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1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the thesis and the problems that led to our purpose. The chapter is concluded by our formulated purpose.

1.1 Background and problem discussion

The rapid technological development of the second half of the 20th century has had a great impact on our society, one example being the creation of the Internet. In the 1990s the Internet usage really started to boost. In Sweden, the number of users increased by 70.8 % between 2000 and 2004 (Kotler, Wong, Saunders & Armstrong, 2005), now comprising 73.6% of the country's population. In the world, a total of 888.7 million people have access to the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2005). This rapid development has greatly affected both individual and business relationships, and today the Internet has become one of the most commonly used channels of communication (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004).

We believe that in industrial markets, first contact between an organisations and its potential customers can in many cases be established through web sites. Industrial firms will in this thesis be referred to as companies characterised by *“all the organisations that buy goods and services to use in the production of other products and services, or for the purpose of reselling or renting them to others at a profit”* (Kotler et al. 2005, p.302). Further, business-to-business (B2B) and industrial markets will be treated synonymously. The Internet provides an increased availability of information, resulting in customers being faced with a greater supply of products (Kotler et al. 2005). It is hence becoming increasingly important for firms to differentiate both their products and themselves from their competitors. The increased selection of products implies that differences between products are decreasing, thus competing solely on price or quality is no longer enough in order to stay competitive (McDowell Mudambi, Doyle & Wong, 1997).

1.1.1 Why branding is important

The creation of a strong brand is one way for companies to differentiate themselves, and thereby possibly gain a competitive advantage (Riezebos, 2003). In fact, a consistent brand message has proven to be of higher importance than price in an industrial purchase decision. For instance, if a brand is of high quality but fails to meet overall expectations, it is likely that the brand value will decrease. Customers may in that case choose another provider at the time for their next purchase (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

Aaker (1991, cited in Mudambi, 2002, p.525) state that *“Many industrial purchase alternatives tend to be toss-ups. The decisive factor then can turn upon what a brand means to a buyer”*. Due to benefits like this, branding has for a long time been one of the main concepts within marketing. However, since the 1980s, the importance of the activity has substantially increased and can now be regarded as the cornerstone of marketing (Weilbacher, 1993). Caldwell and Freire (2004) even refer to branding as one of the most powerful tools in a marketing strategy, and Bergstrom (2000, p.2) state that *“brands will rule in the new decade”*. According to Webster Jr. and Keller (2004), industrial markets are characterised by their customers, and not by products as consumer markets are. This is because industrial buyers tend to be fewer, and buy larger quantities, than consumer buyers normally do. It has for that reason become increasingly important for B2B companies to focus on building long-lasting relationships with their buyers, rather than just focusing on pure transactions. A strong brand facilitates the forming of relationships between companies and customers since the aim of

a brand is to differentiate a company from its competitors. By communicating to potential business buyers what a brand stands for, a company can differentiate itself from its competitors (Riezebos, 2003).

A strong brand can prove to be the most valuable possession of a firm. Further, it can be argued that branding is no longer just an additional activity for product distinction, but rather a concept of its own. Brands are beneficial not only to companies, but to customers as well. Through branding activities customers can experience an enhancement of the aspects that set brands apart. Branding can also provide customers with an added-value, meaning that customers receive more than just the purchased product (Riezebos, 2003).

Added-value can take the form of both functional benefits and/or representational satisfaction, where the latter include emotional and self-expressive satisfaction. As long as brands are meaningful to customers, they bring added-value (Riezebos, 2003; De Chernatony, 1993). However, added-value is difficult to create, since a brand is much more than just a logo or a name. The value of a brand lies in how it is interpreted by customers at every interaction that exists between the brand and the customer. Hence, a brand is regarded as an asset for companies even though it cannot be controlled by a company but rather by those holding perceptions of it (Morrison, 2001). Kotler et al. (2005, p. 273) define perception as *“the process by which people select, organise, and interpret information to form a meaningful picture of the world”*, which is the definition we will rely on throughout this thesis.

1.1.2 Lack of industrial branding research

Most economies are predominated by trade between firms, since most products have to go through a number of stages before reaching the final customer. Hence, all stages before final consumption are represented by trade between firms (Kotler et al. 2005). In spite of this, the majority of the existing research on branding has been performed with business to consumer (B2C) markets in mind (Shipley & Howard, 1993; Michell, King & Reast, 2001; Mudambi, 2002; Webster JR & Keller, 2004). Even though it has been established that branding is equally important in both markets, there is still a gap in the research concerning branding in B2B firms (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

For a long time, consumer based research has been applied to B2B markets. More recently, it has been acknowledged that research based on B2B markets is needed since there are great differences between the two markets. The main dissimilarities between the two markets are structure and demand, the number of people involved in the purchase-process, and the nature of the decision process (Kotler et al. 2005). In industrial markets, purchases are most commonly made by buying units, consisting of several persons. Understanding how buying units perceive brands, and how this affects the purchase decision, is crucial for successful industrial marketing. Another difference between the markets is that risks involved with industrial purchases are often higher than the risks of purchases of consumer products. A bad industrial purchase decision might influence not only the individuals of the buying unit, but the entire company. In order to reduce perceived risks, business buying units tend to be more prone to purchase brands that they have a positive relation to. This can be explained by the fact that familiar brands are perceived to promise reliability to a greater extent than unknown ones (Mudambi, 2002).

To build relationships through a brand, a company should communicate representational factors. In consumer markets, the importance of emphasising both functional and representational factors has been acknowledged for a long time. The lack of research within industrial branding, has left industrial marketers without guidance concerning what factors to

emphasise in their brand message. Traditionally, it was believed that industrial firms should focus on communicating the functional aspects of their offering. However more recent research has highlighted the fact that buying units consist of people acting as “ordinary consumers”, responding to representational factors to a greater extent than what was initially believed (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004).

1.1.3 Online industrial brands

Unlike most B2C firms, many industrial firms have not actively created their brands. Rather, company name has become company brand (Webster JR & Keller, 2004). It is our conviction that the Internet has pushed industrial firms to engage more in branding activities. Based on our statement that first contact between firms are often established through the Internet, having a webpage is crucial in order not to lose potential buyers.

Due to the high risks involved in industrial purchases, building strong customer relationships is of importance for industrial firms. One way of creating these emotional bonds with your customers is to emphasise representational satisfaction in industrial brand communication. While the Internet offers a great opportunity for industrial firms to communicate with their buyers, brand messages need to be adapted to this medium (Rowley, 2004a). Communicating your brand message on the Internet could be seen as a great opportunity. However, the lack of research in this field leaves industrial firms without much guidance on how to convey this communication. The branding research on which industrial firms rely on today, is to a large extent based on consumer markets. This poses a problem since according to Lynch and De Chernatony (2004, p.406) *“there is a lack of consensus on the extent to which consumer branding techniques and concepts can be applied in business markets”*.

With this in mind we will examine printer manufacturers’ web sites as an example of an industry selling products to both business and consumer buyers. Choosing this industry will allow us to examine differences in the perception of the same brand in different markets. The firms we will examine are Canon, Dell, Hewlett-Packard (HP), Lexmark, Brother, Citizen, Epson, Gestetner, IBM, Konica Minolta, Kyocera, Mitsubishi, OKI, Ricoh, Samsung, Toshiba and Xerox. This study will allow us to use the existing branding theories complemented as far as possible by B2B literature. Through this process, we aspire to describe how industrial online brands can be perceived. Furthermore, this approach will allow us to draw conclusions concerning perceived differences or similarities between industrial and consumer brand messages.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how printer manufacturers’ online brand messages can be perceived regarding functional benefits and representational satisfaction, and how this may affect the examined brands.

2 Frame of reference

In the following chapter, a discussion concerning brands and branding will be conducted in order to present the underlying concepts of this thesis. This will be followed by a presentation of functional benefits and representational satisfaction, branding in industrial markets and online branding. Finally the chapter is concluded by formulated research questions.

2.1 What is a brand?

When examining brands, a number of different definitions can be found. Keller (1998, p.2) defines a brand, quite straightforward, as *“a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to differentiate them from those of competitors”*. Further, the author argues that a brand gains meaning for customers through their personal experiences, commercial messages, interpersonal communications and other means, in all possible interactions between them and the brand. Kapferer (1997) on the other hand, focuses more directly on the aspects of customer perception in his brand definition. The author states a brand to be a living memory built on a person’s interactions with a brand. The brand further differentiates a company from competitors by surrounding its offering with additional meaning.

Both definitions above emphasise the importance of differentiation. Through branding an offer can be differentiated from that of competitors. Brands can also be beneficial for customers. As long as a brand incorporates added-value for the customers, a brand also brings added-value to the company (Keller, 1998). Added-value, or brand equity as it is also referred to, is defined by Riezebos (2003, p. 69) as *“the contribution of the brand name and its related connotations to the consumer’s valuation of the branded article as a whole”*. Creating added-value is a difficult task since a brand is much more than just a logo or a name (Morrison, 2001). Moreover, the value of a brand is determined by how it is perceived by customers. Michell et al. (2001) state brands to play a role of a *“mental patent”*. Thus, brands are regarded as assets to companies, even though they cannot be controlled by anyone except for those having perceptions about them (Morrison, 2001).

We believe the definitions presented above to be of importance for a basic understanding of what a brand is. However, we have chosen De Chernatony and McDonald’s (1998, p.20) definition of a brand that incorporates the above definitions and extends them further. It states a brand as *“...an identifiable product augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added-values which match their needs most closely. Furthermore, its success results from being able to sustain these added-values in the face of competition”*. This definition identifies three key aspects of a successful brand; it is dependent on customer perception; the perception is influenced by the product’s added-value characteristics; and these characteristics need to be sustainable (Rowley, 2004a). This definition is the most precise of the presented definitions, why we believe it to be the most suitable for the purpose of this thesis. The definition’s key aspects will be used as the basic framework for our analysis.

2.2 What is branding?

Even though brands and brand strategies are important, creating a brand is not enough in order to achieve a sustainable advantage. Brands have to be carefully managed through coherent messages in order for customer perception to correspond to what the firm desires. If no brand management actions are taken, the brand will be completely controlled by the customers. Brand management can also be referred to as branding (Morrison, 2001).

Successful brand development and brand management begins with a fundamental marketing strategy and the development of a marketing program. Marketing strategy involves the concepts of market segmentation, targeting and positioning. Superior marketing through being relevant, distinctive, consistent, cohesive and creative leads to superior customer awareness, preference and buying action (Webster JR & Keller, 2004).

A successful brand strategy contributes to the establishment of a product's position, protection from competition and enhancement of the product's performance in the market. It should further generate a powerful bargaining position, both with retailers and distributors given a better market acceptance, quality assurance, increased profit margins and benefits of manufacturer's marketing efforts. Also, a successful brand strategy can support the market segmentation, enabling the creation of a distinct image in order to create a market niche and a foundation for price differentiation (Sinclair & Seward, 1988). Brand positioning incorporates a brand's core values, and requires points of both similarity and difference compared to competing brands. The differing points are what drive the customer's behaviour, and the similar ones break even with the competitors and negate their intended points of difference (Webster JR & Keller, 2004).

In spite of branding not being a new activity, it has gained increased attention in recent years. This is mainly due to the massive increase in the amount of commercial messages people are exposed to and the massive increase in the number of products the customers face. Decreasing product differentiation and the fact that important economies of scale can be obtained through communication are other explanations (Nilson, 1998).

Today, branding is seen as a core marketing activity, and to brand or not to brand is no longer the question. Rather, companies need to ask themselves how brands and branding activities should be managed within their own organisation. If no specific brand name is created, company name will usually function as brand name, which is often the case in industrial marketing (Webster JR & Keller, 2004).

As mentioned previously, every touch point between companies and customers is an input to brand image, and a properly managed brand can generate a number of benefits. A brand can be managed actively by a company as a strategic asset, otherwise it will be managed passively, more or less at random by its customers (Webster JR & Keller, 2004). It is however the active effort of trying to affect customers' perception of a brand that we will refer to as branding in this thesis. This approach is in line with what Keller (1998) advocates, and with Nilson's (1998, p. 25) definition of branding, stating that *"As the value of a brand is created by all the different activities the customer will connect with the brand, the brand management process is identical to managing all the factors that are externally apparent and relates to the brand, i.e. virtually all the activities of the company"*.

2.2.1 Branding in B2B markets

A vast majority of branding research has been devoted to acquiring insights concerning strategies for consumer brands (Sinclair & Seward, 1988). Webster JR and Keller (2004) go even further and argue that nearly all discussions of branding are based on consumer markets. In comparison to this, the amount of research performed on branding in industrial markets is quite non-existent (Shipley & Howard, 1993; Sinclair & Seward, 1988; Mudambi, 2002; Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004), which is a significant weakness of branding literature (Michell et al., 2001).

Further, Sinclair and Seward, (1988) argue that people in general do not believe branding to be very beneficial for industrial firms due to the great similarity that exists between products. However, the existing research performed on industrial markets indicates that this assumption is not a correct one. Branding in industrial markets is vital just because of the diminishing possibilities to differentiate a product solely on price or quality (e.g. Saunders & Watt, 1979; Mc Dowell Mudambi et al., 1997; Michell et al., 2001). The implementation of branding can under these circumstances provide a firm with a competitive edge compared to its competitors (Shipley & Howard, 1993). Despite the lack of attention given to industrial branding, Shipley and Howard (1993) argue that the phenomenon is widely employed by industrial firms. However, there is little knowledge of how branding is used by these firms and how they add value to their products.

2.2.2 Functional benefits and representational satisfaction

In order for a brand to be perceived as successful, its benefits have to satisfy a collection of customer needs, not only the rational ones. *“A brand is more than just the sum of its component parts; it embodies additional attributes that are intangible, but very real”* (Caldwell & Freire, 2004, p. 51). In the existing literature, different labels are used when describing these tangible and intangible benefits. The two phenomenon will in this thesis be referred to as functional and representational. Using the term representational factors and not emotional factors is due to the wider scope of representationality, containing emotional satisfaction along with personality and social roles (De Chernatony, 1993). The reason for treating the emotional and self-expressive satisfaction jointly is because they are very similar and interrelated (Aaker, 1991). Even though we will mainly treat these two aspects jointly under the label representationality, they will be described separately as well. This will be done in order to provide a more thorough understanding of the concept of representationality.

Functionality

According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), functional benefits describe what a brand is. Firms that focus their branding efforts on functional messages will base their competition on product characteristics. Functional benefits promote the technical features of an offering, and the utility of the service from a customer perspective (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998). The evaluation of functional aspects usually treats the perceived rational benefits such as quality, efficiency, availability, value for money, taste and performance (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

Even though the functional attributes can create a sustainable advantage for a brand, it can also act as a hindrance since it tends to limit further brand development. A company only emphasising functional attributes can easily lose its competitive advantage since these aspects can, in many cases, be easily copied by competitors (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). However, brands should not entirely focus on the creation of representational satisfaction. According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), all brands should promote a functional benefit which has relevance for consumers. Even though representational factors are usually described as the relationship creating aspects, functional messages should be incorporated into the overall message. To further ensure the creation of a successful brand, the representational aspects should be created around the functional ones.

Representationality

The creation of representational satisfaction is crucial for firms since these might facilitate the creation of added-value which, if done successfully, can lead to a sustainable advantage for a brand (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). While functional aspects focus on what a brand is, representational aspects describes what a brand does (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). These aspects are important to communicate since individuals involved in the purchase decision process consider, besides the functional benefits, personal issues. The emotional satisfaction can for example concern job security, status, friendship, ego, career advancement and other social and psychological factors (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). Since many industrial offerings are quite similar, the need for these firms to distinguish themselves through emotional satisfaction is enhanced (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998). The advertised message is then based on the experiences that exist around the product (Riezebos, 2003) or the perceived advantage obtained through a purchase (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998). Further, the aim of this branding activity is to alter customers' experiences of using a brand (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

Brands can, besides evoking emotions, take on the form of a communication tool among customers, stating for instance the self image that an individual has or wishes to proclaim (Riezebos, 2003). Self-expressive aspects can be expressed for example as, sophisticated, adventurous, competent or fashionable. A brand that suits a person's self-concept can create feelings of comfort or even fulfilment (Aaker, 1991).

The benefits of representationality "...add richness and depth to the experience of owning or using the brand" (Aaker, 1991, p. 97). It is vital for B2B firms to provide some representational connection through their brands (Stern, 2000). In spite of this, there has for a long time been a common perception that B2B brands should only focus on functional attributes, however the importance of representational satisfaction must be acknowledged. The underlying reason for this is the view of business buyers as being more rational than individual consumers. Even though rationality is said to have a key role in business purchases representational factors also require attention since buying units ultimately consist of individual consumers (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998). The representational satisfaction of greatest importance for most industrial brands are trust, peace of mind and security (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004).

Overall, a successful brand should have a mixture of both functional and representational aspects, since customers use both categories when evaluating brands. The selection between brands is based on a comparison between the levels of functional benefits respectively representational satisfaction that each brand promotes (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998). It should be acknowledge that even though functionality is the basis in many industrial purchases, many organisational purchasers may be attracted by representational messages (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). We believe that, even though business purchase decisions are made by a buying unit, since these units consist of individual consumers the representationality of a message will be of equal importance for branding in both B2C and B2B markets.

Brand box model

Functionality and representationality are stated by De Chernatony and McDonald (1998) to be independent of each other. Companies can be plotted in the De Chernatony-McWilliam matrix, figure 2.2, based on their levels of functionality and/or representationality. We will, as Caldwell & Freire (2004), refer to this model as the Brand box model. Further, this

model shows that a brand will always use a mixture of these two dimensions, and there will never be a total exclusion of either one of them (Caldwell & Freire, 2004). In order to decrease the number of B2B brands from occupying the impersonal and rational space that so many of them do today, a more balanced view using both functional benefits and representational satisfaction is needed (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). An underlying criteria in the creation of a successful brand is the recognition of what type of brand a company has, since this will facilitate and enable a proper allocation of required resources (De Chernatony, 1993).

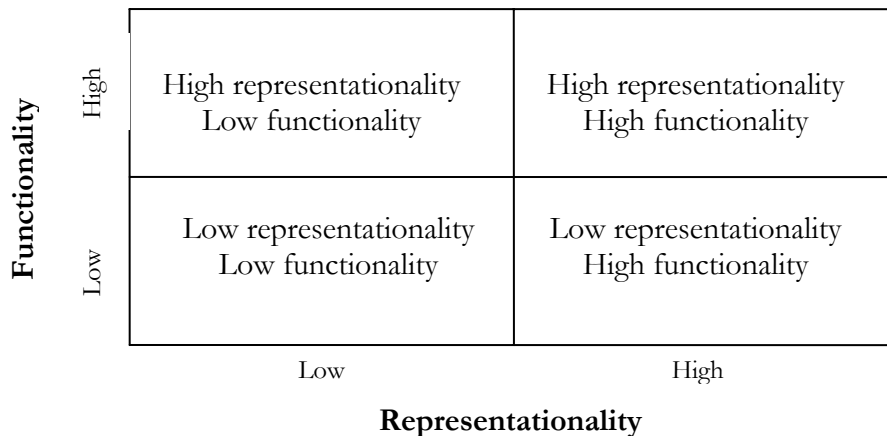


Figure 2.1 Brand Box Model (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998)

Brands supporting both high representationality and high functionality are perceived as having an excellent functionality at the same time as they work as non-verbal statements for their customers. To maintain this position, companies must maintain and further develop a brand that emphasises the image of its customers. Along side the development of the more representational aspects, the functional ones also have to be further developed. It is crucial that a brand's quality is maintained, and product development should occur continuously (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

In the bottom-right quadrant of figure 2.1, brands with low representationality and high functionality are placed. These brands have to focus on how to maintain their product superiority, since consumers buy these brands due to their functional needs rather than to any representational ones. A lot of resources should be devoted to R&D departments since these brands run a great risk of having their product copied by competitors (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

Brands in the quadrant with high representationality and low functionality usually appeal to customers due to their symbolic value rather than with their functional benefits. The functional differences between brands in this category are relatively small, brands distinguish themselves through their representational factors. The development of a continuous lifestyle-reinforcement marketing activity is crucial for brands belonging to this quadrant, making product development to become less important (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

The bottom-left quadrant consists of brands with low representationality and low functionality. These brands are attractive to consumers that do not put much emphasis on neither

functional aspects nor representational satisfaction that a brand can bring. In order for these brands to become successful there is a need for a great availability, and competition is usually based on a low price (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

2.2.3 Added-value

There are several different definitions of what added-value is, however, we have chosen to regard it as all extra benefits provided by a company beyond the mere product (Riezebos, 2003), with emphasis on representational and functional aspects. To create a sustainable added-value for a brand it is important that firms focus on offering customers more than just one aspect of a brand. To create a powerful brand with meaningful added-value there are several criteria that have to be fulfilled. First, a brand has to be differentiated from that of competitors, meaning that a brand name should stand for specific value-added benefits. Further, a brand's added-value should go beyond satisfying customers functional needs, with the aim of satisfying representational need as well. Customers must also feel that the added-value reduces any perceived risks connected with purchasing a specific brand. If this is done successfully, a brand will facilitate for a customer when making a purchase decision. All of these aspects of added-value have to support an overall coherent message, where all aspects underpin each other (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

However, fulfilling all of the above mentioned criteria does not naturally imply that the added-value offering will be successful. Since added-value is evaluated in relation to other brands, it is crucial to understand the added-value created by competitors. In order to spot a brand's actual or possible added-value it is useful to consider brands according to Levitt's (1980) four stage model, incorporating brands as a generic product with either an expected, augmented or potential branding strategy (cited in De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

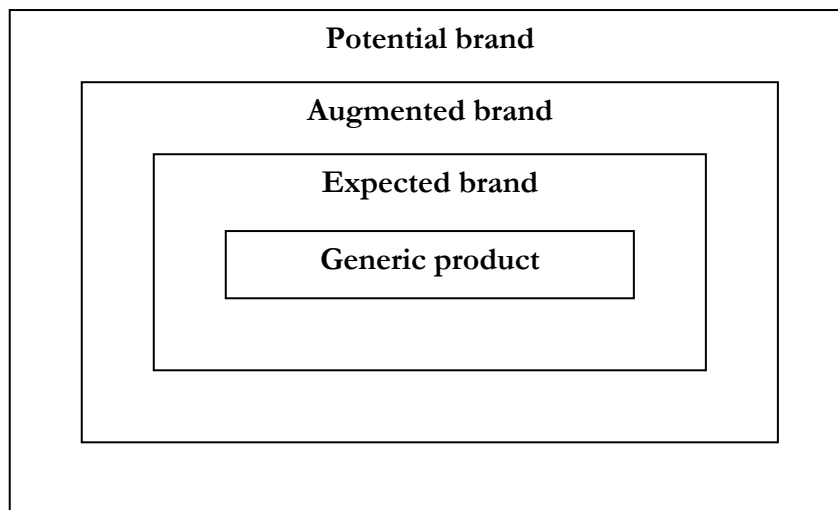


Figure 2.2 Levitt's (1980) Four levels of a brand model (cited in De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

The *generic product* is the most basic level of the model, showing only functional aspects. These functional features are what facilitate for firms to enter the market. At this stage products can quite easily be copied by competitors. Thus a generic product is usually not enough to create added-value that is sustainable (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998). All

products can move beyond this stage and provide consumers with a certain amount of expected value. In other words, there is no such thing as a completely generic product (Riezebos, 2003).

For firms having an *expected brand*, consumers have an idea about the very small differences between brands within the same market segment. At this stage products satisfy the most basic demands of customers such as design, availability and price. Customers are looking to satisfy their motivational needs (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998), and when buying printers, this need is to get print-outs. Firms with brands on this level usually only experience a very limited amount of competition. As in the generic product stage, the communicated added-value is concentrated around the products functional attributes (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

As customers become more confident, they are more willing to try other brands. Customers are seeking for the company that can provide them with the best value. In order for firms to keep customers in this phase, they need to augment the benefits of their brands. This third stage is referred to as the *augmented level* (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998). For printer manufacturers, augmented benefits can be for instance a quiet printer. At this level many brands will satisfy exactly the same motivational needs why the pressure to focus on the discrimination factors increases. These factors can take the form of both functional benefits (e.g. size, colour and shape) and representational satisfaction. Giving a brand a specific personality through representational aspects provides a greater possibility to create successful discriminators than what only using functional ones do. In order for a brand to be successful at this stage, it must first fulfil any motivational needs. Further, a brand should also have discriminators that are of importance to the customers (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

When the augmented benefits are seen as part of the standard offering, a brand has moved into the final stage, *the potential level*. In order for an augmented brand to reach the potential level, creating new benefits that will increase the added-value of the brand is required. If this is not done, the augmented brand will decrease one level to the expected level (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998). At this stage companies will do what ever it takes to tie customers to their brands (Riezebos, 2003). The potential level is the most challenging stage for companies since the only limitations in the creation of added-value are financial and imaginary. The problem of this stage is that competitors will sooner or later try to copy the added-value and customers will become more confident and experienced, resulting in customers trying other brands (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998).

2.3 Brands and the Internet

There are several available communication channels that companies can use in order to communicate their brands. One of them is the Internet, which we have chosen to examine further. As the Internet is becoming a part of basic marketing strategy (Einwiller & Will, 2002), B2B marketers now ask themselves how they can improve their competitive position (Mudambi, 2002). Many first argued that branding would become obsolete in the age of the Internet (Neal, 2000; When branding met..., 2002; Rowley, 2004a; Rowley 2004b) since people could obtain a massively increased amount of information concerning products and services. This new information enabled customers to examine and access the offering from a variety of possible providers, and hence being able to choose the cheapest alternative. However, the assumption of customers as mainly price driven, and of brands as

losing in importance in the decision-making process, turned out to be false (When branding met..., 2002).

It now seems that the avoidance of regional pricing differences, information access inequalities and variations in availability, has put end users back in contact with producers. This increases brand importance since brand equity is now the main decisive factor between only marginally differentiated products (Neal, 2000). Brands are now stated to be of even greater importance on the Internet than in most other environments. This is explained by the greater selection of relatively unknown brands, making customers choose familiar brands that represent values or attributes that are meaningful, clear, and trusted (Bergstrom, 2000; When branding met..., 2002). Thus, brands save customers time when dealing with information overload (Rowley, 2004b). This becomes particularly important in an electronic environment when buyers cannot see or confirm that suppliers are “real” (When branding met..., 2002). Hence, branding may play an increasingly important role since product features and benefits now need to be refined and captured in order to be communicated online (Rowley, 2004b).

However, not all researchers agree on this matter of brand-importance on the Internet. Rowley (2004a) presents a perhaps more balanced view when stating that the digital age may cause branding to become less important for frequently purchased products of low value. However, it may remain important for infrequently purchased, highly differentiated, high-value products. For industrial firms, the Internet is particularly well suited as a source of information. It allows firms to make company and product information accessible, which brings the Internet a clearly rational value. Moreover, it is most probable that industrial firms will use the Internet to an increased extent when sealing commercial transactions. This is already illustrated by the popularity of “marketplaces”, where negotiations can take place online (Riezebos, 2003).

2.3.1 Tailoring brands for the Internet

As discussed above, there are many approaches to online branding. However, regardless of the selected approach, online branding can be viewed as a significant opportunity for the creation of competitive advantages (Neal, 2000; Bergstrom, 2000). Rowley (2004b) even states that the Internet can play a central role in marketing communications as well as in brand and relationship building. Even though branding on the Internet is not much different from branding in general, there are both opportunities and challenges related to Internet branding. Establishing an online brand has shown to be more complicated than initially suggested (Bergstrom, 2000; When branding met..., 2002). Further, it is stated by several experts that industrial web marketing is not used in the most effective way (Evans & King, 1999).

Some mistakes that companies commonly make concerning their brands are that they assume brands to appeal in the same way on the Internet as through traditional channels of communication. However, the Internet users have in fact significant attitudinal differences (Bergstrom, 2000; When branding met..., 2002). The Internet is also considered as just another distribution channel, while it in fact is much broader, facilitating segmented or one-to-one marketing (Bergstrom, 2000; When branding met..., 2002). These are reasons why the Internet must be considered in a proper context and used in a way that strengthens brands (When branding met..., 2002).

Evans and King (1999) suggest that the implementation of a site follows a specific order. First there is web planning, where a firm plans if, and in that case, to what degree, a web

site makes sense for a firm. This implies site options ranging from a small information service to an entire cybermall. Proper goals are set in relation to this first choice, defining everything that follows. Then the firm decides how it wants to enter the web, before designing and placing the site components on the web. Finally, the site needs management in the form of site promotion, maintenance, updates and evaluation of performance. In this thesis we will examine already established web sites, hence only firms in the final stage of this process will be studied.

According to Rowley (2004a) there are several challenges for online branding. One example of this is the message capacity of the web. Each web page does not allow much scope for communicating messages and information. However, the use of links can allow for massive amounts of information but requires user-knowledge on how to navigate a site in order for customers to find the information. Another issue is that of brands as search keys, where a unique brand can play an important role in the search process. Finally, there is the issue of globalisation. Through the Internet world wide branding has become possible, however, customer preferences may remain local. Even when common values have been identified, these need to be communicated differently in different countries. Further, the online brand audience is less predictable and more diverse than brand audiences for other channels (Rowley, 2004a).

Rowley (2004a) further argues that relationships between organisations and customers has been changed by the digital environment, which might impact the experience of the brand. As mentioned, customer brand perception is based on all interactions with the brand. Since customers make active choices concerning which sites to visit, the Internet allows for a greater customer control of which messages that will reach them, and hence affect their brand perception. Also, there is the concept of permission marketing, where the customers can agree or refuse marketing messages from companies. It has also become easier to gather information about customers in order to segment them and design segment-specific offers, or even one-to-one interaction. Another change is that the Internet allows customers to engage in self-service, which to some extent makes the customer the person constructing the experience (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Rowley, 2004a). This further brings that internet-experienced customers may be more satisfied with the brand experience than newcomers (Rowley, 2004a).

2.3.2 Web site elements

There are some unique sensory aspects of the Internet, providing for strong emotional and affinity connections, key tools that are impossible for any other media to combine. It is therefore of importance for companies to find a way to emphasize what they are trying to accomplish with their Internet brand communication by exploiting these web-characteristics. By doing so, brand attraction can be created and strengthened, generating loyalty and brand experience (When branding met..., 2002). Web site elements that communicate brand values and brand messages are crucial for this thesis. These are colour, graphics, and text (Rowley, 2004a).

Colour – Colours are often associated to cultural messages. Colours, shades of the same colour, combinations of colours, and even pictures should all be chosen with care in order not to detract from a consistent colour message (Rowley, 2004a).

Graphics – Graphics include pictures and other images, and indicate the content and nature of the product. Graphics serve as a visual representation of a company's brand values, why it is important to select them carefully (Rowley, 2004a).

Text – This is what sets the tone of voice of the message. It also determines if the message is intelligent, understandable and relevant. Further, it helps define brand personality and reinforce brand values (Rowley, 2004a).

In conclusion, one could claim that managers need to take a systematic and thorough approach to brands in the online marketplace. However, a brand is ultimately only as successful as the customers' perception of it. Due to this we assume that good web site design will further enhance a positive customer brand perception, while a poor web site design will have the opposite effect.

2.4 Research questions

Our analysis will focus on the three key aspects of brands stated in our selected brand definition. These key aspects consist of customer perception, brand-added-value and sustainability of added-value. In order to cover these aspects two sub-questions were formulated for each of the three areas.

Customer brand perception

In this section we examine the perception of the printer manufacturers' online brands, focusing on the factors colour, graphics, and text. This section will present the examined web sites and serve as a basis for the analysis of the following two key brand-aspects.

Given the different tools for web site communication, what is perceived to be emphasised by the selected companies in their brand communication and what are the overall messages of the sites?

What are the perceived differences and/or similarities between the sites with separate entries for business and consumer buyers and the single-entry sites?

Brand-added-value

Here we will use Levitt's model Four levels of a brand to determine the printer manufacturers' level of brand development. This is based on the extent to which value has been added to the products.

Given the perceived web site communication of the companies, to what extent have the brands been developed?

What are the perceived differences and/or similarities between the sites with separate entries for business and consumer buyers and the single-entry sites?

Sustainability of brand-added-value

As the added-value has been determined, the sustainability thereof is evaluated based on the level of representationality that the printer manufacturers emphasise in their brand communication. This will be graphically displayed in the Brand box model.

Given the perceived emphasis of representationality and functionality of the printer manufacturers' brand communication, how may this affect the sustainability of the brand-added-value?

What are the perceived differences and/or similarities between the sites with separate entries for business and consumer buyers and the single-entry sites?

3 Method

Since we are addressing a problem of perception, we found a qualitative method to be most appropriate. Further, this chapter will present how our sample was selected and how data was gathered and interpreted. The chapter ends with a discussion assessing the chosen method.

3.1 Research design

In order to fulfil our purpose and see how printer manufacturers use functional and representational factors in their communication with their customers, we chose to develop a questionnaire as an analytical tool. The interest to examine how brands are perceived took form based on a discussion with Anna Blombäck, a doctoral candidate at Jönköping International Business School. Anna Blombäck drew our attention to the lack of existing research within the field of industrial branding, which was also supported by the literature we found.

We believe that the gaps in this area of research pose as a serious problem for industrial marketers since there are no theories guiding their brand strategies. It seems as if industrial marketers today have to use a trial and error approach to their branding, rather than being able to ground it on relevant research. To get an understanding of how close or far apart the concepts of business and consumer branding are, we decided to examine printer manufacturers since these brands carry both consumer and business products. Another aspect making the printer manufacturer industry interesting was the possibility it offered to compare companies that have separated business and consumer segments and those treating all buyers as one segment. It also allowed for comparisons within the brands having two separate entries. Furthermore, since printers represent non-frequently bought products, branding is according to Rowley (2004a) important for these kinds of infrequently purchased products.

We limited our study by selecting to examine only one communication channel, the Internet. Through web site branding firms have the possibility to clearly separate these two customer segments, why this marketing channel suited our purpose well.

Since the purpose of this thesis is to examine brand perception it would have been difficult, and not very beneficial, for us to perform quantitative research with the aim of falsifying or verifying existing theories (Bryman 1995; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). This is due to our intention of generating in-depth knowledge, which a quantitative study does not offer. Referring to the above mentioned definition of perception stated by Kotler et al. (2005) the suitability of a qualitative study was further reinforced.

Further, since the range and variety of industrial firms is quite large, it would be difficult to draw any conclusions for industrial firms in general. The aim of this thesis is to gain a greater understanding of what factors printer manufacturer stress through their web sites. To perform our study and fulfil the formulated purpose, we chose a qualitative approach since we wanted to generate knowledge rather than testing the existing one. Further strengthening our choice of method is the fact that we did not position ourselves outside of the study as observers, instead we chose to actively engage in it.

One of the commonly mentioned benefits with qualitative research is its flexibility (Holme & Solvang, 1996). We believed this to be of great importance to us due to the lack of research performed in our area of study. Holme and Solvang (1996) further argue that the flexibility is at the same time a weakness of the approach. We believed that since we were the

ones completing the questionnaire, adding questions along the way would not pose any problems. The possible difficulty facing us here was if any of the web sites would be updated and changes would have been made. However, to exclude this possibility we saved all examined web pages from a single date.

Other drawbacks usually connected with qualitative research according to Svenning (1997) is the subjective judgement of the researchers that can affect the results of a study. It is our belief however, that it is impossible for people to be strictly objective, why this is a problem facing all researchers.

3.2 Sampling

Normally, when an examination of the entire population is not feasible, a sample can be selected and examined in order to draw general conclusions applicable for the population at large (Bell, 1987). We performed a non-probability sample since according to Svenning (1997) there is no need for probability sampling when employing qualitative research.

In order to find out how many printer manufacturers there are, we visited web sites such as www.pricerunner.se, www.mycom.se, www.onoff.se, and www.siba.se. From these web sites printer brands were found and most of them reappeared in all web sites. Through this search method we also learned that the word printer includes a great variety of products, and thus many different market segments.

Since there are so many different usage areas for printers we decided to limit our study in order to make our selection more coherent. To be able to select a sample out of the initially found population, that would fit our purpose, we decided to create a few assumptions that companies had to live up to, in order to be selected. This is in line with Svenning (1997), who state that in qualitative studies the objects of study can be selected based on certain qualities. No companies solely manufacturing photo printers were included in our study, since these firms seemed to be directed exclusively towards individual consumers. Further, companies only offering multifunction machines (where printers are included), or other more specialised printers such as bar-code printers were all excluded since these seemed to be marketed only to other businesses. Overall, to be included the manufacturers had to produce printers that both consumer and business buyers were likely to purchase.

Due to the great number of existing printer manufacturers making quite different products throughout the world, we believed that it would be beneficial for us only to look at a selection of this population. Since our focal point is to examine if there are any differences in brand-emphasis between consumer and business web sites, we believed this to be most accurately displayed when looking primarily at firms that offer the same products to both segments, but have chosen to divide their market into two.

When examining the different printer brands we found that although some made a distinction between their business and consumer markets others did not. We found it interesting to see how these printer manufactures communicated with their customers through their web sites. We believed that the examination of printer manufacturers would give us a solid ground in order to see how representational satisfaction and functional benefits are used. Further, our study will allow us to spot any potential differences between messages sent to consumer and business markets, not only between brands but also within the same brand.

After conducting the above mentioned sampling we had acquired a sample size of seventeen printer manufacturers. We chose to divide these seventeen companies into two sub

groups. In the beginning of the thesis, our main interest was to examine those companies that had developed two separate web sites, one for their consumers and another for business buyers. However, as mentioned above, we soon realised that it would be of interest for us to also investigate companies offering equivalent products that had decided not to divide their market into two. Another reason for dividing the printer manufacturers into two groups was that by analysing each group separately we could distinguish if there are any similarities or differences between the two chosen branding strategies or not.

3.2.1 Separate-site firms

Canon is a Japanese company. It was founded in 1937, and the main focus of Canon at that time was cameras. This has over time developed and today they offer printers, scanners, calculators, binoculars and other closely related products (Canon, 2005).

Dell was established in 1984 in the United States. Products offered by Dell, besides printers, are computers, servers, software etc (Dell, 2005).

Hewlett-Packard (HP) was founded in the United States, in 1939. Besides printers, HP offers a variety of computer related products such as screens, calculators, scanners, cameras, and servers, to mention a few (HP, 2005).

Lexmark was started in 1991 as a spin-off to IBM. The company, which originates from North America, offers various models of printers and some consumable goods in connection to them (Lexmark, 2005).

3.2.2 Single-site firms

Brother is a Japanese brand and it was created in 1928. Besides selling printers the company also offers for instance sewing machines, typewriters, and fax machines (Brother, 2005a; Brother, 2005b).

Citizen started to produce watches in 1930 in Japan. Today the company manufactures watches, jewellery, printers and other electronic equipment among other (Citizen, 2005a; Citizen, 2005b).

Epson was founded in 1942 in Japan. The company offers a variety of products such as computers and peripherals, including PCs, printers, scanners and projectors, watches, plastic corrective lenses (Epson, 2005).

Gestetner was established in 1881, and since 1995 the firm is part of the Ricoh corporation. The company's product selection consists of printers, copiers, fax machines and scanners (Gestetner, 2005a; Gestetner, 2005b).

IBM was founded in 1911 in North America, however, the name IBM was not adopted until 1924. IBM produces, along with printers, computers, servers, software and other computer accessories (IBM, 2005a, IBM, 2005b).

Konica Minolta is the result of the joining of Konica Corporation and Minolta Corporation in 2003. The headquarter of Konica Minolta is located in Japan. Offered products are printers, scanners, cameras and other camera related products (Konica Minolta, 2005).

Kyocera was founded in 1959, in Japan. Originally, the Kyocera business-plan concerned ceramic components. Today, the company still offers ceramic components but also includes printer, electronic components and telephones (Kyocera, 2005a; Kyocera, 2005b).

Mitsubishi is a Japanese firm, which was founded in 1870. Besides selling printers Mitsubishi is engaged in a variety of markets such as aircraft manufacturing, shipbuilding, nuclear power engineering, waste treatment plants, satellites, oil products, beer, property and casualty insurance, and warehousing (Mitsubishi, 2005a; Mitsubishi, 2005b).

OKI was created in 1881 in Japan. Even though OKI is mainly famous for its printers in Europe, the company supports a variety of other products such as ATM machines, computers, telephones and much more (OKI, 2005).

Ricoh is a Japanese firm which was established in 1936. Besides printers Ricoh supplies scanners, computers, servers and software (Ricoh, 2005).

Samsung was founded in 1938 in South Korea. Samsung offer their customers products such as, printers, cameras, white goods, televisions, telephones and much more (Samsung, 2005).

Toshiba was formed in Japan in 1965. Besides selling printers, Toshiba offers a selection of computers, copiers and fax machines (Toshiba, 2005a; Toshiba, 2005b).

Xerox is a North American company which was founded in 1961. Xerox's main offering is printers. Along with this the company offers associated supplies, software and support (Xerox, 2005).

We chose to exclude Sony from the examination of printer manufacturers since the company does not display any printers of their own brand on their web site.

Throughout this thesis, the web sites will be referred to only by printer brand names, since all information is gathered from these web site addresses. The references coded as 2005a are the Swedish or international pages that have been used for the analysis. The company presentations above are however sometimes based on additional information from foreign sites, referred to as 2005b. In the cases where foreign sites have been used, there were no Swedish sites available for those companies.

3.3 Data gathering

When starting the collection of data, a literature review was performed to gain familiarity with the subjects of industrial brands and branding. This was essentially done in order to gain increased understanding of the extent to which the areas were documented. Further, it was important to discover prominent authors, books and articles within the area.

Brands and branding proved to be massively researched areas covered by a vast amount of literature, however most commonly based on consumer market research. It became clear to us that only limited research had focused on branding of industrial firms, as stated among others by Webster JR and Keller (2004). Further, almost no research at all focused on what brand factors that were communicated in this market. Although functional factors were what was traditionally emphasised in industrial markets, there should be an increased focus on representational aspects due to the possible benefits they can bring (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). As we started to focus on brand emphasis in industrial markets, with emphasis on representational and functional factors, we started to search for more specific

knowledge within this selected field. Relating the selected theories to each other, drawing conclusions from them, was relevant for us in order to facilitate the gathering of data.

The strategy of using a questionnaire was decided to be the most appropriate data-gathering approach to adopt. Using questionnaires is a beneficial way to collect large amounts of primary data, from rather large populations, in an economical way (Saunders et al, 2003; Zikmund, 2000; Bell, 1987). Since we decided to evaluate printer manufacturers' web sites ourselves, the questionnaires served as an analytical tool for us to rely on.

Since we wanted to know where emphasis was put in industrial Internet brand communication, and if the perception of the brand messages differed between consumer and business markets, a questionnaire strategy seemed suitable. According to Zikmund (2000), questionnaires can be performed through different medias of communication, why it suited our purpose of examining the Internet. Furthermore, since the use of questionnaires is a method that generates primary data (Zikmund, 2000), the usage of this method will lead to an avoidance of the risks associated with using secondary data. These are for instance low quality data or inappropriate data, collected in a way that is not compatible to our study (Saunders et al, 2003). The major argument against the use of a questionnaire is that designing, testing, collecting, and analysing the questionnaires are time-consuming tasks. There is also a great risk related to questionnaires being designed poorly (Saunders et al, 2003), with risk for misinterpretation, thereby generating unreliable conclusions.

As in all research, the gathering of data is of crucial importance for the final result. A thorough collection of data usually pays off later on in the research process. Svenning (1997) argues for the importance of carefully developing a questionnaire, claiming the most difficult task to be the translation of abstract theories into concrete questions. The difficulties of creating a reliable questionnaire were at least partly avoided since we developed it as a support to our web site examination. The risk of respondents misinterpreting the questions is thereby avoided. However, it may in our case be even more crucial to develop a precise questionnaire, since no defects in it can be detected through the answers of the respondents. Therefore, we decided that testing the questionnaire was still relevant, and it was required before putting it to use. To ensure that the questions were correctly formulated and that we would obtain the information needed we performed a test run on three printer manufacturer web sites. After the test-run we made some adjustments to our questionnaire in order to improve the data collection.

In our final questionnaire both open-end and closed-end questions were used. To best answer the formulated purpose of this thesis, we decided it to be crucial to incorporate open-end questions, which will allow us to gather more in-depth and in many cases original data. Since we chose to examine seventeen different web sites we also included close-end questions to make the data easier to handle (Christensen, Andersson, Engdahl & Haglund, 2001). This allowed us to spot any differences and similarities between the selected companies web communication, however, in almost all the cases the closed-end questions were followed up with a more thorough individual description.

For the examination of printer manufacturers' web sites, a questionnaire was developed, which we filled in ourselves, adopting the roles of potential clients. The three key brand-areas on which we base this research, were naturally the foundation on which we based our questions, customer perception, brand-added-value and sustainability of brand-added-value.

The first key area, customer perception, was evaluated through a number of questions concerning what was exposed and communicated through the printer manufacturers' web sites. These questions aimed at capturing what the web sites emphasised in their communication through some of the means that the Internet provides, colours, graphics, and text.

Secondly, added-value, is closely related to the first area since it consists of what is offered beyond the mere product (Riezebos, 2003), hence what is communicated on the web sites besides pure product facts. The questions in this section aimed at clarifying on what level of brand development the examined printer manufacturers turned out to be.

The third and final of the key areas is sustainability of added-value. However, the sustainability is depending on the level of representationality of the brand communication (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). Since the questions concerning customer perception already covered the aspect of functional/representational emphasis in the communication, no additional questions were needed in order to complete this part of the analysis. The gathered data concerning the first two key areas was considered sufficient.

3.4 Interpretation of data

We have throughout this thesis discovered just how flexible a qualitative study is, especially when it comes to the interpretation of the gathered data. We found this to be in line with Saunders et al. (2003) arguing that the interpretation of data in qualitative studies occur both during and after the collection phase. Since the examination of the web sites was performed through a discussion, based on our questionnaire, new thoughts were constantly stirred up for each web site we examined. Again referring to the lack of research, we did not know what to expect for the web sites when formulating the draft for our questionnaire. By using this approach we were however in no way hindered by a strict questionnaire, but could constantly modify our analysis by adding data where we believed it to be beneficial.

When collecting data we relied on our questionnaire in order to gather comparable data from all the selected sites. At the same time, the first phase of the analysis took place. This implied that a concluding question for each web site element was posed concerning what was emphasised in terms of functional benefits and representational satisfaction. For example, when analysing colour, we noted our perception of the selected colours of the sites. Then we analysed whether colours were used in order to enhance product characteristics or if they also communicated feelings or emotional messages. Based on this we determined where emphasis was put in the colour message. This was done for each element of each firm.

The answers to the concluding questions, concerning functional or representational emphasis, were summarised in tables in order to create an overview. In this way, we could determine which factor that was emphasised by each firm, as will be shown in the presentation of our results (Tables 4.1-4.4). The use of tables also enabled conclusions concerning what most companies emphasise through a certain web site element. By adding a grey background to all elements emphasising functionality, reading the results will be facilitated further. Separate tables were created for the firms having different entries for business and consumer clients and firms with single sites. For these firms, the business sites will be referred to by an added B after the company name, and the consumer sites will be indicated by a C. By separating the data in this way, the discovery of potential differences between these two segments was facilitated.

The data concerning added-value was collected in a similar way. Based on a combination of the added-value data and our overall perception of the sites, we determined each brand's level of development according to Levitt's four stage brand model. As for the third key area of our brand analysis we relied on the data collected through the questions concerning customer perception and added-value. As we had determined the emphasis of representationality and functionality, and the level of added-value, we analysed the effect this might have on the brand. The analysis was performed through the use of the Brand box model.

3.5 Method assessment

Regardless of choice of method, or process of data-gathering, research procedures need to be critically examined. In relation to this, two concepts should be taken into consideration; validity and reliability. Due to the two concepts' relation to measurements, their importance has been well established for quantitative research, whereas their role in qualitative research has been more questioned (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Still, we have chosen to apply both concepts to our selected method, adapting the analysis of them to the qualitative nature of our study.

3.5.1 Validity

According to Wiederheims-Paul and Eriksson (1989), existing definitions of the term validity are quite vague why the authors have chosen to define it as the ability to measure that which was intended to be measured. If the gathered data does not answer to the purpose, even though the data might be reliable, it is not valid (Svenning, 1997). Repeating the purpose of this thesis, we want to investigate how printer manufacturers' online brand messages can be perceived regarding functional benefits and representational satisfaction, and how this may affect the brands.

Validity is commonly divided into internal and external validity (Wiederheims-Paul & Eriksson, 1989; Svenning, 1997). Internal validity is concerned with the targeting of the right sample and the usage of a proper measuring method. External validity is achieved when it is possible to draw general conclusions from a study, applying for the whole population or as common theory. In qualitative studies it is important to be careful when trying to create common laws since the sample many times is not representative for the whole population (Svenning, 1997).

In order for our study to obtain highest possible validity, we chose the method that in our opinion answered best to our purpose, implying the creation of a questionnaire, for us to fill in ourselves. Through our choice of method, common problems concerning the internal validity such as dishonest information from the respondents (Svenning, 1997), were avoided. However, this means that we have had a subjective influence over both the collected data and the interpretation thereof. But, as mentioned above, subjectivity is an inevitable problem for all research, not just for our study.

To increase internal validity we have chosen firms having separate entries for business and consumer buyers since we believe the differences in brand message between the two sites to be of great interest. Including these firms in our sample will display actual differences in companies' brand messages in terms of representationality and functionality, rather than differences between organisations at large. However, relating the data from these firms to that of firms with single entry sites will allow for a deeper understanding for the area of

study. Given our selection of a qualitative study we have no aspirations of this study generating general, objective conclusions, why the external validity will not be elaborated further.

3.5.2 Reliability

While the validity is concerned with what is being measured, reliability focuses on how an investigation is performed. A research is commonly seen as having a high reliability if the results of an investigation can be replicated. Svenning (1997) states that in a qualitative study, the issue of reliability is not as important as in quantitative studies since qualitative research is more case specific. However, as stated by Cooper and Schindler (2001), even though a study is reliable, that does not automatically make it valid. Saunders et al. (2003) further state the four threats to reliability to be subject or participant error, subject or participant bias, observer error and observer bias.

Just like validity, reliability can be divided into internal and external reliability. External reliability represents the degree to which a study can be replicated, and internal reliability describes, if there is more than one observer or author, the level to which these persons are consistent. It is difficult for a qualitative study to achieve external reliability since it is to a greater extent that quantitative research based on the subjective interpretation of researchers, and since the analysed situations might not reoccur (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

In this thesis, the subjectivity is related to the analysis of printer brands. Given that the perception of a brand is based on your every interaction with it, our interpretation and analysis of data will be coloured by our previous interactions with some of the brands, and lack of interactions with others. Taking this risk of observer bias into consideration, our analysis might be most reliable for the companies we had not heard of before, since our only perception of them must be generated from the companies web pages. Nevertheless, our experiences of printers were quite limited, and the continuous comparisons between the sites are believed to reduce the effects of our previous brand perceptions. Further, brand awareness and emotional connection are two separate concepts not to be confused (Gobé, 2001). Hence just because we were aware of some of the brands prior to our study, that does not mean that we had emotional connections to them. Concerning the internal reliability, we performed all the evaluations and analyses of the web sites together in order to obtain good consistency of our results.

4 Results and analysis

In this section, our empirical findings will be presented and analysed according to the above presented key aspects of a successful brand. The analysis follows in relation to the empirical findings, in order to emphasise the relation between the two. To conclude, our results and performed analysis a model will be presented describing printer manufacturers' brand emphasis and level of brand development.

4.1 Key aspects

In the frame of reference we selected De Chernatony and McDonald's (1998, p.20) definition of brands as the one we would refer to, presenting a brand as "...an identifiable product augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added-values which match their needs most closely. Furthermore, its success results from being able to sustain these added-values in the face of competition". The definition was, as stated previously, selected since it identifies three key aspects of a successful brand; it is dependent on customer perception; the perception is influenced by the product's added-value characteristics; and these characteristics need to be sustainable (Rowley, 2004). We have previously referred to branding as the management of all factors externally apparent and related to the brand (Nilson, 1998). Applying this to our web-site focus, the extent to which the printer manufacturers actually do manage these three brand aspects will be analysed.

Customers' perception, regardless of whether they are business or consumer buyers, can be affected through online communication. We examined this by taking the roles of potential customers. Value can, as previously mentioned, be added to companies' products through both functional and/or representational aspects (De Chernatony, 1993). As Riezebos (2003) stated, brands bring added-value as long as they are meaningful to consumers. Finally, the sustainability of the value-adding characteristics depends on their level of representationality. The more representational they are, the harder it becomes for competitors to copy them (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). Hence, sustainability will be the third area of analysis.

4.1.1 Web site perception

Dell, Lexmark, Canon and HP are the only companies of our sample with separate entries for business and home users of their products. All of the separated sites seem to have devoted equal attention to both pages of their sites. The remaining companies of our sample, Epson, Konica Minolta, Brother, Samsung, Xerox, OKI, Kyocera, Ricoh, Mitsubishi, IBM, Toshiba, Citizen and Gestetner, do not have separate entries for business and home users on their web sites.

When analysing customer perception of the web sites we have relied on Rowley's (2004a) web site-elements, stated to communicate brand values and brand message. We have selected to examine colour, graphics, and text. Finally, the overall messages of the sites are presented.

Colours

Colours are in our opinion what first strikes you when entering a new web site, why it will be the first factor we examine. There is not an absolute definition to what a specific colour communicates since this may differ between persons and cultures. However, colour plays an important role in how a message is perceived (Rowley, 2004a), why we have examined it

further. First, the companies having separate pages will be described and analysed, followed by the firms having single sites for all consumers.

On both of Dell's sites, blue is the dominating colour. The company logo is blue, just like the pop-up menus, however they are varying in different shades making the site more vivid. Keeping the same colour throughout all pages makes it clear to the customers which site they are visiting. The consistency in colour also makes the site seem familiar rapidly, as all pages resemble. White background and some grey details complement the dominant white and blue. The colours are strong and cold, creating a feeling of company confidence, trustworthiness and knowledge in the field of technology, hence mostly functional factors are emphasised on both sites.

Lexmark uses fewer colours than Dell, however the colours are employed in a similar way since the colours of the logo are used throughout the entire site. Keeping a colour-consistent header on all pages secures customer recognition of site pages and brand (Rowley, 2004a). The colours used are almost entirely on a black and white scale, with some deep red details in contrast to the otherwise strict colours. The grey background softens the impression of the site, creating a calm, serious feeling that generates company credibility. Further, the neutral, sophisticated colours used by Lexmark enhance the pictures of the printers, since no bright colours steal the attention. In conclusion, this also emphasises the products' functional features of both sites.

For Canon's web sites, white is the truly dominating colour. It is only challenged by the clear red of the company logo, reappearing on links, headlines and other small details of the site. The text is in grey, reducing the contrasts that a text in black would generate. The site is very bright. There is almost a sense of being in a processing laboratory due to the extreme brightness of the pages. Perhaps this is the exact feeling Canon, as a leader in imaging products (Canon, 2005-05-02), is striving to communicate. The emphasis put on state-of-the-art research and top-of-the-line products through the use of colour reduces the risks of a boasting tone that the same message might generate in writing. In general, this is a site that to a very large extent focuses on representational factors, both on the business and home-user pages.

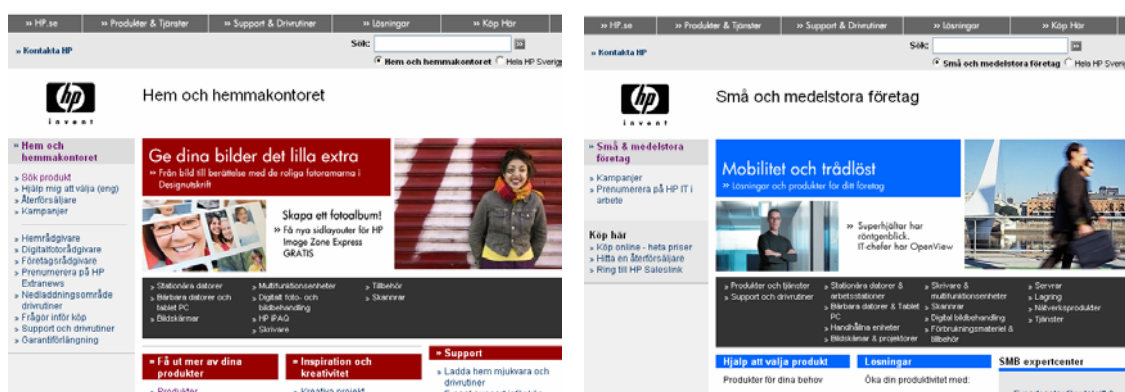


Image 4.1 HP's consumer and business sites

HP is the only one of the firms with separate pages for business and home users not keeping a consistent colour message throughout its web sites, as shown in image 4.1. However,

Results and analysis

both pages have a white background. For the business page, a clear blue colour has been chosen, in combination with two shades of grey. The home-user page on the other hand is dominated by a wine-red colour, combined with the same shades of grey as the business page. The recurrence of the grey, despite the dominant colour being changed, keeps the feeling of site familiarity at the same time as it strongly communicates a difference between the pages. The business page gives a cold, rapid and edgy impression while the red creates a more relaxed setting of calm and warmth. The colours make the two sites send out completely different messages, selected to target each customer group through the feelings they communicate to the site visitors. However, both selections of colours mostly emphasise the representational factors of HP's products.

When examining the web sites of the single-site companies, we found that most of the companies have chosen quite similar colours in different shades. We feel that in many cases the colours do not add that much to the web page due to the careful way in which the colours are applied.

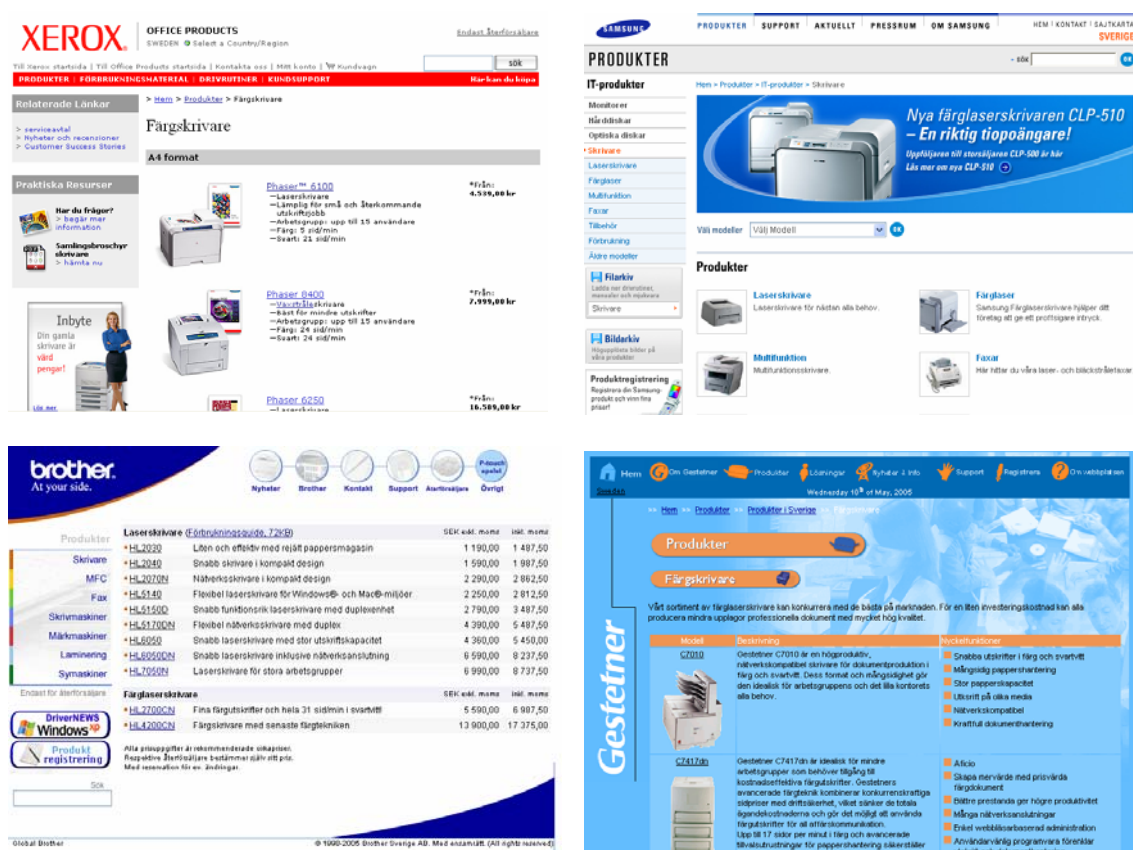


Image 4.2 Xerox, Samsung, Brother and Gestetner web sites

Both OKI and Ricoh web sites have clear red logos on white backgrounds, combined with pop-up menus in different shades of blue. On OKI's site the printer category pages, like colour printers and black-and white printers, are in different colours to emphasise the differences. However, the extensive use of colour makes a consistent colour message difficult to interpret, and the site looks a little disordered. Clearly no coherent colour message has been developed for the site, why no representational or functional colour message can be

distinguished. Ricoh on the other hand has kept to the red, white and blue colour combination, making it their trademark, emphasising the red colour of the logo through links and headlines. A similar colour setting is employed by Xerox and Toshiba, using red logos and white backgrounds, however grey is used instead of the blue used by Ricoh and OKI. The simple selection of colours by Ricoh, Xerox and Toshiba puts product features in focus, hence communicating functional factors. The Xerox page can be seen in image 4.2.

Konica Minolta and Samsung (image 4.2) are also using a white background but they keep closely to matching shades of clear blue and grey. This creates a controlled impression of professionalism and trustworthiness. The same is applied by IBM and Kyocera that use colours on a black and white scale. IBM has included some blue elements, and Kyocera some red, but both colour messages are consistent and create confidence. The colour messages on all four of these sites hence emphasise representational features.

Brother (image 4.2) and Epson use different dark blue shades on a white background. Colours are so scarcely used on these sites that any message of product benefits is impossible to discover. In our opinion, it is clear the colour message has not been devoted much attention from the companies.

Mitsubishi, Citizen and Gestetner on the other hand, use colours more extensively than any of the other examined sites. On Mitsubishi's site, a strong blue colour dominates and two shades of beige are complementing it. Citizen presents their products on a white background but with an extensive use of yellow and grey, and Gestetner has chosen a dominant blue background with some orange and dark blue elements. Due to this substantial use of colour, very dramatic looks are created on the sites, in great contrast to the other printer sites. The emphasis is on product functionality, and the message is loud.

Separate-site firms	Colours	Single-site firms	Colours
Canon – B	Representational	Brother	-
Canon – C	Representational	Citizen	Functional
Dell – B	Functional	Epson	-
Dell – C	Functional	Gestetner	Functional
HP – B	Representational	IBM	Representational
HP – C	Representational	Konica Minolta	Representational
Lexmark – B	Functional	Kyocera	Representational
Lexmark – C	Functional	Mitsubishi	Functional
Overall	Func. / Rep.	OKI	-
		Ricoh	Functional
		Samsung	Representational
		Toshiba	Functional
		Xerox	Functional
		Overall	Functional

Tabell 4.1 Perceived colour messages

Concluding the discussion of colour, it is our opinion that companies in general having separate web pages for businesses and home-users have consistent and well-considered colour messages. For the single-site companies, this generalisation cannot be made, but a majority of those firms also presented consistent colour messages. Of the four companies

with separate web sites, two focus on functional aspects and two emphasise representational factors in their colour message. In comparison, four of the thirteen single-site firms focused on representational factors, six on functional ones, and three have not given the colour message much consideration.

Graphics

In our view it seems logical that all the examined printer manufacturers picture their printers on their web sites. However, this is done in a wide variety of ways, and in many cases, additional pictures are used to communicate other messages to the site visitors. The pictures, and what they are communicating, is what will be examined next.



Image 4.3 Pictures from Dell's consumer and business sites

Dell has selected different pictures for their two pages, as image 4.3 shows, however they are all placed on the top of the page, clearly exposed to the site visitors. The page directed towards home users shows a father and son in front of a computer, printing images from a camera. This can be interpreted in a functional sense, since it shows the product in use. That the child is only about ten years old can also be interpreted in a sense that the printer is easy to use for everyone in the family. A deeper meaning of the picture lies in the message that using the printer is something that family members can do together, creating or reinforcing family bonds. This indicates an emphasis on representational factors in the communication.

On Dell's business site, a man is pictured at the office, looking at a print-out with his feet on the table (image 4.3), communicating functional factors. However, an element of representationality can be found in that the man is pictured with his feet on the table. This indicates relaxation and absence of stress, features that are usually attractive and requested in a workplace. The message communicated through the pictures on Dell's site is hence mainly representational, stating that buying a Dell printer can help obtain the projected ambiance.

Lexmark also uses one additional picture on each of their two web pages. Lexmark has done the opposite to what Dell has in their placing of communication emphasis. The home user site focuses solely on a woman using a printer at home, without emphasising any other benefits than functional ones, nor appealing to any emotions. She looks like a business woman, dressed for the office, working at home. The business page, on the other hand, pictures a group of young people supposedly closing a business deal. These young, smiling business people, just about to close a deal, communicate success, beauty and money, and can therefore be considered as emphasising more representational factors. Hence, at the Lexmark pages, the consumer communication is more functional than the business com-

munication. In spite of this, the overall impressions of the two web pages are mainly functional.

Just like Dell and Lexmark, Canon presents pictures on top of both of their pages. The home user site has a picture of a man dressed for the office, aiming to throw a paper plane. By this Canon communicates the target consumer as someone working at home. Playfulness, ease, and humour, are communicated, all clearly representational factors. On the business page, a smiling young man is pictured, however not typically dressed for the office. He is relaxed, smiling, and a lot younger than the man in the home-user page. The picture really signals more leisure than work, and no functional factors, hence emphasis lies on representational factors on both pages.

Finally, on HP's business page, two businessmen in suits and briefcases are pictured. They are photographed in motion, creating a feeling of efficiency, professionalism and time optimisation. This can further be interpreted as if buying HP, no time or worries will be wasted on printing. Hence time can be spent on more urgent tasks. This message focuses on the representational satisfaction of buying an HP printer, thus mainly representational factors are emphasised. On the home-user site, two pictures of young people are shown. These young, relaxed people in outdoor settings emphasise individualism, calm and lack of prestige. No functional aspects are communicated, why these representational factors dominate HP's communication.

The companies employing one web page for all their different printers have all chosen different strategies when adding pictures to their sites. In general, what can be said about these companies is that we found the web pages a bit cold, mainly focusing on products.

Brother, Kyocera, Ricoh and Samsung all show quite strict pictures of their printers, supporting a rather impersonal message with strong functional focus. Xerox has added print-outs in their pictures of printers, making the pictures more appealing, but this does not challenge the company's clear emphasis on functional product aspects. Epson has done the same as Xerox, however taking it one step further, moving focus from the printer to the print-out. Since actual print-outs are the benefits of all printers, or in other words, what you really want when acquiring a printer, this shift of focus does not alter where the major emphasis of the communication lies. Focus is still on functional factors.



Image 4.4 Picture from Xerox's site

IBM has chosen to add a picture to their web site which is not directly connected to printers. Even though the picture has printers in it, focus lies on a young woman. It does not communicate much, but it adds some representationality to the web page through reducing some of the focus from the actual products. However, the fact that the woman seems to be in a laboratory, or in some kind of setting for technological development, still keeps the emphasis on functionality.





Image 4.5 Sample of Toshiba's pictures

Toshiba and OKI have not only used pictures of their printers, but also some additional pictures to extend their brand message communication. On Toshiba's site, only one picture is displayed, however the motive shifts, fading into a new one every couple of seconds. In this way the site is kept clean and clear, while at the same time displaying different kinds of people, in different business and home settings. Most pictures display Toshiba products in use, but the messages are focused on image and attitudes, hence communicating representationality.

OKI pictures people in a lobby on their site, which communicates a trendy, busy, business environment. The representational emphasis of the communication is further reinforced through the company's printer presentations. Moving pictures of the displayed printers, that the visitor is in control of, allows the potential buyers to study the printers from all different angles, sending out a clear message of honesty. Allowing the visitors to freely examine every angle of the printers communicates that OKI has nothing to hide about their products, that they are confident and proud concerning their products. In a deeper sense, that also communicates reliability of the company's technological development. Even though the printer is pictured, which usually communicates functional factors, it is done in a way that emphasises representational aspects as well.

Konica Minolta, Mitsubishi, Gestetner and Citizen all have pages showing pictures of their printers, but these photos are different from the ones mentioned above. They are more artistic, and background colours have been added to make the pictures stand out more than what a traditional white background would offer.



Image 4.6 Picture from the Konica Minolta site

Konica Minolta has chosen to present its printers emphasising more than just the functional aspects of the printers. The printers are shown on a blue background, where humans can be distinguished. Throughout the web page there are different, quite small pictures showing business people in situations such as meetings, but also pictures of technical fea-

tures of the printers. The business-oriented pictures communicates image and hence representational factors, whereas the functional pictures of small technical features communicate an eye for details. In combination, these pictures create a sense of professionalism and credibility, why representationality is in focus on this site.



Image 4.7 Citizen site background

Mitsubishi, Gestetner and Citizen have pictures as consistent site backgrounds where people can be distinguished. On top of Mitsubishi's web pages, a young woman's face is pictured, communicating a sense of fashion and intensity. Gestetner and Citizen have both chosen backgrounds where people in different business-related situations can be distinguished. Citizen pictures people envisioning ideas, looking at a globe, in business meetings and in great warehouses, which communicates the printers and the ability to print as integrated parts of a business environment. The fact that Mitsubishi, Gestetner and Citizen also have chosen to add image-related pictures to their sites, makes us consider their communication to emphasise mostly representational factors.

Separate-site firms	Graphics		Single-site firms	Graphics
Canon – B	Representational		Brother	Functional
Canon – C	Representational		Citizen	Representational
Dell – B	Representational		Epson	Functional
Dell – C	Representational		Gestetner	Representational
HP – B	Representational		IBM	Functional
HP – C	Representational		Konica Minolta	Representational
Lexmark – B	Functional		Kyocera	Functional
Lexmark – C	Functional		Mitsubishi	Representational
Overall	Representational		OKI	Representational
			Ricoh	Functional
			Samsung	Functional
			Toshiba	Representational
			Xerox	Functional
			Overall	Functional

Table 4.2 Perception of graphics

In conclusion, pictures are truly effective means of communication. Of the firms with two sites, Dell, Canon and HP emphasise representational factors through their pictures, whereas Lexmark use the same means to communicate functional aspects. When comparing

this to the single page sites, it shows a difference in that seven of the thirteen firms focused on functional aspects, and six on representational.

Text

Just like graphics, text sections on the web sites are used in a wide variety of ways, ranging from bullet heads to large amounts of fluent text. There are also differences in what is emphasised in the texts. This will be described further in the following paragraphs.

Under the pictures on both Dell-sites, text and links follow, presenting the company's different printers. Once a printer is selected, it is shown on top of a new page, next to two other similar printers, with brief technical descriptions below all three. The prices are indicated as well. This facilitates for the buyer to make comparisons between similar products without having to make an extensive effort to do so. In this sense, the home and business sites do not differ at all, and the same printers are offered on both sites and described in the same way. An example of a printer description is the Dell Workgroup Laser Printer M5200n that *"fulfils the requirements of quality and high volumes at the same time generating low total printing costs"* (Dell, 2005-05-02). Hence, the communicated texts are clearly emphasising the printer's functional aspects.

Lexmark also presents its printers by pictures on top of the page, with a quite brief technical description below. Comparisons can be made between the products of the site, however there is a lack of price information. The written information on the printers contains slogan next to the pictured printers, and functional descriptions below the pictures. A slogan for a home-use printer can for example be *"Lexmark Z515 is a complete and price-worthy printer for personal usage like colour print-outs. It is perfect for printing written work, web pages and pictures"* (Lexmark, 2005-05-02). Both texts emphasise functional factors of the printers.

Canon briefly presents its printers just like Dell and Lexmark however on this page the printers are all presented on the same page and links only need to be used for thorough product information. Canon presents neither prices, nor possibilities for comparisons on their web pages. On their business page the text communicated says *"The compact model NP6612 is an effective solution for smaller offices. It has automatic paper feed and a special sleep mode for the toner. The handling is simple, economical and environmentally friendly. It produces 12 high quality A4 copies per minute and is completely reliable"* (Canon, 2005-05-02). This message emphasises performance, however some representational aspects are also highlighted through the use of words like *reliable*. The messages for both pages are constructed in the same way, and are mainly functional.

HP presents all its printers most briefly of the four companies. Just like Dell, HP also has a function for comparing the company's different products, where the prices are indicated. The texts on both business and consumer sites appeal to emotions, and an example of this is the HP LaserJet 1160 printer for home-users, described as *"A printer of high compatibility and good price that you can rely on for high-quality, black-and-white printouts"* (HP, 2005-05-02). This communication is very similar to that of Canon in the emphasised risk reduction, but still dominant functional message.

The printers of Epson, Kyocera, IBM, OKI, Gestetner and Toshiba are all presented with both bullet points and fluent text. The web sites of Epson, Kyocera, IBM, Gestetner and Toshiba all highlight the printers' functional benefits, but a small difference in the messages within each web page can be spotted between the bullet points and the fluent text. In all cases, the sections with fluent text becomes more representational. However, the overall message for Epson's, Kyocera's and IBM's web sites is clearly functional. As Kyocera

(2005-05-02) communicates, *“Our unique ECOSYS-technique does not only benefit the environment through increased efficiency and low noise-levels, it also offers high quality and efficient performance along with decreasing long-term costs”*. These companies all describe their products with a relatively short amount of text.

OKI, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on the representational satisfaction of their printers, describing them through a quite extensive amount of text. An example of what they communicate is *“Print-out in black and white is the engine of a smooth working company, the real hero that faithfully works through the workload”* (OKI, 020505). Hence, unlike the other companies, OKI has more or less focused all of its fluent text on representational satisfaction. The message communicated by OKI is quite different from all the others since a large part of it is not in a direct way connected to the printers’ features.

Xerox has created a text layout that is different from all of the other examined firms since the company has chosen to only describe their printer in bullet points. What further sets their text apart from that of the competitors is that Xerox has chosen to have a very long and detailed text, however dividing it under different headlines. The displayed text is very functional throughout the site, solely stressing the functions of the printers.

Brother, Mitsubishi, Samsung, Konica Minolta, Ricoh and Citizen have all chosen to present their written messages in the form of fluent text. Even though all of these firms have chosen fluent texts to describe their products, the variation in length of the text, and how the text is used varies a great deal. On Samsung’s site, which gives a typical example, a text is displayed consisting of technical aspects such as *“Laser printer, 14 pages/minute, 2MB, 600 dpi, USB 1.1. A compact printer worthy of its price, with paper storage”* (Samsung, 2005-05-02). This is clearly a functional text, presenting only the printer and its features. However, since these texts at the same time are quite short, there is not much space for anything else than the quite short and “cold” descriptions of functional aspects of the products. Mitsubish stands out through not placing much emphasis either on representational satisfaction or functional benefits.

At the other end of the spectrum, opposite from Samsung’s brief, technical descriptions, we find Ricoh and Konica Minolta. Ricoh uses far longer text sections in connection to their printers than the above discussed companies do. The main message of Ricoh’s text is still rather focused on the functional benefits of the products, however efforts to increase the level of representationality are made. An example of this is the peace of mind that the company’s printer Aficio™ CL100N is claimed to bring through the quote that it *“...comes with peace of mind, as the leading office automation manufacturer, Ricoh has built an award winning portfolio of products to back up this claim”* (Ricoh, 2005-05-02). Of the examined companies, Konica Minolta has the most massive sections of text. The company carefully describes more than just the printers, also treating areas in connection to printers such as compatibility to different computer systems. Konica Minolta is consistent through out the text, with a strong focus on the functional benefits of their printers.

Separate-site firms	Text		Single-site firms	Text
Canon – B	Functional		Brother	Functional
Canon – C	Functional		Citizen	Functional
Dell – B	Functional		Epson	Functional
Dell – C	Functional		Gestetner	Functional
HP – B	Functional		IBM	Functional
HP – C	Functional		Konica Minolta	Functional
Lexmark – B	Functional		Kyocera	Functional
Lexmark – C	Functional		Mitsubishi	Functional
Overall	Functional		OKI	Representational
			Ricoh	Functional
			Samsung	Functional
			Toshiba	Functional
			Xerox	Functional
			Overall	Functional

Table 4.3 Text messages

In this element, tables are turned concerning the communication emphasis between our two categories of web sites. All four of the of the two-entry-sites companies communicated the functional aspects of their printers, whereas OKI, a single-site firm, is the only one communicating mainly representational aspects.

Overall message

For the divided sites, starting with Dell, main focus lies on communicating functional factors, however, representational factors are more present on the home-user page than on the business page. Since the message is mainly functional, the selection of colour seems appropriate to emphasise just that. For Lexmark, the opposite messages are communicated, where representationality is more present at the business page than at the consumer page. For the business users, more representational factors are communicated through the young, beautiful, and successful persons in the picture on that site. Depending on what ambiance the business clients want to create, this might seem appealing to them. The home users are approached by emphasis of functional aspects, only appealing emotions in a brief slogan. However, given the texts and colours, the messages on both sites are mainly functional.

Canon communicates in the same manner on both of their sites, emphasising both functional and representational factors of their products. However, the strong colour message, together with the representational pictures, puts the representational factors of their communication in majority. Finally, HP communicates in a similar fashion on both of their sites. Representational factors dominate in the colour and picture communication, and are also emphasised to some extent in the texts.

Concerning the undivided sites, the majority of the companies emphasise functional factors in all of the analysed elements of their Internet communication. OKI stands out in their written communication as the only one of these firms emphasising representational factors of their printers. Konica Minolta, Toshiba, OKI, Citizen, Gestetner and Mitsubishi do the same in their selection of pictures, but other than that, the communication is focused on technical and functional aspects.

Separate-site firms	Colours	Graphics	Text	Overall
Canon – B	Representational	Representational	Functional	Representational
Canon – C	Representational	Representational	Functional	Representational
Dell – B	Functional	Representational	Functional	Functional
Dell – C	Functional	Representational	Representational	Functional
HP – B	Representational	Representational	Functional	Representational
HP – C	Representational	Representational	Functional	Representational
Lexmark – B	Functional	Functional	Functional	Functional
Lexmark – C	Functional	Functional	Functional	Functional
Overall	Func. / Rep.	Representational	Functional	Func. / Rep.
Single-site firms	Colours	Graphics	Text	Overall
Brother	-	Functional	Functional	Functional
Citizen	Functional	Representational	Functional	Functional
Epson	-	Functional	Functional	Functional
Gestetner	Functional	Representational	Functional	Functional
IBM	Representational	Functional	Functional	Functional
Konica Minolta	Representational	Representational	Functional	Representational
Kyocera	Representational	Functional	Functional	Functional
Mitsubishi	Functional	Representational	Functional	Functional
OKI	-	Representational	Representational	Representational
Ricoh	Functional	Functional	Functional	Functional
Samsung	Representational	Functional	Functional	Functional
Toshiba	Functional	Representational	Functional	Functional
Xerox	Functional	Functional	Functional	Functional
Overall	Functional	Functional	Functional	Functional

Table 4.4 Overall perception of the sites

4.1.2 Added-value

Value can, as previously mentioned, be added to companies' products through both functional and/or representational factors (De Chernatony & Mc Donald, 1998). As Riezebos (2003) stated, brands bring added-value as long as they are meaningful to customers. Having performed the analysis on the selected firms' brand communication, we can now continue to discuss brand development through Levitt's four stage model.

Generic product

This is the most basic level, showing only functional aspects of the products. As already stated by Riezebos (2003), there is no such thing as a completely generic product, which is in line with our findings. No printer manufacturer is using a generic product strategy, since all of the examined web sites communicates at least some level of added-value.

Expected brand

As stated in the frame of reference, consumers have an idea about the very small differences between brands of this level of brand development (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998). The printer manufacturers with brands on this level communicate added-value that is concentrated around functional product attributes. Further, the product must fulfil the

motivational need of producing print-outs. Based on this, the only firm found to be on this level of brand development is Mitsubishi.

Augmented brand

When a brand is on an augmented level, brand benefits are emphasised and enhanced (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998). Most of the companies we have studied are on this level of brand development. The firms are Dell, Lexmark, Ricoh, OKI, Brother, Xerox, Epson, Samsung, IBM, Kyocera, Citizen, Toshiba and Gestetner. These firms do not only satisfy the motivational need of producing printouts but also communicate discriminators, mainly characterised by functionality. The benefits emphasised by these brands are for example printer quietness, low print-out costs, attractive design, displays that are easily understood.

Potential brand

Of our sample there are three companies on the potential brand level, HP, Canon and Konica Minolta. These firms emphasise both functional benefits and representational satisfaction of their products to a great extent. Since this level of brand development is difficult to maintain for a longer period of time, it seems logical that only three of the examined firms are found to be on this level.

4.1.3 Sustainability of added-value

As already stated, the sustainability of added-value is related to the level of representationality in the brand communication. Since functional factors are more easily copied than representational ones, representationality generates greater sustainability of the added-value (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). A sustainable brand-added-value can hence be a critical asset for a firm.

After having analysed brand perception and the four levels of brand-added-value of the printer manufacturing firms, the Brand box model can be applied to our results. The examined firms are divided into the four categories of the model. The results are presented in the matrix, and described further in the next sections.

Functionality	High	Canon Hp Konica Minolta	
	Low	Mitsubishi	Brother Lexmark Dell OKI Epson Ricoh Gestetner Samsung IBM Toshiba Kyocera Xerox Citizen
		Low	High
		Representationality	

Figure 4.1 Brand Box Model adapted by the authors.

Low functionality – low representationality

In this section we place Mitsubishi due to a number of reasons. Mainly, Mitsubishi's site focuses on presenting product aspects, without emphasising neither functional benefits nor representational satisfaction to any larger extent. The written product descriptions are very scarce, and the pictures of the printers are rather dull. Although the site has a picture communicating representational factors, it is not enough for the firm to reach the upper left segment of the matrix. This can be linked to the added-value-analysis, where Mitsubishi was the only company on an expected brand level. Hence, for the printer manufacturing firms examined, brands on an expected brand level can be assumed to be characterised by little emphasis of both functional and representational factors.

Low functionality – high representationality

Not a single company from our sample was placed in this segment, which can be explained by the characteristics of the development of added-value presented previously. Printer manufacturing firms in early stages of brand development mainly communicate functional aspects, whereas the companies with more developed brands have completed their communication by also introducing representational aspects. Given this order of the brand development, it seems likely that no printer manufacturer, that has not developed functional factor emphasis, communicates a high level of representational satisfaction.

High functionality – low representationality

The majority of the firms of our study, Dell, Lexmark, Ricoh, OKI, Brother, Xerox, Epson, Samsung, IBM, Kyocera, Citizen, Toshiba, and Gestetner are placed in this segment. To a very large extent they all communicate the functional benefits of their products, with little or no emphasis on the representational satisfaction of their brands. Considering the relatively high levels of added-value, these firms are the same as the ones previously stated to carry augmented brands, their main focus is on functional product benefits. Given the number of firms, evidently the level of emphasis on representational and functional aspects differ slightly within the segment, however not to an extent affecting their segment placement.

High functionality – high representationality

Canon, HP, and Konica Minolta are the three remaining firms, these firms are placed in the segment highly emphasising both functional benefits and representational satisfaction. When visiting and examining the web sites of these firms it was clear that they have truly dedicated attention to their online brand communication. These are the same firms as those already stated to have a potential brand in the brand-added-value analysis.

4.1.4 Relating the Brand box model to Four levels of a brand

As previously mentioned, Riezebos (2003) state, in relation to Levitt's model Four level of brands, that there are no completely generic brands, why all brands can be assumed to provide customers with at least some additional value. Since added-value can be created either through emphasising the functional benefits or the representational satisfaction that a product may bring, the Four levels of a brand model can be related the Brand box model. De Chernatony & McDonald (1998) state that all brands have at least some emphasis on both representational and functional factors. This is in line with what Riezebos (2003) stated concerning the lack of strictly generic brands.

When presenting our results, a pattern became obvious in that the examined printer manufacturing firms positioned on a certain level of brand development also shared the same position when placed in the Brand box model. We can therefore draw the conclusion that in the case of our examined printer manufacturers, the brand development can be illustrated by the figure below (figure 4.2). By displaying a combination of the two models graphically, we want to stress the importance of what is emphasised in the creation of a successful brand. For the examined printer manufacturers, functional benefits are what is mainly emphasised, why the brand development of these firms also has this focus. Not until the brands are highly developed is representational satisfaction recognised, which is illustrated by the rapid increase of this factor in the upper-right section of figure 4.2. This is further in line with Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) who stated that representational aspects should be created around functional ones.

This model may not be applicable for all industrial firms, however, that was never the aim of this thesis. Based on our qualitative approach, we find this model to provide an in-depth image of the development of the brands in our sample.

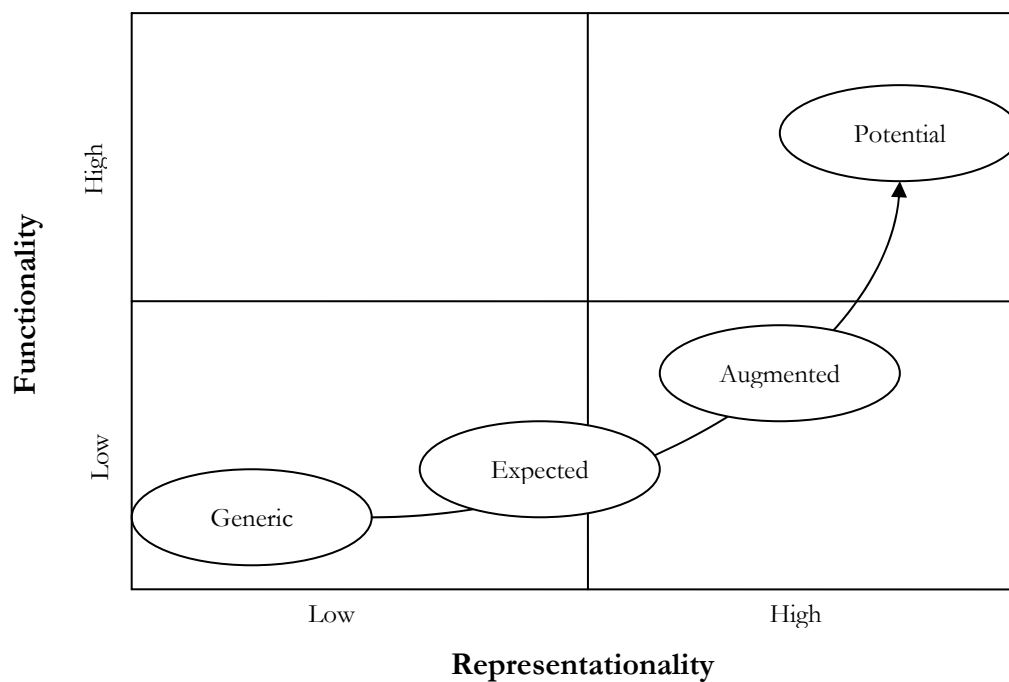


Figure 4.2 Printer manufacturers' brand emphasis and level of brand development model

5 Final discussion

This chapter will conclude the results of the analysis, drawing conclusions based on our previously formulated research questions in accordance to the earlier presented three key aspects of a successful brand. Further, we will provide a broader discussion concerning the results of this thesis, and also concerning the subject in a wider context. Finally, some suggestions for further research will be presented.

5.1 Conclusions

In our research questions, a description was given of what we aimed to study within the frames of this thesis. The research questions were based on the three key brand aspects, and they will be repeated below, followed by concluding answers to them.

Given the different tools for web site communication, what is perceived to be emphasised by the selected companies in their brand communication and what are the overall messages of the sites?

What are the perceived differences and/or similarities between the sites with separate entries for business and consumer buyers and the single-entry sites?

Through analysing the companies use of colours, graphics, and texts on their web sites, some conclusions could be drawn on what industrial firms, in this case exemplified by printer manufacturers, emphasise in their online brand communication. For industrial firms in general, functional aspects tended to be strongly emphasised, whereas little or no attention was dedicated to communication of representational ones (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004).

We found four of the seventeen selected firms to have separate web sites for their business and consumer buyers. The analysis of the sites with separate entries showed that these firms emphasise representational factors to a larger extent than the examined printer manufacturing firms in general. Similar messages are communicated regardless of the targeted buyers, however by different means. The predominant representational emphasis of the separate-site firms can be explained by these firms having established marketing strategies for their consumer markets emphasising representational factors. Adopting these strategies on their industrial markets can be seen as a natural development of their marketing strategies. When comparing these results to those of single-site firms, it became obvious that the single-site companies emphasise functional benefits to a larger extent than the separate-site firms. This result is in line with the view of what industrial firms in general communicate.

Given the perceived web site communication of the companies, to what extent have the brands been developed?

What are the perceived differences and/or similarities between the sites with separate entries for business and consumer buyers and the single-entry sites?

Riezebos (2003) stated that there are no completely generic products, which is in line with our findings since all the firms of our study communicate functional benefits and representational satisfaction to some level. Of the examined printer manufacturers we found the majority of them to have developed their brands to an augmented brand level, emphasising product benefits. Three of the firms had brands on a potential brand level, strongly emphasising both the functional benefits and representational satisfaction of their brands. One firm had developed its brand to the expected brand level.



Two of the three firms having brands on the potential brand level are firms with separated sites for their business and consumer users. Hence, the firms with more developed brands tended to separate the sites to a larger extent than those with a single site, using the possibilities of personalised communication the Internet provides.

Given the perceived emphasis of representationality and functionality of the printer manufacturers' brand communication, how may this affect the sustainability of the brand-added-value?

What are the perceived differences and/or similarities between the sites with separate entries for business and consumer buyers and the single-entry sites?

Thirteen of the firms emphasise functional benefits quite strongly, whereas less attention is given to the representational satisfaction that purchasing their products could imply. One of the examined firms, Mitsubishi, is not emphasising neither functional nor representational satisfaction to any larger extent. Finally, there are three firms strongly emphasising both representational and functional benefits, and two of these three have separate web sites for the two user groups. The printer manufacturers having highly developed brands are likely to achieve more sustainable competitive advantages than the firms with less developed ones, since functional aspects are more easily copied.

Overall, we found that the examined printer manufacturers have developed their brands on a functional basis. However, as figure 4.2 shows, representational factors are more emphasised in the higher levels of brand development.

5.2 Further interpretation of the findings

As have been discussed above, the issue of industrial branding is an important one despite the lack of research devoted to it. It seems as many researchers who stress the importance of conducting more research within this area of study are of the opinion that it would be beneficial to treat branding in the different markets separately.

In our study we found that there were no major differences between the printer manufacturers who had decided to divide the printer market in to two segments compared with those who treat all consumers in the same way. Furthermore, according to our findings, the firms with separate web pages were in general emphasising the representational factors to a greater extent than the single-site companies. Even though we do not claim our results to be generalisable to a wider population, we do believe that there are implications that companies who have been involved in consumer branding might have put more effort into their over all branding activities. Since the importance of representational factors have been acknowledge in consumer branding for a long time, we believe that it is likely that this knowledge will rub off to the more business focused aspects of the brand.

Due to the lack of significant differences we do not regard it as beneficial to treat business and consumer branding as two different concepts. We further believe that even though industrial markets and consumer markets are quite different, as discussed previously, it is important to remember that in the end all purchases are conducted by individuals, whether in group or individually.

However, by arguing that brands and branding should be treated as a single phenomena, we are not saying that it is best for the industrial firms we examined to have a single-entry page. By dividing the web sites the brand messages can be further personalised and the possibilities for one-to-one marketing increases. This does not imply that the overall im-

pression of the brand message has to be different between the two web pages, rather it is important for firms to stress the same level of representational and functional aspects through out their web site.

Overall, the most important aspect for industrial branding today is to provide the area of study with additional research. This is needed in order to form a better basis for industrial marketers to support their branding strategies. Furthermore, we do not believe it to be beneficial to treat consumer and industrial branding separately, rather a greater focus should be on the customer at hand. Since the range of industrial buyers is huge, it could be a drawback to gather all these customers in a too narrow segment. As marketing today is concerned with the importance of creating sustainable relationships the focus on the individual customer becomes even more crucial in the creation of a successful brand.

5.3 Suggestions for future research

As previously stated, qualitative studies do not aim at generating generalisable results, hence our results are not likely to be applicable for all industrial branding. It would however be of great interest to perform similar studies on other segments of the industrial sector. It seems likely that such studies would generate rather different results, given that we selected a segment where both industrial and consumer products can be found. Since branding of consumer products is such a well-established phenomena it is probable that this has affected also the industrial-focused communication of the examined firms. Examining brand perception and branding of “pure” industrial products, without any consumer buyers, would contribute to another, and fuller picture of the concept of industrial branding.

Another interesting aspect to examine further would be the entire brand communication strategies of industrial firms, where the Internet only constitutes one element, to see how that corresponds to the consumer based research available today. This would be of particular interest since online branding has been stated to be far from optimal capacity (Evans & King, 1999).

A final suggestion for future research is to apply our model describing the brand development and brand emphasis of the examined printer manufacturers to other sectors and products. It could be of interest for both industrial and consumer markets to see whether brand development based on representational and functional emphasis follows the same pattern for all goods. We believe that there is a possibility that some products will follow an opposite pattern, where representationality is the main focus throughout the brand development.

In conclusion, the presented suggestions together with this thesis share the same purpose, to increase the understanding of industrial online branding in order to make it more effective.

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Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

Customer brand perception

1. **Colours**
 - a. Number:

 - b. Expressing:

 - c. Mostly Functional / Representational / Both?

2. **Graphics – Pictures and images**
 - a. No. of appearances:

 - b. Placement:

 - c. Expressing:

 - d. Meaning:

 - e. Mostly Functional / Representational / Both?

3. **Text** Amount:
 - a. Placement:

 - b. Expressing:

 - c. Meaning:

 - d. Mostly Functional / Representational / Both?

4. Is the layout consistent?
Yes / No Describe...

5. Is there a clear overview of the site?
Yes / No Describe...

6. What is the overall impression of the site?
Describe...

Brand-added-value

7. Does the company have separate web pages for businesses and consumers?
Yes / No
8. If yes, has the firm devoted equal attention to business and consumer sites?
Yes / No
9. If no, which site is more developed?
Consumer / Business
10. Is price in focus?
Yes / No
11. Is product in focus?
Yes / No
12. Are functional benefits and representational satisfaction equally emphasised?
Yes / No
13. If no, which is mostly emphasised?
Functional / Representational
14. What is the site expressing?
15. Does the site communicate reliability?
Yes / No
16. What is the level of brand development?
Generic / Expected / Augmented / Potential

Describe...