

Leveraging a Global Brand in the B2B SME marketplace: an interpretive case review of Wackes AB

Degree project in Global Marketing [BUSN 39]

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1. Abstract

- Title:** Leveraging a Global Brand in the Business-To-Business SME Marketplace: An Interpretative Case Review of Wackes
- Course:** BUSN39 Degree project in Global Marketing
- Authors:** Ruben G. Panagopoulos & Dylan C. Sellberg
- Supervisor:** Magnus Lagnevik
- Res. Question:** How does an SME's international growth impact the enterprise's brand in a business-to-business environment?
- Purpose:** Determine how a global reputation can effect a small and medium enterprise from several perspectives; namely from business customers, internally, and among its network.
- Theory:** The concept of SME business-to-business branding literature alongside that of global branding and brand associations.
- Method:** This research is built upon a multitude of methodological stages, most prominently by describing; our case subject selection, philosophy, strategy, design, method, empirical collection, method of analysis, and limitations.
- Empirical:** Empirical work for this thesis was completed at Wackes AB Sweden, a global partner for promotional products. Empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews alongside a secondary data analysis.
- Conclusion:** International growth affects an SME business-to-business brand in four different ways, which helped create the four 'F' model. First, it serves as a benefit on the external perception (Flaunt). Secondly, it serves a strong function in acquiring clients (Function). Thirdly, it consistently impacts a brand's image in a positive way (Fashion). Finally, international growth brings about several potential problems for managers and employees to consider (Fixes).

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Introduction

4.1. Background

Business-to-business branding has often been associated with business-to-consumer branding. However, far less research has been done in the field of business-to-business branding. The ambiguity of previous research conducted in this field provided us as researchers, a particular interesting field of research. The field of research has further narrowed by studying **Small-to-Medium sized Enterprises (SME's) in business-to-business markets** aiming for to **internationalize and/or** a desire to reach clients on a global scale.

Our personal interest played a significant role in eventually choosing for a lesser-known theoretical concept, **SME business-to-business branding**. A generous amount of branding literature being taught at Universities all over the world is concerned with business-to-consumer branding, however at Lund University we were introduced to the topic of business-to-business branding in several courses. From there on, we became aware this topic would stimulate our mutual interest and provide a challenge. We analyzed several ideas and concepts; through these we found we could contribute significant theoretical and practical implications to the field. **This chapter will highlight what previous academic literature states about SME business-to-business branding, where our contribution comes into place, in what way previous academic literature and our contribution lead to research questions, and finally how our research questions eventually will help us to solve the formulated problem.**

4.2. Scope of research

It is important to first show why the field of SME business-to-business branding is in need of our contribution. In order to do this, we will explain what has been said in previous academic literature and why these findings are reasons for us to divulge further into the SME business-to-business topic. This determines the scope of our research and will lead to how we eventually structure the entire paper.

Previous research on business-to-business branding has been under researched (Mudambi, 2002).

Mudambi (2002) states that the nature and importance of branding in business-to-business markets is unclear, even though the concept of branding is widely accepted in the business-to-consumer market. In many cases, business-to-business branding has been treated as the ‘intellectual step-child’ of business-to-consumer branding and been somewhat neglected. Furthermore, the focus of the two schools of thought are also different, since business-to-business branding, as a general rule, requires the development of a positive reputation, goodwill, and the commitment of the entire company to a set of given brand values (Ohnemus, 2000).

Ohnemus goes on to explain the juxtaposition business-to-business branding currently is in. This juxtaposition is with the fast-moving consumer sector, which exists out of a completely different power balance (Ohnemus, 2000). Roberts & Merrilees (2007) contributed in their way to the field of business-to-business branding by building upon what Mudambi stated in 2002. Even though their study was done later than Mudambi’s, they still agree with what he is arguing for by stating the following, “business-to-business branding literature is embryonic, so much remains to be done” (Roberts & Merrilees, 2007).

According to a study by Keränen et al. (2012) only 64 articles specifically addressing business-to-business branding have been published. 22 are theory based, while 42 are problem based. There is limited research on business-to-business branding in general (Bengtsson & Servais, 2005; Beverland, Napoli & Lindgreen 2007; Glynn, 2011; Mudambi, 2002 as cited in Malaska, Saraniemi, Tahtinen, 2011) and on SME branding in particular.

To further specify on SME branding in particular Opoku et al. (2007) convey the following message:

“Branding is a critical issue in the small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) sector because brands allow actors, such as organizations, to say things about themselves in ways that every-day language cannot convey. Marketers and entrepreneurs are rightly concerned with brands because they facilitate the repeat purchases on which sellers rely to enhance corporate financial performance and the survival of the firm” (Opoku et al, 2007).

Even though Opoku et al. (2007) state the importance of branding for SME’s, their work in business-to-business markets exists out of incredible complexity. This complexity is reviewed by Ohnemus (2000) as “exceptionally high”, because firms can apply radically different branding and pricing models, have industry specific distribution models, and the extensive use of patents can either increase or decrease overall average profitability.

This complexity is shown by Krake in 2005, whose research attempts to address and construct a comprehensive framework of the recognized gap in business-to-business branding called for by Mudambi (2002). Krake (2005) sees brand management receives little or no attention from SME’s, however she suggests that branding plays a more important role in business-to-business decision making than has generally been recognized. Understanding how customers perceive the company brand will be key to future management decisions of SME business-to-business enterprises (Krake, 2005).

As shown by the statements of Ohnemus (2000), Mudambi (2002), Krake (2005), and Opoku et al. (2007) the existing branding literature of SME’s in business-to-business markets is not sufficient in order to understand the complete picture. From this previous research we see that there is a desire amongst academics for an increase in knowledge on SME business-to-business branding.

Branding being a critical issue for SME's (Opoku et al., 2007), it being exceptionally high in complexity for SME's (Ohnemus, 2000), and brand management receiving little to no attention from SME's (Krake, 2005) all give us the opportunity to take these SME struggles and create a larger base of knowledge.

4.3. Research question and problem formulation

The research question used to guide us through this entire process is based upon previous academic literature and the found struggles an SME faces while dealing with branding in a business-to-business setting. The research question is as follows:

- How does an SME's international growth impact the enterprise's brand in a business-to-business environment?
 - With a focus on the relationship between international perception and its correlation with brand associations and organizational structure.

The focus on international growth narrows our topic down more and helps us to fully divulge into the impact it has on the SME organization. This research question in turn allows us to describe what the aim is of this research. Due to the shortcomings in the relevant literature our aim is to contribute to the field of SME business-to-business branding, with a focus on international growth and its implicit and explicit implications on an organization. To study the effects that international growth has on SME's in a business-to-business setting gives us the opportunity to have a complete view on the tensions and interrelations that exist while going through the process of growing internationally.

4.4. Structure of research

The structure of this research circumvents one case study. This case study research will be conducted at Wackes AB in Lund, Sweden. Wackes is a market leader in a very fragmented promotional product marketplace and are currently in the process of, and have been for over a decade, expanding their global reach, creating a very interesting position in the promotional products industry.

Their recent adoption of going global through following existing Swedish clients abroad provides us with a unique case involving strategy, brand image and associations, effects on the company's structure, and a complete body of research through semi-structured interviews.

As of now, Wackes falls under the category of a 'medium-sized' SME. As defined in EU law, a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) is defined as having anywhere between 10-250 employees and between 2 and 50 million Euros in annual turnover. European Union law divides the category of SME's into micro, small, and medium-sized companies.

The leads provided by our research question, and clarified by our research aim, provide us with a red thread through the research. It assists us throughout the literature review and in turn it forms a firm foundation in formulating the next step: gathering empirical data. These in-depth empirical findings of the case study will provide us with a test for the existing literature. Specifically, whether the literature overlaps with our practical data completely, somewhat, or not at all. Coming to a close, in the analysis we will look at how the case subject has evolved throughout their internationalization process and analyze these findings through a model specifically designed for our case study.

Further, we will discuss the analysis in our discussion chapter. This chapter is divided into two sections, one concerning theoretical implications and another concerned with practical implications.

The theoretical implications will highlight the important factors from the case study that can be added to the existing field of academic knowledge regarding business-to-business SME branding. The practical implications will specifically discuss how our findings impact our case subject. A conclusion will be formulated as a result of the aforementioned work in order to answer the research question. The conclusion will show what has been found, what the findings mean, how these should be interpreted for researchers, practitioners, the subject of our case, and specifically note what our contribution is to the field of business-to-business SME branding.

5. Methodology

This chapter will provide the reader a description of the type of research methods, the research strategy, and the type of research philosophy used in this paper. The foundation of this chapter should all unfold from how we, as researchers, understand our surroundings and observations. Therefore, we first explain which type of philosophical aspect we use in order to clarify our approach to this research. Secondly, the type of research strategy will be highlighted. Here it is explained how data is gathered, which is of vital importance. Due to the complexity of this research, once the type of research strategy is established, an elaboration of the research methods used will be provided. This is necessary to link previously mentioned research questions with empirical data. Eventually, we will transform empirical data into written chapters, which has been suggested as being the most important investigative processes that happens during all research projects by Holley & Colyar (2012). These research methods will provide a sharper picture of the aforementioned research strategy.

5.1. Case subject selection

The process of selecting Wackes AB was particularly interesting for us as researchers. Initially, our aim was to research international growth of Swedish companies to the United States. Upon finding a journal that highlighted companies who performed this procedure, we discovered 12 firms of interest. After sending inquiry emails, we were graced with three companies who were willing to participate in our case study; J. Lindeberg, Thule and Wackes.

Initially, Thule was our goal to work with due to our relationship with a few employees there. However, they were unable to participate due to the fact that their global transition occurred over twenty years ago and those who were involved are no longer with the firm. J. Lindeberg was of great interest to us and was subsequently chosen as our case. We began reviewing literature relevant to global perceptions in the fashion industry.

However, just before we were set to begin empirical research with J. Lindeberg we were informed they would no longer be able to work with us due to time and resource constraints.

At this point we were back to square one, and were all but forced to scrap the research that was completed on the fashion industry. We then followed up with Wackes who was fortunately still willing to work with us. Through selecting Wackes, we were able to continue using our global branding literature that was discovered during our initial pursuit of J. Lindeberg, but also we were inclined to shift our scope from business-to-consumer branding to business-to-business literature.

We then molded our research question in order to help discover the problem Wackes was facing; namely, the effects of being a global brand in the business-to-business marketplace. Wackes was a perfect fit for this research because they are a small to medium sized firm with only 55 employees, and also continually considering a global expansion in addition to their current global structure.

5.2. Methodological discussion

From the onset of research we knew it was our goal to work closely with a company in the form of a case study. In the business-to-business field it is very important to understand how the actors within the company think in order to have a sound conception of the firm.

A case study of this nature allows us to see the firm from the inside out. In-depth interviews of the CEO, local employees, and international employees within the firm will paint a complete picture of Wackes' operations, struggles, relationships with other firms, and goals among many other things. This case study will allow us to draw generally arching principles that can ideally be applicable to any small-medium sized enterprise looking to grow globally in the business-to-business sector and will serve as especially applicable to Swedish companies looking to expand beyond the Nordic region.

Wackes makes for a particularly suitable choice of case due to their proximity in Lund, Sweden. Also, they have made it a point to ensure their employees in other offices and regions are available to us for at least a few hours of time. This is a huge benefit when considering how tight on time most firms are.

An issue a single case study of this nature faces lies in being able to create a generally applicable conclusion. A specific field such as promotional products may be difficult to replicate across different industries. However, we intend on focusing our research on the ideology and trials that a global business-to-business brand faces, and the specific nature of their business is an afterthought to our research.

Another issue in choosing Wackes as a case study is the way in which they have gone global is very unique. Their global expansion has been done in the act of “following” clients. They have been requested to establish offices in locations like Paris and Atlanta in order to gain a contract. They have done so which has been the sole reason for their global offices. This is a very unique way of expanding globally. However, regardless of how they expanded globally, the fact that the act is completed and they have established there is the overarching concept in a global firm; thus, the application of Wackes as a global firm is still valid. This unique method of expanding globally will be expanded upon further in the analysis section of our work.

5.3. Research philosophy

People do not always know why they behave in the ways that they do, which is the reason that researchers require methods that enable them to make sense of their experience (Nuttall et al., 2011). In this research, we are searching for answers specific to the field of business-to-business branding. In order for us to generate a substantial contribution to this field, it is important to first illustrate our mindset.

We believe a standardized and/or linear approach to research is one with too many limitations.

If, for example, the linear process of deduction would be applied, changes in new theoretical ideas or relevant sets of theory data, which appear relevant after data collection, would not be allowed to be included according to the linear perspective.

Expanding the understanding of both theory and empirical phenomena, alternating from one type of research activity to another (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), is something we see as a useful tool. **This supports us to not only look at the case study from one specific field, academic or practical, but to fully comprehend how processes evolve in a globally developing organization like Wackes.**

Abduction is the theoretical frame of reference for this paper, to consider data and existing theory as in tandem. Abduction consists of three steps (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007):

1. The application of an established interpretive rule (theory)
2. The observation of a surprising –in light of the interpretive rule– empirical phenomenon
3. The imaginative articulation of a new interpretive rule (theory) that resolves the surprise

These three steps are the foundation of this research. The chapter about the literature review is step one in Alvesson & Kärreman's (2007) model, step two is analysis, and the third step is a combination of the sections where findings and contributions are described.

The abductive approach places a major emphasis on how we as researchers interpret what is encountered and how this could result in an alteration in describing our findings and contributions. Due to this, we deem it necessary to fully comprehend reflexivity. Our pre-understanding, including our academic framework, will be used as a tool that opens up a dialogue with the empirical material (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007).

The understanding of reflexivity as a relationship between knowledge and ways of producing knowledge challenges the researcher to understand the ways in which ontological and epistemological presumptions guide decision-making and the choices she makes through the whole research process (Keso et al., 2009). Alternatively, it concerns the complex relationship between the knowledge creator and the process of knowledge creation (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009).

Another reason to take reflexivity into account is the suggestion of Alvesson & Kärreman (2007) that it helps to realize the full generative potential in breakdowns and mysteries. As shown by Keso et al. (2009), reflexivity helps us to understand our chosen philosophical presumptions concerning our ontological and epistemological position. The philosophical standpoints used are based upon the work of Easterby-Smith et al. (2012).

The understanding of philosophical issues is significant for multiple reasons; it can help research designs, it helps recognize which designs will work and which will not, and it can help identify and even create designs that may be outside of what we have previously experienced (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Before we are capable of understanding what type of positions existed within the field of ontology and epistemology, it is required to first determine what both terms illustrate. Ontology is the philosophical assumption about the nature of reality. Epistemology is the general set of assumptions about ways of inquiring into the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

It was deemed beneficial to ontologically position ourselves in the field of relativism. This allows us, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2012), to accept that many truths exist and when these are observed, they depend on the viewpoint of the observer. That being said, it matches the second step of Alvesson & Kärreman's (2007) abduction philosophy discussed previously.

Social scientists focus on two contrasting views of how social science research should be conducted, positivism and social constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

One of the main differences between the two sciences concerns the position in which the observer conducts research. Based on this position, an estimation of the type of epistemology can be made. When the observer acts as an independent from the observed, a positivism approach is used (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Social constructionism happens while the observer is part of what is being observed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

In this research it is clear that we are not taking part in what is being observed. Nevertheless, some implications of social constructionism are still considered valuable to the contribution.

Constructionism follows principles of grounded theory and has also been termed the 'factor analytic' (Lee, 1999) approach, as it commonly reduces large amounts of qualitative data collected from observation, interviews, etc. into meaningful 'factors' that better explain the data while potentially providing transferable explanations of other contexts (Bluhm et al., 2011).

Due to this, we have chosen the constructionism-epistemology implication. Here, the aim is to converge by starting with questions, using a case study, analyzing qualitative data, triangulating, and comparing...eventually leading to a generated theory (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). *We have done this consistently throughout the research. On several occasions it has been noted that an employee mentioned a new idea that we had not done previous research on. This method of research allowed us to reflect back on the literature and often times research further, or more specifically, into a certain field.*

5.4. Research strategy

The nature of our research is qualitative. In order to clearly depict what we think is qualitative research, it is important to first define the term. The definition of qualitative research in this paper was originally described by Sinkovics & Alfoldi (2012).

They conceive qualitative research as a set of interpretive activities that seek to understand the situated meaning behind actions and behaviors, and rely heavily on the researcher as a unique interpreter of the data. This heavy reliance on the researcher being a unique interpreter corresponds to our philosophical research point of view.

The qualitative research strategy was chosen due to several key factors. Some were chosen deliberately and some evolved out of constraints felt throughout our preliminary research process.

These deliberately chosen factors grew out of our desire to deliver a piece of great qualitative quality, namely; contribution to theory, novelty, transparency, and good writing (Pratt, 2008). In addition to this, a qualitative inquiry offers an interpretation of the lived experience (Holley & Colyar, 2012) and has the unique ability to address issues of description, interpretation, and explanation (Bluhm et al., 2011). These are of significant relevance to this research due to the chosen type of research philosophy, abduction. The combination of having an abductive mindset, together with performing qualitative research fits tremendously with our goal to provide a piece of reference for business-to-business companies looking to determine the impact a global expansion will have on the firm.

The previously mentioned three abductive steps compliment qualitative research, which has been described as research which strives for a deep, often contextual, and emotional understanding of people's motivations and desires (Nuttall et al., 2011). Conceiving qualitative research as a set of interpretive activities seeks to understand the situated meaning behind actions and behaviors, and relies heavily on the researcher as a unique interpreter of the data (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). It is important to have us, as researchers, interpret the data in order to compare the results to previously reviewed literature and discover new material in order to make a contribution in the field of branding. Furthermore, understanding the employees motivations will help to filter the material into what is truly impactful and what is said as a result of their opinions or corporate-indoctrinated ideologies.

Nevertheless, some argue against the use of qualitative research. Recently, Holley & Colyar (2012) stated that qualitative research at its best generates multiple, frequently conflicting perspectives and accounts. Adding to this is the notion of the extensiveness and sometimes lack of cohesiveness amongst results (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). Plus, it has been observed as particularly difficult to pin down because of its flexibility and emergent character (Van Maanen, 1998:xi, cited in Gephart, 2004).

Advocates of qualitative research concede that although other techniques may have greater efficiency; they suffer from a lack of effectiveness, since their empirical goals are missing (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). We intend to employ qualitative research in such a way that it is most effective. To illuminate emotion, bestow texture, and encourage improvisation (Hooper, 2011), together with describing processes of situational details, which unfold over time (Gephart, 2004).

We intend on illuminating emotion using the flexibility which semi-structured interviews provides. This way, if we see an employee is particularly passionate or knowledgeable on a certain subject we can investigate further. We can also ask follow-up questions to those on the interview guide in order to bestow texture to the interview. Qualitative research also naturally allows for improvisation. Questions at the beginnings of the interviews will be intentionally vague and broad, allowing interviewees to put their own spin and emphasis on generally applicable context. In this way, we will be able to shape the interview around their responses and investigate more in-depth on the areas in which they highlight in their initial responses.

Since qualitative research makes a potent vehicle for interpretive listening and active insight mining, it can not only help our research, but also benefit a building brand (Hooper, 2011). Ideally, these interviews and our investigation within the firm will provoke Wackes to think in ways which they have not previously thought, and hopefully identify solutions which will improve their brand.

Furthermore, our investigation of Wackes will be broadly applicable to brands similar in nature to Wackes. Namely, a business-to-business SME wishing to pursue a global perception.

5.5. Research design

The research will be effectuated through the use of a case study design. Case studies provide unique means of developing theory by utilizing in-depth insights of empirical phenomena and their contexts (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

Moreover, it allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, organizational processes, and managerial processes (Yin, 2003). What distinguishes a case study from other research designs is the focus on a bounded situation or system, an entity with a purpose and functioning parts (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The case study style of research compliments our philosophy and research design by being able to expand and generalize theories. Furthermore, it has the characteristic of analytic generalization (Yin, 2003).

The design face of our case study will be representative, to capture circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation (Yin, 2003). This is important in order to elicit the most credible responses possible. Employees will feel most natural in these commonplace scenarios and environments, which will provoke the most natural responses. This is why we have chosen to interview Wackes employees in their office during work hours. This will ensure they are in the proper mindset to respond appropriately and will create the most applicable responses.

What needs to be kept in mind while conducting case study research is the main difficulty, as noted by (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), which is handling the interrelatedness of the various elements in the research work. Being able to handle the relations that evolve of studying and organizing relevant literature, asking correct questions to the subjects of study, and ultimately positioning us as researchers in an unbiased way is of great importance.

The usage of a case study design comes down to the case study itself being an object of interest in its own right, the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To elaborate on this, we are aiming to take full advantage of the potential case research has.

A standardized conceptualization of the research process as consisting of a number of planned subsequent ‘phases’ does not reflect this potential (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). We believe that since Wackes is such a small firm, the employees are our best outlets to relevant information regarding their global expansion.

Specifically, the international employees will be able to contribute to how they believe others have viewed, or view, their global expansion; the Swedish employees will be able to identify how going global has impacted normal procedures; the CEO will be able to provide a conception of the overall impacts of being an SME in the global marketplace.

The previously mentioned constructionism epistemology implication will be applied to how we conduct this case study. During the case study we take advantage of the flexibility this implication provides us with, in other words: we allow our research design to adapt throughout the process.

When it is deemed necessary to divulge further into a specific theoretical topic due to findings in our empirical data, we will take a step back in the process and research relevant literature to be able to analyze and discuss the empirical findings in a correct manner. The ability to ‘take a step back’ and thoroughly go through the empirical findings to see whether other literature is deemed necessary for a complete as possible picture allowed us to take full advantage of the rich case Wackes provided us with.

5.6. Research method

Several data collecting methods can be used while doing qualitative research. In-depth interviews, focus groups, text and document analysis, projective techniques, observational methods, and ethnography are several examples (Nuttall et al., 2011). Building upon our philosophy, strategy, and design, we have chosen to gather our empirical data through the method of in-depth interviews.

The in-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic (Milena et al., 2008). This picture will provide us with the necessary insights into how their practical knowledge differs or overlaps with theoretical findings.

However, rather than assume that the subject is reporting authentic experiences, we see the subject as a politically motivated producer of what are, for him or her, favorable "truths," or as a person repeating institutionalized standard talk about a specific theme (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). Variations in thoughts, while conducting the interview also fall under common behavior of interviewees.

The interviewees themselves could discover new aspects of the themes they are describing and suddenly see relations that they had not been conscious of earlier (Kvale, 1996).

Keeping these assumptions in mind, before interviews were conducted, we ensured interviews were not biased due to poorly constructed questions. Yin (2003), argues being biased is one of the main weaknesses of doing interviews. Together with biased responses, inaccuracies due to poor recall, and reflexivity of the researcher, Yin (2003) notes it is important to follow your own line of inquiry and asking conversational questions in an unbiased manner that also serve the need for your line of inquiry. **In order to make sure our questions were not biased, we went through our literature review, asked questions related to existing academic views and aimed to explore the shortcomings existing literature possesses.**

This was done in order to clearly work towards our goal; contributing to the field of SME business-to-business branding, with a focus on international growth and its implicit and explicit implications on an organization

We will use a semi-structured type of interview. This semi-structured way of interviewing implies asking questions, which will not follow an exact outlined schedule (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Analyzing the interview as it is being conducted and coming up with relevant questions based on what the interviewee says is all allowed during a semi-structured interview. However, using similar wording ensures that eventually, all the questions that exist in the interview guide will be asked to all interviewees (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This type of interviewing applies best to our situation due to the desire to incorporate as much rich data as is possible. By not restricting the interviewees to pre-defined topics, we allow them to also partially guide us and provide us with more insights than thought of up front.

Through analyzing our literature we came up with an interview guide where the most important topics and questions are discussed. This interview guide can be found in Appendix 1, and serves as merely an outline. This interview guide was not consistently adhered to on a strict basis. Rather, it functions as a crutch for the interviewers throughout the process, and as a reminder to the researcher to not enter a biased position which could negatively impact the research outcome. We also sent this interview guide to the interviewees at least 24 hours before the interview took place.

In addition to the primary empirical data collection, we will use secondary data such as internal documents that are both provided for us and acquired independently. These documents will range from time-lines of company development over the years to sales presentations for current and future clients.

5.7. Empirical Collection

As previously mentioned, in order to fully understand the case of Wackes, we used internal documents as well as interviews. We have conducted 8 interviews in total, one of which was with the CEO Thomas Davidsson. With a total of 8 interviews conducted, we nearly covered 20% of the company. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted in person (2 interviews), on Skype (5 interviews), or over the telephone (1 interview), see Appendix 2 for the interviewee function description at Wackes.

At the beginning of each interview we first asked if it was okay to record the interview for transcription and analysis purposes. Then, we asked the respondents to state their name, position, time spent at Wackes, and describe a day in their shoes before officially beginning. The interview questions were semi-structured. They were compiled in alignment with the flow of the literature review, and can be found in Appendix 1. Interview questions were structured with the intention of specifying the generally applicable literature to the business-to-business SME marketplace. This style provided us with a sound framework and also still left room to use a fine application of the comments generated.

Due to the nature of the firm, each subject played a critical role in the business operations of the company and had well developed internal knowledge. Some were even mentioned as key subjects to the interviewer and were referred to us by the CEO. In order to ensure the subjects had a relation to our research, we attempted to interview subjects both inside and outside of Sweden. We were able to interview an employee from France, one from Atlanta and seven from Sweden. However, some of the Swedish employees dealt with international relations with the office in China so they were ideal subjects. Additionally, we had a scheduled interview with an employee in Oslo but due to an unfortunate circumstance he had resigned days before our scheduled time. This is a testament to the internal struggles small, global, firms face which will be elaborated upon in our analysis and discussion chapters.

We also reviewed the internal documents Wackes provided us. Unfortunately, they had not recorded any meeting minutes or relevant internal communication when first going global, so we were left with a company timeline and the current website, www.wackes.se. These documents were used as supplements to our analysis, development of the company overview, and also provided a base for an interview question regarding brand image.

5.8. Method of analysis

Kvale (1996) describes five main approaches for how to analyze data gathered from interviews: categorization of meaning, condensation of meaning, structuring of meaning through narratives, interpretation of meaning, and ad-hoc methods for generating meaning. We have chosen to analyze gathered data through the interpretation of meaning. In this way, ‘the researcher has a perspective on what is investigated and interprets the interviews from this perspective’ (Kvale, 1996).

Specifically, the data was analyzed thoroughly in order to draw accurate and specific conclusions. Firstly, all interviews were transcribed in full immediately after the interview. This allowed us to catalog the entirety of the interview and preliminarily highlight the potentially important statements and ideologies. Then, once all interviews were conducted, we were able to analyze the transcripts with highlighted results.

To do this, we lifted comments and important ideologies into a single document consisting of the findings from all interviews. Once these comments were simplified and laid out clearly, we were able to create over-arching themes of the statements. These themes were: the business functions a global brand serves, the impact of a global perception among the network, the impact being a global player has on brand associations, and the problems faced by a global organization. Once these themes were identified, we went through the aforementioned highlighted comments and placed them into their relevant categories.

Finally, to be sure we did not miss anything from the original interviews, we reviewed the original transcripts for a second time. Fortunately, we were able to realize several important ideologies which we had missed and included them into our findings.

5.9. Limitations of the study

However thorough, most research is not complete without limitations or suggestions for further research. Limitations are inherent with any research, and we encountered a few with this case study.

First, the time frame allotted to this work was rather narrow which caused literature research, empirical research, and analysis to be restricted in depth. The time frame of approximately three months allowed us, as researches, to designate approximately three weeks to these three major phases of research, with room for adaptation.

Second, the nature of a global brand reputation is very difficult to interpret from the inside out. Employees we interviewed may have somewhat of an idea how their customers perceive their global presence, but it would have proved extremely beneficial to also interview the companies whom Wackes works with to see how this global reputation is perceived. However, interviewing these companies on behalf of casework for Wackes could have potentially given off the wrong message to their clients, so this method of investigation was forgone to preserve the integrity of our research.

A third limitation to our research is the existing incomplete business-to-business branding literature from this moment. As previously mentioned, the field of business-to-business branding is rather new and under-researched causing a lack data and implications. However, we hope that our implications will further contribute to this somewhat narrow field and eventually encourage other researchers to do the same.

6. Theoretical framework

6.1. Globalization

For several decades it has been alluded that the world is becoming more and more homogenized, and firms need to respond to this phenomenon. Until the 1980's, most SME's focused their efforts on their country-of-origin, while large, multinational companies dominated the international business scene (Baronchelli & Cassia, 2011).

Back in 1983, Theodore Levitt spoke of the most powerful force driving the world today, technology. "It has proletarianized communication, transport and travel. It has made isolated places and impoverished people eager for modernity's allurements. Almost everyone everywhere wants all things they have heard about, seen, or experienced via the new technologies" (Levitt 1983). Furthermore, development and progress in areas of communication and technological advancements have allowed for access to information, people, and more ways of doing business across the world (Kaur & Sandhu, 2013).

Expanding on Levitt's ideology, some have developed his ideas of globalization further, suggesting that globalization is due to the convergence of income, media and technology. Authors (Jain, 1987; Czincota & Ronkainen, 1993; Assael, 1998; Bullmore, 2000, Cited in Mooij, 2003) believe this convergence will lead to a more homogeneous consumer culture. From the technological perspective the notion that companies are increasingly using intranets to communicate insights and best practice (Aaker, Joachimstahler, 1999), still holds true today. The ubiquity of technology is decreasing the potential for sustained competitive advantage. Thus, managers are focusing more on differentiating their brands on the basis of unique emotional, rather than functional, characteristics. They are also increasingly being forced to re-think their global product strategies (Ohnemus, 2000).

Another aspect of globalization is the rise of global consumer culture. Concentration, expansion, internationalization of the consumer goods industries, the growth of affluent consumer segments in every nation, democratization, loosening of class boundaries, and a quickened flow of information through the commercial media all contribute to the market expansion.

These have all led to the growth of global consumer culture (Arnold, Price and Zinkhan, 2004). This rise in global consumer awareness has even caused academics to create positioning strategies in an increasingly competitive marketplace, such as the Global Consumer Culture Positioning, or GCCP (Alden, Steenkamp, Batra, 1999). Ozsomer et al. (2012) epitomize the trend with the following statement “the globalization of markets has put global brands on the center stage”.

This branding center stage places a global focus on the five areas of research within branding; brand positioning, corporate image and reputation, strategic brand management, and brand growth (Keller, Lehmann, 2006).

6.2. Act of going global

Furthering the aforementioned tendency towards globalization, the idea of born global companies, young, rapidly internationalizing small and medium enterprises (Altshuler & Tarnovskaya, 2010), come into play. The internationalization process typically denotes a “process of increasing involvement in international operations” (Welch & Luostarinen, 1988).

From inception, these firms seek to gain competitive advantages from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in various countries (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). Due to the current scenario, SME’s can no longer stay out of the international arena and they need to be aware of foreign market opportunities, creation, and identification (Baronchelli & Cassia, 2011).

These types of firms have often been referred to as “born globals” however, some companies operate for a long time in domestic market, but then after some event globalize themselves; these companies are called “born-again global” (BAG) firms (Bell, McNaughton & Young, 2001).

Their behavior is defined as reactive (Bell et al, 2003).

“Companies whose brands have become more global reap some clear benefits” (Aaker, Joachimstahler, 1999). Aaker and Joachimstahler (1999) go on to encourage companies to create strong brands in all markets through global market leadership.

They have identified four qualities necessary in order to make this global transition. All four of these qualities lie in creating a sound global brand image.

1. Stimulate the sharing of insights and best practices across countries
2. Support a common global brand-planning process
3. Assign managerial responsibility for brands in order to create cross-country synergies and to fight local bias
4. Execute brilliant brand building strategies

Kapferer (2012) defines several reasons to create a global brand: economies of scale, synergies between countries, the speed with which innovations created worldwide can be brought to market, the existence of exploitable global segments, and the benefits of having an international image. He also suggests that modernity is expressed via internationalism, thus increasing perceived value.

Altshuler & Tarnovskaya (2010) have shown that it is possible for a young small to medium sized enterprises to build an international brand. They also note that a strong and unified vision for the company and its brand by the founder and management is of the utmost importance.

Furthermore, Baronchelli & Cassia (2011), highlighted four factors that have a positive impact on the international development of born global companies: positioning in niche-based industry, holding previous markets' and segments' knowledge, focusing on product innovation and firms' innovativeness, and gaining access to networks.

Many new industries have recently focused on branding, in order to avoid becoming commoditized in the wake of ever-increasing price pressures and global competition (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001).

The consultancy firm Interbrand (2014) defines global brands as brands that have awareness outside their base of customers and that generate at least one-third of their sales outside their home country. Steenkamp (2013) expands on her research to clarify how a brand is perceived as global, using international sales as a base.

In the aforementioned study of Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra (1999), it was proven that perceived globalness had a strong influence on purchase decisions. The results of this study proved that perceived globalness influenced primarily perceived quality, and perceived prestige of the brand.

This study, however narrow, provided grounds for Holt, Quelch, and Taylor (2003 as cited in Kapferer 2012) to research further on how perceived globalness influences brand preferences. Five "levers" of influence were discovered:

1. As an indicator of quality
2. Increased status conferred on the brand by its perceived globalness
3. Linked to the images and special characteristics attributed to individual countries
4. Increased responsibility, fostered by perceived brand globalness
5. American image associated with a number of global brands

In contrast to the popularly held notion that a global perception is best (Bauer, Exler, and Bronk, 2007), it was revealed a number of drawbacks are associated with global brands.

The group uncovered that the major drawback to a global brand is perceived inauthenticity. The variables to this drawback are the company's country-of-origin, and brand familiarity. Luckily, due to aforementioned technological advances (Levitt 1983; Jain 1987; Assael 1998; Bullmore 2000) there are increasing ways to gain authenticity.

During the act of going global, several factors internally in the organization change together with the scope of where the company offsets its services and/or products. Trapczyński & Wrona found it seems legitimate to adopt a more holistic definition of internationalization as “the process of adapting firms’ operations (strategy, structure, resources, etc.) to international environments” (2013).

This adaptation of the firm is something which needs to be translated throughout the whole organization, it involves ‘monitoring the performance of the operating divisions: to check on the use of the resources allocated; and, when necessary, redefine the product lines of the divisions so as to continue to use effectively the firm’s organizational capabilities’ (Chandler, 1993, cited in Birkinshaw et al., 2006).

In addition to this, the choice of an appropriate structure with which to conduct international operations should take into account numerous factors related to management control, human resources, standardization, product and market characteristics, and so on (Zenoff, 1971, cited in Herbert, 1984).

It is said by Andersson (2000) that it is not enough to be a firm with resources and opportunities in the environment; internationalization is part, or a consequence, of a firm’s strategy. It is an example of strategic change that can be defined as an entrepreneurial action (Schumpeter, 1934, cited in Andersson, 2000). However, the unfolding internationalization process produces its own set of challenges and choices, which can never be fully anticipated at the strategic formulation stage (Welch & Welch, 1996).

Unfortunately for SME's, the internationalization process has been argued to be typically emergent rather than deliberate in nature. For example, they are rarely a result of long-term strategic planning (Kaynak, Ghauri, & Olofsson-Bredenlo w, 1987; Brush, 1995 as cited in Agndal & Elbe, 2007). This internationalization also depends strongly on single individuals (Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Piercy, 1998; Lloyd-Reason & Mughan, 2002; Nummela, 2004 As cited in Agndal, H & Elbe, J, 2007). Namely, Kaur and Sandhu (2013) found that the role of founder or manager is central to the internationalization of a firm.

However, internationalization comes with several challenges for SME's. Small and medium sized enterprises are challenged due to their lack of resources (Altshuler & Tarnovskaya, 2010; Knight and Cavusgil, 2004; Partanen, Chetty & Rajala, 2011; Agngal & Elbe, 2007). In extreme cases, studies have found that a lack of international experience can lead to internationalization failure (Autio et al., 2000, as cited in Lee, Qian & Qian, 2012). Also, their processes evolve relatively slowly and in smaller steps compared to large firms (Agndal & Elbe, 2007).

6.3. Branding

Brands and branding have been the focus of scholars in the past and have been defined, interpreted, and evaluated in many different ways. However, there are several red threads connecting each and every definition and interpretation of brands and branding. The most widely accepted branding research has been done in the field of business to consumer branding (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1996; Alden, Steenkamp, Batra, 1999).

Brands are symbols in which stakeholders or customers create identities with (Opoku et al., 2007). Branding is most widely accepted as the process of creating brand image (Duncan, 2005) in order to sustain a competitive advantage (Fombrun, 1996). Also, branding focuses on the image of the company to its customers (Mudambi, 2002). In turn, brands can develop personalities similar to humans (Aaker, 1997).

In order to create brand success, brands must orchestrate experiences to be had around their brand in order to put customers in a more emotional mindset towards the brand. Furthermore, competitors can easily match the products and functions of a brand but it is not easy to imitate emotional experiences (Stern, 2000).

Efforts to identify pathways through which associations with global perceptions diffuse have been limited (Alden, Steenkamp, Batra 1999). These authors also acknowledge the literature of Kapferer (1992) stating awareness, trust, and global reputation are the best guarantee of future earnings, but call for research to help identify exactly how this plays out. Due to this lack of business-to-business research, it is often necessary to use business-to-consumer branding research as a reference point while determining business-to-business branding influences.

Furthermore, “the benefits accruing from strong business-to-business brands are similar to those for consumer brands, that is: the opportunity for greater value creation, the ability to charge premium prices, loyalty through powerful customer – brand relationships and the ability to sustain differentiation in crowded markets” (Lynch, Chernatony 2004).

In the introduction of this paper previous studies have been highlighted concerning specifically business-to-business branding with a focus on SME's. A further elaboration on this limited previous research comes from Cretu and Brodie (2005). They chose to study the correlation of brand image and company reputation in relation to three factors: perceived quality, customer value, and customer loyalty. They specifically looked into the business-to-business relationships between shampoo manufacturers and hair salons. Their research confirmed that the brand's image has a more specific influence on the customers' perceptions of the quality, while the company's reputation has a broader influence on perceptions of customer value and customer loyalty.

Furthermore, research conducted by Lynch and Chernatony (2004) resulted in three propositions to lay the foundations for successfully building business-to-business brands.

- *Proposition 1)* Organizations offering successful B2B brands need to recognize that industrial purchasers are influenced by both functional and emotional brand attributes.
- *Proposition 2)* For successful external brand communications, an organization's internal and external brand communications should emphasize both functional and emotional brand values.
- *Proposition 3)* Industrial salespeople should be trained to adapt their sales presentations and brand messages to accommodate the varying importance attached to different brand values by buying centre members.

6.4. Brand associations

Branding literature has concluded that a firm's real value lies outside the business itself: in the minds of potential buyers (Aaker, 1996). Aaker (1996) identified three key aspects of branding important to marketers: general name awareness, or how well known the brand is; the general reputation of the brand; and purchase loyalty, measured as the number of prior purchases of the brand.

One aspect of this real value is brand association, an area that this research is intended to develop upon further. Brand associations have been closely tied with brand equity, the overall essence of a firm. Hutton (1997) defined brand equity as buyers' willingness to: pay a price premium for a favored brand over a generic or unknown brand; recommend the brand to peers; and give special consideration to another product with the same company brand name, while Keller (1993) defines brand equity in terms of brand knowledge and unique brand associations.

Pekka Tuominen summarized brand associations very eloquently in *Managing Brand Equity* (1999). This definition, derived from Aaker's (1991, 1992) work, is the following:

“A brand association is any mental linkage to the brand. Brand associations may include, e.g., product attributes, customer benefits, uses, life-styles, product classes, competitors and countries of origins. The association not only exists but also has a level of strength. The brand position is based upon associations and how they differ from the competition. An association can affect the processing and recall of information, provide a point of differentiation, provide a reason to buy, create positive attitudes and feelings and serve as the basis of extensions” (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1992).

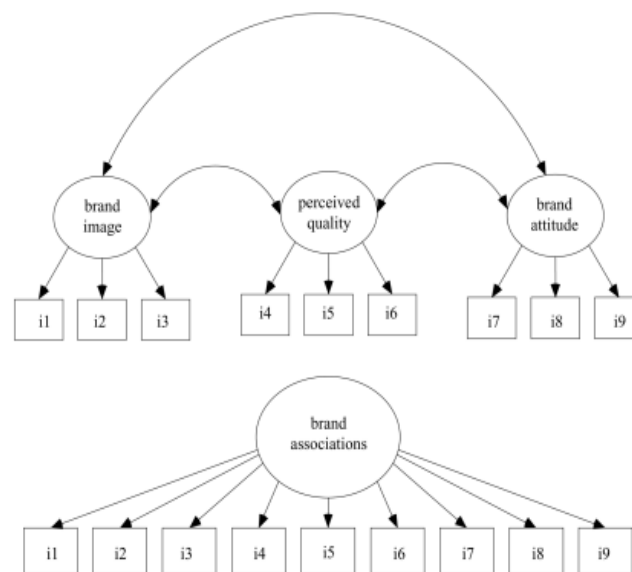


Figure 1

On the other hand, some believe brand associations are those inferences, beliefs, and information etc., occurring when a customer interacts with a brand (Brown & Dacin, 1997).

Finally, Keller (1998) believes brand associations are informal nodes linked to the brand nodes in memory that contain the meaning of the brand. A comprehensive compilation, of what comprises brand associations has been conceived by Low and Lamb Jr. (2000). They believe brand image, perceived quality, and brand attitude make up major pieces of brand associations (Figure 1).

Brand image is the reasoned or emotional perceptions consumers attach to specific brands (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). Or, the information linked to a brand in customer memory (Keller, 1993).

In a similar light, corporate image is a holistic view of a specific organization, which emerges as a specific attitude (Alvesson, 1990, Balmer and Greyser, 2007).

Balmer and Greyser (2007) expand on image further noting that corporate image is a point of view at a certain point in time, while reputation is an overall perception.

Company reputation has been broadly described as the long-term combination of the stakeholders' assessment about the firm, 'how well the firm meets expectations, and how well the firm's overall performance fits with its socio-political environment' (Logsdon & Wood, 2002).

This reputation addresses the image of the company to all its constituents, including investors (Mudambi, 2002). Consequently, corporate reputation has been defined as "a particular type of feed-back received by an organization from its stakeholders, concerning the credibility of the organization's identity claims" (Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

The influence of company reputation, or what is often referred to as corporate reputation, can be expected to become more important when there are higher levels of service (Cretu and Brodie, 2005).

Persson (2004) identified six brand image preceptors in business to business. In order of strength and importance they are relationship, product solution service, distribution, company, and familiarity.

Brand attitude is customers' overall evaluation of a brand, whether good or bad (Mitchell and Olson, 1981). Perceived quality is the customers' judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority (Zeithaml, 1988; Aaker and Jacobson, 1994). The results of Low and Lamb's (2000) study indicate that brand image, brand attitude, and perceived quality are separate and distinct dimensions of brand associations on an overall level.

They also discovered that brands, which do not have high familiarity with customers, do not have highly developed brand associations in consumers' memory, hence, brand associations for these less-known brands tend to be uni-dimensional. This will prove as an interesting angle in business-to-business research, depending on how well known the particular business is.

Another, somewhat contrasting way, in which researchers have deciphered brand associations is classifying them in three different scopes (Tuominen, 1999):

1. Attributes
2. Benefits
3. Attitudes

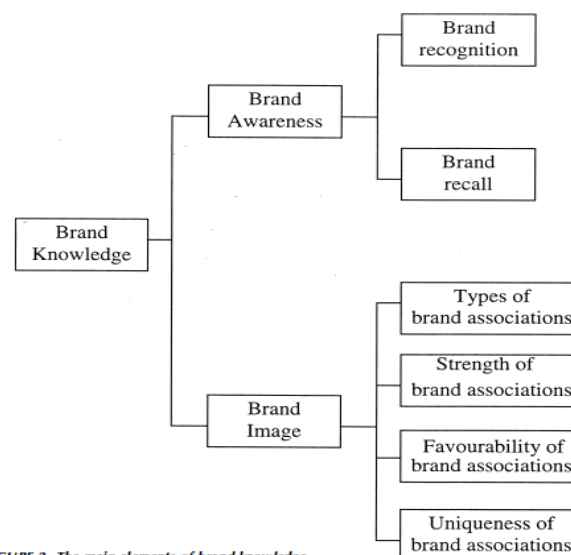


FIGURE 2. The main elements of brand knowledge.

This school of thought places brand image as an antecedent to brand associations. In other words, different types of associations make up a brand image. The brand image together with brand awareness, comprise brand knowledge, shown in Figure 2.

However, Tuominen (1999) does proceed to describe three different types of brand associations. Attributes, product related and non-product related; benefits, functional, experimental and symbolic, and attitudes.

The first types of brand associations are brand attributes. Due to the nature of our research in B2B global reputation, product-related attributes are not a necessary topic to divulge further into. The four types of non-product-related attributes are price information, packaging or product appearance information, user imagery i.e., what kind of a person uses the product or service, and usage imagery i.e., where and in which situations the product or service is used. Price is a particularly important attribute, because consumers often have strong beliefs about the price and quality (Tuominen, 1999).

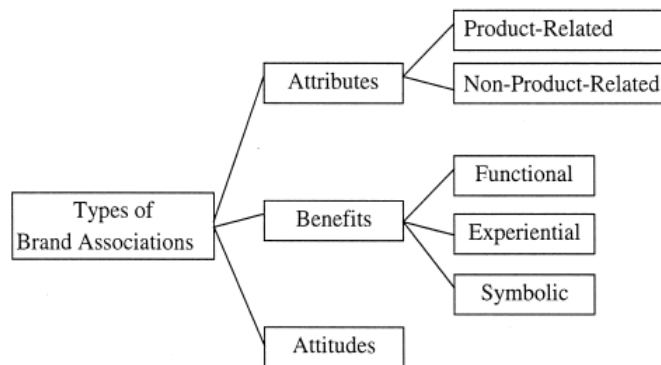


FIGURE 3. The main types of brand associations.

This notion towards price and quality ties in to the model designed by Law and Lamb (2000), where perceived quality plays a major role in brand associations. Perceived quality can be defined as "the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority" (Zeithaml, 1988). Brand benefits are the personal value and meaning that consumers attach to the product or service. Symbolic benefits are those proving most relevant in the analysis of B2B global reputation, they are the more extrinsic advantages of consumption (Tuominen, 1999). The third and final aspect of brand associations, according to Tuominen (1999), is brand attitudes. Brand attitudes are the most important aspect of analysis when considering how the reputation as a global firm impacts brand associations.

Brand attitudes are defined in terms of consumers' overall evaluations of a brand. Brand attitudes are important because they often form the basis for actions and behavior that consumers take with the brand (e.g., brand choice).

It is important to note that brand attitudes can be formed on the basis of benefits about product-related attributes and functional benefits and/or beliefs about non product-related attributes and symbolic and experiential benefits (Keller, 1993; 1998).

Tuominen (1999) has identified secondary brand associations as when a brand association is not directly related to the product or service, rather the brand becomes identified with this secondary entity. Secondary associations may arise from associations related to, e.g., the company, the country-of-origin, the distribution channels, a celebrity spokesperson of the product or service, or an event. Similarly, a brand may be associated with its "country-of-origin", in such a way that consumers infer specific beliefs and evaluations.

Finally, the distribution channels for a product may also create secondary associations. The last two types of secondary associations occur when the primary brand associations are linked to user and usage situation attributes, especially when they are for a particular person or event. In other words, secondary associations can be leveraged to create favorable, strong, and unique associations that otherwise may not be present (Keller 1993; 1998).

6.5. Brand association effects

"To tap the potential of B2B brands, business marketers must understand and effectively communicate the value of their brands"

- Mudambi (2002)

Brand management literature repeatedly alludes to the fact that a positive brand image leads to a competitive advantage (Aaker 1991, Keller 1993). Especially in business-to-business relationships, companies often undergo intense scrutiny before being chosen as a partner (Argyle 1990, Wittman et al., 2008). Brand associations can have both negative and positive impacts on an organization, but the importance of positive brand associations cannot be understated.

Favorable brand associations occur when consumers believe that the brand possesses attributes and benefits that satisfy their wants and needs (Kapferer, 2012).

Brand associations can also serve as a way to differentiate and imply superiority over other brands in a similar category, crucial to a brand's success (Tuominen, 1999). In the case of global business-to-business relationships, there are rarely instances where competitors do not exist. In this case, associations can help establish a category membership and define the scope of competition with other products and services, like global businesses. Positive brand associations also lead to brand differentiation based on emotional characteristics; these types of values are viewed as long lasting (Feldwick, 2002; Chaudhuri et al., 2002).

Furthermore, a company's reputation can have a strong impact on its customers. Greyser (1999) identified three ways in which a brand's reputation can be used as a way in which customers differentiate the brand in their own minds. The first relates to differentiating customers' perceptions of the product and service quality, so it is similar to the influence of the brand's image. The second and third are broader influences on customers' perceptions of financial value and their loyalty to the company.

These emotional connections translate directly into buying decisions, or as Bashe (2001) calls them "sales closers", emphasizing how important these emotional connections are in any sales environment. Alternatively, several studies have indicated that supplier selection may be strongly impacted by factors such as reputation, image and trust (Shaw, 1989; Abratt 1986); all pieces of positive overall brand associations.

Some research has suggested businesses, like humans, wish to engage with firms who mirror their own brand image (Campbell, 2010). A similar comparison has been drawn comparing business relationships to personal relationships regarding what makes an attractive fit from firm to firm. Namely, trust and its influence on commitment.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) later posit, alongside Achrol (1991, as cited in Morgan and Hunt, 1994), that trust is a major determinant of relationship commitment.

It has also been proposed that when exchange partners share values, they indeed will be more committed to their relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). “Shared values, the only concept that we posit as being a direct precursor of both relationship commitment and trust, is the extent to which partners have beliefs in common about what behaviors, goals, and policies are important or unimportant, appropriate or inappropriate, and right or wrong. Similarly, Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987) theorize that shared values contribute to the development of commitment and trust” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

In contrast, firms not sharing key characteristics like market positions, market share and financial strength are more likely to have “affair” style relationships as opposed to “marriages” (Wilkinson et al., 2005). Positive brand associations can be created naturally, but also through marketing. The success of a marketing program is reflected in the creation of favorable brand associations, i.e., consumers believe the brand has attributes and benefits that satisfy their needs and wants, so that a positive overall brand attitude is formed (Tuominen, 1999). Marketers must also consider the psychological concerns of business-to-business buyers, with the possibility of being an important means of differentiation in markets dominated by a focus on functionality (de Chernatony and McDonald, 2003).

While brand equity is beneficial for consumers to screen out messages in chaos, to reinforce the confidence of purchase decisions, and to create greater satisfaction, it will also conducive for sellers to increase marketing effectiveness and efficiency, to establish brand loyalty, to improve the profitability, and to distinguish from competitors (Huang, 2001). In short, branding can benefit the business customer by increasing purchase confidence. Purchasing a well-known brand can reinforce prior experience and relationships.

Branding can increase customer satisfaction (Mudambi, 2002). The main benefit of applying a universal, consistent, and focused brand strategy is that it has provided global scalability and branding efficiency, which translates into enhanced shareholder performance (Ohnemus, 2000).

There are also several additional factors that come into play in business-to-business branding worthy of investigation. Things like country-of-origin, network actors, and actions of salespeople have all been identified as pieces to the business-to-business branding puzzle.

In global branding, country-of-origin is an inherent identifier between firms. Country-of-origin has been identified as a critical marketing variable in consumer purchase decisions. The country-of-origin will also effect the consumer evaluation toward a product or service (Erickson, Johansson and Chao, 1984).

Networks are a significantly important factor of early internationalisation. Resources and market knowledge are inherently part of a firm because of strong networks and relationships. Often, connections are established long before firms were founded. This suggests that while the entity of the firm may have been new at the time of internationalisation, the resources, knowledge and experience which drive early internationalisation were in fact sources of competitive advantage that were leveraged from the founders/managers and networking (Kaur & Sandhu, 2013).

Consequently, these networks are important especially to SME's with limited resources that are highly dependent on the resources and expertise of others (Gilmore, Carlson, & Grant, 2001). Sepulveda & Gabrielsson (2013) were some of the first to discover that born global network content becomes increasingly strategic with internal resource growth.

The ability to utilize networks can, therefore, be seen as critical to the brand building efforts of SME's. Such relationships are valuable resources and essential to the competitive positioning of the SME (Håkansson & Snehota, 2006; Jarillo, 1988). By influencing network actors, an SME may harness their resources to achieve its own objectives (Ritter & Gemünden, 2003).

Furthermore, Morgan and Hunt (1994) expand on this stating that in order to be an effective competitor in the global economy, a third dimension of business-to-business branding is how exactly the brand is communicated.

While most business-to-business firms use a mixture of communication vehicles, the characteristics of many industrial markets dictate that personal selling is the dominant medium of communication. Ultimately, for many business-to-business firms, the successful development of buyer-seller relationships may hinge on the salesperson's behavior (Williams, 1998).

In contrast to consumer markets, in business-to-business markets, the responsibility for implementing segmentation recommendations generally falls on the sales representative, not the advertising executive (Robertson and Barich 1992).

7. Empirical Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results from the interviews conducted at Wackes. We will start by explaining how Wackes came to be and highlight the most important events on their way to becoming a global business-to-business brand. This includes their most important structural changes and their largest clients. Second, the topics of the interviews will be described together with how these topics were discussed by the interviewees. The final part of this chapter will describe general thoughts by the interviewees on Wackes, these will provide an layer of knowledge since these thoughts were not pre-determined, but discovered through the use of our semi-structured interviews.

7.1. Company overview

Steffan Pousette, Stefan Lydén, Christer Hellqvist, and Lars-Olof Wackelin founded Wackes in 1983 in Borås, Sweden. Seven years later, in 1990, it was time to expand their reach, an office in Stockholm and Munich were established. However, the Munich office was later liquidated in 1992. In an effort to stay competitive Wackes launched their first website, www.wackes.se, in 1995. By 1996 the Stockholm office doubled in size and their success was proven in 1998 when Wackes had their best year to date, boasting 8 million SEK in profits and they were able to purchase their building in Borås, Sweden. The following year Wackes entered their first merger, with PTH-Z in Lund, Sweden. This prompted their office space in Lund, Sweden and at this point Wackes totaled 50 employees.

After a relatively quiet period with no major events, Wackes became partner of the Special Ad Group (SAG) in 2006. The next year proved to be very important in Wackes' efforts of becoming a global business-to-business company, 2007 marked the set up of a buying and sourcing office in Shanghai, China.

With efforts to improve their set of competencies, Wackes earned their ISO 9001 and 14001 certifications, in combination with acquiring a promotion company called Sporrong.

Wackes' efforts for change started to materialize in the year 2011, they hired a country manager in Paris, France, a new CEO was appointed, and BANG Promotions was incorporated into the business. In 2012, Wackes began collaborating with KNP, allowing them access to a staff office in Hong Kong as well as in Shanghai. In that same year Wackes opened up shop in Oslo, Norway, led by another country manager. In 2013 Stadium Promotion, based in Stockholm, Sweden, was acquired and the integration process of quality systems was initiated.

Currently, Wackes is privately held, and had a 2013 turnover of 120 million SEK. Approximately 105 million SEK was generated within Sweden and the remaining outside of Sweden. Despite only possessing a 2.2% market share in Sweden, Wackes maintains the position as promotional product market leader; in an industry worth annually approximately 5 billion Swedish Kronor.

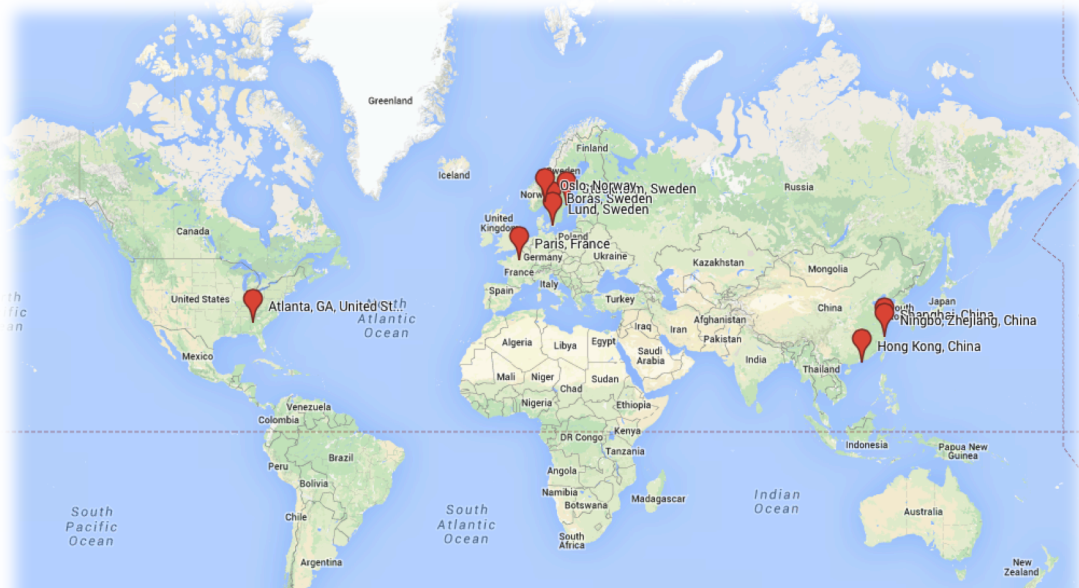
“As a market leader we have a 2.2% market share, which shows this business is extremely fragmented.”

- CEO

Wackes' three largest clients to date are Scania, Nordea, and Schneider Electric. Wackes promise to all their clients is to design, source, and distribute fine branded products. In addition, Wackes intends for their clients to gain 24/7 brand building awareness among employees, staff, clients, and fans.

Wackes maintains nine offices in five countries:

1. Borås Sweden
2. Lund Sweden
3. Stockholm Sweden
4. Paris France
5. Oslo Norway
6. Atlanta, GA United States of America
7. Hong Kong China
8. Shanghai China
9. Ningbo, Zhejiang China



Map 1 – Wackes World



Map 2 – Wackes Europe

7.2. Interview findings

Wackes being an SME provides a very interesting case concerning what are thought of as the benefits of working as a global company; not only on a management level, but also to the everyday employee. This section will provide an insight into the internal thought process of being global, highlighting notions about benefits and drawbacks of working global, while still being an SME organization.

When asked about working in a global organization, the interviewees' answers differed in varying degrees. These differences showed the type of views within the organization from the perspective of employees. Either, answers were focused on how, for example, the organization could benefit from being global, or the answer was focused on how a client could benefit from the organization being global. These differences will be noted upon throughout the following discussion. We have sorted the empirical findings into categories we discovered were evident after the fact. These categories are later transformed into the "Four F's" and contain the functions of being global, the issues of being global, the global impact on brand image, and the external perceptions of a global firm.

Interviewees were divided into several groups due to the nature of how Wackes is organized and in order to preserve their anonymity. Employees placed into group 'A' are employees working in one of the facilities Wackes has in Sweden. Employees placed in to group 'B' are employees working in one of the facilities Wackes has in France, the United States, or China. To clarify that not all statements are made by the same person in either one of the groups, a number behind the group distinction 'A' or 'B' is shown; e.g. Employee A-1 or Employee B-1. To emphasize the importance of some of the quotes, the statements made by the CEO are not shown as being from either group 'A' or 'B', the CEO has a separate notation.

7.3. Functions of being global

Concerning the benefits of working for a global organization, it was noted that this allowed the organization to work with large clients.

“Landing big clients is a major benefit of being global. Going global means you have the opportunity to work with global clients.”

- Employee A-1

“It’s very important to show possible customers that we are global, ‘that we are not that guy in the corner, we are really the one and only here.’ ”

- Employee A-3

“The large companies we aim for are also international and they need to work with companies, which have the same strategies as we have.”

- Employee B-1

In addition to be able to land larger clients, working on a global basis also results in larger orders, which helps to create better pricing according to the CEO. Wackes is able to show current and future clients that they are one of the few companies in the world providing a specific service and this is highlighted through the fact that a large portion of their clients are customers through existing clients’ referrals.

“It’s not our size; it’s our customer’s size that will attract other customers. So I would say our biggest advantage is referrals.”

- CEO

“It [having global offices] shows that we know what we are doing.”

- Employee A-1

From the inside out, clients have been perceived as satisfied with the work Wackes does. Wackes employees see themselves as desirable to have as a global partner, even when the client does not necessarily work on a global basis.

“Clients who work with us and use our service in different offices, I think are pretty happy about it most of the time. We have customers who really want a global partner. Maybe not use it but they want the thinking to be the right way.”

- Employee A-3

The perspective from the clients was also taken into account:

“They [clients] feel that they want to work with someone who understands the issues that ride along with being global.”

- Employee A-3

“We can follow our clients or customers when they decide to go international or if they want to go international and need help with their promotional items for their organization abroad.”

- Employee A-4

When asked about the benefits of being a global company, the majority of the interviewees spoke about the ability of Wackes being a global company, while at the same time acting like a local company. The presence they have globally with their nine offices shines through in this description given by an interviewee:

“You know the habits [of clients] locally, so you can also adapt the item, within the customers’ brand image kept in mind. “

- Employee B-1

Working with smaller clients in multiple locations across the world is something advantageous for Wackes; however it is not only an advantage for smaller clients that Wackes is a global company. An emphasis was laid on the ability of Wackes to provide a structure in between global demands and local differences, in order for large global organizations to take advantage of this.

“If a global customer works with domestic suppliers each and every one they would work with would be different. We provide a ‘red thread’ through the assortment.”

- Employee A-1

“You can sit anywhere, fly to the client and service them as long as you have that little global distribution network, which we do.”

- Employee B-2

At the same time, this shows the importance of having the ability to understand cultural differences.

“We have a local in the countries where we do business, who will understand the type of business that is being used in that country. For example, Spanish clients told me that they think in another way about branded items or giveaways: ‘I don’t care if it works when we leave the fair, I just want it to work for the hours I’m there. Because I don’t want to pay more than necessary for these items.’”

- Employee A-3

One interviewee also pointed out the importance of attracting correct talent internally for Wackes. Emphasizing that Wackes being a global company is interesting for future employees:

“Wackes being global is interesting for attracting employees, there are people in this industry, who think it is exciting to have the opportunity to work international or maybe even be working in another country.”

- Employee A-4

In addition to the aforementioned benefits of being a global company, it also allows Wackes to differentiate themselves from competitors. When it comes to solving logistical problems, Wackes has the upper hand.

“Being international is a really good way to differentiate us from competitors. We are able to quickly fix problems, logistical problems, and get items quickly anywhere in the world”

- Employee B-1

“If you compare us with others, I think that we are more global.”

- Employee A-1

“ Clients see that we are a global company, which results in them knowing that we have the capabilities to help them with global logistic problems.”

- Employee A-3

Employee A-3 even states that Wackes continually pitches to prospective clients the fact that they have global offices:

“Yes, all the time. That is one of the unique things of Wackes.”

- Employee A-3

7.4. Issues of being global

After the questions related to what the interviewees perceive as benefits, we looked at the other side of the coin to see whether they could also account for any drawbacks of being global. The prevailing subject throughout all the interviews appeared to be related to the internal organization of Wackes.

“It’s tough to keep a small organization together when you are in 6-7 different places, if we have been in one place from the start, the cost would have been much less than today. If we had gathered all the knowledge, the competence in one place, that would have been more easier than to spread it out.”

- CEO

What is interesting to focus upon here is that the CEO illustrates and is aware of the problem and throughout the organization the problem is viewed in the same way. The CEO clearly states it could have made a major difference if the organization would have started out as a global company.

Employee A-3 and A-4 paint the picture in a different light and focus on the experiences felt among the three offices in Sweden:

“The biggest drawback is mostly internally, because it’s tough to communicate. We have a problem in Sweden with 3 offices to communicate and I guess that the other [offices] out there think that we are really bad on communication.”

- Employee A-3

“It should be much easier to have one office where everybody works at one spot.”

- Employee A-4

Drawbacks are not only seen internally, the company structure also results in some external issues. Also, a comparison between local clients in Sweden and clients across the globe is of significance. Due to the impacts of being global, Employee A-4 states the following:

“We are quite a small company. We don’t have that many people in our organization and not that many people abroad. In the US our single-person office has to be good at everything, he has to be good at logistics, he has to be good at products, he has to be a good salesman, he has to be really something extra.”

- Employee A-4

Building upon this problem of some offices having to do a lot of work in combination with being active globally:

“The speed and tempo of work are slowed down. Everything is not just forced through the factories and production, you need to check a lot of more factors and comply to regulations if you are global.”

- Employee A-1

The last part of the previous quote brings us to the final major drawback that was mentioned. Compliance to international regulations is of high importance to a company like Wackes. Especially with their focus on CSR, which will be elaborated upon further in this chapter, different rules apply to different parts of their global range.

“To adhere to all the compliances is a really tough task, to be compliant with your products everywhere.”

- Employee A-1

7.5. Globalness impacting brand image

Since Wackes is a business-to-business company, it could not be assumed that they have considered the creation of a brand image. Therefore, interviewees were asked about their thoughts on Wackes' communication of a coherent brand image and how this works. The results were mixed among those asked. The CEO stated the following:

“Internally there are two schools; 1) most of the people in our company believe that the most important thing is that we help our clients. 2) Some in our company are very much into the importance of having a very strong brand image, a very strong home page, and really thought through all what we're saying in our communication externally. Personally I think we have probably not been given this that much of attention.”

- CEO

Even though the CEO stated that most of the people at Wackes were mainly concerned with how they can help their clients the best, the following was said about the brand image of Wackes. Some only stated a couple of terms:

“Stability and high service.”

- Employee A-2

“Trust, success, safe, reliable, and since we are Nordic: expensive”.

- Employee A-3

While some answered with more details:

“We may be very bold, but very honest. We believe in a handshake, that’s as good as a signed contract.”

- Employee A-1

“We are a down to earth company, we are Swedish and very keen on that we are doing our thing, including good products, and logistics that work.”

- Employee A-4

“We say what we do and we do what we say. We never overcommit, we are trustworthy, we always get the client a fair value for their money, and we never gouge them. However, there is no sex-appeal involved, Wackes is not sexy.”

- Employee B-2

“We treat people, as we want to be treated ourselves. We are very client and action oriented, so if there is a problem, we fix it.”

- CEO

However, not only a consensus exists amongst the interviewees. The brand image is not just taken for granted and the quotes below show an interesting view on what could be changed in order to maximize Wackes’ potential:

“At the moment we don’t look like who we are. We should sharpen up our offer and look more as we want to look like, in this way companies can perceive us in the way we want them to. We are like any other B2B company at the moment, but what we would like is to show that we have taken a step aside. That we aren’t like those standard B2B’s because we have chosen another way. We have another way of thinking when it comes to these kind [promotional goods/branded] of items.”

Employee A-5

“We do have a brand name, I just don’t know how you would further enhance that. I do think that we’ve done an okay job in the business-to-business market, but I also think that we could do a better job. It’s just a matter of allocating resources and time, so I think the aspect of having a brand image could be upgraded for sure.”

- Employee B-2

The misunderstanding of how Wackes could further enhance their brand image is also felt in top management; through an example of their webshop the CEO said the following:

“We see that there is a demand of more fashionable webshops, more technology, and more cool different functions. So, of course we can learn a lot from B2c because they are very much ahead of us. Young people they actually do all of their business on the Internet, which is something we need to follow. We’re trying now to get younger people into the company so we can follow the development.”

- CEO

7.6. Perceptions of a global firm

Due to the time restrictions at hand while conducting this research it was deemed as not being worthwhile to conduct research at the clients of Wackes. Nevertheless, we wanted to gather data on an as close as possible representation of Wackes' brand image. Therefore we asked how Wackes' employees think clients perceive the current brand image of Wackes, even though an image is not actively being communicated:

“To show that you are an international player gives you a more solid image, a more professional image. Clients' head offices know that they can have the same communication through the world to monitor their brand image.”

- Employee B-1

“We don't have any kind of appeal, because we are Wackes it's more of a trust factor building a relationship. When a Nordic client approaches us, we highlight we are Swedish, when it's an international client we amplify this to a lesser extent, then it's more the international approach we look at.”

- Employee B-2

Certainly this could be considered as a bold statement, Wackes not having any appeal due to the fact that they build client relationships made of trust in addition to not amplifying the Swedish heritage. This is however not a general consensus amongst those interviewed. According to some, the Swedish heritage of Wackes is definitely a form of appeal.

“When I have to introduce us I say that Wackes is Swedish. To me it gives an impression of quality and that Sweden is reliable. Customers expect creativity when they hear this.”

- Employee B-1

“They like the design perspective from Scandinavia. We think different, clean and with not as many styles and details. We don’t just sell them a pen, we tell them why they should use this pen.”

- Employee A-1

The impact of being a Scandinavian firm pays dividends in the observation that clients keep on coming back even though there are cheaper alternatives. The following quote expresses this explicitly:

“We’re known for good products, good quality and not the cheapest one on the market but it works when they come to us. Most of the time you notice they haven’t checked with others because they think: ‘it’s okay with Wackes and it’s reliable so we’ll go with them’.”

- Employee A-3

The perception of clients on Wackes’ brand is also described with the notion of Wackes’ ability to differentiate themselves from their competition. In the organization they are convinced that the products that Wackes has are an added value to what the client desires:

“They [clients] perceive Wackes as a very good company, we have good quality, and our suggested products are thought through. We have an idea that the products we are bringing to the table should do something. They communicate for the client, not only should to be a fun product, but to also do some good for the company and I think that our clients can see that we are trying to do that.”

- Employee A-4

“They [clients] think that they are working with a high-quality, stable company, even though sometimes they may think we are too high priced sometimes. Everyone thinks products are nice, but it’s not about what you would like to have, it’s about what it can do and mean to a company.”

- Employee A-5

The appreciation of clients for Wackes' services translates into the feedback Wackes receives. Whether it is a client who has been a customer of Wackes for over 30 years, or a client who recently joined the clientele of Wackes. The next statement of the CEO also shows on which factors Wackes could improve:

“When we ask clients what they think about us, for example Scania, who has been a client for 30 years, they say that they appreciate our honesty, we never say anything that’s not true. And regarding Schneider, a client from France, we were up head to head against Staples [an American promotions company] and they were offering logistics centers all over Europe, they had offices all over Europe, but what they didn’t have was soul, knowledge, or creativity. We do have those facets. They say that our machine is working, that we deliver when we are supposed to.”

- CEO

Also the CEO admitted that not all the feedback that is received is positive. He showed us that some of the clients feel Wackes shows a lack of initiative:

“What they say sometimes is that we have a lack of initiative, we are reacting, and we are not ahead and proposing. We have to be more proactive, that is the feedback we get from some clients.”

- CEO

7.7. Business-to-business/business-to-consumer

This feedback of clients, to be more proactive for example, is taken into account internally by Wackes. An interesting notion, which naturally evolved throughout the interviews, was whether Wackes could learn from how branding is used in the business-to-consumer industry or how it would compare to a companies active in the business-to-consumer market.

“I think that we have a lot to learn [from business-to-consumer market] anyway, because most of our business is through web shops and I think it is the same way to sell things.”

- Employee A-2

The realization exists within the company that there is a lot to learn when it comes to how Wackes is selling their products to their clients.

However, the unique thing about Wackes’ business is that the products, which they sell to their clients, end up being sold (or given) to every day consumers.

“It’s more and more important for us to think who is actually receiving the products. It’s the end-user, not the company we are selling to.”

- Employee A-3

Another aspect of why it is very important to understand the clients and adapt to the new developments in the market is as follows:

“It is very important that you understand the clients’ needs, that you have your ear to the ground and see what happens out there. Things are starting to move really fast, everybody can get something really fast. But if you are not there when the client needs you, you don’t know what will happen tomorrow. That’s very important in the b2c industry, and becomes more and more important in the b2b industry. The competition is getting harder and harder and even if we think our clients are loyal I think that is something that could be changed. Everybody is looking for a better price and a better deal, faster deliveries and better products. So we really have to be somebody.”

- Employee A-4

Throughout the interviews, the answers given by the Wackes’ employees, whether on the aspects which work effortlessly or on the aspects where improvement is needed, were built upon their mutual interest for the well being of the company.

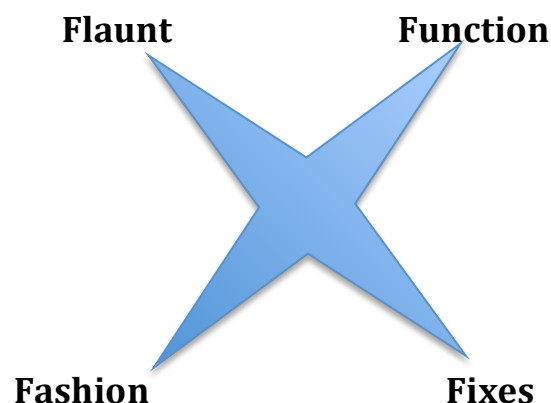
The ability of Wackes employees to self-reflect is not something that can be found in every organization and some great feedback was received while working with the interviewees:

“It’s very interesting to see these questions through and I’ve learned a lot while considering them.”

- Employee A-4

8. Analysis

A thorough analysis has been conducted of literature and empirical results from the Wackes case. Combining the findings of branding scholars with the experience of first-hand employees in a global business-to-business firm, it is possible to draw several congruent notions. In turn, a comprehensive picture of business-to-business global branding is developed. Ultimately, these congruencies were grouped into four categories: the function of a global brand, the perception of a global brand, the impact being a global brand has on brand image, and finally the problems associated with being a global business to business firm. For simplicity of comprehension, we have developed a model, which applies to our findings at Wackes. We have defined this as the “Four F’s of impact”. These four concepts describe what an SME in the business-to-business environment is likely to encounter. The F’s have been defined as: **Flaunt**- an external perception that a firm is more desirable due to their global competencies. **Function**- the actualized internal benefits that being a global firm has on daily operations. **Fashion**- The external perception that a brand’s image is of a higher standard due to their global orientation. **Fixes**- The internal struggles an SME may encounter throughout the process of expanding globally.



8.1. Flaunt

“An external perception that a firm is more desirable due to their global competencies.”

The most prevalent association between reviewed literature and findings within Wackes is tied to the curb appeal of a global brand and its impact on a consumers' perception. The ability to attract global clients, a business' country-of-origin, the ease of expanding within the network, and the appearance of success were all echoed across literature and within our investigation.

Perhaps what was most vehemently communicated was the notion that being perceived as a global firm allows you to attract global clients. Employees, as well as in the studied literature, communicated this ideology implicitly and explicitly. Three of Wackes' Swedish employees noted that being global gives you the opportunity to work with global clients. Thomas Davidsson, CEO, specified this by saying that Wackes was chosen by LiuGong, a Chinese machinery company, due to the fact that Wackes had a global setup and was a Western oriented company. An international employee echoed this process, stating:

“Global companies want to see an international ideology.”

The fact that a global company is more attractive to other global companies was also implicitly communicated on several occasions. Basically, employees confirmed the idea that companies want to work with those with a similar brand image and shared values (Campbell, 2010; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Both a Swedish and an international employee noted that businesses prefer to engage with other businesses who have the same strategy or “similar ways of looking at the world”.

A second facet of the perception of a global brand lies within the country-of-origin effect. The country-of-origin will effect evaluation of the product or service according to Ericon, Johansson and Chao (1984). When asked about

the perception a Swedish company communicates, six Wackes employees, including the CEO, believe that originating from Sweden gives an impression of quality, reliability, and creativity. Some even expanded that Scandinavia is the dominating factor in this perception, above Sweden alone:

“They [customers] like the design perspective from Scandinavia. We think different, clean and with not as many styles and details.”

However, this was not always seen as a positive benefit. One employee stated that the Nordics have a reputation of being expensive, which excludes them from client races in Southern Europe for example. Another contradicted this idea completely, stating that a Swedish company only has appeal to Nordic clients and that international firms are only concerned with Wackes being international as well. This creates an interesting whirlwind in what the best way to communicate an international firm with strong roots in a certain country is.

A third benefit derived from the perception of a global brand is the ability to expand through a network. Brand building within networks is critical to the competitiveness of an SME (Hakansson & Snehota, 2006; Jarillo, 1988). CEO Thomas Davidsson stated himself that:

“Being perceived as global allows you to expand in the network”

Networks are clearly a crucial piece to the puzzle in the business-to-business world and according to discoveries made at Wackes, leveraging these networks is easier as a perceived global brand.

A final noted congruency between literature review and empirical research is the notion that being perceived as a global firm shows that the company is successful or knows how to effectively accomplish tasks. Three Wackes employees said that being global shows that you can handle complicated work. Another suggested that it shows other businesses you have “logistics that work”. A third suggestion was that being a global company shows other companies that you are a stable firm. Literature by Holt, Quelch and Taylor

(2003 as cited in Kapferer, 2012) stated that being global indicates quality to other firms. While no employees indicated quality was an effect, the combination of quality logistics, stability, and the ability to handle complicated work indirectly contribute to the definition of quality.

8.2. Function

“The actualized internal benefits that being a global firm has on daily operations.”

Function is an aspect derived from the appeal that a global brand has. In essence, this appeal creates effects alluded to by both researchers and employees of the industry. Global brand image has been duly noted as a driving factor behind how a business-to-business brand functions on several levels. Specifically, impacting competitive advantage, communication to other firms, and as a profit driver.

Four out of eight employees specialized the importance of differentiating themselves (Wackes) with their competitors. One international employee noted:

“Being international is a really good way to differentiate us from competitors. We are able to quickly fix problems, logistical problems, and get items quickly anywhere in the world”

This association perceived by consumers serves as a point of differentiation in a competitive market (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1992). Furthermore, Greyser (2009) expands on this notion stating that reputation can be used as a way in which customers differentiate product and service quality. Finally, positive brand image leads to competitive advantage (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Wackes’ employees repeatedly communicate competitive advantage when asked about the functions of being a global firm. This conveys an importance and appears to have a significant impact on business.

Secondly, Wackes' employees illustrate the function of being able to communicate on a local level as a major benefit of being a global firm. Essentially, this function is being close in proximity to customers around the world. Wackes' initial global expansion to France occurred in response to the potential business Schneider Electric could bring. In addition to this, the creation of Wackes' office in Atlanta was essentially an act of following an existing client, Qlikview. Before Qlikview began work with Wackes, according to a Wackes employee, they had a "perfectly" functioning relationship with another promotional product supplier. However, this supplier could not function according to their needs abroad in Atlanta, Georgia. So, Wackes was chosen due to their willingness to expand globally over another competitor which ties back to the function of competitive advantage. Furthermore, four out of eight employees alluded to local communication and service as a function of being a global firm. A Swedish employee said it best:

"It's very important to show possible customers that we are global, that we are not that guy in the corner, we are really the one and only here."

Scholars abide by this school of thought as well. Kapferer (2012) defined synergies between countries as a primary reason to create a global brand.

A third function of a global brand in business-to-business relationships is increased profits. One Swedish employee noted that being a global company helps them reach larger companies, and helps Wackes grow bigger.

Naturally, dealing with larger companies and growing bigger is a direct determinant of profits. International sales are such an important factor in perceiving a brand as global that Steenkamp (2013) even based her definition of a global brand on it. Furthermore, it was proven that globalness has a strong influence on purchase decisions thus effecting profits (Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra, 1999).

An international employee further committed to this school of thought mentioning that in the sales pitch to a global client one of the crucial touch points is that Wackes is global and can provide global services to meet their needs.

8.3. Fashion

“The external perception that a brand’s image is of a higher standard due to their global orientation.”

After global perception and the functions of being a global brand, another thread running through both literature and empirical research is the impact being global has on brand associations and its effects on the firm. *Although the way in which Wackes has gone global was very unconventional, by following their clients in an act of “chasing” business, they have nonetheless established a firm footing as a global brand. Regardless of how they have got to this point, there is still a very evident impact on the brand image. Our results indicate that all a firm needs, in this case, is one employee in a given country in order to earn the perception of being a global brand. This perception has had an evident impact on the firm’s brand image and associations.*

According to Low and Lamb (2000) and Tuominen (1999), price and quality plays a huge role in brand associations. Furthermore, a piece of these brand associations noted by Low and Lamb (2000) is the brand image. One employee said that showing you are international gives off a more solid, professional image.

Wackes employees noted the importance of product and service quality to their brand image. The CEO believes that some employees believe the most important thing to do is help the clients with high-service and high-quality products which in turn has an impact on their perception of Wackes’ image. Cretu and Brodie (2005) noted the converse, whose research concluded that brand image has a specific influence on a customers’ perception of quality.

Our analysis thus far has alluded to mainly positive correlations of being a global brand and its impact on brand image and performance. However, there were certainly some drawbacks that were uncovered mainly through empirical research and are occasionally echoed in the literature.

8.4. Fixes

“The internal struggles an SME may encounter throughout the process of expanding globally”

One of the most commonly noted drawbacks within the firm was the issue of internal organization. Multiple employees, and even the CEO, stated that the scattered nature of having a global entity provides for some communication problems. Zenoff (1971, cited in Herbert, 1984) states that operations need to consider several internal factors such as management control and human resources when embarking on international operations. Altshuler & Tarnovskaya (2010) show in their research it is possible for small to medium sized enterprises to build an international brand; for Wackes it is important to communicate this coherent international brand ideology. Also, as suggested by Altshuler & Tarnovskaya (2010), in order to create this coherent image, it has to start at the management level of Wackes. The first step in this process has already been taken by Wackes, since the CEO recognizes the lack of a coherent message. This helps the organization to further emphasize on the factors that have a positive impact (Baronchelli & Cassia, 2011) on international development and on being a born-again global.

The lack of communication has turned into a lack of congruency in communicating the brand values and messages. According to Lynch and Chernatony (2004), all organizations internal and external communications should emphasize both functional and emotional brand values; which is clearly something in the works for Wackes. Wackes currently uses the realization of the CEO as momentum, using technology and perhaps hiring more specialized employees to ease the internal communication flow.

Unfortunately, the lack of coherence throughout the organization alongside the difficulties that come along with communication translate into a weak structure as noted by several within the organization. The CEO mentioned this need to gain structure quite eloquently:

“If we can still be creative but a little bit more structured, then I think there is a huge potential and that is potential we’re seeking.”

It is evident the CEO admits to be coping with several challenges for his company in order to internationalize. Correctly allocating resources and having to deal with the characteristics of an SME being, unlike larger organizations, relatively slow in evolution processes and needing to work in smaller steps (Agndal & Elbe, 2007) is of high importance.

The reason for the lack of structure the CEO is talking about is more than likely due to the way in which Wackes opened its global offices. For SME's the internationalization process is rarely a result of long-term strategic planning (Kaynak, Ghauri, & Olofsson-Bredeno w, 1987; Brush, 1995 as cited in Agndal & Elbe, 2007). Wackes started out as a local company, serving the market of Sweden back in 1983. At that time the prospect of working, as an international company was not a prevalent idea. However, the increasing involvement in international operations (Welch & Luostarinen, 1988) during the late 90's resulted in being an international company by definition. According to the definition of (Bell, McNaughton & Young (2001) this would make Wackes fit in the category of born-again globals (BAG). Wackes' behavior reflects the definition of Bell et al. (2003) as reactive.

Instead of making internationalization a part of their strategy from the moment of initiation, Wackes adapted their strategy post-international expansion. According to Andersson (2000), it is not enough to be a firm with resources and opportunities in the environment; internationalization is part, or a consequence, of a firm's strategy. However, in Wackes' defense, the unfolding internationalization process, especially as a BAG, produces its own

set of challenges and choices, which can never be fully anticipated at the strategic formulation stage (Welch & Welch, 1996).

Another rather trivial problem was addressed by two employees, the ability to meet global regulation and certification guidelines for certain products. However, both employees noted that with quality work this hurdle could be avoided rather easily.

Another few issues noted by Wackes employees and the CEO as well are some things to be learned from the business-to-consumer market. Wackes employees noted how increasingly important it is to have an online presence and specifically an active and creative webshop.

Several employees noted how the webshop for them used to be seen as a “modern fax machine” but they all noted the stress the younger, newer generation puts on technological features like webshops. This desire is in line with work done by Aaker and Joachimstahler back in 1999 stating that companies are increasingly using intranets to communicate insights and best practice. Furthermore, businesses are increasingly being forced to re-think their global product strategies (Ohnemus, 2000).

Overall, it is rather evident that being a global brand has a significant impact on business operations of an SME. Four main subjects of these have been categorized as the impact of perception, the function, the impact on image, and the pitfalls an organization may face.

9. Discussion

Throughout this research, we have conducted a thorough literature review, gathered empirical data from Wackes through several in-depth interviews, and analyzed this material very thoroughly. This section is intended to provide implications and a reference point for theoretical and practical stakeholders.

9.1. Theoretical implications

Having a brand image is unfortunately not an automatic ‘top-of-mind’ thought for companies active in a business-to-business market. This was evident through analyzing the case of Wackes. Especially with regard to Wackes working on a global playing field, no up front structure was put together; the company was designed to work in the local market of Sweden. Neither does its structure support a congruent brand image, nor a cohesive internal structure to support their global services. This implication suggests a practical viewpoint, however presenting this case subject and how Wackes works in their respective environment is a theoretical implication in its own right.

To elaborate, the case study of Wackes is very unique; it provides a perspective asked for by academics Ohnemus (2000), Mudambi (2002), Krake (2005), and Opoku et al. (2007). The existing branding literature on SME’s working in business-to-business markets was not considered sufficient and our case study provides specific insights into how an organization actually behaves while going through the change of becoming a global SME brand.

The ability of small medium sized enterprises to build an international brand definitely exists (Altshuler & Tarnovskaya, 2010). It starts with the organization itself and this realization is something that should work top-down. Wackes’ management is in the midst of directing people internally and is in that way able to create a coherent image (Alshuler & Tarnovskaya, 2010).

Zenoff's (1971) illustrated the importance of a global firm considering several internal factors that deal with brand image and the CEO of Wackes shows efforts of addressing these internal factors.

Just like Welch & Welch (1996) state, an organization always has the possibility to bump into unexpected events. This comfort provided by Welch & Welch places less of a strain on Wackes to consider and adjust the problems they have in an uncontrolled manner. To properly carry out this rather complex transition the correct tools have to be utilized. This is evident in their use of new technologies and hiring new employees for specific tasks. **The by Ohnemus (2000) stated complex business environment SME's are active in is evidently also the case for Wackes; especially due to their nature of not being build as a global SME.**

Nevertheless, the abilities of how well thought out a structure has to be in order to help a firm expand globally are limited. It should not be underestimated that the positive results of going international amplify the quality and performance of the organization. Wackes' employees indicated that their clients see Wackes as a quality organization, confirming Holt, Quelch, and Taylor (2003). It shows that the process of SME internationalization is rarely a result of long-term strategic planning (Kaynak, Ghauri, & Olofsson-Bredenlo w, 1987; Brush, 1995 as cited in Agndal & Elbe, 2007).

Campbell (2010) and Morgan & Hunt (1994) pledged the idea of companies wanting to work with organizations that attain a similar brand image and shared values. Even though other scholars made statements, which contradict their view, our research suggests a compliance with the thoughts of Campbell, Morgan & Hunt.

Adding to this, we found compliances to existing theoretical thoughts from Aaker (1991, 1992) and Greyser (2009). Being a global company in a very fragmented market with small market leaders helps Wackes differentiate themselves from the competition.

The advantage of being a born-again global is that they already have experience from their years as being a local company and can build upon the tacit knowledge already existing in the organization. Making adjustments to fit the international market is a smaller step compared to building this from scratch.

When investigating further into how it is possible for Wackes to differentiate them from competition, Hakansson & Snehota (2006) and Jarillo (1988) see it as a critical element to build upon the brand within the networks the company finds itself in. This investigation led us to the implication that companies in business-to-business markets share this ideology. As shown by the CEO, Wackes uses current client referrals as a competitive advantage in their SME filled market to attract and bind new clients.

Another discovery while conducting this research is concerned with the country-of-origin effect. Ericson, Johansson and Chao (1984) established that an effect of the country-of-origin does exist in the evaluation of products or services; Wackes offered us an in-depth insight into this phenomenon existing in practice, specifically on the importance and use of their heritage.

Despite the above-mentioned contributions to existing theory, we consider our main contribution to be related to a combination of two ideologies existing within the organization. To clarify, these two ideologies are related to two schools of thought within the Wackes organization. The first ideology is that the most important thing is to service and help current clients. The second is that having a brand image is crucial in order for Wackes to gain more clients.

The dialogue that exists between employees has to consider both ideologies. Advantages of working with high-service and high-quality products should help the perception of Wackes' image, therefore generating new clients. The fact that Cretu and Brodie (2005) noted the discourse, that a customers' perception of quality is specifically influenced by the brand image, shows a combination of these two views could evolve into a positive relationship.

9.2. Practical implications

The advantage of conducting this qualitative research in an SME like Wackes is that the eight in-depth interviews provided us with some major insights. The most significant observation we made of Wackes' brand image is that there is no consensus amongst the ones active in the organization, as noted previously referring to the two ideologies of the organization. Several thoughts came to mind when thinking of what Wackes' brand image is or what Wackes stands for.

This whirlwind of interpretations results in not having a cohesive image communicated internally nor externally. Their differences are not only shown through what is thought of being the brand image, the country-of-origin importance is also not considered as equally important throughout the organization. We consider these differences, as a basis for improvement in order to grow the business and acquire desired clients.

The translation of these findings shines through in their internal structure; remarks were made in all levels of the organization on how the internal structure is not in an optimum stage and communication with the multiple establishments of Wackes is sometimes extremely difficult.

To recognize that this consensus exists throughout the organization shows the importance of the implication and we think that these resources should be part of the firm's strategy (Andersson, 2000). Through this research it was discovered that Wackes could place itself into a specific field of academic theory, the one of 'born-again globals' (Bell, McNaughton & Young, 2001). Throughout the organization, the realization exists that Wackes was born as a Swedish company and made the transition to working on an international, and later on a global basis. However, the process did not seem to be clear amongst those active in the organization. Using a term such as BAG, and adapting to this ideology helps an organization move onwards and see the advantages that come along with being a born-again global.

Overall, the belief in the organization exists that being a global company has a positive influence on attaining large clients. Emphasizing that not only large Swedish clients can be customers, eventually Wackes could be able to attract large global organizations from other countries.

According to our analysis, one of the foundations, which make Wackes successful in their current stage of work, is concerned with differentiating themselves from their direct competitors. Wackes is able to fix, for example, logistical problems all over the world, and within the organization everybody believes in these aspects.

As a result separating Wackes from their competitors. Due to this finding of coherence within the organization, the effects in their work are noticeable and the competition stays behind.

We believe Wackes is working towards an incredible opportunity of being a dominating supplier of promotional goods in major markets across the USA, Europe, and Asia. *As mentioned in our methodology we see our research as a tool for Wackes to ideally provoke them to think in ways, which they have not previously thought. Through our research Wackes is hopefully able to identify solutions which will improve their brand and organization as such. In addition to this, we consider these specific practical implications of Wackes having the ability to be broadly applicable to brands of similar nature to Wackes; namely a business-to-business SME wishing to pursue a global perception.*

10. Conclusion

This research has proved compelling and educational day after day. We, as researchers, have learned an immense amount from our analysis of literature alongside the thorough case review of Wackes. This research provided us with a firm understanding of how a business-to-business SME deals with having an international reputation. The research question, which guided us through this research, provided us with several aspects for consideration:

“How does an SME’s international growth impact the enterprise’s brand in a business-to-business environment?”

- With a focus on the relationship between international perception and its correlation with brand associations and organizational structure.

We have concluded that international growth affects a business-to-business SME brand in four different ways, which helped create the **Four F model**. First, it serves as a benefit on the **external** perception (**Flaunt**). Secondly, it serves a strong function in acquiring clients (**Function**). Thirdly, it consistently impacts a brand’s image in a positive way (**Fashion**). Finally, international growth brings about several potential problems for managers and employees to consider (**Fixes**).

In addition to this, it is evident that a firm faces both internal and external challenges while going global in a business-to-business environment. These challenges are illustrated both explicitly and implicitly depending on the nature of the issue. For example, the “functions” and “fixes” influences on being global are both explicit and more concrete than a “flaunt” and “fashion”, which are much more difficult to measure, however still exist implicitly.

The major factor influencing the brand of Wackes was their original structure while working as a Swedish brand. Through this research it was concluded that Wackes can see itself as a company which has been reborn, only now as a global player, a born-again global.

Through the realization that Wackes made this new step, the future of the company's brand image will come forward; it is of the essence that their new structure is the mortar of the whole organization, keeping it together in an organized way.

If Wackes is able to make that next step in creating an internal understanding of the born-again global structure, they will see immense benefits. The combination of the current ideologies in the organization could result in fruitful ideas on how to improve communication throughout the organization, help communicate a solid image for clients, and most of all give ease and understanding to all members of the organization.

In sum, it is evident that an SME's international presence has real impacts on an enterprise's brand. From a consumer's perspective, these impacts consistently serve as a great benefit. However, internally there are often several serious challenges when becoming global regarding mainly communication and organization. This paradox between external benefits and internal challenges is very interesting for both managers and practitioners in the business-to-business SME field to relate to when attempting to forecast the impacts of an international perception on business.

10.1. **Call for Further Research**

Stemming from the second limitation of our research, it would be interesting to see a group of researchers analyze the opinions that customers hold on a firm. Essentially, the opposite of the case study we performed. This would bring our research full circle by showing not only what a firm thinks a global reputation means to their customers but also what their customers believe.

Another aspect of our research that could certainly use expansion is the effect country-of-origin has on a global firm. Specifically, how and why do certain countries or regions of the world impact a firm once it becomes "global" per say.

Ericson, Johansson and Chao (1984) performed some research on this topic twenty years ago, but that was long before business-to-business branding was seen as a relevant school of research.

Furthermore, we have seen throughout the analysis of Wackes that there are several contradicting opinions on the real impact country-of-origin has. The phenomenon described by Bell et al. (2003) named born-again globals, is also in need of further expansion. The impact this phenomenon has on an organization as soon as it notices itself as being a born-again global could provide significant insights into how such a process occurs. However, much is yet to be researched and it is our belief that further work in this field will yield compelling and relevant results for Small to Medium sized Enterprises interested in leveraging their global brand image.

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12. Appendices

Appendix 1

Name:

Office location:

Extra information

Position:

At Wackes since:

Could you tell us a little bit about your current position, a day in the life?

On average how many clients, potential or current, do you interact with on a weekly basis?

Of these companies, how many are located outside of Paris?

If possible, could you state where your client's companies are headquartered?

Interview

Benefits/Drawbacks

Question 1)

What are four important benefits of Wackes being global?

[benefits of going global]

1. -
2. -
3. -
4. -

Question 2)

What are four important drawbacks of Wackes being global?

[drawbacks of going global]

1. -
2. -
3. -
4. -

Question 3)

Which one of the benefits would you deem most beneficial to Wackes being global?

[benefits of being global]

Question 4)

Which one of the drawbacks would you deem most beneficial to Wackes being global?

[drawbacks of being global]

Outward perception (clients), internal perspective

Question 5)

How do you think Wackes being global is perceived by your existing or future clients? (if question is desired leading: ask for positive/negative aspects)

[Outward perception of being a global brand]

Question 6)

How do you think current clients perceive Wackes'

- 1) Products/services
- 2) Values
- 3) Overall mission

[Outward perception of being a global brand]

Question 7)

How do you think future/prospective clients perceive Wackes'

- 1) Products/services
- 2) Values
- 3) Overall mission

[Outward perception of being a global brand]

Question 8)

Working as a global company, do you think this will attract clients with similar global aspirations/current coverage? Why so/not?

[Campbell, 2010]

Question 9)

Do you communicate Wackes as an international company, or as Swedish to clients? If so, how do you go about communicating this? If not, why not?

B2B brand image

Question 10

Could you describe what you believe the Wackes brand image is? (The emotional connections customers have to your brand)

Question 11

What impact do you believe Wackes' brand image has on perceived quality?

[Positive brand image leads to a competitive advantage (Aaker, Keller), brand associations can also serve as a way to differentiate and imply superiority over other brands (Tuominen)]

Question 12)

What impact do you believe the Wackes brand image has on customer loyalty?

Question 13

From its initiation Wackes has been a B2B company, a very specific type of market. Looking at the B2C industry, in what way could Wackes learn from this industry?

[B2B-B2C comparison]

Question 14

As an SME would Wackes be able to maintain their high international involvement without utilizing its local partners? How would this work, or not?

[B2B SME branding, network actor's participation]

Question 15

Without its other SME business partners, could Wackes still be successful on a global basis?

[B2B SME branding, network actor's participation]

Question 16

Does Wackes attain an influential position among its network? If yes, how is this position utilized to the full potential?

[B2B SME branding, network actor's participation]

Appendix 2

Interviewees at Wackes

| Name | Office Location | Interview date | Function |
|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| L. Wood | Paris, France | 23/04/'14 | Manager France |
| A. Bladh | Stockholm, Sweden | 24/04/'14 | Sålj (sales) Sweden |
| J. Mansson | Lund, Sweden | 24/04/'14 | Inköp (purchase) Sweden |
| T. Davidsson | Lund, Sweden | 25/04/'14 | CEO |
| L. Rafstedt | Lund, Sweden | 02/05/'14 | Sålj (sales) Sweden |
| F. Olsson | Atlanta, USA | 02/05/'14 | Manager USA |
| P. Rylander | Stockholm, Sweden | 07/05/'14 | Sålj (sales) Sweden |
| S. Hallen | Stockholm, Sweden | 07/05/'14 | Inköp (purchase) Sweden |