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BRANDS AND BRANDING - BRAND IMAGES IN KAINUU

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<p>Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tutkia brändimielikuvia Kainuussa. Tavoitteena oli selvittää mielletäänkö kainuulaisia tuotteita, palveluita tai yrityksiä brändeiksi kohderyhmässä. Teoreettinen osuus koostuu brändi- ja brändäysteoriasta.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena. Tutkimusaineisto kerättiin henkilökohtaisissa haastatteluissa, joko kasvokkain tai puhelimitse. Tutkimuksen kohderyhmänä olivat 18- 25 vuotiaat nuoret miehet ja naiset. He olivat joko opiskelijoita, työssäkäyviä tai työelämän ulkopuolella. Kaiken kaikkiaan 40 henkilöä haastateltiin.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittavat, että paikallisia tuotteita, palveluita ja yrityksiä ei yleisesti mielletä brändeiksi koska ne eivät ole laajalti, Kainuun ulkopuolella tunnettuja. Mielikuvat paikallisista tuotteista, palveluista ja yrityksistä ovat melko positiivisia ja paikallisuus on arvostettu tekijä.</p> <p>Haastatellut antoivat myös joitakin parannusehdotuksia. Yleisin ehdotus oli markkinoinnin ja mainonnan lisääminen, paikallisten tuotteiden, palveluiden ja yritysten tunnettavuuden parantamiseksi.</p>	
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<p>The purpose of this thesis was to study brand images in Kainuu. The aim was to find out if the target group of the research associates local products, services and companies as brands. The theoretical part of the thesis consists of brand and branding theory.</p> <p>The study was conducted as a qualitative research. The research material was gathered in personal interviews, either face to face or by phone. The target group of the research included young people from the age of 18 to 25, both men and women and from different backgrounds. All together 40 persons were interviewed.</p> <p>On the basis of the results it was concluded that the local products, services and companies are not generally associated as brands because of the lack of wider knowledge and recognition of them. The images of the local products, services and companies are all in all quite positive and they are locally respected.</p> <p>Some future improvement suggestions were also given by the interviewees. The most common one of them was increasing marketing and advertising to make the local products, services and companies more widely known.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the markets have become more and more competitive the importance of branding has grown. It is important for producers to distinguish their products from the competitors in order to develop brand loyalty. This enables maximizing sales and keeping up a strong brand image. To gain the position of being a brand can be very beneficial for a product or a company. Probably the most important point about a brand is that that it can reach a unique and prestigious position in consumers' minds. For a product to succeed it is essential that consumers think that it is distinguished clearly from competitors. While building a brand it should be emphasized that it takes time. A brand does not form by itself, but instead building a brand is a purposeful action.

This thesis defines more closely what a brand is and some theory and background information about branding and building brand images is included. The aim is to give information clearly and understandably and create a general overview about the topic for the reader.

The research problem of this thesis was whether there are local brands in Kainuu. As well as finding out people's images of products in Kainuu and if they are associated as brands. Also the best known local products and brands were looked for. The target group of the research was made up of young people at the age of 18-25. The research method used was interviewing and there were altogether 40 people interviewed. All of the interviews were completed within two weeks in the middle of February 2006.

Kainuu is situated in the geographical centre of Finland. It is a part of the Oulu province and its so called capital city is Kajaani. Besides Kajaani there are 9 other municipalities in Kainuu and all together there are nearly 86 000 inhabitants. The area of the province is 338 145 square kilometers. The main industries are forestry and wood processing although tourism is a growing area of enterprise. Also electronic and technological industries are nowadays a very important part of especially Kajaani's economy. The following figure shows the industrial structure of Kainuu. As the figure shows, services are the biggest source of livelihood followed by commerce and industry.

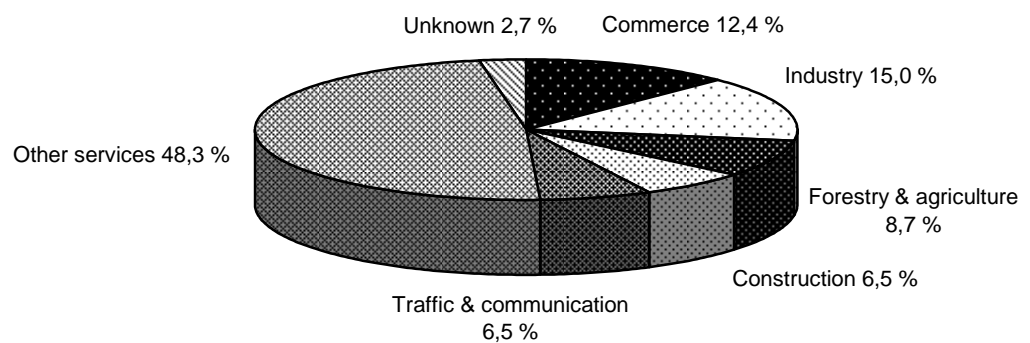


Figure 1. Industrial structure of Kainuu 2003 (Kainuun Liitto 2006)

The results of the research show that within young people's minds the products, services or companies originating from Kainuu are not generally associated as brands because they are rather unknown outside Kainuu. Instead it was found out that locally those products and companies are well-known and highly respected. Also the results indicate what young people think should be done to increase the knowledge of products and companies originating from Kainuu outside the region.

The research can be helpful while considering what kind of role the products and companies from Kainuu are playing especially in young people's minds. Particularly while wondering whether there are products, services or companies that can be associated as brands and what are their brand images. The results can be helpful for those companies that got mentioned within the

interviews as some suggestions for development arose. Also the theory part of this thesis gives the readers the possibility to get familiar with what are brands and how are they formed. For the students working with this thesis the most important parts, in addition to the knowledge gained from the theory, were conducting the interview research and analyzing and processing the results.

Figure 2. describes the framework for the branding theory of this thesis. It shows how the different theory parts are connected to each other.



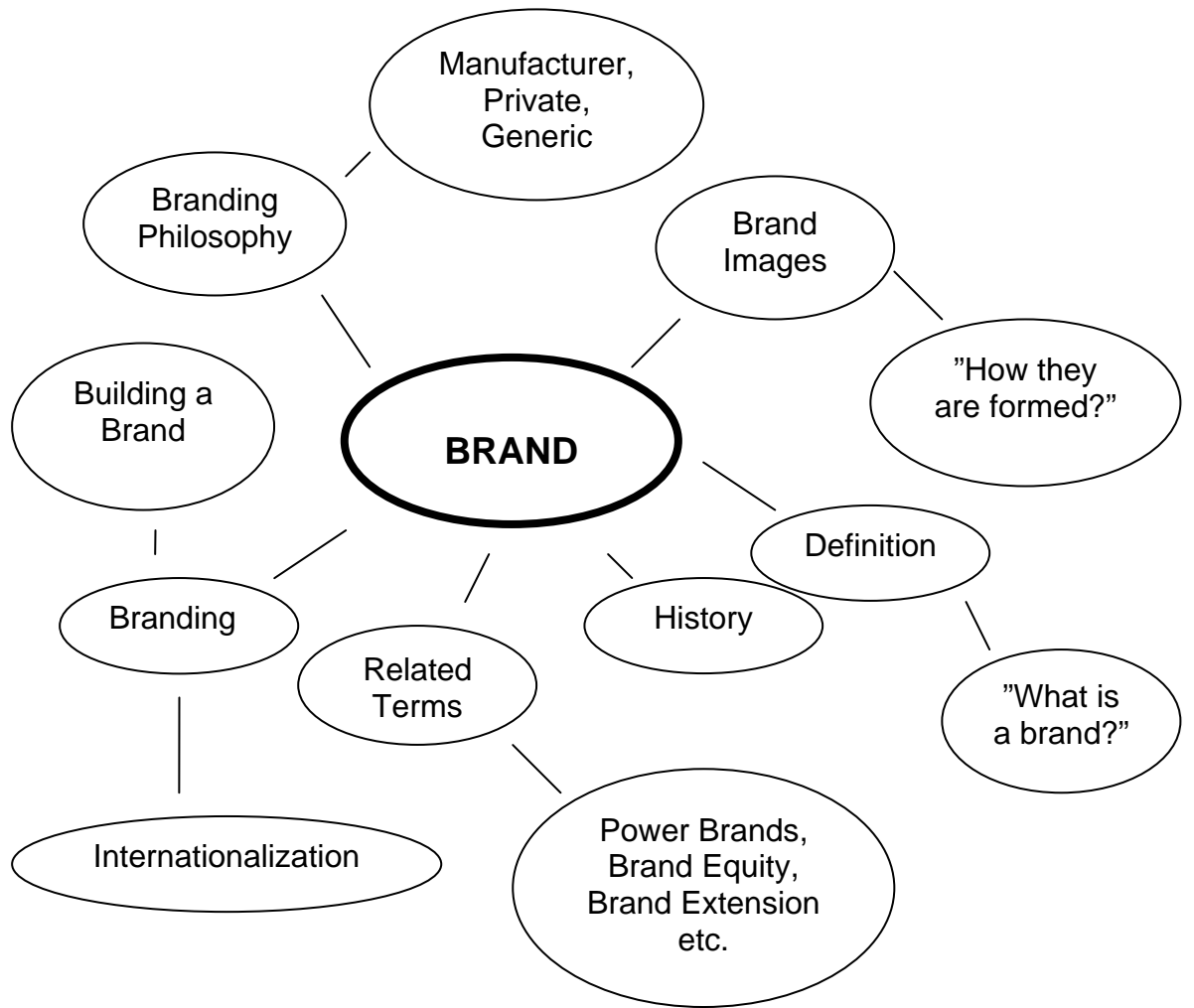


Figure 2. Framework of the branding theory

## 2 BRANDS AND BRANDING

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these and it can be expressed in many different ways. A brand can represent many different value dimensions and also it can be something the company nurtures and builds or exploits and neglects. Brand is to identify a product or service of a maker or a seller. By establishing brands companies can obtain value and appreciation of consumers to their branded products. (Kotler & Armstrong 2001, 301.)

Brand helps the consumers not only to see you and talk about you, but also to remember you. The brand aids you to differentiate your offering from others and it is a way to show that it is the product with all the advantages that the consumer looks for. The most basic function of a brand is to identify a product or service cost-effectively. The name is the central way to differentiate your product, like Coca-Cola from Pepsi and Audi from Toyota. The brand name creates a full set of emotions and impressions within people's minds. Mentioning some famous people's name brings a certain kind of image in individuals' minds, positive or negative set of impressions. This applies to artists, politicians and other celebrities like Michael Jackson and Princess Diana who generate an impression. In some respect they are brands due to their personal achievements but sometimes brands are also created due to skilful manipulation of the media. (Nilson 1998, 49.)

For a business a brand is a necessity. By actively working with the brand, the company can gain some distinct advantages. These advantages can be put in two categories; firstly it is financially beneficial for the company and secondly it gives a sense of purpose for the employees. Brands can have considerable positive effect on the morale in a company, as the employees can be proud of the brand and feel a sense of belonging. This can be seen especially in the entrepreneurial types of organizations. Companies with very high profile and clear statements about the purpose of the company serve as a moral booster for the whole group. Also employees can be seen to be more productive and loyal in companies with strong sense of identity with the company and its brand. (Nilson 1998, 9-10.)

In sense of keeping customer relations, the continuity that brands are representing is important. That is because brands are often much older than the company handling them, as the average age of brands varies from market sector to market sector. A brand that is well-established and built correctly is representing values such as trustworthiness and reliability much quicker and more effectively than any expensive commercial. This leads to the fact that brand is a strategic business tool and developing a brand is a strategic business activity. It is not only a marketing department's priority but it should be the concern of top management as it is crucial to the business success. (Nilson 1998, 9-10.)

A brand is to be seen as more than a product. Brand identity and strategy is based on its product attributes, such as high quality, durability, reliability and premium price. Also a brand is delivering a feeling of buying and using the best. The distinction between a product and a brand is summarized in the following figure. (Aaker 1996, 74.)

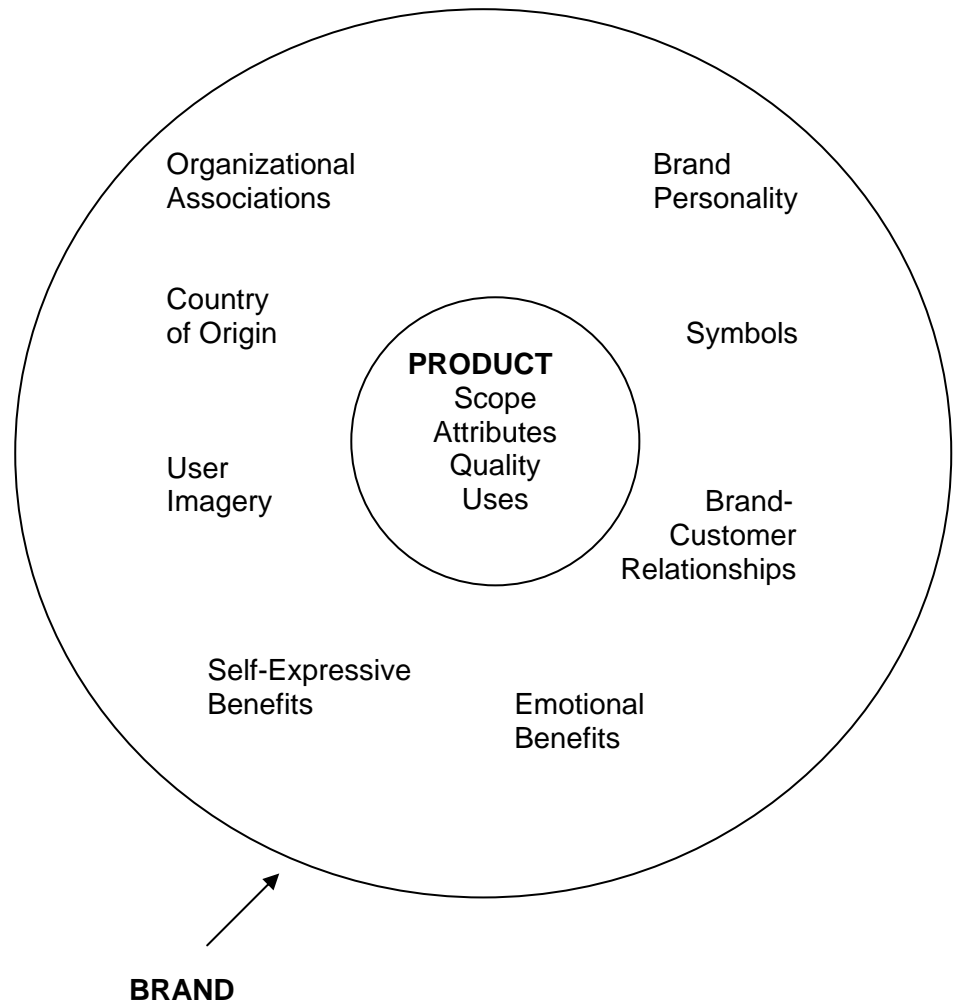


Figure 3. Brand being more than a product (Aaker 1996, 74.)

Every year several different companies and institutions rank the world's greatest brands using loads of different methods. The following figure shows the top ten global brands in the year 2005 ranked by Interbrand Corp. for Businessweek. The method that Interbrand uses ranks the brands by what they are worth economically and financially. It takes several different matters into account. First of all, even to get on the list, the brand must be worth of at least 1 billion dollars, get at least one third of its earnings from abroad, have public marketing and financial data available. The first step of the comparison of the brands' values is to decide what percentage of the company's revenues can be calculated deriving from the actual brand. Then all sorts of taxes and costs are deducted from the revenues credited to a brand and after this the

brand's strength is being assessed to determine the risks. This creates a discount rate which is being applied to the earnings of the brand and finally it results to the net present value of the brand. According to Businessweek and Interbrand, this is the closest figure that can be calculated concerning a brand's value.

	Brand value (€ millions)	Country of origin
1. Coca- Cola	56 046	USA
2. Microsoft	49 751	USA
3. IBM	44 302	USA
4. GE	39 006	USA
5. Intel	29 538	USA
6. Nokia	26 452	Finland
7. Disney	21 946	USA
8. McDonalds	26 014	USA
9. Toyota	20 615	Japan
10. Marlboro	21 189	USA

Figure 4. Interbrand's annual ranking of 100 of the best global brands 2005 (Interbrand 2005)

So when does a name become a brand? How to make a registered trademark to a brand that generates value and get people interested in buying the product or service? One matter affecting this is concerned with target groups. In one part of the market the brand might have a very distinct profile, while meaning nothing at all to others. For instance teenagers have usually totally different interests than middle aged people who are not aware of the current trends among youngsters. According to Nilson (1998, 52) some criteria that make a name to a brand the following four features are all important to take into consideration:

- carries distinct values
- differentiates
- is appealing
- has a clear identity

If the consumers see the brand with a clear profile in respect of what it stands for, then a brand has succeeded in representing distinct values.

The differentiation aspect of a brand is making the product stand out among the rest, as different from the competition. As the obvious differentiation and technological breakthroughs are coming lesser, staying unique is increasingly difficult. But still it is essential to remember that in today's world of tough competition, differentiating too much out of the main stream, can turn out to be disastrous. As the brand can lose appeal to the majority of customers as being a leading one and instead become a side-lined brand. (Nilson 1998, 53-54.)

The appealing aspect of a brand points to the emotional reasons, trust and rely that consumer has towards the brand. These can be earned when a brand is succeeding in giving a positive experience and is attractive. (Nilson 1998, 53-54.)

The fourth point, identity is the aspect that is the easiest to take care of as it is important that the brand is effortlessly recognized. Without identifying the brand it is not possible to build brand loyalty and make a brand easy to remember. (Nilson 1998, 53-54.)

A good name can have a huge impact on a product's success. But it is not easy to find the best brand name. A careful review of the product and its benefits, the target market and proposed marketing strategies are the first things to take into consideration. Some qualities for making a brand name successful would be

- product's benefits and qualities should be somehow suggested
- easy names might be helpful in pronouncing, recognition and remembering
- distinction
- easy to translate into foreign languages

(Kotler & Armstrong 2001, 302-303.)

Nowadays branding has become so strong that hardly anything goes unbranded anymore. Like Al and Laura Ries (1998, 7) have said: "From a business point of view, branding in the market place is very similar to branding on the ranch. A branding program should be designed to differentiate your cow from all the other cattle on the range. Even if all the other cattle on the range look pretty much alike." Basically branding is differentiating your product or service from the competitors so that consumer can easily identify it as being a product that might benefit him/her.

## 2.1 History of brands

Originally the English word 'brand' means the burned mark that cowboys have put on their cattle by a hot marking-iron in order to recognise what is their own. In other words, to brand is to put one's mark on one's property, or on items one has produced. And this was happening already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These first brands were surely pretty far away from today's multinational marketing. (Laakso 1999, 39.)

As an activity branding goes back a very long time, to the time before the birth of Christ. The first examples of branding refer to the oil lamps manufactured in the Greek islands. At that time it was impossible to notice the good or bad quality of a lamp during the purchase. It became evident on how long it could be used before falling apart. (Nilson 1998, 57.)

Every brand has started from something, but the most successful brands are often related to the fact that they have been the first ones in their field. Those companies that have started building a brand as a first one in the field have succeeded in creating brand awareness. Also those companies have got along very successfully in their whole business. (Laakso 1999, 39.)

Most of the companies that started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century put the emphasis on the product quality while advertising, and are still counting on quality being the basic element of a brand. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century while the industrial series

production was rising, the good product quality was most often the way to differentiate. Since then there have been lots of other ways for differentiation. Actually in the 20<sup>th</sup> century using quality as a way to differentiate has become so common that marketing quality itself is not sufficient anymore. Instead, there should be something additional in the product or service that catches the consumers' interests. Since the late 1980s the concept of brand and what it actually is has generated much interest, as companies have started to pay well over the asset value for companies with strong brands, the brand's concept and what it actually is. As nowadays there are so many new products coming to the markets all the time, it is much more difficult trying to make the product known than it was at the beginning of the last century. (Nilson 1998, 57.)

However, the brand is formed only when a consumer feels that there is some added value within the product while comparing it to other products in the field. If in consumer's mind the product does not differentiate from the other similar kind of products, the marketing campaigns have not been successful. The brand building is on solid base only when a product has some kind of feature that is meaningful for the consumer and exceptional from the competitive products. Otherwise the brands fades and gets forgotten. (Laakso 1999, 43-44.)

## 2.2 Related terms

In this chapter some brand related terms are explained. These terms are commonly used in articles and literature concerning brands and branding.

**Power brands** are brands that flourish throughout the time and changing conditions in the markets. They are extremely well adapted to the environment and well taken care of. Such brands would be for example Coca-Cola and McDonalds. (Hart & Murphy 1998, 2.)

**Brand equity** can be measured in two ways, tangibly or intangibly. Intangibly it means the value that a consumer places on a brand. Negative value means



that the brand is not trusted and valued in the eyes of consumers and positive value means that it is. Tangibly it is the value of the brand in marketing and financial sense on a market. (Indiana University 2005)

**Brand extension** means taking an already existing brand and creating a new product or a service under the same brand name (Hart & Murphy 1998, 5).

**Lifecycle of a brand** can vary from nothing to nearly indefinite. It is all up to the way how the brand is taken care of. Generally patents last for fifteen to twenty years before they expire but when they are properly renewed, they can last for ages. (Hart & Murphy 1998, 8.)

**Brand essence** means what the brands promise is to the consumers expressed as simple and briefly as possible, like for example Volvo= safety (Interbrand 2006).

**Brand identity** is the brand expressed concretely, including its name and logo. This is the most important way in differentiating from the competitors and being recognized by the consumers. (Interbrand 2006)

**Brand platform** consists of the five following key elements of a brand:

- **Brand vision** is a view of what the brand intends to become and achieve at some point in the future.
  - **Brand mission** is the way a brand acts upon its vision.
  - **Brand values** are the code by which the brand lives. They act as a way to measure behaviours and performance.
  - **Brand personality** describes the brand's personality traits
  - **Brand tone of voice** describes how the brand speaks to its audiences.
- (Interbrand 2006)

**Co- branding** has two types. First one of them is dual branding. The best example for this are bank/ credit cards, for example Nordea Visa and Nordea MasterCard. The other one is host branding. This is known from brands like Intel and its Intel Inside- products. (Nilson 1998, 96.)

### 2.3 Building a brand

The process of building a new brand includes many different phases. Generally the process of branding can be compared to the new product development process. Naturally when inventing a new product and brand, a new way of handling the process may also be appropriate, but when using the general new product development (NPD) process there are five crucial stages. (Hart & Murphy 1998, 24-33.)

First one of them is setting up clear objectives, is the aim actually to come up with a new product or service or something else. The objectives set should be as clear as possible in order to gain optimal success. They should be both financial and commercial and agreed with the possible sponsors of the project. The second step is to understand the market dynamics. At times this might be the hardest task of all these five because the market conditions change all the time, especially today with the rapid technological development and the growth of Internet. Within understanding the market dynamics there are several so called sub areas to understand like potential competition, the market area itself, distribution and the developments in that particular product or service area. (Hart & Murphy 1998, 24-33.)

The third thing to do in the NPD process is to understand the consumers and their needs and wishes. This is easiest done by a consumer research. Before conducting a new research, the old already existing theories should be carefully looked into. There is no point of conducting a reserach on a subject that has already been looked into. After gaining more knowledge and understanding, it is time to create the idea of a new brand. This is the fourth step of building a brand. This task requires an innovative, creative and flexible team on it. One of the most important points in this stage is the naming of the new brand. This is important because the name is what identifies the product and what communicates with the consumers. (Hart & Murphy 1998, 24-33.)

The last but surely not the least step in the process is launching the new product. A decision should be made whether the launching will be done in a

big world way or in a more discrete way. Again at this point creativity and innovation are very important in order to be able to distinguish this particular new product from the other. Distribution plays a major role in launching a new product. If it is handled well, both internally and externally, the new product has a good starting point. Internal distribution concerns the staff of the retail outlets and the information of the product they are given. (Hart & Murphy 1998, 24-33.)

#### 2.4 Strategic brand analysis

A strategic decision consists of statements of what the brand should stand for and its promise to customers. These kinds of statements are, for example, the development of brand identity, a value proposition and a brand position. When dealing with brands the strategic perspective is constantly needed as brands should be consistent by selecting markets and building assets for the future. There are three perspectives that are viewing the brand strategy: a customer analysis, a competitor analysis and a self-analysis. The brand strategy is having a clear and defined objective. It is to create a business that resonates with consumers and avoids competitor strengths and exploits their weaknesses. Also a business should aim to exploit its own strengths and minimize its weaknesses. For such a business to get created there are several viewpoints under each of the three analyses that are necessary to understand. (Aaker 1996, 189-190.)

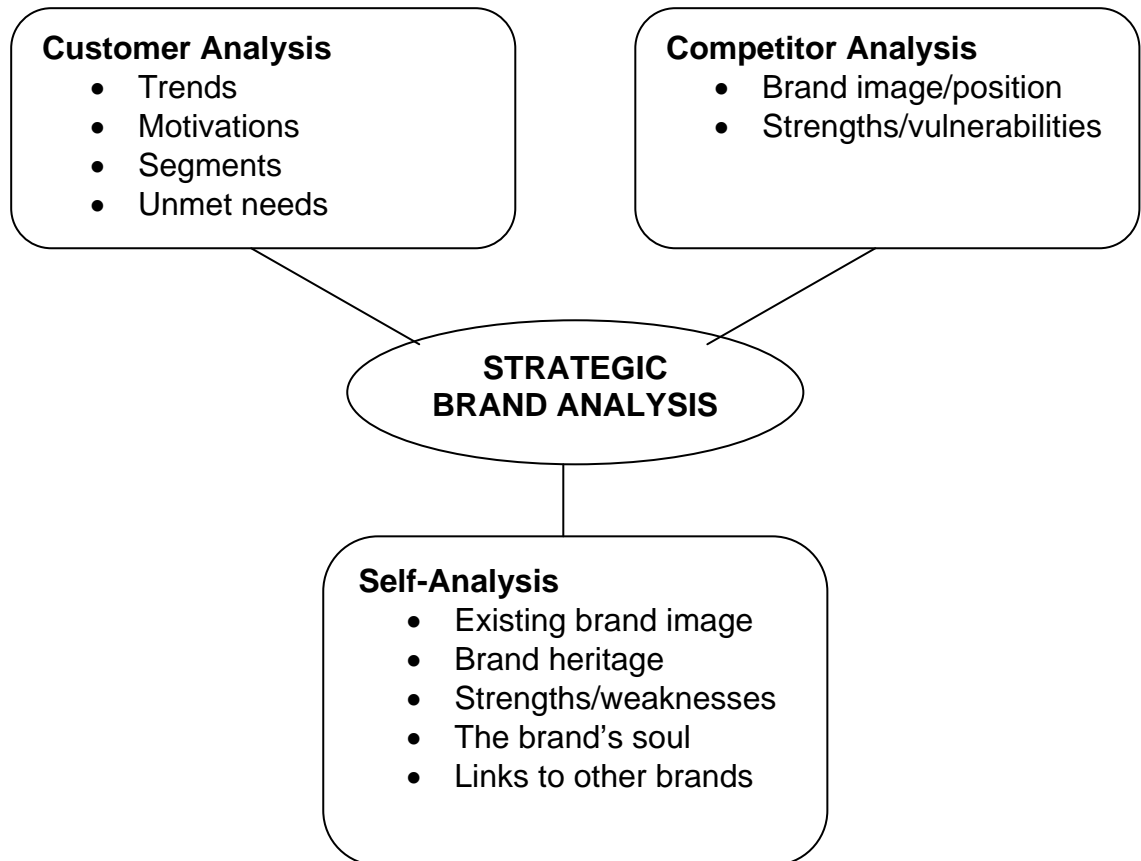


Figure 5. Strategic brand analysis (Aaker 1996, 190.)

#### 2.4.1 Customer analysis

In customer analysis the main emphasis is put on analyzing customer trends, motivations, segmentation structure and unmet needs. When talking about trends it is essential to clarify the latest trends in the field and how they can affect to company's actions now and in the future. Clarifying the trends is very important as they possibly have a huge impact on the company's business activities. The whole branch where the business is operating is possible to classify in areas that are growing or declining. This analysis is essential when there are investments made concerning the brand and other lines of production. As it is not beneficial to manufacture a product that does not sell but it has to be able to follow the trends or even better: be a pioneer of a successful novelty product. (Aaker 1996, 191.)

Through the customer analysis the functional, emotional and self-expressive motives that have an impact on consumers' behavior to buy and use the brand can be determined. Concerning functional benefits it is useful to analyze the functional attributes that are relevant to consumers. In addition it is good to find out what the relative importance of each functional benefit is and whether consumers can be grouped according to them. When analyzing the customer motivations the aim is to find an unmet motivation for which there is not a fulfilling, proper product in markets. Finding a market niche is a great opportunity for a company to succeed and gives also a good chance for product development. (Laakso 1999, 86-92.)

Through customer analyses it has been discovered that consumers more likely want to be seen as more sophisticated and smarter than they really are. This comes out as the functional benefits are emphasized when asking customers to give reasons for their purchases. However, it has been shown that many buying decisions are really based on emotional motives. Sometimes it can be difficult to define the real motives behind the purchases which make the customer analysis very challenging. (Laakso 1999, 86-92.)

In the same field of business the customer segmentation appears more often. After the consumers' values, beliefs and images have been analyzed, the different segments are easy to separate. People belonging to the same segment conceive the products on markets in the same way. Also they have same kind of images about the products. This way of analyzing helps people working with brands to understand the buying behavior of different customer segments. (Jobber 1998, 179.) This is important as marketing communication of a brand is easier when it is made separately for each segment (Laakso 1999, 90).

### 2.4.2 Competitor analysis

The competitor analysis helps in getting to know the brand's competitors and what is their way of functioning, as today it is not enough to be aware of consumers' motives only. (Laakso 1999, 96.) The competitor analysis consists of looking at the brand image/ position and strengths and vulnerabilities of the major competitors. (Aaker 1996, 194.)

The basis for building a brand is to define the most important motives for purchasing and then look for the brands fulfilling those motivations. Defining the competitive brands it is fundamental to determinate how consumers perceive them as consumers are the best source of the current brand images. How the competitor brands want to be perceived is also useful to understand. The best source for this is usually its advertising and advertising plans. (Aaker 1996, 194.)

A careful analysis of all competitors' positions is useful. Direct competitors are easy to name after clarifying the brands that consumers are considering while making the purchase decision. This is easy to find out by strictly asking: "Which product would you buy if our product would be sold out?" The answers will tell the main competitive products. There can be also other alternative competitors that consumers might use. For instance, alternatives for eating in Pizza-Hut would be Kotipizza or some other pizza place. Additional alternatives would be various restaurants and hamburger kiosks, or ending up eating at home. After analyzing the competitive brands the similar brands are to be grouped to get a clear view of the real competitive situation in the field. (Laakso 1999, 97-98.)

In addition to considering the current images of competing brands, in strategic brand planning it is important to pay attention also to past changes and possible future changes in these images. Useful information about the competitive environment can be provided by examining the reasons for such changes. (Aaker 1996, 195.)

Strengths and vulnerabilities of a competitive brand are important to know and knowing them can be useful while planning and building own brand. Going against competitor might be risky, even though you have an exceptional brand and its identity, position and execution. That is because the competing brand might have a strong positive image in some consumer's mind and changing that image and consuming habits can turn out to be impossible. However, it has been observed that a strong brand image is exposed to competitors' attacks more and more often. This might be a result of branching brands out by adding too many features on them. That way the brand can lose its meaning and its image starts to fade in consumer's mind. In the worst case this leads into losing the brand's superiority compared to the competitors. The strength has become a vulnerability. (Laakso 1999, 100.)

#### 2.4.3 Self-analysis of a brand

A careful self-analysis is an important part of the development of brand identity. It defines the images that consumers have about the company's brand. The following areas form the core for a self-analysis:

- The current brand image
- The brand heritage
- The brand's strengths and weaknesses (Aaker 1996, 196.)

The existing brand image describes how the consumers perceive the brand. It also gives answers to questions such as: What kinds of associations are linked to the brand? How does it differ from the competing brands? How has the brand image changed? Is there differentiation in the image across segments? Do consumers feel they are benefiting from the brand and how? (Aaker 1996, 196.)

It is useful to know the brand heritage, in addition to knowing market perceptions. Knowing what the brand first meant can provide additional value. This heritage should be acknowledged and never forgot. A brand heritage

analysis can be helpful in getting a brand back on course, whether the improvements and development have been too radical and the brands starts to lose its central image. (Laakso 1999, 101-102.)

As it is essential to know the strengths of a brand, it is important to acknowledge the weaknesses too. That way the brand's overall meaning for the consumer can be understood and the positive image strengthened. (Laakso 1999, 102.)

As an example of using the effective branding strategy is HK Ruokatalo. It is taking a new step to become a consumer orientated company with high brand recognition by employing an advertising agency to create a new branding strategy for them. As HK is having many different products, with the new branding strategy it wants to clarify how it should focus on marketing them. (Metsämäki 2006)

## 2.5 Branding philosophy

When branding, companies need to decide which branding philosophy of the following three they should use: manufacturer, private or generic.

**Manufacturer brands** are named after their makers; they are usually widely known and trustworthy because of strict quality control. Usually under one manufacturer brand there are several product alternatives, like for example in the car industry. These brands are easy to identify by consumers because of their heavily promoted and well-known images. Consumers who use manufacturer brands are usually the most loyal ones. These brands have the highest quality, respect among consumers and status but also the highest prices. For the resellers these brands are the easiest to sell because of their good image and because of low marketing costs. Manufacturers take care of the heavy promoting and sponsor cooperative marketing with the resellers. Naturally, the greatest part of the profit also goes to the manufacturer. (Evans & Berman 1997, 383.)



**Private brands** get their names from their resellers. Their quality is pretty much the same as the manufacturer brands because usually they are made by the same producers. Marketing and pricing are totally done by the reseller. The aim of the marketing is to wake the interest of people who are possible to become or already are loyal to the reseller. Private brands are sold at a cheaper price because of less emphasis on packaging and lower promotional costs. A good example is Kesko's own label Pirkka. Consumers who use private brands are quite price conscious but still looking for quality. When buying these brand products they take a small risk with the quality, but usually their loyalty towards the retailer is so high that they consider these brand products reliable too. (Evans & Berman 1997, 383.)

**Generic brands** are concentrated on the products themselves, not their manufacturers or resellers. They are a lot cheaper than other similar products because of their lower quality, lack of marketing and poor retail outlet locations. The first generic brand products emerged in the drug industry when cheaper alternatives to manufacturer branded drugs were offered to the consumers. Generics appeal mainly to consumers who are extremely price conscious and not so strict on the quality. They are usually bought in big amounts, for example for big families, schools and organizations. An example of a generic product would be a five liter gallon of unlabelled and cheap soap. (Evans & Berman 1997, 383.)

Mixed brand strategy is a strategy that combines these three branding philosophies. Many companies choose to sell two of the above mentioned brand types, or even all of them. This is a good strategy because this way several target segments can be handled, assortments can be bigger, shelf locations in retail outlets better coordinated and cooperation in distribution carried out. Finnish department stores like Sokos and Stockman are a good example of this. They sell all the three brand types mixed in the same shelves. (Evans & Berman 1997, 383.)

	Manufacturer	Private	Generic
Target market	Brand loyal, quality conscious, risk avoider	Price conscious, comparison shopper, dealer loyal	Careful shopper, price conscious, lower quality
Product	Well known, trusted, best quality control, deep product line	Good quality, less emphasis on packaging, less assortment	Less quality, limited assortment, not well known, little emphasis on packaging
Distribution	Often sold at many competing dealers	Usually only available from a particular dealer	Varies
Promotion	Manufacturer sponsored ads	Dealer sponsored ads	Few ads, secondary shelf space
Price	Highest, suggested by the manufacturer	Moderate, controlled by dealer	Lowest, usually controlled by dealer
Marketing focus	To generate brand loyalty and manufacturer	To generate dealer loyalty and control those desiring it	To offer a low-price, less quality item to control

Figure 6. Manufacturer, generic and private brands (Evans & Berman 1997, 390.)

## 2.6 Brand images

It is unlikely that a brand has only one image. Instead there can be several images that the customer associates with the product and the company producing it. When it was discovered that the feelings and images associated with a certain brand were meaningful purchase influencers and motivators, the term brand image started to get used. This association is made through brand recognition, recall and brand identity and it is based on the proposition that consumers are buying also the image associations of the product and not only the product or service itself. The image associations of the product might be such as power, wealth, and sophistication. Also one important aspect to look for is identification and association with other consumers using the same brand. As today's world is highly consumer led people tend to define themselves by their possessions. People like people who are like them and value the things they value. The same goes for brands. People are more

willing to buy products whose brands represent things they value and like. (Laakso 1999, 147.)

Among competitive brands, good brand images are almost always unique and instantly evoked and positive. Brand communications such as packaging, advertising, promotion, customer service, word-of-mouth and other aspects of the brand experience are influencing on the formation of brand images. (Laakso 1999, 103.)

The strength of brand images can be measured easily by asking the consumers the first words or images that come to their mind when a certain brand is mentioned. This way the brand images are usually easily awakened. In cases when responses are for instance varying highly or reserved, it indicates of a weak brand image. In other words, good brand images are easy to see. A good example would be Volvo. For many people the first concept about Volvo is safety. That is a good brand image. (Laakso 1999, 103.)

According to Aaker (1991, 110) a set of associations that are meaningful to people represent bases for purchase decisions and for brand loyalty. The following figure shows the associations that create value to the firm and customers.

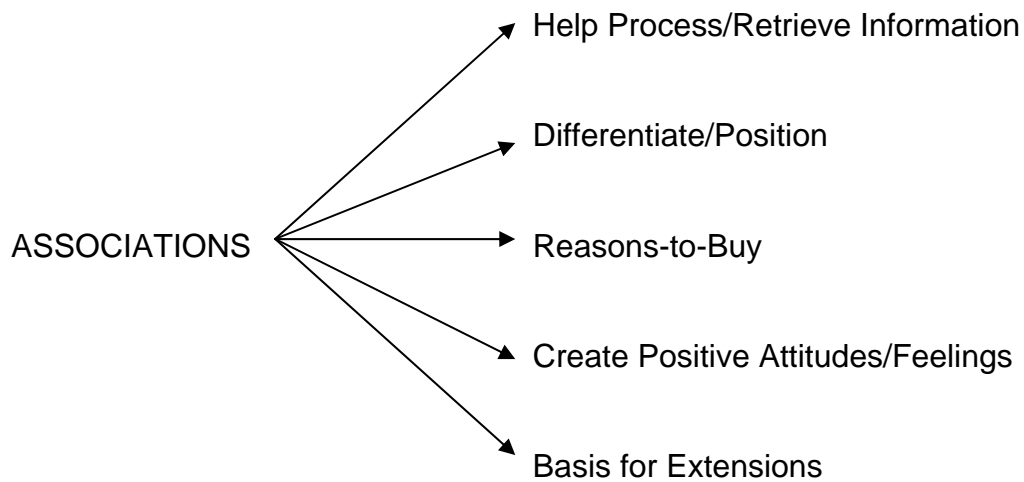


Figure 7. The value of brand associations (Aaker 1991, 111.)

Associations can help in summarizing the facts and specifications the consumer is processing and accessing. They help the consumer to handle the information according to the product. (Aaker 1991, 111.)

The basis for differentiation that an association can provide is important. There are some product classes whose brands are difficult to distinguish for some consumers. Those kinds of products would be for instance wines and perfumes. Associations of the brand name can then have a huge impact on separating one brand from another. (Aaker 1991, 111-113.)

Reasons to buy and use the brand can be formed from brand associations that involve product attributes or customer benefits. These associations represent a basis for decisions of purchase and brand loyalty. For example, Pepsodent provides white and clean teeth and Mercedes adds status to the user. Some purchase decisions can be influenced by associations that provide confidence and credibility in the brand. (Aaker 1991, 111-113.)

Positive attitudes and feelings are created when associations are likeable and they stimulate good feelings that get linked to the brand. E.g. in advertising some likeable symbols with nice, cheerful music is a way to make the association with a brand positive and appealing. Positive feelings can be formed also during the user experience. Some associations work in

transforming the experience into something different from what it would otherwise be. Advertising can make the experience of eating in Hesburger seem more fun, for instance. (Aaker 1991, 111-113.)

A basis for an extension can be provided via association. It can help in making the brand name and a new product fitting together, or provide a reason to the extension. (Aaker 1991, 113.)

## 2.7 Being number one

While the pressure on business is increasing all the time, it means that there is room for one market leader in most market sectors. If others are able to differentiate themselves from the leader there might be space for a second and perhaps for a third supplier too. Any other competitors are usually competing purely with prices, while it is unlikely to be successful as the volumes of the market leader are much higher. In business environment that is getting increasingly competitive and even hostile it is important that companies have ambitious targets in generating their business and brands. (Nilson 1998, 19.)

For a brand it is essential that it is the obvious choice, being the first in the mind of the current and potential customers. For example, while thinking of some refreshing soft drink most would think of Coca-Cola and cigarettes would be associated with Marlboro. So the highest recognition goes to a brand that is first in the mind. The benefits of being the obvious choice are tremendous; you are generally known, you are short listed and buyers have you in their minds. (Nilson 1998, 21.)

## 2.8 Brand management

The core of any business activity is brand management. As brands are all around, companies manage their name, symbols, reputation and values that are tied to them with various success and deliberation. Brand management mainly consists of developing and implementing marketing activities for a specific brand. Also it can mean developing a range of products and services

under a brand. The true management of brands is usually carried out by senior managers, like marketing managers and directors. But also the role of the brand managers is important and they can make a lot of difference in developing a brand. They are not only strategically managing the brand but also driving the brand forward and purely making things happen. The activities that the consumers connect with the brand create the value of a brand. (Nilson 1998, 29.)

Creating preference is a focus of successful brand management. The branded products and/or services are assumed to offer the best possible perceived value for money, so these products and services are really perceived superior compared to the competitors. To be successful you have to be better than the others. In that way consumers will choose your product over the other similar ones. One way to ensure this in the current business climate is to continually work on improving the value perception. (Nilson 1998, 29.)

The competitive advantage is gained when superior value for the money is represented by a brand. An important thing to remember is the cost-effectiveness of the value for money proposition. If not, the company is lacking competitive advantage and sustainable value proposition. A company that manages its brand actively and gains competitive advantage will have a distinct brand profile which is trusted and remembered because it is consistent and built on a solid foundation. All in all building a brand is a wide process in which the whole company is involved. (Nilson 1998, 29.)

Brand management is no different from any other management process as it will not be successful unless some specific targets are set. There has to be three different target levels reviewed in order to build a brand.

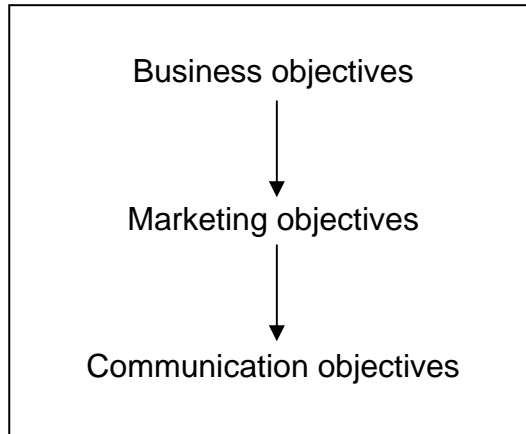


Figure 8. Three levels of targets (Nilson 1998, 29.)

The business objectives cover elements like profits and growth. The marketing objectives explain what should be achieved by marketing and refer to directly related aspects of the market, for example brand share and positions in defined market segments. The communication objectives, such as awareness and attitudes, are related to what the brand communication can influence. These communication objectives need to be consistent with marketing objectives which naturally must fit the business objectives in order for the brand management to be cost-effective. (Nilson 1998, 29.)

### 3 INTERNATIONALIZATION

Today's world is shrinking rapidly, as the advent of faster communication, transportation and financial flows is speeding up. Enthusiastic acceptance of products developed in some other country is rising, as the international trade is booming. Also the decline of trade barriers leading to a definite movement towards free trade has been helpful in internationalization, as it has been enabling the free movement of goods, services, labour and capital. (Kotler & Armstrong 2001, 709-714.)

In the world's 14 richest countries the number of multinational corporations has more than tripled since 1969. There are many companies, such as Coca-Cola and Sony, which have been carrying international activities for decades and are familiar to most of the consumers around the world. But today global competition is growing all the time. Foreign firms are expanding into new international markets and staying only in home markets is not that captivating anymore. Through internationalization companies can achieve new opportunities and success. (Kotler & Armstrong 2001, 709-714.) But still before deciding whether to operate internationally, the international marketing environment should be thoroughly understood by the company. For most firms it is not just simple to jump into international marketing and expect to be successful. (Czinkota & Ronkainen 1990, 213.)

On the other hand, it is good to notice that becoming internationally active is not every company's wish and it is not a necessity for them to venture into international markets to survive. There are many companies that are local



businesses and need to market well only in the local market area, as it is easier and safer to operate domestically. There is a variety of reasons that can have an influence to that fact, and some of them, particularly when talking about smaller companies, can be associated with the entrepreneur's personal characteristics. Some entrepreneurs can find it difficult to delegate responsibility and that way the growth of the company is difficult. Others have in some extent reached their targets, and are not aiming to expand the business. While outsiders may more likely want to see a company growing, in a sense, it is dangerous to force change upon such a company. (McAuley 2001, 88.)

The difference between international and national brand strategies is quite small. The aim of them is to build the strongest possible brand by adding the key value dimensions. When developing an international strategy some specific issues should be looked for. According to Nilson (1998, 109) the following four categories are the most used ones while internationalizing:

1. A uniform, brand profile that is similarly imposed on each country → international
2. A dual strategy, where the uniform international strategy is different from the home market
3. A framework that is common across the world but with local adaptation
4. An opportunistic approach → to get the best short-term result decisions regarding each country and market

The first strategy, the uniform, has been applied successfully by several brands and companies, such as Coca-Cola, but still is not very common. To make this strategy work it should be defined very well and with practical experience. This is as well to avoid serious mistakes, but also to gain credibility with the staff in various countries. This strategy is found to be more appropriate for big brands than to small ones, as they might fail because not sufficiently understanding the need for local adaptation. Either they may not have the needed brand profile or the resources to success positively with this strategy. While observing the companies that have followed this strategy

successfully it occurred that if there is a close link between the brand profile and the real or imagined life style of the brand's home country, it is easier to implement and follow it. Referring to Coca-Cola as an example, it is closely related to the American way of living. (Nilson 1998, 109-110.) And as the marketing slogan goes, by drinking Coca-Cola you can have a taste of America.

The dual strategy's duality means the little aspects that differentiate the domestic market from the international one, although the visual identity and the core values are similar. This is common among companies which have a strong home market but are more careful with international branding. The implementation and the dimensions where to put the emphasis are the biggest differentiating factors. In other words the duality is seen when in different markets a company is focusing on different aspects and is putting emphasis on what is conceived important there. This strategy is very popular and proven to be a successful international brand strategy in many cases. (Nilson 1998, 111.)

Adaptation within a framework, which is the third strategy, is similar to the dual one but differentiates from it by having a stronger will to adapt to the local circumstances. In this strategy the product type must differ between countries, as regional and national habits and preferences are not the same. Consumers are more likely to conceive these kind of brands as national rather than part of a big multinational. (Nilson 1998, 112.)

To take a totally opportunistic approach is the fourth alternative. This strategy leads to a total adaptation to the local market circumstances. It can not be recommended even though it might have some short-term advantages. Instead it lacks for example knowledge of brand building. So to utilize the economies of scale in the brand development process, it is rather advisable to use some of the other strategies discussed. But still there can not be said to be one ideal strategy that suits everyone. (Nilson 1998, 113.)

#### 4 FUTURE OF BRANDS

Few decades ago, if a consumer was asked to name some brands he would have replied a specific product name like Uncle Ben's Rice. Nowadays the most likely answer would be a name of a company like Esprit. What will the answer be couple of decades from now in the future? It could be a name of a person, an athlete, an artist or an actor. Or could it be something else? It remains to be seen how the brands and branding will develop in the future. (Hart & Murphy 1998, 213.)

Brands are mostly about differentiation of quality. The better the brand image is, the better the quality is. At least has been until now. Brands are becoming more and more concentrated on their values rather than quality. Of course the quality is also still good, but that is not enough anymore because so much good quality is offered everywhere. Brands are more about the message that they carry in their values. (Hart & Murphy 1998, 213.) For example Esprit's values are ambitious, energetic, positive, natural, creative, innovative, surprising and inspiring and the consumers that buy Esprit can be described in the same words (Esprit International 2006).

Top brands of their time tell something about the values of the society at that particular time. For example one can easily evaluate the society in the UK by the prominent brands there from 1950s to 1990s.

1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Hoover	Biba	Sex Pistols	BMW	Virgin
Persil	Mini	Adidas	Next	Nike
Kenwood	Oxo	Martini	Filofax	DKNY

Figure 9. Prominent brands in the UK, 1950s to 1990s (Hart & Murphy 1998, 213.)

It can clearly be seen from the figure 9 that in the 1950s, the values of the society were home oriented and focused on the households and family life. When coming to the seventies, the values have changed totally. At that time they referred to care free lifestyle. In the 1990s leisure, amusement and fashion played a big part in people's lives.

The brands that are likely to have the biggest growth and change are the hi-tech brands. Only eight years ago Interbrand's top ten list of the greatest brands included only a couple of high-tech brands, today half of the list consists of high-tech brands. With the rapid development of technology, the prices are falling down fast and it is no longer easy for consumers to choose the right product by price. At this point branding becomes even more important. The quality and price of the high-tech products is practically the same, it is the brand that matters then. (Interbrand 2005.)

The biggest opportunity for marketers today is the World Wide Web, also in brand marketing. Just in a couple of years it has grown to be one of the most important advertising medias comparable to what newspapers, radio and TV used to be some years ago. The concept of interactivity in advertising is linked to Internet too. Nowadays nearly everything that a consumer needs is possible to be viewed, ordered and paid via Internet. A consumer can basically live his life without leaving his home, just by using the Internet. This is why companies need to remember to advertise their brands in the Internet also. To be on the edge of the time every company needs to have good, representable web site that holds brand information and promotion. (Marconi 1993, 231-236.) As Becky Saeger from Visa USA has said: "The Internet has changed everything.

It's forcing us to think faster, move faster and be more aggressive. We feel the pressure of moving at Internet speed." (Hartnett 1999).

Shopping carts, service station gas pumps, in-flight locations, ATMs, waiting rooms, public restrooms and many more have all become public places for advertising. What comes next? This is an every day challenge for marketers. They always need to come up with something new and conspicuous. (Marconi 1993, 231-236.) One of the latest trends in branding is to get a brand image tattooed. Probably the most popular example of this is the Nike Swoosh. Many famous athletes and Nike workers have the Swoosh tattooed somewhere on their body. Many people working at Nike do not see it as just a job but as a whole value system. That is why they make themselves as a part of the whole Nike brand concept by tattooing themselves with the Swoosh. (Feit 2006)

Developing new brands and launching them has never been a piece of cake but it is getting harder all the time. Companies have to come up with something different and unique with every new brand. Already finding a suitable name for a new brand, a name that is not yet in use and is suitable for over 100 different markets creates problems. When it becomes too hard to develop new brands, it is probably the time to start using other strategies of branding, like brand extension and licensing. (Hart & Murphy 1998, 206- 214.)

## 5 RESEARCHING BRAND IMAGES IN KAINUU

Researching images can be separated into two different categories. The first field is researched qualitatively which means people having spontaneous images towards something, for example a product or a service. The other way is to make a quantitative research where the images are in a form that can be structured. (Rope & Methner 2001, 144.)

Qualitative research is a method that clarifies the reasons on how consumers and other customers are behaving. It is a research that derives data from observation, interviews, or verbal interactions and focuses on the meanings and the interpretations of the participants. It helps to understand customers, summarizes the central themes and produces hypotheses about customers' actions. Also it aims to clarify the different motives, attitudes and behavior that consumers have. This research method measures information based on opinions and values as opposed to the statistical data. (Lahtinen & Isoviita 1998, 114.)

Quantitative research is based on science. This research technique in which scientific, concrete, projectable and numerical data can be statistically analyzed and gathered, often from large samples, can also be called as hard data. In quantitative research things, such as former researches and theories and defining hypotheses and terms, are also important to consider. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2004, 130-131.)

In this thesis the research about consumers' images was implemented qualitatively.

### 5.1 Research method

In qualitative research the ways for gathering material are interview, questionnaire, observation and information based on different kind of documents. These four research methods can be used either alternatively or collaterally. Observation is often used when researching interaction or people's behavior. The central difference between a questionnaire and an interview is in the way how the interviewee gives his answer. In questionnaire the interviewees fill the questionnaire by themselves either under supervising or privately. In qualitative research that is quite stiff method. It presumes that the questions are so well constructed, that there is no need for further questions. In addition especially mail questionnaire is quite a difficult research method, as the people belonging to the target group should have ability, skills, time and interest to give written answer to the questions. Interview is a personal situation where the questions are asked orally from the interviewee. The answers are recorded or written down for a later analysis. When compared to other research methods the biggest benefit of an interview is its flexibility. The interviewer has the possibility to repeat the question, specify it or ask further questions. Also the interviewee can ask for specifications for the questions if needed. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 73-75.)

Observation and interpreting the information based on different kind of documents were not reasonable methods from this research's point of view, as the aim of the research was to find out young people's images about products, services and companies originating from Kainuu. The questionnaire was abandoned because of its stiffness. The reason why interview was chosen to be the research method in this case is that due to the facts mentioned above it is the most proper way to get as much profound information from the research problem as possible.

The target group of the research is young people between ages from 18 to 25 and all together 40 people were interviewed. Interviews were implemented personally, face to face or by phone. Persons interviewed were selected from the circle of acquaintances of the interviewers. The only criteria for the selection were that the people interviewed are from 18 to 25 of their age, both men and women and from different backgrounds; students, workers, unemployed. The reason why this age group was chosen is linked with the subject of the research. As the concept of brand is quite new and probably not so well-known among people from middle-age to elderly, the target group researched was chosen to be young people as they might be a bit more familiar with the concept. Naturally this age group is also important for the research because these people are the ones that will be buying the products and services in the future.

Steinar Kvale (1996, 88) has outlined the seven basic stages of an interview investigation in order to assist interviewers in retaining the initial vision and engagement throughout the whole investigation process. The following figure shows all the seven stages from the original idea to the final reporting. This is a very useful way to conduct an interview investigation that provides structure otherwise to a very open and flexible interview study. When conducting the interviews for this thesis, these seven steps were used in order to keep the interviewing process consistent.



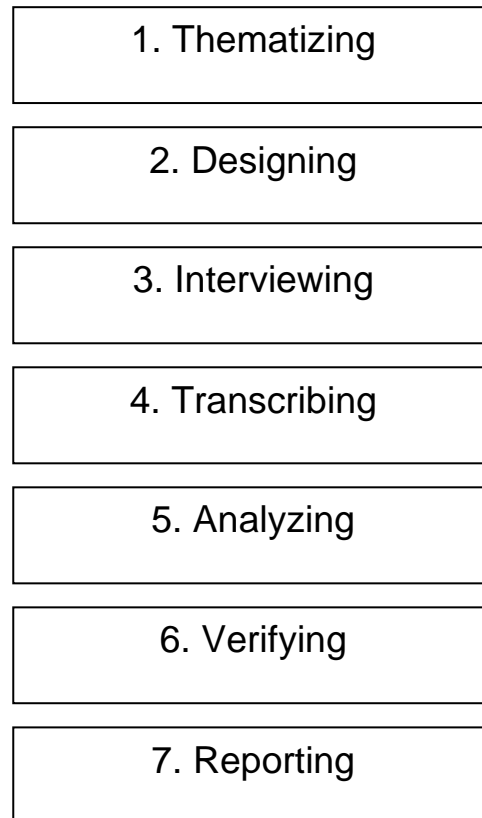


Figure 10. Seven stages of an interview investigation (Kvale 1996, 88)

The first step **thematizing** is formulating and describing the purpose of the investigation before the actual interviews. The interviewers need to make the research problem clear for themselves and what they want to find out with the interviews. This step provides the answers to the questions *why* and *what*. (Kvale 1996, 88.) In this thesis the main research problem was to find out whether there are local brands in Kainuu. This was researched thorough the images that 18-25 year old people have about local products and thorough the fact that do they associate them as brands. Also the aim was to look for the best known local products and possible brands.

The second step **designing** is planning the actual interview, the questions to be asked and deciding who to interview. In this step it is important to decide *how* the interviews will be implemented (Kvale 1996, 88). In the interviews of this thesis eight questions were asked from each interviewee. The questions were kept as short and simple as possible, without using any special

terminology in order to avoid confusing the respondents. The only restriction for the target group was the age from 18 to 25. This because the aim was to interview people from as many different backgrounds as possible, from students studying in different fields to workers and unemployed.

The third step **interviewing** is simply making the interviews (Kvale 1996, 88). Interviews of this thesis were conducted either by telephone or face to face with the interviewees. In both cases, only the interviewer and the interviewee were present. The scene for interviewing was in every case peaceful and calm with as little distractions as possible, for example a remote table in a quiet café. The interviewing situation was kept informal and relaxed so that the respondents would feel comfortable and free answering the questions in their own way.

The fourth step **transcribing** means transforming the answers into analyzable material which usually means writing the spoken answers into written text. (Kvale 1996, 88.) In this case this was done already during the interviews after each question. Answers were written down from word to word by hand.

Stage number five is **analyzing**. In this stage the interviewers need to decide which methods to use to analyze the results of the interviews. The methods used depend on the nature of the investigation, what is the topic of the investigation and what do the interviewers want to find out with it. (Kvale 1996, 88.) The topic of the interviews in this research was firstly brands in general and what they are and then products and companies originating from Kainuu and if they were associated as brands. Results of these interviews were decided to be analyzed by four different perspectives. Firstly 'from a product to a brand' point of view, which of the local products and companies were considered as brands and why. Secondly from brand image point of view, what kind of images did the interviewees have of the local products, services and companies. Thirdly the results were analyzed thorough strategic brand analysis. Finally results were looked from the point of view of what they tell about the respondents and the society they live in.

Sixth stage of the investigation is **verifying**. This is the stage where the results' reliability and validity is being ascertained. This means finding out if the results are reliable and if they give answers to the original problems and questions of the research. (Kvale 1996, 88.) When doing this thesis, theory of reliability, validity and ethicality was closely examined and the results of the interviews were compared to it.

The seventh and the last stage is **reporting**. In this stage the results of the interviews and the theory written earlier are put together and the theory is being applied to the actual answers. As a result of this there should be readable material. (Kvale 1996, 88.) In this case the result is the thesis itself, or more closely the research part of it.

## 5.2 Reliability, objectivity and ethicality of the research

The reliability of the research can be influenced weakeningly by possible sources of error that can be caused by the interviewer, the interviewee or the actual interviewing situation. For instance the interviewer might incorrectly interpret the answers given by the interviewee. On the other hand the interviewee might feel the situation of interview pressing and uncomfortable. This might lead to a situation that interviewee does not answer the questions truthfully and says something different instead of what he really thinks. The interviewee might, for example, answer according to some general opinion, even though his own point of view would be something totally different. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 263-271, 278.)

However the open interview enables the answers to be handled more plentifully compared for instance to mail questionnaire. The interviewer can control the actual interview adjustably by the way the situation requires and by accompanying the interviewee. The given answers are then easy to get clarified by asking additional questions if needed. Literal answers can be connected to a wider complex as the interviewer sees the expressions and gestures of the interviewee during the whole interview. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 263-271, 278.)

The reliability of this research was aspired to be enhanced through ease and relaxed atmosphere within the interviews. Any special terminology was not used because it would have influenced the answers. Instead the clarity of the questions and unhurried response situation were important. Essential for the results was that interviewees were concentrated to think about the questions and answered as thoroughly as possible.

In this kind of research the ethicality means primarily how the researcher presents the information gathered from the interviews. From the results it can not appear what each one of the interviewees have said. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 288-297.) The principal rule while analysing the results was that some specific answer could have been said by anyone from those interviewed, even though in the interview there was not any particularly confidential matters handled.

The objectivity of the research requires that the researcher is neutral while dealing with the material. Researchers own motives, interests and points of view can not influence the results of the research. As a research method interviewing is quite difficult what comes to analysing the results. There can appear misinterpretations if the research is conducted by an inexperienced researcher who is not able to interpret interviewee's verbal and non-verbal communications. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 278.) In this research there was not much attention paid to interviewees' non-verbal communication to avoid the possible misinterpretations. The main emphasis while interpreting the results was kept in the contents of the interviews.

## 6 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCHED BRAND IMAGES IN KAINUU

Perhaps the most critical phase in exploiting the results of a qualitative research is how to interpret them. In a successful qualitative research the subordinate clauses of the respondent's comments give the background for why he sees the things in his way. It is noticeable in a qualitative research that images and views of a certain group can be interpreted through separate and individual comments. With a good segment sampling and through the similarity of a groups images, the results can be interpreted to reflect the images of all those belonging to same segment, even though the results of a qualitative research might not be statistically representative. (Rope & Mether 2001, 150.)

Following two figures show the age and background of the interviewees. There was at least one person interviewed of each age. Nearly half of the interviewees were 22 or 23 years old. 70 per cent of the people interviewed were women and 30 per cent men. Major part, 65 per cent of the interviewees was students, 30 per cent of them were in working life and the last five per cent outside of working life.

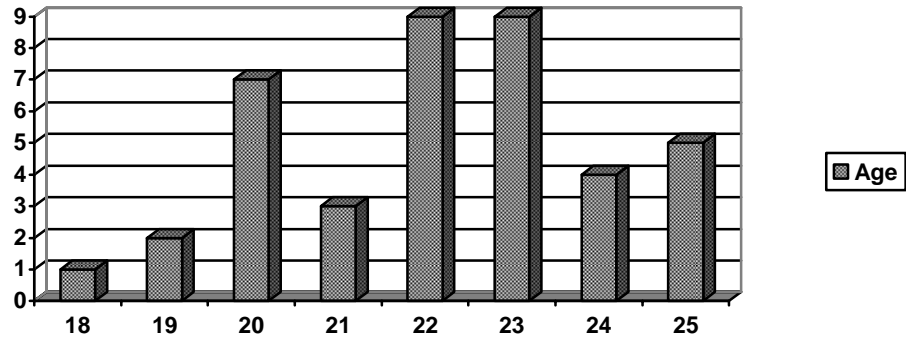


Figure 11. Age structure of the interviewees

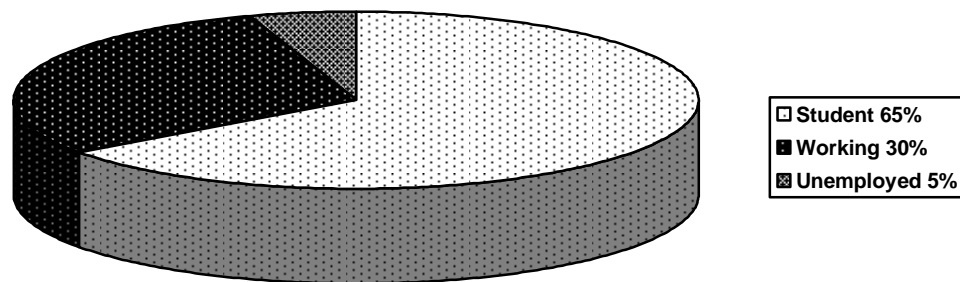


Figure 12. Backgrounds of the interviewees

### 6.1 Brand definitions by the interviewees

The very first actual question of the interviews was to determine what is a brand in the interviewees own words. This seemed to be a very difficult question for the respondents to answer. All of them knew at some level what a brand is, but they had a very hard time putting it into words. The most common answer gotten was that it is a trademark. Most of these answers came with various descriptions what kind of trademark it is. It was said to be among other things popular, advertised, known, famous and characteristic. It was also said to have an established reputation, lots of company's input put in it and something to do with marketing and advertising. Most often brand was associated as a product, but in some cases also as a whole company. Also a written or a drawn logo was linked to a brand.

When the respondents were asked to name some brands, there were quite many that they came up with after some problems in the beginning. Nearly everyone said after the interview that it was quite hard just suddenly to start

naming brands, but after thinking for a while it was really easy. All in all, the interviews provided mentions of 50 different both global and Finnish brands. All of the interviewees were asked to name three. The ten most common brands mentioned were Coca-Cola, Nokia, Nike, Adidas, Levi's, Marimekko, BMW, Iittala, Koskenkorva and McDonald's. Coca-Cola was far more often mentioned than any of the others. This is not a surprise because Coca-Cola is probably the most used model example of a brand in marketing books. When comparing the answers to the theory of branding and professional definitions of a brand, the interviewees were well on the right track even though it seemed at first so difficult to define what a brand is. Many of the book definitions include a mentioning of a logo and define brand as being something that identifies a certain product or a service.

## 6.2 Products, services and companies from Kainuu; brands or not?

All together 52 different products, services or companies originating from Kainuu were mentioned while asking interviewees to name them. Mainly the answers consisted of bigger companies that have at least some kind of wider advertising and distribution, but also lots of smaller and quite unfamiliar local companies were listed. Also few individual products were mentioned, such as tar, honey and potatoes. Major part of the products and companies mentioned can be divided into three different categories; tourism, food industry and technology companies.

In this research the three most often mentioned products, services or companies were Vuokatti, Rockseri and Namelli. Especially two first ones, Vuokatti and Rockseri were mainly associated as brands because of their good image, being widely advertised, successful and known through whole Finland. According to the fact that these features pointed out it seems that these two brands have succeeded in representing distinct values as the interviewees see them with a clear profile in respect what it stands for. Also the feeling of them being unique in their own fields emphasized the association of Vuokatti and Rockseri being brands. They have succeeded in differentiation and making their product and company stand out among the rest.

Vuokatti was mainly felt as positive because being versatile and also unique, for instance with its ski tunnel which was the first one in Finland. But still while Vuokatti is offering lots of services and options for everyone, it has not differentiated too much, out of the main stream, but it is still focused on different kinds of sport activities. Also a thing that points Vuokatti being a brand is that it was seen quite appealing. Even though it is seen as a small skiing resort it has succeeded in giving a quite positive experience and is attractive and also effortlessly recognized.

Initially branding concerned only consumer goods but the concept has spread to concern all kinds of goods and services, also tourism services, like for example Vuokatti. A well planned brand represents certain values and principles, like sustaining development and the safety of tourists in tourism. What comes to sustaining development, Vuokatti has succeeded in it excellently. New technology has been connected to sports fluently and development is all the time going further and further. The development of brand identity depends on the ability of the tourist resort to produce good and homogeneous quality tourism services. Services need to be homogeneous so that they will be comparable with other similar services. In this sense Vuokatti has also been successful. It can be said to be quite comparable to bigger skiing resorts like Ruka and Levi. (Albanese & Boedeker 2002, 144-145.)

What comes to Rockseri, it was quite surprising that as it was felt as a brand, so well recognized and known to be from Kainuu, it's uniqueness and own style were in many answers also associated as negative points. As brands are usually seemed as attractive and giving a positive image. Even though Rockseri is representing good Finnish quality it was felt unfashionable with a narrow consumer group. And most of the interviewees said they would not wear those clothes themselves.

Instead many interviewees did not see Namelli as a brand, because the main assumption was that it is not known well outside Kainuu. Here it is known as a small local factory producing candies and also selling those candies in stores



in Kainuu. But mainly it was doubted whether those products could be even found in other parts of Finland. At least the marketing was founded to be quite non-existing and it came out that probably the products are not always even associated as Namelli's products. This is very important aspect as identity has a huge role for the brand to be effortlessly recognized. Without identification it is not possible to create brand loyalty and make a brand to remember.

Fourthly often mentioned were Katinkulta, Ukkohalla and Ämmän leipä. These were not generally felt as brands as being small in their size and comparatively unknown through whole Finland. Katinkulta and Ukkohalla gained few familiarity points as organizers of some big happenings, such as Back to the 60s, Winter Open and Snow Soccer. But also it appeared that those events are merely known because of themselves rather than the place and surroundings. But locally all these three companies sharing the fourth place are seen well-known and respected.

Fifthly often mentioned were Kainuun Sanomat, Bakery Pekka Heikkinen, Pizza Mafia and Sunit. The familiarity of these was felt quite limited too and that was again the reason why they weren't associated as brands in general. The exception was Sunit, which was known to be functioning also internationally. But because it came out in the interviews that familiarity towards it is quite non-existing outside its target group, it was not associated as a brand either.

There was also few other companies that were gaining notice because of their international functions. In addition to Sunit these were Kiantama, Finspirit and Sinisalo Sport. All of these are exporting Finnish products to other countries. What comes to brand associations, Sinisalo Sport was the only one of these associated as a brand, but mainly within its target group only. It might be said to be even surprising how unknown these companies appeared to be here locally among young people as they were mentioned only once or twice.

### 6.3 Strategic brand analysis of the products, services and companies from Kainuu mentioned by the interviewees

From the strategic brand analysis point of view the companies of the interviews vary a lot. Basically brand strategy means having a clear and defined objective for the business and definitely not all of the companies mentioned in the interview answers have this. Again it comes down to the top three answers that seem to have everything under control in this sense too.

The most important point of customer analysis is to find a market niche and a customer need that is not yet being fulfilled. In a way all of the companies mentioned during the interviews have succeeded in this in their own way but probably it is best done in the top three that got mentioned. Vuokatti has obviously done this with its Ski tunnel and the whole Snowpolis complex and has been successful in it. Possibilities for year round training were extremely limited until this so Vuokatti definitely recognised an unsatisfied need. Rockseri has done basically the same thing with finding a market niche. There is a certain group of consumers that have a demand for this style of clothing, regardless of the fact that the results of the interviews suggested that the local consumers have quite a negative image of the products. In Namelli's case finding the market niche is not so obvious. In some way they have succeeded in it because they are considered unique and they clearly have their supporters locally. But they are not widely known.

Second part of the strategic brand analysis is the competitor analysis. This helps the company to know its competitors, their strengths and weaknesses and what they are up against. In this research and interviews the questions were concentrated mainly on the micro environment of the company, the inner strengths and weaknesses. Research was done to find out if the products or companies originating from Kainuu have it in their selves to qualify as brands. Naturally competitors affect the success of the companies, but this analysis takes place a bit later in the process.

Yet another part of the strategic brand analysis, the self analysis deals again with the brand images that are discussed earlier. It is a very important part of the development of a brand identity. It also includes the strengths and weaknesses of a brand. While asking the interviewees to name some positive and negative facts i.e. strengths and weaknesses of the three local companies or products, the answers of the interviewees were really similar to each other. It seemed to be quite difficult for the interviewees to come up with answers to this question and the question had to be repeated and rephrased several times.

The most common strengths of Vuokatti were that it is versatile, it has options for everyone and lots of services, it is unique with its Ski tunnel and that it is centrally located. Practically all of these points were also considered as weaknesses by other interviewees. Some thought that there are not enough of services, like shopping possibilities and that it is poorly located in the middle of nowhere. The main strengths of Rockseri were its uniqueness, good quality and own style. But again, the own style can also be held as a weakness and unfashionable like most of the interviewees did. Other weaknesses were poor marketing and the fact that they try to do everything by themselves in the company. No professionals are used even though there clearly is a need for them, like for example in advertising. Namelli's biggest strength obviously is its locality and the usage of local raw material. This is definitely a big and unique strength since most of the business normally uses artificial flavours in their products. Weaknesses again came down to lack of marketing which leads to the fact that the products are not widely known and the small size of the company.

#### 6.4 Brand images in Kainuu

As the aim of this research was to find out young people's images about products and brands in Kainuu, it was thought to be measured easily by asking the interviewees' first words or images concerning the products or brands from Kainuu that come to their mind. This way the images should be usually easily awakened. But when doing the actual interview it was clearly

noticeable that it was not that easy for interviewees' to express those images. It was also quite difficult for them to get in mind three products, services or companies originating from Kainuu. This is quite logical, because if responses are reserved or varying highly, it indicates of a weak brand image, and mainly the products originating from Kainuu were not associated as brands. Instead, if products from Kainuu would have been conceived as brands, the good images would have probably been easier for interviewees to see and express.

As it is unlikely for a brand to have only one image, this research prove it as the companies that were associated as brands the most, were also seen with more several images and attributes than the others. But still the image associations towards the products or companies from Kainuu that were mentioned during the interviews are not that strong either meaningful purchase influencers or motivators. That turned out as the recognition towards even products coming from Kainuu was felt very difficult at the moment of the interview. After some products or mainly companies came to the respondents minds, it was hard for them to consider whether they could be seen as brands. This was an effect of the fact that the general knowledge of what a brand is was quite limited and very difficult to say in words within most of the interviews.

As Vuokatti and Rockseri were the ones that gained highest brand recognition from the mentioned, the variety of brand images towards them was also the highest. Some other products or companies that got mentioned several times and were not highly associated as brands were having mainly the same kind of images in interviewees' minds. For instance, while talking about companies that are dealing with food stuffs, such as Namelli, Ämmän leipä, Bakery Pekka Heikkinen, Pizza Mafia and Kaisan kotileipomo, the general image towards them was good taste of the products and good quality within them and the raw materials used. Also they all having their own kind of traditions and specialities, their own assortment was pointed out while asking images. Relating to these food stuffs companies the general negative images were again availability, small size of the business and lack of advertising.

Through the answers it did not appear that the interviewees are particularly using or buying the products or services they named. In general the attributes towards the products or companies originating from Kainuu were quality and uniqueness and also locality was an aspect that gained admiration. Local entrepreneurship is respected as it is seen as a good way to make Kainuu and its municipalities known in other parts of Finland and even abroad, and people are willing to support it in some respect. But still generally it was felt that there has not been enough done within companies from Kainuu to widen the general knowledge of them and there should be more done to add peoples awareness and interest.

The other aspect to look through the results concerning brand images is that in this research they were not positive images that came to interviewees' minds mostly. Especially Rockseri was the one mentioned many times and known for its quality and uniqueness. But the uniqueness was mainly felt as a negative point as the majority of interviewees talking about Rockseri were not willing to buy its products as it does not represent what they like and value, in this case current fashion and style.

#### 6.5 Brands describing society and young people in Kainuu

As earlier mentioned in the chapter Future, top brands of their time also tell something about the values of the society at that particular time. One can easily evaluate the society by its prominent brands in different decades. This also applies to people. One can evaluate the values and lifestyle of a person by looking at his favourite brands.

During the implementation of this research's interviews some interesting connections between the interviewees and their answers were noted. Question number three was to name three brands that occurred in the interviewees mind first. The answers of this question were in some cases very descriptive of the person in question. Most of the answers were quite common separately but when put together as sets of three according to every interviewee the combinations were interesting. For example a 19 year old

working male's answer was BMW, Levi's and Ray Ban and a 24 year old graduating female student's answer was Pepsi, Chanel and Lacoste. It is very interesting to notice how as simple answer as this can describe people so well.

When looking at the summary of all the 40 interviews and the answers to question number three, a top three of brands mentioned in the interviews can be formed. These brands are Coca-Cola, Nokia and Nike. Bearing in mind that the interviews were done only to 18-25 year old young people, a certain kind of image of the values and attitudes of today's society can be formed. But of course this involves only the target group of 18-25 year olds, so this can not be used to describe the whole society of today. In 1990s the top three of the most prominent brands in UK was Virgin, Nike and DKNY. If the top three of this research is compared to the top three of UK in 1990s, it can be said that the societies look quite alike. Nike occurs in the both top three and the two other companies in both decades reflect on leisure time, amusements and basically relaxation and good time. Biggest change would be the involvement of technology in every day life, which Nokia is a proof of.

#### 6.6 Suggestions for development

The last question of the interview was to name some suggestions for improvement for the products, services or companies from Kainuu that the interviewee had mentioned at the question number four. There were quite many similar suggestions that could be generally utilized in any company. There were also some specific suggestions for certain companies on how to improve their operations.

The most common suggestion for each company was to improve marketing and advertising. Ways for this could be for example exhibitions, fairs, marketing events, sponsorships and Internet marketing. It was said that companies should place more ads in newspapers, TV and radio and do it more widely, also outside Kainuu. One very good suggestion was guerrilla marketing which means low cost and highly emotionally appealing marketing.

For example the website of Pipefest, a hiphop festival in Vuokatti, was set to be the starting page of each computer in second level schools in Kajaani.

Other suggestions besides marketing were to versatile and develop, add consciousness and interest, keep customers happy and satisfied, spread word-of-mouth, set up more stores, internationalize and cooperate with other related companies.

Some specific ideas that came up during the interviews for certain companies were for example:

- Kiannon Kuohut to sponsor cold water swimming Finland's Championships
- Better marketing planning, unification of image and products and updating product line according to fashion trends for Rockseri
- More representative surroundings, foreign sponsors to visit and presentative matches for Kajaani's Hokki
- Vuokatti to organize big sport events
- Bakery Pekka Heikkinen to distribute its products to supermarkets and for instance to Kajaani ABC service station

All in all, the suggestions for development were quite similar among the interviewees. Marketing and advertising were seen to be the weakest points needing to be developed in nearly all of the answers. It seemed to be quite difficult for the most of the interviewees to come up with ideas for development. In their own opinion it was difficult because they had not been involved with business or marketing before.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The aim of the research was to find out if some local products or companies are associated as brands in young people's minds in Kainuu. The results of the research tell a lot about the images that young people have about the local companies. In a global perspective these companies are not associated as brands mainly because they are not widely known. Rather they are well-known and respected locally here in Kainuu. It might be quite difficult for the interviewees to associate products and companies originating from Kainuu as brands because they easily compare them to global brands like Coca-Cola and Nokia.

Through the interviews it came out very clearly that the most common images of products from Kainuu are quite positive. The good quality and uniqueness of the mentioned products was especially emphasized by the interviewees. This is something that the companies should build upon. The lacks of marketing and general awareness were the biggest negative points that got mentioned most often. Those are the facts that the companies should concentrate on improving.

The interviews of the research went as planned. The atmosphere was relaxed and the interviewees seemed comfortable while answering the questions even though it was a bit hard in the beginning for them to figure out what to answer.



All of the people asked to take part to the interviews participated, some of them more eagerly than the others. All in all the answers to the interview questions were quite the same what they were presumed to be. The research can be helpful while considering what kind of role the products and companies from Kainuu are playing especially in young peoples' minds. Particularly while wondering whether there are products, services or companies that can be associated as brands and what are those brand images.

The reason why brands and brand images in Kainuu was chosen to be the topic of this thesis is that it is quite topical subject at the moment. The markets have become more and more competitive and the importance of branding has grown as a way of differentiating from the competitors. Everybody knows that there are global brands, such as Coca-Cola, but there has not been much attention paid to the existence of possible local brands. This research was done not only out of plain curiosity towards brands and especially local brands but also in order to be able to generate guidelines for future development of the local companies. The aim was to write a thesis that would serve several different directions, including the authors and others interested in the topic.

The results of the research can be helpful for those companies that got mentioned within the interviews as there were some suggestions for development rising. They are not only beneficial to the companies that got mentioned, but also to other companies originating from Kainuu. The positive and negative sides can be easily generalized to concern any company in Kainuu.

The theory part of this thesis gives it's readers a possibility to get familiar with what are brands and how are they formed. For the students working with this thesis the most important parts, in addition to the knowledge gained from the theory, were conducting the interview research, analyzing and processing the results. Basically the students working with this research learned how to use the theories studied in the lectures in reality.

After doing the interviews and starting to analyze the results, a problem occurred in the way that the interviewees were chosen. 70 per cent of the people interviewed were women and only 30 per cent men. This obviously affects the results because 70 per cent of the respondents being women, the results are mainly from a female perspective. While choosing the people to be interviewed, the interviewees should have been chosen equally as much women as men.

It would be interesting to see, how some of the companies mentioned in this research would purposefully start branding their selves. This thesis could work as a basis for another research or a project, for example how to plan a branding strategy for a certain company.

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## QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWS

1. Age, sex, occupation?
2. What is a brand in your own words?
3. Name some brands?
4. Mention some (three) products, services or companies originating from Kainuu?
5. Would you associate them as brands? Why?
6. Do you think these products/ brands are known outside Kainuu?
7. Name some positive and negative things concerning these products/ brands?
8. In your opinion, what should be done to make them more known?

HAASTATTELUKYSYMYKSET

1. Ikä, sukupuoli, ammatti?
2. Mikä mielestäsi on brändi?
3. Nimeä joitakin brändejä?
4. Mainitse kolme kainuulaista tuotetta, palvelua tai yritystä?
5. Miellätkö edellä mainitut brändeiksi? Miksi?
6. Luuletko, että nämä tuotteet, palvelut tai yritykset tunnetaan Kainuun ulkopuolella?
7. Nimeä joitakin hyviä ja huonoja puolia liittyen mainitsemiisi tuotteisiin, palveluihin tai yrityksiin?
8. Miten mielestäsi voitaisiin lisätä kainuulaisten tuotteiden, palveluiden ja yritysten tunnettavuutta?

GLOBAL BRANDS

Coca-Cola IIII IIII IIII IIII

Nike IIII IIII I

Nokia IIII IIII I

Levi's IIII II

Adidas IIII I

Marimekko IIII I

BMW IIII

Iittala III

Koskenkorva III

McDonald's III

Pepsi III

Arabia II

Fazer II

Luis Vuitton II

Microsoft II

Only II

Sony II

IBM

Rukka

Reebok

Burberry

Diesel

Olympic Games

Harri Kirvesniemi

L'Oreal

H&M

Hilfiger

Pentik

Lapin Kulta

Nivea



APPENDIX 3 2(2)

Lumene

Sean John

Benetton

Valmet

Intel

Finlayson

Mercedes Benz

Dragster

Ice Peak

Calvin Klein

Ray Ban

Volvo

CCM

Nightwish

Toyota

Kismet

DNA

Matti Nykänen

Panasonic

Chanel

Lacoste

Samsung

PRODUCTS, SERVICES AND COMPANIES FROM KAINUU

(presented in the order by how many times they got mentioned)

1. **Vuokatti IIII IIII IIII**
2. **Rockseri IIII IIII II**
3. **Namelli IIII II**
  
4. Katinkulta IIII I  
Ukkohalla IIII I  
Ämmän Leipä IIII I
  
5. Kainuun Sanomat IIII  
Bakery Pekka Heikkinen IIII  
Pizza Mafia IIII  
Sunit IIII
  
6. Hands Up III  
Imagon III  
Kiannon Kuohut III
  
7. Arktiset Aromit II  
FinSpirit II  
Kajaanin Hokki II  
Intotalo II  
Kajaanin Puhelinosuuskunta (KPO) II  
Kiantama II  
Kuutamokeikat II  
Kymppineon II  
Siniset Vaarat II  
Valkoliekki II

8. Honey from Kainuu  
Kainuu's juustoleipä  
Kainuun Sähkö  
Kaisan Kotileipomo  
Kajaanin Laatuperuna  
Kajaani University of Applied Sciences  
Kemikalio Rosa  
Sotkamon Riista ja Kala, canned fish  
Kelluva traktori (floating tractor)  
Leppäkerttu  
Manta's Grill  
Maxi-Makasiini  
Mondo Minerals  
Raateen Portti (Gateway to Raate)  
Oilola –handicrafts  
Pajakka  
Raatin Kello  
Ready To Go (RTG)  
Rönttönen  
Sinisalo Sport  
Snowpolis  
Sotkamon Jymy  
Swamp Soccer  
Talkkuna  
Talvisota -liquor  
Tar  
Tulikivi  
Tuomas Kaakinen's photography  
Ulla Harju's ceramics

DEFINITIONS OF A BRAND

- Trademark, popular, advertised, trademark itself is a concept, not a positive image → pollution of rainforests, usage of child labor
- Trademark, products name
- Trademark, products first image, written or drawn logo
- Product's or company's public image that is achieved with purposeful and long lasting marketing work
- A product or a service that is taken far, created a certain image, lots of input
- Concept, everybody knows, popular
- Title of a product, with exclusive rights to a certain company
- An established trademark, known, popular
- Trademark, known, can also be a company or an organization
- Momentary hit product
- A trademark, a logo, for example a company can sell itself thorough a brand, company's business card
- A product or a product line that everybody knows, with an established reputation, already the name tells the customer what he is going to get, people are ready to pay more of a branded product
- Trademark, some company's product, a labeled product
- Trademark or something similar, a certain image to the consumers, looks & packing, achieved by marketing
- Trademark's or company's image
- Image of what the product is conceived like
- Known trademark
- Product, a product family, can be also intangible
- Trademark
- Product's image, conception, promises
- A well known product
- Image of a product
- Trademark

- Trademark that many people knows, KNOWN
- Trademark
- Known and popular trademark
- Famous thing
- Famous trademark, established, people know it
- Trademark
- Characteristic, well-known
- Advert
- Known mark
- Established, trademark that everybody knows
- Trademark, something that helps identifying the product
- Trademark and image
- Trademark
- Trademark → "the thing" of a product
- Known product
- Reputation of a thing/ a product/ a service
- Worldwide known trademark