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SOCIAL SCIENCES, BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION

# INCREASING BRAND KNOWLEDGE

Through Efficient Brand Implementation

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Bringing a brand vision to life through efficient brand implementation efforts that support the delivery of a brand promise is crucial to creating a strong brand. The objective of the thesis was to find out if conducted brand implementation efforts had been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of Ahooy Creative.</p> <p>To determine whether the conducted brand implementation efforts had been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of Ahooy Creative, an online survey research was conducted. The survey examined the customers' brand awareness and brand associations. The survey was distributed through a mass e-mail, and in total, 132 respondents were gathered.</p> <p>The results showed that the brand awareness of the client company's customers is at a sufficient level in terms of brand recognition and brand recall. The most efficient external communication channels appeared to be word-of-mouth marketing, personal selling, and social media marketing. The customers' brand imagery-related associations were relatively consistent with the brand identity, and brand performance-related associations indicated that customers were quite satisfied with Ahooy Creative's performance. After careful processing and analysis of the data, it was concluded that the conducted brand implementation efforts have been relatively efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of Ahooy Creative.</p>			
<p>Keywords</p> <p>Brand implementation, brand communication, brand knowledge, brand vision, brand promise, brand image, brand awareness, customer-based brand equity, internal branding, external branding.</p>			

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the idea of brands as a strategic asset emerged in the 1980s (Aaker 2014, 23), a growing number of organizations have realized that a brand is one of their most important intangible assets (Keller, Apéria & Georgson 2012, 3). Brands are one of the very few strategic assets that can provide a company with long-lasting competitive advantages (Kapferer 2012, 1). Thus, creating, maintaining, and enhancing strong brands over time has become an important strategic focus of marketing managers (Keller et al. 2012, 3). Nevertheless, one of the most common reasons for brands' failure is that the communicated brand promise is inconsistent with the actual customer experience (Daye 2010-10-21). The gap between customers' experience and expectations is the primary determinant of customer satisfaction (Kapferer 2008, 38). Thus, bringing the brand vision to life through efficient brand implementation efforts that support the delivery of the brand promise is crucial to creating a strong brand (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen 2019, 381; Kahri et al. 2016, 292-293). This requires effective brand communication, both internally and externally (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy & Pervan 2018, 328; Keller et al. 2012, 903).

The topic of the thesis concerns increasing brand knowledge through efficient brand implementation. Since brand implementation is a broad subject (Keller 2013, 179-180), the focus is narrowed to brand communication, the tools and channels of brand communication, and the methods of measuring brand communication's effects. This focus allows a more thorough concentration on the chosen topic. It is also assumed that the commissioner organization, operating in the business-to-business sector, benefit more from information regarding brand communication than information regarding, for instance, distribution and pricing strategies.

This topic is chosen since the commissioner organization recently went through a brand renewal, and this is a great time to review whether the conducted brand implementation efforts have been efficient in increasing brand knowledge. Another reason for choosing this topic is that communicating a brand efficiently and staying true to the communicated brand promise is commonly very challenging to companies (Daye 2010-10-21). Thus, the thesis provides valuable information for society by raising awareness regarding efficient brand implementation from the perspective of brand communication. The third reason for choosing this topic is that the writer personally finds the topic highly interesting and beneficial for her desired future career path. During her internship, she got to learn a lot about establishing a brand identity, and this is an excellent opportunity to further deepen her professional knowledge regarding brand-building.

The primary objective of the thesis is to find out have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of the commissioner organization. Another objective involves raising society's awareness regarding efficient brand implementation from the perspective of brand communication. The writer's personal objective is to deepen her professional knowledge regarding brand-building.

The thesis consists of two parts. The first part is a theoretical framework where all the relevant theories and models are introduced. The theoretical framework is built by going through various literature, science papers, and research from the leading authors and professors in this field. Some significant literary works that are used as a base for the whole theoretical framework include Strategic Brand Management (Keller, Apéria & Georgson, 2012); Aaker on Branding (Aaker, 2014); and Marketing Management (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen, 2019).

The theoretical framework consists of three main chapters (Figure 1). To ensure the reader has a comprehensive understanding of the topic, the first main chapter introduces the concept of brand knowledge and how it is linked to the creation of customer-based brand equity. The strategic brand management process and Keller's customer-based brand equity pyramid are utilized to provide this broad introduction to the topic. The second main chapter concerns brand implementation. Because delivering a brand promise requires both internal and external brand implementation efforts (Vahtola 2020, 231; Aaker 2014, 224; Keller et al. 2012, 197), tools and channels for both internal and external brand communication are introduced. Once brand implementation efforts have been put in place, it is important to measure the effects of the conducted brand implementations efforts (Keller et al. 2012, 46). Thus, some commonly used consumer-related brand performance measurement tools and how brand knowledge can be measured is introduced in the third main chapter of the thesis.



FIGURE 1. Structure of the theoretical framework

In the second part of the thesis, a study is conducted based on the theoretical framework of the thesis. The thesis's primary objective is to find out have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of the commissioner organization. Thus, the study objective is to find out have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of the commissioner organization. The chosen research method is online survey research and the survey is distributed through a mass e-mail. The sample consists of the current and former customers of the commissioner organization. To determine whether the conducted brand implementation efforts have been efficient in increasing customers' brand knowledge, the following research questions need to be solved.

The primary research question:

**Have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing customers' brand knowledge?**

The secondary research questions:

**What is the level of customers' brand awareness in terms of brand recognition and brand recall?**

**Are brand imagery-related associations in customers' minds consistent with the brand identity?**

**Are customers satisfied with the brand performance?**

## 2 BRAND KNOWLEDGE AND CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

The concept of brand equity was potentially one of the most significant marketing concepts to emerge in the 1980s (Keller et al. 2012, 42; Kapferer 2008, 3). Over time, it has evoked a strong interest among marketers, and in the 21st century, brands are often considered to be one of the most important intangible assets of any organization (Shafi & Madhavaiah 2014, 34). According to Keller et al. (2012, 42), the brand equity concept emphasizes the importance of brands as part of marketing strategies and can provide useful insights to enhance brand management. A lot of debate has revolved around how brand equity should be conceptualized and measured (Davicik, Silva & Hair 2015, 4-5). To this day, no common viewpoint has emerged. Nevertheless, most researchers agree that brand equity should be defined in terms of marketing effects uniquely attributable to a brand. In other words, brand equity is the reason for different outcomes resulting from marketing a product or service. (Keller 2013, 57.)

Generally, the concept of brand equity is assessed from one of two different perspectives: financial perspective or consumer-based perspective (Hakala, Svensson & Vincze 2012, 440; Myers 2003, 40). The consumer-based perspective considers the relationship between customers and the brand, whereas the financial perspective is more focused on financial performance (Kapferer 2008, 9). In the 21st century, the emphasis has increasingly been on the consumer-based perspective (Ambler, Bhattacharya, Edell, Keller, Lemon & Mittal 2002, 13). This may be because customers are commonly considered the premise for businesses' existence and success (Kahri, Ahto, Kahri & Mäkinen 2016, 151). The financial value of a brand is also often viewed rather as a result than the definition of brand equity (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 103). Kapferer (2008, 10), for instance, argues that "brands have financial value because they have created assets in the minds and hearts of customers". Thus, the consumer-based perspective on building brand equity can be assumed to be the basis for the successful creation of brand equity and the route to greater financial performance.

The customer-based brand equity concept (henceforth the CBBE concept) provides a unique perspective for defining brand equity and how it should be built, measured, and managed. The concept approaches brand equity from the perspective of the consumer. Thus, understanding and satisfying consumer needs and wants is central in this brand equity approach. The CBBE concept contains various theoretical advances and management practices developed to facilitate understanding and influencing consumer behavior. (Keller et al. 2012, 53.) From the perspective of the CBBE concept, "the power of a brand lies in what resides in the minds and hearts of customers". In other words, customers' experiences with a brand, what they have learned, felt, seen, and heard about the brand, form the premise for customer-based brand equity. (Keller 2013, 69.) Thus, the challenge involves linking the desired thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, perceptions, and opinions to the brand through ensuring that consumers have positive experiences with the brand (Keller et al. 2012, 54).

Keller (2013, 69) defines customer-based brand equity as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand". According to this definition,

an organization is said to have positive customer-based brand equity when the identification of a brand leads to customers reacting more favorably towards a certain product or service, and the way it is marketed. In contrast, if a brand has negative customer-based brand equity, customers react less favorably towards the brand's product and its marketing compared to an unnamed product. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 141.)

The benefits of achieving positive customer-based brand equity may include, for instance, customers being less price-sensitive and more accepting regarding the marketing of the brand, brand expansions, and new distribution channels (Keller et al. 2012, 54). Customers may also pay more of their selective attention to brands that they find familiar, as well as be more willing to include the brand into their consideration set (Hoeffler & Keller 2003, 424). The consideration set refers to a group of brands customers would likely consider purchasing. Being a part of customers' considerations set is essential because it can generate competitive advantages as a result of excluding other brands. (Keller et al. 2012, 61.)

From the CBBE concept perspective, Keller (2013, 69) identifies three elements required in creating brand equity (see Figure 2). The differential effect refers to customers recognizing differences between brands (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 104). Consumer response to marketing, in turn, relates to consumers' differing perceptions, preferences, and behavior regarding a brand and its marketing (Keller et al. 2012, 54). In a situation where no difference in the customer response occurs, the brand's product would be considered to be a commodity, and the competition would probably be based on price rather than other aspects (Kotler 1999, 139). According to Keller et al. (2012, 54), consumers' knowledge and experience of a brand are essential for differences to occur in consumer response. Other researchers have also granted that brand knowledge is a significant factor in creating brand equity (Kotler & Keller 2012, 143; Hoeffler & Keller 2003, 421).

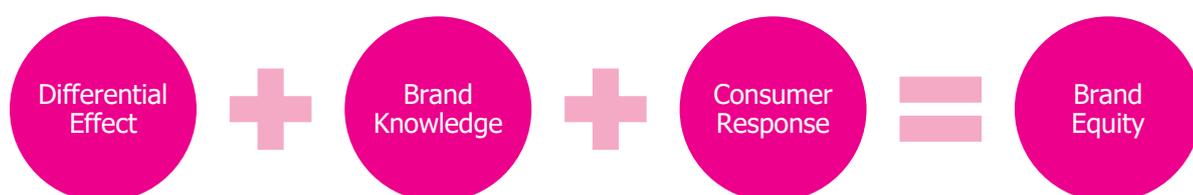


FIGURE 2. The elements of customer-based brand equity (Keller 2013, 69.)

Since brand knowledge creates the differential effect that drives brand equity, it plays an important role in creating brand equity (Keller et al. 2012, 58). Keller (2013, 72) suggests that brand knowledge consists of brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness refers to consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions and can be categorized into two levels: brand recognition and brand recall (Keller 2013, 73). Brand recognition relates to customers' ability to recognize a brand as one they have seen or heard before when given the brand as a cue. Brand recall,

in turn, requires customers to retrieve the brand from memory when given a relevant cue regarding, for instance, the product category, the needs fulfilled by that category, or the purchase or consumption situation. (Keller et al. 2012, 60.) According to Hakala et al. (2012, 441), brand recall is more challenging than brand recognition. This is because customers have to remember the brand when the need for a purchase from a certain product category occurs (Hakala et al. 2012, 441).

Creating brand awareness is an essential step in building brand equity but the level of its sufficiency, resulting in more favorable consumer response, varies depending on customers' involvement level in the decision setting (Keller et al. 2012, 59-60). Customers' involvement level in a purchase situation relates to the extent of the purchase being remarkable for the customer. For instance, in a business-to-business context, customers' involvement level is generally higher because the purchasing decision can have significant consequences for the company's operations (Puusa, Reijonen, Juuti & Laukkanen 2014, 184). According to Aaker (2014, 29), a high level of brand awareness can indicate success, commitment, and substance, all of which are significant attributes to industrial buyers. Nevertheless, creating strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in customers' minds in most cases is crucial for attaining the differential effect that generates brand equity. (Keller et al. 2012, 59-60.)

According to Keller et al. (2012, 59), customer-based brand equity occurs when customers have a high level of brand awareness, and some strong, favorable, and unique brand associations linked to a brand in their memory. The brand associations in customers' memory form a brand image that reflects the associations linked to the brand in customers' minds (Puusa et al. 2014, 229). Essential in creating a strong brand image is to ensure that the brand vision is visible in all the company's operations, whether internal or external (Kotler et al. 2019, 379). This is because creating favorable and strong brand associations requires that the communicated brand promise is delivered and that the communicated information is relevant and stays consistent (Keller et al. 2012, 63-64). Thus, when attempting to create a strong brand image, it is very important to ensure that the communicated brand promise is consistent with the actual customer experience (Kotler & Keller 2012, 90).

## 2.1 Strategic Brand Management Process

The idea of brands as a strategic asset emerged in the late 1980s (Aaker 2014, 23). This realization was significant since it radically changed brand management's role from tactical to strategic (Aaker 2014, 27). In the 21st century, the importance of brands as strategic assets is widely acknowledged. According to Kapferer (2012, 1), a brand is one of the very few strategic assets that can provide a company with long-lasting competitive advantages. Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2009, 9) further suggest that brand equity is a strategic asset and can form the basis for competitive advantage, as well as long-term profitability. Thus, creating, maintaining, and enhancing strong brands over time has become one of the strategic focuses of marketing managers (Keller et al. 2012, 3). Essential is that the brand strategy reflects the business strategy in terms of the company's strategic vision and corporate culture. To accomplish this, brand managers should be involved in both the creation and implementation of the business strategy. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 7.)

Strategic brand management involves planning and implementing marketing campaigns and other related activities to build, measure, and manage brand equity (Keller et al. 2012, 43). The strategic brand management process consists of four steps (see Figure 3). The four steps of the strategic brand management process act as a road map as to how companies can create customer-based brand equity. The concrete process of strategic brand management is next briefly introduced for the reader to gain a comprehensive understanding of how customer-based brand equity can be created.



FIGURE 3. Strategic brand management process (Adapted from Keller 2012, 43.)

Identifying and establishing a brand positioning is the first step of the strategic brand management process. It is an important step because it guides subsequent decision-making (Keller et al. 2012, 104) and is the premise for creating brand associations in customers' minds (Puusa et al. 2014, 217). Brand identity refers to a certain set of desirable brand associations and fundamentally represents what a brand stands for. Brand positioning, in turn, involves linking the desired brand associations to target customers' minds by means of active brand communication. An established brand positioning should efficiently differentiate a brand and demonstrate the brand's benefits over its competitors. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 40-42.) According to Holt (2004, 63), positioning is at the heart of the brand strategy. A well-executed brand positioning clarifies the meaning of the brand. It reflects the brand's unique and similar aspects to competing brands, as well as why consumers should purchase and use the brand. (Keller et al. 2012, 104.) The clarity of focus that a strong brand positioning provides a company with then generates competitive advantages across all the company's operations (Clifton & Simmons 2003, 5).

Planning and implementing marketing campaigns is the second step of the strategic brand management process (Keller et al. 2012, 43). Once a company has identified and established a brand positioning, it should be appropriately communicated through efficient brand implementation efforts

(Kotler et al. 2019, 381; Kahri et al. 2016, 292-293). Brand communication involves all contact points between customers and the brand (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 42). When done right, marketing communication plays an important role (Kotler et al. 2019, 549) in enhancing customers' brand awareness and creating positive brand associations (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 126). If no form of marketing communication is employed, it is highly unlikely that anyone becomes aware of the brand or learns about it (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 124). Nevertheless, according to Puusa et al. (2014, 217), a positive brand image is primarily built through actions and only secondarily through marketing communication activities. This claim is justified since the attitudes formed through direct experience, generally are stronger and easier to access than those derived through marketing communication (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 58). Thus, internal branding's importance in creating brand equity should be recognized (Puusa et al. 2014, 217).

The third step of the strategic brand management process concerns measuring and interpreting brand performance (Keller et al. 2012, 43). Building a strong brand requires consistent investments in brand-building initiatives in the long-term. Only a small part of the brand-building initiatives' pay-off may occur instantly after the investments are made. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 14.) Thus, marketing managers need tools to justify investments in brand-building programs (Keller et al. 2012, 381). Measuring and interpreting brand performance regularly also allows marketing managers to understand the effectiveness of the brand-building programs (Keller et al. 2012, 46) and manage the brand with greater success (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 28). Essential is to understand the sources of brand equity, how they affect the desired outcomes and change over time (Kotler & Keller 2012, 146). One challenge of measuring brand equity concerns the variety of definitions that exist for the term. Over the years, various methodologies for measuring brand equity have emerged as no common agreement on the definition of brand equity, how it should be built, measures, and managed has occurred (Christodoulides & de Chernatony 2009, 4).

The final step of the strategic brand management process concerns growing and sustaining brand equity (Keller et al. 2012, 43). A high level of brand equity can be attained by achieving a strong brand positioning and designing and implementing efficient marketing campaigns. Nevertheless, maintaining the achieved brand leadership position can often reveal to be a quite challenging task. Brand equity management refers to activities that view brand equity from a broader, more diverse perspective. These activities are concerned with managing brands over time, in multiple categories, and across different market segments. (Keller et al. 2012, 46.)

## 2.2 Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid

Keller's customer-based brand equity pyramid is a model used to represent the sequence of steps in creating brand equity (Figure 4). The pyramid consists of six brand building blocks: salience, imagery, performance, feelings, judgments, and resonance. To create brand equity, a brand has to go through the appropriate building blocks to reach the highest building block, where intense, active brand loyalty is created. (Keller et al. 2012, 66.) Companies can choose to build their brand up by going through the building blocks on the left side of the pyramid, selecting a more rational route, or

by going through the building blocks on the right side of the pyramid and choosing a more emotional route. The strongest brands, nevertheless, have gone through all of the brand building blocks. (Keller 2013, 107.)

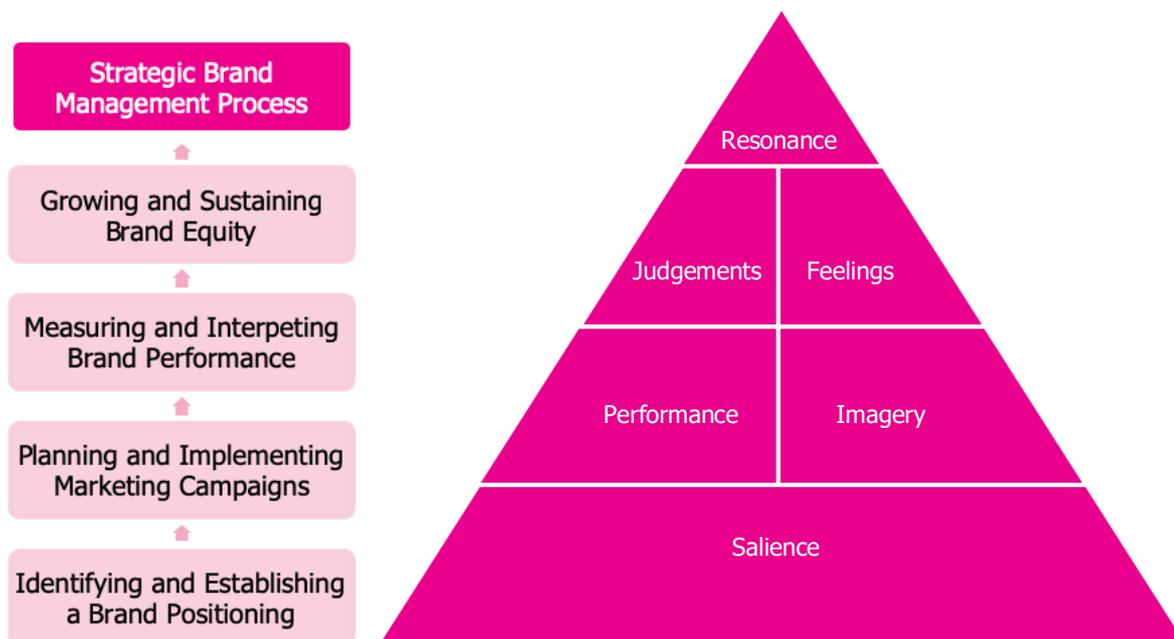


FIGURE 4. Customer-based brand equity pyramid (Adapted from Keller 2012, 66.)

The first brand building block of the customer-based brand equity pyramid involves creating brand salience with customers. Brand salience refers to aspects related to customers' brand awareness. Hence, in the brand salience stage, brand awareness in terms of brand recognition and brand recall is evaluated. (Keller 2013, 107-108.) A salient brand is one that comes to customers' minds immediately when a need to purchase a certain product or service occurs (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 135). According to Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 106), brand awareness is an important source of brand equity because for customers to prefer a brand, they have to acknowledge the brand exists. Nevertheless, as discussed, brand awareness by itself is rarely sufficient enough to influence the customer mindset. Thus, brand meaning, consisting of brand performance and brand imagery, assesses the brand associations in customers' minds more precisely. (Keller et al. 2012, 70.)

Brand performance relates to the more functional brand associations concerning product attributes and benefits. Performance-related associations are of high importance because a product or service directly influences how customers experience a brand. A brand with severe performance-related deficiencies would rarely manage to create a strong brand positioning. The functional attributes and benefits, forming the brand performance associations, differ depending on the product or service category, but a few attributes and benefits are common with most categories. Customers' expectations of primary features, and the supplementary features complementing the primary features, affect how customers perceive the brand's performance and how desirable it is. Primary features are necessary for a product to exist, whereas supplementary features allow the product or service to be customized and serve additional benefits to customers. (Keller et al. 2012, 71.)

In addition to the product or service features, customers evaluate brand performance by assessing the brand's reliability and durability. Reliability refers to the extent to which a brand performs consistently over time. Durability, on the other hand, relates to how long a brand's product can be used before it needs to be replaced. (Keller et al. 2012, 71.) Aspects related to service effectiveness, service efficiency, and service empathy also play a critical role in creating performance-related associations in customers' minds. Service effectiveness refers to the extent to which customers are satisfied with the service the brand provides. The efficiency of the service is evaluated in terms of the speed and responsiveness of the service. Service empathy, in turn, relates to the extent to which customers perceive the service providers to be trustworthy and caring. The aesthetic aspects relating to the look and feel of a brand, as well as the brand's chosen pricing policy, can also affect performance-related associations in customers' minds. A higher price may, for instance, imply to consumers that a product belongs to a higher quality level of a particular product category. (Keller et al. 2012, 71-72.)

Brand imagery refers to the other type of brand meaning. It involves the psychological and social associations related to a brand, rather than the functional aspects. Thus, brand imagery represents how customers think and feel about a brand rather than the tangible aspects of the brand. (Keller et al. 2012, 72.) According to Aaker (2014, 109), the strongest brands' identities include both functional and emotional benefits. He emphasizes that providing customers with emotional benefits, in addition to the functional benefits, adds richness and depth to the brand experience. Even in the business-to-business markets, where customers are traditionally viewed as highly rational, emotional benefits affect customers' decision-making (Aaker 2014, 106-107). Thus, it makes sense to employ emotional benefits as a part of the market offering even in the business-to-business markets where customers are traditionally viewed as less driven by emotions.

There are a variety of imagery-related associations that can be linked to a brand. User profiles, representing typical or idealized brand users, are one of them. User profiles can be based either on demographic or psychographic factors. In a business-to-business context, user imagery often relates to the size or business field of the organization. Typical purchase and usage situations also create imagery-related associations. Typical purchase situation associations can generate from the type of purchasing channel and the ease of the purchase. The timing, location, and intended use of the product, in turn, affect the associations related to typical usage situations. (Keller et al. 2012, 72-73.)

Another set of brand imagery-related associations involves brand personality. Similarly to a person, a brand can also be characterized by using distinctive personality traits. A brand can, for instance, be described as being "modern", "fun", "exciting", or "daring". Brand personality reflects the feelings people have regarding a brand due to the way the brand is marketed, for instance. (Keller et al. 2012, 73.) According to Aaker (2014, 72), having a strong, distinctive, and enduring brand personality provides companies with significant long-term advantages by differentiating the brand from competitors. A strong brand personality makes brands more interesting and memorable, which facilitates gaining brand awareness and developing relationships with customers (Aaker & Joachimsthaler

2009, 53). Thus, creating the right type of brand personality is important. Finally, the history and experiences customers have had with the brand may also influence brand imagery-related associations (Keller et al. 2012, 74).

Brand judgements concentrate on customers' personal opinions and evaluations of a brand. Customers' opinions of a brand are based on all the different performance- and imagery-related associations in customers' minds. By evaluating these associations, customers form an opinion of a brand, and whether they would consider purchasing the brand's products. Thus, customers' attitudes toward a brand form the basis for customers' behavior with the brand. (Keller et al. 2012, 75.) Customer preference and loyalty also result from having strong, positive brand attitudes (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 107). There are multiple judgements customers may have regarding a brand. One of the most important judgements concerns the perceived quality of a brand. Other significant judgements involve brand credibility, consideration, and superiority. (Keller et al. 2012, 75-76.)

Brand credibility refers to the extent to which the brand is seen as being an expert in a particular field, trustworthy, and easy to like. It is also important that customers find the brand relevant for them to consider purchasing the brand's products. Thus, for brand consideration to occur, a brand has to have some strong and favorable associations linked to it. Nevertheless, to achieve brand superiority, some of the brand associations making up the brand image also have to be unique. The unique brand associations in customers' minds result in customers viewing a brand as different and somehow better than others. By being perceived as superior in customers' minds, the brand has the key to building an intense and active relationship with the customers. (Keller et al. 2012, 75-76.)

Brand feelings refer to customers' emotional responses regarding a brand and its marketing. The evoked feelings can vary from being positive to negative, and the intensity of the feelings from being mild to intense. (Keller et al. 2012, 75-76.) From the perspective of creating brand equity, receiving positive customer responses is highly important. Nevertheless, the manner in which the functional and emotional impacts influence the customer responses is not central. All that matters is how positive the customer responses are, and that the responses affect customers' behavior when they encounter the brand. (Keller 2013, 120.)

The highest and final step, in the customer-based brand equity pyramid, involves brand resonance. At this level, the focus is on creating an intense, active, and loyal relationship between customers and the brand. Brand resonance refers to the level of identification customers' have with a brand and the nature of the relationship. Resonance can be characterized by assessing the intensity of customer loyalty and the level of activity generated through that loyalty. (Keller et al. 2012, 79.) Four elements form brand resonance: behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community, and active engagement.

Behavioral loyalty relates to the number and volume of repeat purchases a customer makes. A loyal customer that purchases a brand's products frequently, and preferably in large amounts, can be extremely valuable to the brand. Nevertheless, for resonance to occur, customers should also have a

strong attitudinal attachment to a brand. This personal attachment to a brand leads customers to view the brand as being something special. (Keller et al. 2012, 79.) Brands can also create a sense of community between the brand users that strongly identify themselves with the brand (Keller et al. 2012, 79-80) and thus, further increase brand resonance. Customers' active engagement and willingness to invest resources in the brand, in turn, represents what is perhaps the strongest form of brand loyalty. Customers that communicate positive information regarding a brand become brand ambassadors that help to strengthen the brand. (Keller et al. 2012, 80-81.)

### 3 BRAND IMPLEMENTATION

Establishing a brand identity and positioning that differentiates the brand and resonates with customers is the premise of building brand equity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 40). Nevertheless, this alone does not lead to the effective creation of brand equity. For well-established brand identity and positioning to generate brand equity, the brand vision has to be brought to life through efficient brand implementation efforts that support the delivery of the brand promise (Kotler et al. 2019, 381; Kahri et al. 2016, 292-293). According to MacLavery, McQuillan & Oddie (2007, 2), this can often prove to be a relatively difficult task since the people developing the brand strategy are, in most cases, not the people operating in the customer interface. In fact, failing to deliver the communicated brand promise is one of the most common reasons for brands' failure (Daye 2010-10-21). The motives behind implementing a brand strategy are usually concerned with creating brand awareness, positive brand associations, and customer loyalty. In other words, the objective of brand implementation usually involves increasing customers' brand knowledge and generating deeper customer relationships. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 262.)

The gap between customers' experience and expectations is widely acknowledged as the determinant of customer satisfaction (Kapferer 2008, 38). For customer satisfaction to occur, brand performance has to either meet or exceed customer expectations. If brand performance does not meet expectations, customers are disappointed. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 32.) Customer satisfaction drives brand loyalty and the creation of brand equity (Vahtola 2020, 31). Thus, it is crucial to ensure the customer experience is consistent with customers' expectations (Kotler & Keller 2012, 90).

Consistent fulfillment of the brand promise is essential in meeting customer expectations and thus, creating customer satisfaction (Piehler, Hanisch & Burmann 2015, 53). As Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2009, 8) have stated, "an empty brand promise is worse than no promise at all". Hence, one of the brand managers' primary responsibilities involves ensuring the brand experience is consistent with the brand promise every time customers interact with the brand (Kotler 1999, 152). Accomplishing this requires planning and implementing efficient marketing communication (Keller et al. 2012, 197), and ensuring that the communicated brand promise can be delivered by employees (Vahtola 2020, 231; Aaker 2014, 224). Thus, brand implementation concerns both internal and external branding. According to Aaker (2014, 235), the two branding approaches are complementary and should preferably consist of common elements. Keller et al. (2012, 903) and Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 328) also emphasize the importance of aligning internal and external brand management when building brands.

#### 3.1 Internal Brand Implementation

Employees play an important role in implementing a brand since they are often the ones operating in the customer interface and implementing the brand vision in practice. Thus, it is essential that all employees understand the brand promise and behave in accordance with it whenever they interact

with customers. (Vahtola 2020, 231.) According to Keller et al. (2012, 903), internal brand management, in a sense, ensures external brand management is done properly. Thus, internal branding, as a part of a company's brand management, can be viewed as a necessity for achieving consistency and efficiency in brand implementation (Piehler et al. 2015, 52). Vahtola (2020, 21) emphasizes that organizational culture and company values are communicated to customers directly through employee behavior. Hence, the challenge involves influencing employee behavior so that the behavior is consistent with the company values (MacLavery et al. 2007, 5).

The main objective of internal branding is to ensure employees are familiar with the brand vision and care about it enough to behave in accordance with it (Aaker 2014, 221). According to Puusa et al. (2014, 213), employee behavior is largely based on the attitudes, interpretations, and emotions employees have formed of a brand. Hence, internal brand management involves activities that ensure employees understand, believe in, and practice the brand strategy (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 328). It is also essential that the importance of a brand (Vahtola 2020, 231), and how employees can affect the creation of brand equity through their actions, is understood in a company (Kotler et al. 2019, 381). The challenge involves launching the internal brand properly and following through by ensuring the brand promise can and will be delivered to customers (Aaker 2014, 224).

There are several benefits to having a strong internal brand. A strong internal brand provides a company and its employees with a clear direction and motivation that guides and clarifies decision-making. It can also inspire employees to discover new, creative brand-building programs that better support the brand strategy. An employee who knows and cares about a brand will be more willing to talk positive things regarding the brand. A strong internal brand may also enhance employees' productivity and commitment by providing the employees' work with a meaning or a higher purpose. (Aaker 2014, 221-223.)

Aaker (2014, 225) suggests that there are three stages that employees need to pass for internal branding to succeed: the learning stage, believing stage, and living stage. According to him, the learning stage involves employees learning about brand vision and the aspects that differentiate the brand from competing brands. The believing stage, in turn, relates to the employees accepting the brand vision and believing that the vision will lead to success. Finally, in the third stage of internal branding, the living stage, the employees are inspired and motivated to bring the brand vision to life through actions, and become an advocate for that vision both internally and externally. (Aaker 2014, 225.)

According to Aaker (2014, 225), brand communication during employees' learning stage should involve every communication channel available. The brand vision should be clarified to employees in a way that they have no trouble understanding it. In case employees do not understand the brand vision, it is highly unlikely that they will implement it in practice, and thus, are able to deliver the brand promise. (Puusa et al. 2014, 123.) To enhance employees' understanding and internal brand communication efficiency, it may be beneficial to modify the communicated information according to different employee segments (Aaker 2014, 224-225). Piehler et al. (2015, 57) emphasize that brand

communication is a powerful tool to educate employees regarding a brand, enhance employee attachment, and influence employee behavior. Thus, clear communication is essential, and a great deal of attention should be paid to efficiently communicating the brand vision to employees (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 89).

According to Kaplan (2017, 10), companies should view employees as organizations' first market, meaning that companies should convince employees about the brand's superiority before communicating the brand externally. Multiple channels and means can be utilized to get the message across in the learning stage. Traditional internal communication tools include, for instance, online newsletters, staff magazines, and the company intranet (Piehler et al. 2015, 57). These communication channels allow managers to share information promptly, but utilizing the traditional internal communication channels alone is not likely to guarantee the desired outcome. According to Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2009, 89), to be effective, internal brand communication has to create exposure, be motivating, and engender understanding. Executives' presentations explaining the brand vision and how it is linked to the business strategy play a key role in this (Aaker 2014, 226). External brand-building programs have also been found to affect how employees perceive a brand. This is the result of the external branding efforts making the brand promise visible to employees. (Aaker 2014, 235.)

Once employees have gained a comprehensive understanding of the brand vision, it is time to ensure they believe in the vision and it being the route to success (Aaker 2014, 225). The believing stage involves further internal brand communication efforts, but of higher importance is to convince the employees that the organization is genuinely committed to the renewed brand vision. Two steps support achieving this objective: executing efficient brand-building programs, that visibly support the brand vision; and rewarding employees for brand-consistent behavior. The programs can involve, for instance, training programs driving change in the organizational culture, innovation programs that support employees' participation in the innovation process, external advertising programs, or any enhancements related to the customer experience. (Aaker 2014, 226-227.) According to Aaker (2014, 227), evaluating employee behavior and rewarding from brand-consistent behavior can further motivate employees to behave in a more brand-consistent manner. Having ongoing internal training programs as a part of internal branding activities is also very important (Punjaisri & Wilson 2011, 1526). If employees do not have the necessary skills, it is unlikely that they can behave in a brand-consistent manner and thus, deliver the brand promise (Piehler et al. 2015, 56).

The living stage is often the most challenging stage for employees to pass. Nevertheless, it is also the most important phase for internal branding to succeed. In the living stage, internal branding needs to go beyond just communicating the brand. (Aaker 2014, 227-228.) A positive and sustainable brand image is primarily built through actions (Puusa et al. 2014, 217), and the interaction between employees and customers (Vahtola 2020, 231). Thus, it is crucial that employees pass the living stage. It is not enough that the employees are familiar with the brand vision and believe in it. The entire organization has to implement the vision and deliver the brand promise for the organization to reach the set brand-building objectives. (Kahri et al. 2016, 292-293.)

According to Aaker (2014, 228), brand workshops play a significant role in inspiring employees to behave in a brand-consistent manner. In brand workshops, employees get to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing brand-building programs, suggest new enhanced programs, and freely communicate regarding other brand-related topics as a part of a group. Team task forces, engaging employees in developing new brand-building programs, can also positively influence employee behavior since they increase employees' attachment to a brand. (Aaker 2014, 228-229.) Another way to make the brand vision a higher priority in employees' eyes is to move employees closer to the customer interface. This kind of arrangement can lead to more brand-consistent behavior. It would also be desirable to have one or more of the employees acting as a "brand champion". Brand champions are in charge of the brand by communicating the brand to other employees and encouraging them to behave in a brand-consistent manner. (Aaker 2014, 229-230.)

It appears that many tools and methods in the living stage involve granting employees more responsibility regarding a brand. Thus, it can be assumed that engaging employees in brand-related activities can increase employee attachment to a brand and motivate employees to behave in a more brand-consistent manner. In Figure 5, a combination of the internal communication tools utilized in different stages of internal branding is assembled.

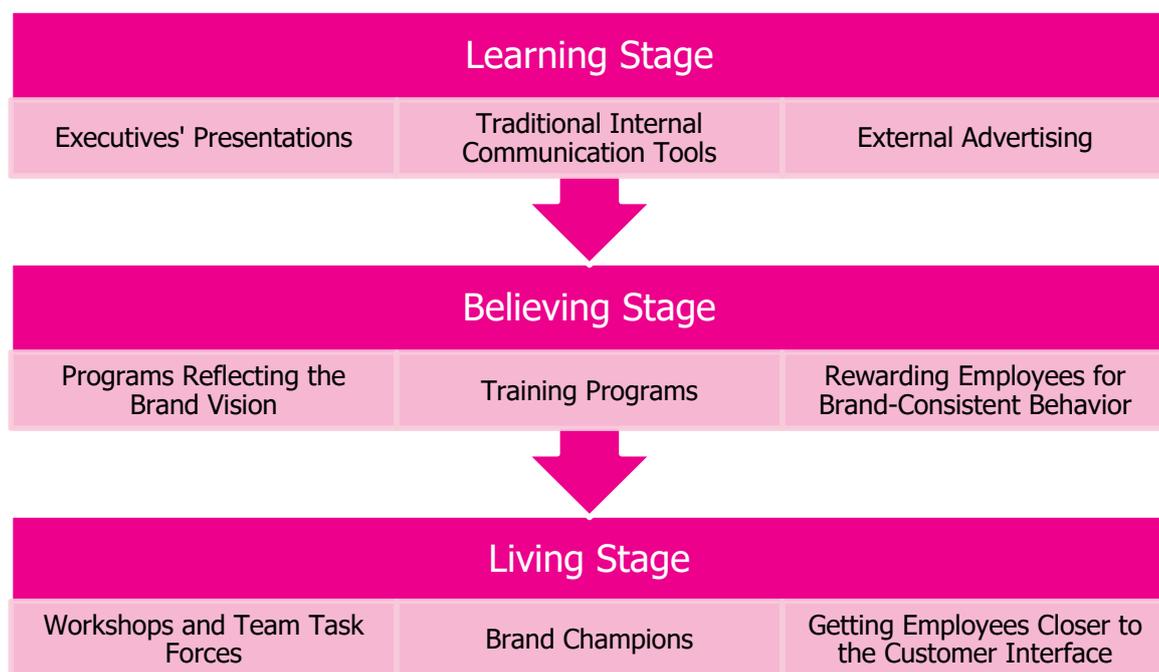


FIGURE 5. The three stages of internal branding and internal communication tools (Piehler et al. 2015, 57; Aaker 2014, 225-235; Punjaisri & Wilson 2011, 1526.)

### 3.2 External Brand Implementation

Customer-based brand equity occurs when customers have a high level of brand awareness, and some strong, favorable, and unique brand associations linked to a brand in their memory (Keller et al. 2012, 59). According to Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 124), marketing communication plays an important role in creating brand equity. Aaker (2014, 170) also emphasizes that communicating a

brand and its vision to customers is the premise of brand-building. If no form of marketing communication is employed, it is highly unlikely that anyone becomes aware of the brand or learns about it (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 124). Hence, it is essential that a set of external brand-building programs are put in place to increase brand awareness and create desired brand associations in customers' minds (Keller et al. 2012, 849).

According to Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2009, 42), brand communication occurs every time a member of the target audience is in contact with a brand. Thus, brand communication involves much more than advertising alone, and multiple means of communication can be utilized (Kotler & Keller 2012, 254). It should be recognized that companies' choices regarding product design, distribution channels, and pricing strategies can also affect the creation of brand equity. (Keller 2013, 179-180.) Nevertheless, external marketing communication plays an essential role in increasing customers' brand knowledge (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 124), and when conducted correctly, it can create prominent value to a brand (Kotler et al. 2019, 549). Brilliant execution of marketing communication requires careful selection of communication channels (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 27). Thus, this chapter's focus concerns external brand communication and the tools and channels that can be utilized in communicating the brand to stakeholders. Aspects regarding product design, distribution channels, and pricing strategies will not be further addressed.

Multiple communication channels can be utilized for delivering a brand message (see Figure 6). According to Kotler et al. (2019, 553), anything that receives customers' attention can increase brand awareness in terms of brand recognition, at least. Traditional external communication channels include, for instance, television, radio, posters, magazines, newspapers, and digital media (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 126). Nevertheless, traditional communication channels are not always the most effective means of delivering the brand message, and thus, managers should also consider other possible communication channels (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 143). Marketing communication channels can be categorized as personal or non-personal (Kotler & Keller et al. 2012, 260). The criteria for evaluating different marketing communication channels include the effectiveness of delivering a brand message and efficiency in terms of costs (Kotler et al. 2019, 553). According to Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2009, 27), selecting appropriate communication channels is essential. Thus, the choice of which marketing communication channels to utilize should be carefully considered.

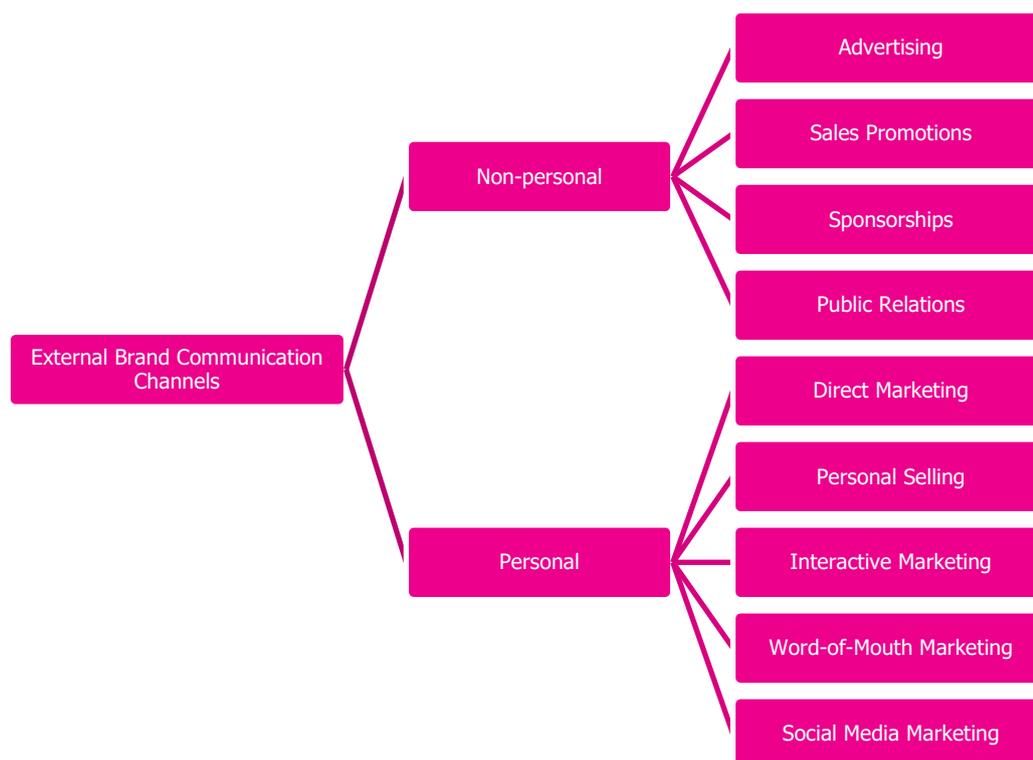


FIGURE 6. The marketing communication mix (Kotler et al. 2019, 553.)

### 3.2.1 Non-Personal Brand Communication Channels

Non-personal external brand communication channels include advertising, sales promotions, events and experiences, and public relations (Kotler & Keller 2012, 261). These communication channels are useful when the objective involves reaching a large scale of people through marketing communication (Kotler et al. 2019, 559).

Advertising refers to any form of non-personal marketing communication that presents information regarding a brand through some channels of paid media (Keller et al. 2012, 257). Investing large amounts into advertising is more common in consumer markets than business markets (Kotler & Keller 2012, 263). This is because advertising allows companies to frequently expose customers to a brand (Kotler et al. 2019, 562), and thus, efficiently increase customers' brand recognition (Keller 2013, 75), which generally is more important in a low-involvement purchase setting (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 135; Keller et al. 2012, 59-60). Nevertheless, advertising can also be beneficial as a part of marketing communication activities for companies operating in business markets. It enables an introduction of the company, its products, and possible new product features. By integrating contact information into the advertisement, it can also generate leads for sales representatives. The advertising material can further be utilized to convince business customers about the company's competence. (Kotler et al. 2019, 567.)

Sales promotions are another means of non-personal external marketing communication. Sales promotions include tools and incentives used to generate a quick increase in sales in the short-term. Whereas advertising convinces customers why they should buy a product, sales promotions provide

them with an incentive to follow through and actually make the purchase. (Kotler et al. 2019, 576.) Sales promotions can be designed to affect either consumers or traders (Keller et al. 2012, 280). The objective of consumer promotions is to attract new customers to try the product, increase re-purchase rates, reward loyal customers, and encourage customers to buy higher quantities (Kotler et al. 2019, 576-577). They are designed to affect customers' choice and quantity of the product, as well as the timing of the purchase (Keller et al. 2012, 281). Trade promotion tools, in turn, often involve financial incentives and discounts (Keller et al. 2012, 283) that are used to persuade retailers to carry the brand, purchase larger quantities at once, and to encourage retailers to promote the brand in stores (Kotler et al. 2019, 577). Advertising and sales promotions are effective ways to communicate the functional benefits of a brand. Nevertheless, communicating intangible attributes in addition to tangible attributes, is often what distinguishes strong brands from others. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 202-203.)

Sponsorships provide a unique way to communicate a brand, increase brand awareness, and develop positive brand associations, by bringing the brand closer to people's lives (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 202-203). Sponsorships and event marketing refer to brands' engagement and involvement in arranging certain events or activities. Sponsored events can vary from sports to arts, and from entertainment to other social events. (Keller et al. 2012, 284.) Central is choosing an appropriate event in terms of marketing objectives and the target audience. It is also essential that the event has a proper level of awareness and an image beneficial to the sponsor's brand. (Kotler et al. 2019, 580.) Ideally, the chosen sponsored event would have an audience similar to the brand's target audience; evoke lots of favorable attention and be unique; have only a few sponsors; and enhance the sponsor's brand image (Keller et al. 2012, 287). When done right, sponsorships can create positive brand associations and further deepen the relationship between customers and the brand (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 203). They serve as an effective means of increasing brand awareness, especially when supporting marketing activities are conducted (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 206).

Public relations and marketing public relations relate to external brand communication programs designed to promote or protect a company's image or market offerings (Kotler & Keller 2012, 281). Public relations activities are especially valuable during marketing crises when the brand's image is at risk. Nevertheless, companies have begun to realize the importance of practicing public relations as a routine part of their external communications. (Keller et al. 2012, 289.) The strongest brands often have a public relations department dedicated to monitoring press relations, market offering publicity, and corporate communications. Lobbying by contacting legislators and other government officials, and counseling the company's management about current public issues, are also responsibilities of the public relations department. (Kotler et al. 2019, 582.)

The major public relations tools include various publications, special events, sponsorships, news, public service activities, and identity media. The objective involves obtaining positive attention from the public to increase brand awareness and create positive brand associations. (Kotler et al. 2019, 584.) Marketing public relations is effective in reaching the attention of locals and other specific

groups of people. It is also very cost-efficient since companies do not have to pay for the media space, which is the case with advertising, for instance. (Kotler et al. 2019, 583.) It has also been found that non-commercial sources of information are generally more effective in creating brand associations than commercial sources of information (Kotler et al. 2019, 583; Keller et al. 2012, 62-63). Thus, marketing public relations is an effective way to increase the public's brand knowledge.

### 3.2.2 Personal Brand Communication Channels

Non-personal marketing communications channels are mainly used for mass communication when the objective is to reach a large range of people. However, as the marketplace's competitive pressure has increased, the importance of more personal, engaging, and interactive marketing communication channels has pronounced. Personal marketing communication channels include direct marketing, personal selling, interactive marketing, word-of-mouth marketing, and social media marketing. (Kotler et al. 2019, 591-592.) In business markets, personal marketing communication channels generally are more effective than non-personal marketing communication channels (Puusa et al. 2014, 180). The effectiveness of these communication channels derives from the carefully structured, personalized communication, direct feedback, and the possibility to customize the offering according to customers' needs (Kotler et al. 2019, 592).

Direct marketing is one form of personal marketing communication. Multiple consumer-direct channels can be utilized to communicate the brand and its offering to customers and prospects. These consumer-direct channels include, for instance, direct mail, catalog marketing, and telemarketing. Three characteristics are common among consumer-direct channels: the messages are customized to appeal to specific individuals; the messages are up to date as they can be prepared and modified promptly; the messages are interactive due to personal communication with the buyer. (Kotler et al. 2019, 593-594.) One significant advantage of direct marketing involves its ability to test and evaluate elements regarding the market offering (Kotler et al. 2019, 596). It also enables marketers to customize and personalize messages, as well as reach prospects at an appropriate time (Kotler & Keller 2012, 287).

Direct mail is a standard channel used to contact customers regarding offers, announcements, and reminders. It allows the message to be highly personalized according to the targeted audience (Kotler & Keller 2012, 287). Direct mail as a marketing communication channel is more expensive than mass media when contemplating the number of people reached. Nevertheless, direct mail is also more likely to reach better prospects when the contacted people are carefully selected. Thus, careful selection of the contacted people is central to the success of this communication channel. (Kotler et al. 2019, 594-595.) Catalog marketing is a commonly used communication channel among companies operating in business markets. It refers to companies sending catalogs regarding their market offering to customers either online or in a print format. (Kotler et al. 2019, 596.) Telemarketing is also an increasingly common communication channel in business markets. The objective of telemarketing is to increase revenues, reduce the cost of selling, and improve customer satisfaction. (Kotler et al. 2019, 597-598.)

Face-to-face interaction with prospective customers is the premise of personal selling. Personal selling involves a high cost, and it is not efficient in reaching a large number of people. Nevertheless, it is especially effective in delivering a detailed, customized message to customers. Active interaction involved between the sales representative and customers also permits the demonstration of a product, the offering of tailored solutions, and after-sales support. (Keller et al. 2012, 291.) Personal selling is of high importance in business markets (Puusa et al. 2014, 180). This may be because business customers generally require detailed information regarding a product; the products are often customized; and after-sales support services are well-appreciated (Puusa et al. 2014, 180). Hence, most companies operating in business markets heavily rely on personal selling to identify prospective customers and grow the business by turning the prospects into customers (Kotler et al. 2019, 602). Essential in this marketing communication approach is to pay attention to the efficient training of the sales representatives (Kotler et al. 2019, 604).

The rapid development of technology and digital media has influenced marketing communication by creating both opportunities and challenges for delivering a brand message (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 144). The internet enables greater interaction between brands and customers, as well as the personalization of marketing communication (Kotler et al. 2019, 597). According to Aaker (2014, 192-193), bringing brand communication online is nowadays necessary for companies that aspire to build their brand through efficient brand-building programs. He argues that digital marketing communication programs are particularly effective because they increase customer engagement, communicate the brand in a rich and informative manner, target a specific audience, and are viewed by customers as more trustworthy than paid media. Kotler et al. (2019, 597-598) also emphasize that using digital marketing communication and other forms of communication together, or investing a significant portion of the marketing budget to digital marketing communication, has become more common among companies. This is because of the easy tracking, customization, and modification of online marketing campaigns (Kotler et al. 2019, 597-598).

As technology and digital media have grown and developed, multiple new marketing communication forms have emerged. Interactivity is generally viewed as an important characteristic of marketing communications in the 21st century. The objective involves obtaining as much information as possible regarding customers, their buying behavior, and preferences. (Vahtola 2020, 154.) Interactive marketing provides the opportunity for tailoring messages to reflect consumers' specific interests. It also enables marketers to receive an instant response and easily trace the effects of marketing. The forms of interactive marketing communication include, for instance, websites, search advertisements, display advertisements, sponsorships, and affiliate marketing. (Kotler et al. 2019, 598.)

A website can be a very powerful digital brand-building tool. This is because it can be tailored to effectively create and reinforce desired brand associations by controlling the site experience and shared information. It can also leverage other brand-building programs by providing more detailed information regarding a brand and its market offering. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 241.) Thus, many digital marketing communications are designed to attract targeted customers to visit the

brand's website. The challenge involves developing a website that is interesting and encourages repeat visits. (Kotler et al. 2019, 599.) The website should be easy to use and offer value to visitors in terms of information or entertainment, for instance. Principally a well-designed website is interactive, personalized, and contains current information. It is also essential that the website properly reflects and supports the brand vision. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 242-243.)

Contextual placement of marketing communication is effective in reaching the target audience with marketing communication. It refers to companies purchasing marketing communication space on sites related to their market offering (Kotler et al. 2019, 598). Display advertisements and banner ads are great examples of interactive marketing forms that advantage from contextual placement. Sponsorships are also most effective when placed according to the contextual placement. Another way to obtain focused exposure is through search advertisements that appear when customers do keyword searches in search engines (Kotler et al. 2019, 599-601.) As discussed, one common objective of interactive marketing communication involves converting traffic to a brand's website (Kotler et al. 2019, 599). This objective can be reached through affiliate marketing, which refers to paying a third party to promote a company's marketing offering, thus generating more visits to the company's website (Kotler et al. 601).

Word-of-mouth marketing generally refers to consumer-to-consumer communication regarding a brand or the brand's products. Depending on the customer experience, the information shared can either be positive or negative. Today, word-of-mouth has transferred to the web, and as a result, the information about both good and bad companies travels extremely fast. Word-of-mouth on the web has been discovered to influence the customer mindset. On average, one person's word-of-mouth can affect two other buyer's attitudes toward a brand. (Kotler et al. 2019, 607.) Thus, word-of-mouth marketing and its influence on the customer mindset should undoubtedly be taken into consideration.

Social media marketing, often also referred to as content marketing, involves creating content to a company's social media channels. The content can be in the form of short videos, articles, or events. By sharing the content in the company's social media, the objective is to gain the target audience's attention. One significant advantage of using the company's social media or website as the channel for sharing content is that its distribution does not cost anything. Essential in planning and creating marketing content is that the content is interesting to the target audience. It should not be all about the brand but rather consist of entertainment that is still somehow linked to the brand. As the role of digital media has grown, content marketing has also increased, both in consumer and business markets. (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2019, 149-150.)

## 4 BRAND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Measuring and interpreting brand performance is an essential step in strategic brand management. This is because it provides valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the conducted brand implementation efforts. (Keller et al. 2012, 46.) Measuring brand performance also helps justify the investments marketers spend in conducting brand-building programs (Keller et al. 2012, 381; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 14). As previously discussed, there are various views regarding the definition of brand equity and how brand equity should be built, managed, and measured. Thus, numerous methodologies for measuring brand performance have occurred over the years. (Christodoulides & de Chernatony 2009, 4.)

Generally, brand performance measurement methods are either consumer- or financial-related (Myers 2003, 40). Consumer-related measures are concerned with measuring non-financial aspects, including brand awareness and brand loyalty, for instance. Financial-related measures, in turn, are more concerned with financial aspects such as price and market share. (Davicik et al. 2015, 6.) According to Ambler et al. (2002, 21), it would be advisable for companies to utilize both consumer- and financial-related methods in measuring brand performance. This is because using a set of measures in measuring a complex concept such as brand equity is more effective than only using a single measure (Christodoulides & de Chernatony 2009, 23). Nevertheless, since the focus of the thesis concerns increasing brand knowledge through efficient brand implementation, the emphasis is placed on consumer-related brand performance measurement methods.

### 4.1 Consumer-Related Measurement Tools

For brand equity to sufficiently guide strategic decisions, it is significantly important for companies to be well aware of the sources of brand equity, how they affect the desired outcomes, and change over time (Kotler & Keller 2012, 146). Some common consumer-related brand performance measurement tools (see Figure 7) have been developed to facilitate understanding the sources and outcomes of brand equity. These tools concretize the effects of the conducted brand-building programs (Keller et al. 2012, 46) and allow marketers to better justify investments in brand-building programs (Keller et al. 2012, 381; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 14). The commonly used consumer-based brand performance measurement tools include brand audits, tracking studies, and brand equity measurement systems.

A brand audit refers to a comprehensive examination of a brand. It is conducted to gain an understanding of the sources of brand equity and the level of customers' brand knowledge. It can also provide information that permits marketers to better improve and exploit the company's brand equity. Conducting a brand audit is especially important when a company contemplates changing its strategic direction. Nevertheless, it would be advisable to conduct brand audits on a regular basis to manage a brand more proactively. A brand audit consists of two steps, which are brand inventory and brand exploratory. (Keller et al. 2012, 392-393.)

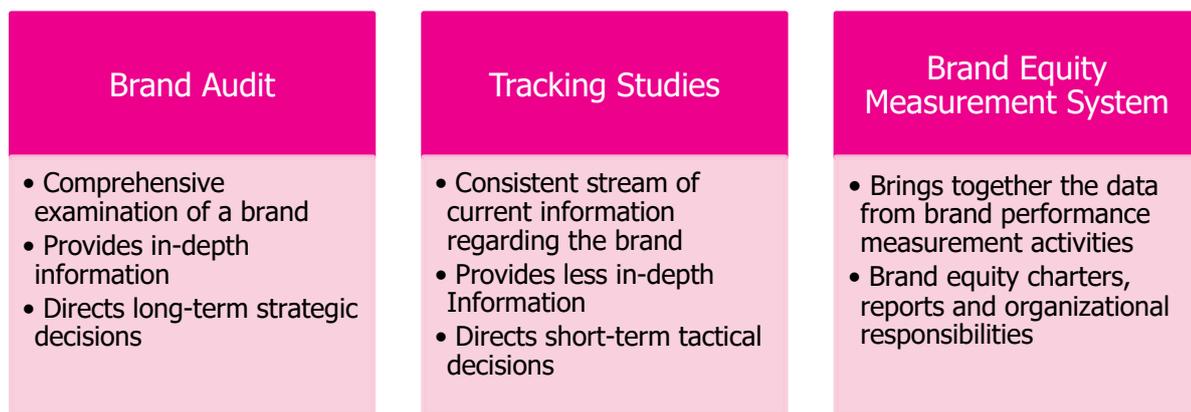


FIGURE 7. Brand performance measurement tools (Keller et al. 2012, 392-393; 397; 407.)

The first step of conducting a brand audit involves examining all currently available information regarding a brand (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 163). The objective of conducting a brand inventory is to create an accurate, up-to-date profile of the market offering and the way it is marketed and branded (Keller et al. 2012, 393). Reaching this objective involves determining the key sources of brand equity and the activities related to the company's marketing and branding (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 164). According to Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 164), it is especially critical to carefully review the brand's and its key competitors' marketing communication activities because a brand would not exist without marketing communication. Conducting a brand inventory is an important step because it can reveal possible reasons behind customer perceptions and provide information on how to better manage brand equity. Furthermore, competitive brands' branding efforts can be evaluated to determine the differences and similarities between the brand and its competitors. (Keller et al. 2012, 393-394.)

Once the brand inventory is completed, and marketers have gained a comprehensive understanding of a brand and its marketing activities, further research concerning current brand equity is needed (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 165). Although a brand inventory is very useful, it should not be taken for granted that the conducted marketing activities have managed to create the desired customer perceptions (Keller et al. 2012, 394). Thus, brand exploratory is the second step of the brand audit. It provides detailed information regarding what customers think and feel about a brand, through the measurement of brand awareness and brand associations. (Keller et al. 2012, 394.) Ideally, the brand exploratory should help marketers to better understand aspects of customers' brand knowledge regarding the brand and its competitors, as well as to determine the optimal level of brand awareness and the desired brand image. By examining what customers think and feel of a brand in comparison to competing brands, companies can also uncover information regarding the differences and similarities among the brand and its competitors. (Keller et al. 2012, 396.) This information can be very valuable for marketers to enhance the company's brand equity relative to its competing brands (Myers 2003, 40).

A brand audit is a useful tool for providing essential information for long-term strategic decisions. Nevertheless, when contemplating short-term tactical decisions, brand tracking studies can be a

more valuable tool. Brand tracking studies consistently provide information regarding a brand and its marketing campaigns' performance, as well as how well the desired brand positioning has been achieved. This consistent stream of current information facilitates the brand's daily decision-making by providing up to date information regarding the conducted marketing activities' effectiveness in influencing the customer mindset, the market outcome, and brand value. If the tracking studies imply that the marketing activities are not effective, the required adjustments can reactively be made to modify the marketing campaigns to be more effective. (Keller et al. 2012, 397.)

Since there is a great variety of situations facing different brands, brand tracking studies and the questions asked should be customized to address each brand's unique issues (Keller et al. 2012, 397-398). The decisions involved in conducting brand tracking studies also concern deciding who to track, when, and where to track. Most companies generally conduct tracking studies on current customers. Nevertheless, it can also be useful to track people that are not yet the brand's customers, or other intermediaries such as channel members and employees. (Keller et al. 2012, 403-404.) The frequency of conducting brand tracking studies generally depends on how frequently customers purchase the brand's products, and how actively products are marketed on a certain product category (Keller et al. 2012, 405).

It should also be decided which of the three basic tracking study methodologies to use: panel, wave, or continuous. Panel tracking concerns interviewing the same people from the beginning of planning a marketing campaign until the end of the marketing campaign. This tracking study method enables the establishment of causality on the customer level but is a relatively expensive and difficult method to maintain. Wave tracking, in turn, involves interviewing separate samples each time interviews are conducted. It does not permit causality, but it enables marketers to follow the effects of the campaign. Continuous tracking is found to be the most effective method for measuring brand performance and communication effectiveness. It refers to continuously tracking random samples of customers. The sample size in the interviews is generally smaller than the samples in panel or wave interviews. However, continuous tracking allows marketers to react quickly because the results of the interviews are continuously available. (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 186.)

Different structures and procedures need to be put into place for the information gained through the brand performance measurement activities to reach its full potential. A brand equity measurement system permits the effective use of the brand equity concept and the collected information. It increases the likelihood that good tactical and strategic decisions are made. Establishing a brand equity measurement system involves creating brand equity charters, constructing reports, and defining the brand's organizational responsibilities. (Keller et al. 2012, 407.) A Brand equity charter refers to a document that provides marketers with general branding guidelines and reflects the company's view of brand equity (Keller et al. 2012, 407-408). A brand equity report, in turn, is a document that represents the results of the conducted brand performance measurement activities. The report should inform the management of current occurrences related to the brand and the reasons behind

these occurrences. (Keller et al. 2012, 412.) It is also essential to nurture the brand and clearly define the organizational responsibilities regarding the brand. This involves issues related to the efficient management of employees and external marketing partners. (Keller et al. 2012, 413.)

## 4.2 Measuring Brand Knowledge

Brand knowledge is a significant factor in creating brand equity (Hoeffler & Keller 2003, 421) and the objective of brand implementation usually involves increasing customers' brand knowledge (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 262). Thus, understanding the current brand knowledge structures in customers' minds is very important when attempting to build brand equity (Keller et al. 2012, 439). Since brand knowledge consists of brand awareness and brand image (Keller 2013, 72), understanding brand knowledge structures in customers' minds requires measuring aspects related to both brand awareness and brand image (Keller et al. 2012, 441).

Brand awareness can be measured by measuring aspects related to brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recognition relates to customers' ability to recognize a brand as one they have seen or heard before when given the brand as a cue (Keller et al. 2012, 60). Thus, brand recognition can be measured by assessing the ease with which customers recognize different brand elements such as the company name, logo, or slogan, for instance. This permits marketers to discover which brand elements already exist in customers' memory and which do not. (Keller et al. 2012, 488-489.) According to Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 185), brand recognition can, for example, be measured by providing customers with a list of competing brands' names and asking which brands would satisfy a specific category need.

Brand recall is generally more challenging than brand recognition (Hakala et al. 2012, 441). It requires customers to retrieve the brand from memory when given a relevant cue regarding the product category, the need fulfilled by that category, or the purchase or consumption situation (Keller et al. 2012, 60). According to Keller (2012, 489), using progressively narrowed cues can provide valuable information regarding customers' brand knowledge structures. This refers to providing broader cues in the beginning and gradually narrowing them into more and more specific cues. One could for example ask for all the brands that come to mind from a certain product class and then narrow the cue into a specific product category. (Keller et al. 2012, 489.) Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 185) highlight that when measuring brand recall it is important to present the need before asking for all the brands that come to mind that would satisfy that need.

Understanding the level of customers' brand awareness is essential because the brands that come to mind first are commonly the brands that are bought most often (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 173). Thus, brand awareness is closely related to the consideration set (Rastogi & Parashar 2018, 175), which consists of the brands customers would likely consider purchasing (Keller et al. 2012, 61). Customers generally purchase one of the top three brands in their consideration set. Thus, the goal of most marketing communications is to enhance top-of-mind awareness and the likelihood that customers will include the brand in their consideration set. Top-of-mind awareness refers to the

first brand that comes to mind when given customers a cue regarding a specific category. (Rastogi & Parashar 2018, 178.) When measuring brand consideration it is important to precisely specify the purchase circumstances (Keller et al. 2012, 498).

Another very important aspect of a brand is its image which consists of all the associations that are linked to the brand in customers' minds. Thus, in addition to gaining an understanding of the level of brand awareness, it is important to understand the brand image that exists in customer minds. (Keller et al. 2012, 491.) Both imagery- and performance-related associations can and should be measured. Imagery-related associations can be measured by assessing customer perceptions regarding user profiles; brand personality and values; purchase and usage situations; and experiences with the brand. Performance-related associations, in turn, can be measured by assessing customer perceptions regarding primary and supplementary features; product reliability and durability; service effectiveness, efficiency and empathy; style and design; and price. (Keller et al. 2012, 494.) In terms of the question structure, Keller et al. (2012, 448) suggest it is best to start with general questions and then continue to more specific issues. This way no bias results.

The key to understanding brand equity is to identify those aspects of a brand that are most likely to be associated with the brand (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 180). Free associations task is perhaps the most simple and powerful way to profile these aspects. In the free associations task customers can for example be asked what comes to mind when they think of the brand. This enables marketers to discover and identify possible brand associations in customers' minds. (Keller et al. 2012, 444-447.) Similar free associations task question can also be used to measure brand personality by asking, for example, what the brand would be like if it was a person. To measure brand personality more conclusively, adjective checklists and ratings can be useful. (Keller et al. 2012, 465-467.)

There are various ways of measuring brand image. Nevertheless, the most common way is to develop a profile of a brand and measure how many people think each of the attributes and benefits describe the brand. (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 181.) Roy & Banerjee (2014), for instance, utilized a 5-point scale in which 1 referred to strongly disagree and 5 to strongly agree, when measuring the gap between brand identity and brand image. Cheung, Pires & Rosenberg (2020) also used a similar scale when measuring the impact of social media marketing elements on consumer-brand engagement and brand knowledge.

## 5 MATERIALS AND METHODS – CASE AHOY CREATIVE

In the second part of the thesis, a study is conducted based on the theoretical framework of the thesis. The thesis's primary objective is to find out have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of the commissioner organization. Thus, the study objective is to find out have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of the commissioner organization. To determine whether the conducted brand implementation efforts have been efficient in increasing customers' brand knowledge, the following research questions need to be solved.

The primary research question:

**Have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing customers' brand knowledge?**

Secondary research questions:

**What is the level of customers' brand awareness in terms of brand recognition and brand recall?**

**Are brand imagery-related associations in customers' minds consistent with the brand identity?**

**Are customers satisfied with the brand performance?**

These research questions are chosen because solving them enables determining whether the conducted brand implementation efforts have been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of the commissioner organization. The aim of brand implementation usually involves increasing customers' brand knowledge (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 262). Thus, the primary research question: "Have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing customers' brand knowledge?" is justified. The chosen secondary research questions are concerned with the level of customers' brand awareness, and the brand imagery- and performance-related associations in customers' minds. This is because understanding brand knowledge structures in customers' minds requires measuring aspects related to both brand awareness and brand image (Keller et al. 2012, 441). Keller et al. (2012, 494) also emphasize that both imagery- and performance-related associations should be measured to understand the brand image that exists in customer minds.

The secondary research question concerning the level of customers' brand awareness is formulated as follows: "What is the level of customers' brand awareness in terms of brand recognition and brand recall?" Brand awareness is important because for customers to prefer a brand, they have to

acknowledge the brand exists (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 106). This question enables determining whether the conducted brand implementation efforts have been efficient in enhancing brand awareness in terms of both brand recognition and brand recall and thus, increasing customers' brand knowledge.

The secondary research question concerning customers' brand imagery-related associations is formulated as follows: "Are brand imagery-related associations in customers' minds consistent with the brand identity?". External marketing communication plays an essential role in increasing customers' brand knowledge (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 124). Nevertheless, it should not be taken for granted that the conducted marketing activities have managed to create the desired customer perceptions (Keller et al. 2012, 394). This question enables determining whether the brand implementation efforts have been efficient in enhancing brand imagery-related associations and thus, increasing customers' brand knowledge.

The secondary research question concerning customers' brand performance-related associations is formulated as follows: "Are customers satisfied with the brand performance?". The gap between customers' experience and expectations is widely acknowledged as the determinant of customer satisfaction (Kapferer 2008, 38). Ensuring the consistency between the actual customer experience and the communicated brand promise, in turn, requires efficient communication efforts both internally and externally (Vahtola 2020, 231; Aaker 2014, 224; Keller et al. 2012, 197). This question enables determining whether the conducted brand implementation efforts have been efficient in enhancing brand performance-related associations and thus, increasing customers' brand knowledge.

## 5.1 The Commissioner Organization

The commissioner of the thesis is a Finnish creative agency, Ahooy Creative. The company is located in Kuopio and Tampere. It has been operating in the creative agencies' business field since 2002. (Ahooy Creative 2020a.) Ahooy Creative is specialized in providing high-quality brand strategy and development solutions for small to medium-sized companies. In addition to brand strategy and development services, Ahooy Creative offers identity and design services, as well as advertising and marketing services. (Ahooy Creative 2020b.) Most of Ahooy Creative's client organizations are located in the Savo region, but the company also has customers around the Southern part of Finland. The company currently employs 27 people, including designers, copywriters, project managers, creative directors, art directors, and web developers (Ahooy Creative 2020c). The personnel consists of a vast array of marketing, design, and branding experts from around the world.

During the last few years, Ahooy Creative has faced several challenges, forcing them to change their company name repeatedly. In Spring 2020, the company went through a brand renewal, and the name was changed from Oddy Inc. to Ahooy Creative. The brand renewal concerned a variety of brand elements, including the company name, logo, slogan, and so forth. Company values and the principles behind the company's operation, nevertheless, remained unchanged. This brand renewal was significant since it finally allowed the company to declare itself an independent creative agency.

(Ahooy Creative 2020d.) However, as the company name has been changed repeatedly over the last few years, it may have affected customers' brand knowledge in an undesired way. Hence, ensuring that the conducted brand implementation efforts are efficient in increasing customers' brand knowledge is significantly important despite the early stage of the brand renewal.

The commissioner organization's objective is to find out have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing customers' brand knowledge. The information gained from examining the current level of customers' brand knowledge and the efficiency of the conducted brand implementation efforts can be utilized for making adjustments in brand implementation efforts and for the planning of future brand implementation efforts. The information regarding customers' current brand knowledge can also be utilized as a benchmark for the results of future brand audits. The thesis is significant to the commissioner organization since it enables them to review have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing customers' brand knowledge, as well as what is the current state of customers' brand knowledge.

## 5.2 Data and Methods

According to Keller et al. (2012, 392-393), a brand audit can be a useful tool to gain an understanding of the level of customers' brand knowledge (Keller et al. 2012, 392-393). Thus, to determine have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of Ahooy Creative, a brand audit was conducted. In the brand inventory phase of the brand audit, all currently available information regarding Ahooy Creative's brand and the conducted brand implementation efforts were carefully examined. Next, in the brand exploratory phase, the current level of customers' brand knowledge was assessed to gain an understanding of have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing customers' brand knowledge. Since understanding brand knowledge structures in customers' minds requires measuring aspects related to both brand awareness and brand image (Keller et al. 2012, 441), this involved measuring aspects related to customers' brand awareness, and imagery- and performance-related associations.

The chosen research method was online survey research. This research method was chosen as a result of multiple considerations. Survey research is one of the most effective and trustworthy research methods to uncover generalizable information regarding customers' thoughts (QuestionPro). It is very convenient and, as a result of its quantitative nature, permits gathering multiple responses, thus increasing the reliability of the study (Keller et al. 2012, 473; 486). According to Keller et al. (2012, 448), determining the sources of brand equity requires accurate profiling of customers' brand knowledge structures. One common problem when examining sensitive issues, however, is that customers may think it is undesirable to express their true feelings and thus, do not answer truthfully. The online approach to market research and allowing respondents to remain anonymous can result in respondents offering more honest answers. The results from online research can also be gathered quickly and analyzed instantly, which helps to avoid interviewer bias. (Keller et al. 2012, 448; 486.) Other researchers such as Roy & Banerjee (2014, 121) and Cheung et al. (2020, 704)

have also utilized online survey research as the research method when measuring aspects regarding brand knowledge.

The data collection was conducted through an online survey (see Appendix 1) consisting of both quantitative and qualitative questions. Survey researches are traditionally viewed as being methods for collecting quantitative data, but in many situations, both quantitative and qualitative questions can be included (QuestionPro). Qualitative questions are very useful to identify possible brand associations in customers' minds and to assess brand recall. Quantitative questions, in turn, are more efficient in obtaining precise and generalizable information regarding brand recognition and the existing brand associations in customers' minds. (Keller et al. 2012, 516.) Since understanding brand knowledge structures in customers' minds requires measuring aspects related to both brand awareness and brand image (Keller et al. 2012, 441), including both quantitative and qualitative questions into the survey was justified and enhanced the quality of the data.

The survey consisted of 20 questions, and each question was carefully chosen according to the research questions. The used survey platform was Google Forms, and the distribution of the survey was conducted through a mass e-mail. In total, the mass e-mail was sent to 1616 subjects. These subjects were carefully selected from the commissioner organization's business contact list. The selection criteria involved that the chosen subjects were either current or former customers of Ahooy Creative. This selection criteria was set since the study objective was to find out have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of Ahooy Creative. Receiving responses from subjects that have not had any experiences with the company would have decreased the reliability of the study. Thus, the sample consisted of Ahooy Creative's customers from the past two years. The sample size was selected to gain as many responses as possible and thus, increase the reliability of the study. The expected response rate was 10 percent.

According to Keller et al. (2012, 490), it is always very important to consider the possibility of respondents making up responses or guessing, especially when measuring aspects related to customers' brand awareness. Thus, the survey was intentionally designed so that respondents did not have to answer every question. The decision of providing respondents with the option to not answer every question was made to increase the reliability of the study. As the sample consisted of both current and former customers, it was assumed that former customers that had not been in contact with the commissioner organization after the brand renewal might not have an opinion regarding some of the questions. The respondents had two weeks to respond. Subsequent responses were not taken into account since the data processing began immediately after the time limit exceeded. Data processing began with a thorough review of the qualitative responses to find recurring aspects and phenomena among respondents' responses. Once qualitative responses were reviewed, quantitative responses were assessed, and conclusions were drawn.

The survey gathered 132 respondents in total. The response rate was 8.17%. As typical for this type of research method, part of the subjects did not respond to the survey. Nevertheless, the number of

responses was satisfactory and suitable for an in-depth analysis to be carried out. It is believed that the response rate could have been increased by mentioning the commissioner organization's name in the sent e-mail. However, it was assumed that mentioning the commissioner organization's name in the e-mail would have affected responses in the brand awareness phase of the survey and thus, decreased the reliability of the results.

## 6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION – CASE AHOOPY CREATIVE

The objective of the study was to find out have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of Ahooy Creative. Since understanding brand knowledge structures in customers' minds requires measuring aspects related to both brand awareness and brand image (Keller et al. 2012, 441), the survey consisted of two phases. The first phase of the survey considered the current level of customers' brand awareness in terms of brand recall and brand recognition. Both brand recall and brand recognition were measured to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current level of customers' brand awareness. According to Keller et al. (2012, 494), to understand the brand image that exists in customer minds, both imagery- and performance-related associations should be measured. Thus, in the second phase of the survey, the commissioner organization's name was revealed, and customers' brand imagery- and performance-related associations were assessed. The survey gathered 132 respondents in total. Nevertheless, as all questions were not mandatory, the number of responses differed depending on the question. This has been taken into account in the presentation of the research results.

### 6.1 Brand Awareness

The first phase of the survey examined customers' brand awareness in terms of brand recall and brand recognition. To maximize the reliability of the results, brand recall was assessed first. This was done because brand recall is generally more challenging than brand recognition (Hakala et al. 2012, 441) and using progressively narrowed cues can provide valuable information regarding customers' brand knowledge structures (Keller et al. 2012, 489). Thus, at the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to list all creative agencies that they can think of. This question was asked to gain an understanding of the level of brand recall, which is an important factor of brand awareness (Keller 2013, 73). The question also enabled determining the current level of top-of-mind awareness.

This question received 111 responses, and in total respondents could recall 179 different creative agencies. The average number of respondents recalling a particular creative agency was 2.38. Ahooy Creative was recalled 33 times, and 19 times it was recalled before other creative agencies. In total, 29.73% of the respondents recalled Ahooy Creative when given a cue regarding the business field. 17.2% of the respondents recalled Ahooy Creative as the first creative agency that came to mind. (Figure 8.) Thus, Ahooy Creative was recalled significantly easier than other creative agencies. Top-of-mind awareness refers to the first brand that comes to mind when given customers a cue regarding a specific category (Rastogi & Parashar 2018, 178). Thus, the results with this question suggest that the conducted brand implementation efforts have been efficient in increasing brand recall and top-of-mind awareness. Nevertheless, an interesting observation was that 2.70% of the respondents mentioned they were aware the company name had changed but could not remember the new name.

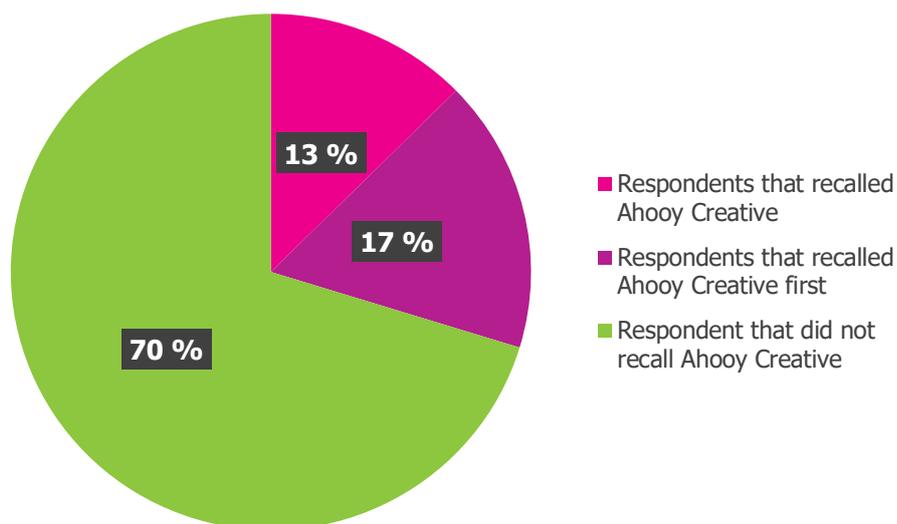


FIGURE 8. Brand recall when given respondents a cue regarding the business field (n=111)

Next, as typical for progressively narrowed cues, respondents were given a cue regarding a more specific business field. This was done to gain a deeper understanding of the brand knowledge structures in customers' minds in terms of brand recall. (Keller et al. 2012, 489.) The question also enabled determining the current level of top-of-mind awareness when given respondents a cue regarding a more specific business field. Respondents were asked to list all creative agencies specialized in brand strategy services, that they can think of.

This question received 96 responses, and in total respondents could recall 116 different creative agencies specialized in brand strategy services. The average number of respondents recalling a particular creative agency was 2.21. Ahooy Creative was recalled 29 times, and 21 times it was recalled before other creative agencies. In total, 30.21% of the respondents recalled Ahooy Creative when given a cue regarding a more specific business field. 21.88% of the respondents recalled Ahooy Creative as the first creative agency specialized in brand strategy that came to mind. (Figure 9.) In this case, Ahooy Creative was also recalled easier than other creative agencies and the number of respondents recalling Ahooy Creative before other creative agencies increased by 2.09%. This suggests that top-of-mind awareness is higher when given a cue regarding a more specific business field. Nevertheless, the number of respondents recalling Ahooy Creative did not radically change. This suggests that part of the respondents was not aware of Ahooy Creative's specialization in brand strategy services. According to Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 124), without efficient marketing communication it is unlikely that people become aware of a brand or learn about it. Thus, it can be assumed that the specialization has not been communicated efficiently enough through external marketing communication.

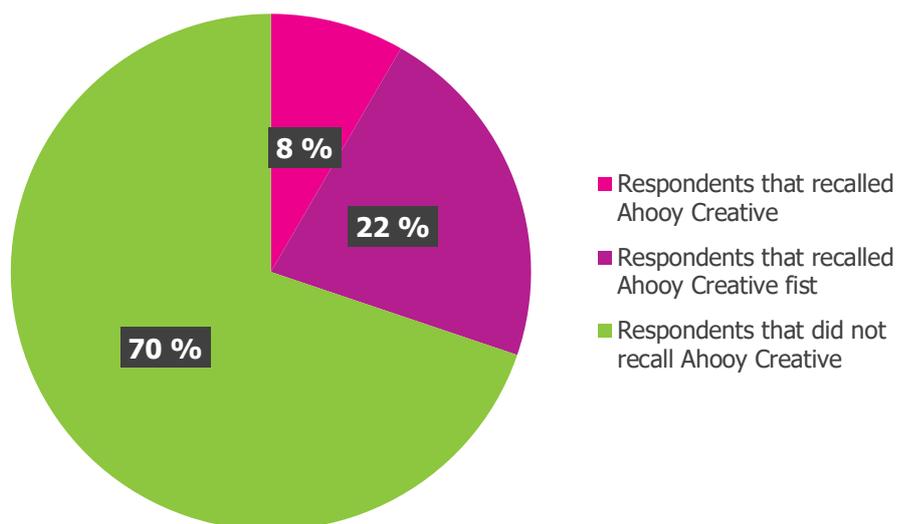


FIGURE 9. Brand recall when given respondents a cue regarding a more specific business field (n=96)

The third question in the survey assessed which creative agency's services respondents would most likely consider purchasing if they wanted to grow their business through means of brand strategy. This question was asked because brand awareness is closely related to the consideration set (Rastogi & Parashar 2018, 175) and the brands that come to mind first are commonly the brands that customers purchase most often (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 173). Thus, this question was asked to gain an understanding of how many of the respondents have included Ahooy Creative into their consideration set. This question received 92 acceptable responses. Unfortunately, many of the responses had to be discarded, as respondents mentioned more than one creative agency. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Ahooy Creative was mentioned in multiple of the discarded responses.

In total, respondents mentioned 31 different creative agencies, and the average number of respondents mentioning a particular creative agency was 1.87. Ahooy Creative was mentioned 19 times, meaning that 20.65% of the respondents would most likely consider purchasing Ahooy Creative's services if they wanted to grow their business through means of brand strategy. 36.96% of the respondents did not know which creative agency's services they would most likely consider purchasing, and 42.39% of the respondents would most likely consider purchasing other creative agencies' services. (Figure 10.) The consideration set refers to a group of brands customers would likely consider purchasing (Keller et al. 2012, 61). Thus, Ahooy Creative was part of 20.65% of the respondents' consideration set. This percentage is comparable to the 21.88% of the respondents that recalled Ahooy Creative as the first creative agency specialized in brand strategy that came to mind. The goal of most marketing communication is to enhance top-of-mind awareness and the likelihood that customers will include the brand in their consideration set (Rastogi & Parashar 2018, 178). Thus, it can be assumed that further efforts in terms of external brand communication is needed to increase brand consideration.

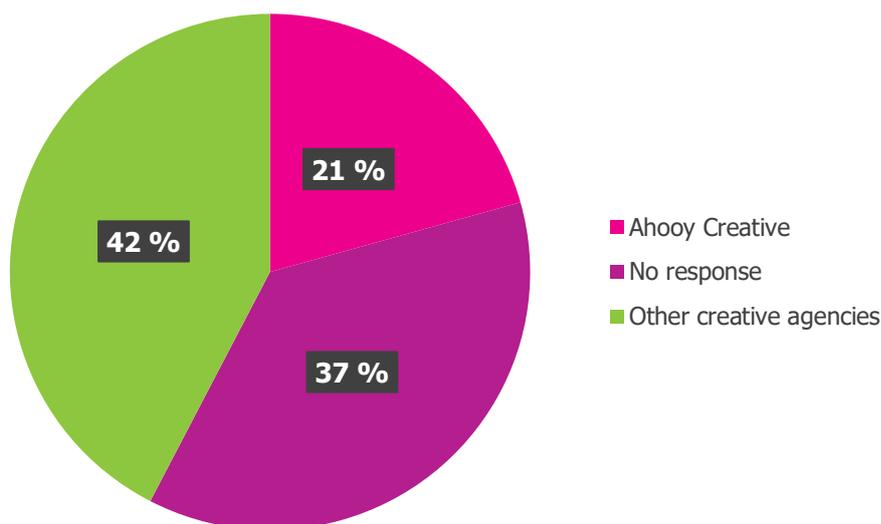


FIGURE 10. Illustration of which creative agency's services respondents would most likely consider purchasing (n=92)

The level of customers' brand recognition, which is an important factor of brand awareness (Keller 2013, 73), was next assessed. According to Keller et al. (2012, 488), brand recognition can be measured by assessing the ease with which customers recognize different brand elements such as the company name, logo, or slogan, for instance. Thus, the level of customers' brand recognition was examined by assessing how well respondents could recognize different brand elements. The brand elements that were chosen to be assessed were ones that had been used most as part of Ahooy Creative's external marketing communication. First, respondents were asked to mark which of the following creative agencies specialized in brand strategy services they recognize. This question was asked to gain an understanding of customers' brand recognition in terms of the company name. It permitted discovering whether the company name already existed in customers' memory or not (Keller et al. 2012, 488-489).

This question received 114 responses. In total, 49.12% of the respondents recognized Ahooy Creative by the company name (Figure 11). Thus, the company name already exists in 49.12% of the respondents' memory. This suggests that brand recognition in terms of the company name is at a very sufficient level, especially when considering the early stage of the brand renewal. Nevertheless, the previous company name, Oddy Inc., was recognized by 76.32% of the respondents. Thus, it can be assumed that further external marketing communication efforts to enhance brand recognition in terms of the company name are needed.

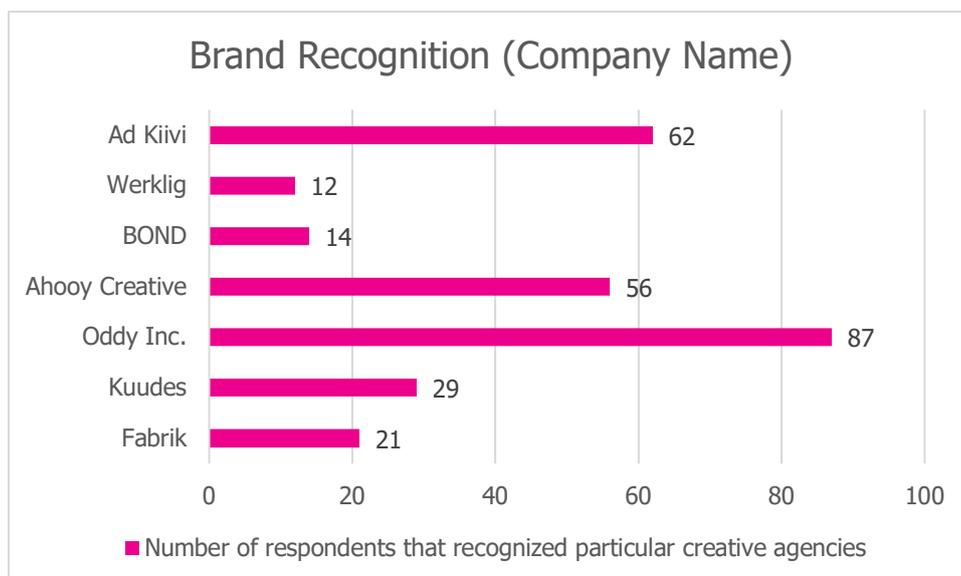


FIGURE 11. Brand recognition when given respondents a cue regarding the company name (n=114)

The second brand recognition-related question measured customers' brand recognition regarding Ahooy Creative's slogan. Respondents were asked which of the following creative agencies' specialized in brand strategy services, slogan is "Something is possible". This question was asked to gain an understanding of customers' brand recognition in terms of the slogan. It permitted discovering whether the slogan already existed in customers' memory or not (Keller et al. 2012, 488-489).

This question received 107 responses. In total, 12.15% of the respondents recognized the slogan and associated it with Ahooy Creative. Nevertheless, 81.31% of the respondents did not recognize the slogan, and 6.54% of the respondents associated the slogan with other creative agencies. (Figure 12.) Thus, a significant number of respondents did not recognize the slogan or associate it with Ahooy Creative. According to Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 124), without efficient marketing communication it is unlikely that people become aware of a brand or learn about it. Thus, it can be assumed that the slogan has not been incorporated enough into external marketing communication.

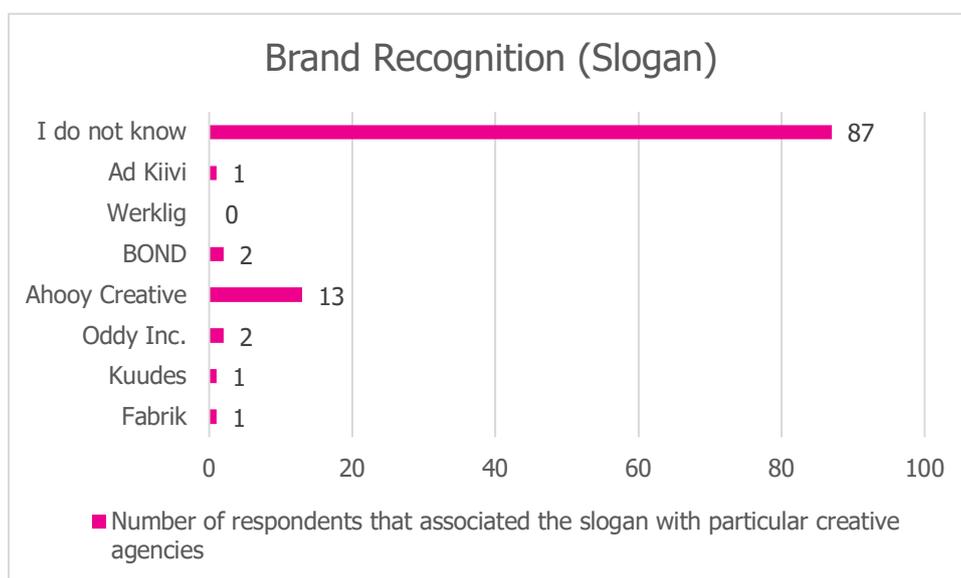


FIGURE 12. Brand recognition when given respondents a cue regarding the slogan (n=107)

The third brand recognition-related questions measured customers' brand recognition regarding Ahooy Creative's icon. Respondents were asked to mark which of the following creative agencies, specialized in brand strategy services, they associate the icon with. This question was asked to gain an understanding of customers' brand recognition in terms of the icon. It permitted discovering whether the icon already existed in customers' memory or not (Keller et al. 2012, 488-489).

This question received 115 responses. In total, 47.83% of the respondents recognized the icon and associated it with Ahooy Creative (Figure 13). This suggests that external marketing communication has been efficient in increasing brand recognition in terms of the icon. Nevertheless, 41.74% of the respondents did not recognize the icon, and 10.43% of the respondents associated the icon with other creative agencies. According to Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 124), without efficient marketing communication it is unlikely that people become aware of a brand or learn about it. Thus, it can be assumed that the icon should be utilized more often as part of external marketing communication.

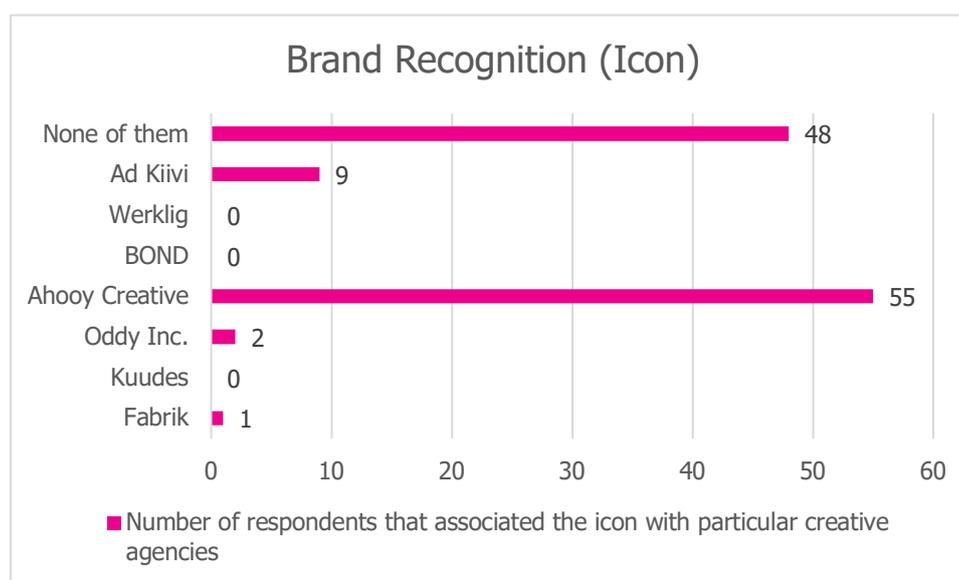


FIGURE 13. Brand recognition when given respondents a cue regarding the icon (n=115)

At this point in the survey, the commissioner organization was revealed to respondents. It was also highlighted that the rest of the questions concerned Ahooy Creative. Respondents were asked how familiar they are with the brand, Ahooy Creative, on a scale of 1-5. 5 referred to very familiar, whereas 1 to not at all familiar. According to Hoeffler & Keller (2003, 424), customers may pay more of their selective attention to brands that they find familiar and be more willing to include them into their consideration set. The goal of marketing communication is often to enhance the likelihood that customers include the brand into their consideration set (Rastogi & Parashar 2018, 178). Thus, this question was asked to gain an understanding of whether external marketing communication has been efficient in enhancing customers' familiarity with Ahooy Creative. The question also enabled determining whether customers find Ahooy Creative to be a familiar brand or not.

This question received 129 responses. A significant majority, 51.16%, of the respondents responded 1. 16.28% of the respondents responded 2, and 6.20% of the respondents 3. 12.40% of the respondents responded 4, and 13.95% of the respondents 5. (Figure 14.) The average of the responses was 2.22. This suggests that the respondents do not find Ahooy Creative to be familiar. According to Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 124), without efficient marketing communication it is unlikely that people become aware of a brand or learn about it. Thus, it can be assumed that although brand awareness is at a sufficient level when considering the early stage of the brand renewal, most customers do not yet consider Ahooy Creative to be a familiar brand.

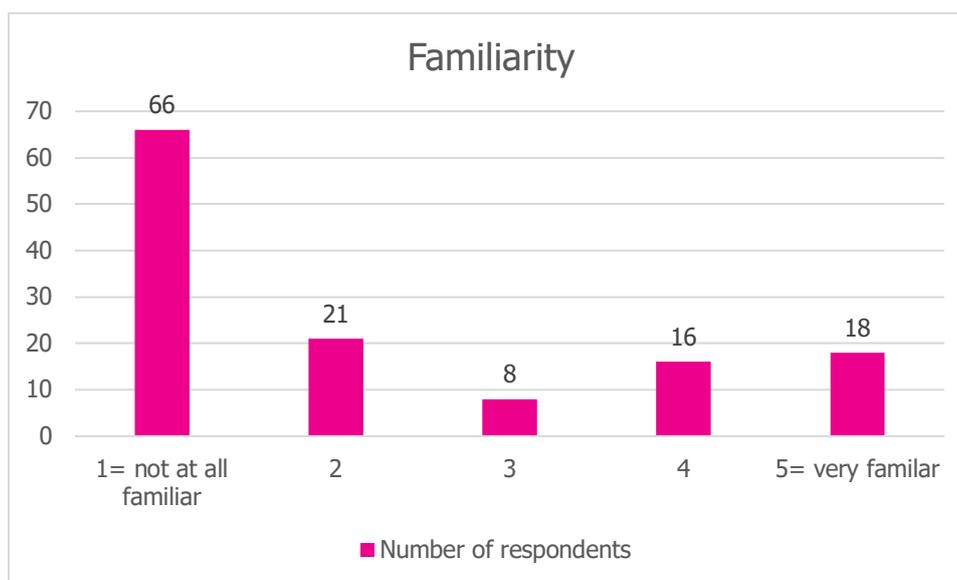


FIGURE 14. Respondents' familiarity with the brand, Ahooy Creative (n=129)

According to Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2009, 27), a brilliant execution of marketing communication requires careful selection of communication channels. One essential criteria for evaluating different marketing communication channels is the effectiveness of delivering a brand message (Kotler et al. 2019, 553). Thus, respondents were next asked to mark all the channels through which they have heard of Ahooy Creative. This question was asked to assess the efficiency of the utilized external marketing communication channels in delivering the brand message and thus, increasing customers' brand knowledge. The marketing communication channels that were chosen to be assessed were ones that had been used for Ahooy Creative's external marketing communication.

This question received 71 responses. From the utilized external marketing communication channels, word-of-mouth marketing appeared to be the most efficient as the majority, 50.70% of the respondents, had heard of Ahooy Creative from a friend, colleague, business partner, or other. Social media marketing and personal selling also revealed to be very efficient communication channels as 43.66% of the respondents had heard of Ahooy Creative through LinkedIn, Facebook, or Instagram, and 30.99% of the respondents through personal selling. 28.17% of the respondents had heard of Ahooy Creative through a website, 23.94% of the respondents through a newsletter, and 16.90% through an online advertisement. The most inefficient from the current marketing communication channels appeared to be an event, a sponsorship, and the blog. Only 4.23% of the respondents had

heard about Ahooy Creative through the blog, 8.45% through a sponsorship, and 14.08% through an event. (Figure 15.)

When communicating a brand in business markets, personal marketing communication channels are generally more effective than non-personal marketing communication channels (Puusa et al. 2014, 180). As word-of-mouth marketing, personal selling, and social media marketing are all personal marketing communication channels (Kotler et al. 2019, 591-592), it is not very surprising that these marketing communication channels appeared to be most efficient in delivering the brand message and thus, increasing customers' brand knowledge. However, the results suggest that further efforts need to be directed toward the blog, event marketing, and sponsorship in order for these less personal marketing communication channels to deliver the brand message more efficiently.



FIGURE 15. The channels through which respondents have heard of Ahooy Creative (n=71)

## 6.2 Brand Image

The second phase of the survey examined Ahooy Creative's brand image. According to Keller et al. (2012, 494), understanding the brand image that exists in customer minds requires examining both imagery- and performance-related associations. Thus, both brand imagery- and performance-related association were assessed in the second phase of the survey. To examine customers' brand imagery-related associations, respondents were first asked to describe Ahooy Creative with three adjectives. This type of free associations task is perhaps the most simple and powerful way to profile the aspects that are most likely to be associated with a brand (Keller et al. 2012, 444-447). Thus, this question was asked to discover and identify brand associations in customers' minds. The question also enabled determining whether external communication efforts have been efficient in communicating the brand persona.

This question received 68 responses. In total, Ahooy Creative was described with 88 adjectives. Figure 16 presents the adjectives that were used more than once. Although much attention has been paid to the translation process, it should be noted that the adjectives have been translated from

Finnish to English. The desired brand persona Ahooy Creative has attempted to establish through marketing communication is fun, creative, approachable, customer-centric, open, professional, brave, and reliable. 7.35% of the respondents described Ahooy Creative as fun, 19.12% creative, 7.35% professional, and 2.94% brave. None of the respondents described Ahooy Creative as approachable, customer-centric, open, or reliable. Nevertheless, Ahooy Creative was described, for instance, as being friendly, compact, sympathetic, human, nice, positive, and serving. Thus, many of the respondents used synonyms, or otherwise related words of the desired adjectives, to describe Ahooy Creative.

The majority of the respondents used adjectives that referred to Ahooy Creative being fun. For instance, respondents described Ahooy Creative as playful, cheerful, wild, youthful, fresh, lively, dynamic, and surprising. Many of the respondents also described Ahooy Creative as creative by using adjectives such as innovative, artistic, visual, weird, and distinctive. Adjectives related to Ahooy Creative being professional and brave included, for instance, professional, smart, skilled, solution-oriented, brave, and determined. This suggest that external communication efforts have been quite efficient in communicating the brand persona. Nevertheless, Ahooy Creative was also described to be attention-seeking, unfamiliar, confusing, expensive, volatile, and arrogant. Thus, it can be assumed that customers' brand imagery-related associations are not yet as consistent with the brand identity as would be desirable, and further efforts to enhance customers' brand imagery-related associations are needed.

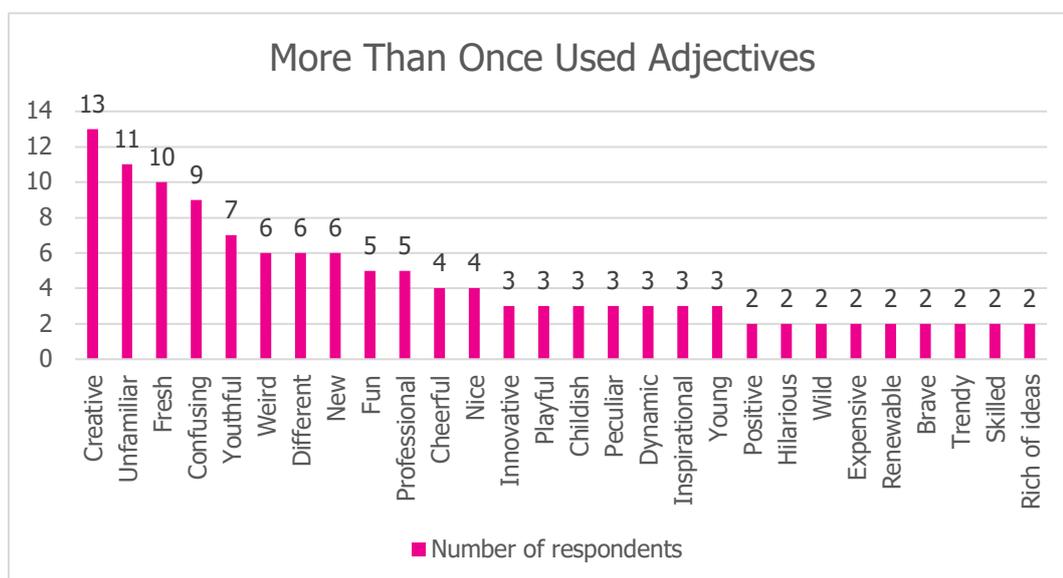


FIGURE 16. Adjectives that respondents used more than once to describe Ahooy Creative (n=68)

Next question more conclusively examined customers' brand imagery-related associations in terms of Ahooy Creative's brand persona. It was asked to determine whether external communication efforts have been efficient in communicating the brand persona. According to Keller et al. (2012, 494), brand imagery-related associations can be examined by assessing customer perceptions regarding brand personality. Adjective checklists and ratings have been found to be very useful in that regard (Keller et al. 2012, 465-467). Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2018, 181) further suggest that the most

common way to measure brand image is to develop a profile of a brand and measure how many people think each of the attributes and benefits describe the brand. Thus, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how well the following adjectives describe Ahooy Creative. 5 referred to very well, whereas 1 to very poorly. Each adjective was rated separately from others.

This question received 79 responses. Nevertheless, a small part of the respondents did not rate every adjective. This has been taken into account in the presentation of the results. The highest averages of responses concerned the adjectives brave, creative, and fun. The lowest averages of responses, in turn, concerned the adjectives customer-centric, reliable, and approachable. Overall, the average of responses was relatively even among all the adjectives. (Figure 17.) This suggests that external communication efforts have been relatively efficient in communicating Ahooy Creative's brand persona. Nevertheless, 3.20% of the respondents responded 1, suggesting that particular adjectives describe Ahooy Creative very poorly. Thus, it can be assumed that customers' brand imagery-related associations are not yet as consistent with the brand identity as would be desirable, and further efforts to enhance customers' brand imagery-related associations in terms of Ahooy Creative's brand persona are needed.

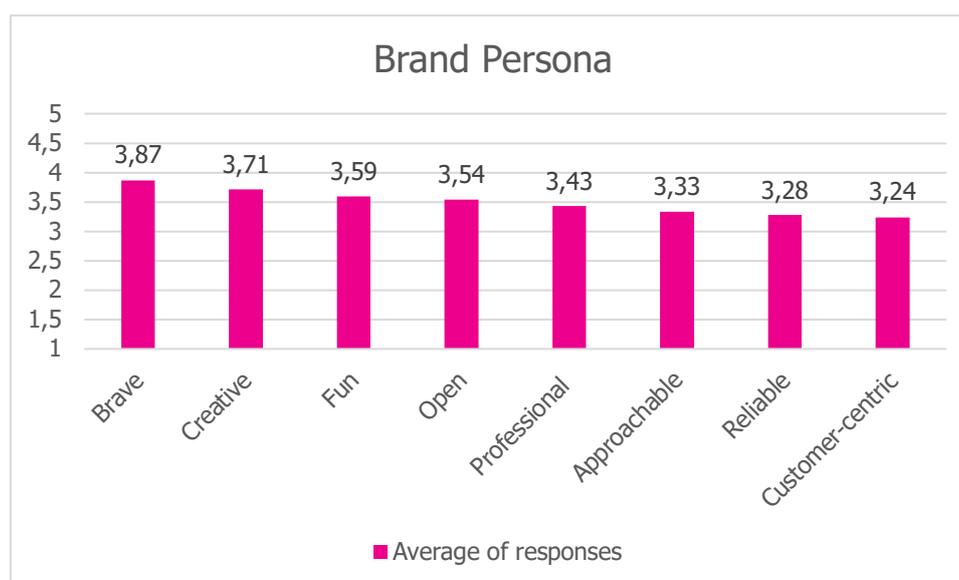


FIGURE 17. Average of responses regarding Ahooy Creative's brand persona (n=79)

According to Keller et al. (2012, 494), brand imagery-related associations can also be examined by assessing customer perceptions regarding company values. As discussed, developing a profile of a brand and measuring how many people think each of the attributes and benefits describe the brand is an effective way to measure brand image (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2018, 181). Thus, to assess customers' brand imagery-related associations in terms of the company values, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how well Ahooy Creative stands behind the following company values. 5 referred to very well, whereas 1 to very poorly. Each company value was rated separately from others. This question was asked to determine whether external communication efforts have

been efficient in communicating the company values. Since company values are directly communicated to customers through employee behavior (Vahtola 2020, 21), the question also gave indication on how efficient internal communication efforts have been.

This question received 76 responses. Nevertheless, a small part of the respondents did not rate every value. This has been taken into account in the presentation of the results. The highest averages of responses concerned company values such as positivity, courage, and freedom. The lowest averages of responses, in turn, concerned responsibility, respectfulness, and reliability. Overall, the average of responses was again relatively even among all the company values. (Figure 18.) This suggests that both internal and external brand communication efforts have been relatively efficient. Nevertheless, 3.05% of the respondents responded 1, suggesting that Ahooy Creative stands behind particular company values very poorly. Thus, it can be assumed that customers' brand imagery-related associations are not yet as consistent with the brand identity as would be desirable, and further efforts to enhance customers' brand imagery-related associations in terms of the company values are needed.

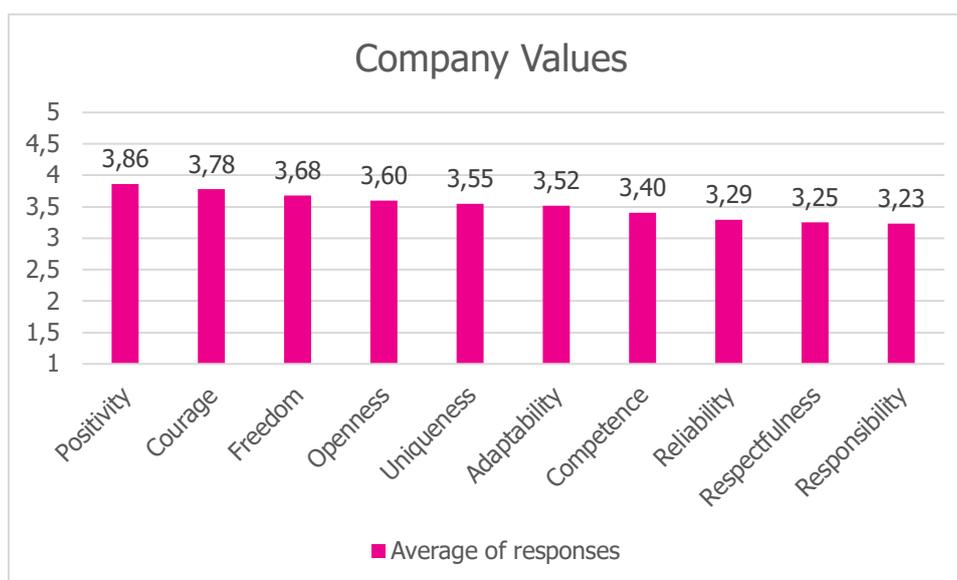


FIGURE 18. Average of responses regarding Ahooy Creative's company values (n=76)

Since understanding the brand image that exists in customer minds requires examining both imagery- and performance-related associations (Keller et al. 2012, 494), customers' brand performance-related associations were next examined. According to Keller et al. (2012, 494), brand performance-related associations can be measured by assessing various customer perceptions regarding primary and supplementary features; product reliability and durability; service effectiveness, efficiency and empathy; style and design; and price. Nevertheless, to avoid bias, it is best to start with general questions and then continue to more specific issues (Keller et al. 2012, 448). Thus, respondents were first asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how positive or negative their experiences with Ahooy Creative have been. 5 referred to very positive, whereas 1 to very negative.

This question was asked to determine how positive or negative customers' experiences with Ahooy Creative have been. Since the gap between customers' experience and expectations is widely acknowledged to be the determinant of customer satisfaction (Kapferer 2008, 38), the question also enabled determining the consistency between the actual customer experience and the communicated brand promise. Ensuring the consistency between the actual customer experience and the communicated brand promise requires efficient communication efforts both internally and externally (Vahtola 2020, 231; Aaker 2014, 224; Keller et al. 2012, 197). Thus, the question also gave indication on how efficient internal and external communication efforts have been.

This question received 82 responses. The majority, 43.90% of the respondents, responded 3. 34.15% of the respondents responded 4, and 18.29% of the respondents 5. 1.22% of the respondents responded 2, and 2.44% of the respondents 1. (Figure 19.) The average of responses was 3.65. This suggests that customers' experiences with Ahooy Creative have, for the most part, been positive. According to Piehler et al. (2015, 53), consistent fulfillment of the brand promise is essential in meeting customer expectations and creating customer satisfaction. Thus, it can be assumed that the actual customer experience has, for the most part, been consistent with the communicated brand promise. This also indicates that internal and external communication efforts have been relatively efficient.

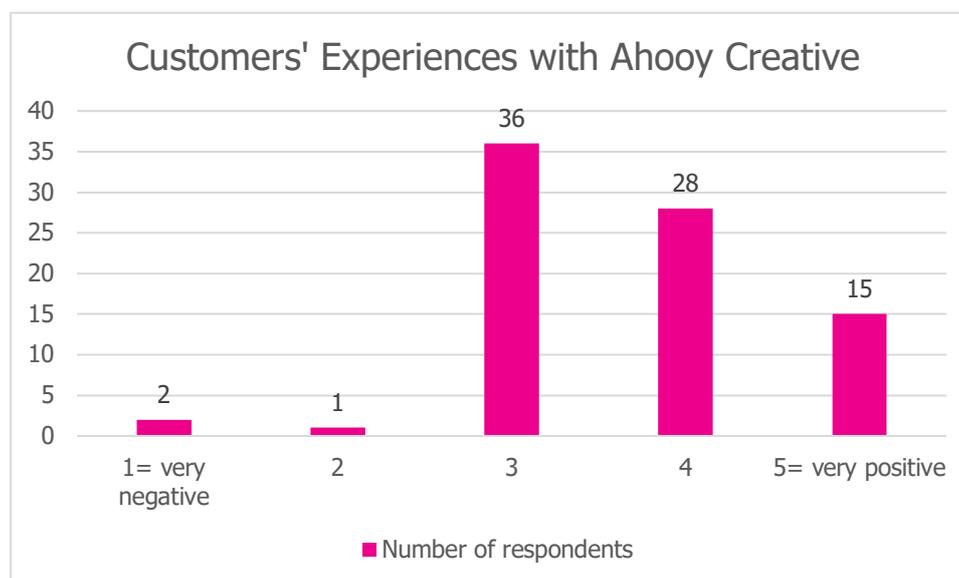


FIGURE 19. Illustration of how positive or negative respondents' experiences with Ahooy Creative have been (n=82)

When measuring brand performance-related associations, it is best to start with general questions and then continue to more specific issues (Keller et al. 2012, 448). Thus, after a general understanding of the level of customer satisfaction was obtained, customers' brand performance-related associations were next examined more specifically. According to Keller et al. (2012, 494), brand performance-related associations can be measured by assessing customer perceptions regarding primary and supplementary features. Primary features refer to the features that are necessary for a

product to exist (Keller et al. 2012, 71). Thus, to assess customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of primary features, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how well Ahooy Creative provides the basic functions of the product or service category compared to its competitors. 5 referred to very well, whereas 1 to very poorly. This question was asked to determine the level of customer satisfaction in terms of the primary features. It enabled a more specific assessment of the level of customer satisfaction.

This question received 81 responses. The majority, 39.51% of the respondents responded 3. 34.57% of the respondents responded 4, and 16.05% of the respondents 5. 6.17% of the respondents responded 2, and 3.70% of the respondents 1. (Figure 20.) The average of responses was 3.53. This suggests that compared to competitors, customers perceive Ahooy Creative to provide the product or service category's basic functions well. Thus, it can be assumed that customer satisfaction and brand performance-related associations in terms of the primary features are at a sufficient level.

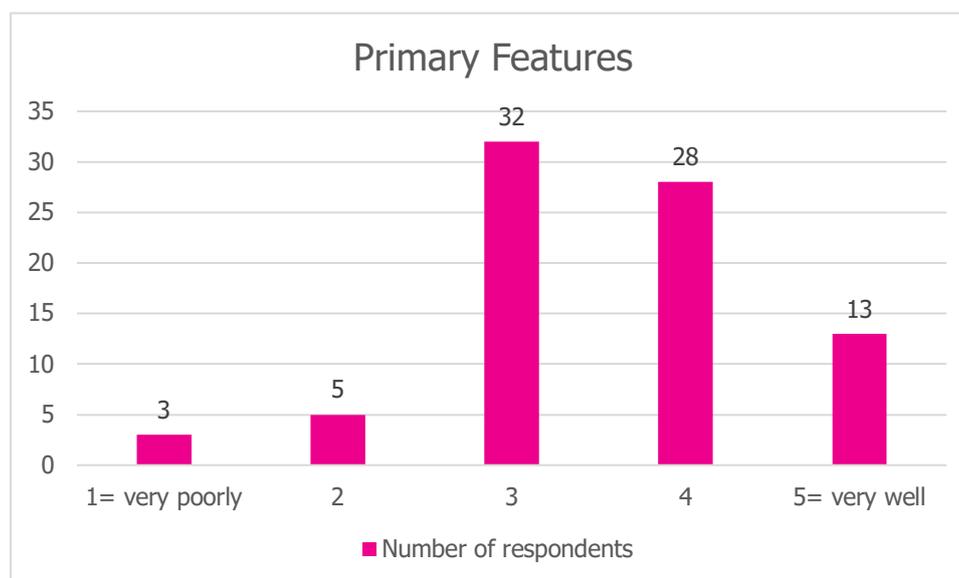


FIGURE 20. Illustration of how well respondents perceive Ahooy Creative to provide the primary features of the product or service category (n=81)

According to Keller et al. (2012, 494), brand performance-related associations can be measured by assessing customer perceptions regarding primary and supplementary features. Supplementary features refer to the features that allow the product or service to be customized and serve additional benefits to customers (Keller et al. 2012, 71). Thus, to assess customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of secondary features, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how much Ahooy Creative provides additional benefits to the basic functions of the product or service category compared to its competitors. 5 referred to very much, whereas 1 to very little. This question was asked to determine the level of customer satisfaction in terms of the supplementary features. It enabled a more specific assessment of the level of customer satisfaction.

This question received 80 responses. The majority, 51.25% of the respondents, responded 3. 27.50% of the respondents responded 4, and 7.50% of the respondents 5. 10.00% of the respondents responded 2, and 3.75% of the respondents 1. (Figure 21.) The average of responses was 3.25. This suggests that compared to competitors, customers do not perceive Ahooy Creative to provide significant additional benefits to the product or service category's basic functions. The average of responses with supplementary features was also slightly lower than with primary features. Thus, it can be assumed that further efforts to increase customer satisfaction and enhance customers' brand performance-related association in terms of supplementary features are needed.

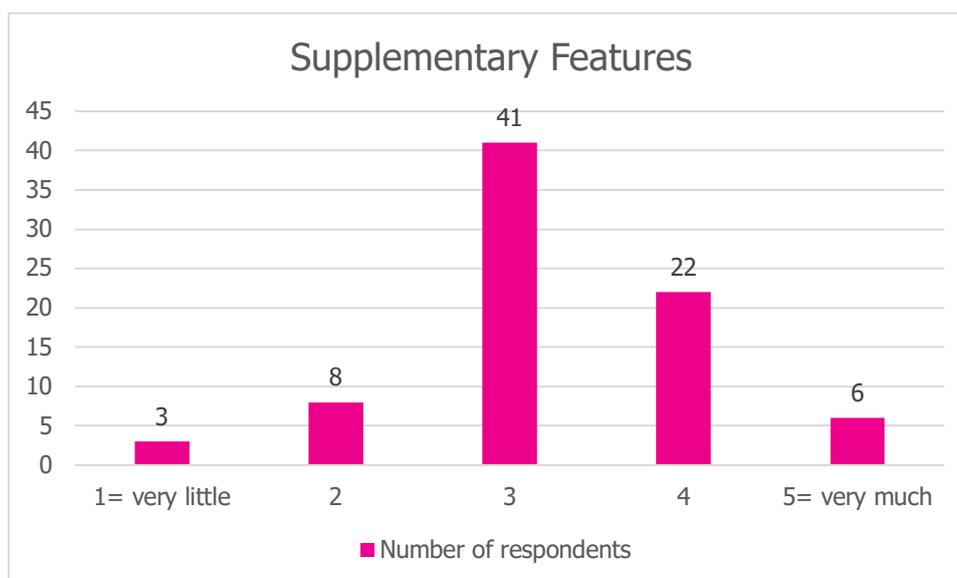


FIGURE 21. Illustration of how much respondents perceive Ahooy Creative to provide supplementary features in the product or service category (n=80)

Next, customers' brand performance-related associations were assessed in terms of the price level. Respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how high or low Ahooy Creative's prices are compared to its competitors' prices. 5 referred to very high, whereas 1 to very low. According to Keller et al. (2012, 71-72), the chosen pricing policy can affect performance-related associations in customers' minds. A higher price may, for instance, imply that a product belongs to a higher quality level of a particular product category. Thus, this question was asked to determine how high or low customers perceive Ahooy Creative's prices to be in comparison to its competitors' prices. It enabled a more specific assessment of customers' brand performance-related associations and gave an indication of the level of customer satisfaction.

This question received 80 responses. The majority, 51.25% of the respondents, responded 3. 35.00% of the respondents responded 4, and 3.75% of the respondents 5. 7.50% of the respondents responded 2, and 2.50% of the respondents 1. (Figure 22.) The average of responses was 3.30. This suggests that customers perceive Ahooy Creative's prices to be similar to competitors' prices. The results regarding customer perceptions of primary and supplementary features showed that customers do not perceive Ahooy Creative to provide significant additional benefits to the product or service category's basic functions. However, customers perceive Ahooy Creative to provide

the basic functions well. When considering the average of responses and the results regarding customers' perceptions of the primary and supplementary features, it can be assumed that customers perceive Ahooy Creative's price level to be suitable.



FIGURE 22. Illustration of respondents' perceptions regarding Ahooy Creative's prices (n=80)

According to Keller et al. (2012, 494), brand performance-related associations can be measured by assessing customer perceptions regarding reliability. Reliability refers to the extent to which a brand performs consistently over time (Keller et al. 2012, 71). Thus, to assess customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of reliability, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how reliable Ahooy Creative is in terms of consistency of performance. 5 referred to very reliable, whereas 1 to very unreliable. This question was asked to determine the level of customer satisfaction in terms of reliability. It enabled a more specific assessment of the level of customer satisfaction.

This question received 78 responses. The majority, 39.74% of the respondents, responded 3. 33.33% of the respondents responded 4, and 12.82% of the respondents 5. 10.26% of the respondents responded 2, and 3.85% of the respondents 1. (Figure 23.) The average of responses was 3.41. This suggests that customers perceive Ahooy Creative to be relatively reliable. Nevertheless, 3.85% of the respondents responded 1, suggesting that Ahooy Creative is very unreliable. Thus, it can be assumed that further efforts to increase customer satisfaction and enhance customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of reliability are needed.

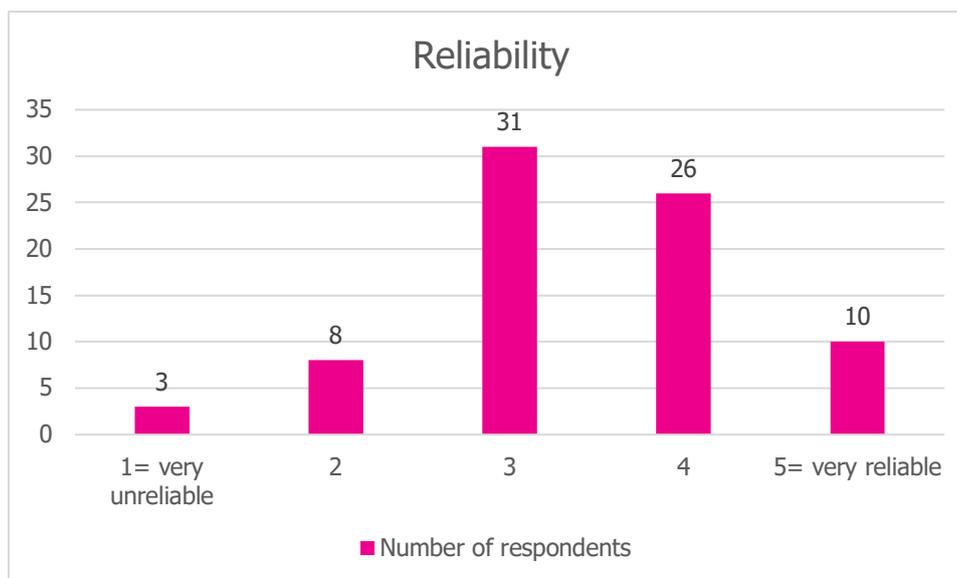


FIGURE 23. Illustration of respondents' perceptions regarding Ahooy Creative's reliability (n=78)

According to Keller et al. (2012, 71-72), aspects related to service effectiveness, service efficiency, and service empathy play a critical role in creating performance-related associations in customers' minds. Thus, brand performance-related associations can be measured by assessing customer perceptions regarding service effectiveness, efficiency and service empathy (Keller et al. 2012, 494). Service effectiveness refers to the extent to which customers are satisfied with the service the brand provides (Keller et al. 71-72). Thus, to assess customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of service effectiveness, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how effective Ahooy Creative's service is. 5 referred to very effective, whereas 1 to very ineffective. This question was asked to determine the level of customer satisfaction in terms of service effectiveness. It enabled a more specific assessment of the level of customer satisfaction. Since employees are often the ones operating in the customer interface (Vahtola 2020, 231), the question also gave indication on how efficient internal communication efforts have been.

This question received 79 responses. The majority, 45.57% of the respondents, responded 3. 35.44% of the respondents responded 4, and 7.59% of the respondents 5. 8.86% of the respondents responded 2, and 2.53% of the respondents 1. (Figure 24.) The average of responses was 3.37. This suggests that customers perceive Ahooy Creative's service to be relatively effective. According to Aaker (2014, 221), the objective of internal branding is to ensure employees are familiar with the brand vision and behave in accordance with it. Thus, it can be assumed that internal communication efforts have been relatively efficient. Nevertheless, 2.53% of the respondents responded 1, suggesting that Ahooy Creative's service is very ineffective. Thus, it can be assumed that further efforts to increase customer satisfaction and enhance customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of service effectiveness are needed.

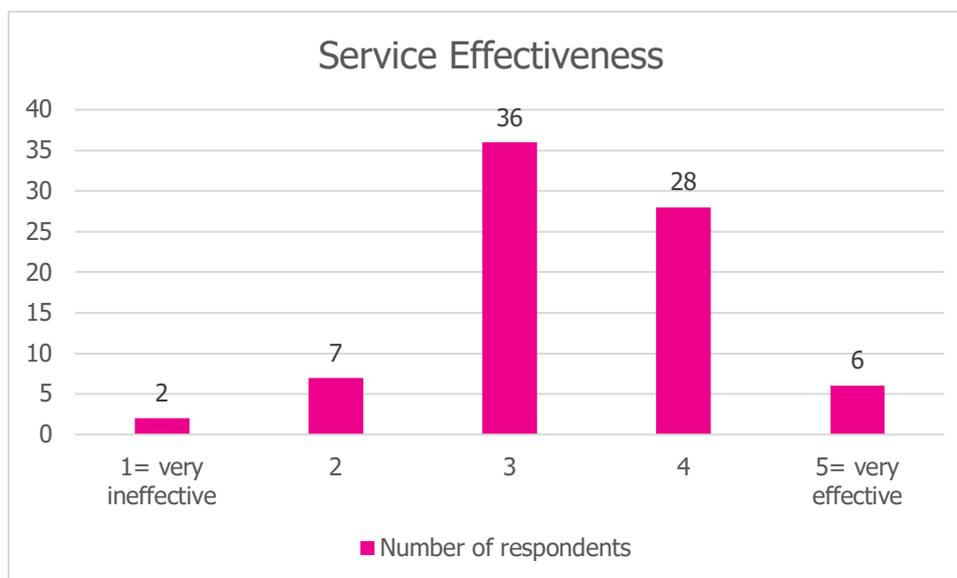


FIGURE 24. Illustration of respondents' perceptions regarding Ahooy Creative's service effectiveness (n=79)

According to Keller et al. (2012, 71-72), aspects related to service effectiveness, service efficiency, and service empathy play a critical role in creating performance-related associations in customers' minds. Thus, brand performance-related associations can be measured by assessing customer perceptions regarding service effectiveness, efficiency and service empathy (Keller et al. 2012, 494). Service efficiency refers to the speed and responsiveness of the service (Keller et al. 71-72). Thus, to assess customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of service efficiency, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how efficient Ahooy Creative's service is in terms of speed and responsiveness. 5 referred to very efficient, whereas 1 to very inefficient. This question was asked to determine the level of customer satisfaction in terms of service efficiency. It enabled a more specific assessment of the level of customer satisfaction. Since employees are often the ones operating in the customer interface (Vahtola 2020, 231), the question also gave indication on how efficient internal communication efforts have been.

This question received 79 responses. The majority, 41.77% of the respondents, responded 3. 20.25% of the respondents responded 4, and 29.11% of the respondents 5. 6.33% of the respondents responded 2, and 2.53% of the respondents 1. (Figure 25.) The average of responses was 3.67. This suggests that customers perceive Ahooy Creative's service to be efficient in terms of speed and responsiveness. Thus, it can be assumed that customer satisfaction and customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of service efficiency are at a sufficient level. The objective of internal branding is to ensure employees are familiar with the brand vision and behave in accordance with it (Aaker 2014, 221). Thus, the results also indicate that internal communication efforts have been efficient.

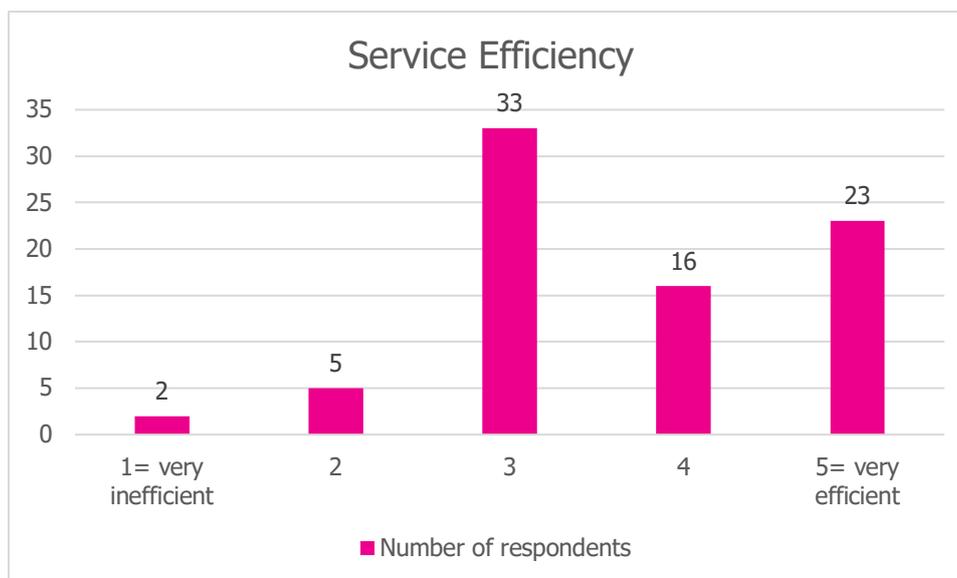


FIGURE 25. Illustration of respondents' perceptions regarding Ahooy Creative's service efficiency (n=79)

According to Keller et al. (2012, 71-72), aspects related to service effectiveness, service efficiency, and service empathy play a critical role in creating performance-related associations in customers' minds. Thus, brand performance-related associations can be measured by assessing customer perceptions regarding service effectiveness, efficiency and service empathy (Keller et al. 2012, 494). Service empathy refers to the extent to which customers perceive the service providers to be, for instance, trustworthy and caring. Thus, to assess customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of service empathy, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how helpful and caring the providers of Ahooy Creative's service are. 5 referred to very helpful and caring, whereas 1 to not at all helpful and caring. This question was asked to determine the level of customer satisfaction in terms of service empathy. It enabled a more specific assessment of the level of customer satisfaction. Since employees are often the ones operating in the customer interface (Vahtola 2020, 231), the question also gave indication on how efficient internal communication efforts have been.

This question received 79 responses. The majority, 31.65% of the respondents, responded 3. 30.38% of the respondents responded 4, and 27.85% of the respondents 5. 7.59% of the respondents responded 2, and 2.53% of the respondents 1. (Figure 26.) The average of responses was 3.73. This suggests that customers perceive the providers of Ahooy Creative's service to be helpful and caring. Thus, it can be assumed that customer satisfaction and customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of service empathy are at a sufficient level. The objective of internal branding is to ensure employees are familiar with the brand vision and behave in accordance with it (Aaker 2014, 221). Thus, the results also indicate that internal communication efforts have been efficient.

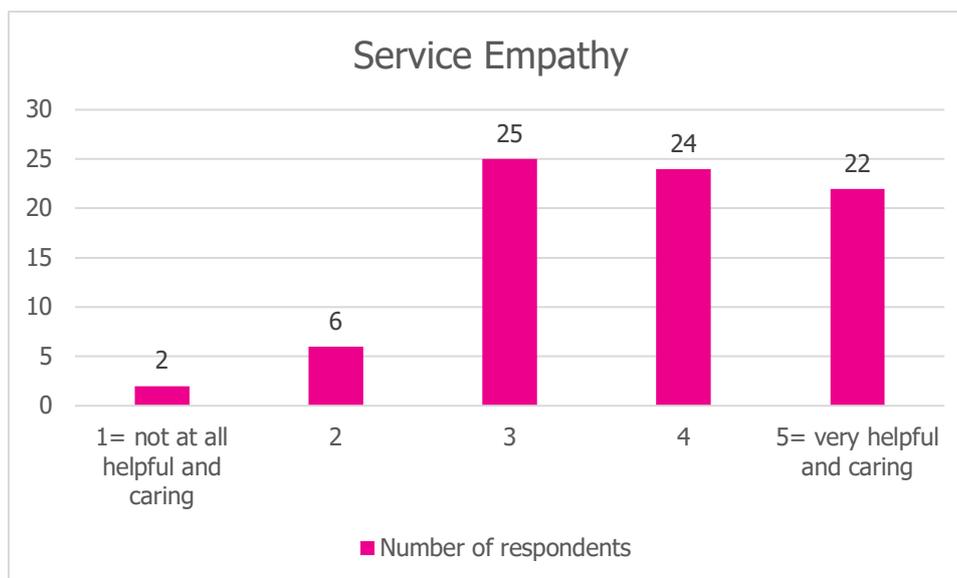


FIGURE 26. Illustration of respondents' perceptions regarding Ahooy Creative's service empathy (n=79)

According to Keller et al. (2012, 71-72), the aesthetic aspects relating to the look and feel of a brand can also affect performance-related associations in customers' minds. Thus, the last question in the survey assessed customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of the look and feel of the brand. Respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, how pleasant the look and feel of Ahooy Creative is. 5 referred to very pleasant, whereas 1 to very unpleasant. This question was asked to determine the level of customer satisfaction in terms of the look and feel of the brand. It enabled a more specific assessment of the level of customer satisfaction.

This question received 86 responses. The majority, 32.56% of the respondents, responded 4. 29.07% of the respondents responded 3, and 13.95% of the respondents 5. 19.77% of the respondents responded 2, and 4.65% of the respondents 1. (Figure 27.) The average of responses was 3.31. This suggests that customers perceive the look and feel of Ahooy Creative's brand to be relatively pleasant. Nevertheless, 4.65% of the respondents responded 1, suggesting that they find the look and feel of Ahooy Creative's brand to be very unpleasant. Thus, it can be assumed that further efforts to increase customer satisfaction and enhance customers' brand performance-related associations in terms of the look and feel of the brand are needed.

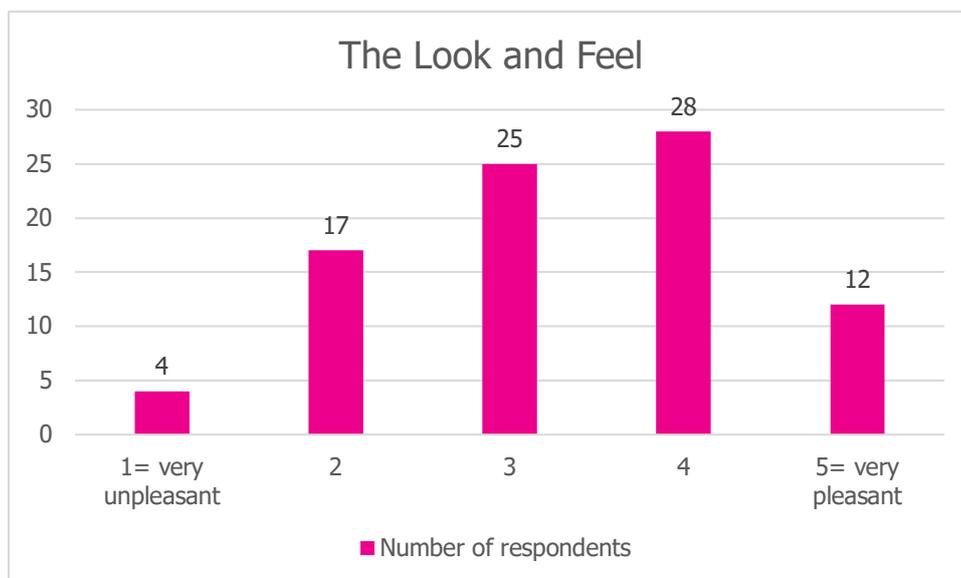


FIGURE 27. Illustration of respondents' perceptions regarding the look and feel of Ahooy Creative's brand (n=86)

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The primary objective of the thesis was to find out have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of Ahooy Creative. To determine whether the conducted brand implementation efforts have been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers' of Ahooy Creative, an online survey research was conducted. Since understanding brand knowledge structures in customers' minds requires measuring aspects related to both brand awareness and brand image (Keller et al. 2012, 441), the survey consisted of two phases that examined both brand awareness and brand image.

The first phase of the survey examined the level of customers' brand awareness in terms of brand recognition and brand recall. The results showed that the conducted brand implementation efforts have been relatively efficient in increasing customers' brand recall and top-of-mind awareness. Ahooy Creative was recalled significantly easier than other creative agencies and was often the first creative agency that came to mind. Nevertheless, the number of respondents that had included Ahooy Creative into their consideration set was lower than desirable. Brand awareness is closely related to the consideration set (Rastogi & Parashar 2018, 175). Thus, it can be assumed that although brand recall is at a sufficient level when considering the early stage of the brand renewal, further efforts to increase customers' brand awareness are still needed.

The results regarding brand recognition showed that the conducted brand implementation efforts have been efficient in increasing customers' brand recognition. Nearly half of the respondents recognized Ahooy Creative by the company name. Similar results occurred with Ahooy Creative's icon. At such an early stage of the brand renewal, the number of respondents recognizing Ahooy Creative's company name and icon is assumed to be very sufficient. Nevertheless, a significant majority of the respondents did not recognize Ahooy Creative's slogan. The results regarding customers' familiarity with Ahooy Creative's brand also showed that over half of the respondents do not consider Ahooy Creative to be a familiar brand. Thus, it can be assumed that further efforts to increase customers' brand awareness in terms of both brand recognition and brand recall are indeed needed.

The most efficient external marketing communication channels appeared to be word-of-mouth marketing, personal selling, and social media marketing. Over half of the respondents had heard of Ahooy Creative from a friend, colleague, business partner, or other. This suggests that Ahooy Creative generates discussion among people. Whether that discussion is positive or negative toned cannot be confirmed at this point. As typical for business markets (Puusa et al. 2014, 180), personal selling and social media marketing also appeared to be a very efficient means of communicating the brand message. The most inefficient marketing communication channels appeared to be the blog, an event, and a sponsorship. It is assumed that directing further efforts toward these less personal marketing communication channels could help the blog, event, and sponsorship to deliver the brand message more efficiently.

The second phase of the survey examined customers' brand imagery- and performance-related associations. The results showed that the conducted brand implementation efforts have been relatively efficient in enhancing customers' brand imagery-related associations. The majority of the adjectives respondents used to describe Ahooy Creative were in line with the desired brand persona Ahooy Creative has attempted to establish. The average of responses regarding Ahooy Creative's brand persona and company values also remained over 3 with all of the adjectives and company values. Nevertheless, some of the respondents described Ahooy Creative to be attention-seeking, unfamiliar, confusing, expensive, volatile, and arrogant. Part of the respondents also rated particular adjectives and company values to describe Ahooy Creative and their actions very poorly. This suggests that customers' brand imagery-related associations are not yet as consistent with the brand identity as would be desirable. Thus, it can be assumed that further efforts to enhance customers' brand imagery-related associations are needed.

The results regarding brand performance-related associations showed that customers have been relatively satisfied with Ahooy Creative's performance. The average of responses regarding the positiveness of customer experience suggests that customers' experiences with Ahooy Creative have, for the most part, been positive. It was also found that customers perceive Ahooy Creative to provide the primary features of the product or service category well and that they are quite satisfied with Ahooy Creative's service efficiency and service empathy. Nevertheless, customers do not perceive Ahooy Creative to provide significant additional benefits to the product or service category's basic functions. The results also suggest that customer satisfaction in terms of Ahooy Creative's reliability, the look and feel, and service effectiveness is not yet at a desirable level. Thus, it can be assumed that further efforts to enhance customers' brand performance-related association and increase customer satisfaction are needed.

The primary objective of the thesis was to find out have the conducted brand implementation efforts been efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of Ahooy Creative. To reach this objective, the level of customers' brand awareness, as well as brand imagery- and performance-related associations, were assessed through an online survey. After careful processing and analysis of the gathered data, it can be concluded that **the conducted brand implementation efforts have been relatively efficient in increasing customers' brand knowledge**. This conclusion is drawn because the study results show that Ahooy Creative's customers' brand awareness in terms of brand recognition and brand recall is at a sufficient level; customers' brand imagery-related associations are relatively consistent with the brand identity; and customers have been quite satisfied with Ahooy Creative's performance.

Building a strong brand requires consistent investments and a long-term commitment into building the brand in the long-term (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2009, 14). Thus, although the conducted brand implementation efforts have been relatively efficient in increasing the brand knowledge of the customers of Ahooy Creative, continuous brand implementation efforts in the long-term are needed. The information gained through the survey enables Ahooy Creative to review the efficiency of the

conducted brand implementation efforts and gain an understanding of the current state of customers' brand knowledge. The information can be utilized for making adjustments in current brand implementation efforts and for the planning of future brand implementation efforts. In the future, it would be desirable to conduct a similar survey to be able to compare the results to this survey's results, and thus maximize the benefits of this survey.

The study results are reliable in terms that similar results can be expected if the survey is repeated under the same conditions and with a similar sample of Ahooy Creative's former and current customers. Nevertheless, since the survey was designed for this specific sample, the findings are not generalizable to all consumers. The focus of the study is also limited to the brand knowledge structures of Ahooy Creative's customers. Thus, although brand knowledge plays an important role in creating brand equity, the findings are not applicable to determine whether the conducted brand implementation efforts have been efficient in increasing brand equity. In the future it would be interesting to conduct a more large scale study in that regard. It may also be interesting to study other stakeholders' brand knowledge structures. The validity of the results is assumed to be relatively high as the chosen research method and questionnaire are strongly based on the theoretical framework of the thesis. However, it should be noted that measuring brand knowledge structures is a challenging task and thus, there is always the possibility of an occurrence of a measuring error.

The thesis writing process from the writer's perspective has been a very pleasant and interesting journey. During the process, the writer has managed to significantly deepen her professional knowledge regarding brand-building, especially from the perspective of brand implementation. As usual for such a large-scale project, there were some setbacks as part of the journey. Nevertheless, as a result of careful scheduling, a positive attitude, and persistence, the thesis was completed within the scheduled timetable. The writer would also like to think that the setbacks that were met during the process taught her patience and skills to cope when things do not go exactly as planned. In conclusion, the writer is delighted with the end result of her hard work and overall pleased with how the thesis writing process went. She believes choosing this highly interesting and challenging topic will be very beneficial for her desired future career path.

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## APPENDIX 1: ONLINE SURVEY

## BRAND AWARENESS

*Brand Recall*

1. What creative agencies can you think of?

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2. What creative agencies specialized in brand strategy services can you think of?

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3. If you wanted to grow your business through means of brand strategy, which creative agency's services would you most likely consider purchasing?

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*Brand Recognition*

4. From the following creative agencies specialized in brand strategy services, which ones do you recognize? (multiple choice)

- Fabrik
- Kuudes
- Oddy Inc.
- Ahooy Creative
- BOND
- Werklig
- Ad Kiivi

5. From the following creative agencies specialized in brand strategy services, which one's slogan is "Something is possible"? (single choice)

- Fabrik
- Kuudes
- Oddy Inc.
- Ahooy Creative
- BOND
- Werklig
- Ad Kiivi
- I don't know

6. From the following creative agencies specialized in brand strategy services, which one do you associate with this icon? (single choice)



- Fabrik
- Kuudes
- Oddy Inc.
- Ahooy Creative
- BOND
- Werklig
- Ad Kiivi
- None of them

#### BRAND IMAGE

##### *Brand Imagery*

7. On a scale of 1-5, how familiar are you with this brand: Ahooy Creative? (5= very familiar, 1= not at all familiar)
8. How have you heard of this brand? (multiple choice)
- An event
  - A sponsorship
  - Website
  - Blog
  - Online advertising
  - Newsletter (e-mail)
  - Personal selling (face to face or telephone)
  - Instagram
  - Facebook
  - LinkedIn
  - A friend, colleague, business partner or other

9. What three adjectives would you use to describe this brand?

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10. On a scale of 1-5, how well do the following words describe this brand? (5= very well, 1= very poorly) (separate answer for every adjective)

- Fun
- Creative
- Approachable
- Customer-centric
- Open
- Professional
- Brave
- Reliable

11. On a scale of 1-5, how well does the brand stand behind the following values? (5= very well, 1= very poorly) (separate answer for each company value)

- Freedom
- Uniqueness
- Openness
- Positivity
- Adaptability
- Courage
- Reliability
- Competence
- Respectfulness
- Responsibility

*Brand Performance*

12. On a scale of 1-5, how positive or negative your experiences with this brand have been? (5= very positive, 1= very negative)

13. Compared to other brands in the category, how well does this brand provide the basic functions of the product or service category? (5= very well, 1= very poorly)

14. Compared to other brands in the category, how much does this brand provide additional benefits to the basic functions of the category? (5= very much, 1= very little)

15. Compared to other brands in this category, how high or low is the price level of this brand? (5= very high, 1= very low)

16. How reliable is this brand in terms of consistency in performance? (5= very reliable, 1= very unreliable)
17. How effective is this brand's service? (5= very effective, 1= very ineffective)
18. How efficient is this brand's service in terms of speed and responsiveness? (5= very efficient, 1= very inefficient)
19. How helpful and caring are the providers of this brand's service? (5= very helpful and caring, 1= not at all helpful and caring)
20. How pleasant the look and feel of this brand is? (5= very pleasant, 1= very unpleasant)