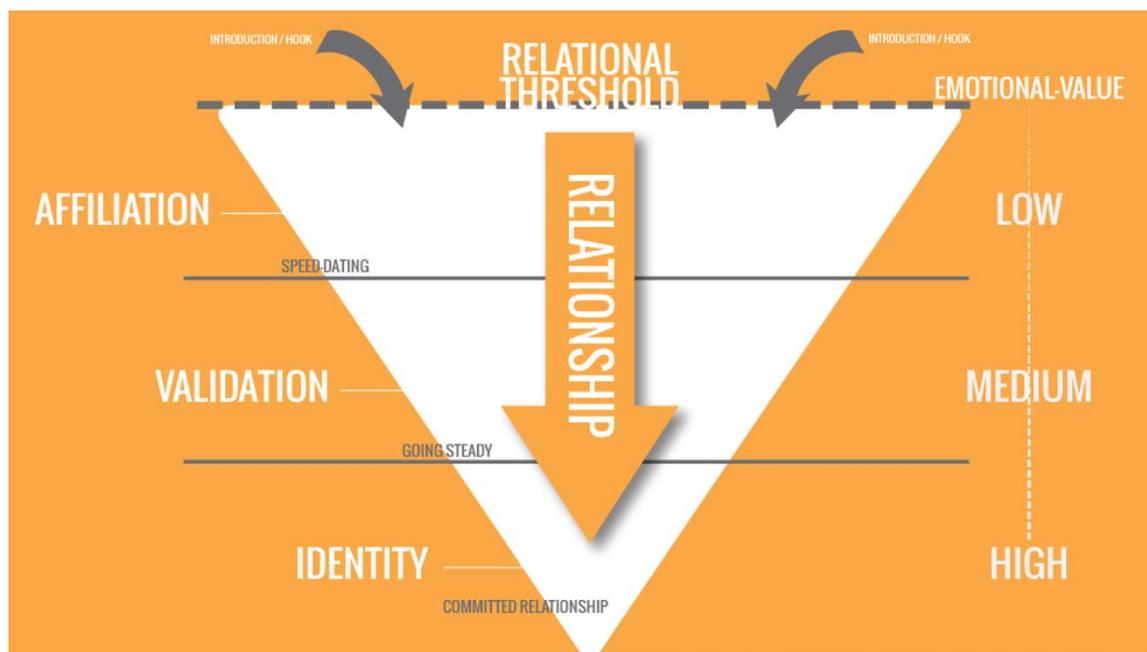


Chart 1: The Emotional-Value Stream Funnel (Gardner, 2014)

Same as in a relationship of couples, *affiliation* is flirting period where advertising agencies and firms will try to deliver good messages to customers so that they will start to fall for the brand (Gardner, 2014). However, there will be difficulty. The first one is creativity. At this stage, there will be tons of brands will try to flirt with customers. As a result, customers, as their right, will “like” a lot of brands but no specific one is chosen yet. Therefore, in order to be the chosen one, brands must be creative in flirting. In the other words, they need to be different from the crowd. This leads to another obstacle. It is, at the same time, brands need to be creative yet delivering correct and contentive message. More importantly, this message should represent for brand culture and brand essence which as are mentioned earlier cannot be copied by competitors. Another difficulty is cost consumption.

The next step of emotional value funnel is *validation*. Validation is about at the right place, at the right time, for the right person (Gardner, 2014). In the other word, validation will be achieved if a brand shows up at the right place and at the right moment when customers need it the most. Thus, it will take a lot of effort for company to know when and where, especially to who though a good positioning. Also, as customers’ need is shown, there will be comparison from one brand to against another. And who has more succeed at affiliation stage will have more chances to win customers’ need. However, there are also the other factors that affect customers choice in this stage (Gardner, 2014). Moreover, validation will be a signal that brand created functional-value successfully but temporarily (s. 1). It is temporarily because it will not last if competitors have better offer as at this stage, customers’ loyalty is not yet gained. In fact, if brands stop at validation stage, there are high possibilities that they will be replaced by the others with right products at the right time than them. For instance, currently, VEC is at validation stage. Despite seeking the needs of potential customers correctly and be at the right time, VEC is fallen to get potential customers for many reasons. Finally, the most important stage in emotional value funnel is *identity*. Identity is achieved when customers’ loyalty is gained. Identity is also achieved when customers define themselves by brands that they choose such as “iFan, “Coke-lover” (Gardner, 2014). As a result, the wall between brands and customers are being collapsed which make them be closer together. Besides, identity will help brands make customers be a spokesperson for them by the act of recommendation. That’s why brand should not stop at validation stage. Once a brand’s identity is achieved,

customers will be the best marketing channel for some reasons. First, the experiences that they share, such as to their friends, are real and not be scripted by brands. Second, identity is committed marriage (Gardner, 2014). In the other words, customers' loyalty is earned at this stage. And finally, for competitors, it is too costly for to break customers loyalty than earn a new one (Aaker, 2014).

2.3.1 Create Brand Vision

As same as many SMEs, VEC's desire is to be not a SMEs anymore and to be a big one. In order to achieve that, VEC, first, need to establish a clear brand vision. It needs to know where they are heading to in the future. Otherwise, VEC will be lost with their ambition. According to Aaker, brand vision is the aspirational image of the brand (Aaker, 2014). Specifically, it is the imagine that brand want to be which is not only in customers' mind but also in employees' and partners' one. Therefore, it is essential for VEC to understand and apply brand vision model which a structural framework by Aaker for its brand vision development.

First, *a brand is more than a three-word phrase* (Aaker, 2014). It is difficult to define a brand within a single thought or phase. As a result, during the process of finding a compelling brand vision, brand may realize that it will be stuck in an endless turnabout. The consequence is an incomplete brand vision. Therefore, it is essential for a brand to have managers with visions. Moreover, a brand's vision should contain, first, "core vision elements" which are the most compelling and differentiating. Second, the other elements will be termed "extended vision elements." "Core vision element" will push brand-building campaign forward as well as reflect brand's value position (Aaker, 2014).

Second, *the role of "extended vision elements" is as essential as "core vision elements"* (Aaker, 2014). It is home for elements which are not fit in core vision such as brand personality or elements that are not most differentiating such as quality. Usually, during the process of brand-building, there will be many ideas will be nominated. However, it is just some of them will be granted as core vision. In order to not waste idea, the rest will be categorized as extended vision so that they still be able to be discussed forward for future use.

Third, *brand vision is not possible to apply to all business* (Aaker, 2014). In the other words, different type of business will have different design of brand vision. As a high-tech SME in automated industry, brand vision of VEC is likely to be innovation. Besides, VEC main business is provide the automated solution for the other firms. Therefore, in B2B, organizational value and trading program will be the most concern core vision for VEC. It depends on business field that brand is engaging, there will be suitable dimension to be selected in brand's vision. Then these dimensions will be employed as a function of the marketing place, strategy, the competition, the customers, the organization, and the brand (Aaker, 2014).

Fourth, according to Aaker: *"the brand vision is aspirational and can differ from the current imagine"* (Aaker, 2014). It is true that brand will find that it is risky to change the achieved brand imagine to the other by brand vision. However, a manager with a vision will realize that a brand without future vision sensation is predictable ending. For instance, for many years, the story about the dead of Nokia is mentioned as a great example about lack of brand vision. As same as VEC, Nokia is high-tech company. Therefore, innovation is the most important brand vision core element for them. Yet, Nokia fail to mark itself as an innovator (Chang, 2012). This will be also a realistic lesson for VEC in improving its brand vision by improving current brand imagine. Always, there will be dimensions that need to be improved to compete. Adding more new dimension into brand vision to create new and early bird growth platform. In sort, if brand wants to create something new in the future, they it will need to go beyond its current imagine.

Fifth, *it is brand essence*. As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 2.1, brand essence is intangible value which make a brand be different from its competitors (Rose, 2018). For this reason, brand essence is the center of the brand vision (Aaker, 2014). Indeed, it is significant for VEC to be different from its competitors as well as put that goal into "core element vision". Brand essence has the ability to turn a negative business into a positive one by delivering significant improvement in internal communication, inspiration to employees and partner, and cooperate methods. In contrast, if an incorrect brand essence is chosen, it will cause negative consequences for brand, staffs, and customers relationship.

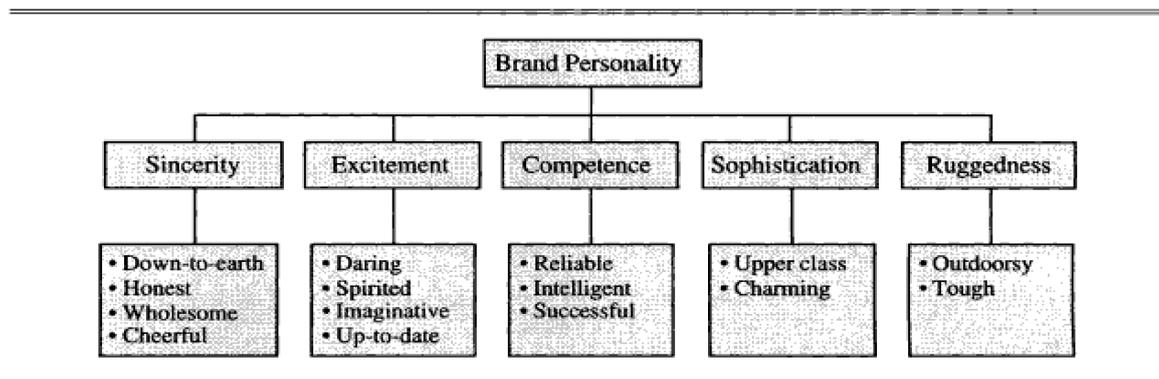
The last one is brand position. According to Kotler, brand position is the method that brand introduces its offering and imagine that aim to establish a distinct place in the mind of target market (Haaften, 2017). Additionally, Aaker states that brand position is a "short

term communication guide that often express what will be communicated to what target audience with what logic” (Aaker, 2014). It is essential for brand to positioning itself correctly in market as well as in customers’ mind. For instance, VEC defines itself as an automated brand. Therefore, it needs to deliver that definition to its customers accordingly so that they will not confuse VEC with the other brands. Within brand positioning, tagline will be also an element that needs brand’s attention. Tagline is a short and memorable description that designed to represent for company and what it stands for **Invalid source specified**.. Tagline should be the centerpiece of the positioning which is communicated externally (Aaker, 2014).

2.3.2 A brand with personality

In order to make branding successfully, another principle that Aaker propose is brand personality. Brand personality is human characteristic that a brand contains. (Aaker, 2014). In fact, people tend to remember longer about an interesting memory, person or brand than a boring one. According to Jenifer Aaker’s brand dimension framework, there will be five main types of brand personality. They are excitement, sincerity, ruggedness, competence and sophistication (Aaker J. , 1997). In each type, there will be evaluation to show which stage a brand is at. For example, if a brand personality is sincerity, it will need to achieve from the lowest level-cheerful to the highest level-down to the earth. Additionally, David Aaker state that an offering brand can be fallen into vary dimension instead being described by a single personality dimension (Aaker, 2014).

A BRAND PERSONALITY FRAMEWORK



Brand Personality Framework (Aaker J. , 1997)

In building branding process, a brand personality will provide some value benefits (Aaker, 2014).

Firstly, a brand personality can be used to represent and communicated functional benefit (Aaker, 2014). It depends on field of business and brand essence, brand will choose the most suitable type of personality to represent for. For example, Rolex is one of the world most famous Swiss-Made watch. Based on Aaker J's brand personality framework, Rolex's brand personality will be Sophistication since it's charming and extremely expensive. Therefore, there will be only the rich who have the ability to purchase it. That's why Rolex is represented for high class people. Also, a brand with imply functional personality will be harder to be attacked (Aaker, 2014). It is because a brand personality is built by many elements consistently in a long period of time.

The second benefit of a brand personality is providing energy. A brand with good brand personality will be able to provide energy by adding interest and involvement (Aaker, 2014). What is the energy that provided by Finnair? It is its commitment to protect the environment by reducing airline emission and foot print. Specifically, it will not only reach only the airline industry's common goal of carbon neutral growth from 2020 onward but also its own carbon emission by 2050 compared to 2005 level (Vauramo, 2017). It is because of this energy, there will be more customers choosing Finnair airline, especially the environmental concern one, rather than the other airline in the industry. The same principle can be applied to VEC.

Next, a brand with strong personality will have the ability to use it as a guiding brand – building programs (Aaker, 2014). A brand building – building will contain basic and needed elements such as digital program, promotions, packaging and advertising. However, in order to utilize the efficient of this combination, brand will be needed to use personality as a catalyst. Indeed, brand building program needs to show what type of brand's personality it is. For instance, in my opinion, VEC's personality is competence which includes successful, intelligent and reliable. Therefore, competence should be

placed in the center of VEC's brand building program so that it will provide depth and texture as well as making the communication effort be more feasible on strategy (Aaker, 2014).

A brand with personality will be treated as a person by customers. That's why gaining a brand personality will help a brand in understanding more about its customers (Aaker, 2014). In fact, when customers mention a brand into their life conversation in a friendly way, it is shown that a brand is treated as a person relationship. It is very essential since it will provide a deeper understanding about the nature of the relationship between a brand and its customers (Aaker, 2014). Moreover, understanding more about what a brand-as-person will be able to expose an emotional value funnel which is mentioned earlier in this chapter. The more emotion a brand gets, the easier getting into a customer's mind as well as achieving an emotional value funnel.

2.3.4 But first, Internal Branding

According to Aaker, a business strategy will have a small chance to succeed if its employees cannot answer these two questions: "What does your brand stand for?"; "Do you care?" (Aaker D., 2014). Indeed, it is not only for business but also for civilization, human is always the key of development. Thus, internal branding's objective is to educate employees about brand vision, brand essence and brand culture (p. 120). And in order to achieve this goal, there will be three stages that a brand needs to make sure its staff will have to pass. They are learning, believing and living (Aaker D., 2014).

To begin with, *learning stage* is about teaching or educating employees about brands' vision and what makes them different from the others (p. 121). During my internship time at VEC, I have a chance to experience the learning stage directly. For the first two days and eight hours per day, I participate in two orientation sessions which are organized by VEC for me and two more new staffs. At the first day, we are mainly told about how VEC was born and what difficulties it has had to survive to date. And to me, it is really inspired by the vision of the owners. It is their vision that motivated them to establish Vision Equipment in 2012 when the automated industrial of Viet Nam is not as developed as now. On the second day, I was educated about VEC's business philosophy. Despite the fact that VEC is a SME, it will always try its best to provide to its customers as same

quality as its big competitors in the market. One of its efforts is sending its employees abroad to be educated by its supplier partners such as Hong Kong and Finland. There will be also the other methods to process “learning” stages such as news newsletters, workshop, influencer, etc. it depends on the size and organizational roles, brand will choose the most appropriate one to conduct (Aaker D. , 2014).

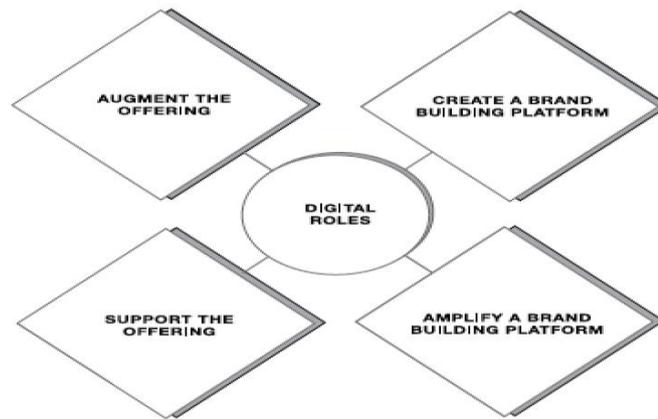
The next stage is *believing*. The main objective of this stage is to believe in brand’s core vision which is the key material of brand success (Aaker D. , 2014). It is true that employee’s belief is significant to VEC. Without it, it will be a difficult task for VEC’s director to keep their talent staffs away from bigger companies. There will be two steps to establish employee’s belief. During the training period, VEC shows me their “in the next 5 years plan” which make me interest in working for them after graduation. By doing this, VEC is applying perfectly the first step which is visible programs in order to clarify that it has a consistent commitment to its visions (p. 122). Together with visible programs, there should be also evaluation and reward for new business idea (Aaker D. , 2014). This system is very important, especially in term of motivation. The brand that has staff committing to brand vision will be solid group groupwork. As they have belief, they will try their best to contribute to brand vision by coming up with new business idea. In the market competition, when everything else are the same, the key difference will the brand’s staff.

The final step in building internal brand will be *living* stage. After conducting educated section, brands need to make some activities to make sure that all of their staffs understand the core of brands vision and no one is left behind. This will be the most important as well as the most difficult stage. Usually, the most popular activity used is workshop (Aaker D. , 2014). Workshop allows brand to conduct many activities with in and for specific purposes. For instance, a role-play communicating with customers will help staff applying brand essence. Customer-journey is also an effective activity that put brand inside customers shoes. Once staffs know more about customers, they will be able to come up with creative ideas to enhance the brand.

2.4 VEC and Digital Platforms – a must have brand building tool

There is no doubt that we are living in the exploitation of digital era. More than ever, digital is serving human life in various ways. Digital platform includes such as social media, blogging, websites, online video and, especially, smartphone world. According to Aaker, these platforms are essential for brand in enhancing and creating breakthrough brand building-programs for reasons (Aaker, 2014). Firstly, digital capability will create engagements (Aaker, 2014). Engaged audience will be more proactive to listen, to learn, to trust and to change behavior toward brand than the passive one. Usually, traditionally platforms such as newspaper advertisements, name appearance at a sponsor event will create a passive engaged audience which are harder for communication and attitude change (Aaker, 2014). Besides, digital will allow the content to be rich and deep (Aaker, 2014). Traditional marketing such as banner on the street will not allow brand to show too much content. However, digital platform makes it possible. For instance, with a social media account, the content of brand is limitless. The richer and deeper of the content, the easier to get more engagement from audience by like, comment and share brand's content. Third, continuing comparing to traditional platforms, digital platforms make it easier to narrow down and focus on target customers (Aaker, 2014). Social media platform such as Instagram allows brand to tailor the content experience accordingly with its target visitors. The final reason why digital platform is a must-have brand building tool is gaining trust. An advertisement on television or newspaper will not allow customers to check brand's credibility. Nevertheless, digital platform makes it happen. According to Craig Bloem – founder and CEO of FreeLogoService.com, there is 84 percent of people trust online review as much as friends (Bloem, 2017). Indeed, digital platform creates the habit of checking online feedback before purchasing of customers. By this way, it gives them more confident to purchase brand's products or service and trust is gained even before the purchase happen.

In order the to utilize these benefits, there are four ways for VEC to apply in its brand-building program by digital platforms. They are augment the offering, support offering, creating brand-building platforms and amplify other brand-building platforms (Aaker, 2014).



The Role of Digital

The Role of Digital (Aaker, 2014)

One of the most traditional way that is usually used to introduce an offering to customers is printing physic brochure. In my opinion, the disadvantage of this one are the limitation of target customers area, lack of communication and supporting about the offering, high cost consumption. With digital platform, it will be able improve these cons. Specifically, instead of printing brochure, VEC can introduce its offering on its own website. As I mentioned earlier about the benefits of digital platform, VEC will have no limitation for the content on its website. Therefore, it will be able to give as much detail as possible about its offering. Moreover, VEC's website should be clean, easy to use and has good navigation about the offering (Aaker, 2014). In fact, simplicity is the key for a website so that all type of customers will be able to use it. Currently, VEC does not have a social media account such as Facebook. Therefore, its communication supporting with its customers is mainly email. In my opinion, as same as B2C business, a B2B business like VEC will also need a social media platform such Facebook so that it will be able to interact and support quicker to customers than e-mail. Additionally, in my opinion, Facebook will make it easier for VEC to keep track with its customers respond about the offering so that the adjustment will be made if it is needed. Gaining credibility to the offering is one more reason why VEC should invest more in website and social media. As consumer can give feedback directly to VEC by its Facebook, the more positive feedback it gets, the more trust it will gain from potential, new and exist customers. Besides, commentary from VEC will be very essential since expert commentary is a route to credibility (Aaker, 2014).

Next, digital platform will augment brand's offering as well as add more functional benefit (Aaker, 2014). The most typical one will be smartphone application. Nowadays, in order to adapt with and utilize the popularity of smart phone, many brands build their own smartphone application with functional benefit. For instance, Finnair—national airline of Finland, has its own application. Within Finnair's application, customers will be able to search and purchase flights, figure out Finnair's offering, order tax-free products, make adjustment to flight order, etc. For Finnair's customer, its application program becomes part of the offering and enhances its value (Aaker, 2014). Thus, as a company specialize in automated industry, it is a good idea for VEC to create an application for smartphone. It is because, with population of 97 million people (WorldoMeter, 2019), Viet Nam is among top 6 most-attractive retail market (Viet Nam Economic Times, 2017). As a result, number of smartphone user is also high. It also adds to the perception that VEC has energy, innovation and update to market's trend (Aaker, 2014).

Third, VEC can create a brand-building program by digital-platform. According to Aaker (Aaker, 2014), digital brand-building platform has the ability to be the center role, or even a leading tool surrounded by other supporting marketing activities (Aaker, 2014). For instance, Adidas encourage its customer to give their thoughts and feedback on Adidas about, such as, a pair of shoes that they purchase on its website by sending them email. In return, customers will receive a 15% discount code for their next order by e-mail on Adidas website. In this case, adidas website will play the center role, and e-mail will play as assisting role. Besides, brand-building platform will be about finding and becoming a clue for a customer sweet spot (Aaker, 2014) as in Adidas' case in is discount price. With the same principle, by creating social media platform, VEC will be able to use it to drive promotion (Aaker, 2014). One of the most effective of social media promotion methods is paid social media influencer. For example, recently, Nike signs a lifetime deal-as much as 1 billion\$ value- with Cristiano Ronaldo who is, together with Messi, the world most famous footballer (Badenhausen, 2016). With 250 million followers in total (Facebook and Instagram), Ronaldo delivers to Nike incredibly effective social media promotion. According to Forbes, Ronaldo's post generates 443,5 million total interactions which included likes, shares, comments, retweet and views on video (Badenhausen, 2016). As a result, Nike is the beneficial of this huge number by increasing brand popularity on social media and sale increasing in soccer products as well.

Finally, digital can be a tool for amplifying brand-building programs. The presentence of digital platforms can improve and enhance the effectiveness of all brand-building

program elements (Aaker, 2014). For instance, VEC can use Facebook as a place for communication and supporting to its offering. Facebook can be also used for VEC sponsorships and video advertising to promote its products and event. Mobile apps will utilize the mobility of smartphone as well as its convenient. E-mail marketing will help in saving advertising cost and easier to notify customers about event and make sponsorship be more visible.

3 VISION EQUIPMENT COMPANY

3.1 Vision and its ambition (Vision Equipment, 2012)

Vision Equipment Cooperation (VEC) is a Viet Nam company which specialize in welding, waterjet cutting, automatic lines, robotics and vision system. By the owner vision, it is established in 2012 when Viet Nam's automated industry is not yet developed. VEC target market is automated industrial company and its target customers is B2B business. For instance, VEC offer the solution for production automated system for products such as candy, milk. Also, VEC provides industrial professional design and simulation. Moreover, in order to assist customers in maximizing the efficient of the machines, VEC offers as installation and programming service that will be designed in accordance with the purpose to improve productivity in production line. Besides, VEC will be also responsible for maintenance and repairing by customers' orders. Finally, for new customers, by its experienced and high skills workers, VEC will provide training packages so that customers will be able to operate the technology accordingly and effectively.

In 2017, from the beginning of May to the end of August, by the offering of Vision's Director who is my best friend father, I have a chance to do my basic internship at VEC as a Marketing Assistant for three months. I have not only chance to participate in VEC's marketing activities but also observe and understand more about it. VEC key customer target group are small and medium enterprise and start up business. The common things of this group are the limitation of financial. Therefore, VEC's offers are required not only quality but also reasonable price at the same time. This raise a challenge for VEC's marketing team. It is branding challenge. As the goal is to provide quality and good price at the same time, VEC need to brand itself that it is not cheap and untrustworthy brand. Additionally, as B2B business, VEC's customers will be stricter on quality than B2C business. Also, VEC's competitors are brands that have big financial for marketing activities in the market. They are also the brand that earn a certain position in the market. Thus, branding will be a difficult challenge that VEC team needs to get through.

Currently, VEC has 5 employees in total. It is cooperating business with multinational brands such as Finland, Russia, Taiwan, Germany, and China. With assistant and permission of VEC manager, i have the following information:

Gross revenue in 2016 and in 2017:

- 2016: 5.180.763.088 VND (196.208,93 Euro)
- 2017: 822.163.000 VND (31.185,05 Euro)

Gross revenue from January to November in 2018:

- 1.034.000.000 VND (39.330,14 Euro)

VEC marketing platform and channel:

- Google Ads: machines, robots, and tools
- Facebook: software, service

Total marketing cost in 2017 and in 2108:

- 350 USD/month (308,95 Euro/Month) (3.696 Euro/year)

3.2 Vision is in tough competition which...

Recently, according VEC gross revenue report, its revenue is declined dramatically from 196 thousand Euro in 2016 to 31 thousand euro in 2017. Despite the situation is improved a little at the moment in 2018 which is 39 thousand Euro, in my opinion, VEC does not maximize its potential ability yet because of some difficulty. According to VEC manager in my interview with him, there are 4 reasons why make VEC revenue declined dramatically. Firstly, its customers do not good or enough financial to meet VEC's offer. A I mention above, it is because VEC key target customers are small and medium enterprises and startup business. Next, its customers have enough financial ability. Nevertheless, not doing business, their purpose is to steal idea from VEC so that they

will use these ideas to build the machine and system by themselves. The third reason is that Viet Nam is already an emerging market. Therefore, it is not only full of opportunities but also full of risks and competition. Bigger brands and more famous brand are starting to interest in this VEC's key target group. With the limitation in marketing budget, VEC will need to choose which activity that will provide efficiency as well as cost reduction such as digital platform. The final reason that VEC's manager state is marketing concern, especially digital marketing. Automation industry in Viet Nam is a very potential market and in process of developing quickly. Therefore, it is significant for VEC to brand their business to become a well-know one before the market is saturated.

3.3 ...lead to the need of improvement in branding

In 2016 and in 2017, VEC spends more than 3.5 thousand Euro per year for digital marketing platform. However, as i mention earlier, ineffective marketing operation is one of the reasons why make VEC's revenue declined dramatically. Specifically, in my opinion, in the emotional value funnel, VEC is successful in step 1 which is affiliation. However, they fall in the next 2 steps which are validation and identity. That's why VEC faces a lot of difficulties in bidding projects with its competitors.

Personally, during internship time at VEC, I aware that their marketing efforts are lack of emotional to make customers remember about them. Especially, VEC is business to business. Therefore, its' branding process will be more difficult than B2C.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Method

The chosen research methodology for my thesis proposal is quantitative method. According to Saunders, (2009, 414) at the beginning, quantitative data is a raw form which has almost zero value to most people. In order to make them be valuable, these data will need to be analyzed to extract the information that they contain. Depends on objective of the research, suitable quantitative analysis methods will be chosen such as graphs, charts or charts. Quantitative research method is chosen since it has the ability to provide a structured way of collecting and analyzing data (Sis International Research, 2016). Moreover, it satisfies the need to collect the data in large scale by gathering numerical data and generalizing them from a group of chosen people in order to explain a specific phenomenon (USC University of Southern California, 2018).

In quantitative research method, data will be divided into two groups. They are categorical and numerical. This is also the reason why I choose quantitative method for my thesis. Categorical is suitable for the research that has data cannot be counted numerically but they are be able to gather into sets by their characteristics (Mark Saunders, 2009). The second group which is also the chosen one for my research data is numerical data. Numerical data are data that measurable or counted numerically as quantities (p. 418). As the purpose of my thesis is to improve branding, numerical data allows me to assign each value of data into numerical scale in which shows the impact of branding.

The theoretical is already delivered in literature review chapters. However, in order to make it be more applicable and to align with the objectives, a certain amount of questions and data is carefully designed in a survey to a certain amount of audience of a target group.

4.2 Survey questions and target audience

Data collection method

As quantitative research method is chosen, a survey is designed to collect data. This survey contains a set of questions which will be delivered to a specific target group of audience. These questions are designed based on the objectives of this research which is to provide the key to improve branding with VEC is the case company.

In order to conduct and administer the survey, I use Survey Monkey website as a tool. Specifically, a link will be sent by email to a specific audience to lead straight to the survey question on Survey Monkey website. As my data is numerical data, graphs and charts are chosen as collecting and analyzing method.

Target audience

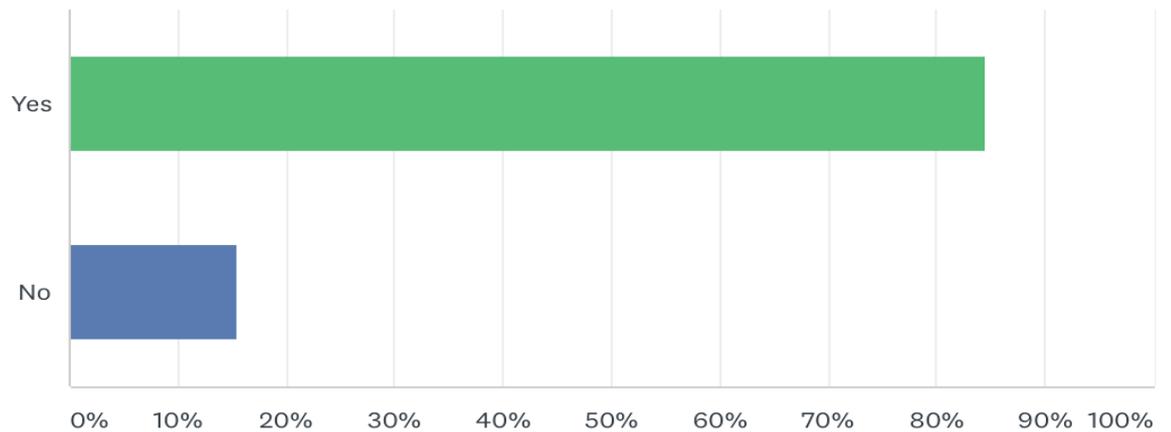
Target audience of the survey is VEC's customers. Specially, by VEC's assisting, the survey is sent by email to 60 audiences who are used to be and current customers of VEC. Also, the email is sent to some of VEC potential customers to analyze about the popularity of VEC brand in automated industry.

Limitation

The limitation of approaching by email is the number of real participants. The result shows that not all the 60 audiences are willing to conduct the survey. The true number of participants is from 45 to 50. Another limitation is the quantity of audience. There are only 60 audiences are chosen to conduct the survey. Therefore, it limits the value of the result within 60 audiences point of view. However, in general, these 60 audiences can reveal the strengths and weaknesses of VEC branding

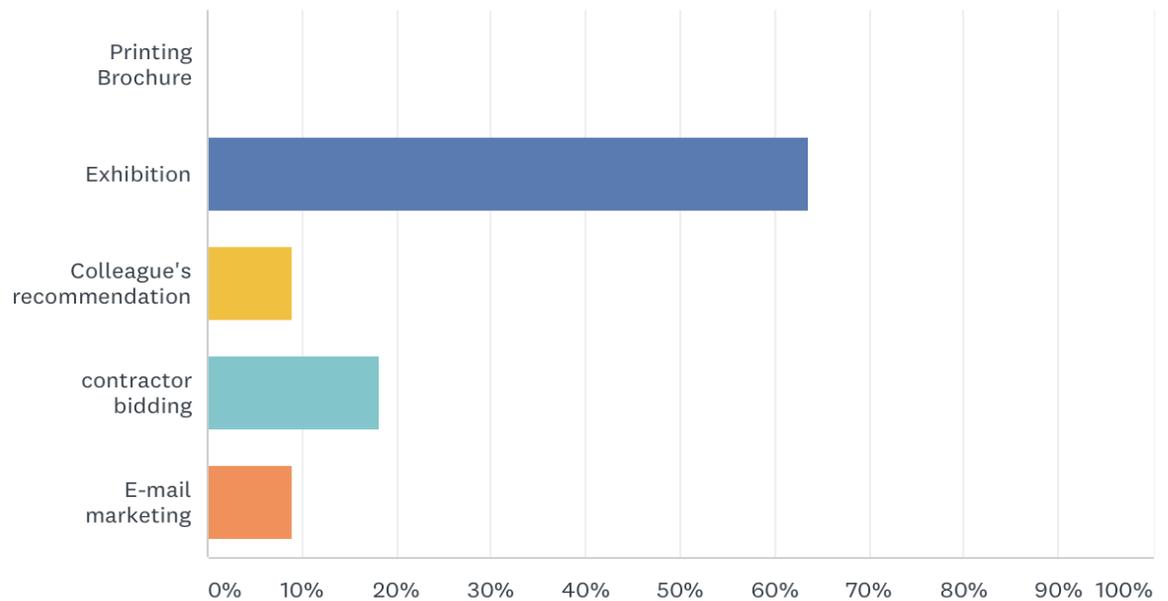
5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

Question 1: Do you know about VEC Co.,LTD



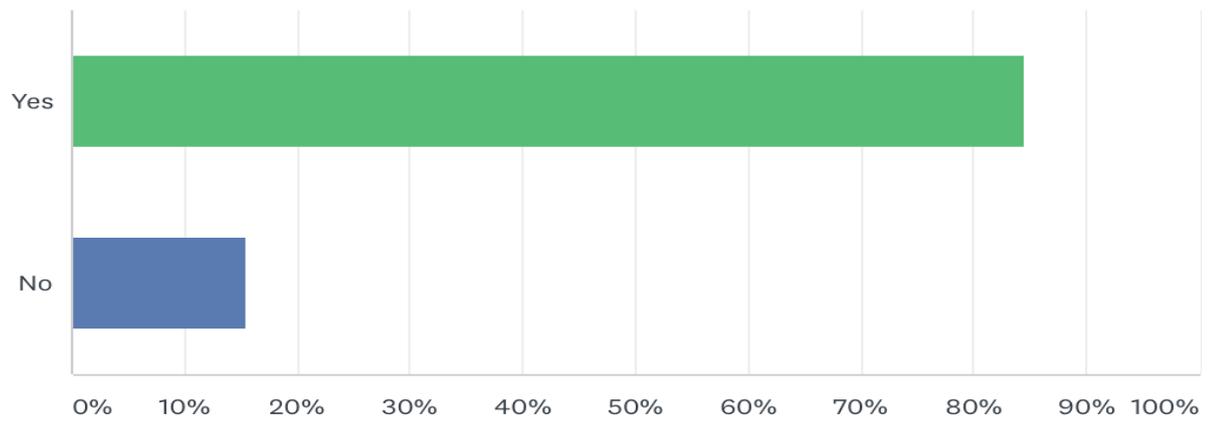
As I mention earlier, the target audience of this survey are ex and current customers of VEC. Thus, there is more than 80% of the answer knowing about VEC as a brand. This is also a good signal that VEC has a certain place in its customers mind. The rest of the answer “No” as expected belongs to VEC potential customers in its email marketing list.

Question 2: By which channel you know about VEC



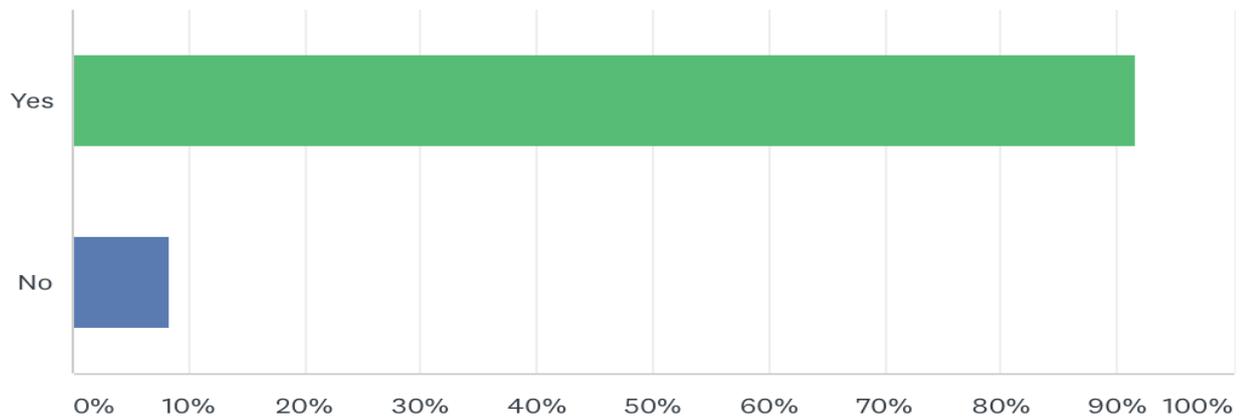
The crucial result reflects the current status of VEC marketing effort, especially by digital platform. There are more than 60% answer that they know about VEC by exhibition. However, there is less than 10% of audiences' answer that they know about VEC by E-mail marketing. In my opinion, there are three problems raising in these answers. Firstly, VEC e-mail marketing effort is not working effectively. They will need to change their marketing strategy to improve this situation. Second, it's costly to participate in Exhibition every year. Besides, the advantage of this activity is the limitation of audience. It means VEC will only reach to the exhibition audience. In contrast, a digital platform will help VEC is not only cheaper but also allow them to reach more target customers at the same time. The final problem is marketing budget. As VEC is a SME, it has limit budget for branding and marketing. Therefore, if it can improve its branding by digital platform, VEC will be able to save a lot of cost.

Question 3: Are you use to be / current customers of VEC?



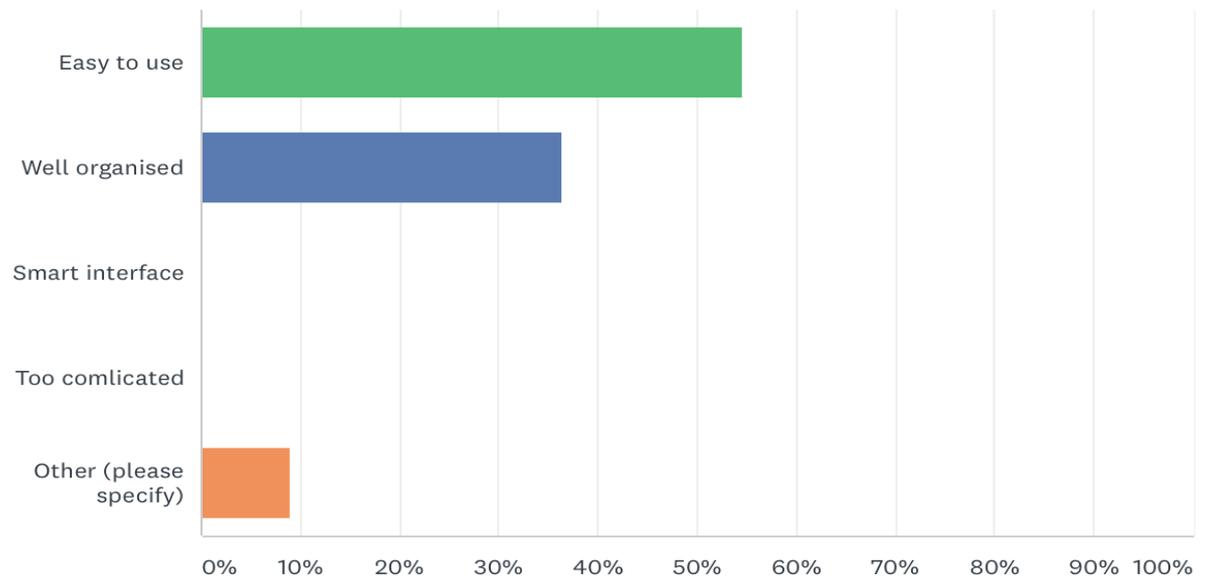
For this question, as my chosen target audience, there are more than 80% of answer that they are used to be and current customers of VEC.

Question 4: Have you ever try VEC's website?



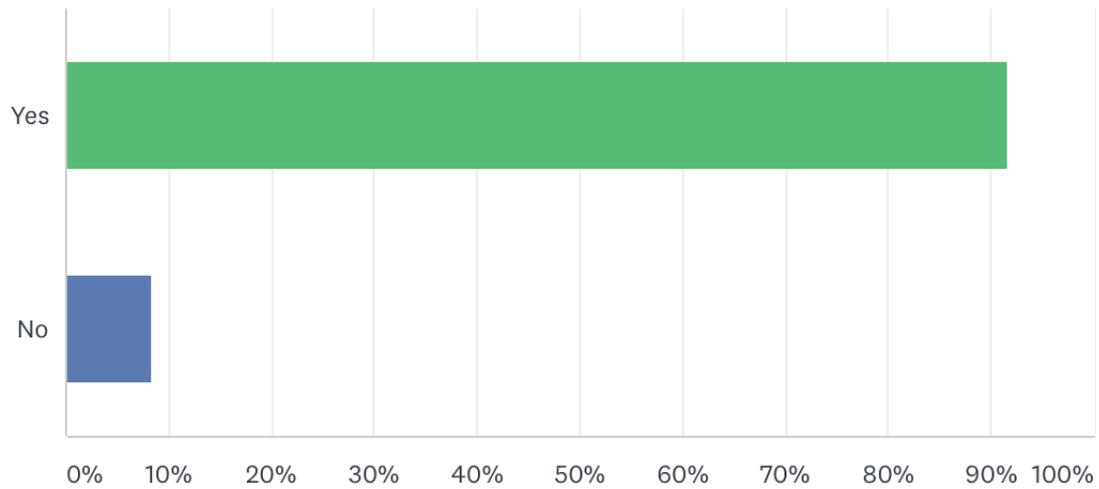
In question 4, there is no surprise that more than 90% answer that they used to surf VEC website. It means that website will one of the most important digital platforms that VEC will need to pay attention to.

Question 5: If yes, VEC's website is



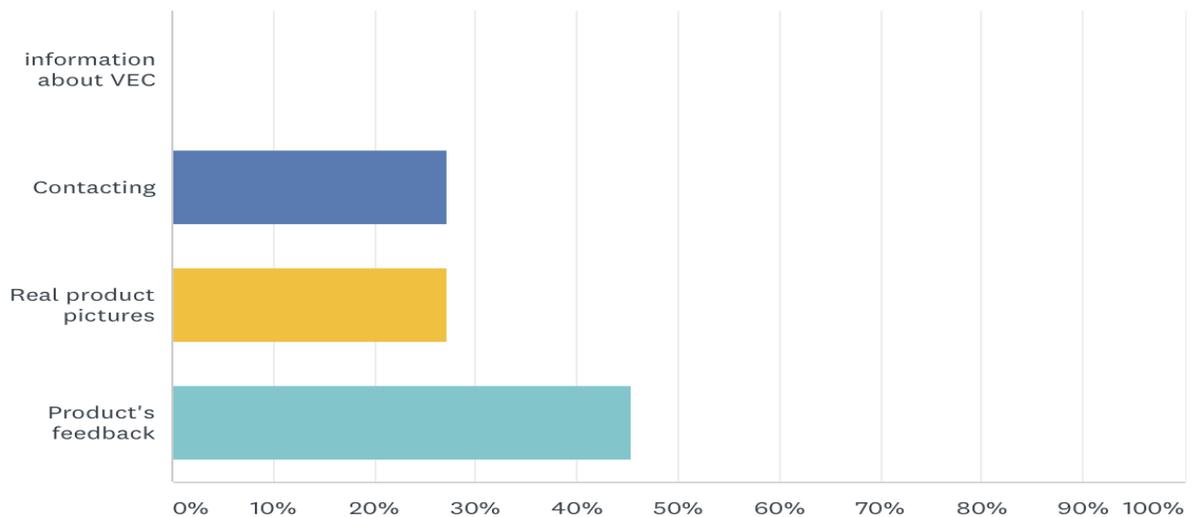
For its website, VEC gains positive feedbacks from visitor. Specifically, there are more than 50% agree that VEC's website is easy to use. Also, there are more than 30% visitors say that the website is well organized. These feedbacks are very value for VEC in term of improving. The task for the team is how to update its website frequently but it will still be easy to use and well organized.

Question 6: Did you try to VEC's Facebook



The objective of this question is to figure out the importance of social media presence such as Facebook. Currently, VEC does not have any social media presence. Therefore, with more 90% of audiences answer that they used to find VEC's Facebook.

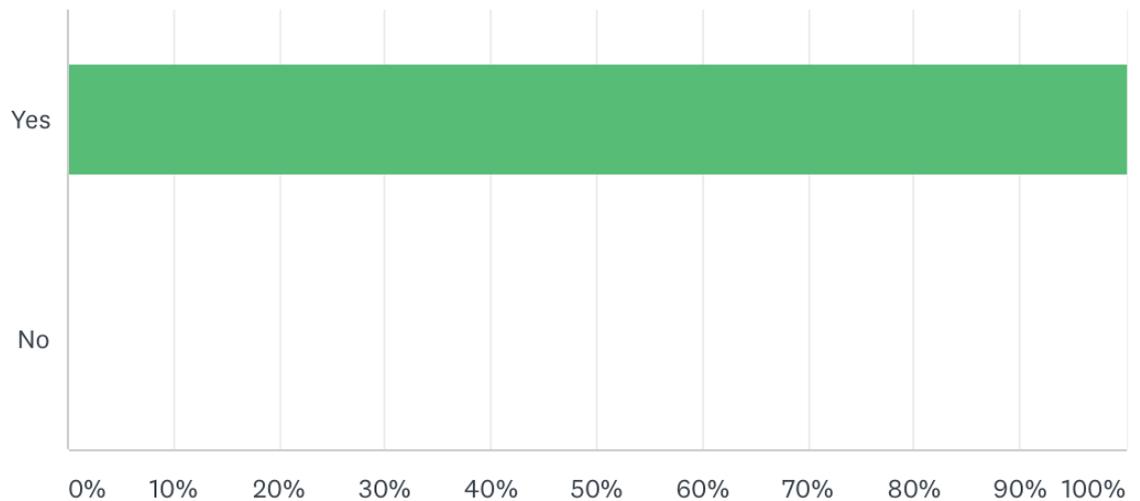
Question 7: You find VEC's Facebook for



Question 7 is designed to strengthen suggestion that VEC should have a Facebook account as an improvement in its branding efforts. The result shows that customers find

VEC's Facebook for contacting, seeing real product pictures and reading products' feedback.

Question 8: Do you think any business should have a social media account?



For the final question, there are 100% of audience which including old, current and potential customers of VEC think that business should have a Facebook account.

6 RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The survey reveals branding problems that VEC is facing. However, it also shows the possible solutions to improve the situation. Specifically, the result of research provides the answers for my research questions which are:

1. What are key characteristics in forming a good brand? How case company will be able to apply some of those?
2. What tools or solutions will make VEC be more reachable in digital space? What action VEC should take to be more visibility?
3. What is the importance of communication between customers and VEC, especially in digital marketing?

For SME such as case company VEC, in order to save cost, it usually designs and operates marketing campaign by itself. Obviously, the advantage of this is cost saving. However, by my internship period at VEC, I realize that the disadvantage is greater than advantage one. For instance, the affiliation campaign of VEC is too general. It has no key point that make it be different from its competitors, especially the big one. Additionally, its message is not fully shown the brand essence as well as brand culture. As a result, potential customers' emotion is insecure to choose VEC. Therefore, especially for SME, how to gain affiliation and cost sufficient will be a challenge for them. By the survey reAs mention earlier the importance of digital platform in Chapter 2.4, engaged audience will be more proactive to listen, to learn, to trust and to change behavior toward brand than the passive one. Therefore, lack of digital presence such as social media is a disadvantage of VEC branding strategy. Digital platform will allow VEC to extend its brand popularity in a wider range than exhibition and contractor bidding. Moreover, as shown in the survey results, digital platform, such as Facebook, can be used as not only a marketing tool but also a communication tool with customers. Most importantly, digital platform such as social networking will increase VEC visibility which make them be more reachable and amplifying brand building program at the same time.

The next problem is branding cost. Doing internship at VEC allows me to figure out that the cost to participate in an exhibition is higher than VEC marketing budget which I am not allowed to specify the number by agreement with VEC. The limitation of exhibition is the limit quantity of customers within it. Also, it is a direct competition with VEC's competitors at the exhibition which will reduce the possibility to get more customers. also,

industrial exhibition is only organized for once or twice a year. Therefore, it reduces the chance to find new potential customers comparing to digital platform presence. Also, according to the survey result, VEC website is easy to use and friendly interface. That's why, in author opinion, during selling process, VEC should introduce its website more so that its customer will be easier to reach VEC as well as get more information about VEC.

Moreover, the survey also shows the inefficient of VEC in e-mail marketing. That could be one of the reasons why the revenue of VEC is declining recently. E-mail marketing will be improved if it has the assisting from social media presence. Once the brand's popularity is increased by social media, e-mail marketing will get more interested from customers. Besides, it is good idea for VEC to organize some activities such as digital marketing workshop in order to discuss solutions to improve digital marketing campaign. Also, a training section will be beneficial for improving skills for VEC marketing team. Besides, e-mail marketing is importance in communicating between VEC and its customers. Therefore, the inefficient of e-mail marketing will affect connection between VEC and customers. in general, digital marketing is extremely important in establishing the communication as well as maintain relationship with customers.

In short, lack of digital platform in branding strategy could affect negatively not only on brand value but also on total revenue of VEC. That's why in brand building process, together with some key principles that author introduce in this thesis, VEC should emphasize on its digital marketing program.

7 CONCLUSION

Branding is an endless topic to research. However, in this thesis proposal, I'd like to provide some applicable key points for brand with VEC is the case company. The objective is to turn a basic generic product into a brand that will be recognized by customers. It not only leverages business but also change businesses positively from the inside. By applicable branding principles, VEC will be able to improve its branding strategy, especially about digital platform. VEC, as SME in automated market, should be well prepared for "The Fourth Industrial Revolution". Especially, beside China and India, Viet Nam is one of most attractive emerging markets. It means that it is not only full of opportunity but also full of risks. Therefore, building a strong brand with strong place inside of customers is as important as matter of live and dead. The principles in this research can be used as reference document for SME like VEC in planning brand building campaign. It is essential to focus on customer emotion. Besides, establishing brand vision to strengthen brand building program is what brand should do. Also, a brand with personality will deliver significant benefits for branding.

Together with branding principles, by using quantitative research method to conduct a survey, author emphasizes on the significance of digital platforms in brand build programs. By the result and analysis of the survey result, using digital platforms such as Facebook as a digital marketing tool in brand building program will improve the efficient of the VEC branding efforts. Also, improving skills for marketing team will be also a solution for VEC to improve branding since human resource is always the key to success in any business. By increasing digital platform presence in brand building campaign, customers will not only reach to the brand easily, but also extend brand popularity in the market. Besides, digital platform will play an important role in communication between brands and customers. For instance, with big amount number of population, Viet Nam is an attractive smart phone market. Therefore, the popularity of social networking such as Facebook and Insatgram will be a huge opportunity for brands to enrich their digital platform in building strong brand.

VEC, with its current revenue issue, will need more improvements in its branding effort, especially in increasing digital present. At same time, because of its budget limitation, VEC will also need to improve the ability of its marketing team. This will not only help VEC in reducing cost but also increase the effectiveness of its branding campaign. As SME, VEC will have limitation in human resource. Thus, its staffs need to be trained in

multi tasking. For example, a marketer will also need to be responsible for selling at the same time. Therefore, it is significant to educate staffs about brand visions. The objective is to make sure the staff understand what company stand for so that they will be willing to contribute their ability to help brand achieve business goal. In short, by this thesis and the case company, author would like to help small and medium enterprises such as VEC to improve their brand building programs in the most effective yet cost reduction way. With the emphasizing on branding key principles and, especially, on digital platform, author expect brands will be able to achieve their branding objectives.

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