Strengthening brand loyalty with brand ambassadors in commoditized markets

Author: Sergio Ganzeboom

University of Twente

P.O. Box 217, 7500AE Enschede

The Netherlands

Master Thesis

MSc Business Administration (Strategic Marketing and Servitization)

Graduation Committee members:

Dr. Raymond Loohuis

Drs. Patrick Bliek

Keywords:

Brand ambassador, Commoditization, Complex products, Simple products, Brand loyalty, Experiential branding

Abstract

Commoditization processes force organisations to find innovative ways to differentiate their products. Brand management is one way to counteract the negative effects of commoditization. The aim of the study is to uncover what effects brand ambassadors have on brand loyalty in commoditized markets. Moreover, the study sets out to discover how product complexity influences brand ambassadorship and ultimately brand loyalty. This study was created with the aid of 6 companies, each with their own unique challenges making the multiple-case study approach the ideal method. After analysis of the cases, it was confirmed that brand ambassadorship can play a role in combating commoditization. Specifically, brand ambassadorship shortens communication lines easing the process of transmitting both brand and product knowledge. The individual employee has the capacity to influence branding due to their ability to create brand experiences for the customer. Additionally, a set of four prerequisites to enable effective brand ambassadorship, namely: organisational fit, market fit, training, and employee brand perception. Lastly, product complexity does influence how brand ambassadorship is conducted, the higher the complexity of the product the likelier the organisation is to focus their brand ambassadorial tasks on relaying product knowledge rather than the transmission of brand values. These findings will help understand how brand ambassadorship can leverage customer experiences to achieve brand differentiation in highly commoditized markets.

Table of contents

1. Introduction

Commoditization processes have led to products becoming increasingly easy to substitute. In part, these processes are driven from increased product and price transparency, easing the comparison (Boudier & Reeves, 2015). However, another important precedent to commoditization is the obsoletion of alternative designs as markets frequently adopt a singular standard design (Reimann, Schilke & Thomas, 2010; Boudier & Reeves, 2015). Fundamentally, commoditization changes market dynamics and gives rise to new challenges. For instance, how to create competitive advantage in commoditized markets. This has led to firms seeking new ways to differentiate and avoid the commodity trap. For instance, firms could attempt to increase product quality or conduct price competition but eventually most firms will focus on bolstering their brands and seek to unlock their branding potential through advertisement. This is because for any strategy to be feasible, a form of branding is required since at their very core brands allow customers to identify a product as belonging to a specific company. This thesis will therefore focus on branding to escape price erosion ever increasing commodification of services and products.

A recurring theme in brand research is the impact that employees can have on shaping brands and their ability to (co-)create brand identity through their interactions with customers, and possibly other employees. It is very much confirmed that employees can play a crucial role in influencing brand performance (Bieńkowska, Sałamacha & Tworek, 2020). But how do employees influence brands? This is a topic that has been researched but there is room for expansion. Both employee management and brand management have received a lot of academic attention. However, there is limited research on the effects of product complexity on brand ambassadorship itself. Moreover, recent commoditization processes have led to companies turning elsewhere for competitive advantage. As such, it may become more common to use brand ambassadorship to forge positive brand experiences.

To elaborate, it is known that experiences have the potential to influence the effectiveness of delivering and receiving brand messages (Kristal, 2019; Östrerle, Kuhn & Henseler, 2018). Employees aid in enabling experiences and as such it could be valuable to further investigate how employee branding, and specifically brand ambassadorship can further enhance experiential branding (Henkel et al., 2007; Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009; Marquardt et al., 2011). However, achieving the level of dedication and commitment amongst employees for them to be considered brand ambassadors is difficult. To illustrate, brand ambassadorship may be achieved through behavioural control which could potentially affect the personal lives of employees and conflict with their work-life balance (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009; Müller, 2017).

Either way, employees find themselves in the position where they are the key contributor to enabling experiential branding. Experiential branding encompasses any interaction between the organisation and a client can evoke an experience as such it is important to set some boundaries in this research. First, this research is limited primarily to the business-to-business sector. The reasoning behind this limitation is two-fold. In general, branding literature has focused on B2C markets (Östrerle, Kuhn & Henseler, 2018; Doney, Barry & Abratt, 2007). Subsequently, historical research attention to B2B branding has lacked behind, however, this should not be the case because B2B branding can be just as relevant as B2C branding (Kotler & Pföertsch, 2007). In fact, research surrounding the benefits of B2B, and corporate branding have picked up steam in the late 2000s and is gaining traction and attention (Beverland, Napoli & Lindgreen, 2007). This research follows this trend by investigating employee contributions in branding in business-to-business markets. Secondly, B2B markets offer an additional challenge when it comes to experiential branding as it is commonly understood that B2B clients are primarily ratio driven whereas experiences usually aim to evoke specific emotions. If experiences can be branded in business-to-business markets, then it becomes possible to challenge logic as the primary factor in decision-making for B2B organisations.

On an academic level the topic of branding in commoditized markets is gaining traction. In fact, it is one of the topics announced by MSI as one of the research priorities for 2020-2022. Under research priority number 2: The Evolving Landscape of Martech and Advertising. One of the questions asked in this research priority is how can brand differentiation be achieved through customer experience in commoditized markets. The aim of this research is to offer insights towards answering this question by studying how brand loyalty is generated from co-created processes by brand ambassadors in commoditized markets. Lastly, the focus is on commoditized markets in the business-to-business sector because they share similar assumptions, in that ratio is traditionally seen as a primary decision maker as opposed to customer experiences. Secondly, this study compares simple product offering (SPO) companies to complex product offering (CPO) companies. Product offering complexity changes the demands both employers and customers ask of employees. This likely has widespread effects on how brand ambassadorship is conducted. The differences in approach to brand ambassadorship likely result in different effects. As such, the second research question may help to uncover why certain effects of brand ambassadorship exists.

What is the effect of brand ambassadors on brand loyalty in commoditized markets?

What are the differences in approach to brand ambassadorship in simple product offering (SPO) companies as opposed to complex product offering (CPO) companies?

The aim is to identify and examine factors contributing to brand ambassadorship in commoditized markets and to explain their relevance and the contribution of brand ambassadorship to brand loyalty. The results should generate both academic and practical knowledge, generating a comprehensive overview of the inner workings of co-creating brand meaning through brand ambassadorship and possibly indicating future topics of research. Moreover, as commoditization is unlikely to leave us and as customers become more

attuned to previously complex products and foreign technologies the comparability of products is likely to increase. As such, branding may become increasingly important to differentiate and find a competitive edge in increasingly commoditized markets. This study contributes to this process by focussing on what employees can do to positively project a brand.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Brand meaning & brand ambassadorship

Brands aim to create identity. This identity needs to captivate how a firm differentiates from its competitors to leverage competitive advantage (Beverland, Napoli & Lindgreen, 2007; Kapferer, 2008). The concept that brand identity enables brand differentiation dates back the 1930s, notably Harrod & Chamberlin (1933) and Robinson (1933) both argued that brand differentiation leads to competitive advantage. Brand differentiation typically creates added value through communicating the values of the product, and values of the entire organisation through establishing (meaningful) relationships between customer and company (Kotler & Pföertsch, 2006; Keller, 2009). Consequently, successful brands create a new decision criterion causing products to be harder to substitute (Romaniuk, Sharp & Ehrenberg, 2007). In part, this is explained due to the positive effects brands can have on customer loyalty reducing the susceptibility of your customer base to the activities from other companies (Caves & Williamson, 1985; Ambler, 1992).

Brand experience can be defined as sensations, feelings and behavioural responses people associate with a brand (Nikhashemi et al., 2019). Whereas experiential branding is brand positioning and is the result of every interaction of the customers with a brand (LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). If successful, this results in brand value allowing the firm to differentiate and ask a premium price (Bendixen, Bukasa & Abratt, 2004; Henkel et al., 2007; Nikhashemi et al., 2019). Branding seeks to align brand image to brand identity. The difference is slim but significant. Brand identity is the message that an organisation aims

to deliver whereas brand image represents how the external market perceives the brand (Keller, 2001; Berry & Seltman, 2007).

Brand loyalty is a very old concept dating back to Copeland (1923). Throughout history the concept of brand loyalty has evolved. It has been used to measure the effect of brand and marketing strategies, but it has also been seen as a key component of brand equity (Aaker, 1991). As for a definition, Aaker (1991) defines brand loyalty as the level of attachment a customer has towards a brand. The author adds that brand loyalty determines whether a customer will change brand if the product in question is changed in any way. If brand loyalty is low, you may still get a multitude of repeat-buyers. However, they remain clients because of the quality of the product or its price and are more susceptible to competition as they do not see the brand as a differentiator (Aaker, 1991).

According to the services branding model developed by Marquardt et al. (2011) brand meaning (Figure 1) is formed through brand management activities able to positively influence brand equity. To be precise, customer's brand experience, brand value proposition (brand identity) and internal and external brand communications form a circular relationship (see Figure 1) influencing brand equity. It is important that internal and external brand messages are the same to ensure a coherent brand message. Additionally, the research participants suggested customer experience to be the most important influencer. Notably, this corresponds to the initial classification of customer experience as a primary driver by Berry & Seltman (2007) upon which Marquardt et al. (2011) based their research. Moreover, the entire relationship is circular, implying that excellent customer experience that is not aligned to your brand identity will create an unintended brand image. Additionally, added value from customer experience can only enable premium prices when they are paired to efficient production and service processes (Verhoef et al., 2009). Further implying the need for organisational coherence.

The second aspect of the services branding model is brand equity. Brand equity consists of brand awareness and brand meaning, these two factors influence each other and if positive

reinforce brand equity. Note, that the relationship between the two sectors is a two-way street. Strong brand management leads to greater brand equity while at the same time a strong brand equity opens new brand management opportunities. Crucially, increased brand equity is associated with superior service in turn generating brand differentiation. However, it is impossible to differentiate on a point of parity (Marquardt et al., 2011). Commoditized markets have many points of parity making differentiation a complex matter. Subsequently, building strong brands is difficult and the authors stress the importance of carefully constructing a brand value proposition (brand identity). The model depicted in Figure 1 forms the foundation from which the research is conducted, it has identified key drivers influencing brand meaning.
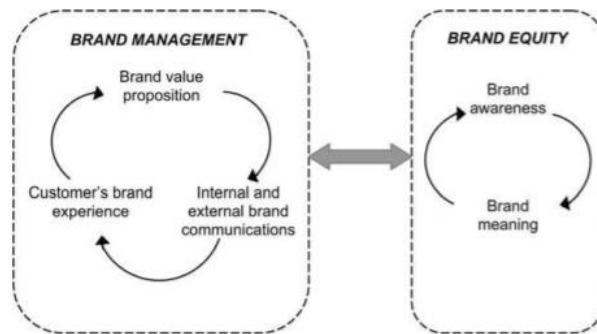

Figure 1: Services branding model (Marquardt et al., 2011)

The next step is to pair the creation of brand meaning to brand ambassadorship and experiential branding. First it is important to realise that there are different types of brand ambassadors. It is common to see large organisations employ celebrities, as brand ambassadors, with the sole purpose of portraying the organisation in a positive light. These types of brand ambassadors typically have limited responsibilities in an organisation. They are effectively a marketing or branding tool to the organisation to be used solely for marketing and branding purposes. However, companies have widened their approach to brand ambassadors and started to recognise that anyone can potentially become a brand ambassador. For example, customers and employees, the focus of this research is on the latter. Consequently, any organisational policy can affect brand equity and could be seen as

a branding activity (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014). As a result, companies should consider how organisational policies will likely affect their brand. Employees represent brands to both existing and potential customers, and even people who will never be customers at all. Afterall, a brand ambassador is a person with a social network. There are many situations where people are inclined to share their experiences with the company and by extension the brand to their social network, creating a form of word-of-mouth marketing (Morokane, Chiba, & Kleyn, 2016). However, Gelb & Rangarajan (2014) also mention a different approach where employees are simply an element of branding rather than its focus. However, even then the employee can be a crucial variable to create brand differentiation and generate value to the organisation. This last approach is common in organisations with high levels of automation and digital customer support with little to no personal contact. Moreover, in commoditization markets it is common to use your expertise as a differentiator (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014).

Sakka & Ahammad (2020) conducted a study researching brand ambassadorship on social media. They found there to be 4 dimensions relevant to brand ambassadorship. The first dimension is word-of-mouth. This dimension is known to exist outside of social media (Kumar et al., 2007). Employee endorsement is the second dimension and entails recommending products or services of the brand on social media, and likely outside of it. The third dimension is employee sharing, employees engage with the organisations' social media activities by sharing them on their own profiles. Lastly, employee culture is effectively synonymous to brand ambassadors in the sense that employee culture entails the degree to which employees behave according to brand values.

Now that there is a foundation on employee brand ambassadorship it is important to describe what these brand ambassadors can influence. In this research three dominant branding stakeholder groups are examined, namely: external branding, internal branding, and employers' branding. External branding is oftentimes identified as the most important branding type (Burkitt & Zealley, 2006). Afterall, external branding affects brand image, or

anyone that is not an active member or employee of the organisation (Keller, 2001; Berry & Seltman, 2007). This is by far the largest stakeholder group in any organisation including the customers. However, that is not to say that external branding is the most important factor for a company and unfortunately companies often fail to adequately budget internal branding (Burkitt & Zealley, 2006). Internal branding at its core is about sharing the intended brand identity to employees in an organisation (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). Logically, this is the first type of branding that should exist if you wish to purposefully create external branding (brand image) and employers' branding. Failure to conduct internal branding results could result in the brand being created by the organisation, which is by no means a bad thing granted the entire organisation works in the same manner with the same values. It is common for brands to have evolved organically over time with the organisation dependent on how employees have always treated customers without giving much thought to branding (Silveira et al., 2013). In practice, you will find many organisations where the services existed first and where branding followed. However, actively conducting internal branding allows an organisation to distinguish oneself from the competition because internal branding creates greater coherence to the organisations' brand identity and as a result increases the effectiveness of external branding (Love and Singh, 2011). Lastly, Employers' branding is essentially branding towards potential employees. This form of branding is gaining traction and is especially important in times of employee scarcity where companies must compete for the best talents (Khan, 2017; Maheshwari, Gunesh, Lodorfos & Konstantopoulou, 2017). Brand ambassadors can fulfil different organisational and branding goals and are typically not limited to a traditional marketing role.

A common misconception in brand management is the notion that a manager can draft a brand identity and then project it into the organisation through internal brand communication. However, this is only partially correct. Iglesias et al. (2019) studied how brand identity is formed from co-creation processes. The authors found that brand identity is an ongoing process co-created by internal and external stakeholders. Furthermore, this process is

shaped with four performance indicators: communicating; internalising; contesting; and elucidating (Iglesias et al., 2019). This concept by Iglesias et al. (2019) confirms that brand identity evolves with an organisation (Silveira et al., 2013). Marketing departments and brand managers face the unique challenge of shaping the brand identity of an organisation in which they are only one of many actors influencing brand identity and ultimately brand image (Vallaster & Wallpach, 2011). To simply, create a proposed brand identity is by no means enough to ensure it is followed as was intended by the brand manager. It is a slow process requiring an organisation to evolve.

2.2 Employee contributions to branding

To create brand meaning, there must be coherence between internal and external brand communications, customer experience, brand identity, and brand communications. Employees are inherently related to every single one of these factors. To illustrate, an organisation can influence brand awareness and affinity through internal brand communications. This is a necessity if an organisation wishes to offer a customer experience in line with their brand identity. In short, the success of brands is in part dependent on employees and their ability to convey and act in accordance with the intended brand identity (Henkel et al., 2007). Furthermore, employees find themselves in a unique position where they are both influencers and influenced by organisational activities (Freeman, 1984). Consequently, it can be said that employees affect and are affected by branding. As a result, the employees are critical to the success of a brand.

A natural question that follows is how to ensure employees act in accordance with a proposed brand identity. First, it's worth exploring whether this can be trained or is an innate ability. One way or another it is generally accepted that training employees improves customer experience (Zhang et al., 2008; Koivisto & Mattila, 2018). However, this is in large part on the merit of offering competent service rather than necessarily conforming to brand

identity rules. For this reason, training should not only be service-oriented but also teach brand values (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009). However, Mody et al. (2018) found that the natural capacity for fostering positive customer experiences and affinity towards the brands in employees has a greater impact on generating brand value. Either way, it can be concluded that both selection and proper introduction towards the brand and training is highly important to generate positive customer experiences. Adaptability was found to be the most important character trait for employees and enables them to adhere to customer needs in a brand-friendly manner (Henkel et al., 2007).

A positive perception of the brand amongst employees results in greater understanding of the intended brand identity (Bravo, Buil, Chernatony & Martínez, 2017). Moreover, the authors suggest that customer-oriented strategies increase the likelihood that employees adopt brand behaviours and act as brand ambassadors. Contrary to earlier statements, Bravo et al. (2017) found no link between job satisfaction and the adoption of brand-aligned behaviour in employees, however, they state it is an antecedent for other activities that do enable better understanding of the brand identity in employees. Crucially, employees show more commitment to a brand when they feel that the services and products are of superior quality and adhere to brand values (Koivisto & Matilla, 2018). Once again, implying the importance of internal branding and coherence between brand identity, brand communications and offered customer experiences. Moreover, offering motivational tools, such as, feedback systems are usually favourable towards improving employee behaviour (Henkel et al., 2007; Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009). However, fair remuneration and breaks are essential to foster positive employee contributions (Koivisto & Mattila, 2018).

However, these generic rewards are not always enough to motivate employees, ideally the work generates feelings of accomplishment, because they believe in the brand values. Recruitment efforts should therefore seek employees that possess similar values to the brand, this selection criterion should, in fact, be superior to technical ability to perform the role (Xiong & King, 2015). Xiong & King (2015) developed an employee brand motivation

matrix. They divide employees into four categories: Brand champions, brand neutral, brand enthusiast and brand detractors (Figure 2). These categories are classed based on two variables, work motivation and brand motivation.
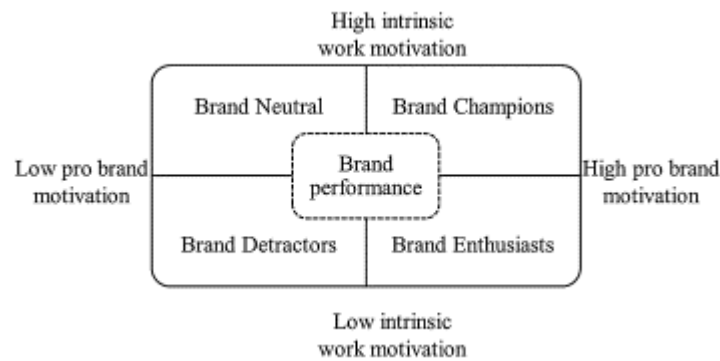
Giving brand information does not guarantee they will accurately conform to the intended brand identity, instead managers co-create brands with employees and other stakeholders through encouraging discussions, the creation of feedback-loops and general connectivity between management and employees (Xiong & King, 2015). Moreover, forming high brand motivation is very difficult when employees perceive branding as a marketing tactic. Once again, implying the need for an undeceiving and authentic brand offering. If this is not the case your organisation may likely consist of a lot of brand neutral employees. Their high work motivation ensures good operational efficiency; however, they are unlikely to create a competitive advantage by contributing to branding strategies. These employees have intrinsic work motivation and have the potential to become brand champions if the organisation manages to convince these employees of the values of the brand through internal brand management initiatives (Xiong & King, 2015).

King and Grace (2008) performed a study researching how employees view the brand and organisation they work for and question them on several criteria, such as, brand perception, how employees acquire brand knowledge, and the impact of a workforce following an organisations' brand on organisational success. The study resulted in the employee

progression pyramid entailing internal branding and employee commitment. The model sketches 2 levels of progression, and 3 types of employees (Figure 3). The brand performance model by Xiong and King (2015) is an extension of this model. However, this model is still relevant as it serves as a basic understanding explaining what is required to move up from one level to the other. The first level of the pyramid, which is not represented in the figure are employees who are neither committed to the job nor committed to the brand. However, if successfully trained these people can effectively become 'brand neutral' (Figure 2), presented in Figure 3 as 'committed to the job'. From there, it is key to transfer brand related information to said employees. This increase in brand knowledge should allow for better interpretation of the brand and if the brand corresponds well with the values of the individual then commitment to the brand is achievable, resulting in brand champions.
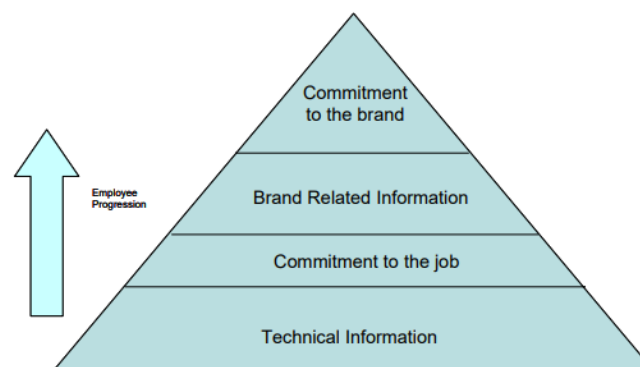

Figure 3: Employee progression pyramid (King & Grace, 2008)

Commitment to the brand can be difficult to achieve as it requires alignment between brand and the individuals' values. But that is not to say that it is fully impossible if this requirement is not met. Informal management control and employee empowerment was found to increase commitment to the brand (Henkel et al., 2007). Conversely, formal management control has an indirect effect on brand commitment since it improves general employee performance. This performance affects behavioural branding, effectively increasing the capacity of employees to create positive experiences for their clients and customers.

There are a multitude of ways employees can contribute to branding, one such way is on social media. Social media has proven to be an important and effective marketing tool. Sakka & Ahammad (2020) divide employee social media usage in two streams. Personal-social stream and the work-related stream. This model is depicted in Figure 4 and is a part of a larger employee brand ambassadorship model by the same authors. In this research only the social media employee usage part of the model is required. Regardless, the personal-social stream aims to find a good work-life balance whereas, the work-related stream is about achieving organisational goals, hence work-related. The key takeaway is that the personal-social stream plays a role in employee well-being, but is mostly outside the control of the organisation, their role should be limited, and there should be boundaries to maintain a healthy work-life balance. As such, a manager should not delve too much into this stream. Employee well-being however does influence employee engagement and by extension is a prerequisite for an employee to be a brand ambassador (Xiong & King, 2015). Work-related social media usage naturally benefits brand ambassadorship as it is another method of reaching stakeholders. However, these findings are not unique to social media. The key take-aways are that employees have interactions with other people that are either on a personal-social dimension or work-related and that these have different goals and should be approached differently. A brand manager may wish for an employee to respect brand values outside of work but if they mistreat the work-life balance it will decrease employee well-being and ultimately their ability to act as a brand ambassador (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009; Müller, 2017).
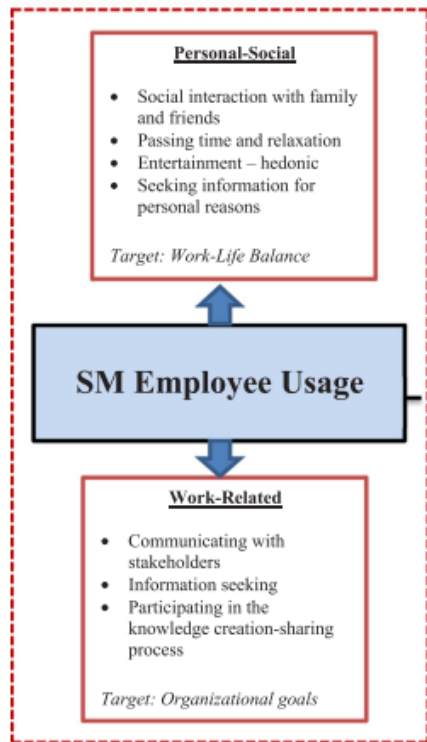
Figure 4: Social Media Employee Usage (Sakka & Ahammad, 2020)

Finally, customers have considerable power to influence a brand and can alter brand perception of existing and potential customers. Therefore, it is important to understand and manage customers to motivate them to share positively (Üçok Hughes et al., 2016). Effectively, stimulating customers to become brand ambassadors who then communicate brand values to other customers. In turn, generating trust and product knowledge to potential customers (Ind, Iglesias & Schultz, 2013; Anisimova & Sultan, 2014). However, the literature strongly suggests that for a customer to become a brand ambassador they require positive brand experiences which could be enabled through employees. In short, it is expected that employee brand ambassadors can stimulate customers to become a brand ambassador.

2.3 Experiential branding

Historically research on experiential branding has focused on the experiences a product or service can provide, however, with the increased popularity of social media platforms and ease of sharing information there has been a shift towards researching the experience

provided by the brand, or brand experience (Şahin et al., 2011). The brand experience does not end after the product has been consumed but is a continuous feeling a customer has over said brand (Brakus et al., 2009). In a study conducted by Şahin et al (2011) brand experience was found to have a positive effect on satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty. In this model brand experience directly affects the 3 variables, moreover satisfaction and brand trust once again related positively to brand loyalty.

Brand experiences are usually co-created between employee and customer. This is where the service-dominant logic approach by Vargo & Lusch (2008) comes into play. A key component of service dominant logic is the idea that enhancing interactions between customer and company should lead to better experiences with a brand (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Ko et al., 2016). Therefore, exploiting brand potential requires in-depth interactions between customers and employees (Dean, Arroyo-Gamez, Punjaisri & Pich, 2016). Once again, implying the need for meaningful (business) customer-employee relationships.

It was already established that customer experience is the primary driver towards generating positive brand equity. First, all interactions between organisations have the potential to be a branding tool because brand meaning is greatly influenced by customer experiences (Marquardt et al., 2011; Mody et al., 2019). Moreover, it is in human nature to attribute human emotions and even traits to brands (Möller & Steffen, 2013; Motta-Filho, 2020). In fact, these emotions are especially present during physical experiences, for example at a store or an event giving them great potential for branding exploitation. When these events are memorable and gratifying the customer experience is very positive generating brand loyalty and brand equity in the process (Zhang et al., 2008; Biedenbach & Marell, 2010; Pratap et al., 2016; Mody et al., 2019). Lastly, customer experience is an excellent tool to improve customer satisfaction as such, it can be a tool towards brand differentiation and ultimately make your products harder to substitute (Rambocas et al., 2014).

Pratap et al. (2016) discuss the practice of gift-giving and games to generate positive co-created experiences at events or exhibitions. Experiential branding is most effective when they are memorable and pleasant (Zhang et al., 2008; Biedenbach & Marell, 2010; Pratap et al., 2016; Mody et al., 2019). In fact, Hussain et al. (2020) claim that economic and social experiences are inferior to hedonic experiences in terms of brand value potential. Moreover, gift-giving positively relates to brand awareness whereas games have a strong positive effect on customer experiences and is useful to convey brand values (Pratap et al., 2016). Additionally, events give the opportunity to create a narrative and bring brand values to customers through an engaging platform (Berry & Seltman, 2007; Üçok Hughes et al., 2016). To successfully build a narrative the creation of a theme is required, including facility design and product displays (Zhang et al., 2008). However, keep in mind that to enable brand differentiation the entire experience is required to be coherent to the brand identity (Motta-Filho, 2020).

Brand experiences are not limited to physical events. Online brand communities are sometimes used to guide and control brand experience. To foster a brand community employees should be involved in branding efforts. Afterall, branding brings forward strategic choices and a strategy is only effective when an entire organisation is coherent to said strategy (Fournier & Lee, 2009). An online community requires community managers who inform customers with technical information and brand values. This is often done through storytelling, an organisation tells a story about why their products and services are valuable to the customer, and in the process attempts to convey brand values thus strengthening the brand. However, an alternative form is 'storygiving'. Üçok Hughes et al. (2016) consider storygiving as a branding tool wherein customers are given a platform to share their experiences with the brand. There are some distinct advantages to storygiving as opposed to storytelling. The story is being told by someone without the inherent motive to further company goals. Therefore, it creates legitimacy and trust to the brand. However, it does mean that the organisation does not control the contents of the narrative. Subsequently, the

influence storygiving has on your brand is unpredictable and may include misaligned brand messages and possibly negative publicity. Moreover, online brand co-creation cannot be stopped; however, an organisation may attempt to facilitate and guide it (Üçok Hughes et al., 2016).

Brand experiences are typically co-created, we find different brand co-creation characteristics. Kristal (2019) found 5 distinct characteristics; these are: "purpose of co-creation; behaviour of co-creators; duration of co-creation; expertise of co-creators; importance of employees." Employees connect different stakeholder networks and can project brand identity through their actions (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2011; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2017; Kristal, 2019).

2.4 Theoretical framework

Analysis of the theoretical background has led to the theoretical framework. The first section of the theory relates brand identity, image and ultimately brand meaning to brand ambassadorship. This is followed up by a section delving into employee contribution towards the creation of brand value, laying out drivers and antecedents needing to be fulfilled for employees to positively contribute to brands and in the process become brand ambassadors. Lastly, employee-customer interactions and especially experiential branding connect brand meaning and brand ambassadorship (amongst employees) to customer experiences. In practice, these experiences seem to be co-created between customer and employee.

Brand ambassadorship was found to improve brand loyalty and is moderated through brand interactions. In fact, brand interactions usually enable brand ambassadorship to be conveyed to the customer and in turn generate brand loyalty. There are 4 constructs forming brand ambassadorship. Combined, these constructs are called employee brand perception and form brand ambassadorship. The following framework will serve as the foundation of the field research
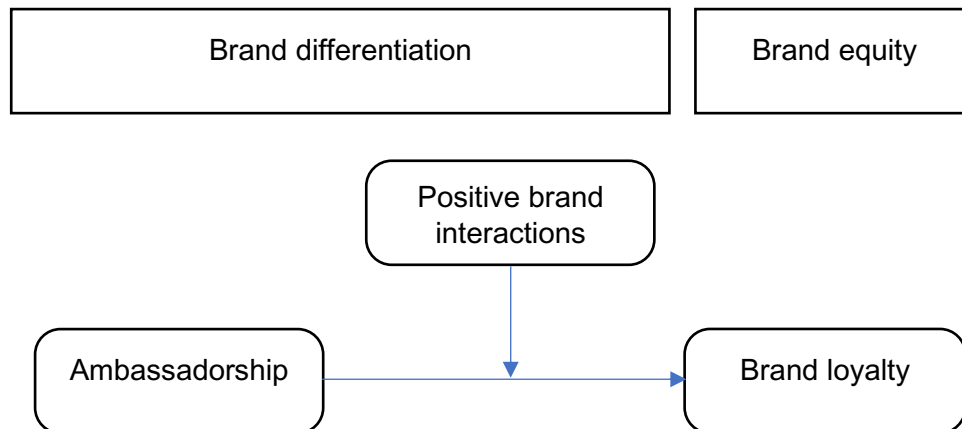
Theoretical framework:

Figure 5: Theoretical framework

3. Methodology

Due to the nature of this research, it is important to investigate organisations with different levels of product offering complexity within their own context. Case studies allow for research wherein individual contexts are retained improving the validity of research in the process (Yin, 2003). As such, a multiple-case study approach was used in this study. Moreover, multiple-case study methodology is generally regarded as a more comprehensive form of research as it allows the researcher to compare results from different organisations to one another (Yin, 2003).

With the aid of the theoretical framework several questions are created to form semi-structured interviews where sales personnel are interviewed from the six case companies. The interviews are constructed in two phases, the first, and shortest phase, is there to sketch context. The companies are in similar markets but are by no means the same and cannot be compared to one another without taking its context into account. Failure to do so, might result in unrepresentative results. Furthermore, it will sketch a basic profile of level of brand ambassadorship within this specific interviewee and present the degree to which employees

are considered a branding medium by the organisation and whether they undertake any actions to increase brand affinity. Four constructs forming brand ambassadorship are used to determine the current level of brand ambassadorship in the participant and to further understand the organisational context. The first construct is employee brand perception, including perception of services and products offered. The second construct is internal communications. The third and fourth are the trained and innate ability which relates to the capacity individual employees possess to follow a specified brand identity.

The second phase of the interview is about brand ambassadorship, brand loyalty and experiential branding. The questions aim to uncover the tangible effects being a brand ambassador brings for customers and the organisation. The questions seek to find links between customer experience, brand identity and the role employees play in these processes.

3.1 Cases

The participating companies are selected with the prerequisite that they are actively attempting to own and maintain a brand. Interviewing companies that have no active branding activities would not be able to contribute to this research. Afterall, the aim is to find out how brand ambassadors contribute to branding. Moreover, it was opted to interview sales employees as they are the ones who are seemingly most actively capable of performing the role of brand ambassador since they are in direct contact with customers. Moreover, in most small and medium sized organisations sales and account managers are often heavily involved with marketing and as a result they are expected to be somewhat conscious of their possible role as brand ambassadors. Additionally, the markets these companies are active in must show significant signs of commoditization and offer very similar products to their competition. Six companies participated in the research and supplied either one or two interviews. They will remain anonymous in this research and are referred to as company A-F.

Their individual contexts are explained when relevant. Below follows a brief introduction to the companies.

Table 1: Participants

Company	Market	Size (employees)	Product offering complexity
Company A	Textile industry	120 - 150	Complex
Company B	Automotive industry	50	Complex
Company C	Tech industry (All-round IT services)	50	Complex
Company D	Plastic packaging industry	215	Simple
Company E	Cleaning industry	10.000+	Simple
Company F	Cardboard packaging industry	25	Simple

There are some important things to note about the cases regarding representativeness. First, all organisations are considered premium brands and big players in their respective markets. Company F can punch far above its weight due to their strategy. They licence their products to partner companies, as a consequence, the number of employees (25) does not represent the size of their product in the industry. Lastly, SPO companies are typically larger than the CPO companies. This is in part explained due to how comparatively niche the markets for company A and B are. Whereas company C is part of a larger group with over 200 employees.

3.2 Procedure and analysis

The qualitative nature of this research allows the participants to be sketched in their own context, branding is a highly context driven phenomenon and to ensure validity of the results this context is to be kept (Yin, 2003). Moreover, the semi-structured interview allows participants of the selected firms to actively contribute to the discussion, more freely provide valuable knowledge to the research and even help discover unforeseen challenges, constructs, variables, or solutions. Additionally, it gives the interviewer the opportunity to ask follow-up questions or use cues and prompts to get a more complete answer or even ask

additional related questions that weren't thought of before the interview started (Mathers, Fox & Hunn, 2002).

The interviews were conducted at the companies themselves, in a meeting room and office. In one instance, the interview took place through Microsoft Teams as this was easier for the partaking company. The interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants. In all cases this was Dutch, the interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. The transcriptions were analysed in Dutch to avoid any meaning loss in translation and then presented in English in the analysis and results chapters. The research is completely anonymous, for both organisation and participating individuals. Any personal information was removed or renamed to guarantee confidentiality.

The analysis is performed through thematic coding. Themes from the interviews are extracted and coded to create a theme-centric overview to allow for the synthesis of thematic information on the effects of brand ambassadorship on brand loyalty. Not to mention, the identification of said effects in the first place. The first theme relates to brand strategy. The second theme is about onboarding and training, namely mentorship versus organisation-wide brand training. The third theme consists of intended brand experiences, followed by a theme about brand ambassadorship in practice, as in how do employees practice brand ambassadorship in day-to-day business activities. Lastly, there is a theme about brand loyalty, specifically how and why the brand experiences are intended to generate brand loyalty.

The results are presented in four sections, the first section speaks about the general understanding the participants have about brand ambassadorship and the different strategies the organisations used. For the further analysis and concrete effects of brand ambassadorship the participants are categorised in two divisions. The first division are those organisations with a complex product offering (CPO). These are participants A, B and C. Whereas, participants D, E and F have a comparatively simple product offering (SPO). Do

note, that the complexity of the product offering is not determined by the complexity of the technical process to create the product but by the technical expertise required for a customer to adequately use said products. To illustrate, organisation A (complex) and D (simple) both have complicated technical production processes, in fact, it could be said that organisation D's products are more difficult to produce. However, for the customer using the products is as simple as putting it into a machine that they already own. Whereas, in the case of organisation A the customer requires product information on how to process the product. The results are finalized with a segment about differences and similarities between SPO and CPO companies.

4. Results

4.1 Understanding of brand ambassadorship

To ensure validity of results all interviews started with an organisation sketch to uncover their product complexity, position in the market chain and current understanding of branding. Furthermore, the participants were asked about their branding goals. Fortunately, all 6 organisations consider branding a tool to increase brand awareness and value. Moreover, the participants view their brand as a platform to display their firm's values and products to the market. Furthermore, brand image is seen as a consequence of their branding efforts however, all participants state that brand image cannot be created by a marketing department or even an organisation alone. All participants share the sentiment that a prerequisite to branding is high efficacy and quality of products and services. This is supported by Verhoef et al. (2009) who argue that efficient and effective production processes are required to uphold brand standards. Additionally, according to the services branding model by Marquardt et al. (2011) efficient services require positive brand experiences. Strategically it is common to follow a one-brand strategy as evidenced by companies C, D, E and F. Company B sells brands they do not own; however, they add their own brand into the mix, creating a simple form of co-branding in the process. Conversely,

company A uses a multi-brand strategy and owns a separate brand for each product line. Lastly, company F finds itself in the position where competitors attempt to copy their products and have recently begun to see branding as a means to differentiate from their competitors. There is overwhelming support in the literature stating going as far as to state that branding is a form of differentiation in and of itself (Beverland et al., 2007; Romaniuk et al, 2007; Kapferer, 2008). However, in the past company F did not need to conduct large scale branding as organisations came to them because they were the only supplier. The phenomenon that companies choose for an organisation without branding was addressed by Aaker (1991) who argue that clients oftentimes do not see the brand as a differentiator but may have different reasons to do business with an organisation.

First, there are some attributes unrelated to brand ambassadorship that influence brand loyalty. Companies can have a competitive advantage unrelated to branding or marketing. However, brand ambassadors can raise awareness about such advantages. For instance, they could advertise in-house production facilities. Additionally, human resources, fair remuneration and adequate holiday plans are positive influencers on employee productivity and satisfaction. Lastly, according to company C, customer ambassadors are the ideal ambassadors as they have greater credibility than a paid employee. This is in line with Üçok Hughes et al. (2016) who argue that co-creation processes can be guided by employees and in the process allow customers to positively contribute to the brand, most commonly on social media platforms.

4.2 Participants with a complex product offering (CPO)

In the early stages of the research, it became apparent that brand ambassadorship can exist in many shapes and contribute to branding and overall organisational success in different ways (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014; Sakka & Ahammad, 2020). Brand ambassadors commonly influence and are influenced by employer's branding. In fact, all six participants explicitly mention employer's branding. However, the CPO companies typically seek people with a

high potential for technical expertise, as such, their employer's branding is focused on this attribute. To illustrate, company C manages employer's branding by offering internships. This allows the company to measure the technical expertise and to guarantee organisational fit. Moreover, as the IT labour market is highly competitive it allows them to bind employees to their organisation. Companies A and B typically rely on conventional methods like enabling a marketing agency or using social media channels. However, internships are not unusual in these organisations and the usage of probation periods is common. Brand ambassadors are often involved in the later stages of employers' branding, especially with the internships or probation periods where they act as mentors. However, it could be argued that this is internal branding, and part of the onboarding process. Either way, brand ambassadors can also contribute to employers' branding through social media or their personal network, however, the latter is not actively pursued.

Amongst the participants the most common method of introducing new employees to an organisation is through getting them into contact with existing employees. It is common to couple a new employee to a senior employee and they generally consider this sophisticated enough for their onboarding processes. Effectively, creating a form of internal branding enabled by existing employees. The question is, are the onboarding activities of these senior employees or mentors more effective when conducted by brand ambassadors. In fact, participants B and C mention that they attempt to instil the values of the firm and teach the junior employee on how to service customers. The internships serve to find capable employees who conform to the organisational culture. However, not all participants pursue brand ambassadorship on an organisation-wide scale. Two out of three companies focus their brand ambassadorship activities solely on sales personnel, with the explanation that they are the ones in contact with the customers. However, they do attempt to make everyone understand their product and services but do not go as far as to stimulate behaving in accordance with the corresponding brand values. This is a significant difference, as the step from explaining your brand promise to stimulating behaviour in line with said brand promise

has proven to be a difficult step to take (Vallaster & Wallpach, 2011). This process was studied by Iglesias et al. (2019) and identified that this communication is only the first step to co-creating a brand identity, to be successful an organisation needs to also internalise, contest, and elucidate the brand promise and that requires active training and discussion within the company.

As to training, all organisations stress the importance of expertise and offer training to improve said expertise. However, there is little mention of brand related training for sales employees. The IT firm (C) did mention that brand related interaction training does exist for engineers that are required to work at a client company. Moreover, all participants do offer extra training, schooling, and education to their employees in not only technical fields but also in, for example, client management or logistics.

However, the most common brand ambassadorial role is through servicing clients. While none of the participating companies went as far as to create a code conduct to guide service interactions, they do focus on specific values intended to create a designed client experience. Organisations with technically complex products, need to project a high level of technical expertise, and stress the importance of adequately instructing how to use their products and why the product is designed in the manner that it is (Ind et al., 2013; Anisimova & Sultan, 2014). Including guidance after product usage and availability of specialists in case they are needed. In fact, in two cases they are going as far as to offer product training to their client. They wish to avoid negative publicity from product failure caused by miss-usage or inadequate guidance from resellers. This is important to avoid negative publicity and to stimulate customers to share positively about the brand (Üçok Hughes et al., 2016).

4.2.1 Applied brand ambassadorship for organisations with a complex product offering

The most common and comprehensive advantage of brand ambassadorship is the greater ability to shape experiences in line with the brand identity through interactions with clients. In

part, this is made possible due to improved communications. In fact, all participants, irrelevant of product complexity, mention improved communication as a benefit of brand ambassadorship. The greater level of communication in turn generates multiple advantages. First, it improves all interactions with clients and is beneficial for maintaining positive relations with customers. In essence, because of the services they offer. Second, it aids in uncovering underlying problems or disagreements that were previously left untouched. Lastly, and unique to complex products is the improved ability to convey product knowledge. This is often done through customer support and ensures customers use the products as intended. The market demands customer support and brand ambassadors are a way to offer this support in a pleasant manner. Additionally, participants A and B mention how fairs and customer visits are an excellent method of bringing unknown products to the attention of customers.

All participating organisations state that brand ambassadors have an improved capacity for creating experiences as the brand identity intended made possible from several advantages related to brand ambassadorship. These are, improved communication, product knowledge and quality of service. However, it can also lead to better employee attraction & retention, and brand awareness. Moreover, the efficacy of the experience created with the aid of brand ambassadorship depends on how this experience aligns to market demands. The key experiences participants tend to create are related to reliability, flexibility, and ease of use. Once these are assured organisations typically look to a social or environmental goal. Additionally, staying up to date with technical developments and the ability to project technical expertise is crucial to the CPO companies.

To illustrate, organisation (C) working in the IT industry offers a total solution. The experience they aim to create, in their own words, is unburdening. In practice, this means taking care of everything related to IT for an organisation. It is common for them to send an engineer to the client company to act as a consultant and an onsite engineer. This engineer would take upon himself all tasks related to setting up and maintaining IT systems without the company itself

ever needing to involve itself with it, all in an effort to create a seamless transition to new IT systems. To be a brand ambassador under such circumstances is a demanding task, and the organisation recognises this, all engineers receive brand training, specifically how to serve and interact with customers. Despite taking on all IT related tasks, they do have to offer support frequently. As their customers will make use of said IT systems, and it will take time for organisations to grow accustomed to a new IT system.

The other two organisations (A and B) follow a similar strategy but to a lesser degree. The experience they aim to create can be summarised as creating a reliable partner, or in the words of company A: 'supplying a good night's rest'. It is worth noting that the participants share similarities. They are both experts in their respective fields and have in-house production capacity, giving them an advantage over most of their competitors. A brand ambassador for these organisations needs to be competent in taking away doubts about the product. However, unlike organisation C they will not aid directly with the implementation and maintenance of their products. Instead, they will offer their expertise and oftentimes flexible solutions to help the client.

Lastly, participant A also has an environmental edge to the experience they aim to create. This is due to market demands. However, this does limit who can become a brand ambassador at their organisation. Someone who does not care for their environmental goals could never credibly sell their products. Moreover, according to all three companies, a brand ambassador can convey a message, whether it is about product quality or environmental sustainability with more credibility than an employee that only has technical knowhow.

4.3 Participants with a simple product offering (SPO)

There is a large difference in how employer's branding is approached by the SPO companies. In fact, organisation E actively pursues employer's branding itself as their overall branding strategy and considers it a key indicator of branding success. They follow the

service-profit chain, in this chain employee satisfaction and loyalty eventually leads to customer satisfaction and loyalty. In practice, their branding efforts are directed towards their employees and include a lot of internal branding. They consider internal branding and employer's branding to be similar, in the end any new employees will receive the internal branding, creating the need for these to connect to one another with the goal of creating satisfied employees. Stating that their branding to existing and potential employees are part of the same process. The literature does support the idea that satisfied employees lead to satisfied customers (Xiong & King, 2015). Participants D and F do not go that far but do mention creating a positive image about working for the company, specifically showing what they do and why it matters.

Company E blends internal branding with employer's branding. To them, an 'internal brand ambassador' is someone who relays brand values to colleagues. Other than that, the closest we get to internal branding is in the selection and introduction processes of the firms and in some cases brand ambassadors are a part of this introduction process. Generally, internal branding is more often considered in this category, possibly due the fact that they are unable to differentiate as much on their product offering. Interestingly, these three find their onboarding processes to be insufficient. In fact, two organisations in this category show interest towards implementing new onboarding processes, one of which already has concrete plans to be executed in 2022.

The organisations stress the importance of the individual (employee) in creating satisfied customers. This is unsurprising considering employees enable or mediate the brand interactions of the client. In fact, it was found by all participants that brand ambassadorship was mostly evident in the process of offering services and that brand ambassadors positively influence the quality of service. Confirming the importance of service interactions when trying to create a brand identity. However, the SPO companies go as far as to state that the brand exists because of the people that work there. In fact, organisation E states: 'We have performed an analysis of our organisational culture and what do our customers value from

us. We have attempted to translate that into our branding'. This conforms to the current understanding that it is easier to adapt your branding to your organisation than the organisation to the brand (Vallaster & Wallpach, 2011; Iglesias et al., 2019).

Lastly, all participants state that brand ambassadorship allows them to differentiate from their competition. Making brand ambassadorship a potential tool to combat commoditization. Further reinforced by what organisation F is experiencing: 'We are now in a position where our brand name has become synonymous with the product, similar to how aspirin became a product name over time'. To fight the competition copying their products they attempt to enable marketing tools to create differentiation, including brand ambassadorship.

4.3.1 Applied brand ambassadorship for organisations with a simple product offering

Employees and by extension brand ambassadors influence brand identity. In fact, it doesn't matter whether they are a brand ambassador or not, they still express values to people within and outside of the organisation. The research found two activities that were particularly dependent on brand ambassadors for success, these are business fairs and customer visits. In fact, the results indicate personal contact is a strong variable in determining the positive effect of brand ambassadorship. To illustrate, organisation D has their own truck drivers, and these often come back with important information that can aid in providing better services that would otherwise never have arrived. They state that brand ambassadorship and personal contact are crucial in this process. Either way, all organisations agreed on the fact that sales employees have great potential as brand ambassadors due to their frequent interactions with customers. To elaborate, it is advantageous in the attraction (and retention) of customers. Industries have a certain level of word-of-mouth. The ability of brand ambassadors to create positive experiences and deliver on brand promises improve all service interactions. As such making it more likely clients will share their experiences in their own networks. The idea is to stimulate the client to advertise the brand to other organisations, further increasing brand awareness in the industry.

There are also benefits unrelated to customers. Firms can leverage the social networks of their employees to create a favourable brand image. As people will likely will share positive experiences about working for the company with others in their social network (Morokane et al., 2016). In this process, the brand ambassador sheds a positive light on the organisation creating a positive brand image. According to organisations D, and E this in turn aids with employee attraction and retention. Furthermore, organisation E found that brand ambassadors create a favourable work environment improving employee satisfaction. However, based on the literature I must conclude that this requires alignment between the characteristics of the brand and the characteristics of the employee in question (Bravo et al., 2017; Koivisto & Matilla, 2018). In fact, this was already seen in the case of organisation D (and A), as they need their employees to believe in the sustainability goals for them to be credible salesmen of their products. Accentuating how firms cannot ignore employee selection processes for suitability as brand ambassadors (Mody et al., 2018).

Brands have primary and secondary goals that often reinforce one another. To illustrate organisation D and F, share similar sustainability goals and create their product in such a way that sustainability is guaranteed. However, in their service offering organisation D is proactive and focuses on quick communication lines and clarity, whereas organisation F is more reactive and aims to solve problems and offer support on demand. Meanwhile, company E is completely different in their approach as they also try to bring about a positive societal change. The takeaways are that SPO companies are aware of the crucial role brand ambassadors can play to positively deliver their product or service offering. Additionally, they create a second reason to choose for their services related to environmental or societal goals. Seemingly, the relative simplicity of the product makes it possible to focus on secondary goals unrelated to the business itself. Interestingly, it was these organisations that had more evolved internal communications channels. To illustrate, two participants use televisions screens in cantinas and magazines to transfer brand knowledge to their employees.

4.4 Differences and similarities

The first and possibly greatest difference between brand ambassadors in SPO or CPO companies is found in the level of technical sophistication required in the individual employee. The CPO companies seek to brand expertise as a differentiator for competitive advantage. This has consequences in the way companies choose to conduct employers' branding, onboarding, training, and the brand experience companies aim to create.

CPO and SPO companies both consider employers' branding an important tool for employee attraction and retention. The CPO companies focus most of their efforts on finding employees with high potential for technical knowhow as it is a key component of their job and a prerequisite to perform as an employee. Interestingly, amongst the CPO companies only company C constantly and proactively conducts employers' branding whereas, in companies A & B this practice is usually ad hoc. As to the SPO companies they conduct employers' branding to a larger target audience. The focus is on creating a positive image about working for the company, often highlighting environmental or societal themes with the goal of targeting potential employees with similar values. Both sectors consider onboarding important, however, the onboarding practices are shallow when it comes to involving the brand, instead the focus is often on a single aspect of the brand. The SPO companies generally value onboarding and internal branding practices more than CPO companies likely due to the necessity to differentiate on something other than the product (Marquardt et al, 2011). Consequently, the SPO companies mention the necessity for improving said onboarding practices whereas, the CPO companies consider their onboarding to be sufficient. Typically, practiced in the form of mentorship.

There is a major difference in where the organisations attempt to foster brand ambassadorship. The CPO companies focus almost exclusively on sales personnel, the companies ensure that sales personnel have the correct technical information and attempt to enhance the service by providing brand related information. However, specific brand training

is rare. In theory this should lead to a sales team that consists of brand neutrals and brand champions when applying the employee motivation matrix (King & Grace, 2008). The effectiveness of all internal branding practices determines the distribution of brand neutrals and brand champions. However, SPO companies take steps to make everyone in the organisation a brand ambassador. In practice, this means brand ambassadors exist outside of the sales team who can aid the organisation in a different way. To illustrate, truck drivers meet the warehouse personnel of a client and possibly uncover processes that could be improved. However, the consensus amongst SPO and CPO companies is that personal contact is what improves the communication between the firms, enabling discussions about problems that would otherwise not have been discussed. Brand ambassadors are the most suitable employees to meet customers as they best represent what the organisation stands for. Consequently, business fairs and customer visits are found to be more successful when the employees adequately represent the firms' values.

As such, the most common task of brand ambassadors is to offer services. The greatest advantage of brand ambassadorship, regardless of product offering, is improved ability to shape client experiences (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Ko et al., 2016; Dean et al., 2016). In CPO companies it is important brand ambassadors relay product knowledge to generate trust. To further enhance these services, CPO companies guarantee the availability of specialists to help with installation and in some cases train clients to use their products to greater effect. All of this is done to create an experience around assurance and reliability. Relaying product knowledge is also important to SPO companies however it is not as much of an issue since customers typically understand the products already. Instead, SPO companies typically have a strong secondary goal in the form of an environmental or societal message and to be a brand ambassador would mean credibly telling the story behind this secondary goal. It was found that CPO companies often seek out flexibility as their second experience, often made possible due to their in-house capabilities. Lastly, the CPO companies mention ease of use as an important customer experience. Moreover, it may be worth investigating whether, as

these results imply, all three experiences; reliability, flexibility and ease of use should be, or are required to be fulfilled before CPO companies look to include a social or environmental goal. Conversely, the SPO companies are quicker to adopt a social or environmental goal in their brand promise. Seemingly, the relative simplicity of the product offering makes it easier to focus on secondary goals that do not have to be related to the core business activities.

SPO companies have a broader perspective about where brand ambassadors can contribute, rather than the focused CPO approach. The focus is more on employees rather than the product and its knowledge. With one participant taking it as far as to make their strategy about employees. However, this extreme is unlikely to be representative for all SPO companies. However, it does seem evident that SPO companies include a greater part of their organisation in the branding activities and are more likely to actively stimulate brand ambassadorship than CPO companies. This study researched the differences between SPO and CPO companies. The greatest differentiator was the focus on technical expertise in CPO companies where the participants do neglect the brand aspect to some degree. Alternatively, the brand is built around the fact that the company is technically sophisticated. However, missed opportunities seem to exist as brand training is frequently neglected. But the consensus amongst both SPO and CPO companies is that brand ambassadors have a positive effect in shaping experiences as the brand identity intended. If the experience aligns to market demands this should give brand ambassadors the capacity to offer superior services. In turn, creating an environment where all interactions with customers lead to brand loyalty.

5. Discussion

The results contribute to the existing theoretical and practical knowledge in the two topics related to the research questions. First, it confirms and adds nuance to some of the known effects of brand ambassadorship. However, the unique contribution of this study pertains to

the second research question. Namely, the differences in approach to brand ambassadorship in SPO companies as opposed to CPO companies.

Theoretical contributions

It is common knowledge that branding, and by extension, brand ambassadorship, can play a role in combating commoditization (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014). To no surprise the results reinforce this line of thinking. In fact, the consensus amongst the participants is that employees, and especially brand ambassadors are potentially the greatest influencer due to their ability to create brand experiences for the customer. This is supported by the service-dominant logic approach, specifically, the idea that value is created through exchanged services rather than exchanged goods (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Ko et al., 2016; Dean et al., 2016). It is important to understand that brands are created by actors from within and outside of the organisation (Vallaster & Wallpach, 2011). These findings are not ground-breaking, and these principles are already well-established. However, the analysis and consequent validity of the research require that the level of product complexity does not influence the most rudimentary aspects of branding. For instance, the fact that the individual employees have a decisive role in creating brand value or how brands themselves can be co-created between customers and employees.

This study found four prerequisites to enable effective brand ambassadorship. First, the experience brand ambassadors aim to create is required to fit to the organisational culture and the services offered. Secondly, a positive brand perception is demanded for a brand ambassador to credibly act as a brand ambassador. Thirdly, it is crucial that the intended brand experience conforms to market demands. Creating an elaborate brand experience that no one wishes to experience is wasteful. Lastly, it was confirmed and consistent with the employee progression pyramid that selection and training of employees is important, not only in terms of expertise but also in terms of brand knowledge or 'brand fit' (King & Grace, 2008; Xiong & King, 2015). Further indicating that not everyone is suitable to be a fully-fledged

brand ambassador to any organisation. If these prerequisites are met a brand ambassador can contribute to positive brand experiences, however, an employee that does not meet these prerequisites can still contribute positively to the firm given that their intrinsic work motivation is high. As a matter of fact, multiple participants do not actively foster brand ambassadorship on every level of their organisation. Instead, chiefly CPO companies opt to use their limited resources in those departments that they expect will benefit the most from brand ambassadorship.

As previously stated, brand ambassadors create positive experiences to customers. This is a result of the improved communications lines a brand ambassador can create. Consequently, customers increase their product knowledge and receive a higher quality of service. The brand values play a crucial role in determining the ability brand ambassadors have to create said positive experiences. This study found that SPO companies are more likely to include comprehensive brand propositions unrelated to business activities. Seemingly, the relative simplicity of the product compels SPO companies to pursue brand differentiation on values outside of their core business activities. As a result, SPO companies are required to dedicate significant attention to organisational coherence between its employees and the brand values. Additionally, SPO companies are more conscious about the need to market the brand values that do not conform to their standard day-to-day business activities to customers. Conversely, CPO companies focus their efforts on retaining and attracting employees. To them, product knowledge is by far the most important attribute a brand ambassador is meant to transfer to customers. Regardless, the consensus amongst all participants is that brand ambassadors best contribute to overall company success and brand loyalty through their interaction with customers, more frequently in the form of customer service interactions. Additionally, and as expected all participants consider the personal contact between employee and customer a critical aspect of being a brand ambassador. Therefore, the success of all brand activities is highly dependent on the individual employee. Furthermore, it was suggested that personal contact and physical

meetings are crucial in relaying brand values but more prevalently in maintaining relations between organisations.

Practical contributions

In addition to the theoretical contributions, this study also highlights several practical implications for (brand) managers in commoditized markets. In both SPO and CPO companies employees play an important role in creating a trustworthy environment for customers. However, trust plays a greater role in CPO companies. The complexity of the product results in the need to adequately transfer a large amount of product knowledge because the customer requires this product knowledge to trust the brand and its products (Ind et al., 2013; Anisimova & Sultan, 2014). In practice, CPO companies need to train their employees to ensure the correct product knowledge and high level of technical sophistication, that is not to say that this can be neglected by SPO companies, it just is not as crucial. Furthermore, the transmission of product knowledge alone is only a baseline that will theoretically lead to customer loyalty if the price quality performance ratio is considered to be advantageous by the customer. Unfortunately, the problem with commoditized markets is that it becomes increasingly difficult, and in some cases near impossible to distinguish yourself based on the price-quality performance ratio alone. Therefore, product knowledge and technical ability alone is usually not enough for an employee to become a brand ambassador or enough to generate brand loyalty. One way to escape the commodity trap is through brand management. It is possible to attain a higher degree of brand ambassadorship by motivating and training employees to behave in accordance with the brand (Xiong & King, 2015). Additionally, companies need to seek a brand proposition that conforms to market demands. Moreover, the results in this study indicate that the existing organisational culture of the company in question should take a leading role in determining brand strategy. There is only one organisation that deviates from this line of thought, however, they as a start-up had a unique and clear brand proposition that is still relevant today. Lastly, employee brand

perception is important, in fact, employees will likely find intrinsic motivational drivers when brand values relate positively to their own beliefs. Naturally, a positive view of working for the company itself is required to foster a positive brand perception. This can be aided by creating a healthy and peaceful work environment and crucially fair remuneration and labour agreements (Koivisto & Mattila, 2018). Ultimately, the level of technical sophistication, the ability of an individual employee to accommodate and emit brand values, and the employee brand perception will lead to brand ambassadors who can more credibly and effectively shape positive brand experiences in line with the brand identity of the organisation.

Now onto the effects themselves, brand ambassadors have the potential to improve all interactions customers have with an organisation. As such, managers should consider which parts of the organisation would benefit the most from brand ambassadorship. This is especially important if there are budgetary or other limitations an organisation may have to conduct internal branding. This study found that in CPO companies the focus was primarily on sales teams and by exception on individuals who due to various reasons frequently interact with customers. Whereas SPO companies would typically make greater effort to encourage brand ambassadorial behaviour amongst most of its organisation. Secondly, managers should consider what kind of experience they wish to evoke from the interaction a customer has with the brand ambassador. The results found there to be a trend where companies wish to guarantee reliability, this is seemingly related to the need to create trust. In fact, reliability was very important to those firms that supply industrial products and assembly line components. However, this does not need to be the case as evidenced by firms with in-house production or exceptional levels of expertise. These organisations wish to market their problem solution capacity. Needless to say, this problem solution capacity is a form of reliability however it is enhanced with a level of flexibility. The latter proposition is obviously superior however, it requires organisational fit, not all organisations will be able to offer said flexibility. Moreover, in some cases there may not even be a demand for high levels of expertise, this is common in SPO companies. As such, it is important to consider

organisational fit and market demands when designing a brand experience. However, in SPO companies it is common to see quick reaction and decision times, essentially, they attempt to improve communication channels primarily to guarantee ease of doing business with them. But there is no reason why CPO companies would not be able to do the same, and in many cases they already do. Either way, once reliability is guaranteed companies typically decide to focus on flexibility and ease of use. These are all experiences that pertain directly to core business activities. However, brands can contain values indirectly related to business activities. Managers must decide whether they focus their brand on their products and organisation alone or if they wish to incorporate outside influences and values. The results in this study indicate the more complex a product becomes the likelier the parent organisation is to focus their brand proposition on the product alone. Vice versa, simple products attract brand propositions that include values unrelated to the product.

Limitations and future research

As with any form of research, limitations exist that need to be acknowledged. For one, the finding that CPO companies neglect to incorporate brand values unrelated to technical expertise and product knowledge into their brand ambassadors needs to be further studied. A quantitative study is required to uncover whether this phenomenon exists in specific market segments or if it was particular to my participants. It is unlikely CPO companies share the view that technical sophistication alone is sufficient for their brand proposition, however, the results indicate it is much likelier to play a prominent role in their brand proposition. Conversely, it would also be prudent to study whether SPO companies can focus on technical sophistication in their brand proposition and compare those findings to the same study in CPO companies. Additionally, a quantitative study researching whether this focus on technical expertise, or rather the relative negligence of brand ambassadorship on an organisation-wide scale has any negative consequences to the CPO companies.

The participants are all big players in their respective markets supplying worldwide, however, 5 out of 6 of these companies would classify as SMEs, whereas company E is a large enterprise. A sentiment prominent in the SMEs, especially the smaller ones, is that they struggle to justify an investment in brand ambassadorship or branding. As such, a study focussing on the advantages of brand ambassadorship in SMEs could be worthwhile, to uncover whether and under which circumstances brand ambassadorship is justified and beneficial to the organisation.

This study found four prerequisites that need to be met to enable effective brand ambassadorship. But it must be noted that the focus of this research was not on finding prerequisites for brand ambassadorship. However, the participants all mentioned at least some of the aspects and it became evident that there is demand for academic research in these topics. As such, a study focussing on prerequisites, or a single prerequisite to brand ambassadorship and how to fulfil them would be valuable. Especially, as it may aid companies in recruiting and training future brand ambassadors. In fact, some participants mentioned the need for recommendations about brand training and how to conduct it. With half of the participants admitting that their current brand training practices are too shallow.

Lastly, the effects of brand ambassadors on brand loyalty are essentially moderated through brand experiences. In some cases, it may even be possible to consider brand ambassadorship as a mediator improving several attributes contributing to the creation of positive brand experiences; improved communications, product knowledge, quality of service, market fit and organisational fit. It is valuable to research these attributes to generate findings as to how they individually affect and relate to other attributes, the creation of positive experiences, brand ambassadorship and possibly brand loyalty.

References

Aaker, David A. (1991). Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name. New York: The Free Press.

Ambler, T. F. J. (1992). The Role of Duty Free in Global Marketing. Business Strategy Review, 3(3), 57–72. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8616.1992.tb00035.x

Anisimova, T., & Sultan, P. (2014). The Role of Brand Communications in Consumer Purchases of Organic Foods: A Research Framework. Journal of Food Products Marketing, 20(5), 511–532. https://doi.org/10.1080/10454446.2012.728984

Bendixen, M., Bukasa, K. A., & Abratt, R. (2004). Brand equity in the business-to-business market. Industrial Marketing Management, 33(5), 371–380. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2003.10.001

Berry, L., Seltman, D. (2007). Building a strong services brand: Lessons from Mayo Clinic. *Journal of Business Horizons, 50 (3), pp. 199-209.*

Beverland, M., Napoli, J., & Lindgreen, A. (2007). Industrial global brand leadership: A capabilities view. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *36*(8), 1082–1093. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2006.08.007

Biedenbach, Galina & Marell, Agneta. (2010). The impact of customer experience on brand equity in a business-to-business services setting. Journal of Brand Management. 17. 10.1057/bm.2009.37.

Bieńkowska, A., Sałamacha, A., & Tworek, K. (2020). The Role of Employees in Shaping Brand Performance. *Forum Scientiae Oeconomia*, *8*(nr 2), 93–107. https://doi.org/10.23762/FSO _VOL 8_NO2_6

Boudier, E., Reeves. M. (2015). Escaping the Doghouse: Winning in Commoditized Markets. Boston Consultancy Group (BSG)

Brakus, J. Josko, Bernd H. Schmitt, & Lia Zarantonello (2009), ''Brand Experience: What Is It? How Is It Measured? Does It Affect Loyalty?'' Journal of Marketing, 73 (May), 52-68.

Bravo, R., Buil, I., de Chernatony, L., & Martínez, E. (2017). Managing brand identity: Effects on the employees. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, *35*(1), 2–23. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJBM-10-2015-0148

Burkitt, H & Zealley, J. (2006). Marketing Excellence: Winning companies reveal the secrets of their success. London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Caves, R.E., Williamson P.J., (1985). What is Product Differentiation, really?. Journal of Industrial Economics 34 (2), 113-132.

Copeland, M. T. (1923). Relation of consumers' buying habits to marketing methods. *Harvard Business Review, 1, pp. 282-289.*

Dean, D., Arroyo-Gamez, R. E., Punjaisri, K., & Pich, C. (2016). Internal brand co-creation: The experiential brand meaning cycle in higher education. Journal of Business Research, 69(8), 3041–3048. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.019

Doney, P., Barry, J., & Abratt, R. (2007). Trust determinants and outcomes in global B2B service. *European Journal of Marketing*, *41*, 1096–1116. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560710773363

Fournier, S .and Lee, L. (2009) Getting brand communities right. Harvard Business Review 87 (4): 105 – 111.

Freeman, R. E. (2010). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139192675

Gelb, B. & Rangarajan, D. 2014, "Employee contributions to brand equity", California management review, vol. 56, no. 2, pp. 95-112.

Harrod, R. F., & Chamberlin, E. (1933). *The Theory of Monopolistic Competition. The Economic Journal, 43(172), 661.* doi:10.2307/2224511

Henkel, S., Tomczak, T., Heitmann, M., & Herrmann, A. (2007). Managing brand consistent employee behaviour: Relevance and managerial control of behavioural branding. Journal of Product & Brand Management, 16(5), 310–320. https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420710779609

Hussain, K., Jing, F., Junaid, M., Zaman, Q.U. and Shi, H. (2020), "The role of co-creation experience in engaging customers with service brands", Journal of Product & Brand Management, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 12-27. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-08-2019-2537

Iglesias, O., Landgraf, P., Ind, N., Markovic, S., & Koporcic, N. (2020). Corporate brand identity co-creation in business-to-business contexts. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *85*, 32–43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2019.09.008

Ind, N., Iglesias, O., & Schultz, M. (2013). Building Brands Together: Emergence and Outcomes of Co-Creation. *California Management Review*, *55*(3), 5–26. https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2013.55.3.5

Kapferer, J.-N. (2008). *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*. Kogan Page Publishers.

Keller, K. (2001). *Building customer-based brand equity: A blueprint for creating strong brands*. Undefined. /paper/Building-customer-based-brand-equity-%3A-a-blueprint-Keller/2f1d660f9f3f98ec6f28c893255b6f68e2ad7ce9

Keller, K. L. (2009) Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment, Journal of Marketing Communications, 15:2-3, 139-155, DOI: 10.1080/13527260902757530

Khan, R.N. (2017), "Relationship between reputation perception and job pursuit intention in the private sector", International Journal of Economics and Management Sciences, Vol. 6, p. 422, Doi: 10.4172/2162-6359.1000422.

Kimpakorn, N., Tocquer, G. (2009) Employees' commitment to brands in the service sector: Luxury hotel chains in Thailand. Journal of Brand Management 16, 532–544. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550140

King, C., & Grace, D. (2008). Internal branding: Exploring the employee's perspective. *Journal of Brand Management*, *15*, 358–372. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550136

Ko, E., Phau, I., & Aiello, G. (2016). Luxury brand strategies and customer experiences: Contributions to theory and practice. Journal of Business Research, 69(12), 5749–5752. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.170

Koivisto, E., & Mattila, P. (2018). International fashion trade shows as platforms for experiential branding. Journal of Global Fashion Marketing, 9(2), 161–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2018.1435295

Kotler, P., & Pföertsch, W. (2006). B2B Brand Management. The Marketing Review, 7. https://doi.org/10.1362/146934707X205877

Kristal, S. (2019). *Theory and practice of brand co-creation*.

Kumar, V., Petersen, J. A., & Leone, R. P. (2007). How valuable is word of mouth?. *Harvard business review*, *85*(10), 139.

LaSalle, D., and Britton, T.A. (2003) Priceless: Turning ordinary products into extraordinary experiences, Harvard Business School Press, Boston.

Love, L. F., & Singh, P. (2011). Workplace Branding: Leveraging Human Resources Management Practices for Competitive Advantage Through "Best Employer" Surveys. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *26*(2), 175. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-011-9226-5

Maheshwari, V., Gunesh, P., Lodorfos, G. and Konstantopoulou, A. (2017), "Exploring HR practitioners' perspective on employer branding and its role in organisational attractiveness and talent management", International Journal of Organizational Analysis, Vol. 25 No. 5, pp. 742-61.

Marquardt, A.J., Golicic, S.L. and Davis, D.F. (2011), "B2B services branding in the logistics services industry", Journal of Services Marketing, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 47-57. https://doi.org/10.1108/08876041111107050

Mathers, N., Fox, N., & Hunn, A. (2002). Trent Focus for Research and Development in Primary Health Care Using Interviews in a Research Project.

Meyer, C., & Schwager, A. (2007). Understanding Customer Experience. *Harvard Business Review*, 13.

Mody, M., Suess, C., & Lehto, X. (2019). Going back to its roots: Can hospitableness provide hotels competitive advantage over the sharing economy? International Journal of Hospitality Management, 76, 286–298. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.05.017

Möller, Jana & Herm, Steffen, 2013. "Shaping Retail Brand Personality Perceptions by Bodily Experiences," Journal of Retailing, Elsevier, vol. 89(4), pages 438-446.

Morokane, P., Chiba, M., & Kleyn, N. (2016). Drivers of employee propensity to endorse their corporate brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, *23*(1), 55–66. https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2015.47

Motta-Filho, M. (2020). Brand experience manual: Bridging the gap between brand strategy and customer experience. Review of Managerial Science. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-020-00399-9

Naidoo, V. (2013). *The alignment of internal and external branding in a leader group*.

Nikhashemi, S. R., Jebarajakirthy, C., & Nusair, K. (2019). Uncovering the roles of retail brand experience and brand love in the apparel industry: Non-linear structural equation modelling approach. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 48, 122–135. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.014

Östrerle, B. Kuhn, M. M., & Henseler, J. (2018). *Brand Worlds: Introducing experiential marketing to B2B branding.* Industrial Marketing Management, 72, 71-98. Doi: 10.1016/j.indmarman.2018.04.015

Philip Kotler, Waldemar Pföertsch, (2007) *"Being known or being one of many: the need for brand management for business‑to‑business (B2B) companies",* Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, Vol. 22 Issue: 6, pp.357-362, doi:10.1108/08858620710780118

Pratap, S., Gupta, A., Mateen, A. and Mahto, K. (2016), "Playing games, receiving gifts, creating experiences and building brands", Marketing Intelligence & Planning, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 486-503. https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-10-2014-0194

Rambocas, M., M. Kirpalani, V. and Simms, E. (2014), "Building brand equity in retail banks: the case of Trinidad and Tobago", International Journal of Bank Marketing, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 300-320. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJBM-11-2013-0136

Reimann, M., Schilke, O., & Thomas, J. S. (2010). Toward an understanding of industry commoditization: Its nature and role in evolving marketing competition. International Journal of Research in Marketing, 27(2), 188–197. Doi: 10.1016/j.ijresmar.2009.10.001

Robinson, J. (1933). "The Economics of Imperfect Competition", *London: Macmillan, St. Martin's Press.*

Şahin, A., Zehir, C., & Kitapci, H. (2011). The Effects of Brand Experiences, Trust and Satisfaction on Building Brand Loyalty; An Empirical Research On Global Brands. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *24*, 1288–1301. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.09.143

Sakka, G., & Ahammad, M. F. (2020). Unpacking the relationship between employee brand ambassadorship and employee social media usage through employee wellbeing in workplace: A theoretical contribution. *Journal of Business Research*, *119*, 354–363. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.038

Silveira, C., Lages, C. & Simões, C. (2013). Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research,* 66. DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.020.

Törmälä, M. and Saraniemi, S. (2018), "The roles of business partners in corporate brand image co-creation", Journal of Product and Brand Management, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 29-40.

Üçok Hughes, M., Bendoni, W.K. and Pehlivan, E. (2016), "Storygiving as a co-creation tool for luxury brands in the age of the internet: a love story by Tiffany and thousands of lovers", Journal of Product & Brand Management, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 357-364. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-09-2015-0970

Vallaster, C. and Lindgreen, A. (2011), "Corporate brand strategy formation: Brand actors and the situational context for a business-to-business brand", Industrial Marketing Management, Vol. 40 No. 7, pp. 1133-1143.

Vallaster, C., & de Chernatony, L. (2005). Internationalisation of Services Brands: The Role of Leadership During the Internal Brand Building Process. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *21*(1–2), 181–203. https://doi.org/10.1362/0267257053166839

Vallaster, C., & Wallpach, S. von. (2011). *Brand Meaning Co-creation of Newcomers: A Founder's Perspective*. https://research.cbs.dk/en/publications/brand-meaning-co-creation-of-newcomers-a-founders-perspective

Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2008). Service-dominant logic: Continuing the evolution. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *36*(1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-007-0069-6

Verhoef, P. C., Lemon, K. N., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M., & Schlesinger, L. A. (2009). Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics, and Management Strategies. Journal of Retailing, 85(1), 31–41. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2008.11.001

Xiong, L., & King, C. (2015). Motivational drivers that fuel employees to champion the hospitality brand. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *44*, 58–69. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2014.10.009

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. SAGE.

Zhang, J., Cai, L. A., & Kavanaugh, R. R. (2008). Dimensions in Building Brand Experience for Economy Hotels—A Case of Emerging Market. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, *4*(1), 61–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160802099782

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview questions

Employee brand affinity

Employee brand perception

- What does branding mean to you?
- Do you actively involve branding into your work practices when interacting with customers?
    - What are the goals of branding in your organisation?
        - What is the role of brand loyalty?
- What is your opinion about these branding goals? Do you believe they are suitable or comprehensive enough? And more importantly do you think they suit the company?
- What is your opinion about the services and products offered and the brand?
    - Do you consider services and products different to the brand? Ask about the relationship between brand and product/services...

Trained and innate brand ability

- How were you introduced to the organisation?
    - Ask about onboarding or introduction processes
- Have you received training from the company?
    - Have you received any brand specific training?

Internal communications

- How do you receive brand relevant information?
    - Are you told to behave or act in specific ways when servicing customers?
        - Is there a code of conduct?
- Does the company make use of feedback systems or ask about employee opinion on the services/products offered or the brand itself?

Brand loyalty & Ambassadorship

Brand loyalty

- Do you have examples or evidence that your branding practices leads to brand loyalty?
    - Relationship brand ambassadorship to brand loyalty
- Is brand loyalty is generated from non-branding practices?
- Do you consider yourself a brand ambassador?
- What do you think are some of the main advantages of brand ambassadorship? Specifically, does it benefit customers?
    - Role of client and customer interactions

Brand interactions

- What experiences and interactions do you aim to create for customers?
    - Have you found certain practices or events to be particularly effective for engaging customers with the brand or product?
        - What is the role of customers in this process?

- What is the role of brand ambassadorship in creating these interactions and experiences?
    - Does brand ambassadorship enable the creation of these experiences?
- Do the aforementioned interactions and experiences actively improve customer brand loyalty?
    - What effects do you think does your brand ambassadorship have on your customers' brand loyalty?
        - How important are employee-customer interactions in this process?
        - In this research the focus has been on increased brand loyalty, what are your thoughts on this?
            - Are there possibly other effects (that I did not mention) of brand ambassadorship?