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MASTER'S THESIS

Communicating Online Brand Personality

- intention, implementation and internal perception

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ABSTRACT

Expressing a brand's personality is shown to be an important way of communicating information about a brand that words alone cannot do. Companies today conduct much of their communication with customers via their company website. The study of the service sector is identified as an area of interest since there is a worldwide shift from manufacturing to industries requiring service organizations. As services are intangible, it is necessary for companies to make their offering more concrete. One way of doing this is by expressing the brand's personality. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that employees understand and can communicate the brand to customers.

Data from four cases were used to evaluate how companies intend and implement their company's online brand personality. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. Once the companies' intention and implementation were established in this study, internal perception was examined to find if the intended messages were understood by staff members.

The results indicate that in order to provide a high internal understanding of the brand, it would require that the brand is clearly defined by the people in charge of implementing it. By having ongoing communication about the brand through both formal and informal channels it gives employees more insight about the brand's personality. Additionally, hiring employees who share similar personality traits with the ones that the company's brand wishes to portray will enhance their brand communication efforts.

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My love to you all, Heather

***

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Niclas

Luleå, June 2010

Heather Jacksic

Niclas Liinanki

“Branding is first and foremost an act of communication: we brand therefore we are.”

~ Jean Noël Kapferer (2001)

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CHAPTER ONE

This chapter includes a brief historical background of branding, internal branding, and brand personality. Branding in the service industry and Internet technology are also touched upon. The research problem will be stated at the close of this chapter.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

1.1.1 BRANDING

In recent years, brands have become a pervasive part of everyday life. Indeed, it is nearly impossible to consider any product or service without thinking of the brand name with which it is associated. It has been said that a brand can be seen as "a specific name, symbol or design" (Doyle, 2002, p. 158), while others have pointed out that there is more to it than that. Keller (1998) explains that strong brands have a number of different associations attached to them, while Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Johnston, & Mayer (2006) describe brands as being the sum of the characteristics of a product or service perceived by the user. Kapferer (2001) argues that the impetus for branding is to reduce perceived risk.

Historically, the rise of branding came about because of the distance between producer and consumer (Nilson, 1998). As the distance grew between buyer and seller, there was no possibility of communicating in person with customers so proprietors needed to rely on other means to reach potential buyers (*Ibid.*). Branding is a way of distinguishing the goods of one producer from those of another (Keller, 1998). The mass communication of a name and distinct packaging, while ensuring consistent quality are the cornerstones of modern branding that goes back more than 150 years (Nilson, 1998).

Aaker (2002) explains that the key to building a strong brand is to develop and implement a brand identity. He defines brand identity as:

> "a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members" (p. 68).

1.1.2 INTERNAL BRANDING

Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) describe internal brand building as a process to align the staff's behaviour with the corporate brand's identity. It helps to promote the brand within the organization, particularly to the employees, in order to ensure that congruence exists between internal and external brand messages (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Mitchell, 2002 as cited in Punjaisri, Evanschitzky & Wilson, 2009). Boone (2000, as cited in Punjaisri *et al.,* 2009) explains that internal branding enables brand messages to be decoded by employees so that their actions reflect customers' expected brand experience.

1.1.3 Brand Personality

According to Aaker (1997), brand personality can be defined as the set of human characteristics associated with a given brand. The same vocabulary used to describe a person can be used to describe a brand personality. As well as including such classic human personality traits as warmth, concern and sentimentality, brand personality reflects attributes such as demographics, lifestyle and human personality traits (Aaker, 2002).

Brand personalities help people to feel more connected to products. Upshaw (1995) explains that while most people know how to interact with other people, they are less sure about how to interact with objects. A brand's personality acts as a facilitator of communication between consumer and brand. He further points out that without personalities, products would still have a role, but would not be approachable and in a sense they would become unknowable (*Ibid.*).

1.1.4 Online Communication

The Internet has been in existence since the 1960s for research and military purposes but has evolved since then and is now widely used in both personal and business environments (Chaffey *et al.*, 2006). The Internet allows for communication between millions of connected computers around the world (*Ibid.*).

In contemporary society where the Internet has become such an integral part of business, it has almost reached a point where if a company does not have a website, it is as though it does not exist at all. M^{c}Manus (2001) identifies many reasons why businesses need to have a website. They include attracting new customers, enhancing reputation, creating revenue streams, diversifying into new business, learning more about customers, enhancing print and radio advertising, increasing referrals, increasing profits, developing brand loyalty, selling directly, and improving customer service. He further notes that a company's website can reach out to potential customers and change visitors into customers (*Ibid.*).

Since Internet technology increases efficiency, intensifies competition while lowering barriers to entry, enhances customer power, allows for transparent but excessive information flows and has over-stretched customers' cognitive abilities, Ibeh, Luo and Dinnie (2005) argue that Internet technology raises new questions for researchers about what entails effective brand building and communication strategies in the online environment.

1.1.5 Branding in the Service Industry

According to Hoffman and Bateson (2006), services are said to be intangible because they are performances, rather than objects, which cannot be touched or seen in the same way that goods are. Instead, services are experiences about which customers make judgements (*Ibid.*).

One of the challenges of marketing services is that, relative to goods, their intangibility makes them less likely to be consistent depending on the people involved in providing the service (Keller, 1998). As a result, branding can be a way to overcome problems associated with intangibility and variability of service. The use of brand symbols help to make the abstract quality of services more concrete (*Ibid.*).

In addition to intangibility, another element of the service industry is inseparability (Hoffman & Bateson, 2006). They define inseparability as the interconnection between the service provider, contact person, or employee with the customer. Since the execution of the service often requires the physical presence of an employee, they need to reflect the organizational image (*Ibid.*). Punjaisri *et al.* (2009) agree with Hoffman and Bateson (2006) stating that service employees become central to the delivery of a brand promise during each service encounter. They further point out that since the employee influences a customer's brand perception, a service organization needs to ensure that their employees are delivering the service at the quality level promised by its brand (*Ibid.*). Hatch and Shultz (2001, as cited in de Chernatony and Cottam, 2006) emphasize the importance of consistency throughout the organization in terms of communications about the brand. Internal branding has emerged as a way to help organizations promote the brand to employees with the aim of ensuring congruence between internal and external brand messages (Punjaisri *et al*., 2009). Thus a major part of branding in the service industry is communicating the brand to internal employees.

1.2 Problem Discussion

The study of the service sector is vital since there is a worldwide shift from manufacturing to industry which requires various service organizations to ensure sustainable profits (Hoffman & Bateson, 2006). Emerging service sectors – both profit and non-profit – are dominating economies that once relied upon industrial manufacturing (*Ibid.*). Currently, over three-quarters of jobs in the European Union are in the services sector[1].

The concept of internal branding has become a recent focus for both academics and practitioners alike (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006; Punjaisri *et al*., 2009). de Chernatony and Cottam (2006) have found that employees working in organizations with more successful brands have a much clearer and consistent understanding of their brands.

Aaker (2002) stresses that a brand personality can help to create a stronger brand. It does this by assisting companies to efficiently organize and arrange commercial clutter and brand proliferation into an understandable form (Upshaw 1995). In addition, brand personality helps customers to rank a product's importance in their lives (*Ibid.*).

In this study, we will examine how brand personality is communicated through the use of the company website. Opoku, Abratt, Bendixen and Pitt (2007) state that the website is an integral part of the organization's communication strategy and therefore managers should be concerned with the brand personality the website portrays. In addition, they claim brands allow organizations to say things about themselves in ways that every-day language cannot

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/economic-sectors/services/ Retrieved 19 February, 2010.

convey. Mullin (2000, as cited in Opoku *et al*.) states that an organization's Internet site is a significant competitive weapon which is very important in acquiring new customers.

The use of the Internet as a branding tool is an important area of study since the literature on Internet branding is currently only in the formative stage (Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005; Simmons, 2007; Rowley, 2009). This is due to the current debate about whether Internet branding is even necessary. Some researchers argue that online shoppers experience information overload so brands are ever more important since they save the customer time by reducing their search costs and ease decision-making (Rubinstein & Griffiths, 2001 and Ward & Lee, 2000, as cited in Rowley, 2009). Others maintain that brands have little to contribute in the online setting due to price transparency, easy search options and product-comparison tools (Ibeh *et al*., 2005). One thing is for certain: the transformational impact of the Internet has changed the way organizations need to communicate with their customers (*Ibid.*). This research project would, therefore, contribute to the body of scientific evidence on this topic.

1.3 OVERALL PURPOSE

Given the above discussion on brand personality, communication, internal branding and the use of the Internet as a branding tool, the research problem for this study can be identified as:

How can the use of the company website to communicate brand personality be characterized?

1.4 OUTLINE OVERVIEW

This paper consists of seven chapters. A schematic diagram depicts how this report will be presented (Figure 1.1). ***Chapter One*** began by giving a background of the area of study we have pursued. It presented historical background, a problem discussion as well as valid arguments for conducting this study. These pointed to an overall purpose. ***Chapter Two*** will provide a review of previous literature in the areas of Internet technology, communication processes, branding, brand personality, brand identity and the internal perception of the brand. ***Chapter Three*** will present the research questions and narrow down the research to form a framework which will provide a basis for developing an interview guide as well as the foundation from which to analyze the data. The methods used to conduct this study are described in ***Chapter Four. Chapter Five*** will present the empirical data that was collected. The analysis of this data will appear in ***Chapter Six***. In the final chapter, ***Chapter Seven,*** there will be a discussion of the conclusions, implications and future recommendations.

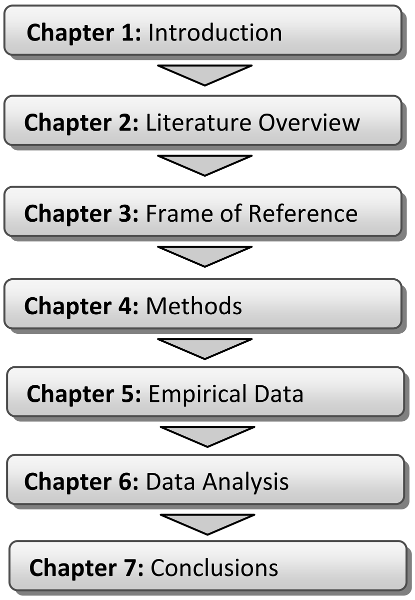

FIGURE 1.1: Outline of this report

CHAPTER TWO

In the previous chapter, the background and problem discussion were presented as well as the statement of a specific research problem. This chapter will give an overview of existing studies that involve the communication process, branding and brand personality in order to help develop the research questions which will be presented in Chapter Three.

2 LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.1 THE COMPANY WEBSITE

According to Rayport and Jaworski (2003), the Internet forms a global network of computers that can share data and programs. It was developed in the 1960s as a military defense system in the United States (*Ibid.*). Since then, technology has grown and changed and electronic commerce now plays a large role in many businesses. Electronic commerce or e-commerce refers to all of the financial and informational electronically mediated exchange between an organization and its external stakeholders (Chaffey *et al*., 2006).

The company website is the setting in which these exchanges takes place. The online Oxford English Dictionary defines a website as "a location connected to the Internet that maintains one or more web pages"[2]. The location and identity of the website is indicated by its web address or domain name (Chaffey *et al.*, 2006). Rayport and Jaworski (2003) identify a website as a series of linked web pages that are maintained and owned by an organization. Of course, websites can also be owned by an individual (Chaffey *et al.*, 2006) and consists of a homepage that allows navigation to the remainder of the pages on the website (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003).

Opoku *et al*. (2007) suggest that a retailer's website is an important part of its communications strategy and therefore managers should be concerned with the brand personality the website portrays. The firm's Internet site is a significant competitive weapon; in the hospitality industry for example, the web site is very important in acquiring new customers (Mullin, 2000, as cited in Opoku *et al*., 2007).

2.2 COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Keller (2001) defines marketing communications as "the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, incite, and remind consumers – directly or indirectly – about the brands they sell" (p. 819).

[2] http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/website?view=uk Retrieved 30 November, 2009.

Wells, Burnett and Moriarty (2003), explain that mass communication is a one-way process. It begins with a sender or the source of the message (S) who encodes a message (M). The message is presented through various channels of communication (C) such as voice, or via media such as print, newspaper, TV or the Internet. The message is then decoded or interpreted by the receiver (R). The authors state that this process is sometimes referred to as the SMCR model of communication. When feedback is given, communication becomes a two-way process. Surrounding the SMCR process is noise which can hinder the communication of the message (*Ibid.*). See Figure 2.1.

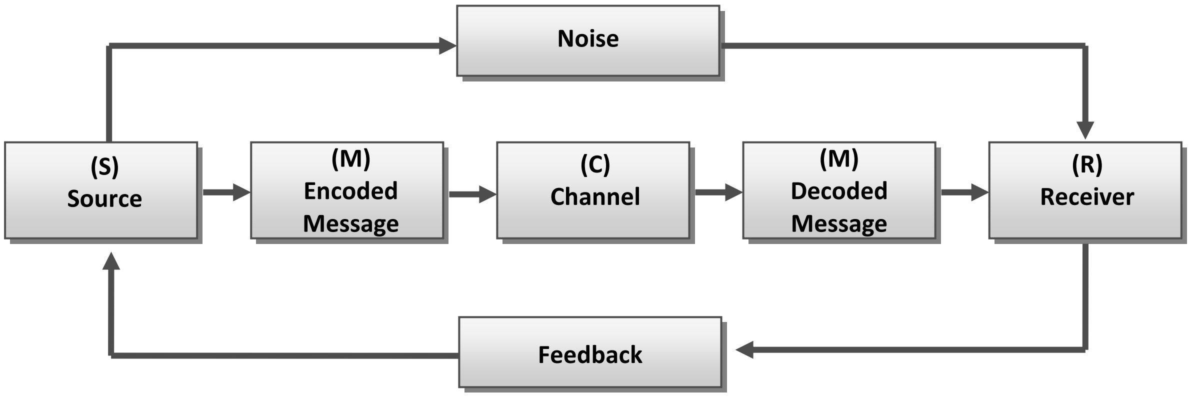

FIGURE 2.1: SMCR model of communication
Source: Wells *et al.* (2003)

Solomon (2009) has another view of the communication process. He points out that while the traditional communications model is not entirely wrong, it does not reflect today's dynamic world of interactivity where consumers have greater choice over which messages they choose to focus upon. He notes that this ability to control the media environment has grown due to the changes in information technology. Consumers are no longer passive receivers of information. Instead, they are becoming, to a greater extent, partners in the communication process who seek out certain messages and dismiss others (*Ibid.*). This is illustrated in Figure 2.2.

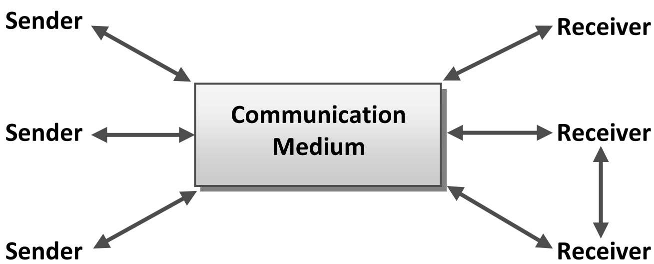

FIGURE 2.2: An updated communications model
Source: Solomon (2009)

2.2.1 Internal and External Internet Communication

Communication can be categorized as both internal and external to the company. When mediated communication is internal, an intranet can be used and when mediated communication is external to the company, an extranet can be used. Chaffey *et al.* (2006) cite 'intranet' and 'extranet' as terms that arose in the 1990s to describe applications of Internet technology with specific audiences. They explain that intranets are networks within an organization that enable access to company information using familiar tools of the Internet such as web browsers and e-mail. Intranets are secured by a username and password. Chaffey *et al.* (2006) point out that extranets are formed by extending the intranet outside an organization to its customers, suppliers, collaborators and even with competitors. Like intranets, extranets are also password-protected so that general Internet users can not gain access (*Ibid.*). The relationship between the Internet and the intranet and extranet is shown in Figure 2.3.

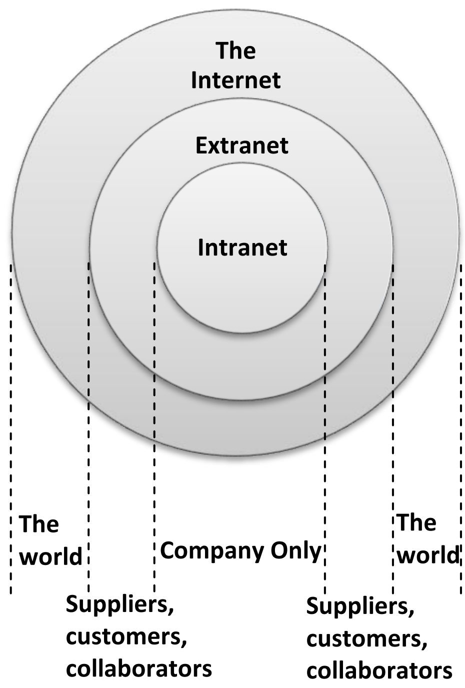

FIGURE 2.3: The relationship between intranets, extranets and the Internet
Source: Chaffey *et al.* (2006)

2.3 e-BRANDING

The process of branding has been described as the creation of value by providing a compelling and consistent offering as well as customer experience that will satisfy customers and ensure they become repeat customers (Aaker, 1991; de Chernatony & M^{c}Donald, 1992 as cited in Simmons, 2007; Nilson, 1998). Because of a brand's ability to create a relationship with a customer, branding can create trust and loyalty (Nilson, 1998).

2.3.1 FOUR PILLARS OF i-BRANDING

In the digital era, new technologies, because of their unique capacity to change old rules, have forced companies to redefine their marketing and branding strategies (Ibeh *et al.,* 2005). Simmons (2007) points out that the literature identifies understanding customers, communicating with them and maintaining ongoing interaction as vital to the augmentation of the core products and services to create a successful brand. Further, he states that these themes are carried over into the discussion of the Internet while introducing a fourth theme: content. These four factors make up the foundation of Simmons' "Four Pillars of i-Branding"[3] (See Figure 2.4). Each will be discussed below.

[3] The term i-branding is used interchangeably with e-branding in this report.

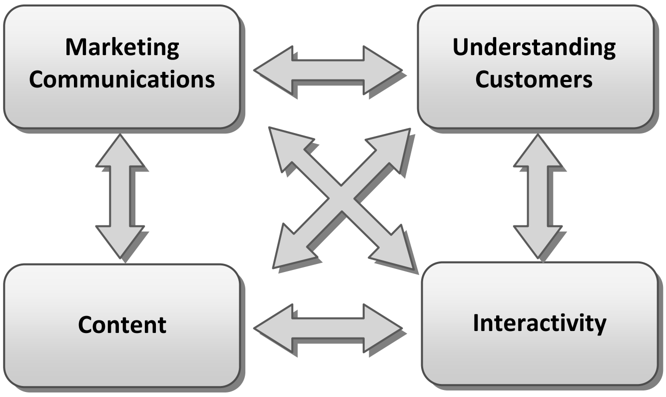

FIGURE 2.4: Four Pillars of i-Branding
Source: Simmons (2007)

2.3.1.1 MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Simmons (2007) asserts that the effect the Internet has on marketing communications is its ability to combine mass market reach with a degree of personalization previously only possible in traditional forms of two-way communication. Earlier, the focus in marketing communication between customers and a company has been on promotion and other one-way messages (*Ibid.*).

It is the information that is important to customers; not the overall company image. However, Simmons (2007) points out that a website must provide more than merely information. Online customers also expect a certain amount of entertainment value when visiting a website. The Internet as a marketing communication medium, therefore, needs to feature the combination of information, entertainment and commerce (*Ibid.*).

2.3.1.2 UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMERS

Simmons (2007) claims that the Internet is made up of a variety of tools that can be used by a company to improve their segmentation. Web metrics, cookies, online surveys and databases allow companies to collect relevant information about their customers in order to target segments more precisely and cost efficiently. These tools can allow for relationships to develop between the company and the customers. The Internet itself also has the unique ability to be personalized for each individual user. This, combined with more exact targeting, makes the Internet an important branding tool (*Ibid*).

2.3.1.3 CONTENT

According to Simmons (2007), one of the major problems users face when interacting with a website is locating specific content. This, he points out, is due to the practice of creating websites by mirroring how the company works instead of the way in which customers navigate a site. For this reason, a company's website needs to be organized and grouped to match specific tasks so that users can find information in a simple and intuitive manner. Smooth and simple navigation along with content grouped in an appropriate way will help to build the likability of a brand and minimize any negative perceptions from an online perspective (*Ibid.*).

Simmons (2007) identifies the sophistication of a website's design as a controversial issue and time is the motivation factor for the duration spent on a specific website. Customers are affected by graphics which, in turn, influences their behaviour and brand perception. While graphics and multimedia can enrich a web experience, Simmons (2007) cautions that a graphics-intensive website that is overly sophisticated may create negative brand perceptions among users. Websites with large graphics files can take time to download; therefore, waiting time is a major concern. Simmons (2007) argues that marketers essentially compete for a customer's time, therefore, there needs to be a trade-off between creating a site that focuses on sophistication while still providing graphic appeal.

2.3.1.4 Interactivity

Interactivity is defined as "the facility for individuals and organizations to communicate directly with one another regardless of distance or time" (Berthon *et al.*, 1996, as cited in Simmons, 2007, p. 551). The Internet is based on information and communication technologies that facilitate simple and rapid interaction. Simmons (2007) explains that the benefit the Internet provides is the ability to create more personalized communication with customers. Interactivity engages customers and helps to create positive brand perceptions (*Ibid.*).

Simmons (2007) identifies the level of customer involvement with the medium, known as 'machine interactivity' as an important issue. While it has been found that thoughts about this form of interaction may be positive, negative or neutral, the majority of the research indicates that customers visiting a website with high levels of interactivity will react more positively. Customers need to be more connected with the content offered by the marketer in order to create positive brand perceptions from it (*Ibid.*).

The positive effects of a good interactivity structure in a company website will help to uncover and satisfy customer needs. Simmons (2007) concludes that high levels of interactivity will enable companies to raise customers' attention levels and to develop strong relationships with them.

2.4 Brand Personality

Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 347). It is her contention that brands can be used symbolically because people often impose brands with personality traits (*Ibid.*). This is partly due to advertising strategies that try to impart personality traits onto a brand through the use of anthropomorphism (e.g., California Raisins), personification (e.g., Jolly Green Giant), and the creation of user imagery (e.g., Charlie girl) (*Ibid.*).

It should be noted that brand personality is not concerned with what people think the brand is or does. Instead, it reflects how people feel about a brand (Abrams, 1981, as cited in Keller, 1998). Upshaw (1995) claims that the brand personality is the outward 'face' of the brand.

According to Beckett (1992, as cited in Keller, 1998), the personality of a brand can impact its performance. It is important for marketers to get the brand personality 'right'. Keller (1998) explains that a brand with the right personality will create the feeling that the brand is relevant and as a result, consumers will be more willing to invest in a relationship with it.

Brand personality can be described as the non-physical part of product knowledge that shapes perceptions about a product (Freling & Forbes, 2005). Brand personality can help to create brand equity (Aaker, 2002). According to de Chernatony and M^{c}Donald (1998), successful brands are important because they guarantee future income. This is because a favourable brand personality is thought to increase consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982), increase emotions in consumers (Biel, 1993), increase levels of trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998), encourage active processing on the part of the consumer (Biel, 1992), and provide a basis for product differentiation (Aaker, 1996, as cited in Freling & Forbes, 2005).

2.4.1 Dimensions of Brand Personality

Until 1997, there was no research that provided a systematically reliable, valid and generalizable scale upon which to measure brand personality (Aaker, 1997). Aaker (1997) conducted an exploratory factor analysis to understand how customers perceive brand personality. The purpose of her study was to develop a framework of brand personality dimensions that could be used to measure brand personality without relying on constructs from the field of human psychology (*Ibid.*).

From her research, Aaker (1997) developed a framework of brand personality dimensions. Instead of treating brand personality as a singular construct, she has isolated five discrete dimensions which allow the types of brand personalities to be distinguished (*Ibid.*). By separating the brand personalities into five different types, it enables researchers to study and understand various ways that the distinct personalities can influence consumer preference (*Ibid.*). In addition to the framework, Aaker (1997) produced a scale to provide a foundation upon which theory of the symbolic use of brands could be based.

According to Aaker (1997), both the framework and scale permit researchers to understand the symbolic use of brands in general instead of the symbolic use of brands within a specific category. Because of this, she explains, the symbolic nature of brands can be understood at the same level as the utilitarian nature of brands that can be capture by models that are generalizable across product categories such as the multi-attribute model developed by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975 (*Ibid.*). Therefore, like the multi-attribute model that helps to clarify when and why consumers buy brands for utilitarian purposes, Aaker's cross-category framework and scale can provide insights into when and why consumers buy brands for self-expressive purposes.

The same vocabulary that is used to describe people can be used to depict a brand (Aaker 2002). Borrowing from psychology, five personality factors (termed "The Big Five") – Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism – emerged to form the five brand personality traits: *Sincerity*, *Excitement*, *Competence*, *Sophistication*, and *Ruggedness* (Aaker, 1997).

According to Aaker (1997), *Sincerity* captures the idea of warmth and acceptance; *Excitement* signifies the notion of sociability, energy and activity; and *Competence* summarizes responsibility, dependability and security. She further notes that *Sophistication* has associations with upper class, glamorous and sexy while Ruggedness tends to glamorize American ideals of Western, strength and masculinity. These five dimensions can be used to explain nearly all noticeable differences between brands (Aaker, 2002).

Aaker (1997) has selected five dimensions of brand personality and has put them into a framework along with 15 facets she feels most strongly illustrate each dimension (see Figure 2.5). This set of traits is designed to both measure and structure brand personality.

The five dimensions and their respective characteristics are:

1) Sincerity, typified by traits such as down-to-earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful;
2) Excitement, typified by traits such as daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date;
3) Competence, typified by traits such as reliable, intelligent and successful;
4) Sophistication, typified by traits such as upper class and charming; and
5) Ruggedness, typified by traits such as outdoorsy and tough.

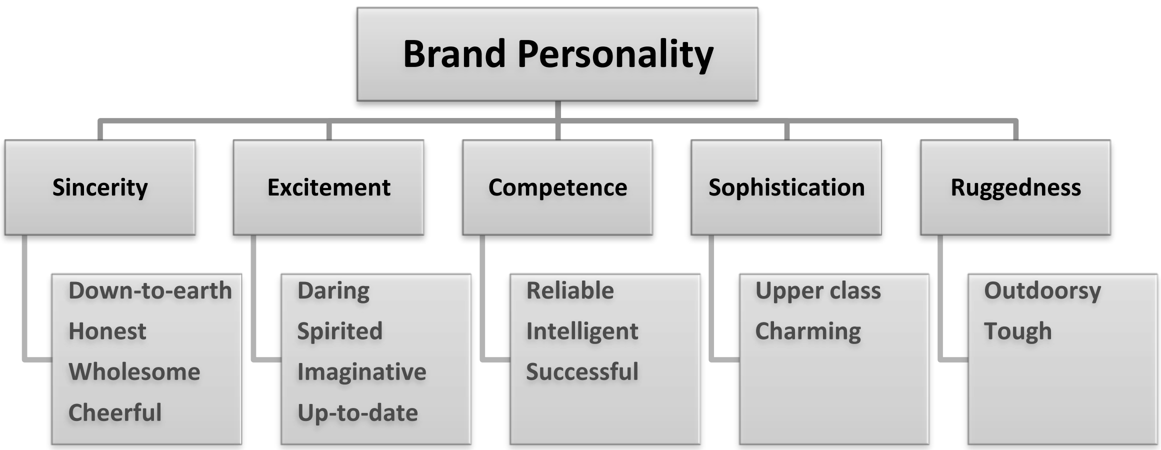

FIGURE 2.5: Brand Personality Framework
Source: Aaker (1997)

In addition to the 15 facets, Aaker (1997) has also included 27 personality traits that help to further describe the five dimensions of brand personality. Her Brand Personality Scale measures the extent to which a given brand possesses any of these personality traits (see Table 2.1). Table 2.1 shows each of the five dimensions with its corresponding facets. The facets are words used to describe each dimension. Each facet, in turn, is described by a number of traits.

TABLE 2.1: Brand Personality Scale

Dimension	Facet	Traits
Sincerity	Down-to-earth	Down-to-earth Family-oriented Small-town
	Honest	Honest Sincere Real
	Wholesome	Wholesome Original
	Cheerful	Cheerful Sentimental Friendly
Excitement	Daring	Daring Trendy Exciting
	Spirited	Spirited Cool Young
	Imaginative	Imaginative Unique
	Up-to-date	Up-to-date Independent Contemporary
Competence	Reliable	Reliable Hard-working Secure
	Intelligent	Intelligent Technical Corporate
	Successful	Successful Leader Confident
Sophistication	Upper Class	Upper Class Glamorous Good-looking
	Charming	Charming Feminine Smooth
Ruggedness	Outdoorsy	Outdoorsy Masculine Western
	Tough	Tough Rugged

Source: Aaker (1997)

2.5 Brand Identity

According to Aaker (2002, p. 68) brand identity can be defined as:

> "a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members."

In addition to this definition, Aaker (2002) recognizes that the brand identity is the way in which brand strategists want the brand to be perceived. Upshaw (1995) explains that the brand identity refers to that part of the brand's equity that extends itself in order to offer benefits that make it a more attractive possible purchase. He adds that brand identity is derived from the melding of a brand's positioning and personality and is revealed in the product/service performance, the brand name, its logo and graphic system, the brand's marketing communications, and in other ways in which the brand comes into contact with its constituencies (*Ibid.*).

Upshaw (1995) points out two crucial variables that will dictate a brand's identity. They are:

1) how a brand is "positioned" within the minds of customers and prospects; and
2) what kind of living personality the brand projects into the marketplace.

The reason these two components are so important, he explains, is because they influence how users and prospective users judge the attractiveness and effectiveness of a brand (*Ibid.*).

To assist marketers to create appropriate brand strategies, Aaker (2002) constructed a brand identity planning model that consists of three stages: strategic brand analysis, brand identity system and brand identity implementation system (see Figure 2.6). The first step of the brand planning model is the strategic brand analysis which consists of an analysis of customers, competitors and the organisation itself (Aaker, 2002). The latter two stages will be explained in the following sections.

2.5.1 Brand Identity System

After the strategic brand analysis is completed, the second stage of the brand planning model is the brand identity system. This helps an organisation construct their brand identity and the value proposition which enables them to facilitate a brand-customer relationship. In addition, this system helps to develop the organisation's credibility (*Ibid.*).

2.5.1.1 Core and Extended Identity

Brand identity consists of a core and extended identity (Aaker, 2002). The core identity makes up the constant associations of the brand that are central to the meaning and success of the brand. Aaker (2002) states that the core identity is often too multifaceted to be included in a single slogan. The core identity includes elements that make the brand unique and valuable while the extended identity provides elements that complement the core identity with texture and completeness. A brand personality does not often become a part of the core identity; it is however a good fit for the extended identity to add needed texture and depth. The extended identity helps to add useful details to complete the picture (*Ibid.*).

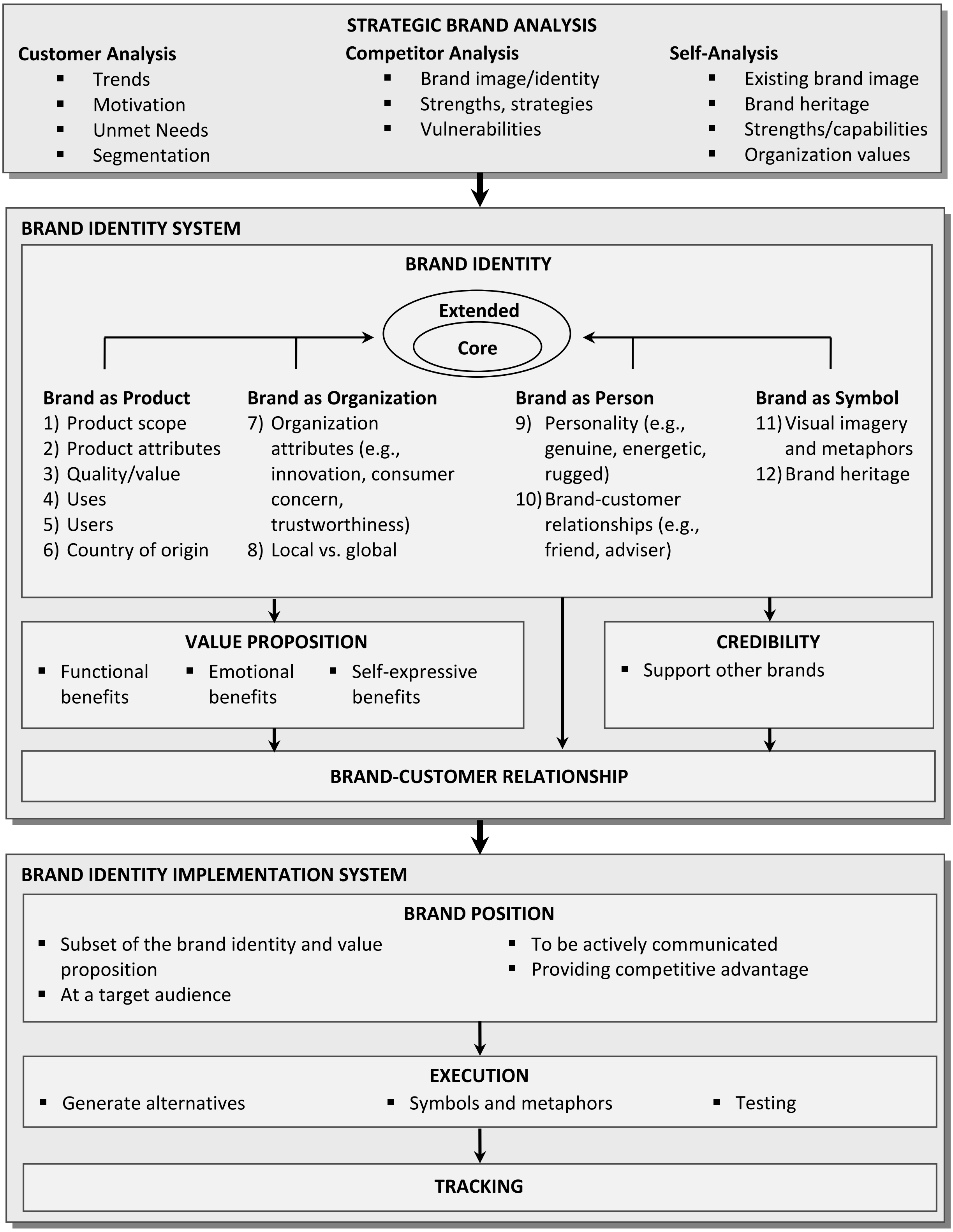

FIGURE 2.6: Brand Identity Planning Model
Source: Aaker (2002)

2.5.1.2 Perspectives of Brand Identity

Aaker (2002) explains that in order to clarify, enrich and differentiate a brand identity, the brand could be viewed in four ways: *brand-as-product*, *brand-as-organization*, *brand-as-person*, and *brand-as-symbol*. Not all four perspectives are applicable to all brands but all should be considered when creating a brand to ensure that the brand's identity has texture and depth. In addition, having a more detailed identity will help guide decisions on implementing a marketing plan (*Ibid.*).

2.5.1.2.1 Brand-as-Product

Product-related associations will almost always be a part of the brand identity because it is directly linked to the choice and use of the brand from the customer's perspective (Aaker, 2002). Under the brand-as-product heading, there are several features that can make up the product-related associations. They are: (1) product scope, (2) product attributes, (3) quality/value, (4) uses, (5) users, (6) country of origin.

The *product scope* feature affects the type of associations that are desirable and feasible. It asks the question what product(s) are associated with the brand. For example, the product associated with Häagen-Dazs is ice cream and the product associated with Visa is credit cards (Aaker, 2002).

Product attributes are directly related to the purchase or use of the product which can provide functional and sometimes emotional benefits for the customer. A product-related attribute can offer something extra (like features or services) or by offering a better product to the customer (Aaker, 2002).

The *quality* and *value* are elements that can determine pricing or otherwise enrich the concept of the product by adding a price dimension. It helps customers to consider if the brand is, for example, a Mercedes, a Volkswagen or a Ford (Aaker, 2002).

Associations with a product's *use* help the brand to 'own' a particular use or application, which forces competitors to work around their established spot. Gatorade, for example, owns the use context of athletes wanting to maintain high performance levels. Clorox bleach is strongly associated with keeping clothes white, even though bleach can be used to clean a number of different surfaces (Aaker, 2002).

Brands can also be positioned by the type of *user*. A strong user-type position can imply a value proposition and a brand personality. Examples of brands centered on the user are Gerber which focuses on babies, Weight Watchers which is associated with those interested in weight control and Eddie Bauer which offers fashions for people with an outdoor lifestyle (Aaker, 2002).

Links to a *country or region of origin* can add credibility to a brand. For example, Champagne is seen as French, Swatch watches are seen as Swiss and Molson Ice beer is seen as Canadian ("*where ice was invented*") (Aaker, 2002).

2.5.1.2.2 BRAND-AS-ORGANIZATION

The brand-as-organization perspective is centered around the attributes of the *organization* instead of the products or services. Attributes such as innovation, a drive for quality and concern for the environment are described by the people, culture, values and programs of the organization. Organizational attributes can contribute to the value proposition (Aaker, 2002).

Associations such as having a customer focus, environmental concern, technological commitment, or a *local* orientation can provide emotional and self-expressive benefits for the customers as well as increase product claims of some brands (Aaker, 2002).

2.5.1.2.3 BRAND-AS-PERSON

The brand-as-person perspective describes the brand in terms of *personality* that is richer and more interesting than product attributes alone. In much the same way as a person can be perceived as fun, competent, or trustworthy a brand personality can also be perceived with these characteristics and can help to create a stronger brand (Aaker, 2002).

Aaker (2002) says there are three ways that brand personality can help to create a stronger brand. First, it can help by creating a *self-expressive* benefit which allows customers to express their own personality. Second, brand personality can be the basis of the *relationship* between the customer and the brand in much the same way that human personalities affect relationships between people. Third, brand personality may help communicate a product attribute which can help to contribute to a *functional benefit* (*Ibid.*).

2.5.1.2.4 BRAND-AS-SYMBOL

The brand-as-symbol perspective can provide unity and structure to an identity and help strengthen the brand awareness and recall. Anything that represents the brand can be a symbol but specifically three types of symbols are important: visual imagery, metaphors, and the brand heritage (Aaker, 2002).

The *visual imagery* of symbols can be powerful and memorable. This can be seen in, for example, Nike's 'swoosh' or the McDonald's golden arches (Aaker, 2002).

Symbols can be more meaningful when they involve *metaphors* like the Energizer bunny for long-lasting batteries or Michael Jordan's leaping ability for the performance of Nike shoes (Aaker, 2002).

A vivid and meaningful *heritage* can sometimes represent the essence of the brand. Starbucks coffee, for example, has a link to the first coffeehouse in Seattle's Pike Place market (Aaker, 2002).

2.5.2 Brand Identity Implementation System

The last stage of the brand identity planning model is implementation. This is done in three steps: *brand position*, *execution* and *tracking*. Relevant to this study is the brand positioning. Execution and tracking will not be discussed here as this is not a focus of our study as they pertain more to brand equity than to brand personality.

2.5.2.1 Brand Position

Aaker (2002, p.176) defines brand position as:

> "the part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands."

Brand position is a subset of the brand identity and value proposition which is aimed at a target audience, is actively communicated and provides a competitive advantage (Aaker, 2002). Positioning is the part that gets communicated. According to Upshaw (1995), brand positioning is what a brand stands for, in terms of benefits and promises, in the minds of customers and prospects, relative to what competitors are offering.

2.6 Internal Perception of the Brand

de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) brand ethos model attempts to better understand the level of employee interpretation of the brand (see Figure 2.7). The authors explain brand interpretation in four stages. The first two stages are influenced by corporate control, while the final two stages belong to employee interpretation. Where the brand is explicitly encoded and employees have a greater or lesser understanding of the brand is considered to be driven by corporate control. The corporate control will either be in the form of a *codified brand* or a *comprehended brand*, depending on the level of employee understanding. Once employee commitment and understanding of the brand passes a certain threshold, the corporate control of the brand becomes secondary to the employees' understanding of the brand. The employees' interpretation then becomes the primary driver of comprehension. At this stage, the brand evolves into the *interpreted brand*. The final stage, the *brand ethos*, can be reached only when the brand is incorporated into the culture and becomes an implied entity within the organization (*Ibid.*).

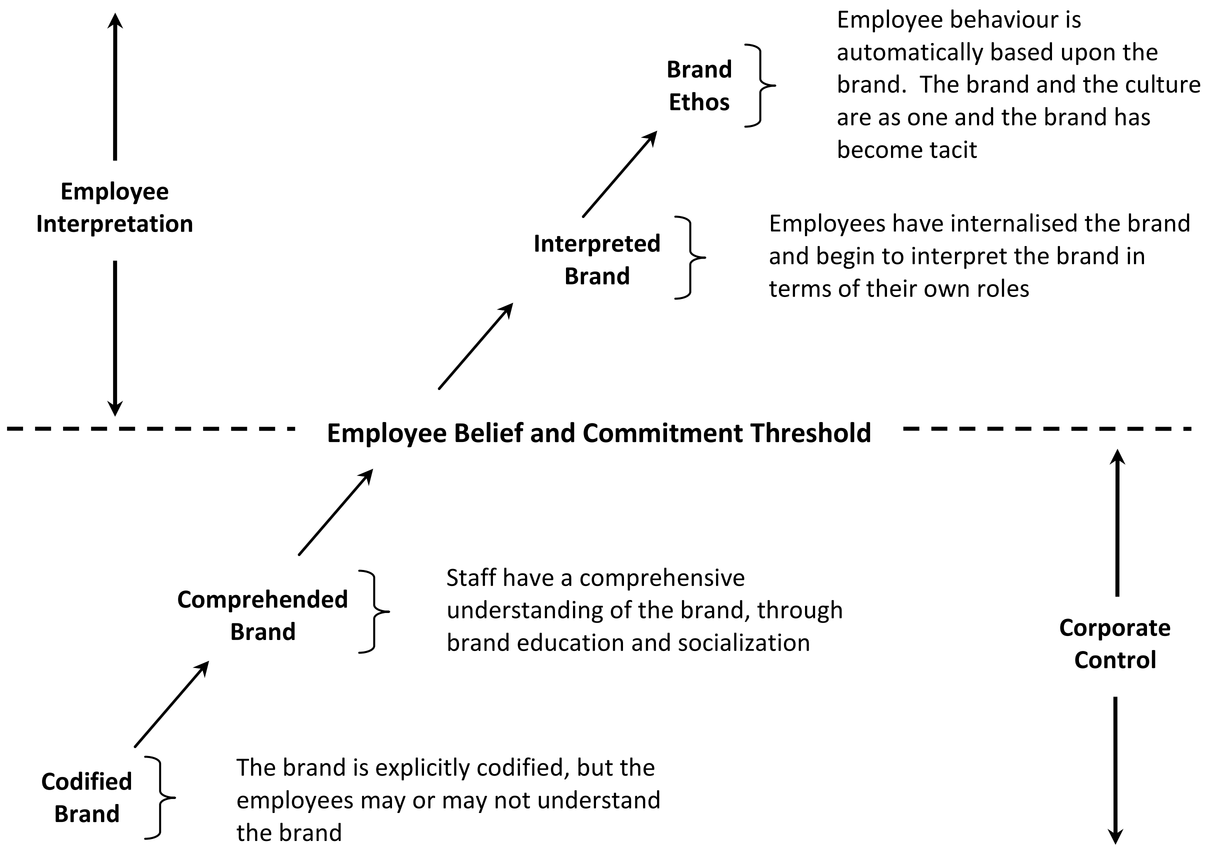

FIGURE 2.7: Brand Ethos Model
Source: de Chernatony & Cottam, (2006)

CHAPTER 3

In the previous chapter, relevant theories and models were presented. From the literature, the most significant theories have been chosen to serve as the conceptual framework for this study. They will also form the basis upon which we will analyze the empirical data.

3 FRAME OF REFERENCE

In Chapter One, the research problem was formulated as:

How can the use of the company website to communicate brand personality be characterized?

Specific research questions are needed in order to understand how brand personality is communicated through an organization's website. The communication process is a logical way of expressing the steps involved when an organization wants to communicate a message about their brand. From the SMCR communication model presented by Wells *et al.* (2003), there are several processes involved in communicating a message. As we understand it, the sender needs to have an intended message they wish to communicate about the brand. This message needs to first be encoded by the organization so that it can be implemented into the communication strategy. In other words, the organization needs to have a clear objective with regards to how they wish their brand to be perceived. Once the message is sent, it can then be decoded by various receivers, including employees, customers, partner firms and the public at large, who may or may not communicate with each other (Solomon, 2009). Given the importance of staff in the service encounter (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006; Hoffman & Bateson, 2006; Punjaisri *et al.*, 2009), we have chosen to look at the employees' perception since they play an integral role in how the brand is communicated to the customer.

From this discussion, we see three factors involved in the communication process: the intended message, the implementation of the message and the perception of the message. Thus, three research questions have emerged. They are:

RQ1: How can the intended brand personality on the company website be characterized?

RQ2: How can the implementation of the brand personality on the company website be characterized?

RQ3: How can the internal perception of the brand personality on the company website be characterized?

3.1 INTENTION

> ***RQ1:*** *How can the intended brand personality on the company website be characterized?*

Aaker (2002) believes that in order for a company to clarify and enhance their brand's identity, they need to develop at least one or a combination of some or all four different brand perspectives: *brand-as-product, brand-as-organization, brand-as-person, and brand-as-symbol*.

In order to examine the intended brand message put forth by organizations, we will utilize Aaker's (2002) brand identity planning model where he presents four perspectives of the brand identity. The second stage of his model, the brand identity system, demonstrates that a brand can be constructed using each of the four perspectives (See Figure 2.6). This will aid in the identification and clarification of the company's intended brand message. One of the four perspectives, *brand-as-person*, can be seen as brand personality, therefore Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale will be used in order to measure the intended brand personality. The brand personality scale will help to capture and analyze the intended brand personality put forth by the organization that can later be compared to the employees' perception of the brand personality.

Defined as having human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997) brand personality is concerned with people's feelings about a brand (Abrams, 1981, as cited in Keller, 1998). Brand personality is separated into five dimensions: *sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness* (Aaker, 1997). Table 3.1 is a conceptualization of the two areas needed to answer Research Question 1 – brand identity and brand personality. The conceptualization of de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) brand ethos model will also be included in this table. Brand ethos is not part of the intention of the brand personality as indicated by Research Question 1. However, by asking about internal branding, at this stage it will aid in understanding the amount of corporate control or employee interpretation in each of the organizations. It will show the way in which the brand personality is intended to be understood internally.

TABLE 3.1: Conceptualization of RQ1

Conceptual Area	Concept	Conceptual Definition	Measurement Used
Brand Identity System (D. Aaker, 2002)	Brand-as-Product	"Products and product attributes, quality/value, uses, users and country of origin associated with the brand" (Aaker, 2002).	Respondents' identification and description of their brand's intended identity.
	Brand-as-Organization	"Organizational attributes such as the visibility of the organization, its culture and values, people, programs and assets/skills" (Aaker, 2002).	
	Brand-as-Person	Also known as brand personality. "The set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997).	
	Brand-as-Symbol	"Visual imagery, metaphors and brand heritage associated with the brand" (Aaker, 2002).	
Brand-as-Person – **Brand Personality (J. Aaker, 1997)**	Sincerity	"The idea of warmth and acceptance" (Aaker, 1997).	Respondents' identification and description of the company's intended brand personality and how they use each of these dimensions to a greater or lesser degree.
	Excitement	"The idea of sociability, energy and activity" (Aaker, 1997).	
	Competence	"The idea of responsibility, dependability and security" (Aaker, 1997).	
	Sophistication	"Associated with upper class, glamorous and sexy" (Aaker, 1997).	
	Ruggedness	"Associated with strength, masculinity and American ideals of Western" (Aaker, 1997).	
Brand Ethos Model (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006)	Codified Brand	"The brand is explicitly codified, but the employees may or may not understand the brand" (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006).	Respondents' identification and description of the intended employee interpretation of the brand.
	Comprehended Brand	"Staff have a comprehensive understanding of the brand, through brand education and socialization" (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006).	
	Interpreted Brand	"Employees have internalised the brand and begin to interpret the brand in terms of their own roles" (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006).	
	Brand Ethos	"Employee behaviour is automatically based upon the brand. The brand and the culture are as one and the brand has become tacit" (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006).	

3.2 Implementation

RQ2: *How can the implementation of the brand personality on the company website be characterized?*

The second research question will be analyzed with the use of the third stage in Aaker's (2002) model, the brand identity implementation system (See Figure 2.6). This stage in the model deals with brand positioning. This is the part of brand identity that is actively communicated to the target audience.

This research question also concerns itself with the various levels a website can have. Chaffey *et al*., (2006) assign different Internet services to specific audiences. For the purpose of this study, we want to examine how messages are communicated not only to external customers, but also to internal personnel.

Since this study specifically looks at the online brand personality, Simmons (2007) four pillars of i-branding will also be applied to specifically observe how the brand's identity is implemented in an online setting. See Table 3.2 for a conceptualization of the elements involved in Research Question 2. Since Simmons (2007) does not define two of the concepts that make up the pillars, we have supplied what we believe to be fitting definitions.

TABLE 3.2: Conceptualization of RQ2

Conceptual Area	Concept	Conceptual Definition	Measurement Used
Brand Identity Implementation System (D. Aaker, 2002)	Brand Position	"The part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands." (Aaker, 2002)	Respondents' identification and description of the communication of how their brand identity is implemented.
Levels of the Website (Chaffey *et al.*, 2006)	Intranet	"A network within a single company that enables access to company information using the familiar tools of the Internet such as web browsers and email. Only staff within a company can access the intranet, which will be password protected" (Chaffey *et al.*, 2005, p.523).	Respondents' identification and description of their website and a comparison of the use of branding at different levels.
	Extranet	"Formed by extending the intranet beyond a company to customers, suppliers, collaborators or even competitors. This is password-protected to prevent access by general Internet users" (Chaffey *et al.*, 2006, p.521).	
	The Internet	"The physical network that links computers across the globe. It consists of the infrastructure of network servers and communication links between them that are used to hold and transport the vast amount of information on the Internet" (Chaffey *et al.*, 2006, p.523).	
Four Pillars of i-Branding (Simmons, 2007)	Marketing Communication	"Coordinated promotional messages delivered through one or more channel."[4]	Respondents' identification and description of how they use the company website to express their brand personality.
	Understanding customers	The use of online tools such as web metrics, cookies, surveys and databases to collect relevant information about customers in order to segment more precisely (Simmons, 2007).	
	Content	"Text matter of a document or publication in any form. Content is both information and communication."[5]	
	Interactivity	"The facility for individuals and organizations to communicate directly with one another regardless of distance or time" (Berthon et al., 1996, as cited in Simmons, 2007).	

[4] http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/marketing-communications.html Retrieved 10 February, 2010.
[5] http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/content.html Retrieved 10 February, 2010.

3.3 Internal Perception

> ***RQ3:*** *How can the internal perception of the brand personality on the company website be characterized?*

The final research question is designed to answer and compare how the intended online brand personality is perceived by the employees of an organization. To do this, Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale will be utilized to assess how employees interpret the intended messages distributed by the marketing department regarding the brand's personality. In addition, de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) brand ethos model will be used to measure how the brand personality is interpreted internally. This model helps to understand how the brand is comprehended and integrated within the organization.

TABLE 3.3: Conceptualization of RQ3

Conceptual Area	Concept	Conceptual Definition	Measurement Used
Brand Personality (J. Aaker, 1997)	Sincerity	"The idea of warmth and acceptance" (Aaker, 1997).	Respondents' identification and description of their perception of the company's brand personality and how each of these dimensions is reflected to a greater or lesser degree in that message.
	Excitement	"The idea of sociability, energy and activity" (Aaker, 1997).	
	Competence	"The idea of responsibility, dependability and security" (Aaker, 1997).	
	Sophistication	"Associated with upper class, glamorous and sexy" (Aaker, 1997).	
	Ruggedness	"Associated with strength, masculinity and American ideals of Western" (Aaker, 1997).	
Brand Ethos Model (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006)	Codified Brand	"The brand is explicitly codified, but the employees may or may not understand the brand" (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006).	Respondents' identification and description of their interpretation regarding how well they understand the brand.
	Comprehended Brand	"Staff have a comprehensive understanding of the brand, through brand education and socialization" (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006).	
	Interpreted Brand	"Employees have internalised the brand and begin to interpret the brand in terms of their own roles" (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006).	
	Brand Ethos	"Employee behaviour is automatically based upon the brand. The brand and the culture are as one and the brand has become tacit" (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006).	

3.4 EMERGED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The SMCR model by Wells *et al.* (2003) shows how one-way linear communication takes place by encoding and decoding a message between sender and receiver. This type of communication is also possible over the Internet, which enables the receiver to become a partner in the communication process (Solomon, 2009). A firm's marketing department will need to communicate the organization's brand personality to both internal and external stakeholders which can be achieved by the company website over the Internet as well as (in some cases) via both intranets and extranets (Chaffey *et al*., 2006). As part of the implementation process, Simmons' (2007) four pillars of i-branding will provide the necessary themes to be included in the website. They are: *marketing communication* (MC), *understanding customers* (UC), *content* (C), and *interactivity* (I).

For the purpose of this study, we seek to gain knowledge regarding how organizations use their website to express brand personality, how brand personality is then implemented, and finally, how these messages are perceived internally. We see the communication model as a way to understand the process involved in communicating the intended brand personality. Adapted from the standard SMCR model, the *sender* would be the business or organization along with their brand identity which would include not only the degree to which they incorporate their brand as a product, their brand as an organization and their brand as a symbol but also their brand as a person (or intended brand personality). The *encoded message* would be the company website which may or may not include an intranet or extranet along with their marketing communication, their content, how they understand customers and how they interact with them. The *decoded message* would be the brand personality as it is perceived by receivers; and the *receivers* would be the employees, partner firms, customers and members of the public. This study will only be concerned with internal perception of the brand; therefore, only employees will be included in our model. The amount of control over the perception of the brand by the employees is indicated by the brand ethos model. See Figure 3.1.

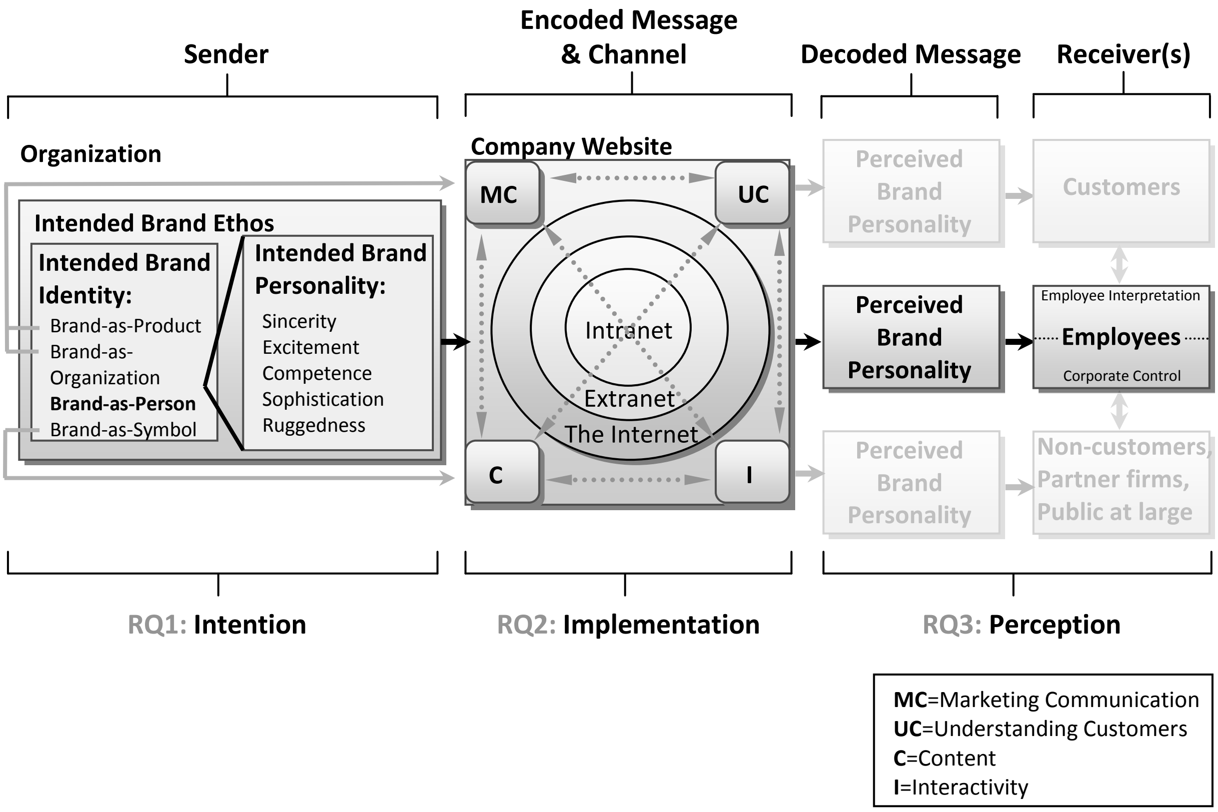

FIGURE 3.1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Adapted from Aaker (1997), Aaker (2002), de Chernatony & Cottam (2006), Chaffey *et al*. (2006), Simmons (2007), Solomon (2009) and Wells *et al.* (2003)

CHAPTER FOUR

The previous chapter presented the conceptual framework based on related studies and concepts that will be used to answer each research question. This chapter will focus on the methods that will be utilized in order to collect and analyze the necessary data.

4 METHOD

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007), research is "the systemic collection and interpretation of information with a clear purpose, to find things out" (p. 610). They argue that there are several ways to do this, including describing, explaining, understanding, criticizing and analyzing (*Ibid.*). The goal of research, as Yin (2009) points out, is to design, collect, present and analyze data fairly in addition to writing a compelling report. Figure 4.1 outlines the step-by-step process used to conduct this study. Each approach builds on the previous and the quality of the research is influenced by validity and reliability at each stage.

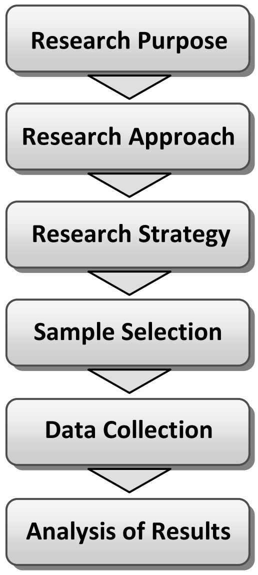

FIGURE 4.1: The Research Process

4.1 RESEARCH PURPOSE

The primary objective of this paper is to gain a better understanding of the way in which companies use their websites to express their brand personality.

According to Saunders *et al*. (2007), research papers can be classified as being exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. They argue that a research project can have more than one purpose. An *exploratory* study is used to find out what is happening in a given situation. It is particularly useful in order to understand a problem when the nature of the problem is unclear (*Ibid.*). The advantage of an exploratory study is its flexibility and adaptability to change. If, for example, new information or insights appear, the researcher needs to be able to change the direction of the study. This means that the focus can be initially broad and will become progressively narrow as the research develops. The objective of a *descriptive* study is to show an accurate account of situations (*Ibid.*). One risk of this type of research might be that the report is only descriptive in nature and does not provide any insights or conclusions to the researcher. *Explanatory* studies examine a problem or situation in order to explain the relationship between variables (*Ibid.*). The authors further note that this type of study could be useful when submitting quantitative data to the statistical test and measure correlations (*Ibid.*).

This study will contain both exploratory and descriptive elements. The purpose of the research is to discover whether the internal perception matches the intended messages. This will be an exploratory study as we wish to gain more knowledge about the processes involved in implementing a company's brand personality in an online format. Since the study of the use of the Internet in business marketing is relatively recent, historically speaking, our purpose is also to provide a description of the phenomenon.

4.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The difference between an *inductive* and *deductive* research approach, according to Saunders *et al*. (2007), is dependent on whether the theory is clear at the beginning of the research. The deductive approach starts from theory that is tested with the research strategy. In contrast, the inductive approach is made from collecting empirical data. Furthermore, the authors state that the inductive approach enables the researcher to gain an understanding of the meaning people attach to certain events and it emphasizes a close understanding of the context of the research with no need to generalize (*Ibid.*).

This study will follow a deductive approach which allows the information gathered to be analyzed and then specific conclusions to be reached. We will be building on existing models and theories to further the understanding of companies' use of brand personality.

Saunders *et al*. (2007) note that a *qualitative* data collection technique focuses on non-numeric data in the form of words, pictures or video clips to describe data, while a *quantitative* data collection technique focuses on numerical data such as numbers.

This research involves qualitative data collection. Our understanding of the research will develop from the words, definitions and explanations given by the respondents.

4.3 RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research strategy is, according to Saunders *et al*. (2007), a general plan for the way in which researchers will go about answering the research questions. Yin (2009) lists the five major research strategies as *experiment, survey, archival analysis, history* and *case study*. Saunders *et al*. (2007) includes *action research, grounded theory* in addition to Yin's five.

According to Yin (2009) three conditions exist to determine which of these methods is to be used. The three conditions are: (a) the type of research question posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events (*Ibid.*). Table 4.1 shows the three conditions and how each is related to Yin's (2009) five major research strategies listed above.

TABLE 4.1: Relevant situations for different research methods

METHOD	(a) Form of Research Question	(b) Requires Control of Behavioural Events?	(c) Focuses on Contemporary Events?
Experiment	how, why?	yes	yes
Survey	who, what, where, how many, how much?	no	yes
Archival Analysis	who, what, where, how many, how much?	no	yes/no
History	how, why?	no	no
Case Study	how, why?	no	yes

Source: Yin (2009, p. 8)

In this study, the research problem and research questions ask '*how*'. This study does not require the control of behavioural events, however, it does focus on contemporary events. This fits with Yin's (2009) requirements for a case study.

Yin (2009) defines the case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p.18). In this research, the way organizations use their website to communicate brand personality is the phenomenon that will be examined in its real-life context.

Multiple cases will be used to conduct this research study. One aim of studying multiple cases is to ensure that the events and processes are not idiosyncratic (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Another reason for using multiple cases is to understand how processes and outcomes are qualified by local conditions and to develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations (*Ibid.*).

4.4 Sample Selection

In order to carry out our research, we will need to sample a population because, as Miles and Huberman (1994) point out, sampling is crucial for later analysis since researchers cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) state that sampling procedures can be divided into two broad categories: *probability sampling* and *non-probability sampling*. They explain that in probability samples, each unit has a known, non-zero chance of being included in the sample, and can allow for statistical inferences.

Meanwhile, a non-probability sample is a sampling in which the chance of being selected is not known (Saunders *et al*., 2007). With non-probability samples it is not possible to make valid inferences about the population (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) give examples of non-probability samples. They include the *convenience sample*, the *judgement sample* and the *quota sample*.

Sampling in qualitative studies tends to be purposive rather than random (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this research study, a purposive or judgement sample will be used. According to Remenyi, Williams, Money and Swartz (1998) a purposive or judgement sample is used when the selected individuals are chosen because of their likelihood of representing a particular issue. They add that such samples comprise of those who possess the knowledge and information to provide useful insights. A judgement sample is commonly used when working with very small samples in case study research and in situations where the researcher wants to use cases they believe will be particularly informative (*Ibid.*).

The criteria for choosing the sample for this study are:

- An established online presence by way of a developed website,
- To be in the service industry since services are intangible by nature and service organizations have a stronger need to develop their brand in order to provide physical evidence to their customers, and
- Local to Northern Sweden in order to allow for face-to-face interviews.

This study includes four cases. Two smaller organizations (under 50 staff members) and two larger organizations (above 100 staff members) were chosen in order to account for differences in size. Since the organizations did not want to reveal their business strategies, they all requested to be anonymous and are referred to Company A through D in this study.

Since this is a qualitative study in which the individuals selected need to possess relevant information, a judgement sample was used when choosing respondents. In each of the four cases, the marketing manager or a person holding a similar role was interviewed. Following this, two other employees from each organization were interviewed. These employees are those considered to be 'typical employees' who are in contact with, and are therefore expressing the brand message to, the customers. The reason for interviewing a person from the marketing department and a typical employee is to compare the intended brand message and implementation on the company website to the perception of the brand by the employees.

4.5 DATA COLLECTION

According to Saunders *et al*. (2007), there are different means of collecting data. These include: *observation, interviews and/or questionnaires and secondary data collection*. They argue that when collecting data, a researcher needs to evaluate all data collection methods to get the most suitable option, not simply the easiest option. "Observation involves: the systematic observation, recording, description, analysis and interpretation of people's behaviour" (Saunders *et al.*, 2007, p. 282). It is used for clarifying the meanings people attach to their actions or the frequency of those actions (*Ibid.*). Interviews or questionnaires involve asking the same set of questions in a pre-determined order to a number of different people (deVaus, 2002, as cited in Saunders *et al.*, 2007). It provides an efficient way to collect responses from a large population. Using secondary data is to reanalyze data that have already been collected for another purpose. It can be a useful source of information (*Ibid.*).

There are three types of research interviews according to Saunders *et al.* (2007): *structured, semi-structured* and *unstructured*. Structured interviews utilize questionnaires based on a predetermined and standardized set of questions. They will be administered by the interviewer and are used to collect quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews are non-standardized and collect qualitative data. Instead of strict list of questions, the researcher will have a number of topics and general questions to be covered in a semi-structured interview. Unstructured interviews are used to explore a theme in an in-depth fashion. There is no list of questions and the interviewee is free to discuss the events, behaviours and beliefs about the subject matter (*Ibid.*).

Yin (2009) states that in interviews conducted for case studies, the query needs to appear as a guided conversation rather than structured questions. He cautions that during the interview process, researchers need to complete two tasks. The first is to follow their own line of questioning according to their study protocol and the second is to ask their actual questions in an unbiased, non-threatening way so as to ascertain both the 'why' and the 'how' from the respondents (*Ibid.*).

The semi-structured interview is a suitable choice for collecting primary data because we want to understand how the company websites are used by our chosen organizations to create brand personality. This type of interview allows us to adapt our questions slightly in order to elicit the appropriate information as it pertains to each of the cases. An interview guide was prepared to form structure for the interviews (see Appendix I and II). The questions pertaining to Research Questions 1 and 2 will be answered by the Marketing Manager of the each of the organizations, while questions that are relevant to the chosen employees in each case will focus on subjects connected to Research Question 3.

4.6 Analysis of Results

Miles and Huberman (1994) view data analysis as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity:

1) Data reduction,
2) Data display, and
3) Conclusion drawing/verification

Data reduction, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data collected during the interviews. They add that while data reduction can occur at any stage of the study, during the analysis stage, writing summaries, teasing out themes, making clusters and other organizational procedures continue until the report is completed (*Ibid.*).

The second activity in the *data analysis* is the data display. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that a display is "an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (p.11). Since long strings of texts can overload the ability to process information, they are convinced that better displays aid in the validity of qualitative analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) have found that matrices, graphs, charts and networks are designed to arrange information in a way that immediately accessible to the reader.

The final analytical activity is *conclusion drawing and verification*. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that this is the point where qualitative analysts begin to derive meaning. They do this by noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions (*Ibid.*).

Yin (2009) discusses four general strategies for analyzing data: *relying on theoretical propositions*, *developing a case description*, *using both qualitative and quantitative data* and *examining rival explanations*. This study will rely on the presented theories for analysis since it is deductive in nature. A with-in case analysis will compare the collected data from each case with the theories and models presented in the literature overview. The cross-case analysis will reveal any differences amongst the empirical data collected for each of the four cases. One reason for conducting a cross-case analysis is to enhance generalizability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although generalizing data is not realistic for a qualitative study (Denzin, 1983; Guba & Lincoln, 1981 as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994), it is still useful to know if the findings of a study are relevant and applicable in similar settings. Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that multiple cases, adequately sampled and analyzed carefully can help answer the question: '*do these findings make sense beyond this specific case?*' (p.173). A second reason for using a cross-case analysis is to deepen understanding and explanation. Multiple cases will not only reveal specific condition under which a finding will occur, but it can also

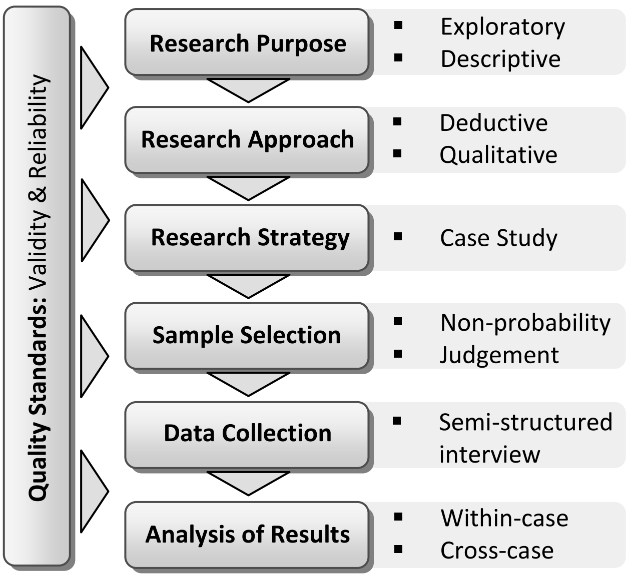

FIGURE 4.2: Summary of Research Choices

show how those conditions may be related (*Ibid.*). Figure 4.2 summarizes the research choices made for this study.

4.7 QUALITY STANDARDS

Problems with the method can be overcome by dealing with issues that arise with regards to *validity* and *reliability*. According to Saunders *et al*. (2007), validity involves two facets. First, validity is the extent to which the data collection method(s) accurately measure what they intended to measure. Second, validity pertains to whether the findings are really about what they claim to be about.

In order to ensure validity in this study, a pre-test was conducted on a similar topic in the months leading up to the current study. Since semi-structured interviews were conducted, we were able to assess the respondents' answers and adjust our questions and/or provide additional information to ensure they understood what was being asked. The interviews were conducted in English with the exception of three. It was our observation that the interviewees had strong competencies in English and felt that they were fully able to answer questions without difficulty. One of our researchers is fully bilingual in both Swedish and English and was able to translate the interview questions for the respondent who felt more comfortable speaking Swedish. The other researcher is a native speaker of English and comprehends a basic level of Swedish so was able to follow the general topic of conversation.

Reliability is defined as the extent to which the data collection technique(s) will produce consistent findings if the test is conducted by the same or other researchers (Saunders *et al*., 2007). In order to ensure reliability in this study, two observers/researchers participated in the interviews with each of the respondents in all four of the organizations which helped to decrease any inconsistencies in the evaluation of the responses. The same interview guides (See Appendix I and II) were used in each case. Ten of the twelve interviews were audio-recorded to eliminate any lapses in memory and to lessen discrepancies in interpretation of responses. Notes were taken by both respondents in the two interviews that were not audio-recorded.

By selecting the right organizations and the appropriate persons in each of the organizations, as identified in section 4.4, it helped to increase both reliability and validity. Choosing these organizations and the individuals in each should allow us to produce consistent findings if the same test were repeated.

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CHAPTER FIVE

In this chapter, the empirical data collected from the four cases will be presented. First, a brief background for each organization will be given along with the discussion from each respondent, organized by research question.

5 EMPIRICAL DATA

Each of the cases is comprised of three interviews. The first interview is conducted with the marketing manager or owner of the company and reflects the intention and implementation of the brand personality on the company website. The second and third interviews are conducted with two staff members who can comment on their perceptions of the brand personality. Table 5.1 displays the structure of the interviews for each of the four cases.

TABLE 5.1: Interview Structure

Cases ⟶	Company A (large)	Company B (large)	Company C (small)	Company D (small)
	Marketing Manager	Marketing Manager	Marketing Manager	Owner
Interviewed:	Employee 1	Employee 1	Employee 1	Employee 1
	Employee 2	Employee 2	Employee 2	Employee 2

5.1 CASE 1: COMPANY A

Founded in 1971, Company A is a service provider located in Northern Sweden and prides itself on delivering world-class standards. Company A employs over 100 people.

5.1.1 INTERVIEW WITH THE MARKETING MANAGER

5.1.1.1 BRAND POSITIONING

According to Company A's Marketing Manager, communication activities take place on two levels in order to position the brand:

P1: Primary brand communication which occurs at the level of mass communication
P2: Secondary brand communication which occurs on a one-to-one level [6]

The Marketing Manager points out that P1 creates an expectation in the minds of the customers and P2 is proof that they are who they say they are. Furthermore, he explains that P1 is designed to create a ladder in the minds of the customers and to keep competitors away from the coveted position on that ladder.

[6] P1 and P2 are constructs introduced by the Marketing Manager at Company A. Put simply, P1 means organization-to-customer communication while P2 refers to employee-to-customer interaction.

This was done in order to establish the organization at that position since, as the Marketing Manager points out, positioning a brand can last for 20 to 30 years or more and it is difficult to reposition a brand once it has been established. They also wanted to focus on their points of difference, including their geographic location. Packaged positively, this is how they stand out from their competitors.

P2 is their warm and welcoming atmosphere. It has been a unified part of their one-on-one communication since 1971. The idea of being "*warm and welcoming*" was chosen to be a part of their communication because it is the essence of the Northern Sweden culture.

Company A focuses on P1 and P2 because they believe if they lose control of P1 and P2, they will lose control of the brand. If they lose control of the brand, then they will lose customers. According to the Marketing Manager, being "*warm and welcoming*" strengthens the brand.

5.1.1.2 Brand Identity

Prior to 2004, Company A did not brand themselves under a unified umbrella. Each sub-unit of the organization did their own work to distinguish themselves.

Company A no longer uses a "brand person" to market themselves. According to the Marketing Manager, brand personality used to be important when marketing in this industry, but it is no longer what Company A does because they do not see it as important. Instead, they focus on the organization because they believe that culture is what is attractive to their customers. They have three strategic pillars which are:

1) Acting as a unified company as opposed to having independent departments
2) Focus on research
3) To be the first with the latest and newest techniques.

Company A considers these their "lowest common denominators" in terms of their offering and they feel that it is what unifies them as a company. They had more product focus earlier where each department made their own marketing but now they have one unified brand under one name and the same logo and strategy. They market their location as a point of difference in order to be able to stand out from other brands. The company benefits from marketing its geographic location to attract customers.

5.1.1.3 Brand Personality

According to Company A's Marketing Manager, their intended brand personality traits are:

- A professional person
- Equally male and female in gender
- Independent and social
- Ability to problem solve
- Extroverted
- Curious
- Warm and welcoming
- Open-minded
- Non-judgemental

The Marketing Manager believes that these traits are conveyed on the website in a section that shows testimonials from the customers. They do this to emphasize their brand's personality traits, demonstrating how they actually are instead of something fictitious.

When asked to rank Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, the Marketing Manager indicated the order of importance of each trait for Company A to be:

1) Competence
2) Sincerity
3) Excitement
4) Ruggedness
5) Sophistication

The respondent was asked to describe why he chose the first two traits as the most important and the last trait as least important. Since we wanted to check the end points of the rankings, the respondent was not asked about the traits that ranked third and fourth as we did not consider them as important as the other three in this discussion. This was done for all four cases.

The reason that *competence* was ranked number one is because they want people to know that they have a world-class company. They do this by having three of the most respected business people in Sweden with no political or financial affiliations to speak on their behalf. Competence is important to them because aptitude is their main core.

When asked why *sincerity* ranked second, the Marketing Manager indicated that in addition to being competent, they want customers to see them as genuine. Northern Scandinavia is crisp and clear, true and honest. They want to be associated with the same positive qualities that the rest of Sweden attributes to people from Northern Sweden. This is done because they believe it helps to gain a competitive advantage in a tough market. As the Marketing Manager points out, they believe that "people are looking for the happiness and security of their childhood and they want to get back to basics". Company A wants to provide that for them.

When asked why *sophistication* ranked lowest, the Marketing Manager stated that he believes that sophistication is not an attribute their naturally carry. The reason they do not focus as much on sophistication is because it would be very expensive (in advertising dollars) to try to convince people that they are something that they are not. Besides, they cannot compete with the innate sophistication that companies located in Stockholm or Gothenburg would have.

5.1.1.4 Brand Ethos

At Company A, employees have no freedom to communicate the brand at the P1 level of communication. The reason for this is that this is the organizations's mass communication effort which comes directly from the marketing department.

At the P2 level of communication, the Marketing Manager believes that the employees have full freedom to express the brand as they see fit. They are encouraged to be warm and welcoming and they receive guidance about treating customers as unique individuals. During the hiring process, Company A tries to find people who already possess a warm and welcoming demeanour so that characteristic is simply part of how they would normally interact with people. Only if a staff member is found to be rude to the customers or otherwise expressing negativity about the company will they be more forcefully directed towards the expected communication.

5.1.1.5 Four Pillars of i-Branding

Company A uses their website as their main form of marketing communication. This directs potential customers to their product catalogue.

Company A does not feel the need to understand their customers' online behaviour. Things such as click-thru rate are not considered important since they believe that it is better to raise brand awareness. This is because, according the Marketing Manager, any time a user is on Company A's website, it is triggering their perception about the brand.

There is no fancy text used in the product catalogue; instead, it simply provides accurate information about product offerings. The Marketing Manager explains that this is the way people expect it to be delivered.

Company A does not interact with customers online the way they would like to. The reason for this is financial. It would cost too much to hire a communication company to deal with all of their online communication. The structure of the website is maintained through a content management system that enables each department to develop their own website with which they can communicate information to the customers.

5.1.1.6 Levels of the Website

Company A's website has only one level. All information is available to the public via the Internet except certain sensitive information that is password protected.

5.1.2 Interview with Employee 1: Administrative Staff

5.1.2.1 Core Identity

Employee 1 stated that Company A's brand is about winter – the snow and cold weather – as well as being world-class in their industry. Since the company is relatively small compared to others in their industry, she believes that there is a "closeness" between the employees and the customers. By this she means that employees are easy to contact and can interact with customers one-on-one. Employee 1 understands that Company A wants to be perceived as a place that is warm inside, despite it being cold outside. The reason for this, she explains, is because they want to show their company's warmth in order to attract customers.

5.1.2.2 Brand Personality

Employee 1 describes Company A's brand personality in the following way:

- A female
- 20-25 years old
- Wears outdoor clothing

- Professional
- Warm and welcoming
- Easy to talk to

Employee 1 believes that this personality gets communicated through the logo and the slogan, both on- and offline.

When asked to rank Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, Employee 1 understood the order of importance of each trait for Company A to be:

1) Competence
2) Sincerity
3) Excitement
4) Ruggedness
5) Sophistication

Employee 1 stated that she ranked *competence* as the most important trait because of the "world-class" statement.

She explained that *sincerity* was next because a company has to be honest and true.

Sophistication was marked as the least important because, according to Employee 1, she has never heard that word in connection with Company A and she sees it as the opposite of the person she describes above.

5.1.2.3 Brand Ethos

Employee 1 explains that she feels she needs to be flexible with the brand because every customer is different and she needs to change her method of communicating with different people. For example, with people who do not like winter activities, she will focus more on being warm and welcoming. Employee 1 claims that she loves working with people and making people feel welcome is part of who she is, so this task comes easily to her.

Employee 1 works closely with the marketing department and is on a steering committee which is developing a training programme designed to help the service desk and other staff members to better understand the brand. This programme will be implemented in the very near future.

5.1.3 Interview with Employee 2: Administrative Staff

5.1.3.1 Core Identity

Employee 2 describes Company A as professional, world-leading and warm. She explained that the brand needs to communicate that it is world-leading in order to survive, but that is more focused on their research and development. Due to the remote location of Company A, they need to work hard to get customers and to keep them. This is why they need to be perceived as warm and to treat customers well.

Employee 2 believes that Company A's website is mostly used for public relations purposes. She believes the website is a tool to communicate the brand to anyone who visits the site. As a staff member, she gets a sense of pride from the website since it shows many of the company's successes.

5.1.3.2 Brand Personality

Employee 2 describes Company A's brand personality as:

- A male
- Characteristics of a typical a person who lives in Northern Sweden (dependable, reliable, trustworthy, hard-working, etc.)
- Robust
- Technological
- Confident
- High self-esteem

Employee 2 states that these traits communicate that the company is professional.

When asked to rank Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, Employee 2 understood the order of importance of each trait for Company A to be:

1) Competence
2) Excitement
3) Sincerity
4) Ruggedness
5) Sophistication

Employee 2 explained that *competence* is the trait the company emphasizes most because of the use of "world-class" in the marketing communication.

Excitement was considered the second most emphasized trait due the communication the company makes about the region in which it is located.

She states that *sophistication* is the least important trait in Company A's marketing communication because she did not think that being sophisticated is genuine, and that trait is not associated with the company.

5.1.3.3 Brand Ethos

Employee 2 believes that due to the internal discussions about the brand it is not possible for staff members to not know anything about the brand; however, she feels she does not know every detail about it and she is not sure if she has understood the brand correctly.

She states that Company A has provided seminars and presentations about the brand discussing various topics. Employees are told to think about the brand when they interact with customers and when doing daily activities, but the brand itself is not discussed every day.

Employee 2 explains that her task is not to explain the brand to the people that she meets, but to *live* the brand. Her role is to explain the operations of her department and she hopes that what she does fits with the message the marketing department wants for the brand. She feels she has a lot of freedom to express Company A's brand and she believes that the messages she communicates about the brand are correct.

5.2 CASE 2: COMPANY B

Company B is a transportation company that provides service to the local community. During peak season, they make 1000 trips per day providing service to 16,000 customers. More than 100 people are employed by Company B.

5.2.1 INTERVIEW WITH THE MARKETING MANAGER

5.2.1.1 BRAND POSITIONING

The Marketing Manager states that Company B's brand is comprised of everything. The brand represents how they act – both personally and professionally – the condition of the vehicles, how the employees are dressed and even how they talk about the company outside of work. The brand is also demonstrated by the condition of the garages and offices. The condition of their signage also reflects their brand.

Company B has a strong and well-known brand in the city in which they operate. It is a well-established brand with many positive associations. In the transportation category, Company B has ranked high in recent years on a nation-wide index for satisfied customers.

Company B is open to new ideas and cooperates with different partners. They want to build the brand by being present at different events and in various situations. Company B supports the city through their cooperation with different sport and cultural events. They arrange special transportation to the city's ski resort, to hockey and basketball games as well as cultural events such as theatre and music performances.

5.2.1.2 BRAND IDENTITY

Company B's goal is to work with a mindset of three attributes that should be present in all of their work: *knowledge*, *relevance* and *product benefits*. The Marketing Manager explains these attributes this way:

- *Knowledge* is: knowing the schedule.
- *Relevance* is: recognizing when it would be appropriate for customers to use their service.
- *Product benefits* is: understanding how their service can simplify their customers' lives.

Company B is currently focusing on showing customers where it is appropriate to use their transportation service. They had advertising campaigns in 2008 where the message was not about travel, rather it focused on patrons enjoying various outings and events. Travel to some of these events and locations were offered free of charge depending on contributions from partner companies.

The Marketing Manager believes that their logotype is “stiff and boring.” She would like to change it to something rounder and softer; however, all decisions regarding such changes are tightly controlled by the board that owns the company. They want to keep the logo is as it is.

The Marketing Manager explains that Company B’s brand should be interpreted as being available to function well for the customers. Company B has three strategies that are communicated internally: *to be simple*, *reliable* and *available*. These strategies are only communicated internally so that they become the foundation of their work and to encompass the whole organization. They want to be known as a company that is available for and who listen to the customers.

5.2.1.3 Brand Personality

The Marketing Manager describes Company B’s brand personality in the following way:

- Both male and female
- Wears a suit jacket and is properly clothed, but not too fancy
- A person who listens
- Available and easy to get in touch with
- Open to customers
- Gives friendly greetings

Company B has changed a lot over the years. The Marketing Manager attributes this to the new CEO in the company. They have gone from being very stiff and masculine to a bit softer and more open. The Marketing Manager explains that the personality traits depend on the CEO of the company and what is reflected back to the company as well as how the rest of the organization is supposed to act. The Marketing Manager is pleased with the latest changes since they are now more customer-focused and they try to resolve problems as quickly as possible.

When asked to rank Aaker’s (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, the Marketing Manager indicated the order of importance of each trait for Company B to be:

1) Excitement
2) Competence
3) Sincerity
4) Sophistication
5) Ruggedness

The Marketing Manager ranked *excitement* first because she felt a strong connection to excitement in her work.

Competence placed second since they have a responsibility to their customers. Company B needs to keep their promises to be on time.

Ruggedness was ranked last because a rough attitude does not work with their company. The Marketing Manager believes it is more important for them to be humble.

5.2.1.4 Brand Ethos

When asked about understanding of the brand internally, the Marketing Manager said that it had improved. They have put more focus on internal education. There will be a seminar later this spring about behaviour, treatment of customers and how the company is perceived externally.

Company B gives out an employee handbook to their drivers about how they should act and things they should and should not say about the company both while they are at work as well as outside of work. Attitudes are changing internally and there is now more of an open dialogue.

5.2.1.5 Four Pillars of i-Branding

Company B's aim is to have the most current and important information on the first page of their website. The information there has both text and pictures of current events in the city as well as showing the schedules.

Company B has put a lot of focus into understanding their customers and into listening to what they have to say about the company. They have conducted a three month web-based survey with the aim of improving their website. They also store customer suggestions in a large database and have acted upon a number of those as well.

The website is concentrated on displaying the schedules and routes in different ways. For example, they have pdf files of regular timetables for each route, a travel planning service and a real-time schedule for each destination. Company B tries to develop services that are useful to their customers.

Both the online customer survey and the section that allows for customers to email their suggestions and complaints allow for customers to interact with Company B via the website.

5.2.1.6 Levels of the Website

Company B's website is used to communicate with current and potential customers. They have no blog or Facebook page. All suggestions that come in via email, telephone or in person are logged into a specific computer program designed specifically for that purpose. Both positive and negative suggestions are logged and are used to find out what the customers want as well as areas which need improvement.

The brand is communicated on the website by being up-to-date. Currently there is only one level of the website – the Internet – but they are working on revisions which should be available in a few months' time. The new plans have included an intranet for internal communication.

5.2.2 Interview with Employee 1: Information Officer

5.2.2.1 Core Identity

Company B does not generally go by their full name, but by their company's initials. Employee 1 feels that the company is a good one and their customers have faith in the service they provide. He states that Company B tries to focus more on the customers rather than the issues. By that, he means that their customers should feel that Company B is doing whatever they can to listen to them. He explains that if a customer comes in with a complaint, they should leave feeling happy. Not only does this make the customer feel good, but it also makes Company B feel good. Employee 1 says that the reason they have a customer focus is because we live in a "rapid time" where everything can change almost overnight, so it is important to make customers happy.

Company B's website is, according to Employee 1, mostly used to find the schedule, to search for information regarding services and prices and to use their travel-planning feature which allows users to compare different routes.

Employee 1 believes that the design of Company B's website is clean and easy to use. It does not require a lot of clicks to find necessary items. Company B's business plan is to make things simple and that should be evident in everything they do. It should be easy to find out when the vehicles arrive, easy to pay for the service and so on.

5.2.2.2 Brand Personality

When asked to assign human characteristics to Company Bs brand, Employee 1 described:

- A person wearing a driver's uniform
- Conscientious
- Treats people kindly
- Proud to work at the company
- A person of mixed gender, wearing trousers on one leg and a skirt on the other

Employee 1 further explained that this person was not only communicated through the drivers, who are the face of the organization, but also through customer visits to their office and when customers come to the information desk for a quick chat. He pointed out that Company B currently spends more money on advertising and have attempted to become more visible in the region. Over the past ten years or so, they have started to have more catchy advertisements and an outward image that is more professional than it was previously. Employee 1 believes that it costs a little more to do this, but it is worth it as it has increased their professionalism.

When asked to rank Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, Employee 1 indicated the order of importance of each trait for Company B to be:

1) Competence
2) Sincerity
3) Excitement
4) Ruggedness
5) Sophistication

The reason Employee 1 marked *competence* as the most important dimension for Company B is because he believes that the company has a wide range of competencies and it is very important for their company to be seen as competent, not only externally, but internally as well. They should have competent personnel as well as tools that can improve the quality of the service. By having a good level of competence within the company, it will be recognized by those outside the company.

Sincerity was ranked second by Employee 1. The reason for this, he explains, is that the company makes a strong effort to be honest to their customers and admit when they are wrong. Company B's travel warranty compensates customers when the company has made an error. Employee 1 believes that being sincere and honest helps them to gain more in the end.

Employee 1 ranked *sophistication* last because he believes that showing sophistication would most likely be interpreted as being snobby and arrogant, traits with which they do not want to be associated.

5.2.2.3 Brand Ethos

Employee 1 thinks he understands Company B's brand well. The company has regular meetings where they discuss the operations of the business and discussions about the brand are also included. They do not have specific meetings exclusively about the brand.

Employee 1 explains that they do not take complaints as criticism, but as suggestions for improvement. Everything regarding the core operations affects the brand, according to Employee 1. They respond to customer surveys and try to fix any problems in any category. By having the general public reacting positively towards the brand, it will strengthen the brand.

5.2.3 Interview with Employee 2: Traffic Controller/Driver

5.2.3.1 Core Identity

Employee 2 states that they have a strong focus on serving customers. He explains that they now have a very good CEO in the company who is good at motivating staff members. He pushes them to strive forward and to continue to develop.

Employee 2 believes that Company B's website is used mostly for travel planning, displaying schedules and so on. The website is very simple and easy to understand.

5.2.3.2 Brand Personality

When asked to assign human characteristics to Company B's brand, Employee 2 listed the following traits:

- Male
- Wears a driver's uniform
- Nice and friendly
- Knowledgeable about the area and their work

When asked to rank Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, Employee 2 put them in the following order:

1) Competence
2) Excitement
3) Sincerity
4) Ruggedness
5) Sophistication

Employee 2 stated that *competence* is the most important dimension for Company B. He explains that if they do not have the required competence, then they should not be driving. If they send out drivers who cannot handle the work, it is bad for the customers.

Excitement was ranked the second most important dimension for Company B. Employee 2 notes that the drivers represent the company and need to show some social skills.

Sophistication is placed last as Employee 2 believes that it does not fit with the persona of a driver and this trait is not communicated at all internally.

5.2.3.3 Brand Ethos

Employee 2 feels he understands Company B's brand well. The company has ongoing meetings with employees every year where they discuss the brand, what it stands for and if anything has changed during the year.

He believes he has a bit more flexibility to express the brand than the other drivers as he also works in traffic control. Overall, Employee 2 thinks that most of the employees have some flexibility when communicating the brand.

5.3 Case 3: Company C

Company C is a small business providing Internet technology (IT) services. They are located in the northern region of Sweden and have been in operation for 13 years.

5.3.1 Interview with the Marketing Manager

5.3.1.1 Brand Positioning

A year ago (2009 as of the writing of this report) Company C re-launched their brand and gave it an environmentally-friendly feel by choosing a green coloured logo. They center their communication on the environmental benefits of allowing for long-distance meetings to take place without the expense and waste of physical travel. Customers can either purchase the infrastructure required or rent a multipoint room.

Instead of focusing on the hardware, technology and technicians, they have created a user-friendly approach to long-distance meetings and decided to spend much of their time helping those who are booking the meetings such as secretaries and other staff members. Since this change was implemented, the Marketing Manager at Company C has found that "the market has exploded."

Since Company C is a small business, they base their marketing and communication budget on sales. The majority of their communication focuses on building relationships with existing customers and they rely on word-of-mouth advertising. Educating their customers is one way of doing that. Their "Support Club" allows for two-way communication between the company and their customers. Since their business is quite technical, they have two levels of support; one is for the technical workers and the other is for the end user.

Traditionally, similar IT companies have only focused on the hardware part of the industry, but Company C is mainly focusing on the service point of view. They see themselves as first movers in service providing in their industry. Because of their size, they are unable to go into a price war with their competitors, so they have positioned themselves differently. Instead, of trying to only provide the hardware for their customer's technical departments, they go the extra mile to provide "service, quality and capability" to both the technical personnel and to those who use the technology (the end-user).

5.3.1.2 Brand Identity

The reason Company C has changed their focus to include services along with the necessary hardware and software is because they want to be perceived as an "easy solution" – one that is easy to use and easy to order. They have done this as a result of the reaction from the market. They found that secretaries, CEOs and other top management personnel do not understand the technology, and according to the Marketing Manager, they should not have to.

The Marketing Manager at Company C wants to focus the website communication on the look and feel of the services. In future, he would like to include video guides for customers and event documentation. The reason for this is to show that they offer a wide range of services.

5.3.1.3 Brand Personality

When asked to ascribe human characteristics to Company C's brand, the Marketing Manager listed the following traits:

- Male
- Professional
- Business-casual attire; neither a stereotypical technician nor a stiff Stockholm suit
- Tech savvy
- Not trying to look too rich (i.e. – they do not visit customers driving a BMW)
- Live and learn attitude
- Do as they say they will do
- Eco-friendly attitude: this includes no unnecessary traveling; instead uses a bicycle or public transportation when it is absolutely necessary to meet with customers face-to-face

When asked to rank Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, the Marketing Manager indicated the order of importance of each trait for Company C to be:

1) Competence
2) Sincerity
3) Excitement
4) Ruggedness
5) Sophistication

The Marketing Manager explained that one of the company's advantages is their experience and competence. Company C's competence is the main argument for persuading customers to outsource for their service instead of trying to do it themselves, therefore it was logical to list *competence* as the most important feature.

Sincerity, according to the Marketing Manager, has to do with maintaining personal relationships with their customers. If they are unable to establish trust through being sincere in the web communications, it will be tough to build strong relationships with the customers. They rely on the customers trusting that Company C will reveal pertinent information to them regarding issues and problems. If a customer feels they are trying to deceive them, they will not buy Company C's services.

The reason the Marketing Manager chose *sophistication* as the least important trait is because the software that comes with their services are very basic and cannot be customized in any way to reflect their tastes in culture or fashion. Hence, *sophistication* is not an important characteristic when it comes to Company C's brand.

5.3.1.4 BRAND ETHOS

The Marketing Manager at Company C believes that the other staff members have the same understanding of the brand as he does. The reason he thinks this is because everyone was involved in developing the new logo when it was changed a year ago (2009). Since then, they have been working on implementing a new direction for the company as they did not have one previously.

The Marketing Manager explains that Company C has not been very strict about forcing staff to relate certain brand messages to the customers; however, they recognize that they will need to do so in the future as the company expands and new staff members are hired. In addition, they are trying to get an ISO 9001 certification and due to this, they will need to be stricter about their brand message.

The Marketing Manager understands that consistency is important and they want to provide a clear impression of their brand to their customers. He states that there is a delicate balance between having a unified look and a feeling of individuality. They are striving for both.

5.3.1.5 FOUR PILLARS OF I-BRANDING

Company C uses the messages on their website to get customers interested in the types of services they provide. They do not focus on a sales push. The reason they do this is because they feel customers need to be educated about their offering first. Since most of their customers are typically "early adopters," Company C focuses their messages at those types of customers. In addition, they offer an online booking service for some of their services.

The Marketing Manager at Company C states that they understand their customers. This is mainly done through offline channels such as during their support club meetings. During these meetings, customers can ask questions and they can suggest topics of discussion for future meetings.

Content on Company C's website is in the form of images and text. They also show live broadcasts of their staff members playing music on Fridays. This is done to lighten the mood and show that there is more to their company than just business. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate their IT capabilities.

Company C interacts with staff members the same way they expect their customers to interact – through Internet technology. Since some of the staff is located in other parts of Sweden, general meetings and departmental meetings are conducted using their own technology. Company C does not use their website to communicate internally. Instead, they have customer relationship management (CRM) software that allows their staff members to be accessed from anywhere.

5.3.1.6 Levels of the Website

At present, Company C's website is accessible over the Internet to the general public. They are not currently using an intranet or extranet. Customers who wish to acquire their services can do so on the company website. This involves filling in a detailed form, but does not require the user to access an extranet.

5.3.2 Interview with Employee 1: Account Manager

5.3.2.1 Core Identity

Employee 1 at Company C states their brand is about eco-meetings and green communication using IT. He believes that the brand identifies itself as a company that takes responsibility for environmental issues, allowing for communication in a sustainable way. He explains that they are different from their competitors in the way that they market themselves and by focusing on providing service to the customer. They offer much more than the technology and necessary equipment which have traditionally been communicated in the market.

He understands that the company website is used to describe their services and to book online. Users can also register to receive their newsletter in order to keep informed about what is taking place within the company.

According to Employee 1, Company C communicates their brand as a 'green' form of global communication. This is evident in both colour of the logo (green) and the image of the globe. He believes that this is an industry standard form of communication; however, they stress their services as an alternative to business travel.

5.3.2.2 Brand Personality

When asked to assign human characteristics to Company C's brand, Employee 1 stated:

- Unisex person
- Very open-minded
- Flexible
- Wanting to fulfill customers' needs at almost any cost
- Eager to be recognized as an important part of a company's business
- A catalyst in changing the way businesses conduct meetings
- An enabler of environmental solutions
- A visionary person

Employee 1 believes these traits are communicated in the company's web TV production. He also mentions their membership with a large 'think tank' for issues relating to sustainable society as an example of how they portray their brand personality on the company website.

When asked to rank Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, Employee 1 indicated the order of importance of each trait for Company C to be:

1) Excitement
2) Competence
3) Sincerity
4) Sophistication
5) Ruggedness

Excitement was listed as the most important dimension because Employee 1 feels that the company tries to do whatever a customer requires and delivers this with a great deal of enthusiasm. He explains that the company's owner is very enthusiastic and a visionary thinker and this trickles down through the company.

The second most important dimension in the company's online communication was *competence*. The reason for this is, he states, is due to their reputation to deliver the types of services their competitors cannot. Even their competitors call them for advice when they need assistance.

Ruggedness was indicated as the least important dimension since being tough and determined is not communicated in the company.

5.3.2.3 Brand Ethos

Employee 1 feels he understands Company C's brand quite well. He explains that the brand is communicated through every day conversations and during meetings. Most of the information about the brand comes from the owner of Company C.

Employee 1 feels there is a lot of flexibility in terms of how he can interpret the brand, within reason. As long as he does not say anything that negates the brand and what they do, then he feels free to discuss it as he feels fit. The reason he states he has so much freedom is because they are a small company and they do not have a firm communication strategy.

5.3.3 Interview with Employee 2: Coordinator

5.3.3.1 Core Identity

Employee 2 understands that Company C provides long-distance meetings. When the logotype was changed a year ago (2009), their company slogan changed from technical descriptions to reflect the value and benefits of using their services. She explains that the reason for this is that it is now becoming necessary for them to communicate the usefulness of their service. It is what the customers are actually looking for.

They focus on the benefits and value of their service offering in order to force a change in behaviour; to get customers to use the technology and to think about it as an alternative to business travel.

The company website, she explains, is used to create awareness about their company. Some customers are using the website to book conferences and to find out more information about service offerings. While they recognize that their site does not have a large hit rate on Google, they have not done anything to change that so far.

Company C focuses on their logotype, slogan and colours to communicate the feeling of their company. This is done, she explains, both online and offline so that the customers will have a “collected image” of the company.

5.3.3.2 Brand Personality

When asked to depict Company C as a person, Employee 1 gave the following descriptors:

- Genderless
- A good person
- Wants to help and be a good partner
- Wears casual clothes – something between a suit and jeans
- Not strict
- A down-to-earth person
- Not rich, but not poor
- Steady, stable and good

She explains that the way this communicated is through the people who work at Company C. They “are not people who do whatever it takes to get their way.” Instead, they are down-to-earth and as individuals they communicate who and what they stand for. In addition, they are not a big city company that puts career above all else and she believes that it shows in the way they conduct business.

When asked to rank Aaker’s (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, Employee 2 indicated the order of importance of each trait for Company C to be:

1) Competence
2) Sincerity
3) Excitement
4) Sophistication
5) Ruggedness

She chose *competence* as Company C's most important dimension since they have a lot of experience in this field. This dimension, she feels, is mostly communicated in face-to-face interactions with customers; however she is unsure if this message comes across on their website.

Sincerity was listed as the second most important dimension. Employee 2 explains that this is because if Company C were a person, it would be down-to-earth. The company wants to be seen as a "stand-up guy" who keeps his promises.

Ruggedness was not seen as very important because she believes that being tough is not the owner's style. On the contrary, he is a good guy.

5.3.3.3 Brand Ethos

Employee 2 feels she understands the brand well. Since she is responsible for their quality systems for their ISO 9001 certification, she is involved in many conversations about the brand.

She feels free to be flexible with the brand as long as what she says and reflects the company's brand. Everything the company does – email, advertising, newsletters – uses selected words along with the colours and logo to present a certain image. This is done because they want to make a complete picture.

Employees at Company C get training in the form of group sessions to discuss who Company C is and how they want to treat their colleagues as well as what they want to communicate to external parties. They do this so that they can all make a consistent statement in order to create the same image for their customers.

Employee 2 believes that the freedom they have to interpret and communicate the brand is due to Company C's small size and the fact they do not have a detailed communication strategy.

5.4 Case 4: Company D

Company D is a service company that offers marketing communications to their customers. They are considered to be the top firm in their industry in Northern Sweden. Company D was founded approximately ten years ago.

5.4.1 Interview with the Owner

5.4.1.1 Brand Positioning

The Owner explains that in general, industries in the northern regions of Sweden are connected to natural resources like mining, forestry and water power. Company D is attempting to position itself as a "new natural resource from the north." She explains that

when people think of Northern Sweden, they think of the natural resources and they want to be a part of that.
They want to be seen as a company that is in the top of their field. They want to be known for being in the centre of what is going on in marketing and to be creating new trends. They also want to share this information with their clients because they want to be considered a new communication agency; not simply an old, traditional agency that continues to do the same things. They also want to move into different areas of communication.

The Owner explains that they are considered leaders in their field. Their knowledge of branding and communication is at a higher level than the public's understanding of marketing. In this way, they see themselves as a guide, not only a guide for the northern region of Sweden, but also as a marketing guide. They do this by publishing marketing tips on their website.

5.4.1.2 Brand Identity

Company D is currently in a stage of growth and development with regards to presentation of their product offering. The company wants to present their offerings on a case-by-case basis where several of their products may be included. Since they offer many different products, the presentation of each case in an organized fashion is very complex.

Company D hosts parties and social events for their customers. They combine these activities with some of the digital capabilities they can offer clients by presenting, for example, photos and videos from these company outings on their company blog. This, the Owner explains, allows them to build relationships with their customers, so much so that the customers consider them a part of their family.

Their brand name can fit into different contexts and it has many opportunities for co-branding. Company D co-brands itself with other organizations that share products with a similar name in order to build on various metaphors and symbols of their brand. Their brand name lends itself to be manipulated in various ways to promote themselves in a very creative manner[7]. The Owner repeatedly uses their brand name symbolically along with other terms. The use of the various metaphors is an opportunity to present themselves in situations where they are not anticipated in order to make unexpected connections with the brand. This helps to increase brand recognition.

5.4.1.3 Brand Personality

When asked to ascribe human characteristics to Company D's brand, the Owner listed the following traits:

- Tom-boy (elements of both male and female)
- Open-minded
- Socially and environmentally conscious
- Natural
- Casually dressed in jeans and sneakers

[7] Due to anonymity issues, examples cannot be given.

- Social and friendly
- Happy
- Doesn't take herself too seriously
- Active

The Owner of Company D states that they do not present this person explicitly to the customers on the website. Instead, this personality type is the way they actually are. There is a connection between the personality of the staff members and the brand itself which she states customers may get a glimpse of through postings on the blog, but it is not something they actively communicate. Besides, the Owner states, most of the self-marketing work that they do is through face-to-face meetings and this is how the brand's personality gets expressed.

When asked to rank Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, the Owner of Company D indicated the order of importance of each trait as:

1) Excitement
2) Competence
3) Sincerity
4) Ruggedness
5) Sophistication

The Owner indicated *excitement* as the most important trait because they want to draw attention to being fun and creative.

Competence was considered the second most important because they are already known as a very competent actor in their industry. She explains that too much emphasis on competence can be interpreted as being stiff and boring, so while they still focus on being competent, they are now putting it second to being exciting.

The Owner considered *sophistication* as a negative trait and did not want her company to be associated with that dimension.

5.4.1.4 BRAND ETHOS

Company D arranges regular company outings as they are a fun group of people who enjoy being social. Many of these events are recorded with photos, videos or in text. Company D allows staff members to post original material from these company outings directly onto their website in blog format. They are given the freedom to express their individual personalities and preferences on the site. These postings do not have to be directly related to the company. They can also include, for example, recipes or wine selections. The postings are not directed from the company owners; instead, the staff is encouraged to post anything which they consider to fit with their interests and with the company's brand. The reason for doing this is that every staff member has an individual personality and it is the culmination of all of them that make up the entire brand.

The Owner explains that customers are attracted to people, not brands. By allowing different individual personalities to shine through, it allows customers to associate with one or more staff member that they feel most comfortable with.

Company D can allow staff members to be free with the brand because they trust them. The staff they hire are professionals at branding and communication and therefore know how to express the brand in a positive and exciting way. This, the Owner explains, is possible because they carefully choose their staff members during the hiring process and once hired they are, according to the Owner, "living the brand."

5.4.1.5 Four Pillars of i-Branding

5.4.1.5.1 Marketing Communication

Company D uses their website as a showcase of their work and company culture. Since they provide a broad and complex range of services, they feel that this is the most effective way of expressing what it is that they do both to the general public and to past and future customers.

While they acknowledge that people do visit their website, they are also aware that the Internet has changed the old model of communication with the sender, the message and receiver. The Owner states that the receivers are no longer passively ingesting information. She explains: "that picture [of the old model] you can throw away because the receiver has transmitted [sic.] to a taker and you have to go where the takers are." She further explains that they cannot simply rely on sending out information. Instead, Company D needs to go where their customers are which is on social media sites like Flickr, youtube, Facebook and Twitter.

Company D sends out a digital newsletter to customers and partner organizations to keep them informed about what they are doing. The newsletter directs users back to the part of their website which displays their portfolio of completed works.

5.4.1.5.2 Understanding Customers

The Owner explains that companies need to reach out to their customers and to "go where they are." In other words, customers typically post their ideas on social media sites as opposed to a company's website, so in order to understand customers, she suggests visiting social media sites. She recognizes that companies need to become part of the informal dialogues that take place there in order to help solve customers' problems or to help change negative impressions.

5.4.1.5.3 Content

Company D uses their website as a blog to display information. This is not the typical way a company would use their website to promote themselves. By placing articles and blogs on their website, they can demonstrate the company culture and different ideas in marketing.

The content of their blog does not only consist of business-related topics. For example, some of their staff members have formed a rock brand which uses part of Company D's name. The two organizations are co-branded in order to increase the others' profile. Snippets of information about the rock band are integrated into Company D's website.

In addition to the blog, Company D has a library of cases that visitors can access to see the various product offerings. These cases can demonstrate how Company D is able to provide solutions for their customers.

5.4.1.5.4 Interactivity

The Owner of Company D states that they do not interact with the customers through their website. Instead, they use social media to interact with people. Company D posts their blog news on their Facebook and Twitter pages. However, at the present time, their Facebook page is not used by their clients. It is more of a place keeper so that they may develop it further at a later date.

5.4.1.6 Levels of the Website

Company D only uses the Internet level of the website. At the current time, they feel it is unnecessary to have an intranet or extranet since their company is so small.

5.4.2 Interview with Employee 1: Web Development Manager

5.4.2.1 Core Identity

Employee 1 sees the company brand as being in the forefront of advertising and communication in Northern Sweden. The company has a broad range of competencies in order to be attractive to customers. The website is used to show who the staff members are as well as some of the services they provide. She explains that this is done to demonstrate their competence. By displaying information about the staff members, they can show who they are and what they stand for. The blog not only showcases some of the work they do, but it also displays fun and interesting activities that they have done outside of work. They do this because they want their customers to have fun when working with them.

Speaking Swedish, she describes Company D's way of working as 'KUL' which means 'fun' in English where the K stands for *kul* (fun), the U stands for *utveckling* (development) and the L stands for *lönsamt* (profitable).

When looking at the website, it brings up the feeling of fun while still demonstrating that they do important work competently.

5.4.2.2 Brand Personality

Employee 1 listed the following traits when asked to assign human characteristics to Company D's brand:

- Happy
- Outgoing
- Interested in clothes
- Active
- Interested in doing new things
- Would drive a fast car

- Excitement seeking

She states that the people that work at Company D all make up the brand and each person is very different, so it makes it difficult to pinpoint one list of traits that pertains to the company. Employee 1 explains that the message about their brand's personality get communicated, for the most part, offline when they are going to meet with clients. She adds that Company D is so well known by the inhabitants of this region that they almost do not need to advertise themselves.

When asked to rank Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, Employee 1 at Company D indicated the order of importance of each trait as:

1) Excitement
2) Competence
3) Ruggedness
4) Sincerity
5) Sophistication

Employee 1 ranks *excitement* as the strongest trait because of all the social events they host where everyone from the company participates, not because they have to, but because they truly want to. The company also thinks it is important for the staff to have fun while they are working. She explains that it is an incentive for them to produce high quality work.

She placed *competence* as the second strongest trait. Employee 1 explains that competence and excitement were almost at the same level, but ranked excitement slightly higher because she feels the amount of fun and excitement at Company D is quite exceptional. Employee 1 adds that the people are also very competent and they have a wide range of competencies so there is always someone who knows a lot about each speciality.

Sophistication is not part of the company culture. Employee 1 explains that the brand is not trying to be upper class and glamorous.

5.4.2.3 Brand Ethos

Prior to Employee 1's employment, Company D had a training session regarding the company's brand. Employee 1 does not feel she understands Company D's brand very well. She explains that this is because she is more interested in the technical aspects of the company rather than with branding. She believes that if a company provides good products people will buy them. Despite not knowing a lot about branding, she feels that she is free to express the brand as she wishes.

5.4.3 Interview with Employee 2: Creative Director

5.4.3.1 Core Identity

Employee 2 explains that the basis of the brand is "to do good for [their] customers and for [their] customers' customers." They endeavour to do this with a high level of knowledge and willingness to learn about the end customers in order to sell the right product to their clients.

Company D wants to be perceived as a strategic partner by their customers. They want to be used as an advisor in order to help the customers decide what products are necessary for each client. Company D does not want to sell products just for the sake of selling them; instead, they want to be able to advise their customers about the '*right*' products for them. This, he explains, will allow Company D to offer the best quality services and products.
Employee 2 explains that most agencies use their websites as a portfolio of projects they have completed. Company D wanted to use their website in a different way. They created a blog-style website that could show visitors that they are updated and current as well as to show who they are as the people behind the brand. Since using this blog style, they have been able to increase visitor count to their website and they have noticed that people visit them daily. Because of this style, it allows them to film various events that can then be compiled and posted on the website in order to demonstrate the things they are doing. It does not only show the projects they have completed, but also expresses the kind of company they are. This, he explains, includes the things they do, the music they like and other campaigns that they notice and, in doing so, they can make other people aware of them. The reason for this is to illustrate that they know what they are doing. The blog is also helpful for their clients because they can post their successes as well. Employee 2 states that this association with other brands is "good branding" and these activities have helped to increase visitor traffic on their website.

Employee 2 describes the feeling he believes people get from their website that they would want to work with them because it shows that they know what they are doing.

5.4.3.2 Brand Personality

Employee 2 assigned the following human traits to Company D's brand:

- A person who does well, but does not live with excess
- Hermaphrodite
- Likes good food and good wine
- A cultural person who goes to exhibitions and likes to travel
- Very social
- Self-taught, not an academic
- Aspires to improve

Employee 2 believes that this person is a "distilled version" of all the people who work at Company D. He explains that this is communicated quite well both offline and via the website.

When asked to rank Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, Employee 2 at Company D indicated the order of importance of each trait as:

1) Excitement
2) Competence
3) Sincerity
4) Sophistication
5) Ruggedness

Excitement was ranked as the most important trait because he felt that excitement represented the passion and drive the staff has to do good work.

Employee 2 felt that *competence* came second because they know their business very well, having worked with it for a long time.

Ruggedness is the least important trait because the idea of American masculinity is not represented in their company.

5.4.3.3 Brand Ethos

Employee 2 feels he understands the brand quite well. He describes that the brand is and should be represented by him and his colleagues. He states that the owners have a set of core values and have plotted a direction for the company. These messages are communicated in everyday conversations, posters in their conference room as well as in everything they do.

The brand, as Employee 2 explains it, is not explicitly communicated to the staff in a formal way, but it is a general feeling amongst the people who work there. He says that the view he has of the brand comes from working with the other staff members. The brand itself is quite flexible as long as the core values are still expressed.

CHAPTER SIX

The previous chapter discussed the data collected from the interviews with each of the cases. This chapter will analyze that data based on our conceptual framework.

6 DATA ANALYSIS

To begin with, the responses from each of the interviews conducted at all four companies will be explored individually through a within-case analysis, comparing them to the theories and models presented in previous chapters. Next, each of the cases will be compared with each other using a cross-case analysis. The analysis will be structured according to the research questions as shown here:

RQ1: Intended Brand Personality on the company website
- Brand Identity
- Brand Personality
- Brand Ethos

RQ2: Implementation of the Brand Personality on the company website
- Brand Position
- Levels of the Website
- 4 Pillars of i-Branding

RQ3: Internal Perception of the Brand Personality on the company website
- Core Identity
- Brand Personality
- Brand Ethos

Our conceptual framework (see Figure 6.1) will be used to analyze the data. The goal of the analysis is not only to answer the research problem and the research questions, but to apply the theories to the collected data, looking for differences and similarities.

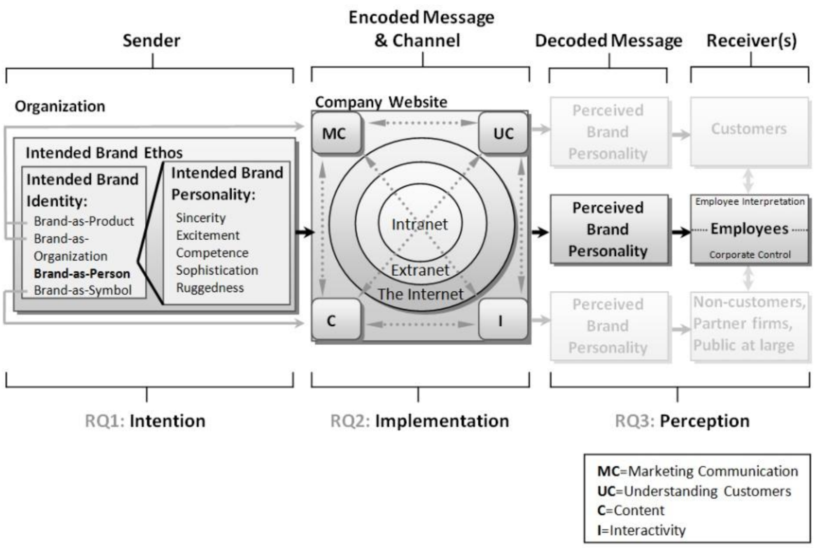

FIGURE 6.1: Conceptual Framework

6.1 WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS: COMPANY A

6.1.1 INTENDED BRAND PERSONALITY ON THE COMPANY WEBSITE (RQ1)

6.1.1.1 INTENDED BRAND IDENTITY

According to Aaker (2002), there are four perspective of the brand identity: *brand-as-product, brand-as-organization, brand-as-person, and brand-as-symbol.* The Marketing Manager at Company A uses two of the perspectives of Aaker's brand identity.

Aaker (2002) explains that one aspect of the *brand-as-product* perspective is to highlight the brand's *country of origin,* which can also include the location and region, to strengthen the brand identity. Company A is located in the northern region of Sweden and uses this feature to attract customers.

Aaker (2002) lists *innovation* as one of the aspects of the *brand-as-organization* perspectives. Company A's efforts at communicating a world-class facility as part of their primary brand communication would fall under this category.

The *brand-as-person* perspective was acknowledged by the Marketing Manager. He stated that it used to be important when marketing companies in this industry, however as many of the other companies started implementing this perspective, it provided less of a distinction and he no longer feels it is an important part of brand communication. What is interesting to note, however, is that a person appears in nearly all of the company's marketing efforts – both in print and online advertising.

The *brand-as-symbol* perspective was not an important part of the brand communication. In fact, the logo was not discussed by the Marketing Manager at all. We found this to be curious since Company A's logo is displayed predominantly on all of their marketing collateral and it appears to be a main focus of their marketing communication. A possible reason that it was not discussed is perhaps because the Marketing Manager did not consider the logo as important as the other aspects of the brand's identity.

The analysis of Company A's intended brand identity is summarized in Table 6.1.

TABLE 6.1: Evidence of Company A's Intended Brand Identity

Concept	Evidence
Brand-as-Product	Markets their geographical location as a point of difference
Brand-as-Organization	World-class facility
Brand-as-Person	No longer used; yet has a person in most of marketing collateral
Brand-as-Symbol	Not important; yet is present in most marketing collateral

6.1.1.2 INTENDED BRAND PERSONALITY

The Marketing Manager's intended brand personality is focused on professionalism, independence, being social, non-judgemental and having an open mind along with being extroverted and curious with the ability to solve problems. It also has a warm and welcoming attitude. These characteristics can be matched to Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale (see Table 2.1) and, in doing so, can be categorized into Aaker's (1997) five dimensions. Table 6.2 shows the personality traits given by the Marketing Manager at Company A. These responses were grouped and matched to Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale according to the traits we believed best corresponded to Aaker's (1997) definition.

TABLE 6.2: Evidence of Company A's Intended Brand Personality

Dimension	Evidence	Comparison with Aaker's (1997) Traits
Sincerity	Being social Non-judgemental Warm and welcoming	Corresponds to Friendly Both correspond to the notion that sincerity captures the idea of warmth and acceptance
Excitement	Independent Open-minded Extroverted Curious	Corresponds to Independent Corresponds to Imaginative Corresponds to Spirited Corresponds to Daring
Competence	Professional Problem-solver	Corresponds to Reliable, Successful, Confident Corresponds to Intelligent, Technical
Sophistication	-	-
Ruggedness	-	-

6.1.1.3 Intended Brand Ethos

There are four levels of brand ethos: *codified brand*, *comprehended brand*, *interpreted brand* and *brand ethos* (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006). At Company A, employees do not participate in communication at the P1 level (mass communication) which is completely under corporate control. At the P2 level of communication (employee-to-customer), employees are free to express the brand as they see fit. Knowledge about the brand is provided through interactions at meetings and in conversations with staff members. The brand is not automatically understood through the utterance of the brand name, however. Therefore, Company A's brand ethos would coincide with de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) description of a *comprehended brand*. Since employees are given the freedom to express the brand as they see fit within reason, we believe that Company A is moving towards an *interpreted brand*. Table 6.3 summarizes the analysis of Company A's intended brand ethos.

TABLE 6.3: Evidence of Company A's Intended Brand Ethos

Concept	Evidence
Codified Brand	-
Comprehended Brand	Provided through interaction at meetings and everyday conversations
Interpreted Brand	Employees are free from corporate control to express the brand
Brand Ethos	-

6.1.2 Implementation of the Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ2)

6.1.2.1 Brand Position

Brand position is the part of the brand that is actively communicated to a target audience to provide a company with competitive advantage, relative to what competitors are offering (Aaker, 2002; Upshaw, 1995). Company A focuses their communication efforts on being world-class and their geographical location which are both mentioned in their slogan.

However, the slogan is not visible at the top of their website; one must scroll down several page lengths to find it. Images and graphics are also used to convey their geographic location. Neither of these attempts to communicate the brand's position is as prominent as we expected from a positioning statement.

6.1.2.2 Levels of the Website

Chaffey *et al*. (2006) describe three levels of the website: *intranet*, *extranet* and *the Internet*. Although the Marketing Manager did not discuss it, Company A's website has two extranet features that can be accessed by customers. One of the extranet features is provided by an external supplier and it is not focused on branding, rather it is used as part of the service. The other extranet feature has no resemblance to Company A's website in terms of colour scheme and layout.

The Marketing Manager also mentioned that there are areas of their website that contains password protected information which would suggest that either an intranet or an additional extranet is present. Since the Marketing Manager did not discuss an intranet or extranets in terms of branding, we can assume that Company A only has one level of the website – the Internet – from the perspective of brand communication.

6.1.2.3 4 Pillars of i-Branding

6.1.2.3.1 Marketing Communications

According to Simmons (2007), the effect of the Internet on marketing communications allows for two-way communication. While Company A does not have a specific feature that allows for two-way communication, they do provide email addresses and encourage visitors to contact them. Simmons (2007) points out that online customers expect some amount of entertainment value and the website should include a combination of information, entertainment and commerce. Company A's website is rich with information and does provide some entertainment value with several short videos. It can be said that the news that is updated and changed regularly provides entertainment as well. Company A has a commerce feature on their website where customers can order services.

6.1.2.3.2 Understanding Customers

The Internet, according to Simmons (2007), allows companies to collect relevant information about their customers through web metrics, cookies, online surveys and databases. Company A does not believe it is necessary to understand their customers' online behaviour. The reason for this is, the Marketing Manager explains, is because their goal is to raise brand awareness and that is triggered any time a user visits their website.

6.1.2.3.3 Content

Simmons (2007) explains that a company's website needs to be organized and grouped to match specific tasks so that users can find the information they need in an intuitive way. The Marketing Manager at Company A states that they only use plain text to promote their product offering in their catalogue. He insists that this is the way people expect it to be delivered. Simmons (2007) identifies the ability to download large graphical files as an important issue when designing websites. In order to keep download times to a minimum, Company A does not display a large amount of graphical information.

6.1.2.3.4 Interactivity

Interactivity enhances brand perceptions. Simmons (2007) indicates that the ability to create more personalized communication with customers helps to create positive brand associations. While Company A recognizes the need to interact with customers online, they are unable to do so at the present time. They provide information, but do not allow for any response.

The analysis of Company A's responses regarding Simmons' (2007) four pillars of i-branding is summarized in Table 6.4.

TABLE 6.4: Evidence of the 4 Pillars at Company A

Concept	Evidence
Marketing Communication	Email addresses Entertainment value comes from a combination of information, videos and regularly updated news articles Commerce in the form of ordering services
Understanding Customers	Considers it unnecessary in their situation
Content	Text is presented in the way customers would expect File size is kept small
Interactivity	Recognize the need, but are unable to do so at present

6.1.3 Internal Perception of Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ3)

6.1.3.1 Core identity

The core identity is made up of associations with the brand that are essential in creating meaning and building success for the brand (Aaker, 2002). As the core identity cannot always be captured in a single slogan, the respondents were asked to summarize the core features of the brand. Table 6.5 shows the comparison of the core features of Company A's brand as identified by the Marketing Manager as well as by Employee 1 and 2.

TABLE 6.5: Intention and Perception of Company A's Core Identity

Respondent	Response
Marketing Manager	World-class standards; geographic location; warm and welcoming attitude
Employee 1	World-class in their industry; winter, snow, cold weather; warm inside
Employee 2	Professional and world leading; warm

The Marketing Manager identified three core statements which are understood by Employee 1. Employee 2 did not mention the geographic location as part of the core identity.

6.1.3.2 Brand Personality

Table 6.6 shows a comparison of brand personality traits listed by each respondent from Company A. This table separates the intended message from the marketing manager and the interpreted message from the employees. Table 6.7 illustrates the similarities between the intended brand personality from the Marketing Manager's perspective and the brand personality as it is perceived by Employees 1 and 2.

TABLE 6.6: Intension and Perception of Company A's Brand Personality

Intended Message	Internal Perception	
Marketing Manager	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
Equally male and female	Female	Male
Professional	Professional	Professional
Independent and social	Wear outdoor clothing	Confident with high self-esteem
Ability to problem solve	20-25 years old	Technological
Warm and welcoming	Warm and welcoming	Warm
Extrovert	Easy to talk to	Robust
Curious		Hard-working
Open-minded		Dependable
Non-judgemental		Reliable
		Trustworthy

TABLE 6.7: Matching Traits of the Intended and Perceived Brand Personality

Similarities		
Marketing Manager	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
Professional	Professional	Professional
Independent and social		Confident with high self-esteem
Warm and welcoming	Warm and welcoming	Warm
Extrovert	Easy to talk to	

From this, it is evident that internal perception is similar to the intended message on a number of points. While the employees' perceptions of the brand personality differed on some attributes, they are aware of the company's warm and welcoming trait which is the main message that the Marketing Manager wants to be communicated at the P2 (employee-to-customer) level.

It is interesting that the Marketing Manager maintains that *brand-as-person* is not used in their brand communication, yet a person is used in much of Company A's marketing and was identified by Employee 1 (who works closely with the Marketing Manager) to be representative of the brand personality.

The respondents were asked to rank the amount of focus placed on each of Aaker's (1997) five dimensions in the marketing communication. Table 6.8 presents a comparison of the responses given by the Marketing Manager and Employee 1 and 2.

TABLE 6.8: Ranking of the Dimensions of Company A's Brand Personality

Intention	Internal Perception	
Marketing Manager	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
1) Competence **2) Sincerity** **3) Excitement** **4) Ruggedness** **5) Sophistication**	1) Competence 2) Sincerity 3) Excitement 4) Ruggedness 5) Sophistication	1) Competence 2) Excitement 3) Sincerity 4) Ruggedness 5) Sophistication

Since Employees 1 and 2 ranked the dimensions very closely to the way in which the Marketing Manager ranked them, it suggests that the employees understand the general message of the brand personality as it is intended by the Marketing Manager. The dimensions of brand personality capture the P1 level of communication which includes their world-class standing and their message about their geographic location. Both of the employees responded that *competence* is the top priority in messages regarding the company's brand personality.

6.1.3.3 Brand Ethos

Based on de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) description of the brand ethos model, Employee 1 is acting at the *interpreted brand* level. She has internalized the brand and can interpret it in terms of her role, adjusting her communication depending on to whom she is speaking. While she attends meetings and engages in conversations about the brand, Company A has less corporate control over how she expresses the brand. Having internalized the brand, she is developing training sessions for others that have not yet been implemented.

Employee 2 feels she has a lot of freedom to express the brand; however, she is somewhat uncertain about whether she understands the brand correctly. We believe that this places her between the *codified* and *comprehended* brand as explained by de Chernatony and Cottam (2006).

Although it appears that when the Marketing Manager discusses the employees' understanding of the brand, it seems to be at the *comprehended brand* level, yet Employee 2 did not know if she understood the brand correctly. This would suggest that the company is at the *codified level*. It is interesting that the Marketing Manager would grant the employees the freedom to express the brand as they see fit given that some of the employees are not clear about what the brand message should be.

6.2 Within-case Analysis: Company B

6.2.1 Intended Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ1)

6.2.1.1 Intended Brand Identity

Of Aaker's (2002) four perspectives, the Marketing Manager communicates the brand in the form of product and organization attributes when describing Company B's identity. The three attributes, *knowledge, relevance* and *product benefits* demonstrates that their brand concentrates on product *use* as explained by Aaker (2002). Company B emphasizes the importance of the customer in everything they do. This is a main message that is communicated both internally and externally and has become a part of their company culture. Table 6.9 outlines Company B's intended brand identity.

TABLE 6.9: Evidence of Company B's Intended Brand Identity

Concept	Evidence
Brand-as-Product	3 attributes: knowledge, relevance and product benefits
Brand-as-Organization	Customer focus
Brand-as-Person	-
Brand-as-Symbol	-

6.2.1.2 Intended Brand Personality

The Marketing Manager's intended brand personality has both male and female qualities, s/he listens to others, is available and easy to get in touch with. This person dresses in a suit but is friendly and open. These characteristics were matched to Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale as shown in Table 6.10.

TABLE 6.10: Evidence of Company B's Intended Brand Personality

Dimension	Evidence	Comparison with Aaker's (1997) Traits
Sincerity	Listens Friendly greetings Open to customers Available	Corresponds to Real Corresponds to Friendly Corresponds to Sincere Corresponds to Small-town
Excitement	-	
Competence	-	
Sophistication	-	
Ruggedness	-	

6.2.1.3 Intended Brand Ethos

Company B spends time training their employees about the operations and gives them an employee handbook to supplement their learning about the company and the brand. Because there does not seem to be much employee interpretation of the brand, it appears that there is a significant amount of corporate control in terms of expressing the brand. When there is a high level of corporate control and the brand is explicitly codified such as in an employee handbook, it places a company in the *codified brand* stage, according to de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) brand ethos model. Table 6.11 summarizes Company B's intended brand ethos.

TABLE 6.11: Evidence of Company B's Intended Brand Ethos

Concept	Evidence
Codified Brand	Employee handbook explains the brand
Comprehended Brand	-
Interpreted Brand	-
Brand Ethos	-

6.2.2 Implementation of the Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ2)

6.2.2.1 Brand Position

Company B has benefited from successful partnerships with activities arranged by local sports and cultural clubs. These associations are, according to the Marketing Manager, the part of the brand that is actively communicated to their customers. This corresponds to

Aaker's (2002) and Upshaw's (1995) description of brand position. Positioning messages are done both on the website and via offline channels. Company B's website displays hypertext logos of partner organizations that visitors can click to find more information. Some are direct links to the partner website while others are internal links to a short description about the organization on Company B's own website.

Although the Marketing Manager at Company B states that they position themselves via associations with partnership organizations, their website shows a slogan that mentions transportation and lower prices than other forms of transportation.

6.2.2.2 Levels of the Website

Company B is in the process of implementing an intranet so the company can communicate with the employees. To date, they currently only have one level of the website, according to Chaffey *et al*. (2006) which is the Internet level.

6.2.2.3 4 Pillars of i-Branding

6.2.2.3.1 Marketing Communications

Company B's website allows for the two-way communication described by Simmons (2007) by including a web-based email function. Information regarding schedules and some self-promotion messages are also presented on the website. These two features satisfy Simmons' (2007) requirement of information however, it excludes entertainment value and commerce.

6.2.2.3.2 Understanding Customers

Company B uses both on- and offline methods to understand their customers. They take time to speak to customers in person, over the phone and through the email feature on their website. They also have conducted an online survey and have logged all suggestions and complaints into a database. These tactics are conducted in order to improve their customer service which supports Simmons' (2007) logic to use these tools to improve segmentation. By improving customer service and catering to those customers' needs, Company B is, in effect, better able to segment customers.

6.2.2.3.3 Content

Simmons (2007) points out that websites should reflect tasks performed by the customers and information should be organized in an intuitive manner. Company B's website allows for three different methods for searching for travel routes and timetables. This is an effective way to allow the customers to decide how they wish to search for information.

Since the website is designed to be utilitarian in nature, we believe that it is not necessary for it to be sophisticated in the way that Simmons (2007) suggests. While it does have a few graphic elements, Company B's website is rather simple and does not require long download times to support sophisticated graphics.

6.2.2.3.4 Interactivity

Company B's website allows for customer interaction via their online email feature. Simmons (2007) claims that this type of personalized communication engages the customer which will help to create positive brand perceptions. Company B wants to have a dialogue with their customers. We think that this dialogue is at least partially responsible for their success in having satisfied customers as shown by their nation-wide recognition in recent years. Table 6.12 summarizes Company B's use of Simmons' (2007) theory.

TABLE 6.12: Evidence of the 4 Pillars at Company B

Concept	Evidence
Marketing Communication	Allows for two-way communication via web-based email service Schedules provide information
Understanding Customers	Uses database to log suggestions and complaints
Content	Schedules organized in different ways depending on use
Interactivity	Web-based email function

6.2.3 Internal Perception of the Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ3)

6.2.3.1 Core Identity

Table 6.13 compares the Marketing Manager's intended core identity with the internal perception by Employee 1 and 2.

TABLE 6.13: Intention and Perception of Company B's Core Identity

Respondent	Response
Marketing Manager	Appearances; satisfied customers; partnerships
Employee 1	Customer focus
Employee 2	Customer focus

Employee 1 and 2 understands the customer focus part of Company B's core identity, but do not include appearances and partnerships in their perception.

6.2.3.2 Brand Personality

Table 6.14 compares the brand personality traits listed by the Marketing Manager with the responses given by the two employees. Table 6.15 shows the similarities between the intended brand personality from the Marketing Manager's perspective and the brand personality as it is perceived by Employees 1 and 2.

TABLE 6.14: Intention and Perception of Company B's Brand Personality

Intention	Internal Perception	
Marketing Manager	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
Both male and female	Mixed gender	Male
Wears a suit jacket	Driver's uniform	Driver's uniform
Listens	Conscientious	Friendly
Easy to get in touch with	Kind	Knowledgeable
Open to customers	Proud of the company	
Friendly		

TABLE 6.15: Matching Traits of the Intended and Perceived Brand Personality

Similarities		
Marketing Manager	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
Both male and female	Mixed gender	
Friendly	Kind	Friendly

It is evident from the responses given that the brand personality at Company B is not fully understood since the employees had difficulty matching the responses given by the Marketing Manager.

The respondents were asked to rank the amount of focus placed on each of Aaker's (1997) five dimensions in the marketing communication. Table 6.16 presents a comparison of the responses given by the Marketing Manager and Employee 1 and 2.

TABLE 6.16: Ranking of the Dimensions of Company B's Brand Personality

Intention	Internal Perception	
Marketing Manager	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
1) Excitement	1) Competence	1) Competence
2) Competence	2) Sincerity	2) Excitement
3) Sincerity	3) Excitement	3) Sincerity
4) Sophistication	4) Ruggedness	4) Ruggedness
5) Ruggedness	5) Sophistication	5) Sophistication

The Marketing Manager stated that *excitement* and *competence* are the most important traits, but we do not see any evidence of *excitement* in any of the external communication. In addition, when ranking the dimensions, she mentioned that she chose *excitement* first because she felt a great deal of *excitement* in her job. This leads us to question whether she answered appropriately since we wanted to her to rank the dimensions in terms of the amount of focus the marketing department placed on each. From our perspective, *sincerity* seems to be the trait most communicated throughout the company. It is also possible that the reason the Marketing Manager chose *excitement* because of Aaker's (1997) description of excitement which included in the word sociability which may have been understood as Company B's attempts to be open and sociable towards their customers.

There appears to be some difficulty for the employees to match the personality traits given by the Marketing Manager. This could be evidence that perhaps Company B does not have a strong brand personality or there is a miscommunication of it. When comparing the responses given about the brand personality (see Table 6.14) to the ranking of the dimensions, it is interesting to note that while many of the individual traits correspond to the *sincerity* dimension, only one of the respondents listed *sincerity* in the top two dimensions in terms of importance relative to Company B (see Table 6.16).

Another discrepancy we noticed is that when discussing individual traits about Company B, the Marketing Manager mentioned characteristics that involved *sincerity* exclusively (see Table 6.10), yet when she ranked the dimensions that were most important to Company B's brand, *excitement* and *competence* were more important than *sincerity* (see Table 6.16). We speculate that the reason for this is that the traits listed in Table 6.10 are reflective of how the company is and the dimensions ranked in Table 6.16 are how they would like to be perceived.

Although the Marketing Manager lists *excitement* as the number one trait of the brand personality, we see no evidence of *excitement* in their website communication.

6.2.3.3 Brand Ethos

Based on the fact that the brand personality is not well understood from the employees' perspective and that there is a high degree of corporate control as evident from the employee training and handbook, it suggests that Company B is at the *codified brand* stage of de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) brand ethos.

Although the evidence suggests that Company B is at the codified brand stage which would mean there is a high degree of corporate control, the employees feel they have a certain degree of flexibility when communicating the brand, which would suggest a high level of employee interpretation.

6.3 Within-case Analysis: Company C

6.3.1 Intended Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ1)

6.3.1.1 Intended Brand Identity

Company C focuses on the features of their product offering to identify their brand. They are providing an easier alternative to (business) travel. From Aaker's (2002) *brand-as-product* perspective Company C emphasizes *product attributes* and highlights the *uses*. A major part of the brand is dominated by messages from the *brand-as-product* perspective.

Part of Company C's brand identity includes providing an environmental solution with a global perspective since they provide connection around the world. These two elements of the brand are consistent with Aaker's (2002) *brand-as-organization* perspective. Associations with environmental concerns and having a global orientation provide emotional and self-expressive benefits for customers.

The Marketing Manager explained that much of their role is in educating the customers in not only how to use the technology, but also in the various possibilities and solutions available to them. Using their "Support Club," Company C takes on an advisor or teacher role. This role matches Aaker's (2002) definition of *brand-as-person* perspective which can help to create a *relationship* between the customer and the brand.

Company C's slogan (withheld due to anonymity issues) brings up the metaphor of traveling without going anywhere which involves Aaker's (2002) *brand-as-symbol* perspective.

Table 6.17 shows the evidence of Company C's intended brand identity.

TABLE 6.17: Evidence of Company C's Intended Brand Identity

Concept	Evidence
Brand-as-Product	Focus on total product offering - both product and service
Brand-as-Organization	Global elements; eco-friendly attitude
Brand-as-Person	Teacher/advisor for support club members
Brand-as-Symbol	Travel metaphor

6.3.1.2 Intended Brand Personality

The Marketing Manager's intended brand personality is a professional male, dressed in business-casual attire who is not trying to look too pretentious. He is tech savvy and has a 'live and learn' attitude.

When the characteristics are matched to the items in Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale, most of the descriptors fit under the *sincerity* and *competence* dimensions, suggesting that these characteristics are the main focus of their brand's personality (see Table 6.18).

TABLE 6.18: Evidence of Company C's Intended Brand Personality

Dimension	Evidence	Comparison with Aaker's (1997) Traits
Sincerity	Business-casual attire Tries not to look pretentious 'Live and learn' attitude	Corresponds to Sincere Corresponds to Honest Corresponds to Real
Excitement	-	-
Competence	Professional Tech-savvy	Corresponds to Reliable; Successful; Confident Corresponds to Technical
Sophistication	-	-
Ruggedness	Male	Corresponds to Masculine

6.3.1.3 Intended Brand Ethos

According to de Chernatony and Cottam (2006), in order to effectively communicate the brand internally, the brand must first be *codified*. This is to ensure that it can become a part of the internal culture with all of its implicit meanings. Company C has recently undergone a brand transformation. Most of the staff members were involved in the creation of the brand; however, the Marketing Manager states that they do not enforce a strict policy for the manner in which employees must communicate the brand. This would suggest that Company C is situated between the comprehended and interpreted brand. Table 6.19 shows a summary of Company C's intended brand ethos.

TABLE 6.19: Evidence of Company C's Intended Brand Ethos

Concept	Evidence
Codified Brand	-
Comprehended Brand	Provided through interaction at meetings and everyday conversations
Interpreted Brand	Employees are free to express the brand
Brand Ethos	-

6.3.2 Implementation of the Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ2)

6.3.2.1 Brand Position

The brand position is, according to Aaker (2002) and Upshaw (1995), the part of the brand that is actively communicated to a target audience relative to the competition. Company C uses their website to affirm that they are a service company that allows for environmentally friendly alternatives to regular business travel. On their home page, they link to a 'think tank' focused on sustainability issues. Company C also wants customers to know they are a "one-stop shop" for long-distance meetings, providing both products and services. This message is expressed within the website in the descriptions of their services. It is not a part of their slogan.

Although the Marketing Manager states that environmental issues and being a 'one-stop shop' is the brand position, their slogan focuses on being an alternative to business travel. This message is featured prominently throughout the website.

6.3.2.2 Levels of the Website

Since Company C is a small organization, they only have, according to Chaffey *et al.'s* (2006) description, one level of the website – the Internet.

6.3.2.3 4 Pillars of i-Branding

6.3.2.3.1 Marketing Communications

Simmons (2007) explains that the Internet can allow for two-way communication in order to combine mass market reach with customer personalization. Company C's website allows for two-way communication to take place using a web-based email feature.

Company C's website includes written information, images as well as videos. It also displays links to former and sometimes live webcasts of meetings. For entertainment value, the employees will sometimes play music and broadcast it live over their website. They also do this to demonstrate some of their technical capabilities. Customers have an option to purchase some of the services on their website via an online booking form. These activities feature the combination of information, entertainment and commerce that Simmons (2007) considers necessary for the Internet as a marketing communication medium.

6.3.2.3.2 Understanding Customers

Company C's understanding of their customers takes place at their support club meetings and through other offline channels. Any information collected through these face-to-face meetings is inputted into their customer relationship management (CRM) database. While most of their understanding is gained through offline means, using a CRM database is consistent with Simmons (2007) who states that online tools including among other things, databases, can allow for relationships to develop between the company and their customers.

6.3.2.3.3 Content

Content on Company C's website is displayed in images, texts and videos. These have been implemented to show their services using an easy-to-follow approach and it matches Simmons' (2007) theory that information on a company website needs to be organized in a simple and intuitive manner.

Company C's website graphics are kept to a minimum while providing enough information to demonstrate their services to customers and potential customers. While it may be said that they could display many more graphical elements on their website, Company C remains consistent with Simmons' (2007) assertion that there needs to be a trade-off between sophisticated graphics and multimedia and slow download time.

6.3.2.3.4 Interactivity

Company C's website allows customers to fill in booking requests for services as well as the ability to send emails to the company via their web-based email function This agrees with Simmons' (2007) suggestion to include interactivity on a website in order to engage customers and create positive brand perceptions while developing strong relationships with them. Since Company C does not want to scare off their customers with the use of too much technology, they spend time interacting with their customers face-to-face in order to create positive associations.

Table 6.20 gives a brief summary of the evidence of Simmons' (2007) four pillars of i-branding at Company C.

TABLE 6.20 Evidence of the Four Pillars at Company C

Concept	Evidence
Marketing Communication	Website allows for two-way communication via email service Uses a combination of information, entertainment value and commerce
Understanding Customers	Takes place offline CRM database
Content	Uses images, texts and videos to display information Simple and easy-to-follow navigation Strong trade-off between large file size and slow download time
Interactivity	Filling in booking information; web-based email service

6.3.3 Internal Perception of Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ3)

6.3.3.1 Core Identity

Table 6.21 compares the responses given about Company C's core identity by the Marketing Manager and Employees 1 and 2.

TABLE 6.21: Intention and Perception of Company C's Core Identity

Respondent	Response
Marketing Manager	Environmental benefits; user-friendly approach to technical issues; service, quality & capability
Employee 1	Eco-meetings & green communication; sustainability; not only product, but service
Employee 2	Distance meetings; focus on services

The Marketing Manager has three core statements about Company C. Employee 1 mentioned the environmental benefits and the focus on services, but did not include their user-friendly approach. Employee 2 was able to identify the company's focus on service.

6.3.3.2 Brand Personality

Table 6.22 shows a comparison of brand personality traits listed by each respondent from Company C. This table separates the intended message from the Marketing Manager and the interpreted message by the employees. Table 6.23 illustrates the similarities of the intended brand personality from the Marketing Manager's perspective and the brand personality as it is perceived by Employees 1 and 2.

TABLE 6.22: Intension and Perception of Company C's Brand Personality

Intention	Internal Perception	
Marketing Manager	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
Male	Unisex	Genderless
Professional	Open-minded	A good person
Business-casual attire	Flexible	Business-casual attire
Tech savvy	Wanting to fulfill customers' needs	Helpful
Not trying to look too rich	Eager to be recognized	Not strict
Live and learn attitude	Catalyst for change	Down-to-earth
Do as they say they will do	Enabler of environmental solutions	Not rich, but not poor
Eco-friendly attitude	Visionary	Steady, stable and good

TABLE 6.23: Matching Traits of the Intended and Perceived Brand Personality

Similarities		
Marketing Manager	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
Business-casual attire		Business-casual attire
Not trying to look too rich		Not rich, but not poor
Eco-friendly attitude	Enabler of environmental solutions	

Table 6.23 reveals that the internal perception of the Company C's brand personality does not match on many points. Employee 1 understands that Company C is an enabler of environmental solutions while Employee 2 recognizes that the brand as a person would wear business-casual attire and would have a suitable income. A possible reason for this is that the brand has recently undergone major changes and perhaps the brand has not yet been fully codified. Although the Marketing Manager believes that the staff members have the same understanding of the brand as he does, it is apparent when talking about specific characteristics of the brand, they are not in agreement.

The respondents were asked to rank the amount of focus placed on each of Aaker's (1997) five dimensions in the marketing communication for Company C. Table 6.24 shows the responses given by the Marketing Manager compared with those given by Employee 1 and 2.

TABLE 6.24: Ranking of the Dimensions of Company C's Brand Personality

Intention	Internal Perception	
Marketing Manager	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
1) **Competence** 2) **Sincerity** 3) **Excitement** 4) **Ruggedness** 5) **Sophistication**	1) Excitement 2) Competence 3) Sincerity 4) Sophistication 5) Ruggedness	1) Competence 2) Sincerity 3) Excitement 4) Sophistication 5) Ruggedness

Employee 2's responses match the top three dimensions that Marketing Manager assigned to Company C marketing communication. While Employee 1 had no exact matches, he was able to rank *excitement*, *competence* and *sincerity* within the top three ranked dimensions. This would suggest the general dimensions of the brand are perceived correctly even though they may not be in the correct order.

6.3.3.3 BRAND ETHOS

Both Employee 1 and Employee 2 stated that they felt they understand Company C's brand. However, when we compare the brand personality traits given freely by the Marketing Manager to those given by Employees 1 and 2, there are only three matching traits (see Table 6.23). Employee 1 only perceived the company's environmental message correctly while Employee 2 perceived the appropriate attire and income status.

Conversely, when we compare the responses given about Aaker's (1997) five dimensions in Table 6.24, Employee 2 correctly perceived the top 3 dimensions the Marketing Manager indicated, while Employee 1 struggled. One reason that could account for this discrepancy is that perhaps Employee 1 is focused on his role in the company when understanding the brand rather than on the brand's personality itself.
In terms of interpreting the brand, Employees 1 and 2 agreed that they have flexibility in communicating the brand. This may suggest that they are at the level of *interpreted brand*, according to de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) brand ethos model. However, since the brand appears to not be well-understood, we suggest that it is possible that they are still at the *codified brand* level.

6.4 WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS: COMPANY D

6.4.1 INTENDED BRAND PERSONALITY ON THE COMPANY WEBSITE (RQ1)

6.4.1.1 INTENDED BRAND IDENTITY

A small portion of their website is dedicated to showcasing their work. This is different from most advertising agencies which almost exclusively focus on their cases to demonstrate their capabilities. Given this information, we can say that Company D uses a limited amount of product-related associations when compared to Aaker's (2002) theory.

According to Aaker (2002), Company D focuses mainly on a *brand-as-organization* perspective throughout their website. The videos and blogs they post about company outings and parties they have hosted demonstrate the people, culture and values of their company.

Company D does not specifically express their brand in terms of human characteristics as explained by Aaker's (2002) *brand-as-person* perspective. Instead, they allow the individual staff members to express the brand in their own way. Each person who works at Company D was carefully selected to match or in some way enhance the company's innate culture.

Company D's name (withheld for anonymity issues) lends itself to collaborate with other products. Because of this, Company D has a strong use of Aaker's (2002) *brand-as-symbol* perspective with regards to their brand identity. They use symbolic metaphors associated their brand name to market the company in many different way. Their name can be associated with visual imagery as well. In this way, customers are able to make strong associations with the brand (Aaker, 2002).

Company D's brand personality is a combination of the employees that work there, the characteristics of the brand's name and what the company stands for.

The analysis of Company D's intended brand identity is summarized in Table 6.25.

TABLE 6.25: Evidence of Company D's Intended Brand Identity

Concept	Evidence
Brand-as-Product	Presenting services through cases on the website
Brand-as-Organization	Blog illustrates organizational culture through images and articles
Brand-as-Person	Combination of employees' personalities
Brand-as-Symbol	Metaphors of Company D's name used in different contexts

6.4.1.2 Brand Personality

When asked to describe the brand personality for Company D, the Owner stated that the brand would be a casually dressed tom-boy who is social, open-minded, happy, friendly natural and active. That person is socially and environmentally conscious and does not take herself too seriously.

When these characteristics are matched to the items in Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale, the main focus of the brand personality is *sincerity* and slightly *rugged* (see Table 6.26).

TABLE 6.26: Evidence of Company D's Intended Brand Personality

Dimension	Evidence	Comparison with Aaker's (1997) Traits
Sincerity	Casually dressed Social &Friendly Happy Natural Socially & environmentally conscious	Corresponds to Real; Original Corresponds to Friendly Corresponds to Cheerful Corresponds to Down-to-earth Corresponds to Sentimental
Excitement	-	
Competence	-	
Sophistication	-	
Ruggedness	Active	Corresponds to Outdoorsy

Although the Owner states that the brand personality is not expressed on the website, we believe that the images of the staff members at the top of their website show a definite personality which has many of the traits she listed in Table 6.26.

6.4.1.3 Brand Ethos

Company D has made their company a lifestyle and it is innately understood by the people who work there, even though they are given a great deal of flexibility to express the brand. This corresponds with de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) *brand ethos* since it reflects how the brand and the company culture are intermingled. With *brand ethos*, employee behaviour is automatically based upon the brand and the brand is inferred by its name alone. Table 6.27 summarizes Company D's brand ethos.

TABLE 6.27: Evidence of Company D's Brand Ethos

Concept	Evidence
Codified Brand	-
Comprehended Brand	-
Interpreted Brand	-
Brand Ethos	Company D has made their company a lifestyle

6.4.2 Implementation of Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ2)

6.4.2.1 Brand Position

Company D positions itself as a new natural resource from the north which is top-ranking in their field. Their message about being a new natural resource is listed as a positioning statement situated below their logo on the homepage of their website. They also want to be known as a very knowledgeable company and seen as those who are creating new trends in their industry so they can act as a guide to help their customers to be successful. Although they want to convey this message to their target audience, it is not implicitly communicated as stated by Aaker (2002) and Upshaw (1995). Instead, Company D uses its regularly updated blog so that these messages can be inferred through the articles, images and associations with other successful companies that are posted on their website.

6.4.2.2 Levels of the Website

Company D considers themselves too small to incorporate Chaffey *et al*.'s (2006) levels of the website. Currently they only use the Internet level for their website which is open to the general public.

6.4.2.3 4 Pillars of i-Branding

6.4.2.3.1 Marketing Communications

The Internet, according to Simmons (2007) allows for two-way communication. Company D uses a blog to market their company. The majority of their focus is on one-way communication, however, embedded in the blog is a section for visitors to post comments. The same content is available on the company's Facebook page. Fans of their Facebook page can also leave messages. People who are fans of the company on Facebook, however, are not necessarily Company D's customers. They could be friends of the employees or other members of the public.

Company D displays a portfolio showcasing their work on their website. They also include a section with contact information and information about each staff member. This follows Simmons' (2007) requirement of information that is important to the customer. Simmons (2007) explains that a certain amount of entertainment value is also needed to engage visitors to a website. Company D incorporates several ways to entertain users. Their blog is updated regularly by several different staff members which can include anything from wine tasting and recipes to latest trends in marketing. They do this using text, images and videos. Their website does not allow for e-commerce, Simmons' (2007) third feature to be included in a website used for marketing communication.

6.4.2.3.2 Understanding Customers

A variety of online tools exist to assist companies in segmenting their target market (Simmons, 2007). Company D keeps track of visitor count on their website. They have noticed that since changing their website to a blog, it has increased traffic. They mainly keep in contact with their customers through offline means.

6.4.2.3.3 Content

Since the main purpose of Company D's website is to show their company culture and to provide visitors with marketing information, they have arranged this in a blog-style format. Other parts of the website contain a write-up on each staff member and links to Company D's portfolio in order to display their work. This suits Simmons' (2007) view that content should be grouped so that specific tasks can be carried out.

Company D uses both graphics and text to display information on their website, but in a minimalistic way. In doing so, they have, according to Simmons (2007), made a balanced trade-off between sophisticated graphics and download time.

6.4.2.3.4 Interactivity

Simmons (2007) explains that customers need to engage with the content offered by the marketer in order to create positive brand perceptions. He notes that interactivity strengthens the relationship with customers (*Ibid.*). While the Owner of Company D states that they do not interact with customers through their website, there is a section for customers to comment on blog entries. Perhaps she does not consider this interaction on their website since visitors have left very few comments as compared to their Facebook page which has several more comments and discussions about their posts. Table 6.28 summarizes Company D's use of Simmons' (2007) four pillars of i-branding.

TABLE 6.28: Evidence of the 4 Pillars at Company D

Concept	Evidence
Marketing Communication	Allows for two-way communication Contact information; updated blogs, images & videos for entertainment value
Understanding Customers	Mostly offline; Keep track of visitor count
Content	Arranged according to task; balanced trade-off between sophistication and download time
Interactivity	Has a comment section after each blog entry but is not extensively used

6.4.3 Internal Perception of Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ3)

6.4.3.1 Core Identity

Table 6.29 illustrates the core identity as identified by the Owner as well as by Employee 1 and 2.

TABLE 6.29: Intention and Perception of Company D's Core Identity

Respondent	Response
Owner	New natural resource; industry leader; guide
Employee 1	Forefront in their field; competent
Employee 2	Knowledgeable; advisor; strategic partner

The Owner identified three core statements about Company D. Employee 1 understands that they are industry leaders while Employee 2 inferred the reference about being a guide or advisor to their customers. Neither Employee 1 nor 2 mentioned the statement about being a new natural resource.

6.4.3.2 Brand Personality

The following table (6.30) shows a comparison between the traits the Owner listed as Company D's brand personality and those listed by the two employees. Table 6.31 displays the similarities of the intended and perceived message of Company D's brand personality from the Owner's perspective as compared with the opinions of the employees.

TABLE 6.30: Intension and Perception of Company D's Brand Personality

Intention	Internal Perception	
Owner	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
Tom-boy	Happy	Hermaphrodite
Open-minded	Outgoing	Does well financially, but not in excess
Socially & environmentally conscious	Interested in clothes	Likes good food and good wine
Natural	Active	Cultural (exhibitions & travel)
Casual clothes	Interested in doing new things	Very social
Social & friendly	Would drive a fast car	Self-taught; not academic
Happy	Excitement seeking	Aspires to improve
Doesn't take self too seriously		
Active		

TABLE 6.31: Matching Traits of the Intended and Perceived Brand Personality

Similarities		
Owner	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
Tom-boy		Hermaphrodite
Open-minded	Interested in doing new things	
Social & friendly	Outgoing	Very social
Happy	Happy	
Active	Active	

The traits in the above table show that Employee 1 matched four traits while Employee 2 matched two traits. The trait they all agreed on was being social and outgoing which is also evident from an outsider perspective when viewing the blog entries on Company D's website.

Of particular interest is that when the interview began with Employee 1, she claimed she knew nothing about branding nor had she any interest in brands, yet she was able to match more traits than Employee 2, a creative director whose role is to implement the brand on the website. A possible reason for the discrepancy is that all three respondents stated that the brand personality was a combination of all the employees who work at Company D and perhaps they work more closely with some of those personality types than with others.

In addition, we are curious about Employee 2's metaphor about 'KUL' when describing Company D's way of working. This was not mentioned by two other respondents, specifically from the Owner herself, and we wonder if this is an idea she devised on her own or if it was a concept she heard while employed elsewhere.

All three respondents were asked to rank the amount of focus placed on each of Aaker's (1997) five dimensions in the marketing communication for Company D. The responses given by the Owner compared with those given by Employee 1 and 2 are displayed in Table 6.32.

TABLE 6.32: Ranking of the Dimensions of Company D's Brand Personality

Intention	Internal Perception	
Owner	**Employee 1**	**Employee 2**
1) **Excitement**	1) Excitement	1) Excitement
2) **Competence**	2) Competence	2) Competence
3) **Sincerity**	3) Ruggedness	3) Sincerity
4) **Ruggedness**	4) Sincerity	4) Sophistication
5) **Sophistication**	5) Sophistication	5) Ruggedness

Employee 1 and 2 were able to match the first two dimensions to the Owner's responses. Employee 2 was also able to match the third dimension. This suggests that the Owner has been able to communicate the essence of the brand to the employees.

It is interesting to note that while Employee 2 was able to match 3 dimensions, he was only able to match 2 traits. A possible reason for this could be that since there is not a strict definition of the brand expressed to the employees, they may not recognize the details, yet have a clearer picture of the overall brand.

The level of importance of the *ruggedness* dimension varies significantly among the three respondents. Whereas the Owner and Employee ranked *ruggedness* in fourth and fifth place respectively, Employee 1 ranked it third. This could show that the use rugged elements are unclear within the company's brand personality.

A discrepancy was found when we compared the individual traits given by the Owner (see Table 6.30) with the ranking of the dimensions (see Table 6.32). In Table 6.26 we concluded that the company was mostly *sincere* and a little bit *rugged*, while Table 6.32 shows that *excitement* and *competence* are the most important traits. A possible reason for this discrepancy is perhaps due to their website which displays a high degree of excitement. It is possible that even though Company D is quite an *exciting* company (as shown by the blog entries on their website), they would like to be seen as more *sincere*. Another reason could be that they feel *sincerity*, yet outwardly express *excitement*.

Although the Owner did not assign any traits in the *excitement* dimension in Table 6.26, Employee 1 perceived the company to be exciting. She listed 'outgoing', 'interested in doing new things,' 'would drive a fast car' and 'excitement seeking' as Company D's brand personality (see Table 6.30). These traits all belong to the *excitement* dimension.

While Company D does not want to associate the company with the *sophistication* dimension, we consider some of the parties, events and partners they associate with on their website to be elements of this dimension since they include traits such as *glamorous* and *sexy*. The fact that Employee 2 mentioned that the brand's personality includes being cultural with an interest in going to exhibitions and traveling along with liking good food and good wine, which would fit in the *sophistication* dimension, suggests that at least one employee agrees with our perception of the company.

6.4.3.3 Brand Ethos

From the respondents' descriptions of Company D's brand, there appears to be evidence that Company D matches de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) definition of *brand ethos*. This is because Company D focuses on the internal company culture and while they sometimes talk about the brand, its messages arise organically from the people who work there.

6.5 Cross-Case Analysis

This section will compare Companies A, B, C and D with one another. It will focus on the similarities and differences found in each case based on the conceptual framework presented in Chapter Three. Like the within-case analysis, the cross-case analysis will be conducted in the following areas:

- Intended brand personality on the company website (RQ1)
- Implementation of the brand personality on the company website (RQ2)
- Internal perception of the brand personality on the company website (RQ3)

6.5.1 Intended Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ1)

6.5.1.1 Intended Brand Identity

Aaker (2002) states that brand identity is used to clarify, enrich and differentiate a brand. This is done using four different perspectives of the brand. Table 6.33 shows the different perspectives upon which each company has put emphasis in their branding strategies.

TABLE 6.33: Cross-Case Analysis of the Intended Brand Identity

Brand Identity (Aaker, 2002)	**Company A (Large)**	**Company B (Large)**	**Company C (Small)**	**Company D (Small)**
Brand-as-Product	Geographic location	Knowledge, relevance and product benefits	Product and service offering	Case work on website
Brand-as-Organization	World-class standing	Customer focus	Global company Eco-friendly	Blog shows company culture
Brand-as-Person	-	-	Teacher/advisor role	Combination of employees' personalities
Brand-as-Symbol	-	-	Travel metaphor	Brand's name used in various metaphorical contexts

We recognize that all companies have some elements of all four of the brand identity perspectives. Every company has a product offering, a company culture and a personality that can be interpreted from an observer. They also have a mark or symbol that represents the brand. Differences lie in the way each of these is used to communicate the brand. Companies can choose to focus more or less on each of the four perspectives in their marketing and branding communications.

Each of the cases has a strong focus on the *brand-as-product* perspective, but they have used different elements to communicate their product/service offering. Prior to conducting the study, we believed that there would be little focus on the brand-as-product attribute since we assumed it would be difficult to assign attributes to intangible service offerings. But, in fact, the opposite was true. We found that these service organizations put a great deal of emphasis on their product (service offering) and they benefit from having a product focus since it helps to make their offerings more tangible and it distinguishes them from companies offering similar services.

There is an emphasis on the *brand-as-organization* perspective in each of the companies, although it is demonstrated in different ways. This was anticipated since every company is made up of unique individuals with different values. Since service employees are central to the delivery of a brand promise during each service encounter (see Hoffman & Bateson, 2006 and Punjaisri *et al.*, 2009) focusing on the company culture is a way of influencing employee behaviour and therefore ensuring consistent service quality.

Only the two smaller companies – C and D – focused on the *brand-as-person* perspective. It was surprising that the two larger companies did not actively communicate personality-related associations since, as Upshaw (1995) points out, personality traits can act as a facilitator between the company and the customer, enabling the product to become more approachable for the customer. Larger companies can be seen as nameless, faceless and unknowable. Upshaw (1995) views the brand's personality as the outward 'face' of the brand and therefore has an impact on how people feel about a brand. Companies should make a conscious effort to create a brand personality that will best reflect their brand. A possible reason that the two larger companies differed with regards to communicating the brand-as-person perspective is that they offer different service to different customer groups and it would be next to impossible to have one personality to appeal to everyone.

When discussing the *brand-as-symbol* perspective, it is important to make the distinction between having a strong brand symbol and using symbols and metaphors to communicate the brand. Both Company A and B have strong, recognizable logos, however, they do not use them as a focal point in their branding strategy. Conversely, Company C and D actively use metaphors and visual cues in order to connect those associations the metaphors create with their company. Keller (1998) stresses that the use of symbols can be a way to overcome problems associated with intangibility and variability of services. The fact that Company A and B do not actively communicate their symbolic associations was surprising because they are also service companies and using brand symbols would help to make the abstract quality of their services more concrete (Keller, 1998).

6.5.1.2 BRAND PERSONALITY

Brand personality is the set of human characteristics assigned to a brand (Aaker, 1997). Table 6.34 illustrates how each of the four companies has assigned personality traits to their brand.

TABLE 6.34: Cross-Case Analysis of Intended Brand Personality

Brand Personality (Aaker, 1997)	**Company A (Large)**		**Company B (Large)**		**Company C (Small)**		**Company D (Small)**	
Sincerity	Being social Non-judgemental Warm and welcoming	2	Listens Friendly greetings Open to customers Available	3	Business-casual attire Tries not to look pretentious 'Live and learn' attitude	2	Casually dressed Social &Friendly Happy Natural Socially & environmentally conscious	3
Excitement	Independent Open-minded Extroverted Curious	3	-	1	-	3	-	1
Competence	Professional Problem-solver	1	-	2	Professional Tech-savvy	1	-	2
Sophistication	-	5	-	4		5	-	5
Ruggedness	-	4	-	5	Male	4	Active	4

The numbers in the column to the right of the traits represent the rankings for each dimension as given by the Marketing Managers/Owner.

By looking at the personality traits that all four companies assigned to their brands, it is apparent that there is a strong need to express traits from the *sincerity* dimension. There could be several reasons for this. First, all four companies are service companies and may have a natural desire to express sincerity. Another reason could be the region in which all four companies are located. Northern Sweden culture dictates that people are honest and sincere. Finally, the Internet has forced companies to become more transparent resulting in an increasing need to be sincere, honest and truthful. It is interesting to note that none of the companies chose *sincerity* as the most important dimension (as indicated by the number).

It was surprising that the two companies that ranked *excitement* as the most important dimension for their company did not lists any traits that corresponded to *excitement* in their description of the brand's personality. In the within case analysis, we suggested a possible reason might be that *excitement* is how they want to be seen, while *sincerity* is how they actually are or vice versa.

Competence was ranked highest in each of the four cases even though it was only assigned traits by half of the companies. One reason for this is perhaps due to companies wanting to make subtle associations about their competence without stating it outright.

Sophistication was ranked least important by all but one of the companies. This was an expected result due the location since *sophistication* contradicts Northern Sweden's culture and it could offend customers.

Both of the smaller companies chose *ruggedness* as part of their company's personality. This is likely due to their location in Northern Sweden as it is sparsely populated in the cold north and the landscape is rugged with many trees and rocks. What is unexpected, however, is that none of the companies ranked it higher than fourth place. Perhaps this is due the fact that they do not need to put more emphasis on a quality that inherently exists within their company.

The top three dimensions were *sincerity*, *excitement* and *competence* while *ruggedness* and *sophistication* placed lowest. This could be due to the nature of the dimensions. *Sincerity*, *excitement* and *competence* are characteristics that an individual company might naturally have while *ruggedness* and *sophistication* are characteristics that one aspires to be. The choice of dimensions could also be because of the geographic location. All companies have a certain degree of ruggedness intrinsically due to being located in the north of Sweden, so there is no need to add more of this dimension in their communication. Because these companies are naturally rugged, it would be conflicting to make sophistication a strong feature of their communication strategy.

6.5.1.3 Intended Brand Ethos

Internal brand building helps to promote the brand from within the organization to ensure congruence exists between internal and external brand messages (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Mitchell, 2002 as cited in Punjaisri *et al*., 2009). de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) brand ethos model attempts to better understand the level of employee interpretation of the brand. Table 6.35 shows our interpretation of the stage at which each of the companies is located in their intended brand ethos.

TABLE 6.35: Cross-Case Analysis of the Intended Brand Ethos

<table>
<tr><th>Brand Ethos (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006)</th><th>Company A (Large)</th><th>Company B (Large)</th><th>Company C (Small)</th><th>Company D (Small)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Codified Brand</td><td></td><td>x</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Comprehended Brand</td><td rowspan="2">x</td><td></td><td rowspan="2">x</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Interpreted Brand</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Brand Ethos</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>x</td></tr>
</table>

de Chernatony and Cottam (2006) state that employees working in organizations with more successful brands have a clearer and consistent understanding of their brands. We have not found any evidence to support this claim since respondents in Company A, B and D have all received awards giving them high recognition and praise. These three companies are all considered successful and yet represent each of the stages of brand ethos.

The amount of brand ethos a company has is perhaps due to the type of employees working for the organization. In some companies, the employees are more acutely aware of the brand

and issues dealing with how it is interpreted as part of their daily work, whereas in other companies, employees need only to worry about carrying out their specific tasks.

When comparing Company A and B (large companies), they are at different stages of the brand ethos model. The same is true for Company C and D which are small companies. This would suggest that there is no evidence to support that company size plays a role in brand ethos.

6.5.2 Implementation of Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ2)

6.5.2.1 Brand Positioning

The following table (6.36) shows how the four companies choose to position themselves and an analysis of the methods used on the website.

TABLE 6.36: Cross-Case Analysis of Brand Positioning

	Company A (Large)	Company B (Large)	Company C (Small)	Company D (Small)
Brand Position (Aaker, 2002)	World-class; Geographic location	Associations through partnerships	Eco-friendly; 'One-stop shop'	New natural resource; Leaders in their field
Use of website for positioning	Slogan; Images & graphics	Links to partner organizations	Graphics ; Text descriptions	Position statement; Blog
Evidence	Embedded in website; Must infer message	Slogan does not include messages about positioning	Slogan does not include messages about positioning	Position statement; Must infer message

Positioning involves actively communicating the brand identity and value proposition to a target audience (Aaker, 2002). This can be done in different ways. Company A uses their slogan, images and graphics to position themselves on their website, however the slogan is difficult to find and visitors must infer the geographic location from images and graphics. Company B uses both on and offline messages to communicate their associations with organizations and events to express their brand with a row of hypertext logos of their partner organizations. Their slogan does not include any messages that relate to their positioning. The homepage of Company C's website demonstrates their environmental commitment while their 'one-stop shop' message is communicated deeper within the site. Their slogan focuses on an altogether different message. Company D's website uses a positioning statement to affirm that they are a new natural resource for the north. Their blogs and articles are used to express that they are creating new trends and are leaders in their industry.

6.5.2.2 Four Pillars of i-Branding

There are four features needed to create successful brands via the Internet: *marketing communication*, *understanding customers*, *appropriate content* and *interactivity* (Simmons, 2007). Table 6.37 displays the items that are utilized by each of the companies in their online brand communication.

TABLE 6.37: Cross-Case Analysis of Four Pillars of i-Branding

4 Pillars of i-branding (Simmons 2007)		Company A (Large)	Company B (Large)	Company C (Small)	Company D (Small)
Marketing Communication	Two-way Communication	Available via email	x	x	x
	Information	x	x	x	x
	Entertainment Value	x	-	x	x
	Commerce	x	-	x	-
Understanding Customers	Activities used	-	x	Offline activities	x
Content	Navigation	Complex	Simple	Simple	Simple
	Sophistication vs. download time	Balanced	Simple text files	Balanced	Balanced
Interactivity	Allows via website	-	x	x	x

[x] = evidence of use

[-] = no evidence of use

A comparison of each of the four cases reveals that none of the companies includes all the aspects Simmons (2007) requires for branding online. Companies A and B provide offline services, so it is understandable that they have not implemented all of Simmons' (2007) suggestions for i-branding. Since Company C is an IT company whose main goal is to use online means as much as possible, it is logical that they would include nearly all the features included in his four pillars. Company D is only lacking the commerce feature on their website, however, due to the nature of their service, such a feature would be unnecessary.

6.5.2.3 Levels of the Website

Chaffey *et al*., (2006) state that there are three levels of the website. Table 6.38 shows the levels of the website that companies can use.

TABLE 6.38: Cross-case Analysis of the Levels of the Website

Levels of the Website (Chaffey *et al.*, 2006)	Company A (Large)	Company B (Large)	Company C (Small)	Company D (Small)
Intranet	Not used for branding purposes	Planning to implement	-	-
Extranet	Not used for branding purposes	-	-	-
The Internet	Evidence of use	Evidence of use	Evidence of use	Evidence of use

As seen in the above table, only the Internet level is used by each of the four companies. Since Company A has extranet features and Company B is about to implement an intranet, size can be seen as a determining factor for having more than one level of the website. The Marketing Managers at both Company C and D agree with this, stating that the reason they only have one level of the Internet is because of their size.

6.5.3 Internal Perception of Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ3)

6.5.3.1 Core Identity

The core identity includes elements that make the brand unique and valuable (Aaker, 2002). These need to be communicated to the employees so that they can explain to customers how the brand and the product offering will benefit them. Table 6.39 shows the number of correct responses for both employees at each of the four companies.

TABLE 6.39: Cross-Case Analysis of the Core Identity

	Company A (Large)		**Company B (Large)**		**Company C (Small)**		**Company D (Small)**	
	Emp. 1	Emp. 2	Emp. 1	Emp. 2	Emp. 1	Emp. 2	Emp. 1	Emp. 2
Core Identity	3/3	2/3	1/3	1/3	2/3	1/3	1/3	2/3

Company A has the most understood core identity while Company B had the least. An in-depth discussion of the core identity is included in the following sections of this chapter.

6.5.3.2 Brand Personality

Brand personality reflects how people feel about the brand (Abrams, 1981, as cited in Keller, 1998). From this perspective every brand has a personality. Each of the respondents was able to assign a certain number of traits to their company's brand. Table 6.40 shows how accurate the respondents were at describing the traits and ranking the dimensions of brand personality in the same way as the Marketing Manager/Owner of their respective companies.

TABLE 6.40: Cross-Case Analysis of Internal Perception of Brand Personality

	Company A (Large)		**Company B (Large)**		**Company C (Small)**		**Company D (Small)**	
	Emp. 1	Emp. 2	Emp. 1	Emp. 2	Emp. 1	Emp. 2	Emp. 1	Emp. 2
Dimensions	5/5	3/5	0/5	1/5	0/5	3/5	3/5	3/5
Traits	3/9	3/9	2/6	1/6	1/8	2/8	4/9	2/9

The above table represents the number of correct answers given by the employees as compared with the responses given by the Marketing Manager/Owner.

The traits are seen as giving specific understanding of the brand personality while the dimensions give a broader view. The respondents that were able to match the dimensions had more accuracy at matching the traits. This might suggest that the employees at those companies had a better understanding of the brand personality. However, it appears that matching traits does not always result in being able to match dimensions as shown by the responses given by Employee 1 at Company B and Employee 1 at Company C. This was a surprising finding since we believe it should be easier to have a general picture of the brand personality (as seen with the dimensions) than it would be to understand specific traits.

It is evident that company size is not a determining factor for accuracy in internal perception since respondents at both Company A and Company D had better understanding of the brand personality than Company B and C.

6.5.3.3 Brand ethos

de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) brand ethos model helps to identify the level of employee interpretation of the brand. It is necessary for service employees to understand the brand since they influence a customer's brand perception (Punjaisri *et al.*, 2009; Hoffman & Bateson, 2006).

Table 6.41 groups the data from the core identity shown in Table 6.39 and the brand personality data from Table 6.40. Put into percentages, the results from each company can be compared.

We recognize that there will be some discrepancies in understanding the brand personality and core identity due to the different nature of the companies as well as the amount of involvement each of the employees has in the company's branding efforts. Since only two employees were questioned in each case, these numbers are not representing true percentages but are indications of employees' understanding of the brand. In addition, since this was a qualitative study, our aim was not to generalize.

TABLE 6.41: Cross-Case Analysis of Core Identity, Dimensions and Traits

	Company A (Large)		Company B (Large)		Company C (Small)		Company D (Small)	
	Emp. 1	Emp. 2	Emp. 1	Emp. 2	Emp. 1	Emp. 2	Emp. 1	Emp. 2
Core Identity	100%	66%	33%	33%	66%	33%	33%	66%
Dimensions	100%	60%	0	20%	0	60%	60%	60%
Traits	33%	33%	33%	17%	13%	25%	44%	22%
AVERAGE	**65%**		**23%**		**33%**		**48%**	

The above table shows that Company A has good internal understanding of the company's brand personality. The other three companies display varying degrees of difficulty.

Company A uses regular presentations and seminars to inform staff about the brand. Branding discussions are also included as a part of everyday conversations with and amongst staff members. Employee 1 is responsible for teaching other staff members about the brand, which could explain her high rate of accuracy. Employee 2, however, stated she was unsure about the specifics of the brand, yet she had an above average accuracy rate.

Company B has regular meetings where they discuss operations of the business. They also have an annual meeting to discuss the brand, what it stands as well as any changes. Employees receive a company handbook as well.

Company C communicates the brand through everyday conversations and meetings. Employee 1 stated he received most of the information about the brand from the owner. This could explain why he had a good understanding of the core identity. While Employee 2 said she is involved in many conversations about the brand and is in charge of implementing their quality systems. This could reveal why perhaps she is more knowledgeable about the specifics of the brand rather than the core identity.

Company D expresses the brand through everyday conversations, posters in their conference rooms and in everything they do. Employee 1 is not concerned about branding, yet she understands the specific traits of the brand personality better than the core identity of the brand. Employee 2 understands the core identity of the brand but has a less solid grasp of the specifics.

Company A, C and D express their brand through informal, everyday conversations and meetings. All four companies stated that they also have formal discussions about the brand. Both Company A and D state that during the hiring process, they try to find applicants who already possess the traits of their innate company culture. Considering that these two companies have the highest level of understanding of the brand personality, it suggests that hiring the appropriate employee could have an impact on internal brand understanding which supports de Chernatony and Cottam's findings (2007).

Assuming that each of de Chernatony and Cottam's (2007) stages of the brand ethos model are at equal intervals, we could assign percentages to them and plot the averages from each company. Table 6.42 shows the location of the four cases in terms of their brand ethos from the averages collected from Table 6.41. The shaded areas in Table 6.42 represent the corresponding stage based on the responses from interviews and de Chernatony and Cottam's (2007) definitions (from Table 6.35).

TABLE 6.42: Accuracy Plotted on the Brand Ethos Model

Brand Ethos (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006)		**Company A (Large)**	**Company B (Large)**	**Company C (Small)**	**Company D (Small)**
Codified Brand	**0-25%**		23%		
Comprehended Brand	**26-50%**			33%	48%
Interpreted Brand	**51-75%**	65%			
Brand Ethos	**76-100%**				

(See above text for an explanation of the table)

The brand ethos model is comprised of the employee interpretation of the brand and the degree of flexibility or corporate control imposed by the company. Table 6.42 includes two elements: (1) the stage at which each company is characterized (as indicated by the shaded area) and (2) the accuracy of employee understanding of the brand personality (as indicated by the 'x'). When these two elements are presented together we can see that there is correlation between our classification of their actions and the level of accuracy of their understanding of the brand for Company A to C.

We speculate the discrepancy found with Company D could have occurred for different reasons. First, they stated that their brand personality was made up of each of the individuals who are employed in the company. This could prove difficult when assigning one set of traits to the brand personality as they have so many from which to choose. Second, because Company D has a strong organizational culture and lifestyle, we interpreted that their company fits with the definition of brand ethos. However, this may not be the case. The brand ethos model does not account for the level of employee understanding which was below the level of *brand ethos* as seen in Table 6.42.

CHAPTER SEVEN

This final chapter will examine the overall conclusions of this study. The findings from each research question will be addressed in order to answer the research problem. The implications to both managers and theorists will be presented followed by recommendations for future research.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to characterize the use of the company website to communicate brand personality. Detailed answers to the three research questions will provide insight into this problem by examining the intended brand personality followed by the methods used to implement these messages on the website. Finally, internal perceptions of the company's brand personality will be assessed.

7.1.1 INTENDED BRAND PERSONALITY ON THE COMPANY WEBSITE (RQ1)

The brand identity is a way of expressing the brand to customers. It can show the product attributes, the organizational attributes, the personality attributes or the symbolic attributes in varying degrees (Aaker, 2002). Companies can focus on one or all of these attributes (*Ibid.*). This research shows that product attributes were the most common way of expressing the brand. Furthermore, we found that the smaller companies in our study use all four perspectives, incorporating them into their marketing strategies, while the larger companies in our study have the ability to focus on fewer perspectives.

Brand personality helps to create brand equity (Aaker, 2002) and it is therefore important to get it 'right' (Keller, 1998). Our findings show that *sincerity*, *excitement* and *competence* are the personality dimensions that the companies in our study strive to communicate to their customers. This could be because these traits are more important than *ruggedness* and *sophistication* when attracting and retaining customers for these service providers. Companies can choose between different traits within each dimension (Aaker, 1997). In order to express, for example, *sincerity*, a company can place emphasis on being honest, down-to-earth and real or cheerful and friendly. The way in which a company expresses their brand personality will be dependent on the messages the company wants the customers to interpret. If a company naturally possesses traits in one dimension, they can concentrate their marketing strategies on one or more of the other dimensions in order to create balance.

7.1.2 IMPLEMENTATION OF BRAND PERSONALITY ON THE COMPANY WEBSITE (RQ2)

Once a company has decided how to position itself, it can incorporate messages about the core identity. The four cases reveal that there are several ways to communicate the brand's position on the website, including using slogans, links to partners, graphics and other text descriptions.

All four cases benefit from having an online presence. While Simmons (2007) states that marketing communication should include commerce, entertainment value and information, he notes that commerce is not the main element required for online marketing. This was evident in this study; however, we speculate that the nature of the service could be a reason for not including commerce.

The research shows that these companies are using only one level of the website for branding purposes. The smaller companies interviewed revealed that size was a determining factor for the use of various levels, however, since both Company A and B are large organizations which have so far opted against having more than one level, there may be other factors involved.

7.1.3 Internal Perception of Brand Personality on the Company Website (RQ3)

This study reveals that the ability of the employees to match the marketing managers' description of the company's core identity, dimensions and traits are not dependent on one another. For example, it is possible for employees to have an understanding of the specifics of the brand personality without understanding the core of the brand offering.

It was assumed that if the employees understood the core identity, they would have greater understanding of the dimensions and therefore greater understanding of the individual traits. However, this study shows that this was only true for Company A. It was surprising that some employees had a high understanding of the traits yet very low understanding of the importance of each dimension for their company.

Of the four cases, Company A and D were identified to be the most successful at communicating brand personality to their employees. Common to these two cases were formal and informal conversations about the brand as well as hiring employees who possessed many of the same personality traits as the brand. This could suggest that hiring, in the words of Keller (1998), the 'right' people and using a number of different ways to educate staff members about the brand helps to increase internal perception.

While this study was meant to examine the use of the company website to communicate brand personality, it was found that these service companies are expressing their brand personality less via the company website while concentrating more on face-to-face interactions with customers.

7.2 Managerial Implications

The value of creating a strong brand personality should be prioritized, especially in service companies which depend on their employees to communicate the brand to customers in order to overcome issues of intangibility, variability and inseparability (Hoffman & Bateson, 2006). Communicating the brand personality internally requires that the brand is clearly defined by the person in charge of implementing it. This would involve knowing how the company wishes the brand to be perceived. Although the Internet has changed business in many ways, companies should not depend solely on technology to communicate the brand. Our research found that the companies interviewed in this study are primarily using offline rather than online interactions when dealing with customers in the service industry. Hiring employees who share personality traits similar to those of the brand could be advantageous. Our study suggests that companies benefit from hiring employees who possess similar personality traits since those employees already possess a deeper understanding of the specific traits the company wishes to communicate and they naturally express them on their own without much instruction. Distributing handbooks to employees at the start of their employment could be a way to inform the employees about the brand, but this study revealed that this action is not enough to effectively communicate the brand. We found that informing staff members through both formal and informal channels on an ongoing basis gives employees more insight about the brand's personality.

7.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Existing theories enabled a conceptual framework to be constructed for this study. Brand identity, brand personality, the four pillars of i-branding, the levels of the website, and the brand ethos model were applied to the four cases. Evidence was found to support Aaker's (2002) brand identity. Aaker's (1997) theory assisted in identifying how the companies assigned personality to their brand. While each of the companies has an online presence, their offline activities are equally strong. The company website utilizes parts of each of Simmons' (2007) four pillars, although they may be missing some elements such as a commerce feature. While following the requirements of the four pillars, companies may conduct certain activities offline. There was no evidence to suggest that Chaffey *et al*.'s (2006) levels of the Internet is necessary for every website as only the Internet level was used in these four cases. This study found that employee interpretation and corporate control of the brand are not mutually exclusive. de Chernatony and Cottam's (2006) brand ethos model suggests that no employee interpretation can take place at the codified or comprehended brand level. However, the investigated companies claimed to have a high level of employee interpretation even though the company functions at the codified or comprehended brand levels.

7.4 FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

This study included an assessment of the internal perception of the brand personality. Based on the conceptual framework, there are two areas which can be further explored. An obvious extension would be to examine how customers perceive the brand personality to see if there is congruency between the messages communicated from the company and those received by the customers. This type of study could help businesses ensure that they are communicating the brand personality in a way that is understood by the target audience. Taken further, the study could include comparing the personality traits of the company with those of its customers. Because people react favourably to personalities similar to their own (or those they aspire to be) and often make purchase decisions based on self-expressive purposes (Aaker, 1997), matching the degree to which a customer possesses the personality traits of the company would help a company to better target and segment the population.

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APPENDIX I INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MARKETERS

<u>For Marketers:</u>

Discuss their brand (core identity)

↓

Method of communicating the brand

↓

Their view on branding? → **Brand Intention** → **Brand Implementation**

Brand Intention
- Product focus
- Organization (culture) focus
- Brand personality focus
- Focus on the symbol (logo, etc.)

Brand Implementation

↓

Brand Position

↓

Offline Activities | **Online Activities**

Online Activities

↓

Other online activities | **Company Website**

Company Website

↓

- Marketing communication
- Understanding customers
- Content
- Interactivity

RQ1: Intended Message	RQ2: Implementation	RQ3: Perception by Employees
□ **Brand Identity** Brand-as-Product Brand-as-Organization Brand-as-Person Brand-as-Symbol	□ **Brand Position** Core Identity	□ **Core Identity**
□ **Brand Personality** Sincerity Excitement Competence Sophistication Ruggedness	□ **Levels of the website** Intranet Extranet The Internet	□ **Brand Personality** Sincerity Excitement Competence Sophistication Ruggedness
□ **Brand Ethos** ↕ Codified Brand Comprehended Brand Interpreted Brand Brand Ethos	□ **4 Pillars of i-branding** Marketing Communication Understanding Customers Content Interactivity	□ **Brand Ethos** ↕ Codified Brand Comprehended Brand Interpreted Brand Brand Ethos
Message Development by Sender	**Encoded Message/Media Channel**	**Decoded Message**

Appendix II Interview Guide for Employees

RQ1: Intended Message	RQ2: Implementation	RQ3: Perception by Employees
□ **Brand Identity** Brand-as-Product Brand-as-Organization Brand-as-Person Brand-as-Symbol	□ **Brand Position** Core Identity	□ **Core Identity**
□ **Brand Personality** Sincerity Excitement Competence Sophistication Ruggedness	□ **Levels of the website** Intranet Extranet The Internet	□ **Brand Personality** Sincerity Excitement Competence Sophistication Ruggedness
□ **Brand Ethos** Codified Brand Comprehended Brand Interpreted Brand Brand Ethos	□ **4 Pillars of i-branding** Marketing Communication Understanding Customers Content Interactivity	□ **Brand Ethos** Codified Brand Comprehended Brand Interpreted Brand Brand Ethos
Message Development by Sender	**Encoded Message/Media Channel**	**Decoded Message**