



Premium Brand Identity and value adding emotional storytelling

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Abstract:	
<p>This thesis is made into a case study as it has been commissioned by the ceramic tableware company Vaja Finland. The case owner wanted to research what the cornerstones of a Premium Brand on the Finnish market would look like, and how they themselves could be represented as one. Emotional storytelling was added to help them implement value adding marketing, this to get their customers excited about the Brand and what the company stands for. The researched theory contains what a Premium Brand is and how Brand identity affects the brand image and how it affects the positioning on the market. Then following marketing- theory and tools like SWOT and the Marketing Mix was added to help get a clearer picture of where Vaja Finland's Brand currently stands. The benchmarking model PCDL was implemented to get a picture of Vaja Finland's competitors, and if some of their marketing techniques could help inspire Vaja Finland how they could update their own website / webshop and social media channels. Interviews with the case owner gave a picture of where the company currently stands and opened ideas for how and what kind of emotional storytelling could be used to add value into future advertisement campaigns. Based on the findings gathered via the marketing analyses, the author was able to create a personal Brand Identity Prism (designed by Kapferer) for Vaja Finland. Through it they will be able to see what their Premium Brand value cornerstones are and what kind of emotional storytelling could enhance or add value to their future marketing strategies. Even though this thesis was focused on a specific company, the structure and models used here can help any small business owner get a better grip of where they should start when trying to define or create their own Premium Brand Identity, and how emotional storytelling can be defined and used to enhance or create value for advertisement purposes.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

When looking at today's businesses one thing is clear, the ones who succeed usually have a strong brand and a great story that customers can relate to. Branding and brand identity become an extremely important aspect in a company's marketing and customer value management. Brands are more than just names and symbols; they are the key element in a company's relationship with its consumers. By building a strong brand equity, customers are more likely to stay loyal, because they value the brand more than their tangible assets.

Successful branding requires a well-planned strategy; it will help define and add value to the customers and most likely convince them to buy the products. Famous companies like Coca-Cola, Nike or Harley-Davidson have not succeeded because they deliver unique benefits or reliable services; instead they have succeeded because they have created strong images and connections with their customers across different cultures (Kotler et al., 2006). A good brand makes the customers feel good about the choices they have made and helps them believe that they made the right decision when buying a specific product from a specific company.

Due to the digitalisation, the world has gotten smaller and companies may have difficulties attracting customers because of the wide range of brands. Old standing premium companies can rely on their long history to keep on converting old and new customers, but newer companies are facing challenges in getting market shares, as they don't possess the long trustworthy history. A strong brand identity and the art of storytelling can be used as valuable marketing tools to enhance value, and if used rightfully they can become crucial components of a long and successful customer conversion plan.

Strong brand identity will help a company differentiate themselves from potential competitors, as customers understand and appreciate the values and personality they are representing. Storytelling can be used as an inbound strategy-marketing tool to help attract customers to a specific company instead of companies vying for their attention (HubSpot, 2018). According to Kimball (Kimball, 2018), the brand identity comes alive with the help of storytelling, the two exist symbiotically, enforcing one another. This thesis will examine if and how a strong brand identity and emotional

storytelling can help a premium brand company build a steady foundation by attracting and maintaining a loyal customer flow.

1.2 Research aim

The thesis aims to give a good understanding how premium branding, a strong brand identity and emotional storytelling can add value to the case owners' concept and help them understand how they could improve their marketing. The thesis will focus on existing brand identity theory including premium branding, brand equity, positioning- and value creation. The Storytelling theory explores how it could create or add value to both customer and the company itself. The goal is to assist the case owner Vaja Finland to recognize and reinforce their own brand identity, which will later help them to identify what cornerstones their storytelling should consist of to create or enhance value to their brand. Ultimately, this thesis should help Vaja Finland reach a good premium brand foundation that they can stand on for years to come. Even if the thesis is written to answer Vaja Finland's inquiries, the reader should get a basic understanding of what tools small premium brand companies can use to conclude their brand identity and how storytelling as a marketing tool can add value to their brands concept.

1.3 Research questions

The thesis focuses on understanding what and how a strong brand identity and emotional storytelling can add value to Vaja Finland and help them differentiate themselves from their immediate competitors on the Finnish market. The research questions are:

- What are the cornerstones of Vaja Finland's premium brand identity?
- What kind of emotional storytelling can create or enhance value to Vaja Finland's brand?

1.4 Delimitations

The case owner Vaja Finland wanted to research what a premium brand looks like on the Finnish market and how they can differentiate themselves from their immediate competitors. Because the case owners' requests were so specific, the theoretical part is limited to branding theory with special focus on premium brand identity. Another limitation is that the study is positioned from

the perspectives of the case company and its corporate brand identity, and not on how the brands image is perceived by its customers. The thesis focuses and interprets Vaja Finland's inner thoughts and feelings about its corporate brand identity and possible value adding marketing.

As Vaja Finland is on the brink of entering the Finnish market with full force, they are required to focus on value building marketing tools that can be implemented to the brand itself, instead of launching costly depthless campaigns that might not achieve any results. Persona storytelling was the first option as a marketing tool (Herskovitz, 2010), because Vaja Finland was founded by one designer and one ceramic model maker and the personal story of these two could have been wittingly used. However, it was quickly found ill-suited because the owners would in the end always need to focus more on the actual production, instead of playing a major part in a time-consuming marketing plan. Instead, the decision was made to focus on the product inspiration and company history to create a good story. As proven storytelling can be used as a co-creation tool to give a premium brand that extra factor that it needs to have to be able to convince the customer to buy more expensive products (HubSpot, 2018). In addition, Kimberly describes storytelling in the magazine Forbes as a fundamental human experience that unites people and drives stronger, deeper connections. Moreover, when communicating the brand through stories companies have a better chance to implement themselves into their customers' lives. Telling stories is an inexpensive way to create value not only for the brand but also for the consumers; as emotional connections are hard to break once they have been formed (Kimberly, 2018).

When customer segmentation or a targeted market is mentioned in the thesis, it doesn't take into consideration if the marketing communication is done for B2B or B2C. Instead it reflects all customers that in general would be interested of buying Vaja Finland's products.

1.5 Structure of thesis

The thesis consists of six different chapters, which are Introduction, Theoretical background, Methodology of the study, Empirical research, Findings & Discussion and Recommendation.

The first chapter consisting of the introduction is where the basic background information of the study is explained, also including research aim & questions, delimitations, theoretical framework, methods & material, and the structure of the thesis.

The second chapter consists of the theoretical background, and it covers various theories with reference to the study. This part will support the empirical study and research objectives.

The following part is the methodology of the study, which discusses the methods and approaches of the research and how they were supported and implemented in the thesis. The empirical research section is embedded in the Method chapter. It explains how the theory has been used when analysing the data collected concerning Vaja Finland, and then presents the results achieved by the research and models.

The fifth chapter talks about the Discussion, which is done based on the findings of the empirical research throughout the study. Finally, the Recommendation chapter will give the reader an overview of the data result to support the thesis as well as suggestions to Vaja Finland how they could benefit from the findings.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter contains a review of the academic literature and research / marketing tools that are relevant to the scope of this thesis. The theoretical background begins with a discussion of how brands are built up and what factors company branding consists of. Following a discussion how brand identity plays a huge role of how a company portrays themselves towards the customer and what attributes will help keep customers loyal. Afterward, several marketing- and branding tools are introduced, and how these are implemented in chapter 4 to answer the thesis research questions. Furthermore, in the literature review the focus of the thesis is on premium branding and brand identity and not the image that results from the company's inner thoughts and feelings about its corporate brand identity.

2.1 Branding

The company Brand is the most important business asset that plays a significant role in improving the lives of consumers and contributes to the financial equity of the firm (Kotler P et al., 2006). Kapferer describes branding to be, "much more than just giving a brand a name and signalling to the outside world that such a product or service has been stamped with the mark and imprint of an organisation. It requires a corporate long-term involvement, a high level of resources and

skills” (Kapferer, 2008). Branding is the action a company takes to build a certain image the customer perceives of their company.

2.1.1 Premium vs. Luxury Branding

The authors of the marketing Blog BrandUNIQ say that a premium brand demands a premium price that can be justified rationally because of the superior attributes that comes along with the product or service. Usually premium brands reach their status symbol after years of delivering on its promise. However, for a premium brand to be profitable they need to act like ordinary brands, meaning following the principles of mass production, broad distribution, and fast delivery. It is vital to understand that Luxury brands and Premium brands are two separate entities. Luxury means that the quality of the product or service can't be justified when the price tag usually exceeds its functional value. Luxury shoppers seek a sense of belonging to a certain social class where exclusivity and limited production is king. (BrandUNIQ, 2017)

2.1.2 Premium brand building

Premium brands can be introduced in almost any category that presents such an opportunity. The higher price is often seen as the first indicator of a superior product but that alone doesn't automatically make it a premium brand. The starting point in building a premium brand is creating a realistic segmentation of what “category a company wishes to establish themselves in”. The idea is to understand potential benefits consumers are willing to pay a premium for. The benefits can include superior materials or ingredients, unique / distinctive / attractive / functional designs, better performance, cost-effective, sustainability / ethically sourced products or be a local business with locally made products. (BrandUNIQ, 2017)

Products that are difficult to differentiate functionally can be bundled into an “overall package” and positioned as a premium offering. The factors of an overall package can vary from quantifiable benefits e.g. company experience, better product delivery, superior guarantee, “social” reputation etc. The benefits and the premium associated with are only relevant within the context of each category, by reference to the lower-cost brands. Price elasticity is important when it comes to premium branding, since the products are mass-produced, as they need to appeal to a broad variety of consumers. That is why the premium price needs to be within reach to most

people in the company's target groups, even if it requires some small sacrifices from both parties. (BrandUNIQ, 2017)

A good communication strategy is key if a premium brand wants to succeed in communicating the benefitted value of the price premium product or service. Some attributes that are easy to see (superior design) requires little explanation, while other intangible assets may require furthermore explanation. Premium brands also need to recognize that with higher price tags comes higher consumer expectations, which is why the customer- experience and service quality need to be on an excellent level.

In today's digital world social media can break or make a brand, and it is why endorsement or brand ambassadors' work well for premium brands. Influencers are typically attracted by the opportunity to associate themselves with premium brands, which in turn will help elevate their own image to their followers. Brand "communities" built alongside the premium brand is a good approach to keep an open conversation platform for the masses, company messages can easily be transmitted, and customers unknowingly become "message transmitters" to their surroundings. However, it is well to remember that premium brands must be built on a sustainable competitive advantage. Innovation needs to be constant in a premium brand, because at some point, the market and consumer expectations eventually catch up and the brand may fall into a gap where they are no longer providing value and may lose their premium status. (BrandUNIQ, 2017)

2.1.3 Brand equity

Brand equity is the set of assets and liabilities linked into the brand. Almost every marketing activity has a potential impact on brand equity because it represents the effects of marketing investments that have been accumulated into the brand. As well as marketing decisions and marketing conditions affect brand equity e.g. country of origin, slogan, portfolio of products and packages, company image, promotional events etc. (Wita Efanny et al., 2018). There are three types of brand assets / brand equity that can help a company create competitive advantages – brand awareness, brand loyalty and brand associations. Figure 1 describes the relationship of the Brand Equity. (Aaker et al., 2010).

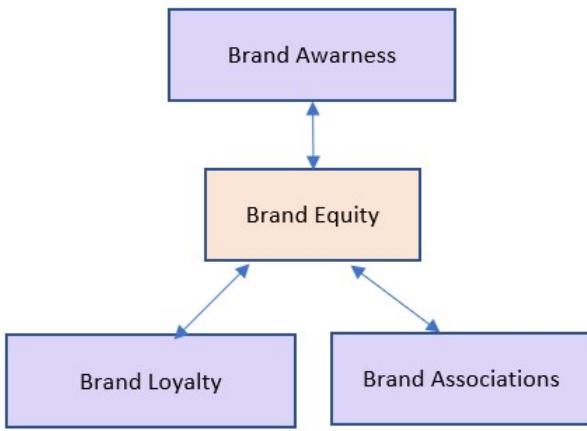


Figure 1. Brand Equity (Aaker et al., 2010).

2.1.3.1 *Brand Awareness*

David Aaker and Damien McLoughlin writes in their book “Strategic Market Management”, that brand awareness is not to be taken for granted as it can provide a sustainable competitive difference. Awareness provides the brand with a sense of familiarity, and people like the familiar. Secondly, name awareness can be a signal of presence, commitment and substance, and these attributes can help companies link their brand to the logic of “there is a reason why I know this name”. Thirdly, the salience of a brand will determine if it’s remembered at a key time in the customers purchasing process. It is necessary to build a strong brand awareness that also has a high recall factor, otherwise there is a high risk of the company failing due to the mass media bombarding customers with clutter and defusing marketing messages. One way to stand out is to extend the brand over many product categories or then go beyond the normal media channels and focus on event promotions, extra publicity, or other attention-building approaches. (Aaker et al., 2010).

2.1.3.2 *Brand Loyalty*

Long-lasting brand loyalty can be key in some business’s survival, as a good customer base will provide a high recall factor and provide enormous sustainable competitive advantages. Brand loyalty, or resistance to switching can be based on simple habits (lack of motivation), preference (likes the products/service), or switching costs (added costs). Customer loyalty will help keep marketing costs low, as it is much cheaper to keep existing customers happy than to try to reach new customers and persuade them to convert. The higher the loyalty, the easier it is to keep

customers happy. Secondly, the loyalty of existing customer represents the entry barrier that possible competitors need to overcome to require new customers. Businesses can protect their customers by signalling that they have high customer loyalty, and customer interest groups can be a good way to go about it. Thirdly, a relatively large, satisfied customer base provides the image of a brand as trustworthy and successful. Moreover, as discussed in the Strategic Market Management book; customers find comfort in the fact that others have selected the brand. Finally, brand loyalty can help businesses acquire the time needed to respond to market changes or product innovation needed to stay ahead of the competition. (Aaker et al., 2010).

2.1.3.3 Brand Associations

Aaker and McLoughlin says that, “the associations attached to a firm and its brands can be key enduring business assets, as they reflect the strategic position of the brand” (Aaker et al., 2010). Product attributes and customer benefits provide the reason why one should buy and is therefore the basis for brand loyalty. However, strong brands should go beyond product attributes to develop associations on other levels that can help differentiate oneself from other competitors. Value propositions specific for a business e.g. design, customer service, quality etc. will add value and help with brand association and ultimately enhancing the brands equity. (Aaker et al., 2010)

2.2 Brand Identity

Brand identity is the collections of tangible brand elements and it tells the story how a brand wants to be perceived, and it leads the brand image that the customer receives and interprets (Haaften, 2017). Brand identity should provide brand consistency and continuity. When companies have determined their identity, it will help them formulate current and future business strategy by making a brand unique. Figure 2 “Kapferer’s Identity and Image”, shows the relationship in a traditional communication model between identity and image. When companies communicate their content (messages) outward, a transaction is made, meaning the company / sender sells their Brand Identity and the customer receives it as the company’s Brand image (Kapferer J.N., 2004).

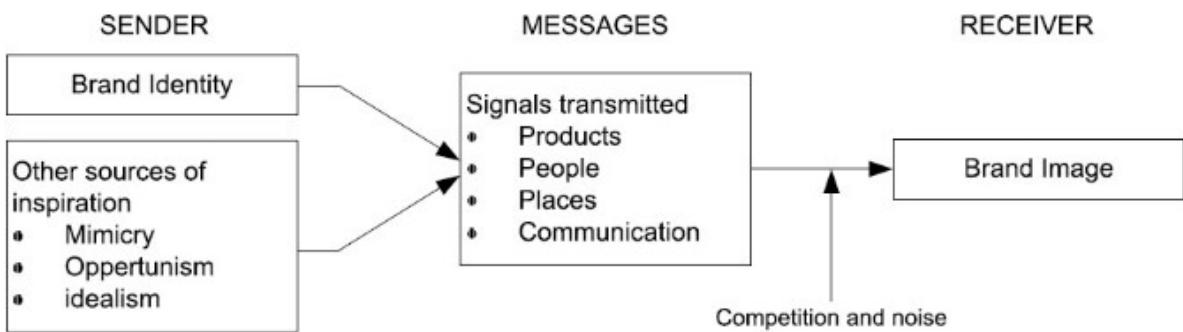


Figure 2. Kapferer's Identity and Image (Kapferer J.N., 2004)

2.2.1 Brand image and Positioning

Brand image is the customer's perception of a company's brand based on their interactions with them. It involves the brand's voice, vision, mission, core values, market position, customer quality and overall experience. A connection between a customer and brand doesn't always have to happen right away or be based on a specific purchase, but it can evolve over time and start from a customer following a brand to ending in purchases and long customer loyalty. Since customers can have different opinions of a brand, it's important to have consistency and work on maintaining it throughout the product's whole lifecycle. (Kaemingk, 2019)

Marion (2017) explains that brand positioning and the creation of a strong brand image, starts with the company understanding who and what their brand stands for. This will help the company position themselves in the market and win the loyalty of their targeted customers. Also understanding what sets a company apart from their competitors will help with marketing, e.g. why does their product create more value and uniqueness. In addition, once a company knows their strength and differentiation, they can better communicate their unique value to their customers. However, it is important to remember that brand positioning and image should not portray to difficult towards the customer, the company strategy can be as complex as wanted, but the customer should only see e.g. three words that summarize the company brand. (Marion, 2017)

2.2.2 Customer segmentation

Knowing and understanding customer segmentation is important to all companies, as it provides guidelines to which marketing tools and messages will work on specific customer groups. A business should gather demographic and psychographic data on their potential customers. For

example, in business-to-consumer marketing, companies might want to focus on age, gender, marital status, location and life stage. Then a segmentation can be created and a marketing plan can be put in place to best suit the specific customer segments, e.g. which communication channel will work best, is there possibility for upselling or cross selling, what kind of customer service is required etc. The bottom line is to understand your customers' personas and audiences, so the company can portray the right brand image and position for each customer segment. (Shopify, 2019)

2.3 Marketing – and Branding tools

Branding and marketing tools are necessary, because through these businesses will be able to build up their brand identities and use the right marketing channels to deliver important messages to their target markets and potential customers.

2.3.1 SWOT

The SWOT analysis (see figure 3) is a simple and useful framework for analysing a company's strengths and weaknesses, and for identifying both opportunities and threats. Used correctly the SWOT can help recognize niche areas in different markets and give advice on how to best develop them. The analysis can also be used to get a better understanding of potential competitors, which can then help craft the company to a better competitive position. (Mindtools, 2016)



Figure 3. SWOT Analysis model (Mindtools, 2016)

2.3.2 Marketing Mix

Marketing mix is one of the most valuable tools in marketing management and a direct link to brand equity; it's a combination of four factors that a company controls to influence consumers to purchase its products (see figure 4). J. McCarthy defined the 4P's in his book, "Basic Marketing – A Managerial Approach" in 1960, later Kotler adapted this concept and the four P's model have been proven to create attraction for sales promotion and boost volume of sales. The concept claims that in order to gain success and acquire marketing targets, a company should have their customer segmentations clear and then concentrate on the following four factors: product, price, promotion and place to help create marketing strategies for each segment. (Paxton, 2017)



Figure 4. Marketing Mix (Paxton, 2017)

2.3.3 Niche Marketing

Authors Tevfik Dalgic and Maarten Leeuw explain niche marketing to be an advertising strategy that focuses on a unique targeted market. Instead of marketing to everyone who could benefit from a specific product or service, this strategy focuses exclusively on one group – the niche market – or demographic of potential customer who would most benefit from the offerings. The benefit of niche marketing is that it allows brands to differentiate themselves and create unique solutions with a specific customer group. A company can use niche marketing to stand out, appear more valuable or build a stronger, long-lasting connection and brand identity with its ideal audience. Niche marketing can also be used by those who haven't engaged in it earlier, depending on the product or service it can help companies explore the opportunity to connect with a smaller, but more loyal customer segmentation instead of only focusing on larger and general market segmentations. (Dalgic Tevfik et al., 1998)

According to Shopify, by making the customer feel exclusive and unique will help result in attracting the buyer's attention and eventually winning their business. Shopify also claims that the most common ways to define a niche are based on the following criteria's:

- Price (high, moderate, discount)
- Demographic base (gender, age, income level, education level)
- Level of quality (premium, high, moderate, low, cheap)
- Psychographics (values, interest, attitudes)
- Geographic (the buyer's precise location)

(Shopify, 2019)

It is argued that niche marketing is usually only used by smaller companies but according to Dalgic and Leeuw the most successful medium-sized companies during the 90's were niche marketers. However, the thing smaller and medium-sized companies had in common were; they offered high value, charging a premium price and they created new experience curves and shaped strong corporate cultures- and visions. (Dalgic Tevfik et al., 1998)

2.3.4 Benchmarking

According to Andersen and Pettersen;" Benchmarking is the art of being humble enough to admit that someone else might be better than you and simultaneously being wise enough to be able to learn from them and become as good or even better" (Andersen B et al., 1995). Benchmarking describes a method that has the possibilities to make fast progresses in different processes. The aim is to learn from other organizations and implement or re-invent the processes to achieve the needed changes to become more successful in different business areas. The options on how to conduct benchmarking surveys are numerous, but this thesis will focus on process benchmarking with the help of competitive benchmarking, as they are seen to best gather information from similar and larger competitive companies. The purpose is to gather information that could give Vaja Finland ideas on how to learn and evolve their own marketing strategy and gain more market insight and shares.

Companies must firstly define the metrics that are to be utilized when making a competitive analysis; best practise is to use specific metrics that are easily compared to their own approach. The benefits of a successful analysis are an organized overview of your own company and how it performs on different levels, and what adjustment learnt from your competitors could be used to maximize your own companies' performance. That is why the PCDL Model was chosen as the benchmarking tool for this thesis. The PCDL model will focus on the following metrics while

comparing the competitors brand images: brand identity, website content, product information to add value, clear marketing strategies on the website and is storytelling used and how?

2.3.5 PCDL Model

The PCDL model presented in figure 5, can be used as a guideline for companies when building their brand identity in specific target markets or customer segmentations. According to Ekhlassi, the PCDL can help define what the aspects of the brand identity is for a company and also be used as a measurement tool when businesses need to calibrate their brands as competition intensifies and the customers' needs to evolve. (Ekhlassi. A et al., 2018)

When a company positions their Brand the right way, it positions them to have a high and valued place in their customers' minds. In addition, when combining different elements like benefits and intangible attributes, it will spark emotional associations for the customer towards the brand equity and it can define what kind of relationship the company and customer will have.

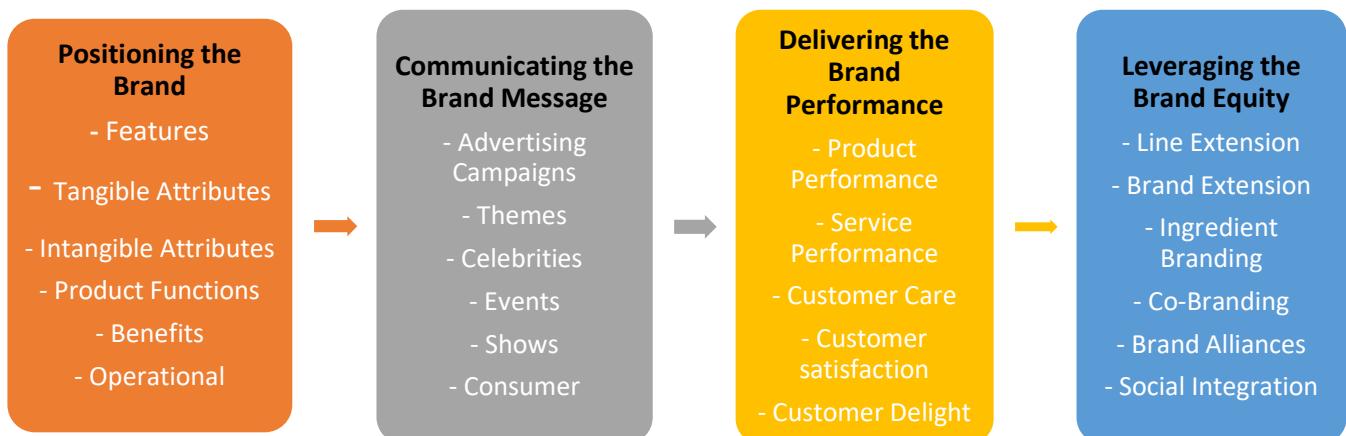


Figure 5. PCDL Model. (Ghodeswar, 2008)

Positioning the Brand correctly will help with Communicating the Brand message, because the usual challenges businesses face are; building brands that are noticed, remembered, changing perceptions, reinforces attitudes and creating deep customer relationships (Ghodeswar, 2008). Communication will help define what kind of feeling is portrayed and the type of customer relationship the company will have with a specific targeted market. According to Ghodeswar 2008, the major marketing channels of communication used to position a brand in the mind of consumers are; advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, sponsorships, endorsements,

public relations, the Internet / social media, and integrated brand communications. Successful brands are built through repetition of themes, values, and personality in different media channels. Moreover, as brands consists of both physical and conceptual attributes it will trigger associations for the customer, which then help create brand awareness for the company. The most successful brands follow what their competition is doing and adjust to better differentiate themselves and achieve advantages over their competitors.

Delivering the Brand performance means that a company spreads its vision across all departments to be able to hold its promise of consistency in all functions. Innovation, improving performance and customer care is necessary if a company wants to evolve and keep up with new and current competitors. Ghodeswar 2008 says " There's nothing that brings people together like stories about the bad service; whether it's a mobile phone that's cut off, a television that's on the blink or a washing machine that's collapsed, getting the situation rectified is every consumer's nightmare" (Ghodeswar, 2008). That is why customer service is so important, if a customer has a bad experience but a solution is provided fast and with care, then in the end the customer might still be delighted about the purchase.

Leveraging Brand equity means linking one brand with another in some way to leverage its brand equity. This is for example done because there is need for innovation, accessing new marketing areas, reaching new customer segments etc. Two or more businesses can benefit from this co-branding or extension if it's done correctly, but if something would go wrong both the umbrella brand and the extension would suffer from it.

The Study Hub IvyPanda has done an analytical essay of how the PCDL model can be used on a company like Coca-Cola. The essay is a good example of how this specific model can help any company understand what to take into account when building their brand identity in a specific targeted market or customer segmentation. The outcome is easily understandable and explained and when added into the model, the result is as shown below in example 1, it is directly quoted from the essay:

Brand positioning: "Coca-cola has managed to position its brand in a manner that the consumers prefer it to the competitors. This has in effect, enhanced the brand loyalty and consequently allowed the brand to enjoy a brand presence and an unprecedented preference among many consumers of soft drinks." (IvyPanda, 2019)

Communicating the brands message: “The advertisement has to be creative enough though, since they need to capture the imaginative and the subconscious of the consumer (Assael, 2001).

Advertisement also seeks to differentiate the product from the competitors. Through advertising, Coca-cola has managed to communicate the value proposition of its flagship product; coke, and this has propelled the brand to high ends among the consumers’ preferences.” (IvyPanda, 2019)

Delivering the brand performance: “Coca-cola company has carried numerous market studies in order to ensure that the customers continue to enjoy an unrivalled satisfaction from the consumption of their products. This has enabled the company to maintain its products as top brand over a long period of time.” (IvyPanda, 2019)

Leveraging the brand equity: “This is a strategy that seeks to link the brand to another entity. This is a strategy that is mainly used in order to seek a new set of association. It is common with companies that have brands which are consumed alongside related products (Onkvisit & Shaw, 2004). This strategy, is not commonly used by Coca-cola since the company manufactures, distributes, and markets its own product. In addition, the Coca-cola products can be consumed solely hence no need for brand association.”

Example 1. Use of PCDL model on Coca-Cola by StudyHub IvyPanda. (IvyPanda, 2019)

The PCDL model is simplified enough and useful when building Brand strategies while comparing companies within the same market segments. It provides a larger picture and will make the findings easy to see and compare. Other more detailed models could be used when just analysing a singular company or trying to see the whole representation of the organization’s brand architecture.

(IvyPanda, 2019)

2.4 Emotional Storytelling

The marketing blog Hubspot describes storytelling to be a process that uses facts and fiction to communicate something to one’s audience. Some stories are factual, and some are embellished or improvised in order to better explain the brands core message to its audience. Storytelling can be seen as an art form that touches almost every culture and society, this because stories have a universal language that should inspire and stimulate a person’s imagination and passion and prosper a personal connection between a brand and its customers. (HubSpot, 2018)

To sum up, storytelling should:

- simplify complex messages
- bring people together
- inspire and motivate

(HubSpot, 2018)

Lani Peterson explains, (in her article “The science behind the Art of Storytelling” for the Harvard Business Publishing), that stories are the essential building block when humans are trying to grow and learn. Storytelling is not something to take lightly, as it is through stories that our minds form and examine our own truths and beliefs. Neuroscientists have proven that when we are listening to a good story – rich in detail, full of metaphor, expressive of character- humans tend to imagine themselves in the same situation. The article quotes storyteller Leo Widrich as he has noticed that when people hear stories, ”not only are the language processing parts in our brain activated, but any other area in our brain that we would use when experiencing the events of the story are, too”. Scientists have also discovered that chemicals like cortisol, dopamine and oxytocin are released in the brain when we’re told a story that we could connect to. (Peterson, 2017)

Above meaning that customers most likely form connections with the brands they buy from, depending on the brand identity and how well it is perceived, the connection might be deeper or non-existing. Nevertheless, one can’t dismiss that it is scientifically proven that companies need to take into consideration the brand identity they are portraying and making sure they enhance their values by telling meaningful emotional stories. Via emotional stories, existing- and potential customers will likely feel inspired to commit and the company will gain better selling potential and possibly build long-lasting and fruitful relationships with their consumers.

Emotional storytelling is seen as a form of storytelling, even if it goes hand in hand with brand storytelling. When getting consumers to have an emotional reaction to a brand will not only help securing the brands name, but it will also help keep their customers loyal. The marketing experts at Inkbot Design have written a blog post named “Is Emotional Storytelling the Future of Branding?”, the research behind shows that humans don’t make decisions logically but foremost emotionally. In addition, the authors write: “In fact, it now seems that we use our rationality only to find arguments which defend the emotional position we took” (Inkbot Design, 2018). The

authors simplify this by explaining that consumers work like lawyers, first they take a position and then they find arguments that support their view. Moreover, by appealing to their emotions first and compelling them to like the brand, will help give the company time to explain how their service or product could benefit to their already inclined targeted market.

2.4.1 Emotional Brand storytelling

Brand storytelling is gaining recognition in the marketing world, as it has been proven that stories stimulate brain activity and wakes people's attention. Michel Brenner explains brand storytelling; "using a narrative to connect your brand to customers, with a focus on linking what you stand for to the values you share with your customers" (Brenner, 2018). With narrative he means storytelling elements, a good story should include characters, settings, conflict, action, climax and dénouement. By creating these points in a brand's story, will help make it easy for the audience to follow along and remember the company's core values. The important thing is to recognize that the company is not the main character in the story, but actually the customer itself. The customer must be the hero and the company brand is just the guide. The driving force behind the business should be the selling point and not only the product, because that is what differentiates one company from another. The values are what defines the company, they should be real, and not something a business would expect that their customer would want to hear. For example, if a salesperson would be willing to bend the rules to land a big deal, then "integrity" is not the right brand value; winning is. If that's truly what the company values, then they should embrace it and not twist it into something "nicer". (Brenner, 2018)

Brand storytelling is creating stories that attract attention through emotion awakening and with the help of continual connections via repetition across the companies' values. The key is to find what emotions would work best for one specific brand and then start embedding it into the branding. Positive emotions are for example joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, inspiration, awe, love, satisfaction and relief. Sometimes it is enough to let an employee tell the brands story on the company's Instagram account and other times it might need more work and help from marketing experts. However, at some point these kind of marketing tactics will become over-exploited and the people will become sceptical and weary. According to Inkbot Design that time hasn't come yet as brand storytelling is still a relatively new term. That is why this is a good tool to use right now when there isn't a lot of scepticism going around, instead there is opportunity to work emotional branding into the brands identity.

2.5 Brand Identity Prism

Cliff Ettridge insists that brands need to be built from the inside out and take into consideration both the employees and customers if a brand identity is to succeed (theTeam, 2018). Brand identity is all about how people perceives the brand, what they might expect, and how they relate to it. The identity can be projected, and its efficacy can be measured thus allowing the company to change and fine-tune its strategy to improve the results. (Freemanagementbooks, 2018) In 1996, a professor of marketing strategy named Jean-Noel Kapferer came up with the idea of representing brand identity as a hexagonal prism to help show the process that is otherwise multi-layered and complicated. Figure 6 shows Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism and what elements are included in the prism: physique, personality, culture, relationship, self-image, and reflection. (Inkbot Design, 2017)

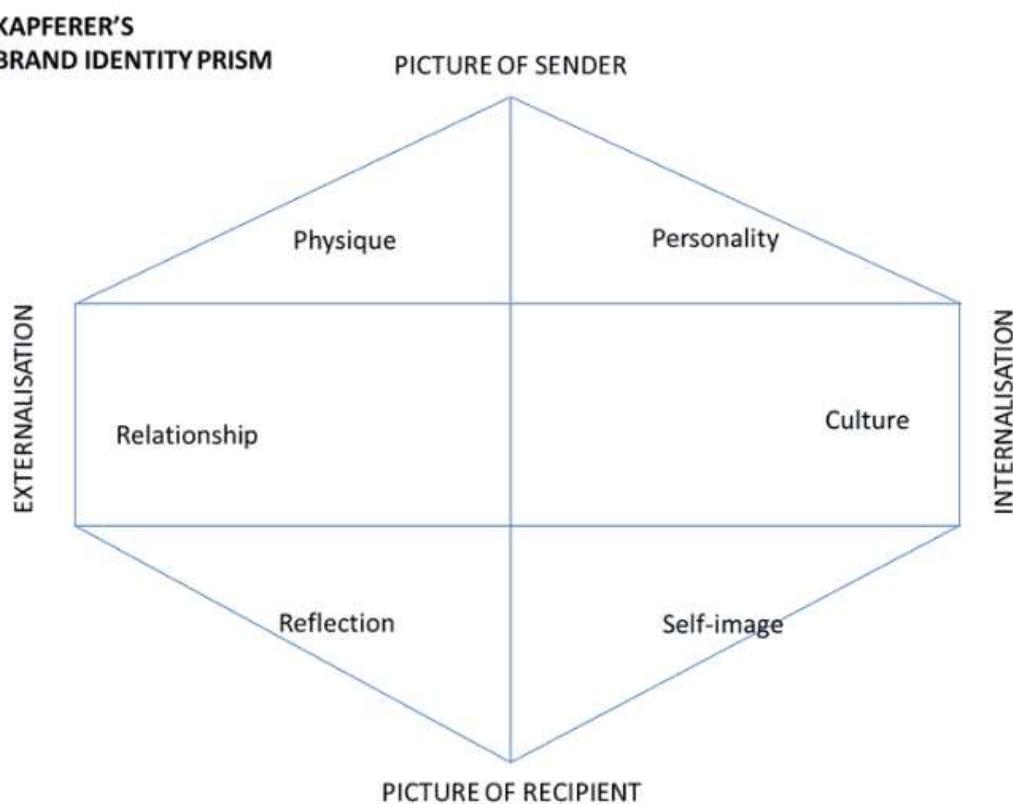


Figure 6. Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (Inkbot Design, 2017)

The professionals at the Creative Branding Agency Inkbot Design say, “Successful brands manage to project a positive and coherent image into the minds of their consumers, which means that all of these six facets need to be carefully intertwined and aligned so that each contributes to

establishing and maintaining brand essence” (Inkbot Design, 2017). The goal by identifying above aspects in a company is to help strengthen and make the company brand more recognisable and memorable in people minds. A powerful brand will radiate a positive brand image and it can significantly affect its perceived quality, and without a good brand image, it would be almost impossible to create customer loyalty and trust. Inkbot Design also claims that 80% of a company’s future revenue comes from 20% of their existing customers, so getting the branding, marketing, and sales efforts right is crucial.

2.5.1 Kapferer Brand Identity Prism

The first element in Kapferer’s Brand identity prism (see figure 6) is **Physique**, this includes the physical characteristics of the products; the colour; the logo, the typeface; the shape, packaging and all the other visual clues that help the customers identify your brand with a single glance. It is important that the connection is incorporated within the whole office and its employees.

Personality: The voice of the product should represent the owners and personnel and be true to the company’s character throughout the entire lifecycle. The brand personality needs to be aligned with the target audience, so the relation to the products are easy. For example, when a consumer imagines the company it should be clear what kind of brand personality they are thinking of. Is it meant to be a modern and short-lived brand for youngsters, or is it aiming to be high quality and long lasting for consumers with a higher income?

Culture: Some key elements of a brand may be deeply rooted in a local culture. It might be a powerful emotional tie, which eventually helps customers connect and associate a brand with a specific area, culture, or value. It is important that the company culture comes across in all playing fields, e.g. customer service, HR, sales, and visuals. For example, some brands have managed to capitalise on the fact they are believed to have originated in a different country, this can be useful when the company needs help with sales in a country that is not used to buying internationally.

Relationship: A part of building a well-known brand is having an excellent relationship with all customers. However, there are a different kind of relationships and it is up to the company to decide how they would like to connect with their targeted audience. Nevertheless, it is proven that when customers feel they are valued and can associate with a brand, then it is more likely for them to make a purchase and keep on coming back.

Reflection: The difference between self-image and reflections is that the former is about the customers' idea of themselves and the latter is how brands perceive their audience. The concept is to have a brand that reflects the personality and identity of the targeted market. That is why the marketing efforts of the company should go hand in hand with a particular demographic area and the marketing messages matching that specific areas income group.

Self-image: The buyer of a particular brand is looking to receive a certain feeling about themselves when purchasing an item from a specific company. The image that the brand has in the world, and what the brand says to others, goes a long way toward improving the self-image of the buyers themselves. So, work out how customers and employees want to be seen in the world and then show them how the brand fits that mould.

(Freemanagementbooks, 2018)

3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHOD

The research approach and methodology of the thesis inform the reader the chosen research method and explains the structure of how the empirical research section has been gathered and how data has been analysed. For this thesis a qualitative method was used, as it allows the study to get more comprehensive answers from the case company, as their own thoughts and reflections give weight to the foundation of how they perceive their own Brand Identity to be.

This thesis is based on a case study for the company Vaja Finland and the author has chosen to gather the needed data for this thesis by conducting semi-structured interviews with the case owner and by compiling a benchmarking study of their chosen competitors. The information gathered is primary data from the competitors' websites and has been combined into a desktop benchmarking study. This will give a better understanding of how their competitors Brand identities are currently portrayed online and if there are some marketing techniques that Vaja Finland could benefit from. The objective is to gather the findings of the theory, interviews and benchmarking study and construct a "Brand Identity Prism" that is tailor made for Vaja Finland (figure 14 portrays the result). The Brand Identity prism will help the case company see their potential areas, help create a meaningful marketing strategy, eventually help keep consistency throughout the company and have customers staying loyal.

In the following chapter the case company Vaja Finland is presented, this will help the reader get a better understanding what the company is all about and where they currently stand in their own business circle.

3.1 Case Company Introduction

Vaja Finland was established in 2011 and is a privately owned company. Their main product focus is high-quality mostly handmade ceramic tableware (mugs, saucers, jars & carafes) made at their own factory in Porvoo Finland. They also sell some other kitchen accessories (kitchen towels, breadboards, rags), yet they are made in Scandinavia and only their designs are printed on the products. They plan to expand their tableware family in the near future. They are a small company with under 10 employees, and they all play an important role in the production as all are specialized in their own field.

In the beginning Vaja Finland's market area was focused on their own designs and custom ordered tableware sets to businesses like hotels and restaurants, however they now plan to slightly change their business model and mainly focus on manufacturing their own productions and designs. Sales have so far mostly been done via physical attendance at different fairs in Finland or via other retailers' shops or webshops. In 2018 they opened their own factory shop and have recently relaunched their own webshop and updated their website.

3.1.1 Background Vaja Finland

Vaja Finland was born from the passion towards high quality, classical and practical products. The owners Fred Owren and Henna Lamberg (both prior employees at the Finnish Arabia factory) decided to team up because of their shared interest in the challenges that working with ceramic material brings and out of respect for Finnish handcrafting skills. Together they moved to the small town Lovisa, where the idyllic city with its sea and forests inspired them to combine their expertise of ceramic model making and design. They decided to renovate a shed (meaning Vaja in Finnish) in their own garden, and there they began planning product development and production of their own tableware family.

Gradually the idea of a brand came to life that would combine their cornerstone values; tableware made with big passion, Finnish quality, and functional design. From the start it was also clear that

their production would stay in Finland and in their own factory, that way they could ensure high quality products and an ethical production chain. Today their factory is located in Porvoo, a city known for its handcraft traditions and knowledge. Vaja Finland has been built up by professionals from the ceramic industry and their goal is to create 100% Finnish, premium quality, beautiful and smart designed products that surprises with its functionality and is intended to be passed on from generation to generation.

3.1.2 Marketing

Vaja Finland is establishing themselves as a high-quality premium brand in Finland and their own marketing channels are currently on their website and social media platforms, Instagram and Facebook. However, marketing thru social media has not been a focal point either, so one could say that exposure to potential customers have been very slim. Nevertheless, their decision to keep a lower profile is related to the high-quality standard they have at Vaja Finland. Because the manufacturing process is so demanding and time consuming, they have had to hold back on full market entry, as their stock is not large enough to handle many big orders at the same time. This is also a reason why their own webshop launch took so long (implemented summer 2019). Consequently, sales have either been outsourced (thru other retailers / fairs) or focused to their own factory shop where first and second quality products are being sold.

Vaja Finland relies on word of mouth and fair- and retailer's exposure to reach new customers. They believe their targeted market are women of all ages- and social groups and men who have a good economy. The primary customer is between 30-50 years old and purchases the products for themselves or as presents.

The following chapter will present a more detailed plan on how the thesis structure was formed together (see figure 7), and how data was collected and analysed to give answers to the research questions.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The thesis has been formed to help Vaja Finland get answers on their current questions about their premium brand identity and what kind of emotional storytelling could create or enhance value into their brand. Figure 7 is a simplified picture of how the thesis structure is built up and what

the different research questions will answer and which branding, or marketing tool has been used to support the findings.

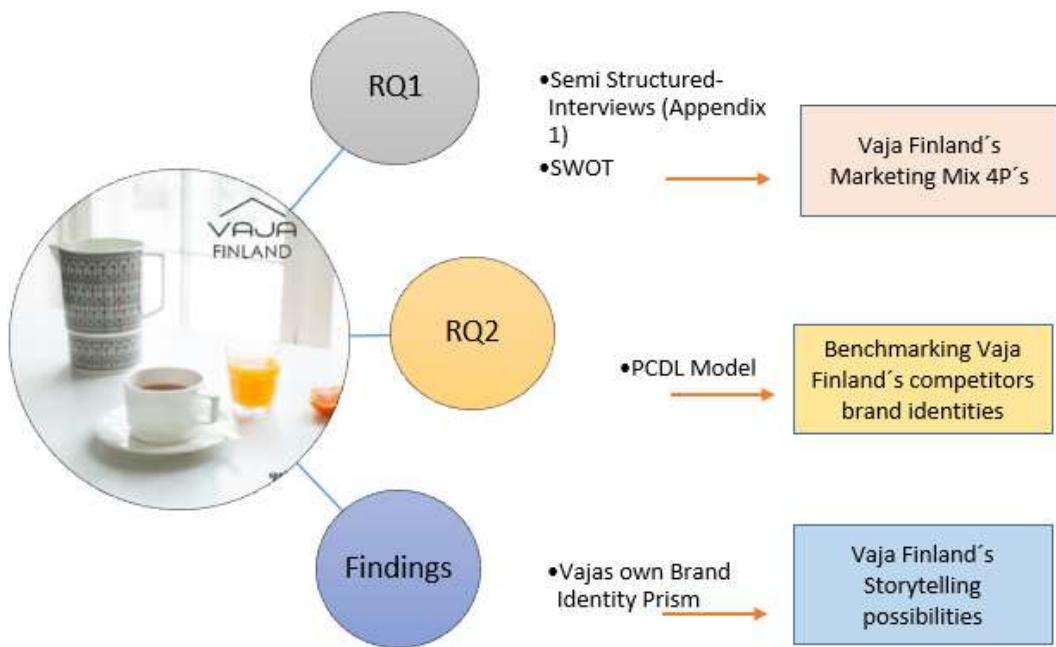


Figure 7. Structure of the research questions development model

3.2.1 Research question 1

Following sub chapters will discuss figure 7 (Structure of the research questions development model) and where or how the information was gathered and later analysed in the different Branding- and marketing models.

3.2.1.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The data collection consists firstly of an empirical study approach containing semi-structured interviews with the case owner. This was necessary so the author could get a detailed understanding about how Vaja Finland perceives their brand identity and what they feel are their value adding cornerstones. The questions are based on the theory gathered for this thesis and also the authors own thoughts on what could possible challenge and inspire the interview objects to put words down on how they would like to take the company forward and also answer the actual research questions. The questions can be found in Appendix 1 and the interview objects were one of the owner Henna Lamberg and their former head of sales Maria Ray. The interviews took place at their office in Porvoo during February 2020 and both parties where interviewed separately. The

language used during the interviews where Finnish and Swedish even if the questions were asked in English, this so the interview objects could discuss in their language and be able to explain emotional thoughts on their own mother though. This option gives both the author, and the interview objects more room to express oneself and adds credibility to the thesis. The reasoning for interviewing both separately was done because it would be more distinct to hear the creative-and business perspectives to their answers, without confusing or creating internal discussion between both persons during the interview. Both interviews where recorded and saved but not transcribed into this thesis, this due to some business sensitive issues where discussed.

A thematic analysis has been done to give the author a foundation to stand on and define relevant themes in the interviews. A proper analysis of the collected data ensures that the data is thoroughly processed and gives the reader an understanding of how the conclusions have been reached. A thematic analysis strives to identify patterns of themes in the interview data, these can then be analysed on their own and help get a good understanding of what the interview objects mean and the author can then analyse their answers (Mortensen, 2020). Appendix 2 is structured by what the interview objects have discussed during the interviews and their comments have been added as citations in the analysis depending on which theme it suits best. As the interviews where done in different languages, the author has freely translated the citations into English. Even if the interviews where done separately, both interview objects answers and point of views will be discussed simultaneously in the “interview findings” chapter. The decision was made as this structural method will give a better overall understanding of what the interview objects combined expertise perceives the values and cornerstones of Vaja Finland to be.

3.2.1.2 SWOT Model

After conducting the interviews, the author was able to base a SWOT analysis of the company to receive a better picture of where Vaja Finland’s strengths and weaknesses are. The information was gathered from the interviews thru the thematic analysis conducted (appendix 2) and Vaja Finland’s own website, webshop and their social media channels and then added into the SWOT model. The interviews gave a good picture of how the company would like to be perceived and what their strengths are, in addition with their online sites it became clear where the company actually stands as these are the main communication channels with their customers. Vaja Finland has re-launched their website 23.11.2020 however, this thesis findings are based on the old website that was active from 2019 until 22.11.2020. Even the webshop has been updated into the new websites format, but the product photographs and content remain the same as from 2019.

The main aspects the author looked at on the website was the content itself, was there enough information about the company, how did the visuals look, how did their website work, did all the tabs work and where there any marketing strategy or storytelling used. On the webshop the researcher checked it's functionality and visual content, was it logical and easy to use, have they implemented any customer value adding marketing techniques etc. Vaja Finland's social media channels were checked for the quality of their posts, number of likes and possible advertising campaigns or collaborations (going back 5 months from February 2020). This helped give a good objective introduction of how the company does their branding and what marketing strategy they might have. It also helped analyse the interviewees answers better and give a deeper understanding of their intentions, as it gave a clearer understanding to better see where their weaknesses, threats and opportunities come from and if they go hand in hand with the owners' point of view.

3.2.1.3 Marketing Mix

According to the journalist Anusha: "branding is the identity of a product or service and when adding the Marketing mix model, the findings will help a company advertise their products correctly to the targeted market" (Anusha J., 2016). By using the Marketing mix model as the foundation, it was logical to decide what features should be looked after and highlighted to be able to make an objective assessment of what assets are currently valuable and practical for different marketing techniques. Therefore, based on the information gathered to the SWOT analysis and the discussions I had during the interviews (thematic analysis, appendix 2), I was able to interpret and add the findings into a Marketing Mix model made specifically for Vaja Finland. Even if the targeted customers are still somewhat unclear for Vaja Finland, the analysis should help the company get a better understanding how their products could best be perceived to a larger customer group. The model should also let them better understand how they currently distribute their products, how they interact with their customers and what benefits their brand has that could help differentiate themselves from their competitors. These all combined will give Vaja Finland a good understanding of which assets they need to develop, and which could be utilized to get better visibility on the market and help promote their products.

3.2.2 Research question 2 and the PCDL Model

Because Vaja Finland is a young company with limited business experience, the practical thing was to make part of the thesis into a desktop study. With the help of a website benchmarking study

using the PCDL model as the substructure, two of Vaja Finland's immediate tableware competitors' and one Finnish handbag manufacturers' possible marketing strategies and websites were benchmarked and added into the analysing model.

All companies are currently strong contenders on the Finnish market, and the benchmarking objects Vaja Finland choose were Iittala, Pentik and Lovia. Iittala and Pentik are within the same market segment as Vaja Finland and chosen because they have reached sales and survived on the market for a long time, and that is something Vaja Finland someday hope to achieve as well. The final company chosen into the benchmarking study is the premium handbag manufacturer Lovia, this due to the owners of Vaja Finland feel that the accessories/clothing industry is always a step ahead when it comes to design and marketing ideas, and because Lovia is also aiming to be a high-quality premium brand like themselves.

Main items that were investigated are also presented in the model of the PCDL model as "Brand attributes". The Brand attributes are the competitor's; brand positioning, how they communicate their brand messages, how are they delivering their brand performance and how are they leveraging their brand equity. The benchmarking study is based solely on information that was gathered from all companies' website's and can be accessed by anyone. The benchmarking findings were added into the PCDL Model using Excel as the IT tool, figure 13 contains Vaja Finland's and their competitors results and the foundation is a copy of the model used in the actual study made by Ghodeswar in 2008. The Brand attributes are listed and then the benchmarking findings for each company has been added in the columns under each Brand. The idea with the PCDL model is for Vaja Finland to gain access to valuable information on how their premium brand competitors are succeeding or "failing" in delivering a good branding experience to their customers.

Examples of attributes that I looked for:

- Do the competitors have a clear slogan
- Do they use emotional storytelling to build a connection with their customers?
- Is the targeted market clear on their webpages?
- How are they adding value for the customer?
- How are the companies differentiating themselves?

This model is just scratching the surface of what actually goes into the visual branding identity and marketing campaigns, but it is still enough to give a good understanding what all companies

are doing right now and how they portrait themselves too their online customer. The findings are meant to help Vaja Finland get a picture of how their competitors are portraying their brand identities online and if there is something that their own business could benefit from when planning their brand identity and marketing strategy / campaigns.

A content analysis was used to document the collected data, as this allows the researcher to find out about the purposes, messages, and effects of communication content. The advantages of a content analysis is the simplicity of the data collection, it is transparent and replicable and it is very flexible as all one needs is access to appropriate sources. (Luo, 2019) To document the data collection, print screens where taken of the attributes mentioned in the PCDL model found on the participants websites. The analysis and PCDL model were conducted between March – October 2020, Appendix 3 shows examples of the print screens taken and on how the data was documented and commentated by the researcher.

3.2.3 The Brand Identity Prism made for Vaja Finland

The final part, the Recommendation of this thesis is to use the findings from research question 1 & 2 and compile a Brand identity prism model for Vaja Finland by using the Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism as the foundation. According to Kapferer: "Strong brands are capable of weaving all aspects (of the prism) into an effective whole in order to create a consistent, clear and appealing brand identity" (Lombard, 2018). The company must consider both the employees and the targeted customer segments if they are going to build a brand identity that will succeed in the long- run. The idea is to create a brand identity that is both visually recognisable and memorable, but also awakens a feeling of a positive brand image that awakens customers' emotions and strives them to become more loyal towards the brand itself.

The prism aims to help form building blocks that defines Vaja Finland's core values in their brand identity, and explain what kind of marketing angles will be best for their premium products and how they can add or create value by forming emotional connections with their customer by using storytelling as a marketing method. That is why it was important for me as the researcher to get the value cornerstones from the case company during the interviews, as they work as building blocks to set the emotional foundation for the prism and the storytelling elements. The SWOT and Marketing Mix helps Vaja Finland to see their strengths, weaknesses but also opportunities in their Brand Identity. When adding the findings from the previous mentioned models into the Prism

(provided by the case owner and my own conclusions as the researcher in this thesis), it will help show how the Brand presents itself. The Physique and Personality, and the Reflection and Self-image subjects will give an idea how the customer sees the brand. Externalization addresses all the output by the brand visible to customers e.g. slogan, advertising, products, while Internalization includes human resources policies, management, company culture.

All together, these categories complete the Brand Identity Prism and provided a roadmap for Vaja Finland to effectively interact with their customers. However, the important thing is that all elements of the prism are working together in sync, because only then they will have structured a Brand Identity that is unique, different, clear, and long lasting.

3.2.4 Vaja Finland's Emotional Storytelling in future advertisement

By going through the steps of the SWOT, Marketing Mix, PCDL models and finally concluding with a personal Brand Identity Prism for Vaja Finland, we now have the roadmap for their value cornerstones and what their Premium Brand Identity actually consists of. Therefore, the researcher can go into the theoretical part about possible adding a form of Niche marketing via the benchmarking study and possibly see what kind of marketing techniques the company could benefit from.

As emotional storytelling is not only demonstrated as an effective way to attract and keep customers loyal, but it can also be very affordable and executed very easily with few finesse via online- and social media. By using the info gathered in the Findings chapter and Vaja Finland's own Brand Identity Prism, I have created a summary under chapter 5.1.1 that will compile and give ideas for how Vaja Finland could elevate their Premium Brand Identity and what kind of value adding emotional storytelling could be implemented in future advertising campaigns. Niche marketing can also be used as discussed in the theory mentioned earlier in this thesis, but one should be careful when adding the Brand into just one or two niches. As there is a risk that the marketing campaign will be too narrow and not speak to a broader audience, and as Vaja Finland's targeted market is somewhat still unclear, I as the researcher would not recommend going too narrow in the beginning of their marketing strategy.

4 FINDINGS

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the results of the interviews, the SWOT and Marketing Mix models, and the benchmarking study done based on the PCDL model. The findings will contain conclusions of my own research observations of the company, intertwined with the theoretical part of what a premium brand identity should consist of and what kind of specific emotional storytelling could enhance or add value to Vaja Finland's' brand.

4.1 Research question 1

As mentioned earlier, the interviews took part with one of the head owners of the company Henna Lamberg and their former head of sales Maria Ray. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1 and the thematic analysis containing some of the interview objects citations in Appendix 2. The SWOT analysis of Vaja Finland is based on information gathered from the thematic analysis, their social media pages, website, and webshop. The Marketing Mix is created from the findings gathered of the two analysis models mentioned above.

4.1.1 Interview findings

When asked about the vision of Vaja Finland both interviewees answered directly that it is to be a market leader of Finnish made and designed ceramic tableware in Finland, but also having an international premium brand in the future. Currently there are not a lot of ceramic tableware companies that have the whole supply chain in Finland, as most have moved their production overseas to cut back on production costs and wages. That is why Vaja Finland believes that there is a market share for their brand, and that way they can honestly guarantee that all ceramic pieces are designed and ethically manufactured in their own factory in Porvoo. However, the story of Vaja Finland does not begin from thin air, but the reason why the company exists is because co-owner and modeler Fred Owren started his career at one of Finland's biggest companies Arabia. There the craftsmanship was forged and when he met Henna Lamberg the idea of making and creating together started to grow. Even before Arabia's production was moved overseas, both Henna and Fred started to talk about the idea of making their own ceramic tableware line where high-quality and 100% Finnish made would be the heart of their designs and production. Following the idea of the brand Vaja Finland was created and slowly the business was formed, and the idea was implemented when production started to take form.

Vaja Finland's value is foremost high quality overall, but 100% designed and made in Finland is right at the top as well. They feel they are stronger as a brand and as a company when they have the whole chain from design to selling finished products under their own control. That way they can also ensure ethical conduct and have that as an asset when marketing to the younger population. Vaja Finland feels that the way of thinking is changing, and customers would prefer buying quality and locally made rather than cheap disposable products.

During the interview we discussed targeted customers and target audience, and it became clear that in the beginning Vaja Finland only focused on their own vision of the design and production (moulding), meaning what would be the best design from their own point of view, a specific customer group was never thought of during the design process. During the year's customers have themselves linked the company together with Scandinavian design, even if this was never the attention from the beginning. Vaja Finland does have a very Nordic and modern feel about them and the label "Scandinavian design" is not something they mind. Now as the plan is to expand the Vaja Finland brand and company, they have started to think about who their customers really are and why they appeal to this specific group. At the moment Vaja Finland would say their customers are people who want to change their entire household tableware or those who start collecting from scratch e.g. young people or then buying products as gifts. Due to the lack of marketing and unawareness of the brand itself, Vaja Finland says that all customers are welcome. They also rely on the "word-of-mouth" technique, as the products are so unique and often a table conversation starter between existing consumer and their acquaintances.

When asked why Vaja Finland is unique and how they differentiate themselves on the market, the clear answer was "we are 100% designed and made in Finland". The products are premium quality, meaning the prices are also higher, but we stand out in quality as we modify every single piece that goes thru our factory. They welcome visitors and are happy to show them the craftsmanship behind the production line and tell them the story of Vaja Finland and why the company is authentic and enlighten them about the love for ceramic tableware design.

Questions 5, 6 and 9 where asked to better get an understanding of the current marketing- and customer follow up plan that Vaja Finland has. It became clear that there is still no direct plan in place and they still perceive themselves as a start-up company. They recognize that brand marketing is important and they should focus on that, and slowly they have started making advertisement material that will support a new marketing plan, e.g. they have made some production videos and taken marketing photos, but nothing has been launched yet. Currently the

advertisement is thru their own social media (Facebook & Instagram), but they feel there is not enough time to be active as they take care of this part themselves. Nevertheless, they have noticed that on Facebook the age group is 40+ and the Finnish languages works best, and on Instagram the followers are younger 20-30+ and English works best when posting. There is currently no customer satisfaction or follow up measuring system in place, and Vaja Finland only relies on oral feedback and what is written on their social media pages. Usually the comments are positive and if they ever receive negative feedback, it is usually related to the prices and lack of new production.

Discussions have taken place and they hope to do things better and bigger within the marketing budget they have for the coming year. The intention is to launch a complete new and fresh advertisement campaign and to have their own permanent shop in Porvoo / Helsinki in the near future. Even if there are some plans in the making, no reflection has been put into what the business should look like in 5-10 years.

Questions 7, 8 and 12 where designed to help Vaja Finland put down to words what their Brand means to them and which adjectives could be used in their possible emotional storytelling. The interviewees used the words: ***Scandinavian, happy, fresh, peculiar, unique, high quality*** and ***Finnish made***. Moreover, words that Vaja Finland never want to be associated with are boring, grey, throwaway, and mass-produced. In addition, when asked how they would like their customers to perceive their brand image following adjectives came to mind: ***lovely, practical, enjoyment, beautiful and proudness***. Maria would like the products to speak for themselves and have the customers feel good and proud about themselves when buying and using Vaja Finland in their daily life, words like premium, unique and price should not be the focal point. Figure 8 is summary of what Vaja Finland's value adding adjectives could be. I also asked them if they have a slogan and the response was, "it doesn't feel like the most important thing right now". Henna told me that they have used "designed to last a lifetime" in earlier advertisement texts, but now they don't use it anymore or any slogan at all.

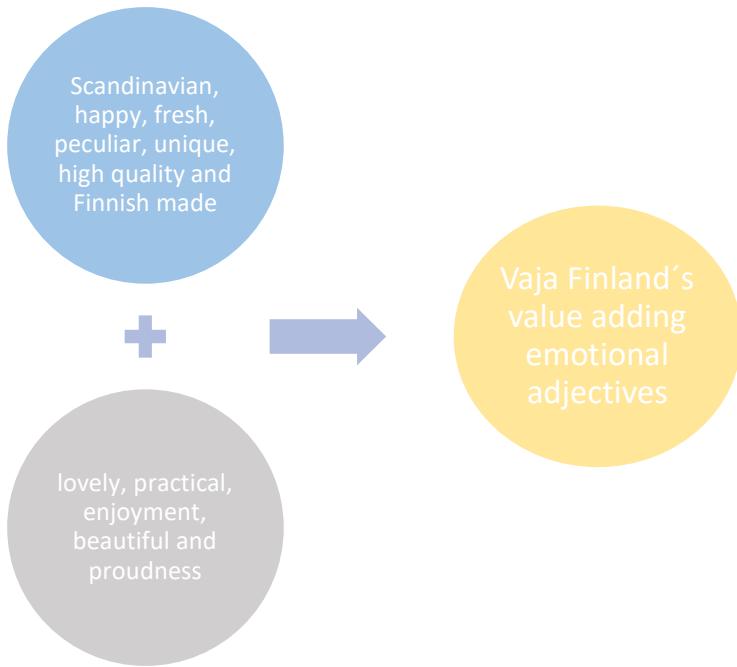


Figure 8. Vaja Finland's value adding emotional adjectives

Vaja Finland has not been interested in benchmarking other brands before and they do not know of anything specific that they would like to “replicate” that other companies do. They are aware that they should be more active on social media, have lotteries or competitions, brand ambassadors etc. but due to resource issues, these ideas have been postponed. Their focus has been on getting customers to come to the factory shop or to their stands on fairs, and via that spread the word of their brand and products. Some retailers have even asked for marketing props that they could hand out to their customers, so one can conclude that there is interest from outsiders to help spread the word of the brand Vaja Finland.

When discussing brand equity and efficiency the interviewees felt that the company is “not there yet”. They do exist on Weecos webshop (which is a sustainable online marketplace for design brands) and have had a few ads via Finnish brand ambassadors, but nothing really that would give them enough attention. But then again the comments during the interview often went back to: “We need to focus on the things discussed earlier, we are still working on our foundation and making it stable, now we are trying to get out to the public who we are and what we do. Do it small but do it good before we start taking over the world”. Also, it is very important for Vaja Finland to have control over who gets to sell their products. The dream is to have own shops across Finland, add new products to existing tableware series, and have tailor-made projects as a

side business and eventually start exporting products at a bigger scale. However, changes in this company takes a long time due to the complicated and delicate production chain.

4.1.2 SWOT of Vaja Finland

Figure 9 shows Vaja Finland's SWOT analysis. It contains the company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats seen from the authors point of view. Following discussion highlights some points from each category and gives an idea on what is good or what should be updated.

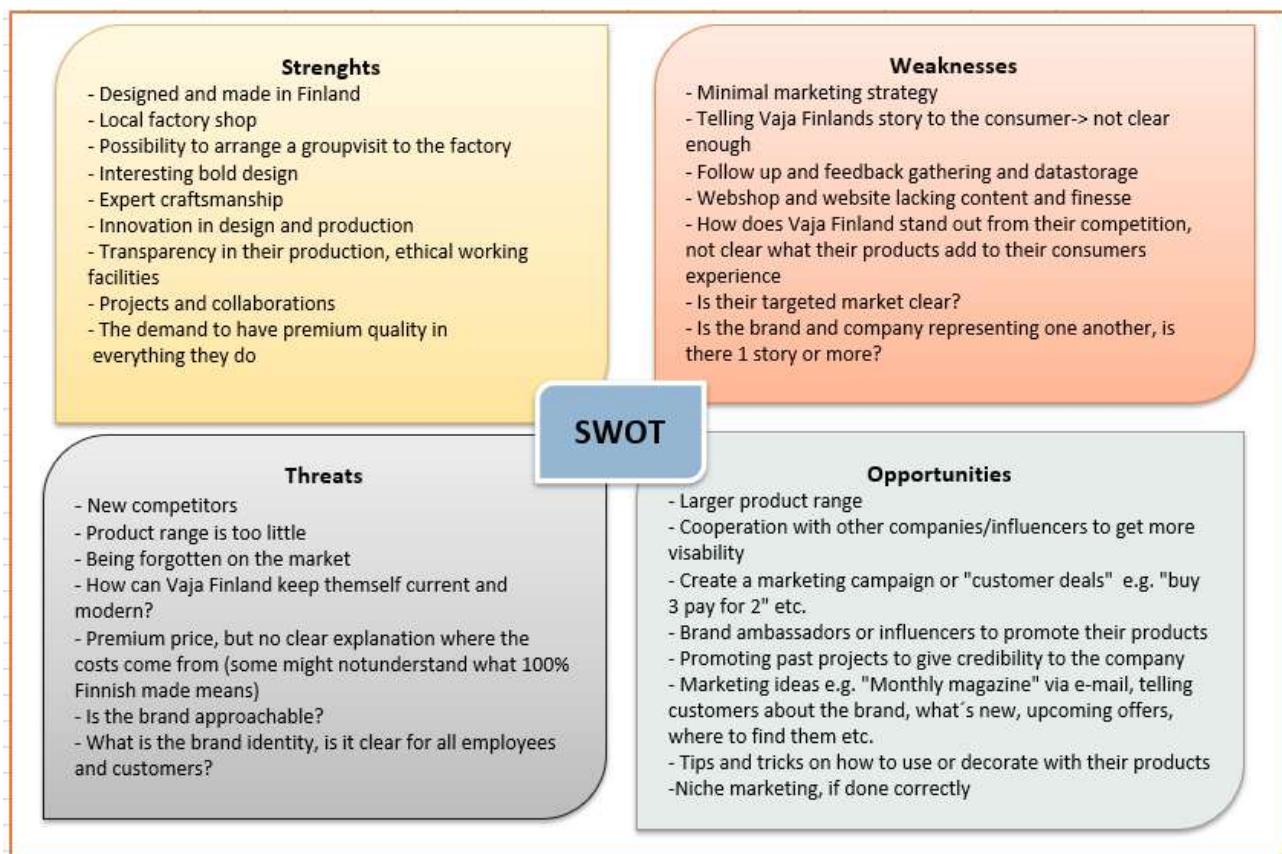


Figure 9. SWOT of Vaja Finland

After examining all Vaja Finland's online platforms and the interviews via the thematic analysis, it is clear that their strengths remains in their story of why they exists, and that they're a 100% owned Finnish company that designs and produces their unique tableware here in Finland without ever compromising the “high-quality standard” in everything they do. As Henna Lamberg said during her interview about their mission & vision: “Our mission is to be an international premium brand and a leading Finnish ceramic tableware company“ and “Our vision is to create beautiful Finnish designs that surprises with its functionality and can be passed on from generation to the

next". These citations are very clear and that tells us that they have reachable goals and that these can be worked into the story of why Vaja Finland exists and what they want to accomplish.

Even if the word of Vaja Finland has not reached out to the whole market yet, they have a good foundation to build upon. The local factory and the possibility to arrange group visits on the production side will help the customers understand where the premium and high-quality label comes from. In the factory shop the owners and employees have the chance to tell their story and inspire the visitors to appreciate the craftsmanship it requires to make tableware from scratch. As Henna Lamberg also said: "We always have the best quality in our products and in our designs, which makes us more than just a Brand", and as Maria Ray added in: "Quality is always the most important thing, and that it is also ethically made". These statements can be shown in the factory and that is why it is important to also get it into too future advertising, as it could help inspire customers to buy their products. The special projects and collaborations (e.g. Arteks "Kukkopilli" & tableware set for restaurant Finnjävel etc.) that Vaja Finland have been involved in, is a good marketing angle to show others how diverse they really can be and it would help spread the Brand within the B2B and B2C market, so these should be advertised more.

Some weaknesses that the company currently has is the lack of strategy, starting from who Vaja Finland's targeted customer should be, to marketing strategy and finally the execution. As Lamberg commented during the interview when asked about their targeted customer: "This is a complex question, due to we have made the designs from our own point of view, what we find are beautiful & functional tableware. But now we see our customers have put us in a Scandinavian design locker, which we are okay with even if we didn't do it ourselves". The focus has remained on the design and production in a start-up mode, but if the company wants to succeed then there should be plans and schedules decided. Trial and error will not work long in today's business environment where things move at a fast pace. In addition, it seems that Vaja Finland doesn't know what their own strengths are in their Brand identity and as the researcher I find it is not stated clearly enough on their social media and webpage either. The focus should be on developing these, so the possible customer perceives the Brand image correctly and the outcome would be that their conversion rates go up and marketing campaigns can be done more efficiently and that way they will be able to reach the right customers more easily.

The biggest threat is that Vaja Finland will be forgotten. As the world is changing and "locally produced" and ethics are becoming more and more important, there will be new competitors on the market that might overshadow what Vaja Finland stands for. Also, the B2C product range has

not evolved in some time, which means that existing customers might grow tired of waiting and move on to competitors' instead. That also effects the questions I added into the analysis, "how can Vaja keep themselves current and modern" and is the brand approachable enough?

Even if there are currently a lot of uncertainties / unmade decisions in the company, there is also tremendous amount of opportunities. There is possibility to evolve the Brand in what way Vaja Finland would see fit, and after the decision has been made, they can create a marketing strategy around that from scratch. Their vision for the products are: "We want our customers to describe us as lovely, practical, beautiful", "one customer even said we are their tableware-love" and "High quality, Finnish made, unique", "using our products should awaken happy, well-being & proudness emotions in our customers". The adjectives they used is a good way to start building their emotional storytelling, the important thing would be to just start the work now and make the necessary decisions, so they could have a campaign ready before the seasonal holidays' start. The sky is the limit and with the help of social media, there is a good chance that they could succeed even if the timeframe is short. Even Niche marketing, if used correctly and carefully, could add an advantage to help the company stand out from their competitors. Because of the current COVID -19 situation that has plagued the year 2020 and closed down most fairs, it would be vital to be active on their social media platforms to gain as much visibility as possible, as meeting customers face to face has been so heavily impacted. A good advertisement campaign that fulfils the Niche marketing criteria's e.g. lifestyle and emotional awakening features (support small local business that stands for Finnish values and high-quality tableware expertise etc.), could help spike sales for some months to come.

4.1.3 Vaja Finland Marketing Mix 4P's

The Marketing Mix analysis (figure 10) is used here to help Vaja Finland see clearly what their key marketing factors are. The ideal would be to use these as an advantage to create a marketing strategy that they could build on for some years to come.

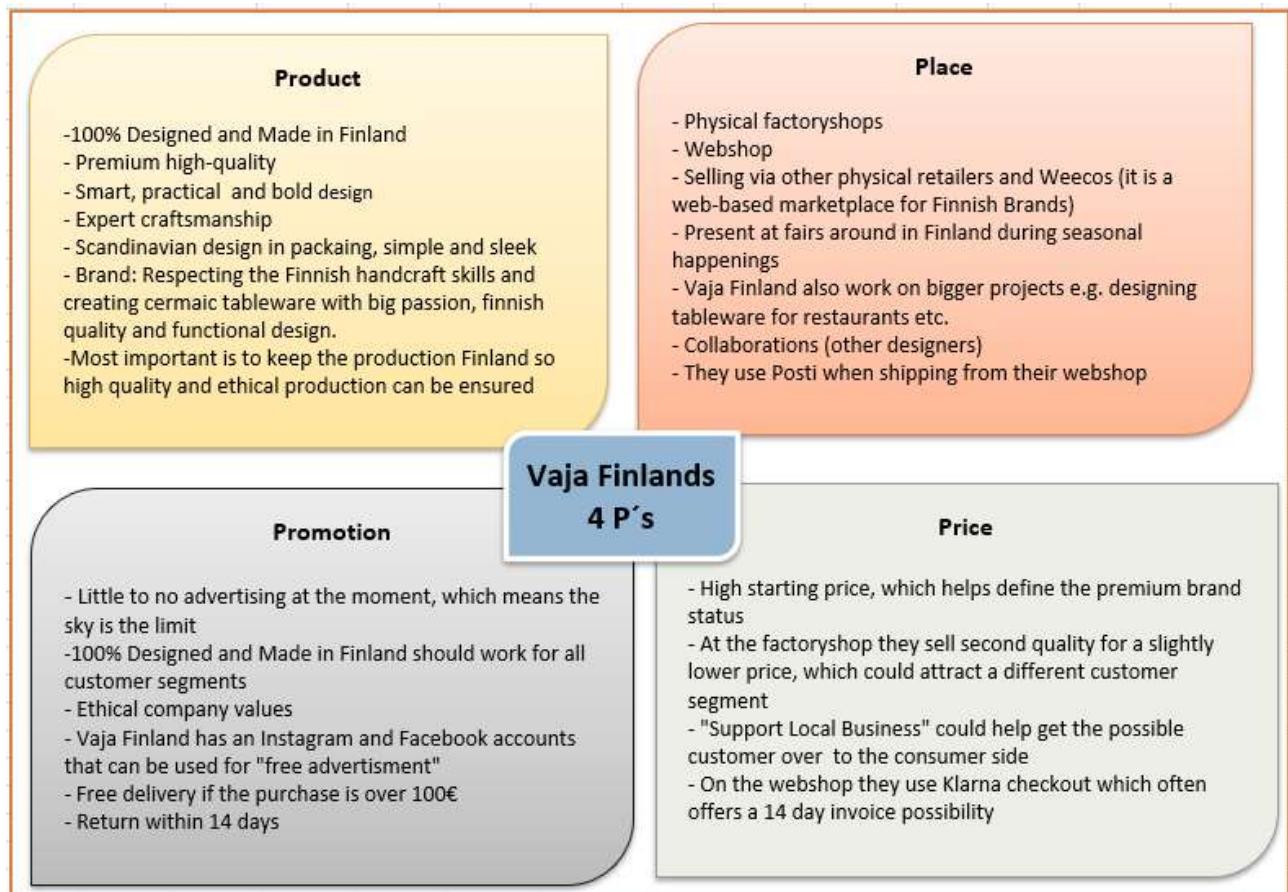


Figure 10. Vaja Finland's Marketing Mix the 4P's

Vaja Finland's products definitely fill a demand on the Finnish market, as there are not a lot of companies that have their entire ceramic tableware production- & supply chain left in Finland. The products themselves are compelling due to their smart, practical, functional and bold design. Figure 11 contains suggested marketing and advertisement cornerstones created by the researcher; these are based on Vaja Finland's marketing mix analysis.

The marketing and advertisement cornerstones could be:

- 100% Designed and Made in Finland
- Ethically and locally produced
- Bold, passionate, and unique design that delights
- Respect for the Finnish handmade craftsmanship
- Handmade with guaranteed premium quality (even their 2nd hand products are top quality)

Figure 11. Possible cornerstones for marketing and advertisement

Vaja Finland could look into a form of “Niche Marketing” when advertising, “ethically and locally produced”, as this would explain the price of the products and can even compel consumers that they need to support the business, which then creates a repeated demand by itself. By creating a trend around the products will help get more free advertisement on social media as sharing and re-posting is already a popular feature on Instagram and Facebook. In addition, this phenomenon is already happening as different cafés and restaurants in Finland are already using Vaja Finland’s products, and the more “likes” a picture gets the more exposure the Brand will receive.

Vaja Finland still exists shyly on the market; they have their own simple webshop and two factory shops, and they sell via other retailers and on a web-based marketplace where other Finnish brands exists. They are also present on different fairs around the country during seasonal holidays; however, in my opinion, this does not help get the Brand enough attention. Vaja Finland has done multiple design and production projects with well-known companies’ e.g. Artek, Sessak and Restaurang Finnjävel but there is no story or written text about these collaborations on their own webpage. Influencer marketing is also very popular right now, but as mentioned earlier in the interviews, Vaja Finland has only done two of these in the past. One can say that Vaja Finland’s Price and Promotion P’s are still much unfinished and need to be further developed.

The high price on the products can simply be explained on the premium quality and “designed and made in Finland” concept as they go hand in hand. The question remains if Vaja Finland should use some kind of discounts advertisement or create competitions on social media, this would most likely attract more customers and their webpage / webshop would get more hits. When buying from their webshop they use Klarna checkout and Posti as their logistical partner, these are two well-known companies in Finland and should not hinder any hesitation for the customer when clicking on the “buy-button”.

4.1.4 Conclusion

According to the experts at BrandUNIQ, premium brands should put themselves into a category that indicates that a superior product is involved and have an excellent communication strategy to get the message out to the public eye. The category can consist of higher priced products, unique, functional, sustainability etc. (BrandUNIQ, 2017). Vaja Finland does fulfil the following Premium Brand label that BrandUNIQ describes, they have the premium price, unique- & functional design, ethically produced, emotional background story, locally designed- and made.

However, the one thing lacking is the clear communication strategy between brand and customer. Following was said during the interview: “We haven’t thought about the communication because we feel we are not there yet, and we don’t have the necessary resources right now”. Currently they rely on what is written on their webpage, word of mouth and what comments they get on their social media. One could say that the consumer- expectations and experience is lacking, and currently they still have some work to do before they can fully match the premium standard discussed in the theoretical part and models of this thesis.

As mentioned earlier in the theory BrandUNIQ talks about the digital world and social media, and how easy it can make or break a brand. Brand “communities” should be built alongside a premium brand to keep an open conversation between brand and consumer. They also warn that even premium brands must be built on sustainable competitive advantages and innovation; otherwise, the brand might find themselves in a gap where they are no longer providing value and lose their premium status. (BrandUNIQ, 2017). Vaja Finland is lacking communication and current innovation, but as they are still “fairly new” to the market, this should not have an effect on them yet. However, they do have customers that have bought their products some years ago and they are still waiting on the innovation or with other words; new products that fulfil their tableware set. Is there a risk that they will move on and complete their tableware set with other competitors’ products? According to what was discussed during the interviews and later analysed in appendix 2 about their lack of communication, innovation, and customer service - then yes of course would be the immediate answer. Vaja Finland is at a passing point where they should do something to keep current customers satisfied, while coming up with a good marketing strategy to get more visibility on the market and connecting with new customers.

According to Ronald Van Haaften, a Brand identity is made up of what your brand wants to say, what their values are and how they are communicated to the consumers. Basically, the identity is the personality of the business and what they promise their customers (Haaften, 2017). When analysing the interviews in appendix 2, researching Vaja Finland’s webpage and social media accounts, the following conclusion in figure12 was reached about what Vaja Finland’s Premium Brand cornerstones could consist of:

- Costumer segmentation/Targeted customer: Customers building their home and buying tableware for the first time, or middle-aged people who want to renew their tableware, or buying products as presents for others.
- Value proposition: Guaranteed premium high-quality products that are designed and ethically & locally made in Finland. Products that dare to “stand out and be bolder” from their competitors on the current market.
- Mission: To be leader in the ceramic tableware market in Finland and slowly expand to other countries. To always have 100% Finnish designed and made stamp on the ceramic products.
- Personality: Long-lasting and passed on from generations, fun, proudness, daring, exciting, functional, unique, bold, expert craftsmanship, 100% Finnish
- Connection & Emotion: Story of how Vaja Finland came to be and what they stand for. Play on the emotions that they want their products and brand to awake in their customers. Where does the inspiration come from and show it in pictures, video and in written text across their digital online platforms
- Marketing: Be active across all digital platforms; be verbal, new pictures, videos, stories, contests, promotions, Brand ambassadors etc.
- Be consistent online and offline: don't copy your competitors, stay active towards customers, monitor feedback, innovate when possible and maintain the brand identity throughout the whole business.

Figure 12. Vaja Finland's Premium Brand cornerstones

4.2 Research question 2:

The second part of the thesis focuses on what kind of storytelling can create or enhance value to Vaja Finland's brand. However, to get a better understanding of the status on the Finnish market, it was decided to do a benchmarking study of some of Vaja Finland's competitors. That is why the PCDL Model was decided to be the most suitable benchmarking tool for this thesis. The following chapter will give a clearer picture of how the PCDL tool was used and analysed, and discuss how the documentation was done in Appendix 3.

4.2.1 PCDL Model findings

As per the experts at IvyPanda description, the PCDL model is simple enough to use when comparing companies within the same market segment and utilising the findings while looking for answers on a broader spectrum to help while building strategies for one's own Brand (IvyPanda, 2019). The key is to position the brand so they are remembered and valued in their customers' minds and this is often done by adding branding attributes to help spark emotional associations for the customer (Ghodeswar, 2008).

Below in figure 13 is the PCDL model that contains Vaja Finland's and the chosen competitor's findings (Iittala, Pentik and Lova). Each Brand Attribute is presented in the left column and the brand findings presented individually in the right column for each company. The analysis of the PCDL model will only go into the details and attributes that could benefit Vaja Finland and differentiate themselves over their competitors in their journey to create their own marketing strategy plan.

Brand Attributes	Vaja Finland	Iittala	Pentik	Lova
Positioning the Brand				
<i>Positioning</i>	Premium high-quality, Finnish made and designed. Long-lasting products for generations	To offer aesthetically and functionally durable products with lasting design to everyday life.	Pentik is an international interior design retailer, who wants to bring northern beauty and cosiness to homes. In our opinion, an inspiring home can be created by combining Finnish handicrafts and the most beautiful discoveries from all around the world. Their ceramics factory is in Posio, Finland	Lova believes there's a way to live modern life in harmony with nature. Respecting nature by using wasted materials and knowing the producers behind the material. Ethical thinking.
<i>Brand associations (attributes)</i>	Finnish company, high quality, values, high priced, premium products	Finnish company, quality, affordable tableware	Finnish company and standards, higher priced products,	Finnish start-up company, high-quality premium products, high priced
<i>Target audience</i>	as gifts, collector products where you buy a little at a time.	Everyone, no age limit	To every age, however usually bought as gifts or bought over time	For people who value sustainability, have a good income or collectors
<i>Emotions</i>	Proud, local, shows some personality and character	Usable, good quality, clean and interesting design	Functional, quality products. Interesting designs that tell a person's personality	New in from the trash bin, helping nature thru sustainability. Proud owner, beautiful designs, value in recycling
<i>Benefits</i>	Long-lasting tableware, easy to combine, interesting and extraordinary, use in every day life and on celebrations	Long-lasting tableware, easy to combine, interesting and timeless, proud, use in every day life and on celebrations	Long-lasting tableware, series that appeal to the consumer, even a series for children. Finnish inspired and solid names.	Finnish designed and made. Long-lasting, simple and easy to combine.
<i>Differentiation</i>	hand-made, practical, happy, different	Many series to choose from, diversity in design and emotion	Corporate gifts, hand-painted, all finnish made, candles	Transparency DNA meaning customers gets access to where the material comes from and what the actual costs are.

Brand Attributes	Vaja Finland	Iittala	Pentik	Lovia
Communicating the Message				
<i>Promotion</i>	social media, webshop, physical retailers and collaborations, fairs	magazines, internet, social media, TV, physical shops & webshop	instagram, pinterest, youtube, brouchers, internet, retail, magazines	Social media, webshop, retail store, magazines and newspapers
<i>Ad Campaigns</i>	"Made and designed in Finland"	"Grow new roots. Bring nature in"	"Dare to Dream"	"Second Chances"
<i>Value adding to the consumer</i>	The customer can trust that the products are of high quality.	Tips and tricks on how to use and decorate the products	Pentik Manor, Pentik-mäki Culture Centre, videos of the Factory, gift ideas for her, under 20€, DIY tips	Each bag has a unique number and DNA, revealing each step before meeting the consumer.
<i>Social cause</i>	Design, quality, innovation and ethical working facilities. Maintaining traditional ways of hand craft.	Respect for the nature and the environment play a central role. The products are meant for long-term use. Code of conduct, Supplier Code of Conduct, Sustainability Report. Piloted a secondhand business model	Working hard pays off, leaving something beautiful for the next generation.	Wasted materials get a new life in Lovia designs Ecological revolution is the purpose.
<i>Delivering the performance</i>				
<i>Delivering the performance Product performance</i>	A few series within the same price points. High quality and high prices.	Products at different price points, "We are present in the garden, at the dinner table and at festivities, everyday activities and rituals. Through our brands, we can transform the familiar into the extraordinary."	Products at different price points. All series have a short story telling where the design got its inspiration.	High-quality, high prices. Not many to choose from, but that is on purpose.
<i>Customer Care</i>	No obvious customer care on the website, except contact information	Easy access to company information, current updates, stores, easy contact, MyIittala, Vintage-service	B2B gifts, Outlets, Pentik Friends Club	Letting the customer see all parts of the value chain. No secrets
<i>Distribution coverage</i>	Factory shop, webshop, Weecos, cooperation with cafe's & shops, C2C	retail, webshop, factoryshop etc. easy to get a hold of their products. Even sold via C2C	retail, webshop, B2B, fairs, factoryshop, C2C	webshop, retail store, weecos
Leveraging the Brand Equity				
<i>Brand extension</i>	Tableware, kitchen accessories, projects	Interior, Dining, Bags	Table settings, textiles, decoration	bags, jewellery, accessories
<i>Brand association</i>	Projects and collaboration with other Brands. Small player on the finnish market, with some international interest.	Pink ribbon in Finland, a big player on the Finnish market	DIY ideas of the products Pentik makes themselves. A big player on the market but more because of the historical value.	Press loans, corporate products. A small player on the Finnish market but has gotten media attention from the international market. Ongoing charity projects
<i>Social integration</i>	Marketing is shown on their social media. thru other projects and retailers they gain attention. Webshop lacking info.	The brand is almost everywhere and they are updating their marketing seasonally. Website is available on multiple languages. Their ceramic production is in Asia and Romania	Their marketing strategy is mostly shown in the retail shops and social media. The webshop isn't as inspiring	Marketing strategy is shown in social media and magazines. Consumers can create unique products together with Lovia.

Figure 13. PCDL Model. Comparing Vaja Finland to their competitors via benchmarking

➤ Positioning the Brand

When first analysing the company's websites, it became very clear that Vaja Finland has not put much effort into theirs. Their homepage is very plain and basic, and their story and brand identity does not come across in the visuals. There is a short story in text of what Vaja Finland is and what they represent, but it is such a basic text with no “eye-catching” details. The signature words used are “premium, Finnish-quality, Scandinavian”, but there is a clear lack of something interesting and emotional awaking and it doesn't not really give anything about the Brand itself.

The other companies have clearly made an effort into their websites; there are videos, moving pictures and eye-catching details wherever you look. Their personality and Brand essence comes forward and their intention and values are clear from just looking at their homepages. They portray their values very visibly and wants the consumers to hear their story, get inspired and get involved.

➤ Communicating the Message

Vaja Finland's current slogan on their website is “Designed and Made in Finland” and they use words like innovation, trust, ethical and maintaining traditional ways of handcraft. These are good adjectives but again, it does not awaken any emotions or give the customer anything new or different. Their background story is mentioned in a short text form, but that's about it. Vaja Finland does currently not provide their customers with any added value, there are no campaigns, interesting facts on their website, tips or tricks, they don't even properly market their bigger design- and productions projects or have a good working customer service.

Vaja Finland's competitors have gone full out on adding value to their customers. E.g. Iittala “Grow new roots, Bring nature in” campaign gives their customers tips on how to use plants and their products as design elements at home, so they have gone beyond the traditional use of mugs and come up with something new that could even attract a new customer base. Pentik again has focused to bring their long history in by creating a Pentik Museum and give DIY tips and tricks for gift etc. on their website. All competitors have good emotional stories to tell, they want to connect with their customers and make them feel good and in addition, all competitive companies have been involved in different charity projects that often results in more value and marketing content. In a manner of speaking, Vaja Finland has access to

inspirational examples in their competitors on how they could think out of the box and create added value to their own customers on their webpage and in their webshop.

➤ Delivering the Performance

Vaja Finland does have consistency in their products, the quality and prices go hand in hand throughout the value chain. However, there has been no innovation of new table series or even a hint if there are any new products in the making. Their customer care and follow up is random and there is really no field on their website where customers could leave feedback or even easily contact them, so one could say their customer service is currently lacking. They also have a heading “Blog” on the website but there is no text or link when you open it and it might confuse the customer and should be taken out if there is no intent to start using it in the new future. Distribution coverage for this sized company is okay but if they want to grow and become more known, then they should focus on coming in to other shops and even link/ promote where their products can be bought on their own website. Their webshop is also very plain, they only have three product categories available and only one picture of each product. It would be possible to add interest and show new features of the products if they were featured in other settings than a basic plain photoshoot.

The competing Brands are fully integrated when it comes to consistency, online and offline. Their customer care and brand vision flows throughout their websites, webshops and physical stores. As they offer many products in different price ranges, their customer base and reach is much broader than Vaja Finland's. Lovia on the other hand is a bit different as they don't have as much products as Iittala or Pentik, but they do make sure their other brand attributes are on an excellent level. Lovia has an excellent customer service, they innovate in their product range and have a brand identity that follows throughout their supply chain and on all distribution channels that they are currently on. In addition, the displaying of their products have been elevated and the customer can see the products in video and inspiring pictures.

➤ Leveraging Brand equity:

Vaja Finland has a lot going for them (projects within interior design e.g. companies like Artek and Sessak) but as they don't promote their big or small successes, nobody will know or care about them.

Iittala and Pentik are active within many different product segments (e.g. interior design, textiles etc.) even if they were firstly known by their ceramic products, but they saw the

opportunity to expand in other areas and they took it. Now they don't have to rely on one product segment but enjoy success within multiple market areas. And they also make sure to have collaborations and promote them throughout their marketing channels and have good stories to back up the facts they are presenting. Lova is a smaller company and focuses on their own thing, one gets the feeling they don't want to have "outsiders" in their value chain but they focus on themselves and what they are doing. The customers' gets to know them on a personnel level while reading their website, there is no doubt you do a good deed by purchasing one of their products, as their marketing stories and collaboration with different charities touches on an emotional level.

4.2.2 Conclusion

When comparing Vaja Finland and their competitors via the PCDL model, it is clear that they are still a long way from achieving the same advanced brand identity and marketing strategy on their website and webshop. The most essential basic parts of Vaja Finland's' brand identity exists but how it should be portrayed and developed is still unclear. Earlier discussed in the theoretical part of emotional storytelling, HubSpot describes storytelling to be a universal language that can inspire, awaken a person's passion and prosper a connection between a brand and its customers (HubSpot, 2018). In addition, according to Michel Brenner brand storytelling should consist of characters, settings, conflict, action climax and dénouement, and when all these are combined a brand's story can be formed (Brenner, 2018). Taking theory and the models into consideration, the most important thing that Vaja Finland could do right now is to focus on what emotions they want their brand identity to consist of, and what values they want to bring forward and how they would like their customers to perceive them. Via these bulletins, they could start making plans on marketing advertisements that will help form emotional connections within their existing customer base and potential new ones'. The competitors have all done a good job on implementing these things (as shown in appendix 3) e.g. up-to date marketing campaigns, brand story for each product, meet the designers, "Pentik Friends or MyIittala", DIY tips, charity campaigns e.g. "Plant a tree by joining the community" and many more ideas can be found on their webpages.

The important thing is not for Vaja Finland to copy any marketing tool or idea, but instead be inspired and think of how they could connect emotionally with their customers while adding value to them at the same time. This would be a good future investment for the company's business and

already now setting down some backbones to how they want to take care of their customers now and on a long-term basis.

5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter will contain a summary and recommendations for both research questions mentioned in the beginning. The goal of this thesis was to help Vaja Finland map their own premium brand identity, and give ideas on how they could use emotional storytelling in their marketing strategy to add or enhance value into their company. By combining the findings of research question 1 & 2 and when implementing the theoretical sources, the outcome became a personal Brand Identity Prism for Vaja Finland, that is presented in the following chapter.

5.1 Vaja Finland's Brand Identity Prism

According to Cliff Ettridge, Brand identity is how customers perceives a brand, what they might expect and how they relate to it (theTeam, 2018).

Figure 14 consists of Vaja Finland's own Brand Identity Prism, it is the end product of the analyses done from the results of research questions 1 and 2. The prism will provide Vaja Finland with a clear picture of what the researcher found the value cornerstones in their Brand Identity to consist of, and what they should focus on when creating their marketing strategy and adding value by utilizing emotional storytelling into their advertising.

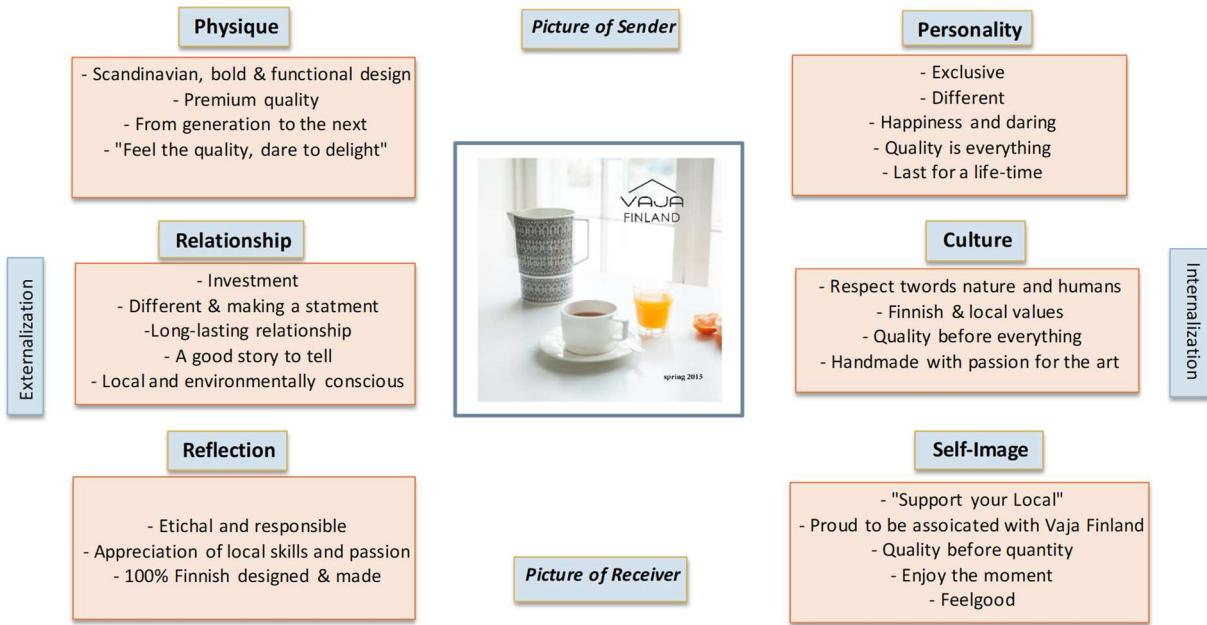


Figure 14. Vaja Finland's Brand Identity Prism

Vaja Finland does have a good background story and a niche purpose on today's Finnish marketplace. Their physique is simple, the products are of Scandinavian design with bold functional features and a guaranteed premium high-quality and they meant to be passed on from generations to the next. Their packaging is simple and clean, as the brand logo itself and it does tell the customer that the products itself will be of superior quality and value. Their trademark and style are consistent throughout their factory shop, table setting on fairs and their website/webshop/social media, even if the online content is lacking in finesse, inspiration, and functionality. As Vaja Finland does not have an active slogan in use, I took the liberty to think of a basic line that could be suited for the brand, and it is "Feel the quality, dare to delight". This could be changed to a more personnel sentence for example, "Feel the quality, we dare to delight" / "Feel the quality, dare to be delighted", or it could be something totally different. The important thing would just to decide on a slogan even if it wouldn't be used in every advertisement setting, because that would help keep the consistency throughout the whole value chain and make the brand more identifiable.

Vaja Finland's personality goes hand in hand with the price of the products, because when one mug costs over 40€ one can expect that there is something exclusive or a price-driven feature behind it. The brands existence is founded on everything being 100% Finnish designed and made with quality that will last for years. The thing that makes Vaja Finland stand out from their

competitors is that their design is exclusive, different, interesting, bold, and the products are intended to bring happiness & proudness to the person using their tableware. They stand on being a conversation starter over the coffee table, inspire people to think out of the box and dare them to bring in something a bit different to their homes. Even if the design “Sirkus” might feel busy, they are very easy to combine with other brands that are plainer in their design and saying that might help hesitant buyers convert into purchasing. Vaja Finland’s targeted audience isn’t just one group but instead it varies from shoppers who buy for themselves or as gifts and collectors, so they need to have personality and advertisement that works for all three groups.

Vaja Finland’s culture is deeply embedded in the respect and inspiration the brand has for nature and humans. They value Finnish heritage, the passion for the handcraftsmanship that goes into every little detail on all products and they would never sacrifice quality, but always strive for perfection in every single product they produce. In my opinion, the culture is not advertised enough and that is why this would be a good addition into their emotional storytelling.

Even if the relationship between Vaja Finland and their customers are slim, they do have good intention to follow up with feedback and give a personal shopping experience if the meeting place is at their own factory shop, a fair or on social media. The cornerstones (e.g. customer investment, a good story to tell, local and environmentally conscious brand) are already there for Vaja Finland to build a great relationship with their customer, they just need to start developing and implementing them as soon as possible. Figure 15 contains more information on emotional awakening advertisement ideas.

As climate- and environmental changes are becoming more and more discussed and important to people, companies that stand for “ethical and responsible” production and values will most likely become sought-after in the future. That is what Vaja Finland is reflecting, as mentioned in the interviews, they do not stand for ware and tare or single use, they want the production to be local and the job environment safe and healthy. As they have chosen to open up their doors to the production line in Porvoo, they want to show that they have nothing to hide but instead inform people how much talent and effort is required to create ceramic tableware from start to finish.

The self-image Vaja Finland would need is to have their customers and employees feel proudness, happiness and feel good of the “support your local” as an advertisement strategy. They want their products to be the cause of enjoyment if it is while drinking a cup of coffee or pouring water into someone’s glass. The premium status and high price are of course important too, but they should

not be the main focal points when planning Vaja Finland's marketing strategy, as they might be misunderstood as "snobbish" features and that is what the interview objects absolutely didn't want to happen.

As said mentioned earlier in the theory by Inkbot Design, the way to become memorable in people's minds is to identify the above six aspects in a company/brand and make sure they are aligned throughout the whole brand identity (Inkbot Design, 2017). As concluded in Vaja Finland's identify prism, they have the story and the product aligned behind them, now they just need to form their Brand identity so that all these attributes are added into their marketing strategy and advertised in the correct way. The next chapter will contain examples and ideas of emotional- and brand storytelling that Vaja Finland could benefit from.

5.2 Emotional storytelling in Vaja Finland's advertisement

The marketing experts at Inkbot design claim that humans don't make decisions logically but foremost emotionally, meaning brands should try to appeal to the consumers emotions first which will then give them time to explain and sell their product (Inkbot Design, 2018). The issue with Vaja Finland is that they don't have any interesting marketing campaigns online or offline, but this also gives them an advantage to go in any direction that they would like right now. My first suggestion would be to ask Vaja Finland to focus on their website/webshop and social media, they need to update these accordingly to what a premium brand is and needs, and so that they also meet the requirements that their targeted customers are already familiar with. A basic website and beautiful product pictures will no longer satisfy the consumer, as they are already used to what Vaja Finland's competitors provide, e.g. information rich-, inspiring- and visually satisfying websites and active social media pages.

The first advertisement campaign should make the customer the hero and be filled with positive emotions that Vaja Finland wants their customers to feel when using their products, these emotions can be: proudness, happiness, fearless, ethical, responsible nature, local, enjoyment and respect for the art (as earlier mentioned in the thematic analysis in appendix 2). These adjective should also be included in their webpage and social media, take away the old pictures and add videos and inspiring pictures of people using the products and make them radiate the value adding emotional adjectives described in figure 8, because a picture of a mug and saucer in nature can only do so much.

Below in figure 15 is a list of emotional awakening advertising ideas for Vaja Finland that I think they could benefit from; these are based on the learnings that came from the sources used in this thesis and the benchmarking PCDL model of their competitors:

- *Update their online presence to a more modern look, focus on bringing forward the emotional adjectives discussed earlier (Figure 8)*
- *Add new exciting visual content to their webpage and social media platforms, make sure the story of Vaja Finland and their brand identity is shown clearly*
- *Come up with a slogan that can follow the companies Brand Identity online and offline*
- *Advertise the factory shop in Porvoo and open-up the production line for groups, even virtually online*
- *Start a “get to know the people behind the Brand story”, meaning present the employees and have them describe their work and what the Brand means to them*
- *Develop a good customer service strategy and implement it, it should contain features like online follow up possibilities, feedback storage, customer “online information gathering” and easy ways for customer to contact the company*
- *Do more collaborations with e.g. influencers or get a Brand Ambassador, make sure this is advertised on Vaja Finland’s own marketing channels*
- *Invite influencers to take part of the production face and have them film the experience and ask them to post on their social medias. Make sure the brand essence and values are shown/discussed in the videos*
- *Advertise older collaboration projects and ask these companies to write an experience- and performance presentation that can be published online for Vaja Finland’s benefit*

Figure 15. Emotional awakening advertising ideas for Vaja Finland

If Vaja Finland would like to add niche marketing as an advertisement strategy for a specific venue, then they could focus more on the value-, high price and premium-quality cornerstones. That could help with making the customer feel more exclusive and unique and attract customers who have a higher income status than the average working consumer, but then it should be done very gently and not in a dominant way. As there is always a risk that some potential customer might take Vaja Finland to be a more snobbish company and make the decision to boycott the brand, as they feel they don't fit within that shown criteria or they don't want to stand for values that hint of overpriced products just to gain some social reputation.

5.3 Recommendation

Earlier in the theoretical section where Premium brand building was discussed, experts at BrandUNIQ told us that premium brands may be introduced in almost any category as long as the company has a realistic segmentation of the category they wish to establish themselves in (BrandUNIQ, 2017). Vaja Finland has a very specific market area, but due to the uncertain targeted customer they do have some challenges ahead to narrow down to the correct marketing strategy that will work for them and their broad customer base. The main issue in my opinion lays in the communication between the company itself and the customers, and the lack of benefitted value advertisement, in this sense meaning emotional awakening brand storytelling. The recommendation would be for Vaja Finland to start using their value adding premium brand identity cornerstones online and offline (see figure 16), the consumer needs to know who they are or could be supporting with just hearing or seeing the company name or logo. Ideas for advertisement was mentioned in the last chapter, but what Vaja Finland first needs to do is decide on a more specific targeted customer and plan on a marketing strategy for the coming year so the consistency would remain throughout the whole value chain. It would be good for them to have a clear picture how they would like to proceed as soon as possible, so they could focus on launching a bigger advertising campaign for the coming year 2021. A potential Brand Ambassador is something they should also consider, that way the company will gain access to not only their own followers but also the ambassadors, a good collaboration and a clear voice/face outwards that talks about the brand will definitely help spark a connection for the consumer to the products themselves.



Figure 16. Vaja Finland's value adding premium brand identity foundation

Another weakness that Vaja Finland should take notice of is that the company hasn't had any innovation towards the B2C market in a while, and according to BrandUNIQ innovation should be a key part in a premium brand otherwise there is a risk that the company will fall into a gap where they are no longer providing value and might lose their premium status (BrandUNIQ, 2017). If the case would be that Vaja Finland does not have any new products in the making, then they should focus on advertising the ones they do have, but in a more innovative way. Can their tableware be used as interior design elements, or can a jar become home to a flower and be given as a gift, can they do a showroom online showing different table settings for inspiration? The current pictures on their Instagram account does show the beautiful details of each product, but there are e.g. no product measurements in the picture texts or ideas to new exiting ways to what end their products can be used. The recommendation would be for the company to start thinking more creatively when it comes to marketing their products on social media, as there is potential to think outside of the box for almost every product they make. A Brand ambassador could help market these ideas very quickly with the help of e.g. video tutorials, inspiring interior design pictures etc.

Brand equity is the set of assets and liabilities linked into a brand and almost all marketing activity can impact the brand equity, as it represents the effects of all marketing investments that have been added to the brand (Wita Efanny et al., 2018). The brand equity consists of brand awareness, brand loyalty and brand associations – and all these can help a brand create competitive

advantages. The word awareness means familiarity, presence, commitment, substance, and salience and all these attributes should be defined into the Vaja Finland brand and marketing strategy, as they will help keep the brand familiar, memorable, and linkable in the customers purchasing processes. An idea to create brand awareness is to have a special marketing advantage, e.g. in Vaja Finland's case it could be the open factory tours or maybe even workshop classes. Brand loyalty on the other hand can provide a high recall factor which can ensure a business's survival and it can also in the long sense keep marketing costs low, and competitors may have a hard time converting consumer over to themselves (Aaker et al., 2010). Marketing campaigns can be quite expensive depending on which media platform one decides to publish on and also depending on what kind of marketing material that needs to produced, but as the facts tell us it could be worth it in the end if the customers loyalty is gained. So, in my opinion Vaja Finland should try to invest in high quality marketing material now that can be used for their social media platforms, as they can be the least expensive way to distribute the material on. According to Aaker and McLoughlin successful and strong brands provide product attributes and customer benefits why one should buy, but if a company goes beyond the "normal" product attributes and develop associations that help them different themselves from their competitors, then that will help take the brands equity to a higher level (Aaker et al., 2010). In Vaja Finland's case the logical association attribute will be "100% designed and made in Finland", but they could also invest into their customer service and have that be the factor that allows them to standout from their competitors. They could start by having a customer survey and find out what the customers thinks of them and how they could improve their business. Then add some contests, or even give discount offers after every buy to attract the customers to back again That way when they have more online traffic, they could implement a measuring system that will help them follow the company's marketing effects, follow customer geographical locations, seasonal trends etc. Having access to that kind of information will eventually give them more ground to base their future marketing strategy on or give them a sense of where to focus their business on next.

Using benchmarking is a good way to learn and get ideas for your own business, the point is not to copy but differentiate yourself. Via the PCDL Model used in this thesis, Vaja Finland got a good picture of what their competitors are doing with their brand identity and if any value adding marketing strategies or storytelling are being used. By combining the information, they will get good knowledge of how their own website and webshop should be laid out and what kind of content they should focus on. The recommendation for Vaja Finland would be to focus on updating their website as soon as possible, the content needs to be modern and reflect the brand

identity they are currently portraying. Visual content needs to be implemented, pictures and videos of not only the products but also other formats that will inspire the customer to buy. The Vaja Finland background story could be told by video interviewing the founders and the employees, a visual tour of the factory and equipment could be shown. In addition, visual mood boards that shows where their inspiration comes from can be presented in some way. All online video content will help attract customers to further explore the Vaja Finland brand, and because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic this will most likely raise webshop sales, as people might be afraid of physically visiting a store.

In my opinion the sky is the limit for Vaja Finland and their marketing strategy, as they are starting pretty much from scratch, they can go in any direction they want but they need to make sure the targeted customer is taken into account in these decisions. The following figure 17 could serve as a marketing strategy guideline to what Vaja Finland should start with and then follow to complete their Premium Brand Identity launch.

1. Decide on a primary targeted audience, even if it is wide to start with
2. Decided which Brand Identity cornerstones (figure 16) and what should be added in the marketing strategy for the coming year
3. Plan what kind of advertising material could be done and where it should be launched (focusing on emotional storytelling) -> then execute
4. Look for inspiration in the PCDL Model on how one could update a website and webshop, then implement and add the new advertising material
5. Have some kind of customer service that allows to track brand performance and give better communication opportunities with the consumer
6. Remember to maintain consistency throughout the company and the brand identity in the long run. E.g. if a blog is added, make sure to update it regularly and not leave it “hanging” after a few months

Figure 17. What Vaja Finland could do to complete their Premium Brand Identity launch

As the models tell, a Premium Brand should be current and consistent in all areas of the company. It starts with the company values and moves through the products and the employees; it follows through to the brand image and should be portrayed the same way in all public relations towards the customers. A Premium Brand delivers on its promises and needs to be ready to adjust to the current market and customer expectations. It is not enough to attract a small loyal customer flow if

no modernisation or innovation is done, otherwise the company could fall into a void and become obsolete.

5.4 Limitations

This study was limited to conduct a research that would benefit the case company and not the direct consumer, so no customer input has been included in this thesis. The challenges for this thesis were to base all results on only written theory, interviews, marketing models and the benchmarking study, and risk of going outside of the thesis's actual aim. The information gathered could be used in many different settings to help build a full marketing strategy for the case company, as SWOT and 4'Ps marketing analyses were done to help get a clear picture of where the company currently stands. However, the findings of these analyses were solely based on the information gathered from Vaja Finland's former website, social media and the interviews done with the representatives from the company, which naturally only includes their own points of views. An outside approach would also have been possible, instead of interviewing only the case company, one could also have interviewed a marketing expert and taken their opinions in to account when focusing on Vaja Finland's perceived brand identity and what kind of storytelling could add value into the brand itself.

If someone would like to continue where this thesis ends, then one could further research many different topics regarding the case company. There is a possibility to only focus on the website or webshop, build up the online content from scratch and implement new fresh material, pictures, and texts. Another idea could be to focus on the emotional storytelling and work out the ideas presented here and do some more research what would work for a specific customer group etc.

The aim of the thesis was not only to help the case company, but also other businesses finding themselves in a similar position struggling to define and utilize their own brand identity. The theoretical sources and marketing models used in this thesis should help companies find a starting point to investigate their own Brand Identity and take advantage of possible advertising opportunities once they have done the necessary analysis. One needs to have an objective eye and be honest of what is working or not working in one's own company, and then have the courage to make the necessary changes to hopefully be able to get more out of the company brand and be able have a more loyal and fruitful relationship with their customers.

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7 APPENDIX 1

Questions for Vaja Finland, they will help define the values and cornerstone of their brand identity:

1. What are your mission and vision? (Why does your company exist and where do you want your brand to go).
2. What are your values? (What beliefs drive your company?)
3. What is your target audience? (Who are your customers and why do they need you?)
4. What is your unique positioning on the market? (How do you differentiate yourself from the competition, what problem do you solve that they don't?)
5. How do you communicate your brand message?
6. How do you plan to talk to your customers, follow up for feedback?
7. If you could describe your brand in three words, what would they be? What would be your brand personality? Give 3 adjectives that describe what your brand is and 3 adjectives that describe what your brand is not.
8. What are the three words you would want your customers to use to describe your brand?
9. How do you plan to track your brand performance and maintain it?
10. What do other brands do that you like?
11. How do you plan to develop your brand equity? (making sure that your brand is seen and not forgotten)
12. What is your slogan?
13. How can you become more efficient? How can you evolve/expand your business?

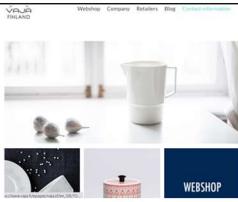
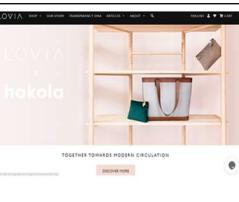
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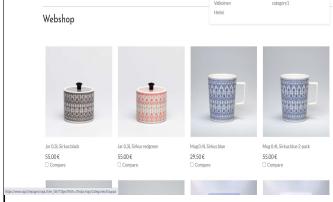
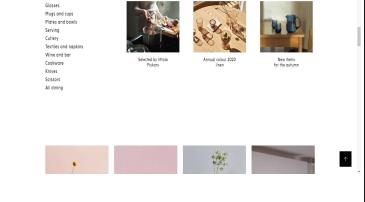
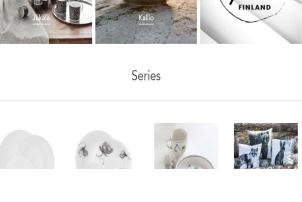
Example of the conducted thematic analysis done from the interviews

Themes	Citations	Citations	Researchers thoughts of the citations
<i>Branding, Mission & Vision</i>	"Our mission is to be an international premium brand and a leading Finnish ceramic tableware company" "Our vision is to create beautiful Finnish designs that surprises with its functionality and can be passed on from generation to the next"	"Our mission is being the number 1 ceramic tableware company in Finland" "Our vision is to have everything from design to production to marketing in Finland", "100% designed and made in Finland"	- Vaja Finland has a clear mission & vision, but the branding itself is still not a 100% there. They have a good background story, but it is not evolved enough and needs to be re-thought if they want to stand out and differentiate themselves from their competitors. - 100% designed and made in Finland will not work forever. Something new and fresh needs to be added or then it needs to be advertised in a unique way.
<i>Values</i>	"Always have the best quality in our products & in our designs, which makes us more than just a Brand"	"Quality is always the most important thing, and also that it is ethically made", "We don't want to have mass-production, but instead provide high-quality that is bought over time if needed"	- These are all strengths, but the brand needs to evolve as well. Having the best product is not always enough, there needs to be added value e.g. great customer service, inspiring website or website etc.
<i>Customer segmentation</i>	"This is a complex question, due to we have made the ceramic moulds and designs from our own point of view, what we find are beautiful&functional tableware. But now we see our customers have put us in a Scandinavian design locker, which we are okay with even if we didn't do it ourselves"	"People who buy our products as gifts, some that want to change their tableware sets at home, young people who are moving from home. Usually they buy 1 or 2 products at a time, as the premium prices has an impact", "We haven't thought about the communication because we feel we are not there yet, and we don't have the necessary resources right now"	- As the customer segmentation is still a bit unclear, then they should create advertisement that works for a larger customer group. There is opportunity to add competitions, special offers, brand ambassadors etc.
<i>Differentiation</i>	"We have our own style in the design that is unique, but we are still not well known on the market", "Finnish made and we can guarantee high quality in everything we do"	"On the Finnish market we are missing the "made in Finland" companies and we are a fresh breeze in the traditional ceramic designs", "currently smaller businesses are telling their story and using that as a marketing tool, this is also how we are doing it, but now we need to try to stand out in some way and that is what we are trying to figure out how to do "	- The products Vaja Finland currently sell are what they claim them to be. But there has been no innovation for the Finnish market in some years and the threat is that they will be forgotten or new competitors will come in and take their customers. Vaja Finland needs to advertise their differentiation and make them more memorable.
<i>Communication</i>	"We can open our factory doors and show customers what we do", "We are in the beginning of our Brand marketing and we haven't really made any effort towards it"	"We have not communicated with our customers in an effective way, sometimes via our social media but no clear brand marketing has been decided on"	- It would be important to have a information gathering program that collects info on customers online and that can gather customer feedback. This will help let Vaja Finland know who their customers are, and then they can adjust marketing campaigns to better suit their biggest customer base. Also this will add value into their customer service and help customers feel special.
<i>Emotions & value adding attributes</i>	"Scandinavian, fresh, unique in our own way", "We don't want to be boring, grey or dispensable". "We want our customers to describe us as lovely, practical, beautiful", "one customer said we are their tableware-love", "We have not thought of any marketing ideas that would give discounts or offers to our customers"	"We want to show our customers how much time goes into every product we do, video and pictures material are being planned" "High quality, Finnish made, unique", "using our products should awaken happy, well-being & proudness emotions in our customers"	- The adjectives Vaja Finland gave are a great way to start to build their emotional storytelling on. They just need to decide on one and then execute.

9 APPENDIX 3

Example of the conducted content analysis done for the PCDL Model

Category	Vaja Finland	iittala	Pentik	Lovia
<u>Positioning the Brand</u>	 <p>WEBSHOP</p>	 <p>Creating atmospheres</p>	 <p>Step into Christmas</p>	 <p>TOGETHER TOWARDS MODERN CIRCULATION</p>
Comments:	Homepage is simple and doesn't really give anything away about the Brand itself	Homepage tells us about the Brand essence and gives good direction of where to click next	Homepage gives us a good idea of what Pentik is about, and they have already made the Christmas Holidays as a marketing focal point	Their homepage tells the customer exactly what Lovia is about -> "Together towards modern circulation". Simple but practical & beautiful website

<u>Delivering the Performance</u>	 <p>Webshop</p> <p>Valkoinen Helmi Category1</p>	 <p>Glossy Plain and Crisp Floral and Botanical Series Candles Tea and coffee capsules Wine and Bar Catering Kitchen Seasons All ranges</p>	 <p>Sale Not to Waste Products Annual value 2019 (year) Buy Home for the kitchen</p>	 <p>Made in Posio FINLAND</p> <p>Kello</p>
Comments:	They have 3 different product categories, "Valkoinen", "Helmi" & "Category1"	iittala has many different tableware collections and they have a good layout separating them from each other and giving the customer options	Pentik has many tableware collections to choose from, and their own factory in Posio Finland. Their website is logically built up and it is easy to see what they offer and also to move over to their webshop.	
<u>Leveraging the Brand Equity</u>	 <p>Projects</p>	 <p>ABOUT Designers Collections Myiittala Sustainability Vintage service Fiskars Group Privacy policy Cookie policy Site terms</p> <p>HELI FAQ Product care Contact us Cookie settings Careers Deliveries during COVID-19 Order tracking Returns and refunds</p> <p>SHOPPING Stores Ordering and paying Shipping and deliveries Sales terms Order tracking Returns and refunds</p>	 <p>Be Inspired</p> <p>Create a home full of feeling. Here are some tips to brighten up the everyday life or to take your parties to the next level as well as some new recipes for using the seasonal ingredients.</p> <p>AKU Gift Ideas</p>	Pentik offers "Be inspired", there they add value by providing DIY tips, Gift tips, Table settings etc to their customers. They also have "Pentik Mini & Pentik Friends" to add Brand Equity