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School of Economics and Management

Open-source Branding

*How Consumers develop a Corporate Brand image through
Instagram – An Exploratory Single-case Study*

by

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Abstract

Title: Open-source Branding: How consumers develop a Corporate Brand Image through Instagram- An Exploratory Single-Case Study.

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Keywords: Open-source branding, co-creation of value, brand image, brand development, brand stories, social media, Instagram, IKEA.

Research problem: The research problem originates from the shifted power balance through the rise of social media. Whereby, organizational control of the brand image is starting to fade. Thus, further research is needed, whether an open-source branding strategy truly affects consumers' perceptions of a brand.

Thesis purpose: The purpose of this research is to analyze how consumers experience a brand through social media and what implications the interaction between consumer-consumers and consumer-brands have on the company's brand image. By mediating and illuminating the importance of involving the consumers into the 'open-source' branding process on social media, through the concept of co-creation of value.

Theoretical framework: The framework consists of three interrelated concepts, open-source branding, co-creation and brand image.

Methodology: The research emphasizes an exploratory single-case study with a qualitative and multisided approach, consisting of semi-structured in-depth interviews with one IKEA representative as key informant and seven consumer interviews. In addition, a virtual observation on the focal channel of Instagram has been conducted.

Findings: The main findings gathered underline the evolvement of IKEA's brand image from a consumer perceptive. From a company perspective, the open-source paradigm has been enhanced, in greater extent.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Today, digital devices have been developed to become a natural part of our communication patterns in the everyday life. A combination of new technology with the Internet's proliferation and accessibility has led to a paradigm shift with new concepts such as smartphones and tablets. A good example illustrating this shift is the Ericsson ConsumerLab Trend Report, showing that 46 % of children growing up with tablets or smartphones expect everything else to be connected (Ericsson, 2015). With this progress people today are even more connected to the online world and spend more time than ever on social platforms (Media Barometern, 2013).

A relatively new phenomenon, part of the empowerment process is open-source branding, inviting consumers to participate in the creation process of a brand. Due to the advent of Internet and the way people are able to interact with each other, thus, Web 2.0 and social media, consumers' voices and opinions are more effective and efficient than ever (Gensler et al., 2013). In turn, this shift makes it easier for consumers to integrate with brands, getting the latest product launches, take part of a promotion or get involved in marketing campaigns. To cope with this new era, brands have started to re-conceptualize their branding strategy, incorporating consumers into a joint co-creation making of the brand. The shift is defined by the on-going situation where broadcasting marketing is replaced with engaging and interactive media usage, especially through smartphones and social media (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009).

1.2 Problem formulation

“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is – it is what consumers tell each other it is.”
(Scott Cook, co-founder Intuit; mentioned in Gensler et al., 2013: 424).

Open-source branding is a paradigm that has changed the way upon how to look on external partners (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Gensler et al. 2013; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000). Although, the literature within the field of open-source branding highlights the importance of co-created branding, there is a further need for understanding how these joint co-creation activities on social media affect consumers’ perception towards a brand, that is, brand image (Keller, 1993).

The academic field, within co-creation processes, are described as important through which consumers are integrated (Ind, Iglesias and Schultz, 2013; Kozinets, 2014). The authors Ind, Iglesias and Schultz (2013) highlight insights from analyzed co-creation processes on social media platforms as ways for consumers to express creativity, socialize and find fulfillment. Furthermore, Kozinets (2014) argues for co-creation as a social brand strategy to gather ideas from, finding and using consumer-generated content and develop authenticity through the originality of the consumers. Synonym with the recent research is the focus on how to develop a brand through the usage of consumers on social media platforms. Not mentioning how the consumer really reacts on acting on the behalf of companies, creating stronger brands.

What is interesting from the on-going research debate is the lack regarding how the consumers react on brand activities within the new digitalized era of branding. The effect of incorporating a co-creation strategy does not always have to automatically be positive, why it is interesting to understand the brand activities and the possible effect on the brand image. Introducing a brand into the social media environment could be compared to as a pinball game, not knowing the outcome of marketing activities located on social media platforms (Henning-Thorau, Hofacker and Bloching, 2013; Labrecque et al. 2013). Furthermore, Henning-Thorau, Hofacker and Bloching (2013) underpin the challenge of exposing the brand for outside reactions, not being able to manage consumer reactions on brand activities.

One way of trying to understand and form the development of a brand is through the concept of brand stories (Gensler et al., 2013). The author (ibid) argues for the incorporation of consumer-generated stories in the branding process, making it congruent to the image of the consumer. Furthermore, Huang (2010) elaborates with the concept of brand stories and how brand stories help consumers to understand and perceive a certain brand.

Although, other recent researchers (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012; Thompson & Malaviya, 2013) goes in the other direction arguing that consumer-generated content only in some cases benefit the brand. For example, using consumer-generated stories can in some cases have the opposite effect, undermining the consumer relationship by using an easy way to be persuasive (Thompson & Malaviya, 2013).

Bearing this theoretical discussion in mind, brand activities on social media platforms may cause different reactions. In order to better understand and gain knowledge from the confusion of reactions from brand activities, it is central to provide further research of the outcome due to the reactions and their influence on the perceived brand image. Whereby this research takes it start and wants to provide a contribution to the field of modern branding through co-creation on social media, open-source branding.

1.3 Research purpose and questions

The purpose of this research is to provide a contribution to the on-going theoretical debate regarding how open-source branding and co-created branding activities affects consumers and their perceived brand image. By analyzing, understanding and discussing co-creation processes between a brand and its consumers through social media, the researchers wants to analyze how the brand image gets affected through co-created branding activities. In order to fulfil the given purpose the following research questions is provided;

RQ1: How is co-created branding activities illustrated on IKEA Sweden's Instagram account with their consumers?

RQ2: How has the perceived brand image of IKEA evolved through the co-created branding activities on IKEA Sweden's Instagram account?

1.4 Research object

To be able to analyze and answer the given purpose and research questions the researchers have decided upon a single-case study. The chosen research object is the international retail company IKEA. The company offers everything from interior and ready-to-assemble furniture focusing on low pricing and a wide customer segment, or as they describe their business concept themselves “To create a better everyday life for the many people” (IKEA, 2015).

The company will be analyzed from the social media platform Instagram and via conducted interviews. Doing this will help the research to better understand co-created brand activities and their impact on the brand image. On the social media platform the focus will be on IKEA Sweden, since the company is divided within countries on the platform. Generally described, the study will analyze a certain campaign called: ‘IKEA Do it yourself’. The campaign itself encourages consumers to upload their own pictures of modified IKEA products with the specific ‘IKEA Do it yourself’ hashtag, making it possible for other consumers to take part of the picture within the category.

In detail, the study will at first analyze co-created brand activity on IKEA Sweden's Instagram account via the campaign, see above, related to the first theorization. In order to analyze, understand and enlighten the open-source branding phenomenon. Moreover, the study will have a second stage related to the second research question and theorization, thus, analyzes the interviews and the consumer’s perception towards IKEA’s brand, that is, brand image. With the two different theorizations the researcher's intention is to provide an adequate empirical analysis, providing material to fulfill the given purpose and research questions.

2 Literature review

This chapter will start with a presentation of previous research contributions in order to get a theoretical background to the research. Furthermore, theorizations will elaborate and illustrate how this research will customize the mentioned literature into models. Thus, will clarify the author's interpretations of the existing literature and presents the key concepts used within the research, utilized to structure the empirical analysis.

2.1 Open-source branding

2.1.1 Introduction to open-source branding

Corporate branding has for long been synonymous with the idea of creating an attractive image in order to magnetize customers and influence buyers (Kapferer, 2008). This in-house approach mediates the perspective that it is built upon the company's perception of what an attractive brand constitutes of. According to Edelman (2010) this is a timeworn approach that is synonym to the age when digital devices and the Internet was not in place. In line with the traditional brand-building model founded on a district controlled approach (Jones, 1999), which assumes that customers are passive recipients of value (Normann & Ramirez, 1993). Furthermore, Edelman (2010) describes the new era, as a game changer for how to build a sustainable brand. Berthon et al. (2012) shares the same opinions as Edelman (2010) of traditional branding approaches, hence, at the same time stress opportunities, as well as challenges, with integrating consumers into the branding process. Nevertheless, contradictions between the branding literatures exist. Several researchers (Ind & Riondino, 2001; Vernuccio, Barbarossa, Giraldi, & Ceccotti, 2012), indicates that there is no need to elaborate and develop theories of how the concept of branding occur in an online environment, in contrast to an 'offline' environment;

A brand is a brand regardless of its environment. What is different is the way the brand's essence is executed. To thrive with brands on the Internet a looser form of brand control is needed, welcoming the active participation of consumers (De Chernatony, 2001, p. 193).

2.1.2 Challenges with open-source branding

The main challenge with open-source branding originates in the development of new technology. These have made an impact on our society in general, making communication more simplified and flexible than ever (Berthon et al., 2012). Due to this fact, companies have new platforms to consider in order being at the same place where potential customers are located. But starting up on digital platforms with a strategy not in line with this new era, will lead to failure, since the power shift due to the digital information society (Fournier and Avery, 2011). Barwise and Meehan (2010) confirms this and points out that companies need to adapt to this new environment that i.e. social media has developed, in order to be successful.

The concept of open-source branding is clearly here to stay and will in greater extent be more frequently applied by companies. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61) Web 2.0 is “a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion”.

Thus, the new way of understanding how to build a brand, the old paradigm where producers produced the brand and the consumers consumed it, will be much more loosened up. Pitt et al. (2006: 121) describes the evolutionary process of brands through an open-source lens as a development where the margins between producers and users are starting to fade. Moreover, the authors coin the expression “prosumption” which relates to production and consumption. Hence, the control is radically decentralized and further explained as “one more step in this evolutionary process, which will require marketing academics and practitioners to question once more what brands do for both producers and consumers (ibid, 2006: 120).”

2.1.3 Aspects of open source branding

According to Vernuccio (2014) a brand’s communication through social media are emerging by the core elements of *interactivity* and *openness*, provided through Web 2.0. In relation, Hatch and Schultz (2003: 1046) have accentuated how brands “acts as a focal point for the attention, interest and activity stakeholders bring to a corporation”. However, the authors (ibid) suggest a managerial tool that imposes an effective brand-building. The tool evaluates the existence and the extension of gaps between three integrated and interdependent elements of strategic management, control and planning of the identity.

Furthermore, Vernuccio (2014: 216) determines how, in such online environment, “there can be a steady growth in the stakeholders’ contribution to the evolution of a corporate identity based on well-grounded values”. Thus, the strategic vision and organizational culture are included as well (Gregory, 2007; Roper & Davies, 2007). In order to build an effectively corporate brand, these three elements need to be aligned with each other as narrow as possible, with customers and non-customer stakeholders in regard (Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

Openness in open-source branding

As the concept of open-source branding has been determined, previously researchers abstract the knowledge of how the customers are becoming more central in the branding process. Gregory (2007) extracts the concept of how the corporate brand is “negotiated”, by the involving stakeholders. Intensely, within the interactively online environment, the participants are acknowledged as active actors of the co-creation process (e.g. Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, 2004a, 2004b; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). However, as Leitch and Richardson (2003: 1074) underpins “Every interaction is an enactment of the organizational identity, which may serve to establish that identity or transform it in some way”. That is, from a traditional point of view, a process that have been governed by the top management (Balmer, 2001), which is advancing into a process whereby the responsibility is shared among and with the stakeholders, that is, a ‘participatory’ process (Vernuccio, 2014).

In an online environment the branding process is perceived as “dynamic and social” (Merz, He & Vargo, 2009: 332), hence, brands’ lack control in such environments (e.g. Fournier & Avery, 2011; Gensler et al., 2013). However, King (1991) notes, a positive effect that may be converted into an opportunity of vaster stages of meaningfulness and flexibility. Thus, will result in an approach of offering and configure the focal brand in a truly “open” way (ibid), with a vast intangible components (Mairinger, 2008; Pitt, et al., 2006). Moreover, according to Ind and Bjerke (2007: 140); “the only real control will be in having an authentic, participative brand”, which can be perceived as an unstable corporate brand (Vernuccio, 2014).

Urde (2003, see also 2013) portrays a brand with the basis on a set of core values, that will be unchangeable, even in a participatory process. In the environment of social media where the content is produced and reproduced by a brand and its stakeholders, the stakeholders become ‘co-protagonists’ (Vernuccio, 2014: 217).

Previous researches of online communities have determined and categorized how users’ becomes motivated to participation, into two vast categories of *rational* and *emotional* (e.g. Hagel & Armstrong, 1997; see also Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008). These categories extracts, according to Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008: 2) into “Rational motivations may include sharing knowledge with the world (knowledge sharing) and advocating a particular stand toward an issue (advocacy); emotional motivations may include building social connections with friends, relatives, or other Internet users (social connections) or entertainment (self-expression)”.

Interactivity in open-source branding

Interactivity has been defined in a vast amount of perspectives and aspects (e.g. Alba et al., 1997; Jensen, 1998). According to Liu and Shrum (2002; see also McMillian and Hwang, 2002) aspects regarding two-way communication, user control and synchronicity is emphasized. Meanwhile Berthon, Pitt and Watson (1996) emphasize ‘web interactivity’ by its simplicity, underpinning how direct communication between an organization and their users occurs, regardless of time or distance. Vernuccio (2014) further emphasizes how social media has been determined into two focal characteristics of interaction, defined by Bordewijk and Van Kaam (1986) as ‘consultation interactivity’ and by Jensen (1998) as ‘conversational interactivity’. The first definition is a central source based by the users who are the main controllers of the outcome, such modes can be determined into today’s RSS systems, podcasts, video-streaming services and closed content communities (Vernuccio, 2014). The latter definition includes a more open and social approach where all users who engage create the content. Whereby, the users wield the maximum level of the created control and dissemination, of brand related material, since there is no powerful central, rather individual ‘power’ (ibid), which will have a function in the present research’s theorization and analysis, illustrated as conversation between the focal brand and their consumers, in the environment of Instagram. Thus, conversational interactivity can be exemplified as content or communication flow within open forums or social networks. Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008) distinguish two key elements within the relational and social dimensions of exchange, termly defined as ‘knowledge sharing’ and ‘social connections’, including the self-expression scope.

2.1.4 Brand stories

The use of brand stories as a marketing tool is well-written about in the academic field. According to Huang (2010: 308) many well-known brands use stories in order “ [...] to create favorable images and beliefs in consumers’ minds”. Furthermore, this perspective is supported by Mckee (1997) who argues that a brand should consider the structure of a story to become more well-known and appreciated by consumers. Hence, constructing a brand story could help communicating meanings and values of a certain product or service (Huang, 2010). Escalas (2004) underpins how individuals learn to understand and see the world through stories that are common cultural elements in their life. Stories are also referred to narratives (Shankar, Elliott & Goulding, 2001), whereby the plot of the story is defined as “an ordered sequence of events made coherent by causality, linear structure, and purpose” (Stern, 1998: 55). Moreover, when describing our lives it is almost impossible doing it without the existence of stories (Gergen & Gergen, 1988), since they facilitate the process of understanding the world in an orderly fashion, independent of the format of medium, including oral, written and visual presented content (Padgett and Allen, 1997). Huang (2010) highlights how stories are largely used to build relationships and to communicate with people, since stories have the power of inviting the audience to imagination. Through this power of stories, they influence the receiver to change their stand point, identification and judgment (Loebbert, 2005).

2.1.5 Firm-generated brand stories

The concept of firm-generated brand stories have developed from a traditional approach where the brand story is mass-communicated e.g. through advertising (Gensler et al., 2013). Hence, the communication flows in a one-way direction, from the company, internally, to external parties such as consumers. The story itself was constructed in order to help the outside members to make sense and complement their own thoughts with an institutional memory (Boje, 1995). Through this perspective it is the brand itself who decides upon how the story would be told, not including any external sources. An essential aspect as Huang (2010) describes is that every brand has its own storyline, originated and produced within the company. How this is told is of importance in the creation process of a firm-generated brand story. The aim of the story is to create a theme (ibid), which in turn pro-actively helps to strengthen the relationship with consumers and improve sales (Gensler et al., 2013). In the coming sections, the theoretical frame will describe brand stories from a consumer perspective, and lastly, how consumer and companies can incorporate each other’s stories.

2.1.6 Consumer-generated brand stories

The consumers' voice has, thanks to development within technology, become a more powerful tool in the process of building a brand. Barwise and Meehan (2010) argues that the advent of social media has empowered the consumers and strengthened their position towards corporations. In detail, the increasing information flow between consumers localized on social media platforms has replaced away the traditional branding paradigm (ibid). Consumer-generated brand stories refer to how the consumers themselves create their version of an experience related to a product or service, and indirectly a brand. Gensler et al. (2013) discuss how the stories generated by the consumers can be positive or negative and compared to traditional channels social media has much more impact. In turn, the stories composed by the consumers has fundamentally changed the brand story process, since the consumers has become the story generator (Barwise and Meehan, 2010).

2.1.7 Coordinating brand stories

To make an impact on the brand's performance, Gensler et al. (2013:244) highlights how brands can "stimulate and promote consumer-generated brand stories that benefit the brand, as well as react to negative consumer-generated brand stories that harm the brand". Brands are not doomed to listen and monitor consumer-generated brand stories, but actively influence consumers' brand stories through different online and offline activities and communication strategies. Thus, the arguments regarding how branding on social media has become more similar to public relations (e.g. Fournier and Avery, 2011), it is essential to amplify the earned positive media coverage and react on the negative. Moreover, brands may use consumer-generated brand stories as complement to the brand's own stories. Gensler et al. (2013) portrays how this mutual creation of a brand story can be beneficial, by *coordinating consumer-generated brand stories* with their own, the brand can ensure its success on the marketplace. Simultaneously, as consumers produce and reproduce, discuss and further disseminate brand stories generated by consumers, new connections are created and *consumer-brand networks* are established (ibid). However, in relation to open-source branding, the active organizational behavior of incorporating and aligning consumer-generated brand stories into the focal brand story is essential. This 'technical' process will be illustrated in the upcoming section.

2.2 The co-creation process

2.2.1 What it is & what it is not

The concept co-creation of value is well researched, argued and determined as a paradigm in marketing during the beginning of the 21st century (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Vargo and Lusch (2004) explicitly highlight the development of the concept of value creation in a historical perspective. However, the concept was first introduced by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000). The authors describe co-creation as a market oriented business strategy, since it is affecting the organization's business model. Furthermore, the customer shall be included in the creation process of value as a co-producer or co-creator of the desired value for both parts (e.g. Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; 2002; 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004), whereby an equal relationship that requires a mutual giving and taking is central. Table 1 shows what the concept of co-creation is and what it is not, in order to clarify the definition;

What Co-creation is Not:	What Co-creation is:
Customer focus.	Co-creation is about <i>joint</i> creation of value by the company and the customer. It is not the firm trying to please the customer.
Customer is king or always right.	Allowing the customer to co-construct the service experience to suit her context.
Delivering good customer service or pampering the customer with lavish customer service.	Joint problem definition and problem solving.
Mass customization of offerings that suit the industry's supply chain.	Creating an experience environment in which consumers can have active dialogue and co-construct personalized experiences; product may be the same (i.e., Lego Mindstorms) but customers can construct different experiences.
Transfer of activities from the firm to the customer as in self-service.	Experience variety.
Customer as product manager or co-designing products and services.	Experience of one.
Product variety.	Experiencing the business as consumers do in real time
Segment of one.	Continuous dialogue.
Meticulous Market research.	Co-constructing personalized experiences.
Staging experiences.	Innovating experience environments for new co-creation experiences.
Demand-side innovation for new products and services.	

Table 1: The concept of Co-Creation, what it is not and what it is. Source: Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b).

In the co-creation of value process the customers are perceived as valuable assets or as Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000: 80) describes it “The competence that customers bring is function of the knowledge and skills they possess, their willingness to learn and experiment, and their ability to engage in an active dialogue”. The business strategy has changed from a “single company, to a family of businesses, and finally to what people call the ‘extended enterprise’, which consist of a central firm supported by a constellation of suppliers” (ibid: 81). Wider clusters of networks are created whereby competence is a “function of the collective knowledge available to the whole system - an enhanced network of traditional suppliers, manufacturers, partners, investors *and* customers” (ibid: 81). According to the authors (ibid), the customers shall not be excluded, but included in the value creation process.

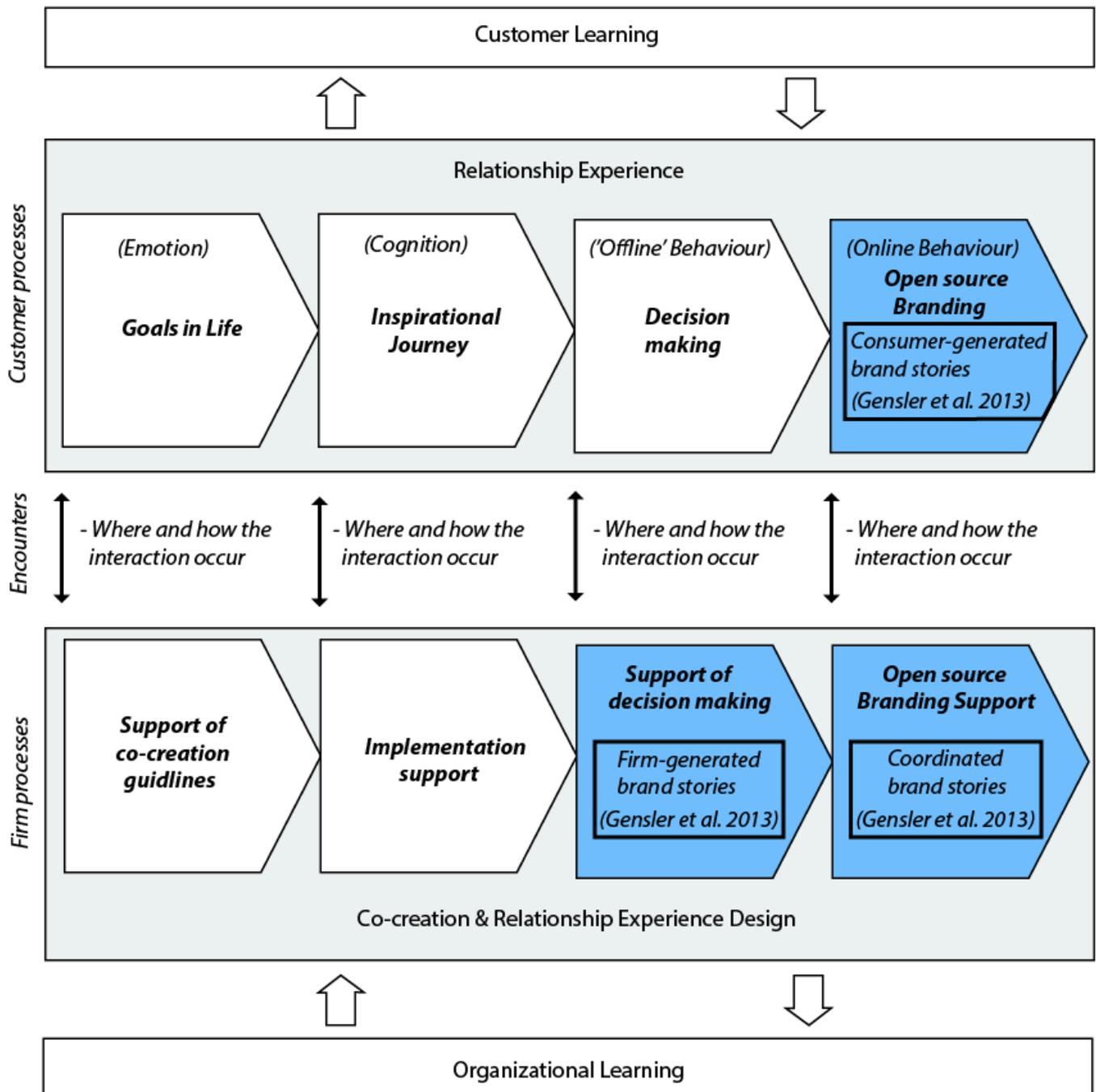
2.2.2 Theorization 1

This section will provide an elaboration of the conceptualized theories reviewed above. From the open-source branding literature and perspective, Gensler et al. (2013) framework of firm-, consumer-, and coordinated brand stories will be central. Thus, will be supported with additional literature regarding openness (e.g. Leitch & Richardson, 2003; Balmer, 2001; Vernuccio, 2014), interactivity (e.g. Jensen, 1998; Krishnamurthy & Dou, 2008; Vernuccio, 2014) and brand stories (e.g. Loebbert, 2005; Huang, 2010). The supported literature will be illustrated in the analysis, in comparison to the empirical material.

Nevertheless, theoretical concepts of open-source branding and co-creation of value defaults from dozens of researchers, as the literature review reveals. The authors of the present research have decided to combine these concepts into an analytical model, by incorporating the active online behaviour of the consumer's participation process of the open-source branding concept (i.e. Gensler et al., 2013; see also Huang, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011) within the conceptual framework of managing co-creation process (i.e. Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008, see also Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, 2004b; Vargo & Lusch, 2014).

Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) have established a conceptual framework of the co-creation process, with foundation from the work of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000, 2004a, 2004b) and Vargo and Lusch (2004). Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) describe the framework as a recursive process, where the exchange of content is in the form of co-creation, as model 1 illustrates.

The authors (ibid) state that, with this framework, organizations can increase the understanding of managing the value creation process and develop relationship experiences with their customers.



Model 1: Theorization model of the conceptual frameworks provided by Payne, Storbacka & Frow (2008) and Gensler et al. (2013), whereby the latter is illustrated with blue colour and source. Source: own model.

Model 1: Conceptual Framework of Co-creation of value. Source: Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008: 86).

- The framework represents the interconnections of process and the nature of reproduction in the co-creation experience (ibid). The black arrows illustrate the different interactions between an organization and its customers that result in respectively value creation process.
- The wider arrows between *Customer Learning* and *Relationship Experience* clarify how the customer is engaged in the *Customer Processes*, based upon the experience the customer have within the relationship (ibid). Payne, Storbacka and Frow (ibid) highlight how *Customer Learning* contributes to the extent of engagement for the forthcoming co-creation processes with the organization.
- In similarity the wider arrows between *Organizational Learning* and *Co-creation & Relationship Experience Design*, indicates how the organization is learning from their experiences within the relationship between its consumers (ibid). Moreover, the learning processes indicate an increasingly and development of the co-creation of value experience for both parties.

However, as model 1 illustrates the incorporation of the two focal concepts, a developed theoretical framework has been created in order to analyze the relationship between these concepts and how a brand with their consumers can co-create value, including the consumers in a greater extent. Whereby the present research underpins value of branding in a joint process with the focal brand and their Instagram co-creation participants.

Thus, will aim to answer this thesis first research question “How is co-created branding activities illustrated on IKEA Sweden’s Instagram account with their consumers?”

Nevertheless, how this model will be used, is by approaching the focal channel, Instagram, and IKEA Sweden’s presence there, with focus on their interaction and co-creation activities with their consumers. This research will extract and illustrate both consumer- and firm-generated brand stories, and then coordinated brand stories in line with Gensler et al. (2013) model of open-source branding, supported by the literature review, as mentioned above.

Then, the analysis will incorporate these stories within the behavioural functions of Payne, Storbacka and Frow's (2008) model of managing the co-creation process, additional, including the consumers way of thinking and their emotional approaches. Thus, will be supported with co-creation literature (e.g. Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014), applied to the case of IKEA Sweden's Instagram account.

Furthermore, from Gensler et al. (2013) framework of open-source branding, the researchers exclude the consumers in a great extent, in comparison to the conceptual framework by Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008). Hence, the researchers of the present thesis emphasize the importance of understanding the consumers, thus, is crucial in co-creation activities according to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a). Further, in line with Prahalad and Ramaswamy (ibid: 38) "we [as marketers] must explicitly recognize how deeply etched ways of thinking limit our ability to shift into co-creation mode". Thereby, consumers shall be incorporated in a greater extent, in ways of thinking and feeling (ibid; Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008). However, if co-creation of a brand's awareness is occurring through open-source branding, it is specially interesting to investigate how the evolvement of the consumer's perception towards the brand, that is, brand image (e.g. Keller, 1993) may have an impact, this, will be discussed and theorized in theorization 2.

Why this analytical model have been developed, is due to the connection between these theoretical concepts of open-source branding and co-creation needs to be highlighted in a greater extent than before, as arguing for above. Due to the paradigm of brand management through social media and Web 2.0, whereby the powershift have changed, thus, consumers' voices and actions have strengthened their role in the digital sphere (Fournier & Avery, 2010). Moreover, since the open-source branding process is a co-creation process by itself, an exchange of branded content between the focal brand and its consumers in a co-created approach (Huang, 2010; Gensler, et al., 2013; Fournier & Avery, 2011). Whereby the behavioural action from the consumer perception emphasize the co-creation of branding in an online environment (see e.g. Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, Vargo & Lusch, 2004 for the co-creation perception).

The following sections will bring up the different aspects around the central exchange of value between the focal brand and their consumers.

2.2.3 Relationship experiences

Several co-creation authors highlight the importance of transforming the passive participant to become active, in the co-creation process (e.g. Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, 2004b; Payne, Storbacka & Frow al., 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) have identified three elements in order to influence consumers to become active participants in the co-creation process. The elements are related to each other and essential in the relationship building process, consisting of emotion, cognition and behavior (see model 2). The elements have their foundation from earlier work on experiential marketing by consumer researchers (e.g. Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). However, these elements emphasize context, emotions, symbolic and non-utilitarian factors of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The element of *emotion* is a mental reaction, occurring after an event triggering an effect, for instance happiness or sadness (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008). However, Payne, Storbacka and Frow (ibid) emphasize an experience of consumption in general is positive, since the individual feels satisfied and becomes filled up with positive emotions and fantasies. Hence, can be negative in similar extent if the satisfaction is not fulfilled (ibid).

Cognition, is a term that can be used as a collection name for mental processes, build upon associations that awakened by sensory input (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008). The input varies depending on the individual's previously knowledge and experiences (ibid). The individual's cognition or thinking processes is very unique, depending on their life experiences and inner knowledge (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a). It is essential for the organization to identify how the organization thinks, distinguished from their customers, whereby Prahalad and Ramaswamy (ibid: 38) suggests "we [as marketers] must explicitly recognize how deeply etched ways of thinking limit our ability to shift into co-creation mode". The mental processes can be perceived as different thinking processes that awaken, when an individual comes in contact with pictures, texts, or discussions. From this the individual can associate to a positive or a negative memory, knowledge, experience or information (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008).

Behavior, as the last element, underpins the active action that is performed after an experience, founded in the previously elements, which in a positive direction, for instance occurs into consumption or sympathetic engagement on social media (ibid). Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008), explain these elements' vitality of a brand's relationship with their customers.

Meanwhile, it is of importance for the organization to enhance customers' positive feelings associated to memories, knowledge or information, which in turn leads to positive behavior and value creation process, in form of actions (ibid). Furthermore, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) states that the participation behavior can be explained through an information-process approach, hence, by complementing with positive experiences, the process will be even more enriching (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008).

2.2.4 Encounter processes in value creation

Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) suggest three forms of encounters in the interaction process, in order to facilitate and understand the value creation process. The first form, *communication encounters*, comprises different activities for the organization to contact, foster and creates dialogue with their customers e.g. through social media, websites or material promotions (ibid). The second form, *usage encounters*, that is, the customer's practical usage of a service or product, which includes the service that initiate to usage, for instance through Internet or social media (ibid). The last form, *service encounters*, includes the interaction that customers have with an organization's service division and applications (ibid).

Nevertheless, Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) explain the value of co-creation among the participants experiences, by determining the different channels used in the encounters, since different interaction can affect the participants in different ways. The authors (ibid) further suggest three categories for these encounters mentioned above, that is;

- *Emotion-supporting encounters*, as metaphors, stories, recognition, new possibilities and surprises.
- *Cognition-supporting encounters*, as outcomes, scripts, references, customer promises, value explaining texts, testimonials and functionality.
- *Behavior- and action-supporting encounters* as usage of a product, know-how communication and trial.

Hence, the authors (ibid) underlines that not all of the categories are equally important for the value co-creation, since some are essential in order to create an experience for the participants, while others for value co-creation process. Whereby, Ballentyne and Varey (2008; see also Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004a, 2004b) emphasize dialogue as crucial factor. However, the communication shall, therefore, influence the interaction between both involving parties, in order to increase all participants' resources more effectively.

Meanwhile, Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) argue that the communication shall focus on the relevance of each channel with its features, in order to fully use the channels advantages and perks. Where an approach of encourage to co-creation behavior is essential (ibid).

2.2.5 Organizational learning process

Organizations emphasize knowledge as an operant resource, thus, in a retro-perspective, continuously and frequently go with the behavior leading to a desirable result (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008). Furthermore, Mokyr (2002) has suggested that knowledge is two-folded into ‘propositional knowledge’ that is generalized and abstract; and ‘prescriptive knowledge’, “[...] which is often referred to as techniques” (Mokyr, 2002; Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008: 89). Hence, these ‘techniques’ “[...] are the skills and competences that entities can use to gain competitive advantage” (Vargo & Lusch, 2004: 9), whereby it is crucial for organization to understand, not only the technique but the consumers as well (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a).

2.2.6 The customer’s learning process

The authors, Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008), state that the customers’ experiences of a product or service from a brand are essential in the co-creation of value process with an organization. Moreover, the authors do also include a learning process for the customers when experience and interaction occurs with the focal brand, and its products or services (ibid). The learning process occur in three levels; remembering, internalization and proportioning.

In traditional marketing the focus has lied within *remembering*, thus, its simple form of learning, whereby the customers’ attention is central, rather than their competence to process information and emotions (ibid).

Internalization, the second level, is about the process of how customers assimilate and interpret experiences and messages (ibid). Since the customer often is prompted to take a stand that is usually based on their emotions they experiences, in relation to the information and message (ibid). Payne, Storbacka and Frow (ibid) highlights internalization as common activities in traditional brand building, which strive for a memorable and consistent customer-associations with a brand identity or product (Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008, see also Urde, 2003, 2013).

Proportioning, on the other hand is a form of ‘double-loop learning’ (Argyris & Schön, 1978), which engages the customer to take ‘one step backward’ (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008), in order to reflection upon their processes and how they are involved in the value creation process with the brand or supplier (ibid). This reflection may interfere with their behavior by engagement through new activities or disengagement from existing. This is common when the customers do not fully understand the brands value proposition (ibid).

2.3 Brand image

2.3.1 Brand image, what is it?

In a historical point of view it has for long been publicized that in order to enhance and align the consumer's perception of a brand, a well-communicated and understood brand image is an essential part of a company's marketing activity (Gardner and Levy, 1955). Shocker and Srinivasan (1979) share the opinion that the market performance of a brand could improve through a well-communicated image. Furthermore Keller (1993:3) define brand image as “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory”. Biel (1992) tries to define what a brand image really is and refer to it as all the attributes and associations consumers connect to the brand name. Hence, in his article he argues for the relationship between brand image and brand equity and how the image drives the brand equity (ibid).

What is of importance to declare about brand image is the notion of who ascribes and creates the brand image. Kapferer (2008) describes within his book the difference often concerned regarding the term brand image, that it is the receiver ascribing the brand image and not the company itself. Hence, he declares that the picture of companies creating the brand image is false and instead highlights brand identity as based within the company, in a sense affecting the image outcome. Sorting out this difference of who the creator of the brand image is of fundamental importance, or as Kapferer (2008:174) describes it “Brand image is on the receiver’s side. Image research focuses on the way in which certain groups perceive a

product, a brand, a politician, a company or a country. The image refers to the way in which these groups decode all of the signals emanating from the products, services and communication covered by the brand.”

What comes clear out of the academic literature review concerning brand image in the early stages is the fact that brand image is the consumer's perception of a brand name. Park, Joworski and MachInnis (1986:135) provide a well-formulated description of what symbolizes the concept “brand image is not simply a perceptual phenomenon affected by the firm's communication activities alone. It is the understanding consumers derive from the total set of brand-related activities engaged in by the firm”.

Hence, in order to be able to understand brand image and what drives consumers’ perception, e.g. feelings, of a certain brand, underlying components will be discussed in the following section.

2.3.2 Needs driving the brand image

Previous research within the field has examined brand image from the consumers’ perspective. To understand the consumers and what is driving their perceptions of different brands it is valuable to clarify the underlying components of the term. Park, Joworski and MachInnis (1986) propose that it is the consumer's needs that drive how a brand will be perceived. The authors’ present three different categorizations that help to derive the brand image, these are: symbolic needs, functional needs and experiential needs (ibid). Functional needs focuses on basic functions and features of brands that satisfy consumers’ needs and solve their problems. Symbolic needs address desires for products that fulfill internal needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego-identification. Experiential needs refer to desires for products that provide sensory pleasure, variety, and/ or cognitive stimulation. Every product can be positioned with a functional, symbolic, or experiential image, or a mixture of all, through which businesses can develop different brands with these images (ibid).

2.3.3 Stories influencing the brand image

In order to examine the consumers' perception of a brand, a story is often composed to help create meanings and interpret the world (Huang, 2010). The author argues for the impact that a brand story has to the perceived brand image among external parts. Relating the concept of brand image to more recently discussions there is a big difference in how a brand image is developed. As mentioned in the earlier sections, the theoretical discussion surrounding the concept focuses on the organization as the single unit of communicating out the brand image, setting the frame for the consumer (Gardner and Levy, 1955; Shocker and Srinivasan, 1979). Although this debate has changed and with the rise of the consumers through a shifting power balance the consumers perceived brand image of today is related to customer co-creation (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014).

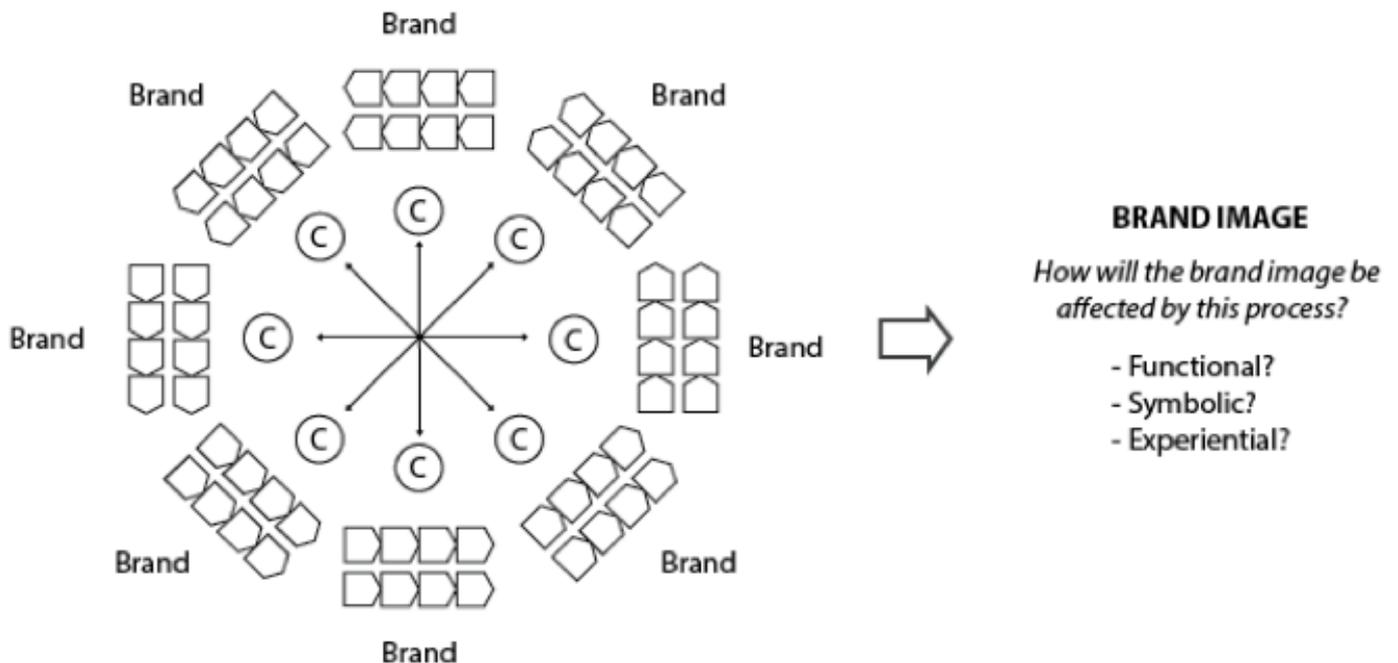
Deepening the understanding of consumers perceived brand image Escalas (2004) proposes that consumers create meanings for brands in a narrative way. The author describes the narrative process as “[...] a link between a brand and the self when consumers attempt to map incoming narrative information onto stories in memory. Our approach rests on the notion that a brand becomes more meaningful the more closely it is linked to the self.” (Escalas, 2004:168). According to Schank and Abelson (1995), incoming information is processed and related to a person's former experiences, developing a new image. Since consumers tend to use narrative stories to process external information, understanding who they are as individuals or in society in general, stories is an effective marketing tool (Huang, 2010).

Relating back to Escalas (2004) the author highlights the link between consumers and the perceived brand image. By enhancing the perspective of the consumers via their perceived image, consumer stories are generated and linked to the brand. According to the author, an association from the consumer is linked to their self-concept, which in turn affects the perceived brand image (ibid). Because of this, telling a good brand story is essential to influence the consumer's perceived brand image (Huang, 2010).

2.3.4 Theorization 2

Within this section the used theories within the analysis will be provided and argued for, in order to account for the theories. Further, a discussion towards the relation between theorization 1 and 2 will be enlighten and strengthen.

While the open-source branding phenomenon continues through the importance of incorporating the consumers in the co-creation process, it is of interest to see how the ‘new branded’ content on the focal channel will affect the focal brand’s image. Thus, leads us to the second research question “How has the perceived brand image of IKEA evolved through the co-created branding activities on IKEA Sweden’s Instagram account?”. The left side of model 2 illustrates how this on-going process of open-source branding is created by all the participatory consumers that share the ‘new branded’ content on the focal channel (Theorization and model 1), under the hashtag ‘Do it yourself’ on Instagram.



Model 2: Theorization model over how the open-source branding process can affect the focal brand’s image. “C” represents the consumers, whereby the arrows between these illustrate the consumer-to-consumer interaction. Hence, in an online environment both consumers and brands create a comprehensive cluster of networks, this model illustrates an example of how the open-source branding process can affect the focal brand’s image. Because of the ‘new content’, that is, created on the focal channel of Instagram, under the hashtag ‘#ikeadiy’. Source: own model.

However, as brought up in previous section, a brand's image may satisfy a consumer's functional needs (Park, Joworski and MachInnis. 1986), such as necessities, or as symbolic needs, thus, emphasize consumers' desires for products that fulfil internal needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego-identification (ibid). The third need, experiential, refer to desires for products that provide sensory pleasure, variety, and/ or cognitive stimulation (ibid). Moreover, as the framework of the co-creation process for open-source branding have been brought up and illustrated in Theorization 1, it is crucial to enlighten and analyze how this process is functioning from an 'offline' to an online environment. Since, from a consumer perspective, it is of essence to understand how the consumer thinks (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a), in order to understand the needs of the consumers.

Why this model is of importance, first of all, to answer the second research question, whether or not a remarkable change have occurred, regarding IKEA's brand image, due to the on-going 'new branded' content and open-source strategy through the focal channel. It is of importance to analyse the empirical changes and theoretical relations, since, several researchers within the branding literature highlights how a brand essence can be affected in several ways (e.g. Urde, 2003), not to mention by the consumers (Huang, 2010). However, this model and theorization is an extension of Theorization 1, thus, this model emphasize to analyze the consequences of the first model, that is open-source branding through co-creation processes, between a brand and its consumers.

Nevertheless, if a change towards the focal brand's image is occurring, the relationship between theorization 1 and 2 is strengthened, thus, provide the effect of the concept of open-source branding. That is, how the concept can change a brand image, aligned with Park, Joworski and MachInnis (1986) arguments of brand image, functional, symbolic or experiential. Thus, show why this extended model is of importance to the theoretical field of branding in an online environment, whereby open-source branding is central.

3 Methodology

In this chapter the researchers present how the research was conducted, motivate the decision of the research informants and introduce the multi-sided methodological approach that has been used in the single-case exploratory study, with IKEA Instagram channel as object. Finally, we describe how the coding process of the empirical data was preceded, the research trustworthiness of advantages and disadvantages of the present research methodological approach.

3.1 Research reasoning

In an academic research it is crucial to argue for both advantages and disadvantages of the decided methodological approach (e.g. Bryman & Bell, 2010; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012) independently of the research's positioning, philosophical standpoint and stance (Willmott, 1993). Since, a research question, issue or topic may be researchable from either a qualitative or quantitative approach, or both, depending on the researcher's inner knowledge, world perception, attitude and experiences (Alvesson, 2003). However, within both the qualitative and quantitative approaches there are a vast amount of different methods that can be adapted in order to gain the desired outcome of a research. Anyhow, since this research's theoretical framework is conceptualized within social interactions, relationships and networks, the researchers of this thesis have decided upon a qualitative approach.

There exist dozens qualitative research methods. Document studies (Bryman & Bell, 2010); a study of produced documents that already exist is one such method. One of the most commonly used and recognized qualitative method is variations of qualitative research interviews (Kvale, 1997), for instance long in-depth interviews that is well determined and propagandize by McCracken (1988). Another method is focus groups, which Hutt (1979; Bryman & Bell, 2010: 511) argues is usually conducted in order to help individuals to define an issue and discuss solely to identify potential solutions, in an innovative way by stimulating creative ideas. Hence, the present research's purpose and research questions, that is, research objectives, the researchers have already identified a problematization that will be analyzed through a multi-sided approach of in-depth interviews and virtual observations.

3.2 Research strategy

3.2.1 Qualitative research strategy

To be able to fulfill the given purpose a qualitative research strategy has been preferred before a quantitative. Since focusing on studying consumers and their relationships to brands, an in-depth method is relevant to get an understanding of the interested phenomenon. Bryman and Bell (2010) argues that qualitative research is preferred when underlying factors of a certain social group is of interest. This research will be positioned from both the perspectives of IKEA and their consumers, hence, the latter will be the focal analyzed group. Since, it is their thoughts and feelings about brands being active on social media platforms that will be studied. With that in remembrance, a quantitative research strategy with numerical data, as empirical outcome, will not provide any insights with relevance (ibid).

3.2.2 Iterative research strategy

Within research strategy it is essential to decide on what type of approach that will direct the research process. Bryman and Bell (2010) describes the two most common strategies, deduction and induction, and how theory and empirical findings correlates from the different viewpoints. The most common when applying a qualitative strategy is the inductive approach through which empirical findings will generate relevant theory (ibid). In contrast to induction, deductive approach emphasizes theoretical concepts that are being deduced from a hypothesis (ibid). Deciding upon the strategies could be perceived as choosing from a two-sided coin with opposite concepts. Although, there is another strategy placed between the two most classical concepts, thus, this strategy symbolizes the thin edge surface surrounding the coin's sides. Bryman and Bell (2010; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012; Prasad, 1993) named this research approach 'iterative strategy' or abduction, and describes the process as "weaving back and forth between data and theory". In this research an iterative strategy describes the research process most relevant. Since, Bryman and Bell (2010: 574) described the process; "This means that analysis starts after some of the data have been collected and the implications of that analysis then shape the next steps in the data collection process", thus, process have been adapted. Having the ability to be flexible in the empirical data process allowed the research to reflect upon valuable insights that may be evident for the research outcome.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Exploratory case study design

In relation to the decided approach of qualitative research strategy, the authors have decided to structure the research design, in order to organize the research process and select data collection methods (Bryman & Bell, 2010). The authors of the present research have decided upon an exploratory case study design as suitable for this research. In line with the present thesis purpose, Eisenhardt (1989) asserts that case studies can be useful to achieve research objectives as providing a descriptive understanding and generating theory. Daymon and Holloway (2002) additionally highlight how exploratory researchers are involved and aim to collect multidimensional and comprehensive information regarding a specific case or a few numbers of cases. In this study a single-case research design will be applied, that will stipulate detailed elucidation of the central object (Bryman & Bell, 2010).

Yin (2009) suggest the importance of ‘how’ research questions tend to strive towards the adoption of a case study design, since operational links need to be investigated, in order to approach and understand a complex social phenomenon. Yin (ibid) also states that case study research design is adaptable when contemporaneous events, within real-life context are being investigated.

Eisenhardt (1989) enhances Yin’s suggestion by adding, when handling with small sample sizes within a population and when a single case is of interest, case studies provide an exhaustive understanding regarding the dynamics of these settings. Through this, the researchers allows to combine several qualitative methods and attain depth within the case of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2010). Furthermore, Alvesson and Sködborg (2009) suggest that an iterative research approach is commonly used within case study based management research in practice, as argued above. Thus, highlights how iterative give the researchers a flexible role of including more relevant factors that may have an impact into the empirical data (ibid).

3.3.2 Single-case study research design

As the typology of case studies defaults, as Yin (2009) argues, into single case or multiple cases. The number of involving cases needs to be argued and enhanced. Multiple case study designs have become heavily used within the business and management research (e.g. Bryman & Bell, 2010; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Hence, a correctly conducted and analyzed multiple sided research design need to include and consider the relevance of relating and comparing the cases that are included (Bryman & Bell, 2010), which will obtain a greater possibilities of generalized distinction between findings to similar settings (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2010). In turn, this results in an improved theoretical building process (Eisenhardt, 1989; Bryman & Bell, 2010). With these foundations of multiple case study research design, it have become well recommended, nevertheless, this approach does not appear suitable for the present research.

As the situation of this case appear, a multiple case research design does not fit. Since, the decision of investigating IKEA and their social media campaign ‘#ikeadiy’ on Instagram during a short period would be difficult to include similar cases with reflective settings. As Yin (2009) emphasizes, extreme, unique or unusual cases, makes it is difficult to compare and determine common patterns, whereby a single-case study research design is recommended. In unification of this statement, and further arguments, this thesis adopts a single-case research design.

The case itself, to clarify, will analyze not only the company of IKEA but the process between the company and its consumers on the social media platform Instagram. And in turn, how this affects the company image from a consumer perspective. Therefore, there is a distinction between a traditional single-case research design which only focuses on the organization, e.g. through employer interviews. In the present research, the researchers, although decided for a single-case design since it is within the IKEA environment on the social media platform Instagram the research takes its stance. Furthermore, by not sorting it as a single-case study other companies with other unique characteristic could have been incorporated. The researchers have found this as a negative option since it would have had negative effects not narrowing the field of research. Examples of negative effects considered, are for instance unique company characteristics e.g. level of interaction between company and customer. Where, IKEA has a high level of customer interaction, not least through the concept of self-assembling.

3.4 Data collection methods

The selection of empirical gathering methods is founded in relation to the research question and purpose. With that in mind, the focus has been on methods in line with the qualitative approach, that is, the underlying stance within the research. By not focusing solely on one method and rely too much on the primary method, semi-structured interviews. Virtual observations have been used as complemented gathering method. In order to be able to explore consumers' engagement and the case company's encouragement of participation on Instagram, further how consumer's perceived brand image is of interest. Thus, the empirical data process entails two stages.

In the first stage semi-structured interviews was conducted to get in-depth with the consumer perspective. Getting insights of how consumers engage with brands via social media and how it invokes on the perceived brand image was the main objective during this stage. For that reason, conducting semi-structured interview was a relevant option to get close to the consumers, gathering a rich empirical material. Hence, the empirical findings identified and guided the way of further data collection.

The second stage of the empirical gathering process comprises of virtual observations. The virtual observation has assessed the identifying process consumer's behavior on the focal social media. In that sense the present method is an effective tool, since it allows the researchers getting closer to the target group in their natural environment on social media platforms.

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Within the research, semi-structured interviews have been selected as tool for empirical gathering. Using this method provides the research with the ability to obtain in-depth information. Furthermore, executing semi-structured interviews allows the researchers to more freely maneuver the interview and choose direction as the interview develops. According to Bryman and Bell (2010), this option will help the researchers to decide what is the most relevant and important to focus on. Compared to the answers given from the respondents during the interview, the researchers become more flexible in their selection of questions. This perspective is shared by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) who confirm the gathering tool as a relevant option in terms of getting more in-depth material.

Relating to McCracken (1998), the author argues that the goal for qualitative interviews is to get access to a certain social group, finding insights of how they interpret the world.

The research entails of eight semi-structured interviews, the persons interviewed represents one representative from IKEA and seven consumers. In detail, the interviews have been executed face-to-face or through video conversation via Skype, with a varied length of 35 to 65 minutes. Performing the interviews face-to-face gives us the opportunity to get more personal, in turn, this is positive, thus process gets it easier to analyze the respondent and ask the most relevant questions (Kvale, 1997). Conducting the interview at a spot where the interviewee has a sense of comfort has been important throughout the process. Bryman and Bell (2010) describes this as an important factor, since the setting in turn influences how the respondent will answer to the given questions.

The semi-structured interviews followed a pre-made interview guide (Appendix 7.1 and 7.1.1), which simplified it for the researchers covering all the topics. Furthermore, using a semi-structured interview technique allows the researchers asking follow-up questions in order to grasp underlying motives. Bryman and Bell (2010) describes it as the researcher is free to pick up on things that the interviewee says.

3.4.2 Virtual observations

Observation as method is an approach of collecting empirical qualitative data, which Malhotra (2010: 230) defines as “recording behavioral patterns of people, objects and events in a systematic manner to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest”. However, the term of ‘virtual observation’ is obligated, due to the fact that the observations were exclusively conducted on the Internet. This methodological approach of gathering data is similar to the term of ‘netnography’ that Kozinets (2002) describes as ethnography on the Internet. Ethnography studies people and culture regarding the phenomena in reflection (ibid). Hence, the researchers of this thesis abstained the term of netnography for two reasons. (i) This research virtual observation exclude the interactions between the audience and the brand of the digital content, such as comments, thus, a case of netnography would include, referring back to Kozinets (2002) argument. Since, approaches that interplay between the brand and its consumers will be provided from primarily empirical data. (ii) Furthermore, collection of how the digital content was promoted, distributed and consistent of content was determined by the researchers.

Bryman and Bell (2007) portrays the importance of the observer's role of being objective in order to be a 'complete observer', which the researchers adapt to some extent. Particularly, by distancing themselves from interaction, either with the audience, or with the brand itself, besides from following the brand personally on Instagram. Observation as method could be argued as more appropriate for obtaining complementary data, rather than exploration and in-depth analysis. However, the researchers support Carson et al. (2001: 141) statement of observation that it "can be an integral interpretive tool in reaching deep and insightful understanding of real phenomena, which provide meaningful and usable data for marketing managers and qualitative researchers alike".

3.5 Sampling method

3.5.1 Case selection

In order to deepen the research and obtain relevant insights to the given purpose a company has been used as a research object, where the chosen case company is IKEA. More in detail, the research will narrow down to the activity on the social media platform Instagram, where the company is present.

Bryan and Bell (2010) describes a case study as focusing on an object of interest where the researcher provides an in- depth elucidation of the object. Providing a case study is often related to generalization problems (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Referring to Bryman and Bell (2010: 61) they give a relevant explanation for how to handle issues of generalization; "The goal of case study analysis should, therefore, be to concentrate on the uniqueness of the case and to develop a deep understanding of its complexity."

However, there are several reasons this research has chosen to analyze IKEA as case company. Thus, have their foundations in the great popularity that IKEA has in Sweden, since the company roots, this is not least represented in the company's business concept (IKEA Group, 2015). Having a broad consumer foundation will facilitate the research, since it is the co-creation process and the consumer's perception of the brand that is in focus.

Furthermore, besides the strong roots to Sweden the company has a broad clientele putting ‘the many people’ in the centre of their business concept, not least because of the joint creation process, manifested in the assembly process (ibid). This makes the company to a relevant case since it prevents the researchers from not being able to get empirical basis.

3.5.2 Interview respondents

The empirical gathering process started with an interview with a Senior Web Developer at IKEA, placed at the Creative Hub department in Malmö. The informant worked with the global website (www.ikea.com) and therefore had a global perspective of the organization, where a holistic understanding over IKEA’s communication was essential. The researchers’ purpose with the interview was to identify developments and challenges that IKEA was facing on a general scale, striving towards their online presence. As mentioned, the research has an iterative strategy, which indicates an oscillation between the theoretical framework and the empirical data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 201; Bryman & Bell 2010; Prasad, 1993). Thus, that in mind, the interview had a theoretical focus on user experience, content and context with a business and social media branding approach. The outcome of the interview has its foundation in the interview guide, (Appendix 7.1) which had a semi-structured design with specific themes that the researchers aimed to cover.

The main focus of the research is concentrated on the consumer perspective whereby seven interviews have been conducted in order to fill out the empirical need. The selected interviewees are all women in the age of 21 to 26, having an active relationship with the company of IKEA and are following the company on Instagram. With active relationship it means they (1) are well familiar with IKEA and sporadically visit their stores; (2) actively integrate with IKEA Sweden on the social media platform Instagram. Another reason this category has been chosen to represent the research sample is related to the interview with the informant from IKEA (Interview 1). From the interview it was stated that it was especially women within age of 20 to 45, who was overrepresented on the social media platforms interacting with IKEA. The interviews followed a semi-structured approach with overall themes, determined into a dozen subcategories (see Appendix 7.1.1) and open-ended questions supporting the researchers throughout the interviews.

The first interview conducted with the Senior Web Developer at IKEA, is relevant to compare as a key informant. Bryman and Bell (2010) describe a key informant as a person who can be of

great help, contributing with a lot of material that plays an important role in the research. Although, there are critique of having a person that you are relying on too much. Bryman and Bell (2010) argues the biggest risk is that you start to see the reality from the key informants' perspective, losing the research distance. This fact has been considered and taken into account of the researchers, although the risk remains that some information are related to the key informants personal thoughts. Especially, since there are no supporting interviews with the perspective from IKEA due to no availability and lack of time.

The selection process of the consumer informants is related to a mixture between two methods, which are argued for by Bryman, and Bell (2010) as convenience sampling and snowball sampling. This type of sampling is within the category of non-probability sampling, meaning that it is hard to generalize the findings derived from the sample to the population. The initial interview was a friend selected from the above-mentioned criteria; this selection could be perceived as a convenience sampling. From this person a snowball sampling was applied, since the informant introduced to new persons, suitable for interviewing.

No.	Informant (and age)	Where	When	Length (min)	Interview Guide
1	Senior Web Developer - IKEA	Lilla Rosteriet, Malmö	4/4 - 2015	65	Appendix 7.1
2	Consumer, 26	Espresso House, Malmö	9/4 - 2015	40	Appendix 7.1.1
3	Consumer, 26	Espresso House, Lund, Nova	10/4 - 2015	40	Appendix 7.1.1
4	Consumer, 21	Skype with video	18/4 - 2015	40	Appendix 7.1.1
5	Consumer, 25	Espresso House, Lund	28/4 - 2015	45	Appendix 7.1.1
6	Consumer, 24	Skype with video	3/5 - 2015	45	Appendix 7.1.1
7	Consumer, 25	Espresso House, Gothenburg	1/5 - 2015	35	Appendix 7.1.1
8	Consumer, 23	At informant's resident	5/5 - 2015	40	Appendix 7.1.1

Table 2: Conducted in-depth interviews.

3.5.2.1 Conducted in Swedish

At the stage of gathering empirical material through interviewing the decision was made to conduct the consumer interviews in Swedish. In order to provide an environment where the informant felt secure and comfortable this was the most suitable choice. Although some expressions and statements risk getting lost in the translation process the overall effects of selecting their native tongue was preferable. To be able to express themselves in a relaxed way assuring that they could provide the best answers the researchers took the decision to conduct the seven consumer interviews in Swedish. With reflection after conducting the interviews the researchers felt it was good and necessary the decision was made, since it opened up and made the interview more as a conversation. In turn, deciding not to conduct the interviews in Swedish the researchers argue that valuable insights would have been missed. This is an important fact to consider and to show transparency the researchers want to argue for the decision.

3.5.2.2 Coding gathered material

The coding process started with a transcription of the gathered data. At the time the transcription process was finished the data was read through in order to get an understanding and feeling for the material. This process was repeated a handful of times, having the purpose and research questions in remembrance. The outcome of the process was determined into several themes e.g. brand image, that the informants focused their answers on, whereby answers were highlighted throughout the coding process. The highlighted themes were related to the themes in the interview guide (see Appendix 7.1.1). This was of great help in order to easier structure the gathered material and use it in the empirical analysis. Relating to Ryan and Bernard (2003) this method is relevant to simplify the coding process, getting an overview of the data by cutting and sorting it.

Furthermore, utilizing an iterative strategy the interview guide had a broad range of topics. By coding the material, it helped us to narrow down our focus, becoming more focused in our research. As an example, the interviewed persons provided more in-depth answers with valuable insights regarding the development of the brand image and the co-creation process, whereby this material became more valuable to the research.

3.5.3 Virtual observation

Observation as a data collection method was chosen on Instagram, since the occasion of content and value exchange takes place there, between IKEA and their audience. Further, the researchers of the present thesis followed IKEA on Instagram during the period from when the company entered Instagram, estimated date: 10th January 2015, until 10th of May. Within these four (4) months, several notes were taken that matters, in regard of this research's objectives. Such as characteristics of posted content, whereby encouragement to participation of the '#ikeadiy' was included, and if any 're-posts', i.e. shared customers' content, from IKEA's perspective occurred (see Appendix 7.2, for illustrative determination).

3.6 Trustworthiness

Within in a research it is a fundamental responsibility for the researcher to ensure the reader that the proposed research design and strategy are trustworthy. Whereby, validity and reliability are the two most adapted standards to assess, hence, of more importance within a quantitative study (Bryman & Bell, 2010). However, the authors (ibid) determines several criterial that qualitative studies need to take into consideration, in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. Hence, these criterial share the idea of an absolute and single truth of social reality. Alternatively, as the present research has conducted in-depth interview and virtual observation, Guba and Lincoln (1982: 239) states that "the more individuals one explores, the more realities one encounters". The authors therefore suggest four criteria to consider for a qualitative study; credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (ibid). Whereby the present research encountered and conducted eight interviews and nine focal observed brand stories on Instagram.

First, Guba and Lincoln (1982) enlighten credibility as how believable or acceptable the empirical findings are in relation to the participants multiple realities. Bryman and Bell (2010) further suggests that credibility is about incorporating all the ethical standards, in order to ensure a higher extent. In this regard, of the present research, the researchers enhance this by asking all the participants in the beginning of the interviews whether or not recording was acceptable. Further, the researchers ensured the informants that, the findings will only be presented in an academic research, and will not be shared or published with and among external individuals, than marketing researchers. Nevertheless, informant anonymity has been used, in order to enhance the ethical aspects of the research, in order to protect the informants' integrity (Bryman & Bell, 2010).

For the virtual observation, an investigation of Instagram's 'terms of use' was perceived by the researchers in order to enact the shared content.

Second, Guba and Lincoln (1982; Bryman & Bell, 2007) entails dependability as a consideration, which independently occurs during the research process when modification needs to be, adapt. Therefore, by keeping a keen account of the processes in all stages within the research, is of importance in order to provide stability to the research design (ibid). Through, the present research, a weekly protocol have been used by the researchers in order to overview what have been done and what is needed to be done during the upcoming week, that also divides into daily work efforts. As the researchers' laid guidelines, in order to contain a strict approach of the research design and the data collection.

Third, as generalizability is of importance in quantitative studies, transferability replaces this factor within qualitative studies and refers to the findings adaptability to other contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). As mentioned before, the present research aims to represent a benchmark, since the unique choice of single case and its settings. Thus, the appropriate standard of transferability is of importance, hence, by providing both a theoretical issue in the problem formulation and starting chapter four with illuminating the empirical focal issue. Transferability for similar cases are of adaptability. Since, Guba and Lincoln (1982) states that the degree of transferability is possible, if relevant determination about the context is provided, of which transferability of findings in similar setting can be investigated.

At last, confirmability as Guba and Lincoln (1982) emphasizes as in terms of objectivity of the results. Hence, as Bryman and Bell (2010) highlights that business research cannot be fully objective, the confirmability of the findings are represented in mainly two ways. Whereby, the triangulation of empirical data approached the research objectives from multiple angles. Firstly, with a IKEA employer from which findings were determined to the focal empirical issue of the thesis, were then discussed more in general by the customer informants. Who did not have any social ties between each other. Moreover, in order to ensure confirmability and minimize biases of the result, virtual observations were conducted.

4 Empirical Analysis

In this chapter, the researchers incorporate the theoretical frame analyzing the empirical findings. At first a case setting will be provided of the case company. This will be followed with an interrelation of the empirical findings and the concepts of open-source branding, co-creation of value where by theorization 1 will be adapted. Then, brand image, thus, theorization 2 will be incorporated by text in relation to the empirical findings and theoretical perspectives.

4.1 Case background

In this section the reader will be provided an overview of the IKEA Group with core values. Further, how and why the focal channel Instagram has been chosen, from the consumer informants' perspective. In order to get background information, which serves as a foundation to the analysis and later in the discussion.

4.1.1 The IKEA Group

IKEA is a multinational furniture company with stores in 27 countries and functions in 42 countries, founded and established by Ingvar Kamprad in 1943 (IKEA, 2015). The company offers everything from interior and ready-to-assemble furniture focusing on low pricing and a wide customer segment, or as they describe their business concept themselves “To create a better everyday life for the many people” (ibid). What makes the company unique is how the customer is incorporated into the concept through self-assembling, which has created opportunities for minimizing costs. Today the company is known worldwide and is famous for the culture and tradition within the company, which tries to reflect their customers and the ‘many people’. Along building a good reputation the company is in great extent trying to actively advocate, through aid and own projects, the environment and civil rights (ibid). Furthermore, IKEA’s core values will be presented (IKEA Core values, 2015). These serve as an important part of the research analysis and the discussion.

IKEA's core values

- **Humbleness and willpower**
We respect each other, our customers and our suppliers. Using our willpower means we get things done.
- **Leadership by example**
Our managers try to set a good example, and expect the same of IKEA co-workers.
- **Daring to be different**
We question old solutions and, if we have a better idea, we are willing to change.
- **Togetherness and enthusiasm**
Together, we have the power to solve seemingly unsolvable problems. We do it all the time.
- **Cost-consciousness**
Low prices are impossible without low costs, so we proudly achieve good results with small resources.
- **Constant desire for renewal**
Change is good. We know that adapting to customer demands with innovative solutions saves money and contributes to a better everyday life at home.
- **Accept and delegate responsibility**
We promote co-workers with potential and stimulate them to surpass their expectations. Sure, people make mistakes. But they learn from them!

4.1.2 Instagram as focal channel

Instagram is a social network platform where people are able to create their own account and share content as pictures or videos with text to their followers. The network makes it possible to follow other users such as friends, family members, celebrities or companies. Moreover, the platform started in 2011 and have had an enormous usage growth the last years, with today over 100 million unique monthly visitors (Ebizmba, 2015).

In relation to Facebook, the distinction between of how the users are utilizing the networks has evolved. Hence, the persons interviewed in the research agreed they used Instagram in a higher extent compared to Facebook. The activity on Instagram included sharing, posting, liking or commenting. Compared to Facebook which was mainly used as a channel for connecting with friends and family, whereby chatting, event planning or group features was essential;

I use Instagram probably more than I use Facebook. On Facebook I talk more with friends, chatting and so with people who do not live near. Since I studied at two places, I have friends scattered all over the place, plus for me, who am originally from Stockholm. Therefore, I think this is a perfect place to talk with friends and keep in touch. So that as well as having a place to talk without having to call. But otherwise on Instagram I post more myself, but I'm probably not overly active. I'm probably more of a person who watches and wants to be inspired, rather than using it myself – (Interview 2).

Instagram very much, then Facebook obviously, since there is everything you need to know, people's birthdays, events and happenings. However, I have stopped to use Facebook as much as I did before. Now it is probably mainly Instagram. Before I used to put up a lot of pictures on Facebook from each party you were at and so, but now I do it on Instagram. On Facebook I basically just chat, check events, and see when peoples' birthdays are – (Interview 4).

In general, I am more scanning the feed rather than uploading and writing myself. Then I am more active on Instagram than Facebook, I have lost a little bit. It is always in trends and waves, but I think Instagram is a little easier and faster. And then it is the pictures that are more fun, which makes Instagram more appealing. I am not so much to read, it takes a little too much time – (Interview 7).

I think others' see me as very active on social media. I post almost a picture everyday on Instagram. But, I'm not that active on Facebook, I rarely post anything there, since I mainly use the chat feature and stay in contact with various groups and events – (Interview 8).

As shown, the usability of the two social media networks differentiates, whereby Instagram has become more popular. Instagram is a social network where the 'conversational interactivity' occurs as Jensen (1998) suggests. Thus, it includes a more social and open approach where all users who decide to interfere and engage, are the creators of the content. Further, the author (ibid) determines there is no powerful central within the conversational interactivity, rather it is individually proliferated between all the users (Vernuccio, 2014). Therefore, Instagram as a social network emphasize the term of conversational interactivity.

As the informants highlighted their preferred usage of Instagram, the posts that are viewed can be related to stories (Shankar, Elliott & Goulding, 2001). In general, a story's plot is defined as "an ordered sequence of events made coherent by causality, linear structure, and purpose." (Stern, 1998: 55). Whereby, Instagram allows people to follow others' lives, as the informants' narrowed above. Moreover, as Gergen and Gergen (1988) underpin the importance of stories, thus, when describing one's life, it is difficult to do without a story. However, depending on who is telling the story, the linear structure and purpose distinguishes, which will be determined in below.

4.2 Open-source branding

4.2.1 IKEA Sweden's generated brand stories

By the time IKEA Sweden joined Instagram in the middle of January 2015, approximately hundred posts have been uploaded until the end of the research process. Of all these posts, seven of them have encouraged participation, integration and sharing under the hashtag 'IKEA Do it yourself' (see Appendix 7.2.1). In line with Huang's (2010) suggestion of how a brands create a theme for their storyline, thus, setting a frame of the stories as Gardner and Levy (1955) emphasize. The following posts presented, illustrates the storyline of firm-generated brand stories that will be analyzed within this section of the analysis. After IKEA Sweden joined Instagram, their second post illustrates their encouragement;



Video text: Hello! We are finally rolling out on Instagram! As main character we have #IVAR dresser, a really #IKEA classic. Tag #IKEADIY if you are doing anything by yourselves, we are so curious... - @ikeasverige, estimated date: 12th January 2015, Appendix 7.2.1.

Within the post a video of a paint roller slides up and down on the 'Ivar' dresser, in order to illustrate how to redesign an IKEA product. Furthermore, encouragement is highlighted for their followers to upload and share their projects under the hashtag 'IKEA Do it yourself'. Further, underpinning the curiosity to see what their customers are doing with their IKEA products. Modifying products is not a new phenomenon but the status quo for how it appears in front of others have started to evolve, as one informant described it;

[...] but before this hashtag, I believe that people redesigned or changed their IKEA products, as before you now. But now, through this hashtag, it is possible for the customers to show each other's which opportunities there is that you can do with IKEA's products. [...] Before, I may be painted my table blue with some flowers on it, but there were no one else than my guests that saw it – (Interview 6).

The paradigm shift of how customers are more willing to contribute and interact via social media adds to the open-source branding process. This is manifested through IKEA Hackers (Interview 1) and IKEA Sweden's online adoption via Instagram and the hashtag 'IKEA Do it yourself', illustrating how the organization learnt through the online social environment. Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) assert this as an important factor in order to develop the co-creation experience with customers of an organization.



Image text: Today's #IKEADIY: For only 7 kronors you can buy a different poster rack that is happy to work double shift as trouser hanger. Complement it with homemade posters or new spring-trousers. No funny business here! – @ikeasverige, estimated date: 16th of March 2015, Appendix 7.2.1.

IKEA with their vision “To create a better everyday life for the many people” (Interview 1; IKEA, 2015) enhance their strategic approach of reaching the ‘many people’ through a low price strategy, which is exemplified above. Not only with the price in focus, 7 SEK, but also the creativity of repurposing a product, in this case a trouser hanger to a poster rack.

To successfully engage the target group the content of the firm-generated brand stories need to be well determined and created, in order to attract customers on social media. Gensler et al. (2013) underpins the importance of stimulating consumer-generated brand stories by enhancing firm-generated brand stories. Based upon the focal brand's core values (e.g. Urde, 2003, 2013), in an open-source branding process. To illustrate what characteristics of the firm-generated brand stories that are appealing for the participants, one of the informants described what characteristics was preferred;

I think that it must have a really good quality firstly. I think it should be good sharpness of the picture, yes quality. [...] Then a lot of color, I think, because it captures the eyes when I browse among hundreds of other images. And especially when I go into a hashtag and searches for a word, then it's an entire grid with lots of pictures and then I don't enter every picture, of course,, but I more likely enter those which are the colorful ones, are classy or finely structured, and have fine still life, and yes, it is probably important to keep it clean, smooth and with good quality as well – (Interview 4).

In relation to the IKEA representative's (Interview 1) focus of contextualization products. It is essential in order to provide the consumer with a user experience. Thus, the following post illustrates this;



Image text: Place the mirror on the table! The cube is an #IKEADIY by the square mirrors #LOTS – @ikeasverige, estimated date: 2nd of March 2015, Appendix 7.2.1.

This firm-generated brand story, illustrates how the focal content, the ‘mirror cube’, reproduced by an amount of mirrors is contextualized in an environment of other products. Thus, this example illustrates how consumers can perceive the user experience of this focal redesigned mirror. Recalling back to Huang (2010), regarding how a brand story aims to create a specific theme for the customers. In order to create a storyline that is appealing and inspiring for the consumer. In the case of IKEA Sweden’s Instagram account, they have several themes and one of those is the hashtag of ‘IKEA Do it yourself’ that is both ‘creative’ and ‘inspiring’ (Interviews 2-8).

4.2.2 Consumer-generated brand stories

The stories generated from consumers, within the context of IKEA Sweden’s Instagram account, illustrates how the consumers have become more integrated in the brand building process. However, the consumer-generated stories refer to the consumer’s experiences of a product or service, indirectly linked to a brand (Gensler et al., 2013). The hashtag of IKEA ‘Do it yourself’ indicates that a modification of IKEA’s products is welcomed for the customers to perform. The Swedish IKEA Instagram account is based upon the organizational learning process as the IKEA representative described related to the IKEA Hackers event (Interview 1). This development illustrates the power balance between IKEA and their customers, since the development of social media, due to the advent of web 2.0 (e.g. Fournier & Avery, 2011; Gensler, et al., 2013).

Three examples of consumer-generated brand stories

The content within the hashtag is produced and shared mainly by customers, but also other stakeholders such as IKEA designers and of course by IKEA Sweden themselves. However, by illustrating the external stakeholder’s reproduced IKEA products, three examples will be analyzed.

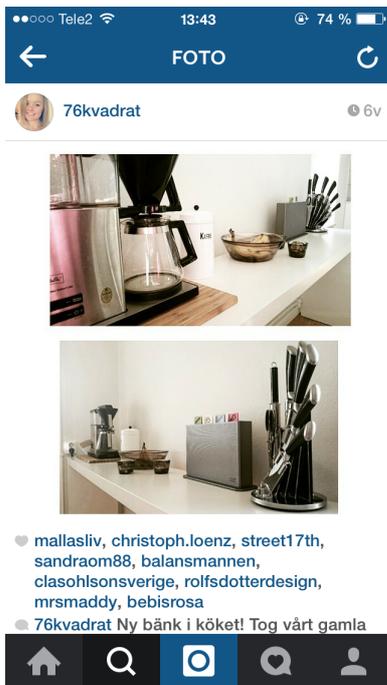


Image text: New bench in the kitchen! I took our old bed table from IKEA and unplugged the wheels. Now all of our daily usage is easy access. #ikea #ikeadiy #clasohlson #melitta #kostaboda #josephjoseph #differentdesign @ikeasverige @clasohlsonsverige @78kvadrat, estimated date: 30th of March 2015, Appendix 7.2.2.

Here, a consumer-generated brand story, posted under the hashtag ‘IKEA Do it yourself’, exemplifies how the person repurposed a bed table into a kitchen table. However, this consumer-generated brand story illustrates how a cluster of networks is created through the shared content under the hashtag #ikeadiy. A cluster of networks is created by several active involved participants, which Gensler et al. (2013) highlights as an important factor the focal brand need to consider. Especially, as the story above, illustrates how the consumer includes several brands such as Clas Ohlson, IKEA and Kosta Boda. Whereby, Gensler et al. (2013) underpin how the focal brand needs to elaborate and integrate with the consumer-generated brand stories. For instance, in an Instagram environment, by ‘liking’, ‘commenting’ or ‘re-posting’. Nevertheless, from the conducted in-depth interviews one informant described how consumer-generated brand stories are effective, becoming eager start to create own ‘do it yourself’ solutions;

[...] Well for instance, I know that you can buy this kind of make-up mirror lamps, and then see how people build their own make-up mirrors, since those are very hard to find in stores. Or to see people decorate giant “cozy corners”, typical girl thing but just to take another example. And then these quite ordinary and white pitchers that IKEA uses a lot of, that people just can paint if they run a little different colors and stripes and make it their own. I'm getting very eager to pamper myself, when I look through that tag – (Interview 4).

The remaining consumer informants had similar positive experiences with the hashtag and agreed they could imagine themselves to participate within this process and post under the hashtag (Interviews 2-3: 5-8). The interaction on Instagram involves everyone with an account making it easy to become an active participant in the co-created process. This could be related to (Jensen, 1998), arguing for a conversational interactivity between the brand and its consumers. The last

example of an active participant, contributing to the conversational activity, is a designer who shared ‘Do it yourself’ experiences with IKEA’s products.

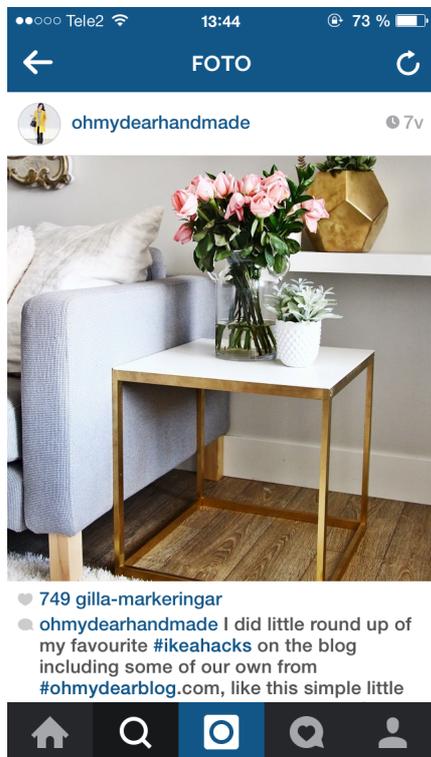


Image text: I did little round up of my favorite #ikeahacks on the blog including some of our own from #ohmydearblog.com, like this simple little side table! Head on over to the blog (link in profile) to check it out! – @ohmydearhandmade, estimated date 23rd of March 2015, Appendix 7.2.2.

Furthermore, this enhances how a cluster of networks is gathering under the focal hashtag, including other brands as well. However, by illuminating these stories above, the phenomenon of how Instagram has empowered the consumers and strengthened their position towards the brand is illustrated (Barwise & Meehan, 2010). Thus, these stories exemplify how IKEA’s consumers are becoming story generators (ibid) in a higher extent than before. As the consumers post and share their stories, IKEA can involve these into their own brand story, thus, this will be analyzed below.

4.2.3 Coordinated brand stories

An essential aspect concerning a brand story is how to incorporate the consumers, complementing the story, making it more mutually created (Gensler et al., 2013). By doing this the brand will get more influenced from external partners, making it more similar to public relations (Fournier and Avery, 2011).

An empirical example of how this could be illustrated is through a re-post of a consumer generated brand story on IKEA Sweden's Instagram;



Image text: More #IKEADY! Trixy @Littlemissfixit has re-made a trio #FROST-stools to a bench with stylish leather belts. The backrest pillows gained eyelets in the corner and hangs on a curtain rod. You are welcome to take a seat! – @ikeasverige, estimated date: 26th of January 2015, Appendix 7.2.1.

The post illustrates how the organization coordinated a consumer-generated brand story into their open branding process. However, IKEA Sweden only used the consumer-generated brand story in the extent of the image and the consumer's Instagram account, if comparing with the original image text;

The original image text: When Jesper and I moved together (around the millennium shift, my god that's a long time ago) we looked for the perfect nuance to an old bathtub that we aim to renovate. We agreed upon a deep green nuance that have followed me as a favorite since then. The "bathtub-green" color presents the products of my latest #diy at the Livet hemma-blog and @ikeasverige today in a nice way, right?! Nice color & material combinations and trixy do-it-yourself-solutions, exactly what I want to work with! #littlemissfixit #ikea – @littlemissfixit, 26th of January 2015, Appendix 7.2.2.

By re-posting a consumer-generated brand story and rewrite the text, IKEA Sweden distance themselves in a safe way by highlighting IKEA's products i.e. the 'frost-stools' and do not interfere with original user's personal text.

In line with Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008) of how a rational motivation indicates to sharing knowledge with the world, in this case how to change or reproduce a set of IKEA products into something else. Thus, a higher extent of unique value and personalization for the focal customer is created, with the products in focus and not the person. Through this process, as Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008) highlights, emotional motivations can build social connections with other Internet users, through self-expression. Thus, this interplay underlines the social connection between IKEA as an organization and the customer '@Littlemissfixit'. Another example will be illustrated, showing how IKEA coordinates the consumer-generated brand stories into their own, brand story, by reposting consumers Instagram's posts that are hashtagged with #ikeadiy.



Image text: Regram: The smart @kommahem have planted lemon and pepper in small grape-houses by the #BLADET vases. Tag your own fine solutions and good looking fix with #IKEADIY! -@ikeasverige, estimated date 3rd of May 2015, Appendix 7.2.1.

Original Image text: Today's blog post. Mini grape house #DIY Budget variant of the #IKEA vase BLADET. #linkinprofile #inredning #interiordesign @ikeasverige #ikeadiy - @kommahem, estimated date 1st of May 2015, Appendix 7.2.2.

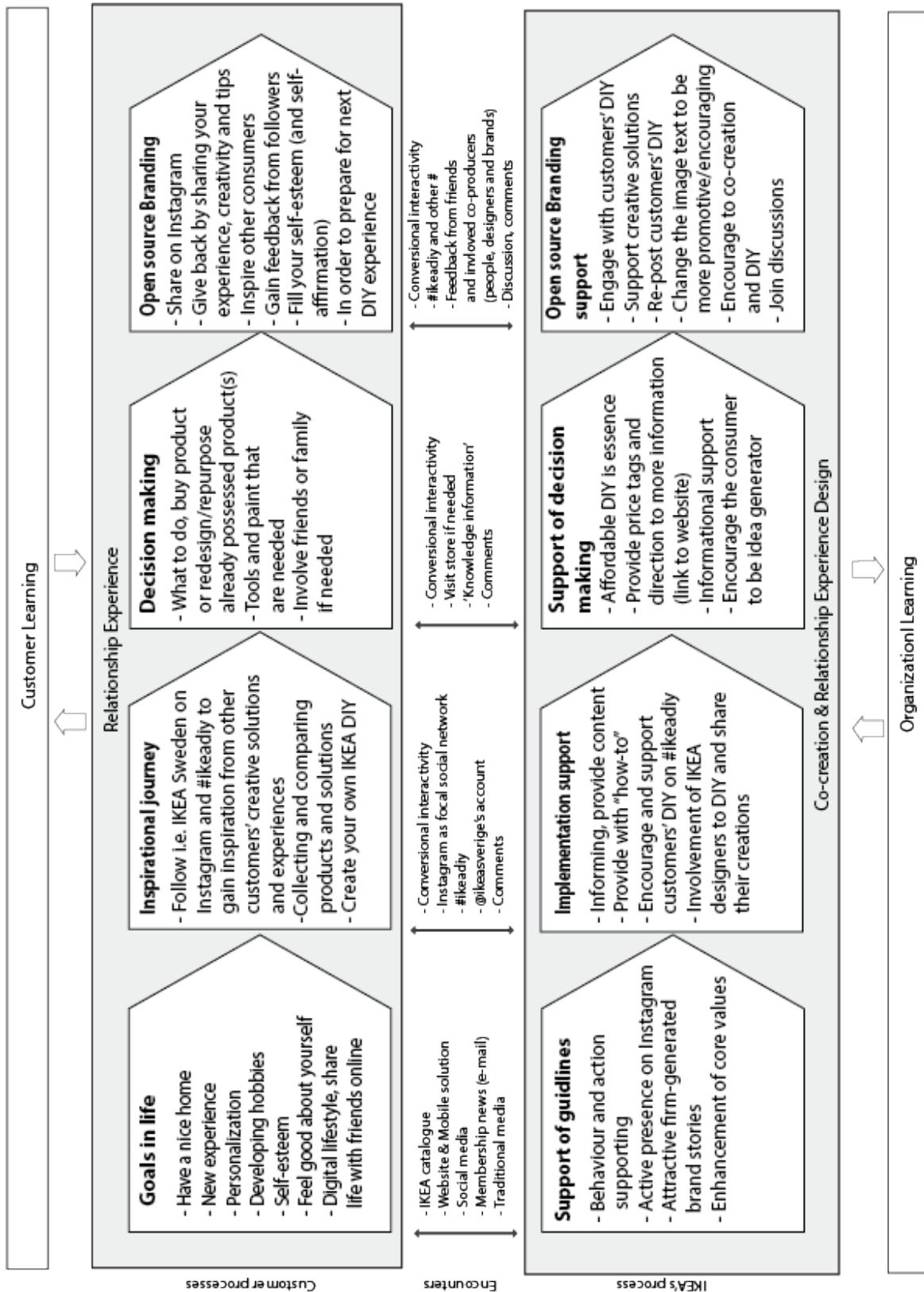
Relating back to Gensler et al. (2013) and how a coordinated brand story is created through involving consumers, this coordinated approach illustrates how IKEA reposted @kommahem's image, and rewrote the text into a more informative. By doing this, IKEA is interacting with their consumers who share their consumer-generated brand stories on Instagram.

Gensler et al. (2013) further highlights this as a crucial part in the open-source branding process, which will be further determined and illustrated by the concept of co-creation of value in the next section, whereby the value is the branding process.

4.3 How to manage Co-creation in Open-source branding

4.3.1 Conceptual framework

As previously analyzed, the open-source branding process is built upon the interactivity and openness between the brand and the consumer-generated brand stories on Instagram. However, by applying the conceptual framework of Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008), relating it to the context and case setting of IKEA Sweden's Instagram account, a more detailed illustration of the co-created branding process will be illustrated. Firstly, as Payne, Storbacka and Frow (ibid) distinguish the different encounter processes, depending on objectives. Model 3 illustrates the incorporation of open-source branding and how to manage co-creation of value, as Theorization 1 emphasize. That is, how to manage co-creation in open-source branding. Thus, the forthcoming parts in this analysis sections will present the surrounding and essential factors of the model, including relationship and encounter experience, organizational and consumer learning processes.



Model 3: Applied theorization 2 model of the incorporation of open-source branding and co-creation. The conceptual framework illustrates how to manage co-creation in open-source branding; determined and interpreted in the case of IKEA Sweden's Instagram activity with their consumers. Source: Own model.

4.3.2 Relationship and encounter experiences

Within the first step of the co-creation process, the focus is on the consumer, from being a passive observer becoming an active participant in the relationship value exchange process (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; see also Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a; Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008). The encounter terms, that Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) distinguish, lies within the communication encounter and usage encounter of IKEA's products. Whereby, the three elements of cognition, emotion and behavior have been identified as essential factors in the process of building relationships (ibid; see also Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). How a person behaves after reading something depends on how the person thinks and feels about the specific experience (ibid). If the experience is positive the person will gain positive thoughts and feelings, which in turn can lead to consumption and sympathetic engagement on social media, and vice versa (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008).

Throughout the empirical gathering process the researchers asked the informants in which extent they saw themselves as active participants in the co-creation process. Whereby one informant highlighted thoughts and feelings of how it could relate to the person's identity;

Yes, absolutely! But only if I make it as hobby, because otherwise I do not think I would get so much out of it. And then I need more time! Since now I am a student and there is not much time to fix and tricks at home, because I really have to spend time on my studies now [with bachelor thesis] [...] When I buy and move into my own apartment in the future [she lives in a student corridor at the moment] I want to decorate with nice and personal interior. Then, this hobby might kick in and I would start to making a lot of 'do it yourself' stuff and feel 'shit how nice my apartment now! I have to show to others'. And then take some nice pictures and posting on my Instagram – (Interview 4).

As the elements of cognition and emotion are illustrated, the informant's individual situation, thoughts and feelings are highlighted and enhanced into a positive and passive action, that might develop into an active and participatory role (Vernuccio, 2014). By illuminating how a person, who have not posted under the hashtag yet, an example of how customers perceive the hashtag is provided. How this informant felt, thinks and gets eager to participate in the co-creation of value process, as behavioral element (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2013). Both, in the co-creation dimension of redesign or repurpose an IKEA product and engage in the open-source branding process, under the hashtag 'IKEA Do it yourself'.

Whereby the behavior- and action-supporting encounter, which Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) extract as usage of products, know-how communication and trial, is central. Hence, in the case of IKEA it is within the theme of ‘Do it yourself’ by modification of IKEA’s products, as analyzed in earlier sections, with Huang (2010) in regard.

4.3.3 Organizational learning process

The term of organizational learning process emphasize the importance of learning by doing, in an ‘operant’ process (Payne, Storbacka & Frow., 2008). It is essential for the organization to understand, analyze and enhance what is beneficial for the company, including their customers (ibid). In the case of IKEA, the representative illustrated their learning process, manifested through the IKEA Hackers incident;

I think IKEA Hackers is a great example of that, at first it was like: “oh we can't let them doing different, and that is not what we are doing”. We even tried to shut them down [the website], because it is not IKEA. That is something that you are doing. So at first we tried to distance ourselves, but now it is like a good mistake we made because we have learnt something. Now we see it as something great and they are our super fans that are doing great things and showing it to the rest of the world. I think we are changing our mindset slowly, so that is an evolution, which just happened within the last couple of years. At first we were like “no, we don't understand social media, we can't control it, now we are like ok, we cannot control it but there is something in it, so let's try” So that is important! – (Interview 1).

In similarity, as Fournier and Avery (2011) underpins, of how brands often takes a defensive role in the online environment. The informant highlighted how IKEA at first took a defensive approach, protecting their identity and core values (Interview 1). However, as their mindset started to evolve, in relation of how the brand started to understand the customers’ ‘thinking’ process. That is, according to Prahalad and Ramaswamy’s (2004a) and Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) essential to understand, in order to emphasize and change into the ‘co-creation mode’. Related to the IKEA representative (Interview 1), it has become essential for IKEA to include their customers in a higher extent in the co-creation of branding process than before, that is, open-source branding (e.g. Gensler et al., 2013; Fournier and Avery, 2011; Vernuccio, 2014). As the discussion continued with the IKEA representative, the interviewer asked if IKEA had any specific aim with their social media activity;

We have not a certain aim. It is more of a local initiative, every market is doing their own thing. [...] But what we are trying to do now is that we are going more local, allowing the markets to act on their own. Hopefully, the intent is to see what works and take learning from that. Maybe there is something general that we can use from the local initiatives and use that global, but right now we are not there. We know that people are using these platforms so we need to be active there as well. – (Interview 1).

At the moment the mobile solution [mobile application] is very specific and very product based. So it is more or less an inventory of our products and the user experience is lacking and there is no inspiration at all. I think IKEA as a company is starting to get better about that kind of stuff but at the moment we are considering it. Personally, I try to push it in all the projects that we do, because considering that millions and billions of people are mobile savvy and expect things. The user experience is of growing importance and we as a small hub push these things. But since it is not a big part of our economy, only 3% of our sales come from digital e-commerce. – (Interview 1).

By knowing the most effective and efficient approach of integrating a brand's customers, the brand needs to possess the 'prescriptive knowledge', which Mokyr (2002) highlights as 'techniques'. Which Vargo and Lusch (2004: 9) in addition refer to "[...] the skills and competences that entities can use to gain competitive advantage", thus, including the 'mass' or the many people with a value exchange for all participants can be seen as an ideal perspective.

The importance of the customers' engagement, communicated through Instagram, relies upon engagement and interactivity between the brand and their consumers. By asking what the IKEA representative thought about Instagram and the hashtag 'IKEA Do it yourself', in relation to creating positive user experiences;

I think it is great. If we can engage people and let them provide us material and content. Because in the end, providing content for the web, including social media, is very important. When you see an IKEA picture, it is like: "yeah I know that comes from IKEA". We only have one perspective, the more we give information to the people how to do it, the more we are empowering people to do their own furnishing. – (Interview 1).

In comparison of how IKEA acted, due to the advent of IKEA Hackers to their own initiative of IKEA Do it yourself. Their mind set have started to change in relation to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (ibid: 38) suggestion of how "we [as marketers] must explicitly recognize how deeply etched ways of thinking limit our ability to shift into co-creation mode".

4.3.4 Customer learning process

Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) elaborates how the previously elements develops into the customer learning process, which folds into three levels, whereby *remembering* is well illustrated from an informant (Interview 3) who narrowed what are the most reminded of the brand followed on Instagram;

Well then, I get of course reminded of them more, as if I am going to buy anything, it is perhaps the case that I am thinking of those stores or brands first, since they are located closer in the memory than others, I think absolutely – (Interview 3).

The *internalization* of the customer learning process, related to the answer from informant 3, is the process of how customers assimilate and interpret experiences and messages (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008). Whereby, the informant is prompted to decide whether the message from a brand is positive or negative, based upon the informant's emotional experiences (Interview 3).

How a consumer associate interpreted memories do also add to how the consumer perceive a brand, product or service (ibid; see also Urde 2003, 2013). Thus, according to Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008), internalization is a common consumer learning process in traditional branding. Whereby, in the case of IKEA and their open-source branding approach, consumers are beginning to interpret IKEA's products in a more creative approach, thus, contributes to how IKEA's brand image is starting to evolve, through the consumers 'Do it yourself'.

The third level of customer learning process, *proportioning*, involves how the customer take a step backwards and reflects upon the co-created value process (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008) or as Argyris & Schön (1978) portrays the process as 'double-loop learning'. This is emphasized, when the customer becomes involved in the co-creation process in the process, some might take a step backwards and reflect upon the process. Hence, by sharing the experience on e.g. Instagram and gain other's perspectives and judgment, another approach of taking a step backwards occurs. One informant provided thoughts and feelings about the values of Instagram, which is the essence of why the social network is used;

It's a damn good question, because it is really quite awful to hear anyway. Because it is so superficial, but anyway, what is value creation for me... it is that social media, and especially on Instagram, I can see what my friends and acquaintances are doing, people put up what they do. If they are on vacation or are out and eat or like that, fun to follow other people living and be updated on things. And why I use it and upload myself is... well actually, I have a need of confirmation that I want to satisfy. I want to show off that it is not enough that I eat a nice dinner, I also want to show it to all of my 300 followers. So it's quite crazy really, if you think about it, especially since everyone else is exactly the same, at least the most people I know anyway - (Interview 5).

The informant described the self-affirmation process by gaining positive feedback from the informants Instagram followers, through likes and comments. Whereby the informant narrowed in a personal way the valuable usage of Instagram. In an online environment, according to Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008), the importance of social interactivity includes the scope of self-expression. That is further related to how people gain self-esteem and self-affirmation from the followers' feedback. In turn, this makes people continuing with attempts to fulfill, both, their followers' satisfaction of appealing pictures and their own self-esteem.

4.4 Brand image

4.4.1 What an attractive brand symbolizes

Throughout the interviewing process the authors have gained insights regarding the brand image of IKEA, and its development after applying an approach, more in line with open-source branding. In order to understand how the image has developed it is of interest to examine what the informants perceive as attractive for a brand on a general basis. Escalas (2004) and Huang (2010) argue for the importance of creating a story that goes in line with the consumer's self-concept, which in turn will link up with the brand story. By enhancing the consumers and what they perceive as attractive, the brand will come closer and more meaningful (ibid). On the question what informant 2 symbolized as an attractive brand the given answer is in line with Escalas (2004);

I think that an attractive brand is symbolized of innovation and modernity. The companies take into account their customers and listens to their opinions. Furthermore, I appreciate if the brand has some type of CSR mindset and think about the world they deliver to. Either it can be the environment or to help poor countries – (Interview 2).

Furthermore, excerpts from two informants explained, from a brand image perspective, why it is of importance incorporating the consumers in the branding process;

[...] I think that a brand have to follow their customers and meet their expectations and desires. In contrast, the brand shall be able to stand for what they deliver to really live up to what they promise in their mission. The brand may not be all changeable without being thought through, since then I will experience it as unstable – (Interview 2).

I'm attracted to companies where customers are clearly involved and contribute with material that feels more authentic and personal. It is much more valuable and attractive than actually all materials companies themselves create, since it feels very much more authentic and real. What the brand creates themselves and shares actually feels more of a fake-reality, which in itself may be compelling, but does not give the same feeling – (Interview 7).

As much as the brand should live up to the expectations from their customers informant 2 described how the brand should not be all too changeable, since then it will be perceived as unstable.

Furthermore, informant 4 described the background why some brands are preferred in front of others, relating back to the own identity and the characteristics that is found attractive;

It is brands in line with my own identity that I prefer to follow and want to be associated with, for example I prefer hip, new brands that feel right in time – (Interview 4).

An insight found essential from the informants is that in order to be an attractive brand it has to be related to the self-image, containing attributes and associations that fits into this concept. On the question if social media and Instagram reflect a person's real life informant 2 responded;

I do not think they match completely, perhaps to a certain extent. It might make it all fun, what is fine and exciting you will upload. But the remainder of this mundane places one cannot up. So I do not really think Instagram is so reality-based full. I am pretty happy of not being 12 years being active when I was younger. So it is good one can sift out and understand how social media really works. It is really nice and very inspiring but it is also the image that one has of social media, it should not be hard or depressing. But sometimes you get lured into it and fall for all the inspiration that comes to one. Now it is someone who does lots of fun things, traveling, then you become the jealous type. But then you come to the conclusion that it is a small part of what is displayed, not all – (Interview 2).

Informant 3 shared the same opinion concerning Instagram and how a user tries to build up an image not including pictures from their everyday life;

Yes, in a way, but it is probably not intended. But I have thought about it myself when I checked, there is much traveling, but it does not happen that much in between – (Interview 3).

At last, the informant made parallels to own usage, not including content that is found irrelevant or uninteresting;

No, no, just, because I do not feel I want to share it with others. But that is because I do not find it fun or interesting perhaps. To those who follow me think that "this is nothing special as well. I'm sitting here with you", for example – (Interview 3).

Another aspect brought up from the informants is that the image built up on social platforms, such as Instagram, does not always have to correspond with the actual lifestyle of a person (Interview 3). This point of view, even more, strengthens the theory that Escala (2004) argued for, of building up a narrative story closely linked to the self-image a person has.

4.4.2 IKEA Sweden brand image - before the Instagram entrance

The literature argues that perceptions of a brand are connected to the brand name (Biel, 1992 & Keller, 1993). Hence, the name of the brand includes all the associations a consumer has gained from brand-related activities (Park, Joworski & MachInnis, 1986). From the empirical material the researchers was able to identify what IKEA Sweden was associated with, in turn, what symbolized their brand image. The following quotes illustrate an excerpt of the perceptions the informants expressed on the question what IKEA symbolize;

Swedish, affordable, very basic, and functional and a very wide product range. Because, independent of what you are looking for IKEA should have something within the same style. I also associate the company as very Swedish because of the colors, blue and yellow. Furthermore, the image is closely related to their concept, being available for all people – (Interview 6).

IKEA is my first choice when I need to buy furniture, partly because it is cheap. There could be cheaper goods elsewhere, but, since they have a very wide selection I tend to find most things there. And if I have to choose five words symbolizing their image they are: good price, affordable, functional, easy to assembly and quality – (Interview 5).

I think that IKEA symbolizes simplicity, interior for all and affordable products. Moreover, I think that the brand produces modern interior and following trends but in an affordable way. I do not really know if this is the case but that is what I am thinking when I hear IKEA – (Interview 3).

What is recognizable from the previously presented perceptions of the brand image is that they are all similar to an extent. Although, there are differences stressed, compared to the main perceptions;

The company aims for the many people, being very simple and very accessible, having a price range where anyone can buy. So, both inexpensive but also hints of some design products. Hence, the IKEA brand is very wide with something for everyone, but no discount chain – (Interview 7).

Furthermore, the same informant continued, describing the relationship to the brand and relating it to other brands;

I'm kind of their best customer. I like their whole concept of going to the store. So I really have a relationship with the company. But what is a little sad is that it still has some bad connotations, precisely because it is cheap and seen as a bit boring. Having too much IKEA stuff at home is like nothing that is positive, more something you have when you are a student. It is like you have gone for the easy option. It is a little boring and maybe hard to remove that image, perhaps they should try more but it is obviously difficult. Of course there are temporary collections with more design, but it is still lacking a little bit there, I think. Comparing them with H & M they have come further on the brand journey clearly, mixing in well-known designers and famous people. For example, you try to mix different brands, not only having IKEA products. It is just like putting a bad valuation if it is only IKEA. If someone would come to my home and it is only IKEA products, then the other person may say "I thought not," just like that IKEA is a little worse and have not the same image as other brands – (Interview 7).

Related to the theoretical frame regarding brand image and the different categorizations that (Park, Joworski & MachInnis, 1986) discussed, the informants tends to relate the brand more to functional needs, solving issues rather than symbolic needs where the brand act as tool for fulfilling internal needs. Hence, in the next section the developed image of IKEA Sweden will be presented, focusing on the consumer's perception of the brand after its entrance on Instagram.

4.4.3 The developed brand image of IKEA Sweden

After the entrance on the social media platform Instagram, consumers have come closer to the brand, getting new opportunities to interact. Leitch and Richardson (2003: 1074) states that “Every interaction is an enactment of the organizational identity, which may serve to establish that identity or transform it in some way” from a traditional branding point of view. Hence, in the new online environment, whereby the power balances between brands and their customers are becoming more equal (e.g. Fournier & Avery, 2011; Gensler et al., 2013). This process is advancing into a responsibility, shared among and with customers and non-customer stakeholders. That is, as Vernuccio (2014) states as a ‘participatory’ process.

Though the conducted in-depth interviews, an illustration of how the perceptions shifted, regarding the brand image;

I think their image has been affected. But it also depends on who has Instagram and uses it frequently. Today it is very important to be everywhere on social media, and reach out to their target audience. Now they have thirty four thousand followers on their Instagram account, it is not so much. But I think their image has changed, become more accessible, modern, and adapted to the global crowd. I think you have to change in this era of digitalism, social media and everything – (Interview 5).

I personally see Instagram as an inspiration and have got new ideas about how I can use the products. So I would say the brand has become more creative and inspiring through Instagram – (Interview 2).

Relating the previous quotes to Fournier and Avery (2011) and Gensler et al. (2013) the entrance on social media platforms has made the brand more accessible and modern. Furthermore, informant 3 explained the progress of the brand image by relating it to the IKEA catalog;

I have not followed IKEA as much in the past but have found them through Instagram. But I definitely think that they have developed a different image since I started following them, among other things, much more creative. Previously the image was connected to the catalog, which you thought was a fun event when it arrived in the mail. People even had signs on their letterboxes saying "No advertising, thanks - but please the IKEA catalog". Now it is a bit the same thing to look at their Instagram, so above all, their image has become much more accessible and modern – (Interview 3).

Moreover, informant 7 provided insights regarding the brand's development, focusing on the progress in terms of personalized, authentic and more fun;

As I said I don't follow that many brands on Instagram, but IKEA's a very good example. Their hashtag, do it yourself, represent what I mean very much so, as I mentioned before, creating a completely different insight than they had been without. It also boosts your self-esteem by showing what you have accomplished, receiving appreciation and comments from friends and followers. [...] It is very exciting and has created publicity and interest based on their products. It is a really fun example that I think is still tied to the original idea of providing a more personal insight into a company or whatever it may be. It becomes sort of not as stiff and more fun and authentic – (Interview 7).

The findings these informants highlighted are the progress of IKEA's brand image. Recalling to the theoretical framework (Park, Joworski & MachInnis, 1986), the perceived brand image has become more related to symbolic values, rather than functional needs. The most frequently used symbolic values the informants associated IKEA with focused on accessibility, modernity, creativity, inspiration, personalized and authentic (Interview 2-8).

Another informant narrows how the evolvement of IKEA's brand image occurred, whereby the informant highlighted the process and the perceived interest if the hashtag were promoted on a global scale;

I think that is very good that they promote this process, since it shows what the hashtag is about, both by text and image and what customers can do and how they can use the hashtag. But as long as the pictures speak for themselves so I do not think that the language does so much. I also think it would be interesting to see if it would become more global. Since then, it would give a wider value to me who watch the hashtag as well, that more people around the world share their styled IKEA furniture. (...) Now IKEA will probably be more associated with creativity, which still has not been what they were associated with before. Before it was more that IKEA was affordable, functional and for all. But now it will be more creative and for all, that the customers will be an extended arm of IKEA's creativity and make it more personal - (Interview 4).

As the informant illustrated, the brand image of IKEA became an extended arm of IKEA's creativity, making it more personal (Informant 4). In relation to theory, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000: 81) emphasize how an 'extended enterprise' is created in a co-creation process, which consists of "a central firm supported by constellations of suppliers". Whereby customers becomes suppliers of several symbolic values, e.g. accessibility, authenticity and creativity, rather than functional needs as Park, Joworski and MachInnis (1986) emphasizes. In the following chapter, a discussion of the focal findings from the analysis will be provided, with a conclusion for the present research, contributions and future research.

5 Discussion & Conclusion

Within this chapter a discussion regarding the main findings will be presented. This is followed by a presentation of the conclusions, related to the purpose and research questions. Lastly, a revision of contributions, limitations and future research will be provided.

5.1 How IKEA manage open-source branding through Instagram

A handful of interesting findings have been illustrated in the analysis, whereby the following section will determine these, in relation to the theoretical discussion and theorizations.

5.1.1 Brand stories contributing to open-source branding

From an open-source branding perspective we have gained insights regarding the importance of being active on a platform which allowed and encouraged consumers to integrate with the brand. Jensen (1998) argued for having a ‘conversational interactivity’ between consumers and the brand, in order to proactively include external partners in the co-creation process (e.g. Gensler et al., 2013). Within the empirical material, insights regarding this, pointed out Instagram as a platform whereby the conversational interactivity have a good foundation. Moreover, the insights highlighted Facebook as a relevant example to compare with, having other functions not advocating a conversational interactivity but consultation interactivity in a greater extent than Instagram. For instance Facebook’s focal functions are more related to chatting, group assembling and event planning, where instead pictures and a fast maneuvering processes was preferred.

Related to theory, incorporating and coordinating consumer-generated content into the branding process is argued for as important (Gensler et al., 2013). Furthermore, setting up a theme for the brand story to follow, will allow consumers in greater extent to relate themselves to the storyline (Huang, 2010). From the case company, the ‘Do it yourself’ hashtag on Instagram represents a theme to which the consumers relate. The insights regarding this theme points in a direction where the theme proactively engages consumer-generated content to be created and uploaded.

We perceive this as an evolvement since IKEA Sweden, relatively late, adapted to the online environment of Instagram. This former approach is reflected through some of the insights from the consumer informants, making before and after parallels. Highlighting how consumers now have greater opportunities in terms of sharing ideas and inspiration through the Instagram platform, under the ‘Do it yourself’ hashtag.

From the empirical material gathered we have gained insights regarding how IKEA Sweden incorporated and coordinated consumer-generated content into their brand story. Reconnecting to our theoretical frame regarding open-source branding, interactivity and openness are essential key factors (e.g. King, 1991; Ind & Bjerke, 2007; Liu & Shrum, 2002; Vernuccio, 2014). By proactively influence consumers on the social media platform Instagram, the insights goes well in hand together with theory, advocating openness and interactivity. As, Vernuccio (2014) argues, how the different stakeholders, producing and reproducing content could be seen as ‘co-protagonists’ of the brand. Thus, through the outcome of our research, the focal consumers are, in a greater extent, becoming co-protagonists. A development as the insights suggests as a trend towards a more including brand, in line with the open-source branding concept.

5.1.2 The co-created branding process

The concept of co-creation of value has been incorporated as a tool into the open-source branding process, by assessing Payne, Storbacka and Frow’s (2008) conceptual framework. Through several insights of the empirical analysis, an identification of the processes have been illustrated, interrelated and further determined into relationship experiences, encounter processes and learning processes between IKEA and the focal consumers. However, as the framework includes the open-source branding process, the insight of how two dimensions of IKEA’s co-creation processes with their customers have also been enlightened. Within the ‘Do it yourself’ approach, the co-creation dimensions distinguishes between an ‘offline’ environment and the ‘online’ environment of Instagram, whereby in the latter is where the open-source branding occurs.

In the co-created branding processes it is the consumer's emotions, way of thinking and behaviour that are essential (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008). Whereby, we have underpinned the crucial aspect of understanding the consumers in a co-creation process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a), due to the fact of how the company, from an open-source branding perspective, has had a defensive approach against consumer initiatives e.g. IKEA Hackers.

The organization started to change their mind-set, adapting to this co-creation mode, which we have perceived as related to IKEA's entrance on Instagram with the hashtag of 'Do it yourself'.

Regarding how consumers feel and think of both firm- and consumer-generated brand stories and the interaction on Instagram, involves a reflective approach of taking a step backwards and analyze the co-creation process (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008). Thus, the insights of how the posts from Instagram often illustrate an ideal-lifestyle of the users, in order to contribute to one's self-affirmation and self-esteem. Hence, the interaction in a conversational interactivity (Jensen, 1998) has been determined into the key elements of 'knowledge sharing' and 'social connections' with the scope of self-expression (Krishnamurthy & Dou, 2008). This interaction contributes to the personalization of content that social networks, such as posts on Instagram, often emphasize.

5.1.3 The developed brand image

With foundation from the empirical insights the informants tend to favor brands that involve consumers, meeting expectations and prioritizing their opinions. Escalas (2010), underpinned that to create an effective brand story, associations closely linked to consumer's self-concept. The insights from the informants highlighted an attractive brand as modern, authentic, creative, inspiring and innovative. We therefore find it as the attributes should be interlinked into the co-created brand story of IKEA Sweden, in order to match the consumer's favored attributes.

Another finding related to what types of attributes preferred, concerned whether a consumer's story really reflected the reality or not. The outcome of this finding pointed in a direction that positive attributes were more common, rather than attributes related to everyday-life. This insight emphasizes content that is unique, whereby consumer-generated brand stories under the hashtag #ikeadiy are modifications of IKEA's products that enhance the personalization of the product's new purpose or design. Thus, the aspect of the consumer-generated brand stories goes hand in hand with the attractive attributes as the informants emphasized. Which enhance Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008) key elements of conversational interactivity (Jensen, 1998) discussed above.

From the gathered insights, related to the former image of IKEA, we found it more related to functional attributes, e.g. functional, affordable, simplicity. According to Park, Joworski and MachInnis (1986), a brand can be associated to various kinds of attributes within different categorizations, such as functional or symbolic needs. In this case, IKEA had an image exclusively related to functional attributes. An insight gained from one of the informants even

pointed out having too many IKEA products was united with getting questioning comments from friends or relatives. Furthermore, insights pointed out other brands, e.g. H & M, as more attractive due to more symbolic associations like famous designers and temporary collections.

By promoting an open approach, encouraging interactivity and consumer engagement the attributes regarding the brand image of IKEA have started to change. Becoming related to as accessible, modern, creative, inspirational, personalized and authentic. Entering social media and Instagram developed another image of the IKEA brand that previously was associated to functional, and in some cases even negative attributes. The insights from the informants provided an image more in line with symbolic attributes (Park, Joworski & MachInnis, 1986). This illustrates an example of the distinction between the case company's brand image categorization of functional and symbolic needs. Whereby, the open-source branding approach emphasizes the latter in the evolution of the brand image.

By analyzing IKEA Sweden's Instagram account and the hashtag 'Do it yourself', we perceive the outcome as a evolution of the brand image, aligning the open-source branding approach, becoming more e.g. modern, accessible, creative and inspiring. During the project, several meaningful insights have been found. From IKEA's traditional image that have been aligned with their brand identity advocating affordability, functionality, for everyone, Scandinavian design and Sweden. However, through their open-source branding approach on Instagram, the consumers are becoming more involved in the branding process, via Instagram and the hashtag 'Do it yourself'.

5.1.4 A holistic perspective: From an evolved brand image to developed brand identity

As several researchers indicate the perceived brand image can influence the brand identity (e.g. King, 1991; Urde, 2003; Gregory, 2007; Roper & Davies, 2007; Ind & Bjerke, 2007; Vernuccio, 2014). Since the branding process is "dynamic and social" (Mertz & Vargo, 2009: 332) that configures the brand in a truly 'open' way (King, 1991), with many intangible components (Mairinger, 2008; Pitt et al., 2006). However, Vernuccio (2014: 216, see also Urde, 2003) further determines how, in an online environment "there can be a steady growth in the stakeholders' contribution to the evolution of a corporate identity, based on well-grounded values" (referring to IKEA, their core values are presented in section 4.1.1), strategic vision and organizational culture (Gregory, 2007; Roper & Davies, 2007).

Thus, the brand identity needs to be aligned with the brand image (Hatch & Schultz, 2003), in order to communicate an aligned and mutually understood brand story.

As figure 1 shows, the vertical axis representing amount of people and the horizontal axis representing time, hence the different processes of co-creation are illustrated.

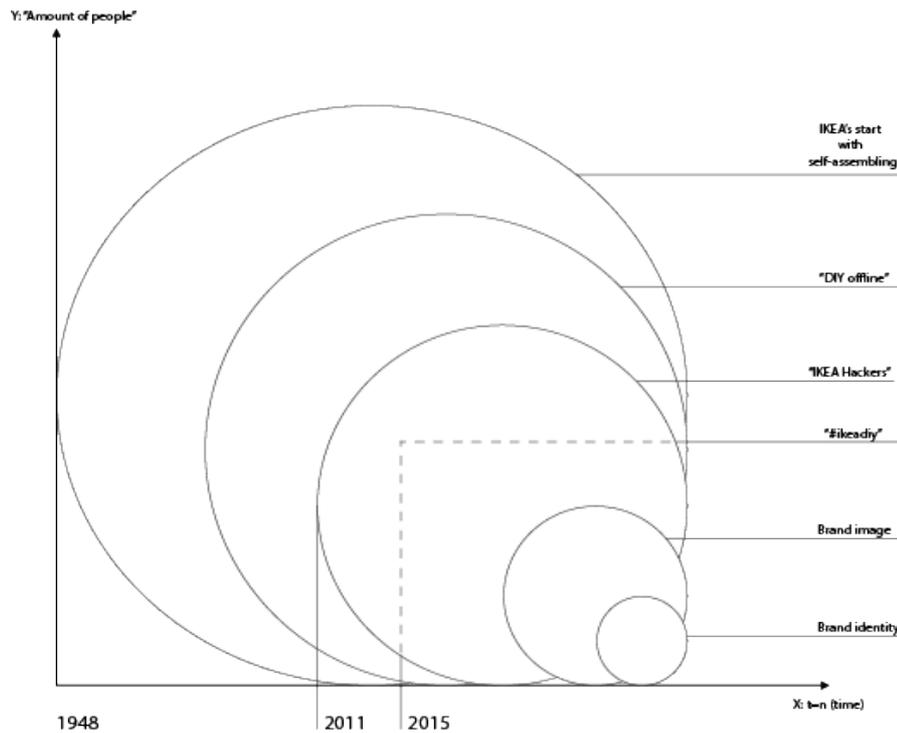


Figure 1: A multidimensional co-creation of value process, in the case of IKEA. Source: own figure.

- *First*, the dimension begins with the self-assembling strategy that is a co-creation process itself, in order to provide lower prices.
- *Second*, the trend of ‘Do it yourself’, whereby a modification of an IKEA product occurs, have been done before in an ‘offline’ environment.
- *Third*, modifications of products in an ‘online’ environment e.g. IKEA Hackers and the Instagram hashtag ‘Do it yourself’.
- *Fourth*, by incorporating and relating the processes of co-creation within the case of IKEA, their brand image evolves.

- *Fifth*, the brand identity is affected by the evolved brand image, through future adaption, according to previously theoretical discussion. Related to the discussion in the previous section, originating within the relation between brand image and brand identity, through core values, organizational culture and strategic vision, we have identified a multidimensional co-creation process.

The X axle illustrates the amount of people that emphasize and are included within the circles, see figure 1. However, the largest circle includes every IKEA consumers that proceeds with the self-assembling process of furniture. Thus, all consumers who self assemble their products, are included.

The second circle, illustrates the amount of people thus modify their IKEA products in an offline environment. Since, as a consumer insight, a consumer did modify her products before the rise of social media. Whereby, the third largest circle emphasize and illustrate the online ‘Do it yourself’ approach that have been created and shared by consumer e.g. IKEA Hackers and ‘#ikeadiy’. Hence, the latter, is the co-created act by IKEA, which promote the encouragement of consumers’ to hashtag their modification of products, thus, are shared on Instagram, as ‘new brand’ content. By taking the hashtag in for account, with more than 1500 pictures under it (01-05-15). The consumer owners of these pictures, as the authors of this research assume and emphasize, are the amount of people who are included in the cutaway portion of the third circle. Nevertheless, it is not possible to neglect the proliferation of content shared on social media, thus, might include more than these 1500 content creators. Since, the reach and impression of every content under the hashtag can affect even more consumers.

However, as this process continues, as Theorization 2 manifest, it is of interest to see how IKEA’s brand image evolves, that is, the fourth circle. Whereby, at least, the consumer informants (8) of this research share similar opinions of how IKEA’s brand image have become more symbolic, rather than functional. Based upon Park, Joworski and MachInnis (1986) research regarding brand images satisfaction of needs (i.e. functional, symbolic and experiential). Nevertheless, these consumer informants’ opinions reflect the amount of people in the fourth circle, thus have been researched.

The last, and smallest circle, emphasize and illustrates how this new process of open-source branding can affect the brand identity, whereby this process is emphasized as further research, that will be later further explained. However open-source branding, a process of incorporating the consumers in a greater extent, in the content creation process, affect the brand image into a different perception of needs. Whereby, an adaption of the open-source branding process in the channel of Instagram, from IKEA's perception, may become more symbolic, hence, not excluding the functional needs of IKEA products.

The insights provided from the IKEA representative emphasized how the organization learnt from mistakes in an 'operant' approach, entering Instagram and opened up for consumers to interact. Similar to how Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) suggest how a company must escape the past, consider how traditional routines within the practices limits the ability to integrate a co-creation mode. We perceive this as process, between consumers and the company. Thus, IKEA's corporate brand identity can leverage from the evolved and enhanced brand image through the #ikeadiy campaign, developing a stronger brand identity, with this 'customer-centric' approach (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2013; see also Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Roberts, Baker & Walker, 2005).

5.2 Conclusions

Our aimed purpose has been to investigate and analyze an open-source branding phenomenon, illustrated through a co-creation process between the case company's Instagram activities with their consumers. In turn, how this has affected the consumers' perception of the case company's brand image. The following research questions have been provided in order to fulfill this;

RQ1: How is co-created branding activities illustrated on IKEA Sweden's Instagram account with their consumers?

RQ2: How has the perceived brand image of IKEA evolved through the co-created branding activities on IKEA Sweden's Instagram account?

5.2.1 Conclusion 1

As the first research question extracts, our research has answered the illustration of the two theoretical concepts of open-source branding and co-creation are interrelated and incorporated with each other and function better together than standing alone, with the provided purpose. The relation between these is essential, since the consumer becomes a co-protagonist of the brand building process whereby an exchange value is central. In this case the utilization of consumers' modification of products and proliferation of positive content. From the consumer perspective, the value is related to symbolic needs e.g. getting feedback, better self-esteem or contributing to a lifestyle. From IKEA's perspective, consumer-generated brand stories becomes an extended arm of the enterprise, where the theme of the 'Do it yourself' hashtag encourages consumers taking part within the co-creation process. Thus, it is contributing to the focal storyline of the case company.

5.2.2 Conclusion 2

The second research question enlightens the evolvement of the brand image, based upon the first research question. In great extent, the brand image has evolved from IKEA's 'traditional' brand image of functional, affordable and for everyone, into more accessible, consumer-centric, creative, inspiring and modern. As a result of the extended arm of consumer-generated brand stories. Thus, has made possible through the online, co-creation process via Instagram and the hashtag 'Do it yourself', which contributes to the open-source branding paradigm.

5.3 Theoretical contribution

This research objective has been to analyze how open-source branding, through co-creation, thus, changes the perception of a brand image. The present research provides a single case study as a benchmark, underpinning the relation between the theoretical concepts, in an online environment. Whereby the theoretical contribution further emphasize Huang's (2010: 314) suggestion, the necessity of developed theory regarding, "whether the structure of brand stories truly affects consumers' perceptions towards a brand". Thus, it has been accomplished, as the section 5.1 and 5.2 emphasize.

The theoretical contributions of this research are related to the conclusions whereby the contribution emphasizes in-depth insights regarding the triangular interplay between open-source branding, co-creation and brand image. In order to analyze the given problem, a model of co-creation has in detail helped to analyze the value involved for both, consumers and the case company. The outcome of the contribution to theory is the relationship between perceived brand image, via incorporating consumers within an open-source branding strategy. Furthermore, as the second question implies, insights regarding the perceived brand image stress the contribution that an open-source branding strategy in an online environment changes how a company brand is perceived.

5.4 Practical contribution

In the case of IKEA, insights regarding a global social media strategy have been determined. Related to this, a contribution towards the case company could be to consider strengths and/or weaknesses, of incorporating a social media strategy only on a local and decentralized scale. Since, utilizing different strategies may imply confusion regarding a consumer's perceived brand image, depending in which country you are at the moment.

Finally, on a general scale, practitioners may utilize the research as a benchmark of how to incorporate consumers, in an online environment through a social media platform. The research may imply with insights regarding expectations from consumers, due to the fact that a company cannot, in the same extent than before, control the outcome in an online environment.

Thus, changing into co-creation mode is essential, since managers have to understand the past, as Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) emphasize. Furthermore, as the research's intention is to analyze how the perceived image may change among a brand's consumers, the outcome could be an indication for other brands. Although, as related to limitations of a qualitative case study, the outcome emphasizes the conditions of the analyzed brand, wherefore it should be seen as a benchmark.

5.5 Limitations and future research

The research has approached the problem through a qualitative approach. This could be seen as a limitation, since applying a quantitative method, a more generalized outcome would have been concluded. However, a qualitative approach contributes with in-depth findings that a quantitative approach may not provide. Hence, our thesis aims to provide a trustworthy transferability with contextualization of the exploratory single case study. Another limitation could be related to unique conditions of the case company. Thus, a significant aspect of the case of IKEA is their strategic vision "To create a better everyday life for the many people", that asserts the unique case setting of the open-source branding strategy. This is difficult to distinguish in a comparison to other brands, thus, additional emphasizes this research as a benchmark for both theory and practice.

Emphasizing future research, the insights regarding the multidimensional process, whereby, the processes are interrelated with each other though the concept of co-creation of value. Hence, it could be of relevance for future researchers to analyze how a brand identity may adapt, whereby incorporating a strategy in line with open-source branding has occurred.

Finally, relating to the limitations above, future research could utilize other industries and various types of companies in terms of e.g. size. This could be relevant to get a bigger sample of companies containing different conditions, and in turn more contributions. Another aspect of future research is related to different perceptions of the IKEA brand depending from where you are. Thus, since the brand have different associations in different countries, compared to this research, focusing on consumers from Sweden.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Interview guide with IKEA representative

This interview guide is divided into 5 themes with 2-5 sub categories within each theme. By this semi-structured approach an open discussion is created and possibilities for following up questions are enhanced, but not included in this interview guide. (T1-T5 illustrates the themes and Sub1-16 illustrates the sub categories within each theme).

T 1: Background

Sub 1: Tasks and focus

Sub 2: Work and implications of importance

T 2: M-commerce

Sub 3: Application user experience

Sub 4: IKEA's vision

Sub 5: Issues

T 3: E-commerce

Sub 6: IKEA's purpose and vision

Sub 7: Web user experience

Sub 8: Issues

T 4: IKEA on social media

Sub 9: Purpose and vision

Sub 10: Commercialized vs. non-commercialized social media presence

Sub 11: Social media user experience

Sub 12: IKEA and the trend 'Do it yourself'

Sub 13: Issues

T 5: Organizational structure

Sub 14: Communication offices and strategies

Sub 15: Social media decisions

Sub 16: Issues

7.1.1 Interview guide with consumers

This interview guide is divided into 7 themes with 2-5 sub categories within each theme. By this semi-structured approach an open discussion is created and possibilities for following up questions are enhanced, but not included in this interview guide. (T1-T8 illustrates the themes and Sub1-32 illustrates the sub categories within each theme).

T 1: Social media habits

Sub 1: Social media popularity

Sub 2: Inspiration from friends through social media

Sub 3: Spending time on social media

Sub 4: Content of posts and shares

Sub 5: Following friends and brands

T 2: Interaction

Sub 6: IKEA on social media (Facebook and Instagram)

Sub 7: Purposes of following brands

Sub 8: Frequency of brand interaction

Sub 9: #IKEADIY

T 3: Sharing brand experiences

Sub 10: Sharing brand experience on social media in general

Sub 11: More specific of sharing IKEA experiences

Sub 12: Characteristics of stimulating brand stories

Sub 13: From brands and friends

Sub 14: Positive or negative brand experience and stories

T 4: Consumer identity

Sub 15: Implications of following brands on social media

Sub 16: Implications of sharing brand stories on social media

Sub 17: Inspiration

T 5: Privacy

Sub 18: Instagram and Facebook privacy

Sub 19: Importance of who can view their content or not

T 6: Open-source branding

Sub 20: Characteristics for brand stories

Sub 21: Involving consumers in the brand building process

Sub 22: Apply into social media

T 7: The Co-creation process

Sub 23: Relationship experience with brands

Sub 24: Relationship experience with IKEA

Sub 25: Learning processes with IKEA

Sub 26: Individual value for Instagram usage

T 8: Brand image

Sub 27: Appealing brand images in general

Sub 28: IKEA's traditional brand image

Sub 29: Symbolic values

Sub 30: IKEA's evolved brand image after the Instagram entrance

Sub 31: The evolved brand images affect in relation exchange

Sub 32: Positive and negative aspects of adapting the brand identity to the evolved brand image

7.2 Virtual Observation

IKEA's promotion activities on Instagram for encouragement to #IKEADIY. Including all activities from 12th of January to 27th of April 2015 (6) plus their 'bibliography' where they promoted #IKEADIY before, hence, they change it time to time, so we could not capture it.

7.2.1 IKEA's generated brand stories and coordinated brand stories



Date: 1st May 2015
[picture] *Bibliography*
IKEA Sweden's official Instagram account. The limited edition of ART EVENT 2015 is now out to buy!



Date: 12th January 2015
[video]
Hell of We are finally rolling out on Instagram! As main character we have #IVAR the dresser, a really #IKEA classic. Tag #IKEADiy if you are doing anything by yourselves, we are so curious...



Date: 26th January 2015
[picture: regram]
More #IKEADiy! Trixy @Littlemissfixit has re-made a trio #FROSTA-stools to a bench with stylish leather belts. The backrest pillows gained eyelets in the corner and hangs on a curtain rod. You are welcome to take a seat!



Date: 9th February 2015
[picture: regram]
Regram: @Trendenser has buffed up their stools - an easy and inspiring #IKEADiy. Have you re-painted any #IKEA furnitures?



Date: 2nd March 2015
[picture]
Place the mirror on the table! The cube is a #IKEADiy by the square mirrors #LOTS!



Date: 16 March 2015
[picture]
Today's #IKEADiy: For only 7 kronor you can buy a different poster rack that is happy to work dubble shift as trouser hanger. Complement with home-made posters or new spring-trousers. No funny business!



Date: 27th April 2015
[video]
This springs most flashy DIY? The new #KNAGGLIG box in untreated redwood is easy pimped with the seasons lovely nuances

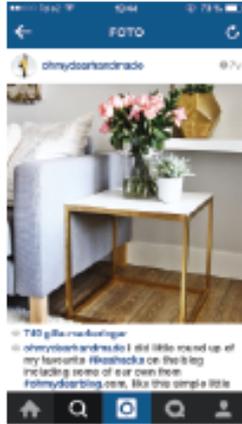


Date: 3rd May 2015
[picture: regram]
Regram: The smart @kommahem have planted lemon and pepper in small grape-houses by the #BLADET vases. Tag your own fine solutions and good looking fix with #IKEADiy!

7.2.2 Consumer-generated brand stories



Date: 1st May 2015
[picture]
"Today's blog post. Mini grape house #DIY Budget variant of the #IKEA vase BLADET. #linkinprofile #inredning #interiordesign @ikeasverige #ikeadly"



Date: 23rd March 2015
[picture]
"I did little round up of my favourite #ikeahacks on the blog including some of our own from #ohmydearblog.com, like this simple little side table! Head on over to the blog (link in profile) to check it out!"



Date: 30th March 2015
[picture]
"New bench in the kitchen! I took our old bed table from #IKEA and unplugged the wheels. Now all of our daily usage are easy access. #ikea #ikeadly #clasholmson #melitta #kostaboda #josephjoseph #differentdesign @ikeasverige @clasholmson sverige"



Date: 26th of January 2015
[original picture @littlemissfixit]
"When Jesper and I moved together (around the millennium shift, my god that's a long time ago) we looked for the perfect nuance to an old bathtub that we aim to renovate. We agreed upon a deep green nuance that have followed me as a favourite since then. The "bathtub-green" colour presents the products of my latest #diy at the Livet hemma-blog and @ikeasverige today in a nice way, right?! Nice colour & material combinations and trixy do-it-yourself-solutions, exactly what I want to work with! #littlemissfixit #ikea"