Country of Origin branding: The Case of Air Canada

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to research how Air Canada uses their country-of-origin as part of their identity and branding strategy and to find out how a global customer base perceives it. Air Canada was chosen for the main focus of this research, as the airline is leveraging their Canadian country-of-origin as the primary factor in differentiating themselves in a highly competitive market. With the vision of becoming a top 10 global airline, Air Canada is using the Canadian country-of-origin as part of their identity and brand strategy to achieve this.

Design/methodology/approach: To explore how Air Canada is using the Canadian country-of-origin as part of their identity and branding strategy, a qualitative method research approach is utilised. A single case study on Air Canada and an interview with an Air Canada Brand Design Manager was carried out to establish the internal identity of the airline. The focus groups were then carried out to establish the image of Air Canada amongst the global audience to identify if there is an alignment or a misalignment between identity and image of the brand. The alignments and misalignments were analysed using Kapferer's (2012) Brand Identity Prism which considers how the identity of a brand is communicated and received as an image by the consumer.

Findings: The results of the research highlight that Air Canada is justified in using the strong Canadian country brand as part of its identity and brand strategy. By asking a global audience who had very limited knowledge of the brand, resulted in consumers evaluating the brand based on their associations with Canada. The favourable associations people have with Canada were reflected positively on the brand image of Air Canada. However, using country-of-origin did have some negative impacts on the image, as the global audience believed Air Canada to be an airline for Canadian consumers only. The results highlighted several alignments and misalignments between identity and image and the most crucial finding highlighted that Air Canada needs to improve their communication and brand visibility to build relationships and engage the global audience they are trying to target.

Research limitations/implications: The study was limited to Lund University Students which will influence the generalisability of results. Also, by focusing only on Air Canada for the case, the results may not applicable to the whole industry, given the fact Air Canada has unique characteristics.

Originality/value: This research will provide valuable insight to brands who use country-of-origin as part of their branding strategy.

Keywords: Country-of-origin, Air Canada, brand identity prism, brand identity, brand image, differentiation, branding strategy, country image.

Paper type: Master Thesis

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1. Introduction

In today's globalised world, competition across many industries is intense, which has led to many brands finding it increasingly difficult to create value and successfully differentiate themselves amongst their rivals (Janiszewska & Insch, 2012). As a result, many brands are expanding globally to attract a new customer base in foreign markets (Van Gelder, 2005). One way a brand can differentiate themselves during global expansion is by aligning their brand with a country-of-origin (also known as COO) (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008). By aligning a brand to the identity of its COO and communicating this effectively to consumers, brands can utilise the favourable association's consumers have with that country and create a positive image in their minds (Adina, Gabriela & Roxana-Denisa, 2015).

The practice of using COO as part of a branding strategy has been utilised by some of the world's most iconic brands as a way to differentiate themselves (Josiassen and Harzing, 2008). For example, the Swiss country brand is considered to be the second strongest country brand in the world according to the Country Index Review, with consumers' associations of Switzerland being; luxury, advanced and innovative (FutureBrand, n.d.). Some Swiss brands including; Swiss army knife, Swatch and Tissot have aligned their branding strategy to the Swiss COO, and this is evident most notably through using the Swiss flag in each of the brand logos, to leverage consumers' positive associations with the country of Switzerland (FutureBrand, n.d.). Alternatively, COO can be used as a powerful marketing tool which can be utilised to 'deceive' consumers on the origin of a brand in order to gain favourable associations and differentiate themselves in the market (Josiassen & Harzing, 2008). An example of this is Häagen-Dazs, which is an American brand but uses words in its brand name to suggest the COO is from Denmark or Germany (Josiassen & Harzing, 2008; Peng, 2013). One of the downsides of aligning a brand to a COO is that any animosity or negative associations consumers have toward a country can negatively impact their image of the brand (Klein, Ettenson & Morris, 1998).

There has been much research over the last 50 years on the topic of COO concerning branding, and there is still no agreed definition about the phenomenon (Tamas, 2015; Josiassen & Harzing, 2008). With this in mind, we view COO as the country that consumers associate with the brand. The existing literature is still inconclusive as to the value of COO and whether brands should, and are in fact capable of, utilising COO effectively as part of their identity and branding strategy (Usunier, 2006). Moreover, some authors even question if COO exists today due to changing market dynamics and the effects of globalisation (Usunier, 2006).

This research will focus on Air Canada, a brand who uses COO as the primary focus of differentiation within their identity and branding strategy. We aim to explore how Air Canada aligns their brand with Canada and explore if the identity that they communicate is the image received by global consumers. To determine why Air Canada uses COO as a differentiation strategy, it is essential to have an understanding of the aviation industry as a whole.

1.1. Background of the Airline Industry

Over the last three decades, the airline industry has undergone substantial transformations across the world (Homsombat, Fu & Sumalee, 2010; Goetz & Graham, 2004; Barret, 2008). The primary catalyst for this change is attributed to the liberalisation and deregulation of airline markets, firstly with the U.S

and Canadian markets in 1987 (Sinha, 2002), followed by the European market in 1994 (Iatrou & Oretti, 2012). This created an environment in which many of the regulatory controls and laws which favoured flag carrying airlines were removed (Doganis, 1994). Flag carrying airlines can be defined as the national airline of a country, (e.g British Airways & Air Canada) and their brand usually incorporates the name of the country, the country's flag and some of the country's unique characteristics, which form part of their brand identity (Goetz, 2002).

The aforementioned change in regulations allowed low-cost carriers (LCC), such as Ryanair, to enter the market and directly compete with flag carriers, by offering much lower fares due to the elimination of many of the substantial operating costs associated with a full-service flag carrier (Dobruszkes, 2006). The higher costs are due in part to, higher landing fees of main airports, increased staffing and costs associated with the increased service offering of flag carrying airlines (Wang, 2014). A LCC can be defined as an airline with a 'no frills' service, as customers pay for their seat only and all other services are an additional cost (Bitzan & Peoples, 2016; Keynes, 2009). LCC rarely use COO in their branding strategy and instead, offer low prices as their primary focus of differentiation (Bitzan & Peoples 2016; Keynes, 2009). Flag carrier airlines find it extremely difficult to compete on price and must therefore look for other ways to differentiate themselves in a way that is relevant to their target market.

1.2 Problematization

The aforementioned regulatory changes in the airline industry around the world create new opportunities for LCC to enter the market (Graham & Vowles, 2006). LCC are the biggest threat to flag carrier airlines by having much lower costs, resulting in lower fares for consumers (Bitzan & Peoples, 2016). This has resulted in the consolidation of many flag carriers, who have joined airline alliances or have created their own LCC subsidiary to compete (Graham & Vowles, 2006). With the ever-growing threat from LCC who differentiate on price by offering low fares, flag carriers must find new ways of differentiating themselves to be competitive in the market (Jarach, Zerbini & Miniero, 2009). One flag carrier which is using a differentiation strategy is Air Canada and they will be the focus of this research. In 2017, Air Canada took the bold step to rebrand and fully align their brand identity and global brand strategy with the Canadian country brand (Air Canada, 2018a). The reason for this was to leverage the association's people hold about Canada in the hope the global customer base will use these associations to evaluate Air Canada (Air Canada, 2018a). Air Canada's primary goal of adopting this strategy is to become a top 10 global airline and expand into new markets (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018). Therefore, this creates the question of how Air Canada uses COO as part of their identity and branding strategy and how the global customer base perceives this?

1.3. Purpose

The purpose of this research is to highlight and analyse any possible alignments and misalignments between the identity of Air Canada and the image of Air Canada among the global audience.

1.4. Aim and Research Question

The primary research question of this paper is;

RQ1: How does Air Canada use COO as a branding strategy and how does a global customer base perceive it?

To answer this research question effectively, three sub-questions have been created:

RQ1A: What aspects of Canada's COO does Air Canada include in their identity and communicate through its branding strategy?

RQ1B: What image of Air Canada is perceived by the global target market?

RQ1C: What are the alignments and misalignments between the perceived image and the identity communicated?

1.5. Research Contributions

This study will use a qualitative approach to investigate the usage of COO in Air Canada's identity. The brand identity prism (Kapferer, 2012) will be used as a theoretical framework to explore if there is an alignment between the internal identity and the image of Air Canada among the global audience. The service industry and in particular the airline industry are areas that are understudied and this research aims to contribute a new angle to the current literature, using the case of Air Canada (Javalgi, Cutler & Winans., 2001; Tamas, 2015).

Furthermore, this study will attempt to address Usunier's (2006) proclaimed "relevance gap", in an attempt to combine the theory of COO and branding, with practical relevance for managers and businesses. Usunier (2006) concludes that a potential approach to resolving the relevance gap is to continuously challenge the long-studied research field of COO. This will enable further insight into the usage and practicality of airlines aligning themselves with their COO for brand managers.

1.6. Delimitations

The main delimitation of this paper is that it focuses solely on the airline industry. The reason the airline industry was chosen is because COO is used as part of their branding strategy in a variety of different ways. The second delimitation of the research is that we are only focusing on Air Canada, meaning that the findings cannot be generalised across all airline brands. Canada is a unique country brand with unique country characteristics (geographical, political, cultural and economic) that are not necessarily shared by other countries. What works for Air Canada may not necessarily work for other airlines.

2. Literature Review

This review will first examine the literature surrounding COO and explore how it has evolved over the years. The second section of the literature review will examine branding, with a focus on brand image and brand identity. The brand identity prism will then be introduced, and finally, the topic of COO and brand image will be linked.

2.1. Country-of-Origin

In today's global economy, branding has become an essential strategy for achieving a competitive advantage and success (Kapferer, 2012). Countries, like brands, have recognised that COO branding can be useful when in marketing themselves for tourism and investment (FutureBrand, n.d.). Canada is an example of a strong country brand that can leverage upon its unique characteristics, to create favourable associations (FutureBrand, n.d.). Brand managers and academics have long recognised the power and value of COO as a way to differentiate their brand, as it can act as a re-assurer and risk reducer for consumers when purchasing unknown high-risk products (Melin, 2002). A review of current literature is therefore necessary to have a clear understanding of the influences of COO on a brand.

2.1.1. History of Country-of-Origin research

COO has been a significant source of marketing research over the last 50 years and has been analysed in a multitude of studies in order to explore its impact on consumer assessment of a brand, its products and their behaviour (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999; Liu, Johnson & Johnson, 2013; Elliott & Cameron, 1994). The research has continuously evolved and diverged into numerous avenues of literature in an attempt to conceptualise COO into various new terms. These facets or research streams of COO have established new terms such as; Country of Origin, Country Image, Product-Country Image, Country Equity, Country of Brand, Country of Assembly, Country of Design, Country of Parts, Made-in Country Image, Country of Manufacture and Country Image, which have been used interchangeably to describe similar concepts (Tamas, 2015; Kleppe, Iversen & Stensaker, 2002; Papadopoulos, Heslop & Bennett, 1993; Shimp, Samiee & Madden, 1993). These facets of research avenues have attempted to evaluate more specific aspects of the broader COO phenomena, and some of these will be explained in this chapter.

There are many articles which have vigorously criticised past COO research and the notion of COO as a concept (Usunier, 2006; Josiassen & Harzing, 2008). Jean-Claude Usunier (2006) suggests that COO is "Ivory Tower" research as it does not offer practical advice for brands and adds to the confusion of the topic. Usiner (2006) further proposes that such research is directed largely by usefulness, while being deficient in any practicality and lacking theory. This was highlighted further by Usunier (2006), who conclusively reveals a "relevance gap" in the research, whereby there is a misalignment of converging business needs and proper management practices. The author goes on to argue that real-world relevance is critical and that adapting to a phenomenon over time can generate new knowledge and reflexivity in research (Usinier, 2006). Finally, Usinier (2006) concludes that a potential approach to resolving the relevance gap is to continuously challenge the long-studied research field of COO and question its relevance.

2.1.2. Country-of-Origin and Cues

Country-of-Origin can be used as a cue by consumers when evaluating new products (Josiassen & Harzing, 2008. Intrinsic cues are features which are a tangible, such as product features (Tamas, 2015). Extrinsic cues are features that are external to the products physical features and are intangible attributes (price, brand value) (Ahmed, Johnson, Ling, Fang & Hui, 2002). Such extrinsic cues enable consumers to perceive a product's country-of-origin as a primary determinant in the purchase of a new product, even before evaluating other attributes (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000). When evaluating a product and making a purchasing decision, customers weigh extrinsic cues when intrinsic cues are absent, and therefore extrinsic (intangible) cues are critical intangible attributes when consumers make purchases (Ahmed et al. 2002).

The Cue Utilisation theory by Jacoby, Olson and Handdock (1971) examined which specific product characteristics can be utilised as determinants of perceived product quality and purchase decisions. The study concluded that cues are based on the judgement of specific product attributes such as quality, colour, price, packaging as well as intangible qualities such as country-of-origin or manufacture. Consumers utilise cues to assess a product or service, which ultimately influences their behaviour (Ahmed et al. 2002).

2.1.3. Country-of-Origin Effect

The term country-of-origin effect (COOE) was first coined by Robert Schooler (1971) who found that a products COO can influence consumers' opinion towards the product. However, Tamas (2015) highlights concerns that the attributes of COOE are challenging to define and conceptualise despite decades of research. The author goes on to say that one of the negative aspects of the term COOE is that its ambiguous nature makes it difficult to illustrate with models or theories (Tamas, 2015). Furthermore, due to the complexity of COO, huge variations occur due to the COO of a product or service, which can, in turn, lead to a divergence in findings (Tamas, 2015). This finding is supported by Josiassen and Harzing (2008) who suggest the effect of COO is highly contextual and is dependent on the product, the country and the specific situation because political and economic situations are continually evolving.

Tamas (2015) has identified that the COOE can lead to many cognitive processes. These include; previous experiences, country stereotypes, country images, awareness with select products/services and its country-of-origin and lastly, consumers' attitudes, perceptions and purchasing behaviours towards a particular nation (Tamas, 2015). Many managers can agree that understanding the aforementioned COOE processes is key to managing a brand. However, the lack of guidance from theory due to the ambiguous nature of COOE, leaves researchers continuously exploring new research avenues to provide clarity (Usunier, 2006; Josiassen-Harzing, 2008; Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch & Palihawadana, 2011).

2.1.4. Country-of-Origin and Services

Research has expanded to evaluate the effect of country-of-origin on services; an area still understudied to this day (Javalgi, Cutler & Winans, 2001). In today's globalised economy, the service sector is subject

to rapid change and innovation with COO playing an ever-increasing role (Tamas, 2015). Javalgi, Cutler and Winans. (2001) found that the connection between COO and services is akin to the connection between COO and products. Bruning's (1997) study investigated the effects of COO, individuals' national loyalty and choice of airline. Bruning (1997) sought to test whether national loyalty played a role in Canadians choosing Canadian carriers over foreign carriers in an increasingly competitive market. The study specifically sought to test whether national loyalty will be an influential factor in Canadians selecting an airline (Bruning, 1997). The study concluded that while national loyalty is an essential component of COO, the attributes of a country come second to price when Canadian customers select an airline (Bruning, 1997). However, the findings of this study are refuted by Ho & Foon (2012) who investigated the effect of COO on international students' perception of their educational institution. The study found that COO did not influence students attitudes and behaviours (Ho & Foon, 2012). This highlights how different contexts affect consumer's attitudes towards COO, which was a concern raised by Josiassen and Harzing (2008).

2.1.5. Country-of-Origin and Country Image

Like much of the other research on COO, the exact definition of a country image has been ambiguous. Wang, Li, Barnes and Ahn (2012) defines the country image as the cognitive depiction of a nation and its inhabitants. Various factors may be included in these beliefs including opinions on a nation's economic and technological situation and potential emotive thoughts towards social and political situations (FutureBrand, n.d., Anholt, 2002). Positive feelings towards a nation can be harnessed as a competitive advantage for brands (Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar & Diamantopoulos, 2015). Chia-Hui (2011) argues that COO is a determinant as an external cue in a consumer purchasing decision. He further suggests that COO has the potential to conceive various perceptions of product and brand quality when it comes to deciding between various COO products. This phenomenon can be further attributed to a consumer's country image beliefs and has the potential to affect purchasing decisions (Chia-Hui, 2011).

Research has recognised that country image is a reliable indicator of consumer evaluations towards a countries products and brands (Papadopoulo, Banna & Murphy, 2017). According to Gotsi, Lopez and Andriopoulos (2011), there have been three main approaches to classifying country image, based off the works of Setiono, Pan, Hsieh and Azcarrage's (2006), Mossberg and Kleppe's (2005) and Roth and Diamantopoulo (2009). Firstly, early studies developed country image as the perceptions which consumers hold towards products originating from certain countries (Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos, 2011). The second wave of research uncovers country image and product image as separate concepts (Han, 1989; Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos. 2011). Lastly, researchers in the 1990s identified that COO is a comprehensive concept affected by many factors, not only country image (Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos. 2011).

Governing a nation's image is a critical aspect of a brands image, particularly with a brand which is irrevocably linked to a nation (directly through its name, logo or some other association) (Tamas, 2015). Wang et al. (2012) argues, however, that while a positive country image of a product may lead to a purchase intention, a favourable product image is more likely to influence a purchase. Papadopoulos, Heslop and Bennett (1993) assert that consumers can separate their view between a nation and the products originating from a nation. Morello (1983), suggests that images are conceived from subjective rather than objective means and is indicative of what our perception of what we believe and are familiar with regarding an object. Morello (1983) concludes that consumers' perceptions towards products with

"Made In" labels are a key indicator for anticipating consumer's actions and attitudes, and that safeguarding a positive image of both a nation and its products should be a countries top priority. Morello (1983) finally lists strategies in which nations can improve their country image and states that products produced in nations with a positive image, should emphasise their "made in" location via corporate communications.

Researchers have also developed varying perspectives on how country image affects the consumer (Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos, 2011). One camp of researchers (Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos, 2011) deem country images as an individual's perceptions, mental pictures and impressions which they harbour towards a particular country. Another group interprets country images as a cognitive structure and finally, others view country image as both a cognitive and affective component of the country image concept (Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos, 2011). Gotsi, Lopez and Andriopoulos. (2011, p.256) define COO in this context "as a mental network of affective and cognitive associations connected to a country". Gotsi, Lopez and Andriopoulos. (2011), further discusses the associative view of country images and describes how country image is constructed of numerous nodes which connect in a consumers' memory. The nodes are developed over time by a country's economic, political and technological circumstances, as well as by historical events, traditions and finally, by a country's products, brands and corporations (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Hence, brands can act as a source of associations which can influence a country's image (Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos, 2011).

Khan and Bamber (2008) state that if a products COO is known to a consumer and other product attributes are unfamiliar, the image of the COO is likely to transfer and impact the image of a product and brand. When consumers have limited attributes or experience of a product to judge on, COO and the name and strength of a brand will represent a more significant role in a customer's purchase decision (Khan & Bamber, 2008). This can be attributed to the fact that COO and its image, as well as the brand name act as a re-assurer and risk reducer, ultimately helping to ease the consumers' mind in purchasing unknown products, particularly those who are high risk and high involvement products, such as airlines (Ahmed et al. 2002; Melin, 2002). Khan and Bamber (2008) suggest that consumer's connotations surrounding brand name cue associations regarding not only the brand but also the brand's COO. The authors further elaborate that customers are easily able to make cognitive connections between a products country-of-manufacture and its COO, thereby juxtaposing their perceptions as a country of origin image and thus cultivating an image of the product and its respective brand (Khan & Bamber, 2008). This can be attributed to national stereotypes, cultural appropriation, independent knowledge and external influences (Papadopoulos, Heslop & Bennett, 1993; Johansson & Thorelli, 1985; Suh, Hur & Davies, 2016).

Many authors conclude that the images which consumers associate with products, often concern product quality and therefore a consumer's perception of product quality will influence their perception of the nation from which the product originated and vice versa (Roth & Romeo, 1992; Kleppe, Iversen & Stensaker, 2002; Han, 1989). Bilkey and Nes (1982) suggest that country image impacts product quality and consumers anticipated risk of purchase. Roth and Romeo (1992) investigated how consumers perceive products deriving from select countries. They conclude that country image and customer purchasing behaviour is highly dependent on the match between the image of a country and the vital product features (Roth & Romeo, 1992). Therefore, customers can create specific images of countries

which they further affiliate with products and product categories deriving from that country (Roth & Romeo, 1992).

2.1.6. Country and Brand Personality

Aaker (1997, p.347) defines brand personality as 'the set of human characteristics associated with the brand". Various studies have confirmed that individuals tend to allocate personality traits to nations to understand and distinguish them (Zeugner-Roth & Žabkar, 2015). Some researchers have found that only certain personality traits may affect consumer's attitudes and behaviours (Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal, 2006; Rojas-Méndez, Murphy & Papadopoulos, 2013). Rojas-Méndez, Murphy and Papadopoulos (2013) state that individuals around the world are developing attitudes towards nations worldwide due to an increasingly globalised economy, where international products, media, travel and instant internet connections are available. These sources of stimulation can create definitive attitudes, judgements and purchasing behaviour towards a nation, brands and ultimately its product (Rojas-Méndez, Murphy & Papadopoulos, 2013). The aforementioned authors believe that personal development is a fundamental aspect of marketing and various psychological theories such as psychological trait theory can assist in understanding, altering, and predicting human behaviour. Effective branding can tap into consumer's emotions and create affective bonds, where brand traits are given symbolic human qualities, which ultimately stimulate greater interest and tighter affiliations towards brands (Rojas-Méndez, Murphy & Papadopoulos, 2013; Garip, 2013). Because of this, brands are positioned within the emotional and experiential world of consumers, where non-functional attributes such as symbolic meaning can influence consumers' perceptions (Garip, 2013; Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). Such symbolic consumption conceives social identity to the consumer and defines an individual's status and role in society as consumers strive to meet their psychological and sociological needs and develop into their ideal selves (Garip, 2013; Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). Via the consumption of a product, a consumer symbolically disseminates a social and functional meaning behind the usage of a product and brand to their friends and family and is indicative of an individual's lifestyle and personal priorities (Garip, 2013).

2.2. Branding

Research has been abundant on the subject of branding since the 1980's, as companies began to realise that their brand name represented an intangible asset (Kapferer, 2012). This section will explore the previous research and theories regarding the topic.

According to Kapferer (2012), brands are one of the most critical aspects of a company's assets and hence, ought to be utilised as a key component in a company's strategy. According to Nistorescu, Barbu and Dumitriu, (2013), a brand signifies the entire essence and meaning of a good, separate from the actual usage of the product. According to the widely cited American Marketing Association (Wood, 2000, p.664) a brand is "a name, term, design, symbol, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from competitors." Brands represent a crucial point of differentiation for companies, and thus proper strategic management of a brand can enable favourable outcomes towards a company's performance (Wood, 2000). When

companies bestow their products and services with the influence of their brand, they are undertaking the activity of branding (Kotler & Keller, 2016). De Chernatony and McDonald (1998), argue that successful brands can identify and transfer pertinent added value to customers via recognisable products, symbols, services, people and places. Healey (2018) states that a brand is a promise of satisfaction between two parties (e.g a firm and a customer). Ghodeswar (2008) argues that strong brands allow customers to associate various information such as images, awareness, thoughts, feelings, attitudes and experiences. He further states that a brand offers a value proposition statement to customers, offering functional, emotive and self-expressive benefits. Hence, the benefits which brands offer are invaluable for both customers and firms alike (Ghodeswar, 2008).

Although customers may have preconceived feelings towards a brand, advertising and publicity allow the brand to influence a customer's feelings positively (Olsson, 2012). Furthermore, creative strategies and thinking, as well as differentiation, allow brands to be seen and stand out to customers (Olsson, 2012). Strong brands can operate as a risk reducer, build trust, strengthen loyalty, guarantee perception of quality and act as a catalyst during the customers search and decision process (Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı, & Özşahin 2011; Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, 2011; Keller, 1993; Melin, 2002). Kapferer (2012, p.22) states that the brand can externally emphasise the internal characteristics of a product, "the brand is a sign, therefore external, whose function is to disclose the hidden qualities of the product which are inaccessible to contact". Brands have the power to act as an identifier to customers (Guzmán, 2005). The brand acts as an identity of the product, where the challenge is to cultivate a distinctive and robust image (Kohli & Thakor, 1997). Identity and Image is the backbone of the brand and therefore, managing both is of great importance to marketers (Guzmán, 2005).

2.3. Brand Identity

A critical step in managing a brand is to forge a strong and clear brand identity (Kapferer, 2012). The identity is comprised of the essential brand core values, the vision and mission of the brand and the tangible/intangible attributes. All of which differentiate the brand and adds value to the customer, as well as the quality and performance of the product (Kapferer 2012; Ghodeswar, 2008). Ghodeswar (2008) additionally states that extended identity is forged into various identity elements, being brand personality, relationship and symbol association that further develop the brand. Barbu (2016) argues that the external (public) image of a brand is reflected by the brand's identity, which begins with the fundamental aspects of a corporation and the products it offers. Kapferer (2012) asserts that brands must work on creating a capable brand identity, before expecting to create an alluring brand image. Aaker (1996) suggests that brand identity is successfully achieved when a brand understands its core values and can communicate these clearly. Identity is comprised of kernel facets, being fixed and indispensable inner core values, and peripheral facets, malleable outer characteristics which the brand can alter when looking to innovate or enhance their image (Kapferer, 2012). The brands that attract attention and perform at a high level tend to possess a unique identity, innovate and create a feeling of amazement and satisfaction from their customers (Kapferer, 2012).

2.4. Brand Image

Extensive research has explored the importance of brand image, although there have been varying views on an exact definition of the term. Hatch and Schultz (2001) define brand image as the external impression of a company and its stakeholders. Arora and Stoner (2009) offer a slightly differing view,

stating brand image as being the emotive attributes which connect a brand with a company or products and can enable an effect on customers purchasing processes. Keller (1993, p.3) offers an alternative view, delineating brand image as the 'consumer perceptions of a brand held as associations in consumers minds'. Kapferer (2012) describes brand image as the perceptions that stakeholders associate with the firm, consisting of brand name, visual symbols, products, advertisements and sponsoring. Wood (2000, p.662) simultaneously refers to the term brand image as brand description and defines it as "a description of associations and beliefs a consumer has about a brand". Keller (2009) further postulates that a strong brand image has the potential to create stronger and more favourable brand associations amongst customers, increase customer loyalty, decrease vulnerability in competitive markets and improve the effectiveness of marketing communications.

Brand image has been irrevocably linked with the brand associations of consumers (Korchia, 2000; Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). Keller (1993) defines brand associations as the perceptions about a brand as reflected in consumer's memory, ultimately forming a brand image in the consumer's mind. Likewise, Aaker (1991) proclaims that brand associations are everything that has a connection with a brand and that this connection to the brand will be stronger in the consumers mind with associations. He further states that brand associations can assist consumers in processing, organising and retrieving cognitive information and thereby assisting them in making purchasing decisions. Previous empirical literature by Aaker (1996) uncovered three possible constructs which are indicators of brand associations; brand image, brand attitude and perceived quality. Furthermore, Low and Lamb (2000) found that brand associations are advantageous as it helps brands when differentiating, positioning and extending brands. Keller (1993) further divides brand associations into subgroups: attitudes and benefits. Brand attitude is characterised as a consumer's overall evaluation of a brand (Keller, 1993), which can be seen as the implicit view of benefits and attributes. Studies have correlated attitudes with having a significant effect on brand image (Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001). Benefits, on the other hand, represent the values consumers associate with a product or service and how these products/services meet the needs of customers (Keller, 1993).

Previous studies have indicated that individuals use their own life experiences and their unique personality to perceive and interpret a brand's image, meaning that each person will interpret a brands image differently (Dean, Arroyo-Gamez, Punjaisri & Pich, 2016; Sjödin & Törn, 2006). There has been a debate in the literature regarding the possibility of firms being able to affect consumers' perception towards brands image. According to Kapferer (2012), since the image of a brand is created in the consumer mind, consumers' perceptions and their created image is difficult to influence. On the other hand, Camiciottoli, Ranfagni and Guercini (2014) argue that brand associations can be exploited to create a positive image in consumers' minds. Melin (2002) illustrates that the knowledge which customers interpret from a brand can be rational (functional) or emotional and that the image of the brand often contains symbolic meanings behind it. He further states that image of the brand is crucial to consumers' perceptions of not only the image of the brand but also of their self-image and the image of other brand users (Melin, 2002). Thus, the brand image can contribute to both a consumer's self-rationalisation and social acceptance (Melin, 2002).

A brand can cultivate a compelling image through the formation of positive, distinct and powerful associations (Keller, 2001; Melin, 2002). A distinct and robust image allows brands to improve customer purchasing behaviour towards their products and hence brands with a premium image can

charge a higher price (Anselmsson, Bondesson & Johansson, 2014). Additionally, a strong brand image can enhance a customer's associations of perceived quality, which can be influenced by many factors including a products physique (packaging), as well as a products advertising, thereby representing the functional values of the brand (Melin, 2002). On the other hand, a brand can create image associations via emotional values, which can be attributed to the performance, lifestyle and COO of the product and the brand (Melin, 2002). When customers interact, and consume a brand, the experience can influence their attitude, where they can feel a sense of belonging to particular group, as well as self-actualisation (Melin, 2002; Kapferer, 2012; Sinclair, 2008). Finally, a positive image can act as assurance for customers, as a straightforward and authentic image of a company's vision can enhance trust with customers (Zatwarnicka-Madura, Stecko & Mentel, 2016; Deheshti, Firouzjah & Alimohammadi, 2016).

Brand image can be further strengthened with effective advertising and the appropriate use of celebrity endorsements (Chan, Leung Ng & Luk, 2013; Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, 2011). These benefits can contribute to higher brand equity and hence better revenues and further growth (Ansary & Hashim, 2017; Lee, Lee & Wu, 2011). Melin (2002) emphasises that many consumers already have established and possible preconceived attitudes behind a brand, without having any direct experience with it. Changing such attitudes can be time-consuming and challenging for a firm to implement (Melin, 2002), as seen in the strategic turnaround of Harley Davidson (Agnihotri, 2013).

According to Keller (1993) and Munoz (2004), strong brand images can positively strengthen an individual's self-image, increase the chance of purchase and lead to feelings of self-belonging. Ultimately, managing such attitudes towards a brand's image is crucial towards a firm being seen in a favourable light (Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012).

2.4.1. COO Cues and Brand Image

Country-of-origin can transfer various cues including normative, cognitive and affective attributes towards the brand image (Shahzad, 2014; Klumpers, 2014), Consumers will decipher these factors as symbolic of product quality, self-actualisation and group affiliation (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999; Klumpers 2014; Millan & Reynolds 2014). The normative attributes consist of social and personal norms which people possess towards a product, brand or service's COO and includes bias, ethnocentricity and animosity (Fernández-Ferrín, Bande-Vilela, Klein & Rió-Araújo, 2015).

Ethnocentricity can be defined as the inclination of consumers to adopt their nation's products over foreign products (Phau & Prendegast, 2000) and is a significant factor in affecting customer decisions by influencing their perceptions and evaluations towards a product attributes. Ethnocentrism can lead consumers to avoid foreign products because they compete against domestic products and this can result in negative foreign brand images and positive domestic brand images (Supphellen & Grønhaug, 2003). Many studies have found that COO cues, such as ethnocentrism, have a significant effect on customers' evaluation of products (Cilingir & Basfirinci, 2014). Chryssochoidis, Krystallis, and Perreas (2007) believe that when it comes to consumers' product evaluations, both COO effect and consumer ethnocentrism are interrelated and that when consumers place their judgements on the product/service/brands COO, both concepts yield similar results. Cilingir & Basfirinci (2014) state that COO is further affected by country image stereotypes and thereby influenced by ethnocentricity.

Animosity is another COO normative cue and has been defined by Klein, Ettenson and Morris (1998) as the remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events that will affect consumers' purchase behaviour in the international market-place. The aforementioned authors state that consumers may avoid purchasing a product due to their feelings of animosity towards the country-of-product origin. These judgements are independent of the actual product judgements. Papadopoulos, Banna and Murphy (2017) attribute animosity to emotion and especially to ingroup-outgroup theory. Both animosity and ethnocentricity are affected by ingroup-outgroup theory, which Tajfel (1981) developed while investigating the relations between groups during conflict and found that the mechanics behind animosity and ethnocentrism can be explained with the theory. As an essential element of research in social psychology (Papadopoulos et al. 2017), the in-group and out-group dynamic can foster feelings of "identity and close attachment" versus "Separateness, opposition or even hatred" (Nijssen and Douglas, 2004, p. 27).

Considerable research has uncovered that consumers evaluate product quality based on its COO (cognitive effect). Josiassen and Harzing (2008) state that a poorly viewed COO is likely to have an impact on consumer's view of price and product quality. Han and Terpstra (1988) confirms that the COO image influences consumers' perceptions of products from foreign countries. Alden, Steenkamp and Batra (1999), concluded that foreign brands from developed countries can be at an advantage when it comes to positive brand images and consumer perceptions, particularly in developing countries where the high status of western brands makes it hard for local brands to compete. In such a case, the foreignness of the product and the western culture from which it originates can be utilised as an effective marketing and positioning strategy, where companies are taking advantage of the substantial equity and image of developed countries (Zhou, Yang & Hui, 2009).

Researchers have previously investigated whether demographics influence consumers' perceptions of foreign products. A 1972 study by Anderson and Cunningham (1972) concluded that the COO effect is more influential in less educated customers (Tamas, 2015). Another study by Schweiger, Otter and Strebinger (1997) found that COO effect is stronger on older consumers and those without much information on the product tended to resort to COO cues when evaluating products. This finding is further supported by Usunier (2006), who states that bias towards foreign products have disappeared mainly with younger customers.

2.5. Country-of-Origin and the connection between brand image and identity.

In the relation between identity and image, Kapferer (2012) created an identity and image model, which conceptualises the relationship between the sender (identity), the message and the receiver (image). The model signifies that the communication signals a company's outputs to receivers will create a specific image in the mind of consumers. The image is a combination of different brand messages, including the name, visual symbols, ads, sponsors and articles (Kapferer, 2012). Thereby, an image is created by decoding the message, products, places and communication outputted by the sender (Kapferer, 2012). Additionally, other sources of inspiration including imitation, opportunism and idealism affect the message sent to the receiver. During the journey from message to receiver, the communication can be affected by noise and communication from other competitors (Kapferer, 2012), which can potentially alter the interpretation to the receiver in an undesirable way and lead to differing brand images in various international markets. There can be a neglect in firms strategically understanding the importance of adapting to communication from competition, which can create issues when trying to

market and communicate a universal brand identity globally (Kapferer, 2012). Moreover, there is still ambiguity in the research in how to research the differing brand image across markets. Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between country and brand Image-Identity connections and have found that the image and identity of a country as a brand does have a relationship and value transfer with a corporate brand (Mihalache & Vukman, 2005; Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos, 2011). Furthermore, previous literature (Mihalache & Vukman, 2005, Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos, 2011) on COO and branding has found that corporate brand identities have the potential to influence country images, and this change in image is uneven across nations. Many authors have attributed this to the fact that consumers ethnocentricity, animosity, group identity and views of themselves diverge and differ across various cultures (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Chryssochoidis, Krystallis, & Perreas, 2007; Bruning, 1997; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015; De Nisco et al, 2016; Johansson, Ronkainen & Czinkota, 1994).

2.6. Brand Identity Prism

There have been numerous theories and frameworks developed behind brand image, however for this study Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (2012, p.158) will be discussed (see figure 1). Kapferer (2012) recognises that brand identity derives from corporate identity and has developed a Brand Identity Prism, containing six facets of brand identity: Physique, Personality, Culture, Self-image, Reflection and Relationship (Kapferer, 2012). These elements are further categorised into two additional dimensions. Vertically being the picture of the sender or the organisation (Physique and Personality), which is communicated to the picture of recipient (Reflection and Self-Image). Horizontally being internalisation (culture) and externalisation (relationship), where culture stands for the organisation's internal and physique stands for the organisation's external (Kapferer, 2012)

The six dimensions of brand identity will be briefly defined using Kapferer (2012):

- Physique describes the physical qualities and specifications of a product, made of salient or emerging features, which come to mind when a customer thinks of a product (Kapferer, 2012);

- Personality represents a brands typical features, expressed as human personality characteristics, using the big five model developed by Goldberg (1992), to measure the various five dimensions of human personality. With those being openness, agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism and conscientiousness (Goldberg, 1992);

- Culture Is the brand's core ideology which is developed internally and displayed externally. This ideology can differentiate brands by building emotive connections with customers and developing strong values (Kapferer, 2012);

- Relationship represents the brands interaction and transactions between people, particularly in the service industry (Kapferer, 2012);

- Self-Image is conceptualised as how consumers view and idealise themselves when using a brands product. An internal mirror (I feel, I am) is what the customer experiences as an inner relationship within (Kapferer, 2012);

- Reflection depicts the brand's perceived user type, which is expressed as outwardly as an external mirror (they are)(Kapferer, 2012);
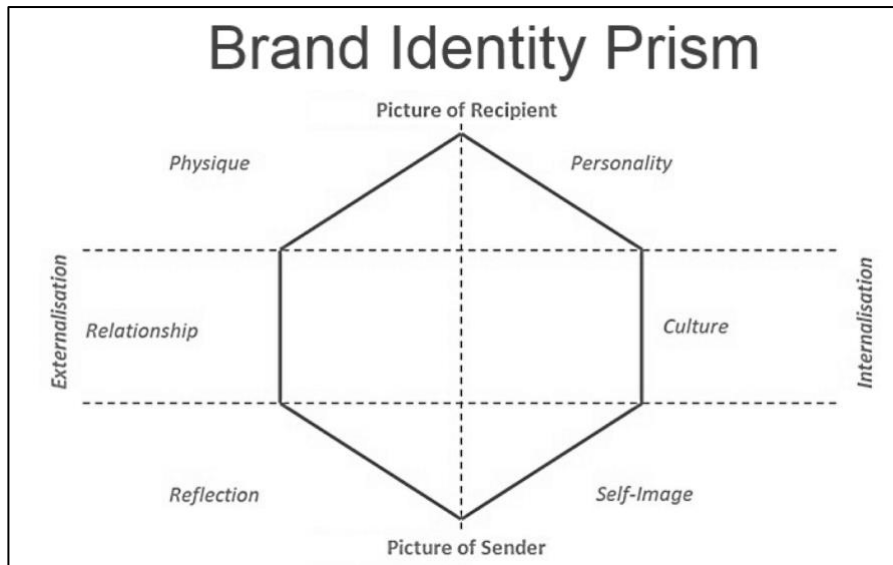
Figure 1: Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2012, p.158)

2.7. Chapter Summary

The academic literature on country-of-origin, brand identity and brand image are extensive. As such, it is essential to highlight the main points that are critical to this study. Firstly, COO has been a significant topic of research for over 50 years with most authors agreeing that COO is an essential consideration for consumers when making purchase decisions of products and services (Josiassen & Harzing, 2008; Tamas, 2015). The current literature states that if a products COO is known to a consumer and other product attributes are unfamiliar, the image of the COO is likely to transfer and impact the image of the product or brand (Khan & Bamber, 2008). When consumers have limited attributes or experience with a product to judge on, COO will represent a more significant role in the consumers' purchase decision (Khan & Bamber, 2008). The COO, its image and the brand name act as a re-assurer and risk reducer, ultimately helping to ease the consumer's minds in purchasing unknown products (Melin, 2002).

Research states that brand identity is comprised of the essential brand core values, being: the vision and mission of the brand and the tangible/intangible attributes (Kapferer, 2012; Ghodeswar, 2008). The values differentiate the brand and add value to the customer, as well as the quality and performance of the product (Kapferer, 2012; Ghodeswar, 2008). The brand image is a description of associations and beliefs a consumer has about a brand (Wood, 2000). A sharp brand image has the potential to create stronger and more favourable brand associations amongst customers, increase customer loyalty, decrease vulnerability in competitive markets and improve the effectiveness of marketing communications (Keller, 2009).

Kapferer's brand identity prism is the most applicable framework for understanding a brands' tangible and intangible characteristics (Kapferer, 2012). According to Kapferer (2012), the brand identity can be represented by a hexagonal prism standing between the sender and the recipients. There are six dimensions of Kapferer's brand identity (physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection and self-image) (Kapferer, 2012). Kapferer (2012) distinguishes between the brand identity created by the company and the brand image perceived by the consumer. These may differ as a result of discrepancies between what was intended and what is received. Brand identities created by the brand managers can be overwhelmed by "noise" leading to unintended brand images across markets (Kapferer, 2012).

3. Methodology

This chapter provides a step by step guide to the selection of various research techniques and justification for each chosen approach.

3.1. Research approach/method

 According to Creswell (2008), a research approach is the plans and procedures a researcher uses when approaching a research problem. This process starts with wide-ranging assumptions, followed by a comprehensive method of data collection and ending with an analysis and interpretation of the data. Researchers must acknowledge which methods will be useful for the study: inductive, deductive or abductive approach, and qualitative or quantitative method (Creswell, 2008; Ali & Birley, 1999).

3.1.1. Inductive, deductive and Abductive research

There are several different perspectives on how to relate theory and research in research design, deductive, inductive and abductive (Creswell, 2008; Heit & Rotello, 2010). The deductive approach begins with testing a theory, which is utilised in the creation of the hypothesis, where instruments to measure and observe attitudes or behaviours of participants are used. This leads to the collection and analysis of data on these instruments to approve or disprove the hypothesis (Creswell, 2008). Induction differs from deduction, in that the outcomes of the study result in theory generation (Heit & Rotello, 2010). Researchers identify patterns, categories and themes deriving from a dataset and analyse these to reach conclusions and build theories (Creswell, 2008). Researchers then attempt to draw general inferences from the results (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012).

As Awuzie and McDermott (2017) mention, researchers must decide on whether to mix various research strategies to test or build theory in their study. Researchers have the option to choose inductive, deductive or an abductive approach (Awuzie & McDermott, 2017). Nilsson (2018) explained that an abductive approach is defined as a constant interaction between theory and initial empirical observation while making inferences to the most probable explanations. An abductive approach can enable further theory development and clarification instead of theory generation (Nilsson, 2018). Dubois and Gadde (2002) suggest an abductive approach is most appropriate in single case research, where the relationship between "everyday language and concepts" are investigated (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 555). According to Dubois and Gadde, 2002, a single case study approach is best achieved through the process of systematic combining (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). The authors go on to say that systematic combining is a process which uses a combination of a theoretical framework, empirical research and case analysis, where the researcher goes back and forth between empirical observations and theory to gain a deeper understanding of theoretical and empirical phenomena (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This research uses the aforementioned abductive approach using the Brand identity prism (theoretical framework), semi-structured Interview, focus groups (empirical research) and the Air Canada case study (case analysis) to simultaneously test and build theory (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The researchers further set out to identify themes within the interview, focus groups and case study, and put these into categories (facets of the brand prism), while seeking to reach conclusions concerning our research question. However, this research does use existing theory such as the Kapferer Brand Identity Prism and theory deriving from existing literature on COO and branding.

3.1.2. Qualitative or Quantitative approach

Qualitative and quantitative research represent two distinct methods to conduct business research (Creswell, 2008; Wood & Welch, 2010). Qualitative research uses words and open-ended questions, while quantitative uses measurements, numbers and closed-ended questions to be able to quantify the data (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). Qualitative methods focus on generating theories, while quantitative is focused on testing relationships and theories (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson. 2012). Creswell (2008) states that qualitative research is useful when the researcher is seeking to come up with new ideas/theories and a possible hypothesis to be tested later quantitatively.

The authors began with the observation that Air Canada was using COO as the primary focus of their identity and global branding strategy, to fuel their global expansion. With the focus of the research to gain insight into how the identity of Air Canada is communicated and received as an image by the global audience, this sparked an interest in the empirical investigation and analysis. The qualitative method was deemed appropriate for capturing these complex meanings and their thematic dimensions (Heit & Rotello, 2010). As such, this study will adopt a qualitative approach, utilising a semi-structured interview, focus groups and a case study to give the research context.

The main advantage of using a qualitative approach is that it allows the researcher to measure life experiences, opinions, emotions, behaviours and feelings (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This is a significant advantage in this study, as we want to gain a greater depth of understanding than quantitative research methods can provide. Another advantage of using this kind of qualitative approach is that this will allow the researchers to analyse data more efficiently and effectively as we can gain insight into intricate behaviours and resulting themes, particularly regarding the image and identity of a brand (Kipnis, Kubacki, Broderick, Siemieniako, & Pisarenko, 2012; Brečić, 2013).

Another justification for using qualitative research over quantitative is highlighted by Purmessur and Boodhoo (2008) who state that qualitative methods are well suited for providing a realistic feel of the world through words, which is something quantitative methods cannot provide through numbers and statistical analysis. The authors argue that it provides an adaptable and responsive way of collecting, analysing, and interpreting data and information (Purmessur & Boodhoo, 2008). As we are looking into exploring human behaviour, particularly the link between Air Canada's internal Identity and the perception of the global image held by consumers, a qualitative method is best suited. Our research is concentrated on not only finding the answers but also on people's thoughts, feelings and emotions about why they exhibit specific views and behaviours about Air Canada (Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnathambi, 2013).

Another rationale for using a qualitative approach is that it enables the researchers to detect and analyse aspects of brand identity and image subjectively, such as consumers' attitudes and experiences, which would not be possible quantitatively (Khan & Rahman, 2015). Seeing as the majority of studies exploring image and identities of brands and their COO have utilised quantitative methods, a qualitative view in this emerging area of consumers' image of an airline's COO identity is significant. Furthermore, qualitative methods can lead to the creation of more practical applications of the COO and Identity-Image constructs (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007).

One of the main criticisms of using a quantitative approach is that the method does not describe a continually changing reality but rather a static view (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). Our research does not aim to provide any statistical results but rather identify relevant themes, an area which is lacking notably in COO research (Genç & Bayraktaroğlu, 2017), further underlying our reason for choosing a qualitative approach.

3.2. Exploratory, Descriptive & Causal Research Design

 A descriptive research design will be adopted for this research in the form of a case study. Descriptive research enables the researcher to sufficiently recognise and analyse a situation in a specific topic and offer further advice on where and how firms, such as Air Canada, can improve their strategy (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). When depicting research in the context of organisational phenomena, independent variables are often utilised (Van Aken, 2005; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). Descriptive research is directed by theory and concentrates on existing explanations (Van Aken, 2005; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). Furthermore, descriptive research attempts to describe natural phenomena within a given circumstance, to gain a deeper understanding and develop new views on the phenomena (Zainal, 2007). Using descriptive research, the who, what, where, when, why and occasionally how questions are attempted to be clarified (Dinesh, 2014).

The connection between brand image and brand identity of Air Canada in a global context is the primary focus of the investigation. As researchers, we are seeking to identify if and where there are alignments and misalignments are between brand identity and brand image. Identifying and suggesting improvements in Air Canada's global strategy has the potential to aid their prospects abroad. As this is a qualitative and descriptive study, recognising and describing the alignments and misalignments is the intent of this study. Investigating the underlying causes (correlations) behind the alignment and misalignment will not be done, as this can be reserved for a quantitative study (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). Moreover, the study is not focusing on finding correlations between the brand identity and brand image, making causal research irrelevant.

Due to lack of time and sufficient resources, a longitudinal design is not useful. Instead, a cross-sectional approach is utilised as the sample studied will take place at one specific point in time (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

3.3. Data source

Primary and secondary are two sources of data which researchers can use in their toolbox. Primary data is information collected first-hand. Primary data is utilised to answer specific questions and the purpose set by the researcher (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Primary data is more time consuming and costly to implement, and researchers must be aware of the difficulties in collecting data such as gaining access to companies for interviews and data, as well as managing non-respondents (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Johl & Renganathan, 2010).

Secondary data, as described by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015). is data already existing in other publications or electronic media. Such data allows researchers to gain and provide necessary background information and might help researchers to identify their specific problem (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). Houston (2004) suggests one issue to keep in mind

is the validity of secondary data and the trustworthiness of the information. Even though primary data collection is more time consuming than only using secondary sources, it provides the authors with more control and a better understanding of the subject under investigation (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, it serves to complement the secondary sources and gives the thesis an overall greater depth (Houston, 2004).

This research will utilise both primary and secondary data. Primary data was acquired through an interview to establish Air Canada's identity and through focus groups to establish Air Canada's global image. The primary data collection was designed to address the research questions and was analysed by the researchers. Secondary data was also used extensively throughout the literature review and case study. Secondary data was used to provide background information regarding the relevant academic research on brand identity, brand image and COO. Primary and secondary data was gathered for the case study of Air Canada. External secondary data, including company information obtained from the Air Canada website, was used together with primary information obtained from an interview with the Air Canada Brand Manager to determine the company's intended brand identity.

3.4. Data Collection Method

There are many ways of finding information about a topic and researchers can adopt a variety of methods to collect data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The most commonly used methods of data collection for qualitative research are: surveys, case studies, observations, focus groups, content analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). This study uses a variety of qualitative data collection methods which includes combining a case study and an in-depth semi-structured interview as well as three focus groups and finished with a content analysis. The data collection process started with combining a case study for Air Canada using a variety of sources to understand Air Canada's brand identity. Step two used an in-depth semi-structured interview with the Air Canada Brand Design Manager, to also gain a deeper understanding of the company's intended Brand Identity. Step three consisted of undertaking three focus groups made up of young adult students from various nationalities to determine how the global audience perceives air Canada's Brand image. Finally, a directed content analysis was carried out to identify any alignments or misalignments between identity and image. The content analysis used the data from the three focus groups and the transcript of the interview, which were then coded and categorised using the six dimensions of brand identity prism from Kapferer (2012). These processes are described in more detail below.

3.4.1. Case Study

Yin (1994) states that a case study is a preferable method when seeking the answer to a how or why question about a contemporary marketing phenomenon. Zainal (2007), suggests that a case study is a suitable method when seeking to examine phenomena on a deeper level. For this research, a case study is utilised to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of COO as part of the brand identity of Air Canada. For our research, it is preferable to do a single-case study, as Air Canada represents a unique and extreme case of using COO as an integral part of its brand identity. A case study enables the use of multiple sources, and since this thesis focuses on both the company and the customer perspectives, the authors found that a case study would be the most appropriate research strategy (Yin, 1994). Also, by choosing a case study, it allows for a more in-depth understanding of The Air Canada

brand identity. One of the issues with using a case study is the reputability of sources and finding accurate information (Baškarada, 2014). We tried to overcome this by using a multitude of sources including: annual reports, company employees and the latest industry information from reputable primary and secondary sources (Baškarada, 2014). According to Baškarada (2014), an advantage of using many sources in a case study is that it allows for triangulation, which is a vital way of improving the validity of the case (Baškarada, 2014). Yin (2009, p.116) suggests that the validity of the results are "likely to be more convincing and accurate if they on several different sources of information". The Air Canada case study can be found in chapter 4.0.

3.4.2. Interview

The research is seeking to gain first-hand insight into the identity of Air Canada, and we did this by interviewing the Yiota Karapanos, The Brand Design Manager at Air Canada. Bryman and Bell (2015) suggest that it is sufficient to interview one individual per organisation, preferably a senior manager, to find out facts regarding the organisation (Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). This is the reason we chose only to interview one influential brand manager from Air Canada. This kind of sampling is called non-probability sampling, and this refers to a sample where not every participant has the same probability to be chosen (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). Another reason non-probability sampling for the semi-structured in-depth interviews is utilised is due to the fact we had contacts within Air Canada who are considered as representable for the whole population. Also, by doing non-probability sampling, the authors were sure that relevant information would be obtained within the time frame. The brand manager reported that other employees would give the same answers as they are all aware of the strategy and culture that the airline was pursuing (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018).

The Brand Design Manager at Air Canada introduced herself as the 'guardian of the brand' and stated that her role was 'to make sure that Air Canada is properly displayed in all channels', which made her the perfect company representative to consult. Air Canada is very proud of their brand and very protective of its identity and image (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018). The research utilised a semi-structured interview to understand what identity Air Canada was trying to communicate as part of its global branding strategy, allowing the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of Air Canada's brand identity (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured nature of the interview is the most pertinent for our study, as it allows the ability to request follow-up questions, probe questions and for both the participant and the researcher to elaborate further when needed (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This allowed for a compromise between structure and flexibility, while still being able to administer a set list of questions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The answers from the interview were later coded to aid in the organisation of data.

The interview was conducted over the phone, as the Brand Design manager was located at the Air Canada head office in Montreal and the interviewers were at Lund University in Sweden. A face-to-face interview would have been preferred, as having a human interviewer presence can allow the interviewee to feel more relaxed and enables a more natural connection due to the potential of both verbal and non-verbal communication (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). However, for convenience and considering the geographical distance, a phone interview was administered, allowing the additional benefit of a significant reduction in time and cost (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The interviewee was contacted by email before the interview taking place. In this email, the purpose of the research was

explained, and Air Canada's input was solicited. The brand manager responded and agreed to be contacted.

The interview questions were determined in advance and based on the theories of Kapferer (2012) and structured around the six facets of the brand identity prism. Before the interview was started, Yiota was informed as to the purpose of the research and we laid out some fundamental ethical implications to seek permission to record and use any quotes. For the results which can be found in chapter 5.1, any direct quotes are presented in '*italics*'. The interview ran smoothly, and the brand manager agreed to send more in-depth responses to the same questions over email. A transcript of the interview was sent to the interviewee at her request. Being able to quickly and easily communicate and respond to questions despite geographical and time constraint is an advantage of an interview over the internet (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The responses were used as a basis from which to create questions to ask the focus group to compare and contrast the identity and image of the Air Canada brand.

3.4.3. Focus Groups

The focus groups aimed to explore the brand image of Air Canada amongst their global target market. There are many advantages of using focus groups over other qualitative forms of research, particularly regarding group interaction (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Discussions among participants, known as group interactions or group dynamics yield insights into complex behaviours, which is vitally important to this study (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001). This was one of the reasons for choosing focus groups over other forms of qualitative approaches in exploring Air Canada's image, as techniques such as structured interviews do not often allow for group interactions and therefore make it difficult to identify common themes (Carson et al. 2001).

Another benefit of using a focus group for this study is the flexibility which it can provide (Villard, 2003). Although we have a set of questions to guide the flow of the discussion, participants often contribute new insights and reveal topics that were not considered by the researchers (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This allows some follow-up questions to ladder down on certain aspects and gain a deeper understanding of why participants hold particular views. Our final rationale for choosing focus groups is the effectiveness regarding cost and time (Carson et al. 2001). We were able to sample an appropriate number of people in a short amount of time, particularly given the fact that the timeline for the master thesis was ten weeks (Carson et al. 2001).

After, again consulting the work of Kapferer (2012), research can be constructed to evaluate and analyse the recipients' image of a brand, in the same way, that identity was done. Therefore, the basis for the focus group questions is structured around the six facets of the brand identity prism (Kapferer, 2012). Three focus groups were held at Lund University School of Economics to analyse Air Canada's image amongst a global target market. The focus groups were carried out in a quiet classroom with a roundtable, which as Breen (2006) suggests, improves group interaction and allowed for all the participants to fully contribute to the conversation. After consulting numerous literature sources on how best to undertake a focus group (Breen, 2006; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Williams, E. 2006), the moderator facilitated group discussion and kept it focused on the topic at hand. In one of the focus groups, a dominating member attempted to control the discussion and provided answers that were sometimes inappropriate in an attempt at humour. The moderator reminded that group that the purpose of the focus group was to hear a range of views and attempted to draw other participants into the

conversation, letting them know that their views were also valuable and wanted. Each focus group lasted approximately 40 to 60 minutes. By the 3rd focus group the data variation levelled off, and it was determined that saturation had been reached and enough data had been gathered to answer the research question.

3.4.3.1. Focus Group Sample

Choosing the participants for the focus group was decided after the interview with Air Canada, as we wanted to choose a sample that was reflective of Air Canada's global target market. The Air Canada brand manager confirmed that Air Canada wanted to become a global brand and are targeting a global audience. We chose to use students from Lund University, which is considered to be one of the most internationally diverse universities in Scandinavia (Lund University, 2018). Another reason this sample was chosen was ease of access, and this kind of sampling is called ad-hoc or sometimes convenience sampling (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). As the brand manager did not state specific demographics for the global target audience, we feel our sample of participants for the focus group, which is a global sample, was justified (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018). We also chose to use participants who had limited or no knowledge of Air Canada, in order to explore how much of a role COO plays in people's images of brands they have little knowledge about. It is also important to say that none of the participants had flown on Air Canada and only two of the participants had ever travelled to Canada. All participants were aged between 20-29, and the nationalities of participants are listed in the table below:

Table 1: Participants Nationality

Nationality	Frequency
Sweden	6
United Kingdom	1
Holland	1
Ireland	1
Russia	1
Iceland	1
Syria	1
Swiss	1

3.5. Data Analysis

Following the collection of the data from the semi-structured interview, the case study and focus groups, the data should then be analysed and displayed using various methods (Sutton & Austin, 2015). As declared by Yin (1994), the data analysis process is utilised to sort, classify, assess and show the gathered data in a clear and coherent manner. As researchers encounter a vast amount of information,

it is critical to have a correct approach to investigating and analysing their chosen topic and field (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). To interpret the qualitative analysis Miles and Huberman (1994), suggest a method to assist in identifying, comparing and interpreting patterns within the data (Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). The multi-step process involves data reduction, data display, drawing conclusions and verification of findings (Miles & Huberman,1994; Neale, 2016).

Data reduction is the process of choosing, reducing and reconstructing data in a researcher's field notes or transcription to make further interpretations/analysis more clear and coherent (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction is an ongoing process throughout the research project where the researchers search for commonalities, themes and relationships which apply to the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Some of the processes include writing memos and summaries, chunking and coding (Yin, 1994). This process should be governed by the research questions and intention behind the study, which in this case, the study focuses on the image and identity (Neale, 2016). In this study, the researchers created and used contact summaries to record the pertinent data from the semi-structured interview and three recorded focus groups (Yin, 1994). The contact sheets were used to summarise the significant themes and results of the interview focus groups (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Once completed, the data was coded (Neale, 2016). Descriptive codes, designed to aid in the organisation of data was carried out in a two-step process. First cycle coding, was used to break up long texts into manageable chunks by assigning a code to every single line of the text in the content sheets (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). Codes were then put into a certain and conceptual order. In this study, we categorised the codes into the six dimensions of brand identity from the Kapferer Identity Prism (Physique, personality, culture, relationship, self-image and reflection) (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Neale, 2016).

Data display is the next step in the qualitative data analysis. Here the data is organised into a table of keywords of both image and identity so that researchers can recognise connections in the data and develop explanations (Neale, 2016). According to Miles & Huberman (1994) using a table can lead to the ability to create themes and draw conclusions as we were able to see the alignments and misalignments of identity and image present side by side in a clear and coherent manner (Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). The table of keywords can be found in chapter 6.3.

Drawing and verifying conclusions enables the researcher interpreting the meaning behind the information displayed and themes created in the previous steps and how this meets the aims and objectives of the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). The process was done in the discussion and conclusion in chapter 5.0 and 6.0 as the results were analysed and compared with existing literature and the research questions were answered to fulfil the aims of the study.

In this study, qualitative data analysis was employed when analysing the data from the semi-structured interview, case study and the focus groups (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The authors sought out keywords that were cited by participants and these helped in the effort to classify, connect and makes sense of various patterns and themes, to reduce the data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The data was analysed under each of the facets of Kapferer's brand identity prism: Physique, Relationship, Reflection, Personality, Culture and Self-Image. The operationalisation of the topic guide and contact summaries enabled the researchers to efficiently analyse and display the ideas (Baškarada,

2014; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Through this process, conclusions were drawn and the information/data verified by exploring the alignment and misalignment of Air Canada's Brand Image and Brand Identity.

3.6. Research Quality

Discussing the quality of the research in this paper is essential. After consulting the work of Yin (1994) testing the quality of empirical research can be achieved through four widely used tests i) construct validity, ii) internal validity, iii) external validity, iv) reliability. We will look at each one of these tests and how it relates to this research paper.

3.6.1. Construct validity

Yin (1994) and Baškarada (2014) suggest that construct validity is the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to be measuring. Yin (1994) goes on to say that this can be improved by creating a chain of evidence. In this research paper, both the interview and focus groups were recorded as evidence. The brand manager of Air Canada also sent an email with all of her answers to reinforce the findings of the phone interview. Bryman and Bell (2015) suggest construct validity can also be improved by asking key participants to look over the case study and interview. The Air Canada brand manager was asked to review the case study and interview information to confirm that she was not misquoted and the case study was sent to other longtime Air Canada employees to confirm the accuracy of the information. It was suggested by Arbnor and Bjerke (2009) that research can further improve its construct validity by providing an in-depth explanation of the investigation to allow other people the chance to review the research (Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). For this paper, this was achieved through providing a step by step guide of how the research was conducted in the methodology in chapter 3.

3.6.2. Internal Validity

According to Yin (1994), the second test focused on internal validity. According to Williams, E. (2006), internal validity concentrates on the management of the actual study and whether the process and execution of the study negatively impact the results. During focus group research, the interaction between the researcher and participants has the potential to improve or damage the studies internal validity (Williams, E. 2006). While conducting the focus groups which were part of this study, the moderator carefully administered guidance, while being mindful to avoid introducing their opinion, exerting too much control, or averting participants own free expression (Williams, E. 2006). Furthermore, the moderator ensured that the participants followed appropriate conduct, ensuring that everyone felt comfortable and safe speaking, prevented the verbal disapproval of contributions and prevented participants from controlling the conversation (Williams, E. 2006). Following LeCompete and Goetz (1982), internal validity can be improved by having multiple researchers engaged while conducting the study and gathering data. Both authors of this research acted in unison to verify the validity and reliability of the observations, the data and the resulting theories and conclusions which are developed throughout the research process (Varga & Zhao, 2016). Following these precautions leads to assurance that the results are valid and conclusions are correct through the elimination of systematic sources of potential bias (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

3.6.3. External validity

Yin (1994) suggests the next quality test is to look at the external validity of the research. External validity is how the findings of this research can be generalised to other people, objects or a setting that were not part of the original study (Baškarada, 2014). This view was confirmed and expanded by Arbnor and Bjerke (2009) who further highlights how external validity and generalisability are closely aligned, as the findings can be used for other similar studies (Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). This research uses a single case study approach focusing on Air Canada and the unique characteristics of the Canadian COO, as such results are not generalisable, as it would be impossible for other airlines to replicate the unique relationship between the company and its COO.

3.6.4. Reliability

Reliability is the final test which Yin (1994) proposes. Reliability is gained when the research is repeated at some point in the future and displays the same results (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). The reliability of this study is affected by the fact that the participants where students and the fact that Air Canada is still somewhat unknown in the global airline industry at present. Bryman and Bell (2015) go on to say that reliability can be improved if a step by step guide to the research is created so that it can be repeated in the future (Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). The methodology chapter provides a detailed explanation of each step in the process to enable other researchers to repeat the study if desired and helps to improve the reliability.

4. Case Study

This chapter introduces the single case study of Air Canada which will be the focus of the research. The case study provides a detailed overview of the history and background of Air Canada as well as how they use COO. The purpose of this case study is to understand Air Canada's internal identity and to supplement the interview of the brand manager. The second part of this chapter introduces the country brand index which gives an overview of the concept of the index and gives focus to how Canada as a country brand features.

4.1. Air Canada Case Study

Air Canada is the subject of this case study and research as the brand is actively leveraging their Canadian COO as the primary focus of its identity and branding strategy. Air Canada is attempting to leverage positive associations held about the Canadian country brand and incorporated these into its brand strategy to create a positive brand image and attract new consumers from around the globe (Krashinsky, 2014). Air Canada has the goal of becoming a top ten global airline (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018) using this COO global branding strategy. In 2017, Air Canada celebrated its 80th anniversary which also happened to coincide with Canada's 150th birthday (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018). To mark this milestone, Air Canada unveiled its new livery, uniforms, service and culture (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018). The airline has a new flight path and ambition "to become a top ten airline in everything we do" (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018).However, before we can understand where the company intends to go and how they plan to get there, it is essential to understand where they have been and the circumstances that have brought them to this milestone in the company's history.

Air Canada is the flag carrier and largest provider of scheduled airline passenger services in Canada (Air Canada, 2018a). The company started as Trans-Canada Air Lines (TCA) on 10 April 1937 by an Act of Canadian Parliament with the aim to provide air service to all regions of the vast nation of Canada (Marsh, 2015). The inaugural flight took place on September 1, 1937, in a Lockheed L-10A with two passengers and a bag of mail and flew between Vancouver and Seattle (Air Canada, 2018a). Passenger services began a few years later in 1939 with service between Vancouver and Montreal and by 1941 TCA provided scheduled service across the Atlantic. In 1947, the airline began to provide services to the United States and linked most of the major cities of Canada (Marsh, 2015). The 1950s saw the introduction of turbine aircraft including Super Constellations and Vickers Viscounts (Marsh, 2015). With the advances in technology and the improved reliability of jet aircraft, TCA began polar flights to Europe and the carrier became the first North American airline to offer direct service to Moscow (Marsh, 2015). By 1964, TCA had grown to become Canada's national airline, and in 1965 it became official when the government of Canada changed the name to Air Canada (Air Canada, 2018a).

The ensuing years had many highs and lows for the airline (Yusufali, 2015). Like most airlines, Air Canada experienced dramatic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, but rising fuel costs and price wars took its toll on cargo and passenger loads which declined drastically in the 1980's resulting in substantial losses (Yusufali, 2015). In 1989, Air Canada was privatised and was no longer a crown corporation, but its financial future looked bleak as losses continued to mount (Yusufali, 2015). Since Air Canada was privatised, it has faced many problems and uncertain times. The airline nearly went bankrupt in 2004 after failing to recover from the downturn brought about by the September 11th attacks (The New York Times, 2004). After recovering, the financial crash in 2008 saw Air Canada nearly go bankrupt again, and the company was only saved by a bailout from the government (Jang, 2009). Since then Air Canada has stabilised and turned its fortunes around to become hugely profitable with shares rising from 77 cents to an all-time high of 30 dollars in 2017 (Air Canada, 2018b). This dramatic rise in the share price signifies the confidence investors have in the company's business plan to become a top global airline and their faith in the executive leadership at Air Canada that is driving this change (Yiota Karapanos, interview May 8, 2018).

Today, Air Canada is among the 20 largest airlines in the world (Air Canada, 2017). In 2017, Air Canada together with its Air Canada Express regional partners carried over 45 million passengers to over 200 destinations across six continents (Air Canada is also a founding member of the Star Alliance and employs 30,000 people around the globe) (Air Canada, 2018a). In 2017, Air Canada was voted as the best airline in North America and is currently ranked 29th best airline in the world (Skytrax, 2017). The airline turned a profit of over $300 million in 2017 which is a significant turnaround in fortunes (the star, 2017). However, the airline industry is in a constant state of flux (the star, 2018), competition is relentless, and there are new threats on the horizon for Air Canada.

In many areas of the world, full-service legacy carriers like British Airways, Qantas and Air Canada have lost much of their market share to LCC (Graham & Vowles, 2006). In Europe, LCC has been the fastest growing market segment (Graham & Vowles, 2006). From 2007 to 2016, low-cost flights grew by 61% while traditional scheduled airlines flights decreased by 10% (EUROCONTROL, 2017). The rapid rise of the LCC is also occurring in many other regions including Asia, Australia and North America (Graham & Vowles, 2006). In the United States, LCC's like Southwest and JetBlue Airways, now hold an estimated 30% share in the overall US airline market (Statista, 2018) while in Australia,

Virgin Blue gained 30% of the domestic market share in just seven years (Whyte, Prideaux & Sakata, 2012). In Canada, new ultra-low-cost airlines like Flair Airlines, Swoop and Jetlines have entered the market or will do so soon (EUROCONTROL, 2017). In the short term to regain lost market share, full-service carriers like Air Canada have discounted prices (CAPA, 2017). However, this tactic is not sustainable due to their higher cost structures and any market share regained is not likely to contribute to the long-term sustainability of their business (Nakaprasit, 2012). Slashing prices is a short-term tactic used by full-service carriers when demand for their services declines (Nakaprasit, 2012). To compete in the long term, Air Canada needs to find an alternative strategic solution that helps them to differentiate themselves by communicating and delivering their unique benefits to attract new global customers to meet the airline's profitability requirements.

Branding offers a solution to both requirements (Nakaprasit, 2012). For full-service legacy carriers like Air Canada, their brand is a valuable strategic asset that provides a competitive advantage to the company and is a potent tool that can be used to communicate the company's unique value propositions to its customers (Nakaprasit, 2012). The corporate brand communicates the essence of the airline, and nothing strips branding to its essence like the airline business (Philip, 2011). Air Canada can highlight their product innovations like lie-flat seats, lounges and entertainment systems and tout their superior customer service. They understand that suitable, tangible products are the prerequisite to having a distinctive brand (Nakaprasit, 2012). However, most of the other full-service airlines can and will match these products and services. Thus, for many legacy carriers like Air Canada, it is difficult to stand out in an industry with economics so constrained that "pretzels can make the difference between profit and loss" (Philip, 2011).

One way to stand out and create long-lasting differentiation in a brand is to provide emotional connections between the brand and its customers (Nataprasit, 2012). These emotional connections help to build strong relationships that cannot be easily imitated by competitors like in-flight entertainment and other tangible products can (Garip, 2013; Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). They help to create distinctive and positive identities that connect in a meaningful way with their customers and insulate the brand against competitors (Nakaprasit, 2012). One way to do that is through the physique and content of airline brand messages that leverage the positive associations with the airlines COO brand, in this case, Canada (Bruning, 1997). According to Bruning (1997), the COO serves as a signal of product quality when information about other attributes is absent. The author goes on to say that consumers use COO as a cue to make inferences about the brand attributes, performance and quality (Bruning, 1997). Consumers will infer attributes to the brand based on previous experiences with products from that country or country stereotypes (Bruning, 1997). Air Canada is one airline that is using this COO effect by leveraging the strong international status of Canada as a country brand to help fuel its goal of becoming a world top 10 airline (Air Canada, 2017).

In 2014, Air Canada ended its 27-year relationship with Montreal based advertisement agency Marketel and elected to go with JWT Canada (Krashinsky, 2014). The company realised that the domestic market was not growing that quickly and that the airline needed to seize growth opportunities elsewhere, particularity in Asia, Europe and the United States. The international strategy required a marketing plan that would 'reflect a global brand image' for Air Canada and the subsequent rebrand is the beginning of that effort (Krashinsky, 2014). A new marketing campaign and a major repositioning of the company's brand image began in 2014 with the goal to increase the presence of the carrier on the world

stage and accelerate its strategy to becoming 'a global player' in the airline industry (Krashinsky, 2014). As such, Air Canada is dedicating up to 50% of its marketing budget to attracting international consumers (Krashinsky, 2014).

Air Canada decided to differentiate itself as a global premium brand in 2014 using the tagline ''fly the flag'. The strategy involves leveraging the Canadian COO brand across all of their marketing to focus on the things that they believe the global audience associate with Canada (Air Canada, 2018a). This is all symbolised by the Maple Leaf, which is Air Canada's logo and brand promise, as the Maple leaf logo aligns with the country flag which evokes feelings of quality (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018). Air Canada has communicated that they want to 'bring to Canada to the world', and when you fly on Air Canada, they want passengers to 'feel like they are flying the flag' (Air Canada, 2018a).

Figure 2: The New Air Canada Livery (Design Week (2017).

As stated earlier, the year 2017 marked the 80th anniversary of Air Canada and the 150th birthday of Canada. The company used this occasion to aim higher and reach further to 'strengthen our position as a global, customer-focused organisation with a truly Canadian spirit' (Air Canada, 2018a). The new livery, together with new uniforms, improved international cabin standard and on-board products represent the 'strength of our nation' and the future looking spirit of Air Canada through 'distinct references to Canadian culture, heritage and evolution' (Air Canada, 2017). The brand has changed and evolved, but ever since the beginning of Air Canada, the livery has always proudly displayed the maple leaf. All aspects of the brand, including the on-board entertainment content and on-board meals evoke Canada's warm and welcoming personality and famous natural wonders.

4.1.1. The Air Canada Maple Leaf through the years

Figure 3: The Air Canada Maple Leaf Through the Years (Design Week (2017).

The new livery is meant to embody Canada's diverse culture and landscapes by visually referencing the countries unique geography, colours and Canadian spirit (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018).

The colours of red and white are found on the Canadian flag and pay homage to the country the airline represents as Canada's flag carrier (Air Canada, 2017). The red also represents the warmth of Canadians and the white symbolises the nation's snow covered landscapes and snow-capped mountains (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018). The black was introduced to enhance the brand and give it a premium feel (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018). The on-board cuisine has been created by well-known Canadian chefs and tells stories of the countries cultural heritage and diversity (Air Canada, 2017). The meals feature Quebecois specialities originating from the French settlers of the 17th century to the Latin and Asian inspired flavours brought to Canada by subsequent waves of immigration over the past two hundred years (Air Canada, 2017).

It is clear from the new livery and rebrand that Air Canada is attempting to create a brand identity inspired by Canada and the Canadian people. Canada is a strong, recognisable country brand known around the globe, and Air Canada is leveraging that connection. From its "glowing hearted hospitality" to its "fly the flag" slogans, the company is using this connection "to become a top ten airline" in everything they do (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018).

4.1.2. Case Study Summary

The case study highlights many relevant points in establishing the Identity of Air Canada. Air Canada has been in business for over 80 years and has faced many challenges throughout its long history (Marsh, 2015). It has faced bankruptcy, mergers, privatisation and open skies (Yusufali, 2015). It has expanded and contracted with the inevitable financial cycles (Yusufali, 2015). Despite all its challenges, it is still in business and remains one of the world's 20 largest international airlines (Air Canada, 2017). Air Canada's management team has adopted a new business plan to become a global powerhouse and attract new global customers from Europe, Asia, South America and the United States (Air Canada, 2017).

The company has hired a new marketing agency and has recently completed a rebrand in the form of new ads, a new livery, uniforms and service (Krashinsky, 2014). The new strategy leverages the Canadian COO to align their brand identity with that of Canada, one of the world's strongest county brands (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018). To continue to expand globally, Air Canada will use its Canadian COO global branding strategy to enter new markets where their brand may be unknown.

4.2. Country Brand Index

Following on from the case study of Air Canada, this section aims to highlight the identity of Canada as a country brand and to provide background on how it is viewed, ranked and the association's consumers have with Canada globally. The country brand index takes place at yearly intervals, so the data which has been displayed is the latest study available.

Futurebrand developed the country brand index, a global brand consulting company and one of the "world-leading authorities" on country brand research and management (FutureBrand, n.d.). The index has, for the past two decades, studied perceptions of 118 countries around the globe in the same way corporate brands are measured and ranked them according to the strength of perception across association dimensions (FutureBrand, n.d.). According to the 2014-2015 report, only 22 countries meet the criteria or a "country brand", and these countries have measurable competitive advantages over

other countries as a result (FutureBrand, n.d.). The country brand index is relevant because it provides valuable insights for brand managers and companies, like Air Canada, that are seeking to leverage country of origin identity and associations for their brand (FutureBrand, n.d.).

Country-of-origin is essential in understanding country brand strength due to its role as a driver of consumer choice (FutureBrand, n.d.). Strong brands associated with a country impact the perceptions of that country. For example, IKEA and Volvo, both internationally recognised Swedish brands, strongly impact Sweden's country brand strength. According to FutureBrand (n.d.), people actively prefer products and services when they are from specific countries. This means that every time consumers buy a Volvo, or fly on Air Canada, they can be consciously consuming an aspect of the country that made them (FutureBrand, n.d.). Most importantly, research by FutureBrand (n.d.), has implied that countries that are highly ranked with stronger perceptions are also stronger country brands.

The 2014-2015 Futurebrand study has interesting and useful results for brand managers from the 22 countries that qualify as country brands (FutureBrand, n.d.). To become a "country brand" consumers must have stronger than average perceptions of the country across six dimensions: quality of life, values and business, culture, history, tourism and "made in" expertise (FutureBrand, n.d.). According to FutureBrand (n.d.) when consumers rate a country as a brand, they are much more likely to do business with, visit and recommend than other countries that are not as highly rated. Thus, according to this study, being seen as a country brand provides a tangible competitive advantage (FutureBrand, n.d.). This knowledge is important not only for country brand managers but also can be valuable to corporate brand managers and business leaders seeking to harness "country of origin" associations for their corporate and consumer brands (FutureBrand, n.d.).
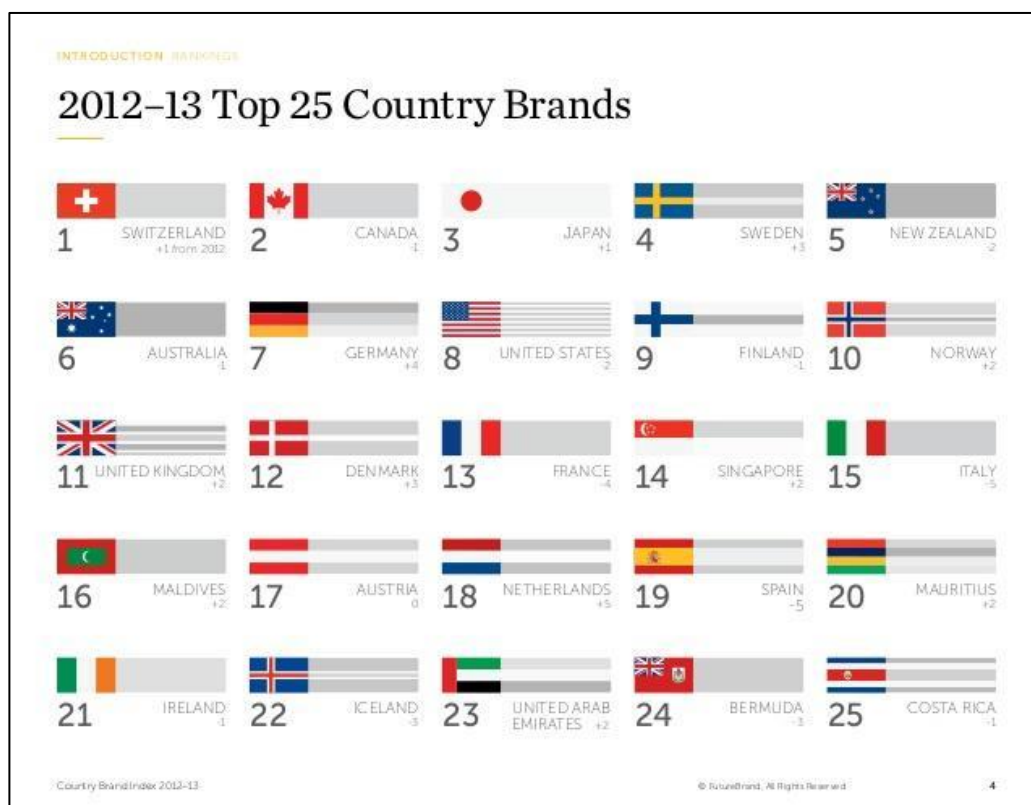

Figure 4: Top 25 Country Brands adapted from FutureBrand (n.d.).

The 2012-2013 Top Country Brands are shown above and rank the top 25 country brands, in this ranking, Canada ranks second (FutureBrand, n.d.). In the 2013-2014 ranking, Canada drops to fifth place. According to the study, Canada performs well in; business potential, quality of life, value systems and tourism. Canada is viewed by the world as; clean, friendly, beautiful, happy, big and respectful (FutureBrand, n.d.). The study goes on to say that the country is also seen as; peaceful, green, fun, spacious and innovative with a lot of technology (FutureBrand, n.d.).

The key association's people have with Canada are its; natural beauty, good infrastructure, political freedom, tolerance, environmental friendliness, health and education, the standard of living, safety and security and an excellent place to do business (FutureBrand, n.d.). Strong Canadian brands that are known internationally are Air Canada, Blackberry, Canadian Club, Canada Dry, RBC, Scotiabank (FutureBrand, n.d.). These results are significant for Canada and Canadian companies like Air Canada because country brands have a tangible competitive advantage over other countries in the areas that are likely to drive future success including the products and services that are" made in" or from Canada (FutureBrand, n.d.). Air Canada is aware of the strong international reputation of Canada as a country brand. Air Canada is also a well-known and a globally recognisable Canadian brand highlighting why they are actively attempting to leverage their associations with Canada to fuel their global expansion aspirations (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018).

5. Empirical Findings

In this chapter, the findings of the primary research will be presented. The first part of the chapter will focus on the interview with the brand design manager of Air Canada to help establish the identity of the brand from an internal perspective. The interview will also be supplemented by the case study in chapter 4.0. This will be followed by the key findings of the three focus groups in chapter 5.2, which are aimed at finding out the image of Air Canada among a global audience.

5.1. Brand Identity- The interview

The phone interview was undertaken with the brand design manager of Air Canada, Yiota Karapanos, who introduced herself as the '*guardian of the brand*' stating that her role was '*to make sure that Air Canada is properly displayed in all channels*' (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018). The key findings were selected from the interview and are presented below:

Physique

The interviewer started off by asking what the vision and goals of Air Canada are? Yiota replied '*Our ambition is to become a top ten global airline in everything that we do*'. To find out how Air Canada will achieve becoming a top airline in regard to the physical appearance of the brand, the interviewer asked respondents what they are trying to portray with the newly redesigned livery? Yiota responded '*We want to portray the professional image in everything we do, our image is to be very professional*'. The interviewer delved deeper and asked if Air Canada was trying to leverage their strong country brand? Yiota responded that '*Yes, we definitely do, we try to bring the best of Canada in everything that we do...We are inspired by Canada; our redesign of the livery was inspired by Canada...You can see on the tail we have our Air Canada roundel, which re-establishes the confidence and heritage of our brand, it has our Maple Leaf in our logo which shows how much our brand is inspired by Canada*'. The interviewer then went on to ask how Air Canada shows its COO in its branding? '*We fly the flag,*

it's on our tail, we proudly display the flag on our aircraft. Definitely, we are Canada's national carrier, so we do play up on that'. Because Yiota had so much knowledge in the area of brand, the interviewer then asked how does Air Canada differentiate themselves through their brand? Yiota replied in-depth by stating '*Our airline is Canada's flag carrier, we have that advantage, we are the only one that has the maple leaf on our tail, we proudly display it...whenever anybody sees that, it makes you feel at home wherever you are internationally, every time a Canadian sees our tail with the maple leaf, you instantly feel at home...there is just something that happens to all Canadians when you see the maple leaf'*.

Personality

The interviewer asked if Air Canada was a person, what would they be like? Yiota did not know how to respond and would think about it and respond to the question over email. The interviewer then asked if Air Canada plays on the personality associated with the Canadian COO in their service and if so what aspects? Yiota replied '*Yes for sure. Safety is our number one priority...Also professionalism, so we really try to play up on that and our glowing hearted hospitality, Canadians are known for that, so definitely that is a behaviour that we portray in our service...I would say our glowing hearted hospitality is key'*.

Culture

Yiota was then asked what Air Canada's cultural values are? Yiota responded at length by saying 'We are an extension of Canadian values...We pride ourselves on being Canada's national carrier, and our values are variables of that Canadian image...We play up on the Canadian image by having Canadian values; we are very diverse, diversity and inclusion is an important role in everything that we do, just like Canada is so diverse and inclusive, so is Air Canada'. The interviewer then asked how does Air Canada as a brand represent Canada and its people? Yiota responded by saying 'Our unique geography, colours, Canadian spirit and the new livery embodies our diverse cultural landscape'.

Relationship

The interviewer then asked about what kind of emotional ties Air Canada is using to try and build relationships with their customers? Yiota responded '*I think we really try to play up the fact that you feel at home on Air Canada, that is definitely an emotion we have seen from our customers that they feel'*. The interviewer then moved the conversation towards what kind of relationship is it trying to build with its global customer base and asked how Air Canada was doing this? '*Good question, for other markets we really want to bring a little bit of Canada to them, and show them how Canada is connected the world, it is a different strategy'*.

Reflection

The questions around reflection lacked concrete answers. When asked about what kind of customers Air Canada is targeting? Yiota responded '*I would say, because we are in such a broad industry, we don't have a specific niche, we target a lot of different types of markets, we target business travellers, Canadians and we also target leisure travellers with Air Canada Rouge, it is broad'*. The interviewer followed up by asking if they were targeting global passengers? Yiota replied '*yes'*.

Self-image

When the interviewer asked about how the brand speaks to the customer's self-image? Yiota responded 'Definitely, we want to make them feel like they are part of a premium brand, we feel that Air Canada is a premium company, we are a four-star airline from Skytrax, which is a company that ranks all airlines... we are very proud of our four stars.'

The interviewee also said that they want their customers to feel like they are '*part of a premium Canadian experience*'.

This interview offered great insight into how Air Canada is using the Canadian COO as the focus of their identity and branding strategy. The fact Yiota confirmed Air Canada wanted to become a global brand, reaffirms the point that our sample of participants for the focus group, which is a global sample, was justified. It is also worth mentioning that Yiota was very interested in this topic of researching the global market and said, '*it was something Air Canada was putting more emphasis on*'.

5.2. Brand Image

After conducting the interview and establishing the intended brand identity of Air Canada, we then conducted three focus groups to find out the image of Air Canada amongst their global audience. In total, there were three focus groups held: Group one had four participants; Group two had four participants, and Group three had five participants, with a total of 13 participants. The most relevant themes have been categorised into the six dimensions of the brand prism below:

Physique

As Physique refers to the physical features and appearance of a brand, participants were asked to talk about anything they associated with the brand? Most participants instantly said the *'maple leaf'* and referred to it as *'the red and white maple leaf'*, as they associated that colour scheme with Air Canada. As participants could not name any more attributes associated with the appearance of Air Canada, the moderator showed them images (can be found in chapter 4.1) of the Air Canada tail fin with the new black and red maple leaf logo. Many of the participants instantly recognised the logo but were initially confused and said, *'that is not Air Canada, Air Canada is red and white'*. While most participants liked the new livery, some were critical of the new logo with comments such as '*The black background and red logo look intimidating. It has a negative feeling as I feel it associates with horror movies or thrillers because there is always red and black colours'*. However, most participants said by having the maple leaf; Air Canada wanted to show '*they were the flag carrier airline of Canada'*. Participants were then shown a picture of an Air Canada aircraft with the new livery and asked to say what they thought about it? Participants instantly said words such as '*quality and safety'* with the 'Air Canada name' and '*Maple Leaf'* being the main reason.

Participants were then asked what kind of brand they think Air Canada is, based on the livery? Most of the participants suggest it was *'premium and professional'*. When asked why this was, respondents said things like *'Canada is a great country, so having the flag on aircraft makes it seem safe and premium, and the look of the aircraft appearance makes it seem professional'*. When participants were asked if Air Canada could improve the look of their brand? Many participants said things like '*you associate Canada with nature and outdoors, so maybe some green'* and the clear majority of participants said,

'*they should use the red and white maple leaf logo as people might not understand the new colour scheme'.*

Personality

 The moderator then asked participants if Air Canada was a person, what would they be like? One of the first exciting insights that was mentioned *'When I think of Canada, I think of a kind and friendly person'. 'Friendly'* was one of the recurring themes of this question and when the moderator asked participants why? They responded with '*I have never met a Canadian person who was not friendly'.* When participants were asked whether they agreed Canadians were friendly? All 13 of the participants agreed. Participants were then asked if they thought Air Canada was friendly? Most of them said that even though they did not have any knowledge of the airline, they think it would be '*friendly'.* Comments such '*the staff of Air Canada would provide great service and be very welcoming'* and ' *I agree that you would be welcomed by friendly staff and the hospitality would be amazing'.* These comments came from people who had no prior knowledge of Air Canada but only of Canada as a country. The moderator again asked what other attributes you would expect if Air Canada was a person? The results included *'adventurer and outdoors'.* When participants were asked more about this, they said things like *'the nature in Canada is amazing, and this is what I think of, when I think of a Canadian person'.* Another participant said, *'Canadians are so warm and Canada is a safe place, so I would expect this to be the same for Air Canada'.*

Culture

Culture was the topic participants had most to contribute on but in the context of Canada and not Air Canada. Many participants had much knowledge about Canadian culture, so the moderator asked questions accordingly. The most common theme was the sense of *'freedom'* participants associated with the Canadian culture. This started a great conversation in the focus groups, and other participants said *'When I think of Canada, I think green forests, lakes and mountains'.* When the moderator asked do you think Air Canada has the same culture, one participant said *'I think Air Canada will have some similarities... I expect it to be friendly, safe and welcoming but the design of the aircraft does not make it look fun, and that is one of the things I associate with Canadians'.* The moderator asked who agrees with this statement? Some respondents said '*The look of the planes is professional and premium and you cannot get fun into that'* and many other participants said that *'safety'* was the most important thing of the culture of Air Canada and one of the participants said *'safe is something I associate with Canada, and I think Air Canada would also reflect this'.*

Relationship

Most of the participants of each focus group found it difficult to contribute anything on the relationship aspect of Air Canada, as only two participants had visited and none had flown with Air Canada, meaning they had a weak relationship with the brand. The moderator asked how Air Canada could build a relationship with them? And there were many responses *'I thought Air Canada only flew between a few cities in Europe and Canada if there were more visible advertising I would be more inclined to use them'.* Other participants said, '*the only time I've seen Air Canada advertising was the maple leaf on the plane at Heathrow airport'.* One of the common recurring themes was the '*lack of visible advertising'* and *'lack of brand awareness'* amongst all participants. Participants also touched upon the fact there was no incentive to use Air Canada. Participants were then asked if receiving a discount for

Air Canada would have any impact? All participants responded that they would, as it *would 'increase the chances they would fly Air Canada and the likelihood of going to Canada'.*

Reflection

When asking questions in the reflection section, the moderator was trying to determine information on the stereotypical user of Air Canada. Participants instantly said *'Canadian'* or *'someone going to Canada from Europe'*. The moderator asked why they only think Canadians would use Air Canada? Participants responded with statements like *'I think Canadians are very patriotic and would probably try and always fly with Air Canada'.* Other prominent answers included *'families, business people and middle class'* When the moderator asked why? Participants said *'Air Canada does not appear high class or ultra-luxurious, due to the relaxed nature of Canadians'.* While other participants *said, 'Air Canada seemed like the everyday person's airline'.*

Self-Image

When participants were asked about how flying on Air Canada affected their self-image, the responses were insufficient. The moderator asked if participants were to use the brand what would it say about them? A typical answer was *'neutral'* or '*no feeling'*. When asked how does the brand make you feel? A common theme was *'reassured it is a good airline'.* One of the other themes that came up was '*not exclusive'*. Participants said, *'Air Canada seems like it is the airline for all Canadians and therefore doesn't feel exclusive'.* Other participants also commented on this suggesting '*It feels like I would only use Air Canada if I ever had to go to Canada, whereas I always try to fly on Qatar or Emirates because it gets me excited to experience the quality'.* The moderator asked why this was? Participants said, '*it will not be the same exciting experience of flying with Emirates or Qatar'.*

6. Discussion

The brand identity prism will be used to analyse the results of the interview and focus groups. A comparison of the Internal identity of Air Canada as a brand (from the interview) and the external image of how people view Air Canada globally (from the focus group) will follow. Alignments and misalignments between facets in both prisms will be identified. As we have based the research around utilising Kapferer's identity prism, we will continue to use the six facets (Physique, Personality, Culture, Relationship, Reflection, Self-image) to categorise the data. The data has been joined in the two prisms; the first prism will show Air Canada's identity (interview) figure 3 and the second prism will show Air Canada's image (focus groups) figure 4.

6.1. The Identity of Air Canada
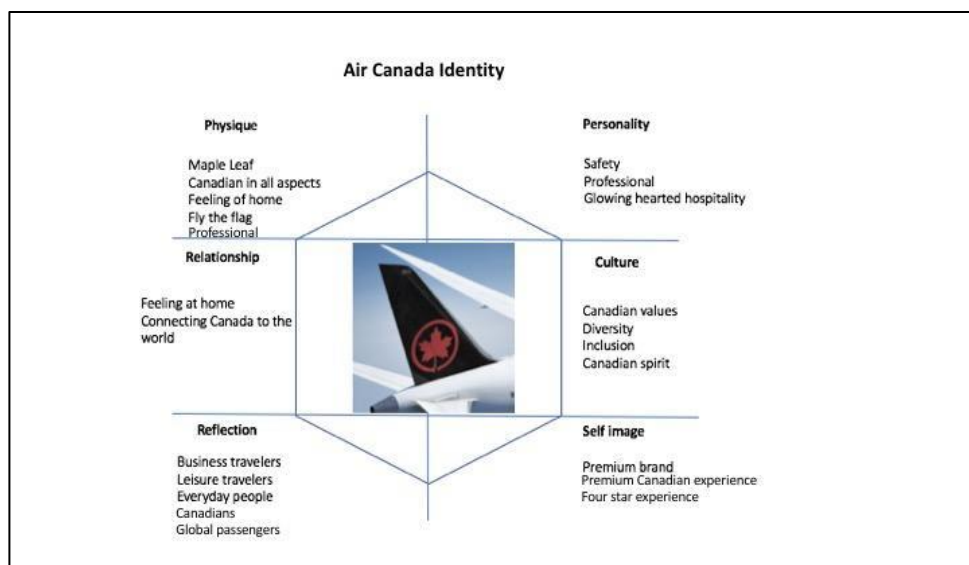
Figure 5: Air Canada Identity Prism

The identity of Air Canada is very much focused on being Canadian in everything they do and to use this as their primary point of differentiation. By having unique associations, a strong country brand and strategy to 'fly the flag', Air Canada seems to have the essence of its identity nailed down. However, some parts of the identity are vague in some facets, and this has led to misalignments in 3 of 6 facets. These will be explained in section 6.3.

6.2. Image of Air Canada
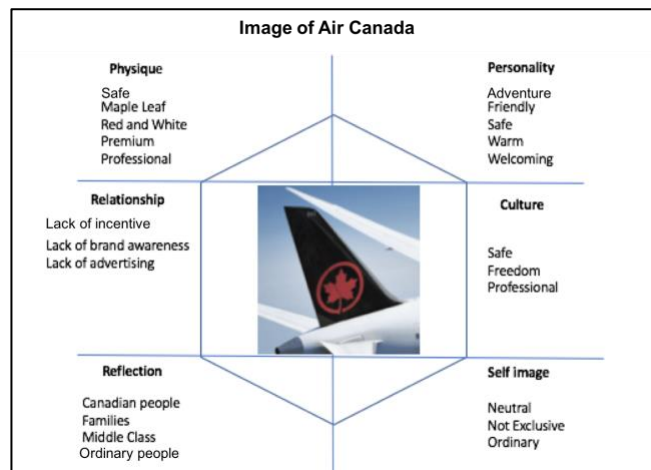
Figure 6: Air Canada Image Prism

The image of Air Canada is generally favourable with participants of the research suggesting using the COO branding, such as the maple leaf creates a recognisable and professional brand. However, a lack of visible advertising and brand awareness does not allow the global audience to generate emotional values and build a relationship with the brand. This will be explained in greater detail in section 6.3.

6.3. Discussion

This section will link the theory from the literature review to interpret specific results and themes from the findings. Image and identity have been talked about in the same sections, as a way to quickly spot alignments and misalignment between image and identity. The section starts off with a table of the keywords which were the most exciting and universal themes and capture the essence of the image and identity of the different facets.

Table 2: Brand Identity vs. Brand Image of Air Canada (Yiota Karapanos, interview, May 8, 2018).

Dimension	Air Canada Brand Identity (Internal)	Air Canada global brand image(External)	Align/ Misalign
Physique	Professional Maple leaf Canadian in everything Feeling of home Fly the flag	Professional Maple leaf Red and white Premium Safe	Aligns
Personality	Safety Professional Glowing hearted hospitality	Friendly Safe Warm Welcoming Adventure	Aligns
Relationship	Feeling of home	Lack of brand awareness	Misaligns

	Connecting Canada to the world	Lack of advertising Lack of incentive	
Culture	Canadian values Diversity Inclusion Canadian spirit	Safe Freedom Professional	Aligns
Reflection	Business Travelers Leisure Travellers Canadians Global passengers	Canadian people Families Middle class Ordinary people	Inconclusive
Self-image	Premium brand Premium Canadian Experience Four star experience	Neutral Not exclusive Ordinary	Misaligns

Physique

When analysing the physique facet, there was a strong alignment between identity and image. Firstly, '*being professional in everything we do*' was one of the key focuses on the Air Canada Identity. This aligns with the image of participants as a common theme was a '*professional overall image*' of the brand. This supports the findings of Kapferer (2012), who states that a strong brand can externally emphasise the hidden internal characteristics of a product. Thus, the new livery of Air Canada and the overall brand was deemed favourable.

One of the other factors of the identity and image which closely aligned was the maple leaf logo on the aircraft's livery. The maple leaf is part of Air Canada's identity of '*flying the flag*', and this was an instant association with Air Canada by participants of the focus groups. Participants were able to link the nation of Canada with Air Canada due to their associations of the maple leaf, as the symbol of Air Canada. Additionally, the symbol of the maple leaf and the recognisability of the Air Canada brand name on the livery was able to transfer added value to customers via the instant recognisability of it being a Canadian service, which supports the findings of De Chernatony and McDonald (1998). The aforementioned authors state that a strong brand can transfer added value to customers through having recognisable products, service, people and symbols. Melin (2002) states that symbolic meanings behind a brand are illustrated in the brand's image, which leads to both rational and emotive responses in consumers. The participants were able to experience both functional and emotional responses upon witnessing the maple leaf on the livery, therefore supporting the findings of Melin (2002).

The physical design of Air Canada, in regard to the maple leaf logo, colours and Air Canada's name on the livery was able to heighten the participant's functional perceptions of Air Canada's product quality, professionalism and safety. One participant mentions that since they view Canada positively and the maple leaf is a potent symbol, and they associate these with safety, quality and professionalism.

> '*Canada is a great country, so having the flag on aircraft makes it seem safe and premium, and the look of the aircraft makes it look professional*'.

Khan and Bamber's (2008) study, which suggested that when consumers do not know much about a brand, they tend to revert to their knowledge of the brands COO and thus, judge the brand based on that knowledge. In the circumstance of Air Canada, people's views on Canada were mostly positive, and this was ultimately translated into mostly favourable view of the physique through words such as '*Professional, Maple leaf, Red and White, Premium Safe*'. However, the colour combination of the red maple leaf with the black background on the aircraft livery did not resonate with the participants, as some members stated that the colours should be a red flag on a white background to replicate the Canadian flag. This had an adverse effect on the image of the brand from some participants as they felt like the colours were a strange combination and did not necessarily represent their associations with Canada. However, the Air Canada '*brand name*' and '*maple leaf*' symbol was powerful enough to still be recognisable, even with the different colour scheme. This again supports the literature of De Chernatony and McDonald (1998), who argue that successful brands can identify and transfer pertinent added value to customers via recognisable products, symbols, services, people and places.

Overall the physique facet of Air Canada was extremely positive with strong alignment between identity and image. According to Kapferer, (2012), brands are one of the most critical aspects of a company's assets and, hence, ought to be utilised as a critical component in a company's strategy. This is something Air Canada is doing, and this is reflected in substantial alignment between image and identity.

Personality

The personality facet is strong for Air Canada as there is a close alignment of identity and image. The overwhelming sense of positivity that was associated with Air Canada's image from consumers such as '*Friendly, safe, warm, welcoming and adventure*' are aligned closely to the identity Air Canada are trying to portray. The reason for this could be attributed to the fact that, as the participants did not have any knowledge about Air Canada, they used the associations they had with Canada and Canadian people to provide these views. Participants believed the traits displayed in Canada or by Canadians would be reflected in the personality of the brand. The findings of Khan and Bamber (2008) support this view by stating if a products COO is known to a consumer and other product attributes are unfamiliar, the image of the COO is likely to transfer and impact the image of a product and brand. The aforementioned author goes on to say when consumers have limited attributes or experience of a product to judge on, COO and the name and strength of a brand will represent a larger role in a customer's purchase decision (Khan & Bamber, 2008). This finding highlights how Air Canada can be prosperous in becoming a global brand, as global consumers who have limited brand knowledge will use their associations of Canada as a country to evaluate the brand. This is a massive advantage for Air Canada, which according to FutureBrand (n.d.) country brand index, is the fifth highest ranked country brand in the world.

In the identity aspect of personality, there was more of a functional approach from Air Canada compared to competitors such as Emirates airlines. Whereas Emirates are more focused about intangible aspects such as creating an unforgettable experience and luxury (O'Connell, 2011; Zhang, 2017), Air Canada focuses on aspects such as '*safety, professionalism and glowing hearted hospitality*' as part of their identity. Although this is a differing strategy, there is a definite alignment between identity and the image as participants associated functional attributes with Air Canada, who are '*safe and welcoming*'. This does, however, reaffirm the research of Ahmed et al. (2002) and Melin (2002), which uses the COO as part of a branding strategy can act as a re-assurer and risk reducer, for purchasing unknown products for high involvement products such as airlines. Therefore, having safety as part of its identity

and image will help Air Canada in the quest to generate new global customers, as safety is one of the most critical factors for passengers using airlines (Ringle, Sarstedt & Zimmermann, 2011).

Culture

The culture facet of both image and identity provided exciting results. The first clear theme was that the participants did not know anything about the culture of Air Canada and instead, reverted to their impressions regarding the cultural aspects of Canada that would be represented in Air Canada's identity. Participants were able to do this by effortlessly identifying Canadian traits and applying them to Air Canada, which supports the views of Gotsi, Lopez and Andriopoulos (2011) and Mihalache and Vukman (2005), who suggest that that the image and identity of a country as a brand and a corporate brand do have a relationship, where the values are capable of transferring between the two. '*Freedom'* was a common theme amongst participants with comments such as;

> *'When I think of Canada, I think Green forests, lakes and mountains'.*

Although freedom does not form part of the identity of Air Canada, the airline should use this finding and try to incorporate this as part of their identity. Participants said '*freedom is about being free and having the choice to go where you want'*. Air Canada should be an inspiration for people to experience freedom and they should play it much more in their identity. However, the keywords that form the identity were '*Canadian values, diversity, inclusion and Canadian spirit'* which suggests overall there is a misalignment in this facet given the fact that there are differences between image and identity. *'Canadian Values'* is a vague term Air Canada has in their identity, and this is reflected in participants' image of the brand who used the words '*safe and professional'* which had already been used in the personality facet, given the fact they did not understand the culture of Air Canada. This can be explained by Kapferer (2012) who believes that brands must work on creating a capable brand identity, before expecting to create an alluring brand image. The vagueness of *'Canadian values'* represents a weak identity and therefore reflects in Air Canada's lack of alluring image. This is further supported by Aaker (1996) who states that brand identity is successfully achieved when a brand understands its core values and can communicate these clearly, something which Air Canada needs to improve upon.

Relationship

Relationship is a weak facet as there is a significant misalignment between the identity Air Canada is trying to convey and the image of relationship amongst the global audience. Most of the participants did not have any relationship with Air Canada. The reason for this was due to a '*lack of brand awareness'* and '*lack of visible advertising'* resulting in a '*lack of incentive'* to use Air Canada. Many participants had limited knowledge about Air Canada because they had never seen any Air Canada advertising. For an airline who is trying to become a global brand, this is a huge issue. An explanation as to why the lack of advertising affects Air Canada's relationship with their global audience is highlighted by Olsson (2012) who believes that advertising and favourable publicity allows brands to influence their image and help build relationships with customers positively.

One of the issues with the relationship facet was highlighted by the brand manager who illuminated the fact they have two differing strategies. For the Canadian market, the brand manager said:

> *'I think we really try to play up the fact that you feel at home on Air Canada, that is definitely an emotion we have seen from our customers that they feel'.*

> *Moreover, for the global market, she said 'we want to show the global market how Canada is connected the world, it is a different strategy'.*

Air Canada's central strategy of making consumers feel at home by '*flying the flag*' and providing a Canadian experience, is focused on the Canadian rather than the global audience. The global strategy of Air Canada is vague with no clear direction, and by not having any visible advertising it will be hard for the global consumers to build a relationship with Air Canada. In the literature by Rojas-Méndez, Murphy and Papadopoulos (2013) and Garip (2013), it would be suggested that Air Canada should tap into global consumer emotions and create affective bonds, where brand traits are given symbolic human qualities, ultimately stimulating greater interest and tighter affiliations towards the brand. This research seemingly contradicts the approach Air Canada is currently taking towards their global customers and can explain why the global audience are struggling to build any relationship or affinity to the brand.

To improve their relationship with global consumers, participants stated that Air Canada needs to create tailored advertising that is representative of the associations the global audience hold about Canada, that will then be reflected in the brand. This further highlights the research of the Khan and Bamber (2008) study which states that positive country associations will be used to evaluate a brand when nothing is known about the brand. Kapferer (2012) suggest that building a relationship can be done as the peripheral facets (outer characteristics) of a brand are malleable, which the brand can alter when looking to innovate or enhance their image globally. Therefore, Air Canada should change their outer characteristics, e.g. change their advertising and marketing to replicate the images a global audience holds towards Canada, to build a stronger relationship.

Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos (2011) state that communicating the identity of Canada in a manner which a global audience can comprehend and communicating this via appropriate channels to reach them will have the benefit of a positive value transfer to Air Canada. Furthermore, seeing as the transfer in image between a country brand and corporate can be uneven across global markets (Mihalache and Vukman, 2005; Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Gotsi, Lopez & Andriopoulos, 2011), Air Canada must be aware that different global markets will possess different images and they must tailor their advertising accordingly, if they are to improve the relationship. As mentioned by Kapferer (2012) in the Identity and Image model, a message transfer between a brands identity and image occurs. The sender (the internal companies brand identity) sends a signal (the companies message and advertising) to the receiver (the customers brand image). Upon transferring the signal from the sender to the receiver (identity to image transfer), the signal can be interfered by communication from competition and noise. Air Canada must be aware of the noise and competition in global markets and sufficiently adapt their advertising and communications to build a stronger relationship with a global audience.

Supphellen and Grønhaug (2003) acknowledge that customers may be wary of consuming foreign brands as it competes against a nation's domestic products, resulting in consumers possessing a better relationship and positive image towards their domestic products. Consequently, Air Canada will have to try and overcome this bias (ethnocentrism) as customers in foreign markets may prefer to fly on their national airline over Air Canada. One way Air Canada can do this is by offering an incentive, which is currently lacking according to participants. Receiving a discount code to fly on Air Canada would '*increase the chances they would fly Air Canada and the likelihood of going to Canada'*. Such use of discounts can enable global passengers to consider trying Air Canada over their domestic airlines and

consider flying to Canada, enabling Air Canada to build trust in new markets and create better relationships with the global audience.

Reflection

The reflection dimension proved to be the vaguest facet from both an identity and image perspective, making it difficult to conclude whether there was an alignment or misalignment between identity and image. Air Canada does not seem to have a clearly defined global customer base, with '*business passengers, leisure travellers and everyday people*', as well as '*Canadians*', all targeted which just about covers all demographics. Participants believed Air Canada was mainly for '*Canadians who are going from Europe to Canada*'. This highlights two interesting insights. Firstly, it would appear that Air Canada is excluding global customers from using Air Canada, as the identity that Air Canada is for everyone is not being communicated effectively to the global audience. This is a fundamental challenge which Air Canada faces in marketing themselves globally, as customers' interpretation of Air Canada's identity can vary across international markets, leading to differing images (Kapferer, 2012). This underlines the fact that Air Canada needs to identify key target markets in its global audience and communicate to these effectively. Kapferer (2012) states that different images across international markets are a significant obstacle in a brands communication, where noise and communication from the competition can influence the intended message of a brands identity. He further argues that a common issue among firms is the neglect in firms strategically understanding the importance of adapting to communication from competition, which can create issues when trying to market and communicate a universal brand identity globally (Kapferer, 2012). Air Canada must be mindful and strategic of how their intended identity will be interpreted and be aware that globally communicating a message intended for Canadians, may result in a global message which is different from the company's intention. Communicating a Canadian identity works well in the Canadian market but means something different in global markets, as highlighted by the results of this study. Additionally, individuals will interpret a brands image differently depending on their individual and subjective interpretations, which can be based on their unique personality and life experiences (Dean, Arroyo-Games, Punjaisri & Pich, 2016; Sjödin & Törn, 2006). Therefore, following what Aaker (1996) and Kapferer (2012) stated, Air Canada must understand its global brand identity and how to communicate their core values globally to create an alluring brand image.

It would appear for the first time in this research that Air Canada's use of COO has been received negatively for participants, as Air Canada is putting so much focus on using COO as part of their identity and communicating this in a way that only engages the Canadian target market. This is highlighted in the image of Air Canada, as participants said '*Canadians*' would be the primary users of Air Canada. With this in mind, it would suggest the reflection facet has highlighted that the current communication strategy almost seems like it is excluding the global customer base. This underlines a potential downside of not communicating a COO in a way that the target audience can understand and this would have appeared to alienate the global target market, which Air Canada is trying to target. This again highlights the point of Gotsi, Lopez and Andriopoulos, (2011) who states that communicating the identity of Canada in a manner which a global audience can comprehend and communicating this via appropriate channels to reach them, will have the benefit of a positive value transfer to Air Canada.

Self-Image

The self-image relates to how customers see themselves concerning the brand. Air Canada want their identity to radiate an image to the customers that they are flying on a '*premium brand' and part of an 'exclusive club'*. However, participants did not agree with this and suggested they felt '*ordinary, neutral and non-exclusive'* while flying on Air Canada suggesting a strong misalignment between identity and image. This can be explained by Melin (2012) who suggests a brand can create image associations via emotional values, which can be attributed to the performance, lifestyle and COO of the product and the brand. The emotional values which Melin (2012) highlights are not present within the global audience, which has been illuminated in many of the other facets. This could be attributed to the aforementioned lack of advertising and brand awareness amongst the global audience, meaning the global audience cannot develop emotional associations with Air Canada. When customers interact, and consume a brand, the experience can influence their attitude, where they can feel a sense of belonging to a particular group, as well as feeling self-actualisation (Melin, 2002; Kapferer, 2012; Sinclair, 2008). A possible reason why the global audience does not feel a sense of belonging is that they are not exposed to interaction with the brand as there is a real lack of communication, as highlighted by the results of the focus group. Air Canada can improve this by again referring to Gotsi, Lopez and Andriopoulos, (2011) who suggests that communicating the identity of Canada in a way the global audience can comprehend, will have the benefit of a positive impact on the global association ability to develop emotional values with Air Canada.

An interesting finding was that there are some discrepancies in the results, given the fact that participants said the image of the brand was '*premium'* when asked about the physique facet, yet in the self-image it was '*ordinary'* and '*non-exclusive'*. This can be explained by Melin (2002), who illustrates that the knowledge which customers interpret from a brand can be rational (functional) or emotional and that the image of the brand often contains symbolic meanings behind it. So participants viewed the physique as emotional as they could see the brand and the overall look of the brand appeared '*premium'*. However, when participants were questioned on how they see themselves in relation to the brand, none of the participants had used it, so it could not offer any insight and therefore focused on the functional attributes.

The central themes would suggest that the global audience is focusing on the functional aspects and see it only as a mode of transport. This underlines the fact that Air Canada's identity misaligned with the image, as they believe they are a premium brand. This can be further explained by Garip (2013), and Kotler and Armstrong (2001) who suggest brands are increasingly positioned within the emotional and experiential world of the consumers and non-functional product attributes such as the symbolic meaning. It is clear the participants did not have any affinity to the emotional aspects of the brand and therefore focused on the functional aspects. This can be attributed to the fact Air Canada plays on the emotive associations of Canadians, and this is not received by the global audience because Air Canada only uses advertising to play on the emotive side towards Canadians, global audiences only see the functional side.

When Brand images are strong, they can be used to enhance a person's self-image, appeal to stakeholders, (Keller, 1993) and influence customers' purchase decisions, all of which have an impact on the corporation's financial revenue (Munoz, 2004; Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). Interaction with a brand can also affect consumers' overall attitudes to the brand where for example

individuals can feel a sense of belonging by consuming or buying a product. For instance, even if a customer does not belong to the elite class, they can feel a sense of belonging (Lindeberg, Blomkvist & Johansson, 2012). The reason why the self-image is a weak fact is that global audiences do not feel a sense of belonging from the global audience.

In conclusion of the chapter, Morello (1983) states that products produced in nations with a positive image should emphasise their "*made in*" location via corporate communications. This highlights the point that Air Canada is using an effective identity strategy by highlighting their Canadian COO and utilising their strong country brand. However, the discussion reaffirms the views of Kapferer (2012) who asserts that brands must work on creating a capable brand identity, before expecting to create an alluring brand image. According to the Brand identity prism, 3 of 6 facets show a strong alignment between identity and image, so therefore there is still much work to do to create a stable alignment in all facets.

7. Conclusion

At this point, it is essential to refer to the research questions that were outlined in chapter 1.3 to see if they have been sufficiently addressed. The primary purpose of this research was to investigate:

RQ1: How does Air Canada use COO as a branding strategy and how does a global customer base perceive it?

To answer the main research question, the three sub-research questions will be answered initially:

RQ 1A-What aspects of Canada's COO does Air Canada include in their identity and communicate through its branding strategy?

>**Physique -** Professional, Maple leaf, Canadian in all aspects, feeling of home, fly the flag

>**Relationship -** Feeling of home, connecting the world to Canada

>**Reflection -** Business travellers, Leisure travellers, Canadians, global passengers

>**Personality** - Safety, professional, glowing hearted hospitality,

>**Culture -** Canadian values, Diversity, Inclusion, Canadian spirit

>**Self-image -** Premium brand, Premium Canadian Experience, four-star experience

RQ 1B-What image of Air Canada is perceived by the global target market?

>**Physique -** Maple leaf, red and white, premium, professional, Safe

>**Relationship** - Lack of brand awareness, lack of advertising, lack of incentive

>**Reflection -** Canadian people, families, middle class, ordinary people

>**Personality** - Friendly, safe, warm, welcoming, adventure

>**Culture -** Safe, freedom, professional

>**Self-image -** Neutral, Not exclusive, ordinary

RQ 1C-What are the differences between the perceived image and the identity communicated?

Three of the themes concerning physique, personality and culture were mirrored in the identity and image of Air Canada by the global audience. Self-image and relationship provided to be very weak facets, and this is down to the fact that both the identity and image were both vague and offered no real insight into the facet. The reflection facet proved inconclusive as the identity and image was vague and lacked any concrete answers.

The most significant misalignment between image and identity seems to be the lack of visible advertising and brand awareness around Air Canada. Air Canada's mission to be Canadian in everything they do form part of a strong brand identity, however Barbu (2016) argues that the external (public) image of a brand is mirrored by the brand's identity, which begins with the particular aspects of a corporation and the products it sells. Given the fact that there are alignments and misalignments between image and identity at many touchpoints it would suggest that Air Canada's identity is not being

communicated effectively. Aaker (1996) states that brand identity is successfully achieved when a brand understands its core values and can communicate these clearly and Air Canada needs to do this an adapt to different markets to be understood.

One of the most unexpected findings and possible negative implications of using a COO as part of a global branding strategy which is that participants of the focus groups thought that Air Canada was primarily flown on by just Canadians. We believe the reason for this goes back to the weak image facet of relationships as participants believed the Air Canada Brand was not visible enough and participants could not recall any advertising. Therefore, we believe that although COO is positive, the communication to the global audience needs to be relevant and understandable.

RQ1: How does Air Canada use COO as a branding strategy and how does a global customer base perceive it?

One of the significant findings of this study is that Air Canada use of COO as part of their identity and branding strategy allows them to differentiate against competition by using the unique associations people hold of Canada. This research highlights the advantage for Air Canada utilising COO as part of their global branding strategy as when consumers have no prior knowledge of a brand they take the associations they have with a country and use these associations to apply to and evaluate a brand. This was proven by the 'global target market' chosen for the focus group in this research, who had little knowledge of Air Canada but used the associations they had with Canada as a country to evaluate the brand. In the case of Air Canada, people generally had positive associations towards Canada as a country which reflected positively in their view on Air Canada, highlighting the fact that using the Canadian COO is a useful differentiation strategy. The area in which Air Canada has a significant advantage, which has been proved by the results, is the positive associations people have about Canada are linked directly to Air Canada. This was reaffirmed by Aaker (1991) who suggests brand associations are everything that has a connection with a brand and that this connection to the brand will be stronger in the consumers mind with associations. Using the COO will also help Air Canada fulfil its aims to differentiate using COO as Low & Lamb (2000) found that brand associations can strengthen brand equity by Differentiating, positioning and extending brands.

The rebranding and new livery at Air Canada have been successful in creating positive associations between the brand and its strong COO. The strategy has been successful as indicated by the steady growth of the airline and its dramatic turnaround in profitability, as well as the positive feelings of the participants of the focus group. To become a global powerhouse, Air Canada should continue its efforts to break into new markets using COO. This will require more marketing efforts and a more significant portion of its marketing budget to be spent internationally to increase international awareness of the brand. The focus group cohorts of this study are the business leaders of tomorrow, and they represent the future of Air Canada's growth strategy. They possess a strong positive brand image of Air Canada based on their strong positive views of Canada and Canadians. Air Canada would be wise to double down on this strategy but work harder to increase brand awareness amongst this population cohort. This could be done by increased advertising in the target markets. While it is understood that the company is trying to be seen as a premium brand, our respondents felt that the brand could use more of Canada in its image and physique, that is relevant to the global audience. Air Canada must clearly define its target cohort and stop trying to be everything to everyone. If they are to be a premium brand, this should be their primary area of concentration.

It can be concluded from the results that using COO as the primary focus of a branding strategy can provide an excellent way to differentiate brands in international markets. Air Canada has a significant advantage in that the Canadian country brand has a positive image amongst the global audience, as seen in the FutureBrand (n.d.) study, as well as our study. Air Canada should continue to leverage the Canadian COO as part of their strategy, seeing as the Canadian brand is a strong brand with intangible associations. However, the research indicated that there is a lack of brand awareness of Air Canada and many participants believed it is just an airline for Canadians. This highlights that Air Canada needs to adapt their branding strategy to a global audience so it can be understood to create stronger alignment between the internal identity and global image. Air Canada should continue to fly the flag to differentiate themselves but adapt their communication and global brand strategy to be relevant and understandable to the global audience. If Air Canada stays authentic and improves their communication, they will have the potential to become a top 10 global airline.

7.1. Theoretical contribution

This research adds to existing theory on COO, in the context of the airline industry, which is understudied (Javalgi, Cutler & Winans, 2001; Tamas, 2015). The study demonstrated the effectiveness of using a qualitative method and contributed to a better understanding of how consumers' attitudes, feelings and perceptions (the image) of a brand, can vary across the global market. Furthermore, this study succeeded in addressing Usunier's (2006) proclaimed "relevance gap", as it combined theory on COO and branding which led to some practical advice for brand managers, highlighted in 7.2.

The brand identity prism was also tested which highlights some strengths and weaknesses of using the model in the context of an airline. Overall the model is excellent to compartmentalise both brand and image but caused some issues regarding gaining depth of answer in the self-image, reflection and relationship factors. The framework worked well for highlighting strengths and weaknesses in different areas and gave us a base of topics to answer our questions around.

7.2. Practical Implications

The results of this study can be used practically by airlines to understand how their identity is being understood by consumers globally. As most flag carriers are trying to/are established global airlines, then it is essential to use this study when considering their branding strategy is being understood globally. With many flag carriers under attack from LCC, flag carriers are looking for ways to differentiate themselves from their competition. Legacy carriers with strong COO associations can benefit from the example of Air Canada and the results of this study. Our advice based on the findings of the research to managers would be to create some clearly defined target markets and create communication strategies that are understandable and relatable to these markets. Brands with a strong COO should align with their country brand to expand globally.

7.3. Future Research

There are many avenues in which further research could be undertaken. Since only Air Canada was used in this study, future research could include a multiple case study approach in order to compare the identity and image of other flag carrying airlines. One other avenue of future research could also look at modifying the brand prism in order to make it more suitable for airlines so that brand managers can use it as a way of practical advice.

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