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The Role of Branding Strategy During Internationalization:

Insights From A Multiple Case Study

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Abstract

Internationalization is a key growth strategy for companies, with branding playing a crucial role in differentiation and global recognition. Multiple studies have highlighted the importance of brand strategies in internationalization and their influence on consumer choice and behavior. However, some companies face challenges in achieving effective brand strategies, hampering their internationalization efforts due to factors like lack of recognition and brand recall.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of branding strategies during internationalization and their influence on effective marketing in foreign markets. It focuses on successful branding strategies, including brand exposure and brand association, to enhance brand awareness and differentiation from competitors. Using qualitative research methods, case studies were conducted on two contracting companies, Agency X and Company Y, to examine their branding strategies during internationalization.

The main result of this study highlights the crucial role of effective branding strategies in the successful internationalization of companies. Specifically, a strong emphasis on brand awareness through enhanced brand exposure and positive brand associations significantly contributes to expanding new markets and differentiation in foreign markets. The findings show the significance of strategic branding efforts in overcoming challenges and attaining long-term success in internationalization. It also reveals that both Agency X and Company Y adopt distinct approaches to internationalization and branding strategies. Variations exist between the two companies due to geographical and industry differences, but the study provides valuable insights into diverse approaches and strategies employed in internationalization and branding efforts.

Keywords: *Brand awareness, Brand recognition, Brand recall, Brand equity, Brand identity, Brand association, Top-Of-Mind, Internationalization, See-Think-Do*

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Sincerely,

Gothenburg, Sweden

02 June 2023

Aliaa Abbas

&

Asma Mohamoud

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1. Introduction

This section begins by introducing the concept of internationalization and highlighting the challenges companies face when internationalizing. By understanding the context of internationalization, we can delve deeper into the specific realm of branding strategies and their implications within this process. Furthermore, it outlines the main issues with a problem discussion and also presents the study's objectives and delimitations.

1.1 Background of internationalization

The process of internationalization involves companies expanding their operations and market presence in foreign countries (Cavusgil et al., 2020). Companies in markets with limited growth opportunities view it as an important growth strategy (Cavusgil et al., 2020). This strategy enables companies to achieve economies of scale and scope, increase market dominance, and reduce input costs. It also contributes to leveraging their firm's specific assets, particularly intangible ones, in the international market. Companies with subsidiaries in different countries can access host-country-specific advantages, enhancing their knowledge base, capabilities, and competitiveness through experiential learning (Cavusgil et al., 2020). Internationalization offers opportunities for corporations to generate synergies across products and markets.

Internationalization has become a significant trend among companies seeking business expansion and market acquisition, particularly in emerging markets (Cavusgil et al., 2020). In the 1970s, scholars Johansson and Vahlne developed the internationalization process model framework, which explains how firms gradually expand abroad over an extended period (Johansson & Vahlne, 1977). This model is widely accepted in the field of international business and provides a framework for understanding the different stages of internationalization. The internationalization process is divided into different stages, starting with the domestic focus of the company, advancing to the pre-export stage, the experimental involvement stage, active involvement in international business, and lastly, the committed involvement stage (Cavusgil et al., 2020). These stages serve as a useful guide for companies that want to internationalize. However, it is important to note that the stages might not be strictly linear or applicable to every situation (Cavusgil et al., 2020). The initial stage is exporting, which represents the simplest foreign market entry strategy, gradually progressing

towards foreign direct investment (FDI), the most complex entry strategy. FDI typically involves establishing subsidiaries and acquiring or merging with local companies. The transition from exporting to FDI involves increasing levels of both risk and control, depending on the company's priorities and the characteristics of the foreign market (Johansson & Vahlne, 1977). This inclusion of FDI in the discussion of branding strategies during internationalization significantly enhances this study. It highlights the strategic choices companies face when expanding their brands globally and emphasizes the crucial role of FDI in this process. Samsung Corporation serves as an example of a company that has undergone this type of process (Cavusgil et al., 2020). They started by exporting consumer electronics to Europe and North America in the 1970s and gradually progressed to establishing manufacturing and sales subsidiaries and factories around the world by 2005 (Cavusgil et al., 2020). Examining the intersection of FDI and branding strategies deepens our understanding of the complexities involved in successful international brand expansion.

Internationalizing a business is a complex process that extends beyond product development alone (Hsu, Chen, & Cheng, 2013). To succeed in foreign markets, companies must consider various factors, with branding being one of the most critical considerations. Branding plays a crucial role in internationalization by enabling product differentiation, fostering customer loyalty, and establishing a recognizable global presence (Keegan & Green, 2019). As Keegan and Green (2019) suggest, a brand is a collection of experiences and perceptions held by customers, serving as a quality certification and helping customers identify and locate products quickly. While branding is essential for sales growth and market share, its significance becomes even more pronounced during internationalization (Zhang et al., 2022). International branding requires a unique set of strategies to navigate diverse markets and cultures (Zhang et al., 2022).

1.2 Branding Strategies on Internationalization

As companies internationalize their operations, the role of branding in internationalization becomes increasingly crucial. The ability to create and maintain a strong brand image that resonates with customers worldwide can significantly affect a company's success in the global market (Rees, 2022). Nike serves as a prime example of a company that has masterfully crafted branding strategies, allowing it to establish a formidable presence across different

cultures and markets (Rees, 2022). Nike has successfully created a recognizable and resonating brand image through its “Just Do It” slogan, which has become globally known and associated with the brand (Rees, 2022). The economic “Swoosh” logo further symbolizes Nike's innovative and performance-focused approach to athletic wear (Rees, 2022). The example of Nike highlights the significance of branding in internationalization, showcasing how effective branding strategies contribute to establishing a strong global brand image.

However, branding goes beyond a catchy slogan and memorable logo. A study conducted by Duke University researchers involved the subliminal presentation of either the Apple logo or the IBM logo to two randomized groups of participants in a stadium (Big Think, 2018). The study found that individuals subliminally exposed to the Apple logo outperformed those exposed to the IBM logo on subsequent creative tasks. This suggests that Apple's brand narrative, which promotes itself as being for cool, creative individuals, has the power to influence behavior beyond affecting cognitive abilities (Big Think, 2018). Companies that invest in building a strong brand identity may be able to reap the benefits of that investment for years to come. Nike's “Just Do It” slogan and “Swoosh” logo exemplify a branding strategy that has contributed to the company's success, establishing a powerful connection with consumers beyond product quality (Big Think, 2018).

The impact of branding on consumer behavior has been well documented, as shown by the Duke University study. For sports brands, building a successful brand goes beyond just creating a catchy slogan. It requires a careful balance of various factors, including rules, regulations, equipment, and celebrity associations, while aligning with the team’s values and resonating with their target audience (Rees, 2022). Building a solid foundation for a brand can be achieved through ongoing or long-term brand-building efforts that highlighting a brand's heritage and past achievements (Greyser & Urde, 2019). This creates a sense of realism that outweighs the impact of short-term downtime and contributes to high attendance, impacting player recruitment spending and team success.

To create a strong and successful brand, it is important to establish a clear and distinctive brand identity as a foundation for the desired customer perception. Brand image reflects how people see the company now, while positioning is the main part of the branding strategy that tells consumers what the company stands for (Keller, 2009). In addition, developing brand awareness is a crucial aspect of international branding strategy. Different levels of brand

awareness, including top-of-mind, brand recall, and brand recognition, are recommended to differentiate the company from competitors in the global market (Aaker, 1991). The concept of brand awareness emerged early in the 1990s as a way to measure a consumer's ability to recognize or recall a brand in various situations (Macdonald & Sharp, 2003). It was discovered during discussions on developing brand awareness that a positive attitude toward a brand does not necessarily guarantee purchase behavior. Therefore, the ability to recognize and recall the brand has become an element of branding strategy. Brand awareness is achieved when customers can easily recall and recognize the brand and when it is top-of-mind. These dimensions of brand awareness are commonly used as measures of branding effectiveness (Aaker, 1991).

A study conducted by Hoyer and Brown in 1990 pioneered research on the effectiveness of brand awareness on the consumer choice process (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). The study found that brand awareness strongly influenced consumers' choice of product, with respondents overwhelmingly preferring brands with high awareness despite quality and price differences. Moreover, participants in the high-awareness conditions made faster decisions and sampled fewer options compared to those in the non-awareness condition. Although the study did not provide strong support for the idea that consumers are more likely to choose the highest quality product in the absence of an awareness differential among brands, it did highlight the importance of brand awareness as a decision-making tactic, even when faced with a familiar or repeated choice (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000).

1.3 Problem discussion

The importance of brand awareness in influencing consumer choice and behavior has been highlighted in various studies, including a replication study by Hoyer and Brown (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). However, despite the emphasis on building brand awareness, some companies still struggle to achieve it (Keegan & Green, 2019). It is worth noting that many companies face challenges in creating brand awareness due to a lack of brand recognition and recall. This raises the question of what factors may hinder or prevent a company from establishing brand awareness as part of their branding strategy during internationalization.

Adapting to different cultures, languages, and markets poses significant challenges for companies during internationalization (Hamid et al., 2012). These challenges influence how consumers perceive and respond to marketing messages. Unique cultural factors can make it difficult for companies to create brand awareness among local consumers, as each country has its own distinct culture and people's perspectives vary based on their socioeconomic status (Hamid et al., 2012). Additionally, companies may face challenges in maintaining a consistent brand identity and messages across different markets while also adapting to local preferences and customs. These challenges can affect the company's ability to build positive brand equity and achieve financial success in international markets (Keller, 2008). Moreover, one of the essential obstacles companies face while internationalizing their brand is the absence of effective brand strategies (McDonald & Einsenhardt, 2020). Companies need to develop brand strategies that consider the unique characteristics of each market (McDonald & Einsenhardt, 2020). This includes understanding local customer preferences, cultural nuance, and competitive landscapes. Neglecting these aspects can result in a brand failing to resonate with local consumers and negatively affecting sales and market share.

Therefore, the importance of brand awareness cannot be overstated in today's global market, where companies are increasingly internationalizing (Punyataya, Sath, & Mishra, 2014). However, further research is needed in this area to better understand how internationalization will significantly affect branding strategies and consumers' perceptions of different products. Hence, this study will explore branding strategies that can be managed during internationalization, with a particular focus on brand awareness and its various dimensions (brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind). By addressing these challenges, companies can enhance their chances of success in new markets.

1.4 Overall Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of branding strategies during internationalization and their influence on effective marketing in foreign markets. Thereby, it seeks to understand consumer and company behavior regarding brand awareness and gain knowledge on branding strategy during internationalization.

1.5 Research Question

The research question is: *How can branding strategies be managed during internationalization?*

1.6 The Outline

This thesis will initially begin with an introduction to branding strategies and internationalization to establish a theoretical framework for the study. The methodology section will subsequently describe the research approach, research methods, research design, and trustworthiness criteria. The empirical section conducts case studies of selected corporations and focuses on two particular sections: internationalization and branding strategies. The findings obtained from the empirical section will not merely contribute to the existing theoretical framework for understanding the internationalization of branding and the role of brand awareness but also enable comparison with relevant theories. Additionally, the study will provide a conclusion, theoretical contributions, practical implications, limitations, and future research for corporations looking to internationalize their brand into potential markets.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section presents an overview of theories on internationalization-related branding strategies. As this study focuses on brand awareness, theories are taken into consideration. It draws upon scientific articles and other academic sources that have explored branding strategies from different perspectives.

2.1 Brand awareness

2.1.1 Concept of the brand

According to Kotler (1999), a brand can include a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of these elements. It is intended to serve as an identifier for goods and services offered by a particular seller or group of sellers, distinguishing them from competitors. Furthermore, a brand forms the communicative essence of a product, encompassing its identity, characteristics, and associations that set it apart from its competitors (Dahlén et al., 2010). A brand represents the unique identity of a product and influences consumers' perceptions of both the product and the brand itself. Aaker shares a perspective on branding

that aligns with Kotler (1999), viewing the brand as a symbol. Aaker (2002) emphasizes the importance of companies establishing a well-defined and comprehensive brand identity. This involves considering the brand as not just a symbol but also as a representation of a person, product, or organization. It also recognizes the influence of people's perceptions on the brand and highlights the role of communication in establishing brand recognition (Aaker, 2002). Moreover, businesses can cultivate associations with their brand on a personal or professional level by using this strategy.

2.1.2 Function of the brand

Gregory and Wiechmann (2002) emphasize the increasing reliance of consumers on brands as influential factors in their purchasing decisions, highlighting the significance of brands in influencing consumer choices. This aligns with Uggla's (2001) claim that brands have a significant impact on consumer behavior and significantly increase the value of products. Pecotich (2007) further reinforces the enduring belief in the marketing field that brands serve as a foundational element, providing market identity and ensuring long-term continuity. It has been emphasized the crucial role of brands in enabling rapid recognition, allowing consumers to quickly identify their desired products (Uggla, 2001). This streamlined process expedites search and decision-making, saving valuable time. Moreover, brands foster a sense of familiarity and loyalty among consumers who have formed a connection with a particular brand. A deeper exploration of the significance of brands highlights their critical value as assets for companies and organizations (Kapferer, 2004). Building upon this perspective, it is important for companies to leverage their expertise to effectively manage and cultivate brands (Uggla, 2001). When this is achieved, the brand becomes the primary asset for the company, carrying substantial value and holding significant potential for success.

2.1.3 Brand Equity

According to Aaker (1996), brand equity refers to a variety of assets connected to a brand's name and logo that add value to the good or service for both the business and the customer. Aaker categorizes brand equity into four primary dimensions: brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand awareness.

Brand associations involve the relationships established by consumers with a brand, including product attributes, specific symbols, or a known spokesperson (Aaker, 1996). The brand's identity, which communicates its goal and values, plays a crucial role in shaping these

associations. Perceived quality is highlighted as a fundamental factor influencing consumers' purchase decisions and impacts all aspects of the brand (Aaker, 1996). However, assessing perceived quality can be challenging due to its subjective nature and variations among individuals. Brand loyalty holds significant value for both the company and its brand, as it represents consumers' steadfast and enduring preference for a specific brand, resulting in repeated purchases. Fostering brand loyalty enhances profitability and sustainability by prioritizing customer retention over acquiring new customers. Brand awareness refers to the strength of a brand's presence in the minds of consumers (Aaker, 1996). It is measured through indicators such as brand recognition, recall within a product category, and spontaneous recall. Building strong brand awareness creates familiarity and preference among consumers, increasing the likelihood of brand choice.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of branding strategies during internationalization and their influence on effective marketing in foreign markets. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of the brand awareness concept, it is essential to provide a detailed definition of the term and its dimensions.

2.1.4 Brand awareness dimensions

The 'Awareness Pyramid' model is derived from Aaker's (1991) brand awareness dimensions, which emphasize the significance of brand recognition at the fundamental level. Figure 1, known as Aaker's (1991) 'Awareness Pyramid', visually represents the brand awareness dimension. This figure illustrates the hierarchical nature of brand awareness, with brand recognition serving as the initial stage. It is crucial for consumers to first recognize a brand before they can recall it or develop top-of-mind awareness. The 'Awareness Pyramid' figure was developed to visually depict the dimensions of brand awareness based on Aaker's framework.

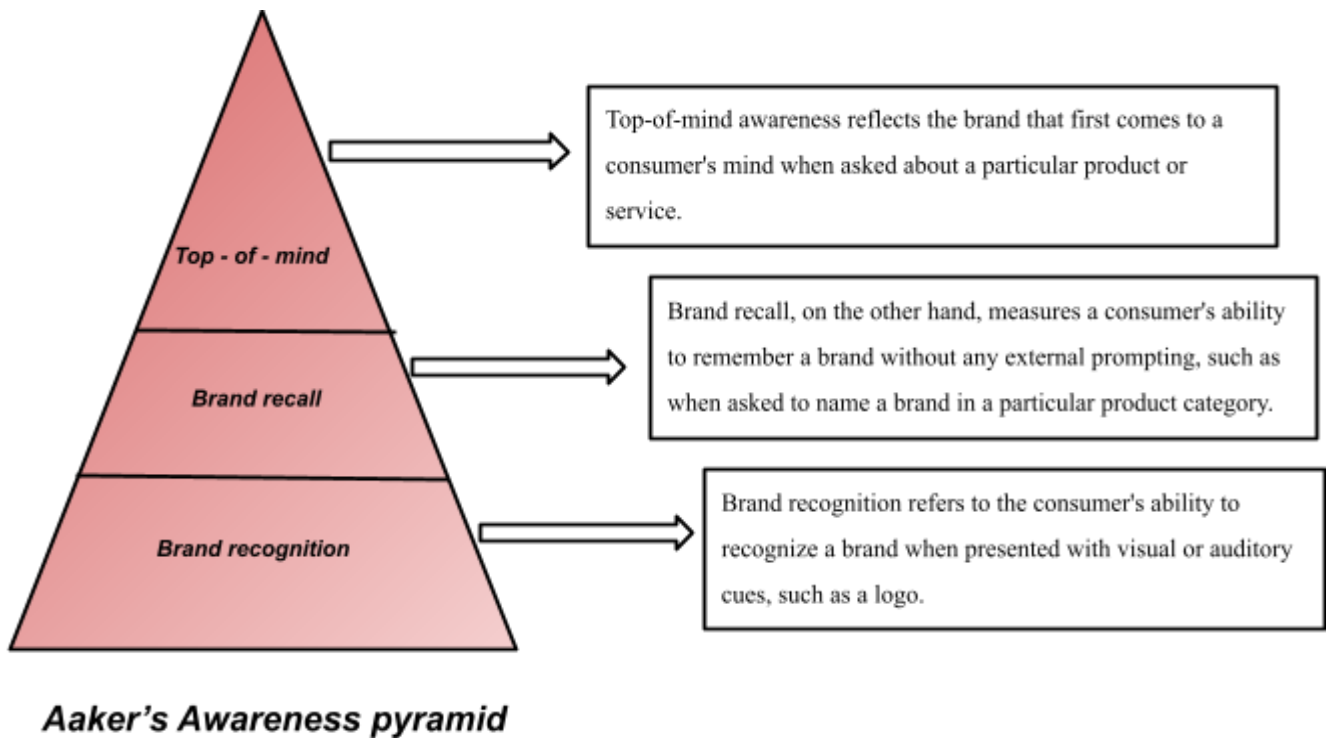


Figure 1: Aaker's (1991) "Awareness Pyramid"

Brand recognition, as defined by Keller (1993), refers to a consumer's ability to identify a brand based on prior encounters. It involves the speed at which consumers can identify and differentiate a brand's elements, such as its logo, symbol, package design, and other characteristics that identify a product and distinguish it from competitors. This recognition is validated when consumers can determine whether they have encountered a particular brand element or advertisement before (Keller, 1993). Consumers have a tendency to choose familiar products (McDonald & Sharp, 2000). In situations where the correct answer is unknown, people tend to choose the option they recognize (Goldstein & Gigerenzer, 2002). Thus, achieving brand recognition is crucial, as it allows future communications to be associated with something tangible, providing consumers with a reference point for the brand information (Aaker, 1991). Moreover, to succeed in global markets, companies must cultivate a strong international image. So, this involves creating a recognizable brand that resonates with customers across different parts of the world. Brand recognition significantly affects the success of internationalization efforts, particularly during the initial stages of market entry (Lages & Montgomery, 2004). Hence, when consumers recognize and trust a brand, they are more inclined to make a purchase from it, even when other alternatives exist (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994). This emphasizes the importance of brand recognition in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

As Aaker (1991) mentioned, brand recall represents a deeper level of brand awareness, indicating a well-established presence in the consumer's memory and consciousness. Besides, it reflects a stronger position in the consumer's mind and refers to the ability to remember a specific brand for a particular product category or need without any prompts or cues (Keller, 1993). In the context of internationalization, brand recall becomes a critical factor that influences the success of a company's expansion into new markets. Companies that possess high brand recall and recognition in their home markets have a distinct advantage in the internationalization process (Mascarenhas et al., 2006). Thus, the recognition and positive perception of the brand in the domestic market can act as a foundation for the company's international expansion. Furthermore, it provides a solid starting point for building brand awareness and consumer trust in new markets. Consumers who are already familiar with the brand in the company's home market are more likely to have a positive predisposition toward it.

At the pinnacle of the "awareness pyramid" resides top-of-mind awareness, a crucial factor influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. This term refers to the highest level of brand recognition, where a specific brand immediately springs to mind when discussing a particular product category or need (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Attaining top-of-mind awareness requires consistent and effective branding efforts over time, granting a brand a competitive edge in the market even when other brands are also closely associated with consumers. Brands must be visible, relevant, and memorable to maintain a prominent position in consumers' minds (Keller, 1993). Moreover, when expanding top-of-mind awareness internationally, companies must have a comprehensive understanding of local cultures, consumer behaviors, and market trends. It becomes imperative to tailor their branding strategies to align with local contexts, including adapting brand names and logos to resonate with local consumers (Cavusgil et al., 2019).

To summarize, brand awareness is the process of establishing a recognizable identity for a product by associating its brand elements with the product category, purchase, consumption, or usage scenarios. It can be measured in terms of its depth and breadth. The depth of brand awareness refers to how easily and likely the brand comes to mind. For instance, a brand that is easily remembered has a higher level of brand awareness compared to a brand that is simply recognized. On the other hand, the breadth of brand awareness indicates the range of

purchase and usage situations in which the brand is recalled (Keller, 2013). The lack of brand knowledge can be depicted using an awareness hierarchy, which starts from brand unawareness, moves to brand recognition through customer reminders (the lowest level of brand awareness), and goes up to brand recall without any customer assistance, ultimately leading to becoming the top-of-mind brand in a specific product category (Aaker, 1991). Building brand awareness involves creating familiarity through repeated exposure and leveraging various elements like the brand name, symbol, logo, and marketing initiatives such as sponsorship, event marketing, and public relations. Aaker (1996) highlighted the significance of cohesive communication in bolstering brand awareness. Repetition enhances recognition, which in turn boosts brand awareness, while elements like logos and symbols facilitate brand recall. Additionally, consumers can develop brand associations through avenues beyond marketing, including advertising, social media, and word of mouth. The following theories will delve deeper into effective strategies for attaining brand awareness.

2.2 Branding Challenges in Internationalization

Globalization has been propelled by the development of information and communication technologies, which have broken down geographical barriers and enabled businesses to expand their markets and attract consumers. As a result, foreign markets have become increasingly accessible and profitable for growth-oriented firms (Cavusgil et al., 2019). In response to the competitive nature of globalization and rapid technological development, companies are now compelled to internationalize at an unprecedented pace (Johanson & Vahlne, 2003). Internationalization is a vital factor in driving business growth, as it allows companies to extend their operations and reach customers worldwide. This process involves making strategic adjustments, implementing structural changes, and allocating resources to adapt to foreign markets and promote growth (Calof & Beamish, 1995).

As underlined by Johanson and Sharma (1987), organizations must invest in expertise and resources in order to effectively internationalize. Their findings are consistent with the Uppsala model, which Johanson and Vahlne (1977) suggested. According to the Uppsala model, international development occurs gradually based on a company's knowledge and involvement in foreign markets, often starting with neighboring or culturally similar countries (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). While the Uppsala model does not directly address international brand awareness, it offers valuable insights that can be applied in this context. Thus, in the context of international business, actively managing and adapting a company's image is

essential for building brand awareness. Companies must carefully consider their identity when entering new markets, consistently reviewing and evaluating their image to navigate market challenges effectively. Aligning the company's identity with market conditions demonstrates an understanding of market requirements, fostering credibility and strengthening its position.

However, as mentioned before, companies face challenges while they internationalize their brand in effectively communicating their brand message to diverse target groups due to cultural differences, linguistic variances, geographic location, and advertising style. Consumer needs, wants, and usage patterns vary across nationalities, requiring brands to adapt their strategies to different cultural contexts. According to Keller (1993), brand communication has enabled brands to connect with consumers worldwide through diverse media platforms. Marketing communication includes different communication methods to engage with consumers and create brand awareness.

2.3 Global marketing communication

To thrive in foreign markets, brands must adapt their positioning strategies to resonate with local audiences while remaining true to their core values and identity. One of the most impactful strategies for positioning a brand or product is simplifying the message (Ries & Trout, 1981). In a society saturated with communication, delivering a clear and concise message becomes imperative for a company to leave a lasting impression. The concept of positioning is of utmost importance because consumers make choices based on comparisons (Kapeferer, 2012). Brands that fail to position themselves leave unanswered questions, relying on customers to seek out answers independently. By embracing effective communication strategies and strategic positioning, brands can navigate the challenges of the global market, enhance brand recognition, and achieve long-term success.

According to Gregory (2002), global branding strategies revolve around building a positive reputation for the company. The author argues that the success of a company's global brand largely depends on how well they communicate and strategize its implementation. In order to effectively manage brand communication, it is crucial to have clear guidelines and strategic objectives that cover all communication channels (Low, 2000). A comprehensive approach that involves the entire organization is necessary for successful brand communication. This means that personnel and management should have a shared understanding and belief in the company's objectives and core values (Ekwing and Larsson, 1991). There is a chance that

poorly managed internal branding will undermine the expectations set by external marketing initiatives. Consensus on objectives and core values is essential for coordinating all communication efforts and ensuring alignment with the brand's vision (Wah, 1998). Placing the brand at the heart of the organization's strategic planning is vital for attaining triumph. It is therefore important that the company adapt its brand strategy and communication to different cultural contexts to avoid misunderstandings or negative reactions from consumers (Alden et al., 1999). Consumer needs, wants, and usage patterns vary across nationalities due to cultural values and economic development (Aaker, 1991).

In order to effectively manage global brands, companies require strategies that enable them to communicate with consumers across the world. Aaker (2002) emphasizes that brand position refers to the specific aspect of a brand's identity that a company aims to convey to its intended audience. Aaker (2002) defines marketing communication as the utilization of diverse media and techniques, such as advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and direct mail. According to Ogilvy (cited in Hankinson & Cowking, 1997), advertising is considered one of the most effective methods of communication with consumers. Typically, companies purchase these media and tools from external sources to serve as controlled means of communication. The following section will discuss the appropriate communication strategies for effectively managing global brands, namely social media and websites. It will examine the ways in which communication strategies can enhance global brand communication and positioning, leading to success.

Website

A company's website is a crucial marketing tool and a valuable brand asset. It serves as an owned channel that companies can use to effectively engage with their customers (Rayport & Jaworski, 2001). Customers often visit a company's website to gain more knowledge about the brand, and it serves as a platform for marketers to share their narratives and interact with their audience. Websites are a crucial communication channel for global companies, as they often serve as the primary way to interact with customers. According to Rayport and Jaworski (2001), a company's website plays a crucial role in enabling effective communication with its visitors. Communication takes place through the website's information and interactive feedback mechanisms. It is important for companies to allocate resources toward creating a website that accurately represents their brand's aesthetic and offers valuable content to

enhance their search engine visibility. Additionally, the website should facilitate two-way communication through a feedback mechanism.

Social media

Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram offer unparalleled access to groups of users who have similar demographic, geographic, and psychographic traits. Kotler et al. (2012) state that social media has various functions, including establishing an online presence and public persona, enhancing marketing messages, collecting customer feedback, and encouraging customer engagement. This presents a unique opportunity for companies to enhance their brand awareness in foreign markets. Marketers have the option to utilize different social media advertising formats to effectively reach their intended audiences. This level of precision targeting is particularly valuable during internationalization, as companies can adapt their branding strategies to cater to the preferences and needs of consumers in different markets. Research has shown that social media that is earned can have an impact on brand awareness and purchase intent. However, it does not seem to have an effect on customer satisfaction. On the other hand, social media that is owned has an impact on both brand awareness and customer satisfaction.

2.4 Network theory

The concept of a network highlights the significance of relationships and interactions among actors in a network. These interactions can have a significant impact on a company's performance and strategies (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995). The extent to which a company is able to establish brand awareness is impacted by the relationships it maintains within its network. Kumar et al. (2016) have pointed out that brand awareness is not only dependent on a company's marketing strategies but also on the relationships and interactions it has with its network actors. When companies plan to expand their global market presence, they should take into account the impact of networks on their brand identity and brand awareness. Establishing robust relationships and interactions within their network can help companies enhance their brand awareness, leading to long-term success in the global marketplace.

In the context of brand awareness, a crucial idea in network theory is the concept of "relational capital". This term refers to the combined knowledge, experience, and resources that a company acquires through its interactions and relationships within its network, as described (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). A company can use its relational capital to

enhance brand awareness. Moreover, companies can increase brand exposure and create a stronger brand identity by leveraging their relationships with various stakeholders. Establishing positive relationships with customers and partners can result in favorable word-of-mouth recommendations and the word-of-mouth effect. This, in turn, can enhance brand awareness and expand the brand's reach within the network.

To take advantage of relational capital and enhance brand awareness using network theory, it is crucial for the company to proactively establish and sustain relationships with diverse stakeholders in its network. According to Håkansson and Snehota (1995), effective customer relationship management involves various aspects such as building and sustaining strong customer relationships, forming partnerships, fostering collaboration, and maintaining open communication. As the network grows stronger and expands, internationalization opportunities naturally arise. The model suggests that investing in networking should focus on enhancing the value of existing contacts rather than seeking out new ones. The reason is that such an application requires both valuable time and capital. Consequently, if a company has an existing collaboration with a supplier, it can also utilize this partnership in foreign countries where the supplier operates.

The collaboration includes the partnerships the company has, both with customers in the form of membership and with other companies and organizations through strategic alliances and sponsorships. According to Aaker (2002), sponsorship offers an opportunity for companies to expose their brand to potential consumers. Through sponsorship, companies can benefit from the associations that the current event provides. Membership and clubs are also opportunities for companies to communicate their brand (Aaker, 2002). High brand recognition indicates the saliency of the brand's origin, while low brand recognition may have little impact on the consumer's decision-making process (Samiee et al., 2005). A common objective of entering into a brand partnership is to gain access to distribution networks, while another objective could be to leverage the partner company's capital and contacts to establish the brand in a foreign market. Such partnerships strengthen the brands involved. Since you cannot deceive the customers, the credibility of such partnerships is very high. It is therefore important that companies use this to their advantage and communicate their core values through partnerships.

In summary, several factors can influence brand awareness, including brand exposure, which refers to the frequency and quality with which consumers and market participants are exposed to a brand. Studies have demonstrated that increased brand exposure through channels such as advertising, sponsorship, and social media can increase brand recognition (Keller, 1993). The attributes and associations that consumers associate with a brand are yet another factor. Thus, positive and powerful brand associations can aid in increasing brand awareness and differentiating the brand from its competitors (Keller, 1993). In order to maintain this, the company must actively manage brand associations by communicating and reinforcing desired attributes in marketing activities and brand communication (Aaker, 1991). Brand awareness must be carefully managed to ensure positive associations and strategically utilized to drive sales and market positioning. In internationalizing a brand, the choice of marketing channels is also a significant factor influencing brand recognition. Utilizing relevant and effective marketing channels for the specific market is essential for optimally reaching the target audience.

The theories discussed in this study provide insights into the challenges and strategies of managing branding during internationalization, which are especially pertinent to the study's objective of examining the significance of branding strategies and their impact on effective marketing in foreign markets. The Uppsala model that Johanson and Vahlne proposed emphasizes gradual international development based on an organization's familiarity with and participation in foreign markets. While this model does not directly address international brand awareness, it emphasizes the significance of market knowledge, learning, and commitment, which indirectly contribute to the formation of a strong brand image. Incorporating the principles of the Uppsala model into a study lays the groundwork for comprehending the incremental internationalization process and its implications for branding strategies. In addition, it is crucial to resolve the communication obstacles that companies encounter during internationalization, such as cultural differences, linguistic variations, and geographical obstacles. By understanding these obstacles and their effect on brand communication, the study demonstrates the significance of adapting branding strategies to various cultural contexts. This knowledge enables companies to effectively navigate these obstacles and develop brand communication strategies suitable for international markets. The theories associated with global marketing communication, such as the use of websites and social media platforms, emphasize the significance of these channels for engaging consumers and building brand recognition. Incorporating these theories into the research highlights the

significance of utilizing digital platforms for effective brand communication during internationalization. It provides a framework for understanding how businesses can use their websites and social media channels to communicate brand messages, engage with consumers, and increase brand awareness in international markets. In addition, network theory provides valuable insights into the role of relationships and interactions within a network in shaping brand recognition. By examining the concept of relational capital and the significance of establishing strong relationships with consumers and partners, the study highlights the importance of collaboration and open communication in boosting brand awareness during internationalization. This understanding enables businesses to perceive the significance of cultivating relationships within their networks in order to increase brand exposure and reinforce brand identity in international markets. The theories of brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind awareness provide an in-depth comprehension of the facets of brand awareness and their influence on consumer behavior. Moreover, these theories stress the significance of creating a recognizable brand, sustaining consistent branding efforts, and establishing a strong position in the minds of consumers. And, by implementing these theories into the study, businesses gain insight into the strategies for achieving and sustaining brand awareness through internationalization. Thus, the study's theoretical framework provides practical guidance on how to adopt branding strategies, leverage digital platforms, and develop relationships within networks in order to effectively navigate the complexities of foreign markets and increase brand awareness. Incorporating these theories ultimately enhances the study's applicability and contributes to a broader understanding of branding strategies and their influence on effective marketing in international contexts.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the approach and techniques used in this study to investigate more about the research topic. It also discusses the reasons behind the chosen research methods and then highlights the quality and trustworthiness criteria.

3.1 Research Approach

The purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of branding strategies during internationalization and their influence on effective marketing in foreign markets. We employed a qualitative research approach, such as interviews, to conduct case studies. A The

qualitative research approach was important in the context of exploring brand strategies during internationalization, as it enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of the behavior of consumers and corporations regarding brand awareness (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). To achieve this objective, we employed a semi-structured interview method, which allowed us to interpret the meaning of the phenomena described by the interviewees (Patel & Davidson, 2019). This type of approach allowed us to obtain rich, detailed data about the experience and perspectives of branding strategies on internationalization from two companies: an agency that helps corporations with their brands when internationalizing (Patel & Davidson, 2019). We wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives, experiences, and behaviors of participants related to the topic, which can be hard to provide with quantitative research. Quantitative research tends to rely on measurable metrics and statistical analysis to draw conclusions. While the content of brand strategies during internationalization may be fully quantified, certain aspects may not be fully quantified (Creswell, 2018). This understanding is particularly important in the context of internationalization, where companies need to adapt their branding strategies to fit the unique characteristics of each market (Cavusgil et al., 2020). Furthermore, while there exists a considerable body of research on branding and internationalization as separate topics, the intersection of these two areas has received comparatively less attention (Zhang et al., 2022). The simultaneous examination of branding and internationalization is an underexplored area, thus necessitating a qualitative research approach that can facilitate the emergence of new insights and theories.

As a case study, we used an abductive research approach. The abductive research approach contains features from both deductive and inductive approaches and is used in many case study-based investigations (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2007). It allowed us to interpret individual cases by identifying patterns. This approach intends to create understanding by refining and adjusting the theory during the research process while simultaneously developing the empirical field of application (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2007). By using this approach, we were able to uncover new insights and theories in these areas. During the research, we continuously refined and adjusted our theories based on the empirical data collected. We compared our findings with existing theories, ensuring that our conclusion was well-supported and reliable. The abductive research approach proved particularly valuable in studying brand strategies during internationalization, as it provided a framework for exploring the unique challenges

and dynamics involved. By applying this approach, we were able to address the complexity of the topic and contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

In addition, we took into consideration the criticism that qualitative interview studies have received, such as the possibility that the interviewer's actions during the interview can influence the result (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). To address these concerns, we designed the interviews in a manner that avoided leading questions and ensured that they did not deviate excessively from the guide.

3.2 Research Design

A case study is the chosen research design that allows us to develop in-depth knowledge by examining a specific organization. One of the significant strengths of conducting a case study approach is the ability to provide empirical data through methods such as interviews and observations (Yin, 2007). Case studies are beneficial when we seek to understand the “how” and “why” behind a phenomenon (Yin, 2007). In order to investigate the purpose of the thesis, we believe that conducting multiple case studies was the most appropriate research design for addressing the topic.

3.3 Sampling

When it is hard to examine the entire population, we need to select a random sample that accurately presents it (Patel & Davidson, 2019). Therefore, when we were selecting the participants for this study, we had specific sampling criteria in mind. Initially, we sought out companies with experience in both branding and internationalization processes. The thought process behind the selection of companies was based on their differences in branding focus. We chose one company, Agency X, because it is primarily focused on branding activities and provides assistance to firms in their branding efforts. This company places a strong emphasis on developing and implementing branding strategies as a core aspect of its operations. In contrast, the other company, Company Y, does not prioritize branding as a core activity. While it engages in internationalization and branding strategies, its primary focus lies in other areas of business operations, such as product development. We selected these contrasting cases to enable interesting analytical comparisons, considering the different approaches and perspectives toward branding.

- **Sample size:** The study is limited to two companies; one agency helps companies internationalize their branding, and the other is a corporation that conducts its own internationalization and branding strategies. Therefore, the sampling size may not be representative of all companies that engage in international branding strategies.
- **Sample Error:** To minimize error, we collected data from two different industries with different orientations to obtain more diverse data. But it is important to note that comparing these companies is challenging due to their different regions and industries. These differences may introduce variations that may impact the generalizability of the findings.
- **Sample bias:** Convenience samplings were used to select participants, as one of us chose the companies through personal contacts. To reduce the risk of bias and improve the validity, the other author of this study took over the interview process and handled the empirical section, ensuring transparent data analysis.
- **Sample frame:** The absence of a comprehensive sampling frame restricted our ability to include a broader range of companies. Despite this, we intended to ensure that the selected companies were relevant and representative of the population under study.
- **Cost and time:** The sampling method we employed was both cost-effective and time-effective. Interviews were conducted digitally, which allowed for efficient data collection, with each interview lasting approximately 1 hour.

3.4 Data Gathering

The study involved a qualitative research design of semi-structured interviews, as explained previously. To select suitable participants for the study, we sought out two different companies with experience in both branding and internationalization processes, as explained earlier. Our specific criteria were to find a company with expertise in branding strategies and another company that uses a conventional branding approach. The participants were reached directly and extended invitations for their participation in interviews. The participants were informed about the study's purpose and asked for their willingness to participate in an interview.

The interviews were designed to provide rich and detailed primary data, which informed the development of the questionnaire. We used an interview guide (see Appendix 1) based on selected theories to formulate questions related to branding strategies and internationalization.

Digital interviews were conducted (see Table 1) to ensure quicker administration and prevent the characteristics of the interviews from affecting the interviewee’s response. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each. Through these interviews, we were able to obtain valuable information that greatly helped in the analysis and conclusions section.

Semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility to ask follow-up questions and explore various areas of interest (Patel & Davidson, 2016). This method allowed for more open discussions about the issues being researched.

In addition to the primary data collected through interviews, we also incorporated secondary data from the participants' websites to support our findings and enhance our overall understanding of branding strategies during internationalization. The combination of primary and secondary data sources strengthened the validity and robustness of our research findings.

Interview	Respondent	Interview platform	Duration of interview	Interview Date
1	Agency X, Employee X	Digital interview-Google meet	60 min	2023-04-15
2	Company Y, CEO	Digital interview- Zoom	60 min	2023-04-20

Table 1: Conducted interview

3.5 Data- analysis

To analyze the data collected through the interviews, thematic analysis was employed, which is a widely used technique in qualitative research (Patel & Davidsson, 2016). This approach involved identifying key themes and patterns related to branding strategies for internationalization. The study categorized the discussion into two main parts: one focused on internationalization, the other on branding strategies when internationalized. Questions were asked based on these categories and theories to derive the data. By using thematic analysis, we intend to identify underlying patterns and connections in the data that may not have been immediately apparent. The objective was to gain insights into the various challenges and obstacles faced by companies in establishing brand awareness during internationalization and

identify strategies to overcome them. The study cited the interviews' perspectives to show a more interesting and detailed understanding of their answers.

3.6 Quality and trustworthiness criteria

For any research study, it is essential to ensure that the report is both reliable and valid (Bryman & Bell 2018). For qualitative research, there are four factors that are important for establishing trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Guba, 1981).

Credibility is considered the most critical aspect, as it requires researchers to connect their findings with reality to demonstrate the accuracy of their research (Polit & Beck, 2012). In this study, the interviewees were given limited information about the objective of the interview to reduce the likelihood of them modifying their answers to fit the objectives of the paper. Leading questions were avoided in the interview guide as they could negatively impact validity. As it was challenging to maintain the interviews' focus without leading questions, it was necessary to prevent irrelevant information from being gathered. Since the interviews were conducted by only one person, it is acknowledged that the conclusions may be limited. Additionally, it is important to recognize the potential for errors in the interviews. One of the authors of this study had a personal connection with one of the companies. The author's relationships with the interviews could lead to subjective analysis rather than objective analysis (Bryman & Bell 2018). However, to mitigate this potential bias, the other author independently conducted the interview and analysis for that specific company. Also, the authors made an effort to interview employees who did not have personal relationships with both authors to maintain objectivity.

Dependability, on the other hand, refers to the consistency of the data under similar conditions (Polit & Beck, 2012). To address this issue of dependability, the study ensured that the interviews were conducted with participants from two different companies. This approach was taken to enhance the diversity of perspectives and reduce the risk of bias. Despite there being only two interviews, the selected companies represented different regions and engaged in distinct branding activities. This diversity in their geographic location, industry focus, and branding strategies provides valuable insights and allows for meaningful comparison. By considering multiple perspectives and comparing the experiences of these companies, the study aimed to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

In addition, the questions that were given in the interviews were similar, which ensured that the data collected was consistent and comparable across participants. Triangulation of the data is also employed, which involves using multiple sources of information to validate and strengthen the insights (Carter et al., 2014).

Confirmability involves the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the responses are neutral and free from their own biases and viewpoints (Polit & Beck, 2012). As mentioned previously, avoiding leading questions, limiting irrelevant information, and using multiple sources of information addressed these issues and contributed to confirmability by reducing the risk of research bias. Additionally, peer-review sessions were held every other week to further enhance the validity and objectivity of the research process. These sessions were implemented to prevent potential biases and ensure a rigorous examination of the study's methods and findings.

Lastly, transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of the research can be tested in other settings or groups (Polit & Beck, 2012). A challenge in generalizability to a larger population could accrue when dealing with qualitative research findings. Using secondary data enhances transferability by providing a wider range of data sources and perspectives on the research topic. Secondary data provides a wider context for the research and can triangulate the findings by comparing the primary data collected from the interviews with other sources of information.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The data collection process for this study was conducted with ethical considerations in mind. Informed consent was obtained from participants to ensure that they were fully informed about the research process (Bryman, 2012). Confidentiality and anonymity were also upheld to protect the participants from emotional or legal harm, and the final decision regarding anonymity and confidentiality was determined by the participants. Confidentiality means that it is not allowed to disclose any personal details of the participants or company information that they may not want to be revealed (Byman, 2012).

4. Empirical

This section intends to present the branding strategies during internationalization approaches of two contrasting companies: Agency X, a branding-focused company that specializes in branding activities for firms, and Company Y, a sustainable energy solution provider that does not prioritize branding as a core activity. The subheadings will be customized based on what is most relevant for each company.

4.1 Agency X

This is a Swedish digital marketing agency that provides a scope of administration intended to further develop advanced promotion execution and produce more. Agency X offers a range of services for web-based public relations administrations, including social media advertising, programmatic advertising, and data analytics.

With offices in various locations worldwide, including Europe, Asia, and North America, Agency X collaborates with clients from diverse industries. They work with a range of clients spanning from B2B to B2C, including e-commerce, travel, hospitality firms, and financial service providers. Agency X partners with companies that are interested in expanding their brands and marketing efforts. Their clients are commonly settled corporations that are larger in size and have a global presence. With decades of involvement in global showcasing and marketing, Agency X has a particular focus on digital channels instead of traditional marketing systems. Their services are designed to improve digital marketing performance and generate more leads. They have extensive experience in international marketing, with a particular emphasis on digital channels as opposed to traditional branding strategies.

In addition, Agency X works directly with their clients' digital marketing to guarantee that their plans are with their media strategies. When clients approach Agency X, they have a scope of marketing needs that shift content depending on objectives and the business sectors they are focusing on. These requirements could be building brand awareness, creating information that resonates with local audiences, or enhancing their advanced presence across different stages. To guarantee that clients are successfully reaching and drawing in interesting

groups, Agency X assists them with enhancing their advanced presence, including their websites, social media channels, and online advertising campaigns.

4.1.1 Internationalization

Agency X considers internationalization a critical process as their clients are already internationalizing. To assess their clients' internationalization and branding strategies, Agency X offers a comprehensive range of services tailored to enhance their digital marketing performance. They work closely with clients to ensure that their plans are fully aligned with their media strategies. A key step in this process involves conducting a SWOT analysis to determine the markets that are worth investing in. This includes assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the client's ongoing tasks, as well as distinguishing opportunities and threats in new markets.

Considering the challenges of internationalization, it's important to note that these challenges can vary depending on the target country and the item being promoted. Agency X understands the need to address these various challenges based on each client's requirements, such as cultural differences, language barriers, competition, and logistical and supply chain issues. Each market has its own unique cultural and business factors that need to be taken into account in order to succeed. For instance, an item that is famous in one nation may not be as well received in another nation due to differences in taste, values, and inclinations. France is known for its rich cultural heritage and solid sense of national identity, which makes it difficult for foreign brands to acquire a foothold in the market. However, by prioritizing internationalization as a key, Agency X assists clients to navigate these difficulties and make progress in the market.

“...most of them are based in Sweden and are often adapted to Swedish customers. In order to enter the French market compared to the Nordic markets, it means tougher challenges with competitors, and the trends differ. But the Nordic markets have the same fashion and behavior, so it is easier to succeed.” - Agency X.

Furthermore, Agency X may face language barriers and challenges when navigating local regulations and legal frameworks. As a result, they conducted research to understand the market that their clients are venturing into, including studying local content and consumer behavior. For example, when a client wishes to enter the French market, Agency X gathers

relevant information and raises awareness about the country's strong sense of national identity and cultural heritage to ensure their clients are well-informed. Since their clients are considering internationalizing to a new market, they may need to invest more in education and raising awareness about their product to gain traction. Additionally, Agency X encourages their client to approach the new market as a learning process, rather than expecting a quick achievement. By testing the market and gathering feedback, they can adapt their technologies and offer them accordingly.

“It is important that the client does not expect sudden change and immediate success when they start expanding their brand. Also, if a fashion company is selling winter jackets in Sweden and wants to expand in France with their product, they need to consider adapting their product to better suit the local weather conditions and consumers' preferences.” - Agency X.

Moreover, Agency X believes that brand recognition is critical to the success of any company when internationalizing. Without strong brand recognition, it becomes challenging for an organization to separate itself from competitors and interface with potential clients. This often leads to a slower reception rate, making it challenging for the organization to fill in the new markets. To address this challenge, they work closely with their clients and assist them in developing effective branding and marketing strategies over the long run. They also continuously monitor their clients' brand performance by gathering feedback from customers and other stakeholders. This approach enables them to identify areas where brands may be falling short and develop strategies to address those gaps.

4.1.2 Branding Strategies

As previously mentioned, Agency X maintains a continuous monitoring system to assess their clients' brand performance. This process intends to distinguish areas where their client's brand might fall short. In order to assess its clients, Agency X has developed its own strategic framework known as the See-Think-Do framework. This model consists of a series of campaigns that are explicitly intended to support each stage of the client's journey- from creating awareness (See), generating interest (Think), and driving action (Do).

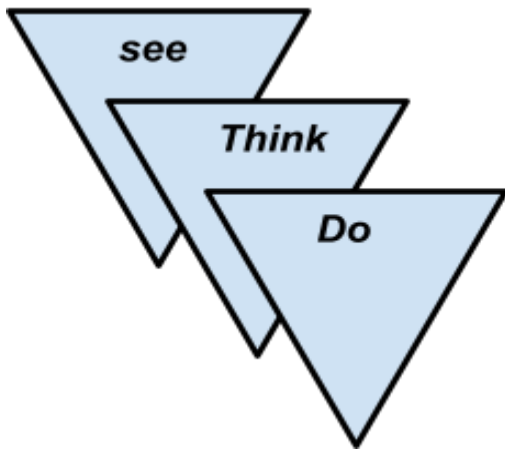


Figure 2: See-Think-Do Framework

The initial step “See”, focuses on establishing and raising brand awareness in the target market. This is accomplished through various campaigns, such as influencer collaborations and online promotion. The objective is to introduce the company and its items to the main audience without directly urging them to make a purchase. By creating a positive impression of the brand and its contributions, potential clients are likely to look into the company. In the interview, Agency X mentioned that the commonly used objectives for estimating brand awareness involve the utilization of digital channels such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. By analyzing these metrics, companies can determine the number of people who have viewed or clicked on their advertisements. This information is used to set objectives for reaching a specific audience size with their ads and driving website visits or item purchases. They believe that their definitive objective isn't exclusively based on sales but also on reaching a specific number of people who have encountered the company's brand. The intent of this step is to gain a better understanding of the factors that contribute to brand awareness.

“We want to target different areas, like getting millions of people to know about the company. For example, we might target a million views over a certain period. Then we look at the data over time to see how we're doing and adjust our goals. The performance data that has been gathered over time enables the assessment of the outcomes and provides feedback on the degree of the progressive. ” - Agency X.

After capturing the customer's attention, the next step is the “Think” phase. This involves efforts to encourage potential customers to think about and consider purchasing from the

company. Agency X assists its clients in exploring the factors that stimulate cognitive processes among users, enabling them to determine the necessary measures for effective website navigation. This includes highlighting the unique features and advantages of the items, as well as guiding potential customers to the company's website for further exploration. The point is to generate a sense of interest and curiosity in their minds and persuade them that the company is a reasonable choice. Agency X addresses the importance of optimizing website usability, ensuring that users can easily find and navigate the website. For instance, if the company is based in Sweden and uses a domain like X.se for its website, users from countries like Sweden might find it unfamiliar. This can discourage them from visiting the website and impact their overall experience.

“For example, the company has xföretag.se, but the company is in the UK, and it perhaps used xföretag.com, and if they see its X.se they think it as strange” - Employer X, Agency X.

To address this challenge, Agency X assesses their client's website by identifying approaches to enhance user engagement. By understanding customer behaviors, they can improve the design and functionality of the website, leading to a better user experience.

The final step, “Do”, focuses on converting potential customers into real purchasers. This includes creating campaigns that are explicitly intended to urge customers to make a purchase. At this step, the potential customer should already be familiar with the brand and its contributions. According to Agency X, customers should also be convinced of the benefits of buying from the company. The objective is to make purchasing as simple and convenient as possible to expand the possibilities of an effective sale. Additionally, the payment process plays a significant role in the decision-making process. Agency X seeks to determine the efficacy of payment methods, such as Swish, in different regions. While Swish may be commonly used in Sweden, it might be unfamiliar to UK users, which can lead to difficulties in completing transactions. Agency X also mentioned how the price sensitivity of the target audience can affect the purchasing process. It is critical to assess the current market landscape and identify the needs of the target audience in order to succeed when internationalizing.

“There was a time were UK citizens were very price sensitive, so many of our clients made offers over there by lowering the price so it was easier to buy” - Agency X

The See-Think-Do framework is believed to be a highly effective approach to internationalization, as it permits companies to plan and execute their branding campaigns in a structured and targeted manner. Agency X believes that by focusing on each of these three steps, companies can increase their chances of success in new markets and establish a strong reputation for long-term growth. The framework is an important strategy that Agency X mainly uses to enhance awareness of the brand across various digital channels, reaching a wide audience. The data gathered from these digital channels provides valuable insight into the effectiveness of the advertisements, enabling the setting of specific targets.

To measure overall brand impact, a "brand lift study" is conducted, which involves posing questions to viewers. For example, a viewer who watched a YouTube video may be asked if they recognize or recall an ad from a specific company. They are presented with a list of options, including the company in question, and asked to select the relevant question. This process is well observed and yields valuable data on the effectiveness of the branding strategy. Agency X considered the "brand lift study" a crucial follow-up process, allowing for the evaluation of brand awareness growth. It is implemented across different digital platforms, such as social media.

4.2 Company Y

This is a company that focuses on sustainable energy solutions through the installation of solar panels and the construction of conservatories for both residential and commercial properties. With over five years of experience in the industry, the company internationalized from the Netherlands to Sweden, providing its services to a diverse range of clients, such as homeowners, commercial property owners, and government organizations. The primary focus of their client base is to reduce their carbon footprint and save on energy costs. Additionally, the company offers expanded and comprehensive service to its customers due to its partnerships and connections with other companies in the industry.

Company Y's mission is to provide sustainable solutions to clients while increasing property value. Their ultimate goal is to help customers make a positive impact on the environment.

“Expanding our services and reaching more customers is a top priority at Company Y. We understand that partnerships with other companies in our industry play an important role in achieving our goals” - CEO of Company Y.

The team at Company Y consists of experts with extensive knowledge and experience in the industry. Their team is composed of engineers, designers, project managers, and marketing experts who work together to provide top-notch services to their clients. Company Y works closely with clients to create custom conservatories and energy-efficient solutions that meet their needs and preferences. The marketing team is responsible for building brand awareness in the market. The CEO emphasized that they use a variety of marketing channels and digital advertising, to reach and engage with potential customers.

4.2.1 Internationalization

The owner of this solar panel and conservatory construction company is closely and actively involved in the process of internationalizing their business. The company started five years ago in the Netherlands, and after establishing a strong presence in the Dutch market, they started forming an expansion strategy. Since then, they have successfully entered the Swedish market, with plans for future internationalization.

The participant in the interview explained the challenges that became prevalent through the internationalization process and how the company overcame them. The CEO of Company Y views challenges as learning experiences and says that in order to internationalize, adaptation is needed. Internationalizing means adapting your business to new environments by navigating cultural differences and adjusting.

Company Y conducts market research to determine which markets would be the most promising. This includes looking at factors such as the interest level in sustainable solutions, the existing competition, and the regulatory environment of said markets. Upon analyzing these factors, Company Y made the decision to internationalize into Sweden due to the growing demand for renewable energy solutions and a relatively less competitive market. According to the CEO of the company, they express a strong willingness to further internationalize, extending their operations to various countries within and beyond the EU.

However, they acknowledge that this endeavor presents distinctive challenges, such as the process of obtaining permission for construction.

“We chose the Swedish market because we wanted to increase our trading opportunities, and we wanted to start through the EU even though we had no contacts in it. Therefore, Sweden was the best choice because it had a really low competitive market in terms of solar panels. But what we thought would be the most difficult was getting permission for the construction of the conservatory and the installation of solar panels. But it actually went as smoothly as expected, we only had to wait six months to get permission, which is relatively little compared to other countries.” -CEO of company Y.

4.2.2 Partnerships

Company Y faced many challenges when they internationalized to Sweden. One of the biggest obstacles Company Y faced was establishing partnerships with local suppliers and manufacturers due to their lack of existing connections in the Swedish market. To address this challenge, they invested time and resources in attending industry events and conferences, allowing them to connect with professionals in their field. This gave them the opportunity to network and build personal connections, ultimately leading to the establishment of potential partnership opportunities.

Once the decision had been made, they focused on creating a strong and consistent brand image that would resonate with Swedish customers. However, they found it difficult to meet the unique needs and preferences of customers in a foreign country, despite feeling that brand recognition would be crucial to succeeding in the new market. This is where their partnerships came to their aid, helping them leverage the expertise of local companies to ensure that the marketing and creative assets were localized and culturally appropriate.

Company Y's partnerships with several local businesses not only assessed their branding strategies but also helped them navigate the regulatory environment, such as building codes, which can differ greatly between countries. Their partnership with a popular home renovation company even assessed their internationalization by offering a full range of services, from solar panel installation to home extensions and conservatory construction. This was particularly important in markets where customers prefer to work with a single provider for all their home improvement needs. By offering exclusive discounts and promotions, the

company was able to incentivize customers to support small businesses while also generating new business for themselves. The CEO emphasized the importance of having local experts when internationalizing in an unfamiliar territory, as they can even help build strong relationships in the community and encourage customers to shop locally.

According to the CEO, a determining factor in Company Y's success was its diverse partnerships, particularly its partnership with a leading energy storage company, which enabled them to maintain and supply a reliable and efficient source of renewable energy to their customers. This was done by combining their high-quality solar panels with the energy storage company's cutting-edge energy storage technology, which was especially useful in markets where energy storage is in high demand, such as in areas with unreliable power grids or high electricity prices.

In order to monitor the success of its internationalized efforts, Company Y is trying to use a range of metrics. One key metric that they use is brand awareness, which they measure mainly through surveys and social media analytics by tracking customer engagement. Additionally, Company Y closely monitors sales performance and revenue growth, as they consider them critical indicators of a brand's success in a new market. Analyzing these metrics, they assess how well the brand is resonating with its target audience and adjust its marketing strategies accordingly.

Competition can be more intense in new markets, and proving a value proposition to potential customers often requires adjustments to pricing strategies or product offerings. The company strives to establish a strong and sustainable presence in the new market, and the CEO believes that carefully tracking these metrics is essential to achieving that goal.

4.2.3 Branding Strategies

Despite the marketing teams' extensive efforts, Company Y believes that they did not achieve the desired level of brand awareness in Sweden. One of their key strategies was to conduct market research to better understand the local market and consumer behavior. This study helped them identify the specific needs and preferences of their target audience.

To establish a dominant foothold in Sweden, company Y made substantial investments in digital marketing. Their website and social media presence were optimized to ensure that their

target demographic was being reached and engaged with. This included creating localized content and leveraging social media to connect with customers and promote their services. By utilizing targeted advertising and search engine optimization, they were able to improve their visibility, which attracted a new wave of customers while building brand loyalty among pre-existing ones. While these tactics assisted them in increasing brand awareness by broadening its online visibility and reaching a more diverse audience, the desired level of awareness was not fully realized.

Furthermore, to gain a competitive edge in the Swedish market, as mentioned before, Company Y implemented a crucial strategy of developing partnerships with local suppliers and manufacturers. This enabled them to procure materials from nearby sources, which reduced costs and allowed them to offer more affordable pricing to their Swedish customer base.

“Collaborating with local enterprises allowed us to establish a strong network and enhance our reputation and awareness in the market, setting us apart from the competitors.” - CEO of company Y.

When asked about specific branding strategies or campaigns that have been particularly successful, the company mentioned that their most successful campaigns are ones that emphasize their commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility. They showcased their values by working with local environmental organizations and sponsoring community events that were focused on sustainability. They also highlighted their use of renewable energy sources and their commitment to minimizing their carbon footprint.

Another successful branding strategy they implemented focused on their commitment to quality craftsmanship. They made sure to highlight the expertise of their staff and their dedication to using only the best materials in all of their products. This helped them differentiate themselves from some of the lower-quality competitors in the market and establish a reputation for excellence. The company believes that by emphasizing their values, expertise, and commitment to delivering exceptional products and services, they were able to establish a strong brand presence and earn the trust and loyalty of their new customers.

Additionally, to stay up-to-date with cultural differences and trends, the company is trying to actively engage in extensive market research and monitor local news and media. Furthermore, they collaborate with local marketing agencies such as Hitta.se to develop targeted campaigns that resonate with the local audience while simultaneously gathering feedback from each region to ensure that their branding strategies are succeeding. Overall, they ensure that their branding strategies remain flexible and adaptable to changes in the market, allowing them to stay ahead of trends and remain competitive in the global marketplace.

As previously mentioned, building strong networks and relationships with other businesses is crucial for success. When asked for examples of how to achieve these connections, company Y recommended attending industry events and conferences to meet with other professionals in their field and chat in person. *“Industry events gave us the ability to establish potential partnership opportunities and build personal connections and familiarity.” - CEO of Company Y.* Establishing a positive reputation and forging strong connections with other industry players also made creating further partnerships easier due to the foundation of trust. Although the CEO stated that they preferred engaging with people face-to-face, they still believe that having an online presence and sharing industry news and updates is essential to forming a sense of trust and familiarity with a broader audience.

Company Y additionally has a referral program in place that incentivizes existing customers to refer new clients to them. This program was very successful due to people's sense of assurance over the quality of the company's services.

“Since we expanded in Sweden, at the beginning I thought that brand awareness was most important among the broad masses, and that top-of-mind was rarely relevant to pursue companies that are not market leaders. This was especially for companies that offer services and not products, and that they are not yet the most credible and well-known in Sweden, where the most important thing was to become known among other large companies that work with solar panels and to build relationships and credibility with customers” -CEO of company Y.

5. Analysis

This section examines and presents the connection between the theoretical framework and the empirical (the two cases) section. Additionally, this section concludes with a case comparison, drawing a parallel and discussing the two cases' contract findings.

5.1 Agency X- Internationalization

Internationalization, as discussed earlier in the theoretical section, offers significant prospects for corporations seeking to internationalize. Agency X's internationalization efforts can be analyzed through the lens of the Uppsala model, proposed by Johansson and Vahlne (1997). The Uppsala model primarily focuses on the process of internationalization for corporations and does not explicitly address branding strategies. However, the study in the empirical section shows that branding strategies are crucial within the broader context of internationalization. By closely collaborating with their clients, Agency X develops effective long-term branding strategies. Their approach seems to align with the importance of branding within the internationalization process. Agency X has adopted a gradual and incremental approach to helping its clients enter foreign markets, based on its increased knowledge and experience in these markets. The Uppsala model suggests that companies typically begin their internationalization journey by exporting to neighboring countries or those with similar practices, taking into account factors such as geographical and cultural similarities (Johanson & Vahlne, 1997).

In line with this model, Agency X has helped numerous large companies with their internationalization efforts by focusing on branding strategies. Their clients already have some experience with internationalization, and they help them refine these strategies while providing guidance throughout the branding process. By gradually internationalizing their client's brand and adapting strategies based on their knowledge and involvement in foreign markets, Agency X operates in accordance with the principles of the Uppsala model. Moreover, Agency X has established several offices in various countries, following a steady approach to internationalization.

Additionally, Johanson and Sharma (1987) highlight the collaborative nature of internationalization, where the process involves international learning and resource acquisition. Agency X seems to recognize the importance of investing in knowledge and resources to successfully enter foreign markets. Furthermore, they emphasize the educational aspect of internationalization, encouraging their clients to view it as a learning experience rather than an immediate achievement.

5.2 Agency X- Branding Strategies

Agency X's branding strategy can be summarized by the See-Think-Do framework, which emphasizes the customer journey and the stages customers go through before making a purchase decision. This framework is not a theoretical model in itself but rather a practical approach used by Agency X. It focuses on three steps, namely creating brand awareness, encouraging potential customers to consider purchasing while recalling it, and changing them into actual purchasers. The theories related to brand awareness, such as the brand "awareness" dimension, could be particularly relevant (Aaker, 1991).

Enhancing Brand Awareness (See)

The first step of the See-Think-Do framework, which focuses on brand awareness, can be connected to Aaker's "Awareness pyramid", as it explains how consumers become aware of a brand and the progression through different stages of awareness. The three dimensions of brand awareness in this model, as mentioned, are brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind awareness (Aaker, 1991). According to the theory, reaching the highest point of the "Awareness pyramid", Top-of-mind, requires consistent and effective branding efforts over time. On the other hand, Agency X discussed in the empirical section how they assess their clients' willingness to invest in creating brand awareness in the target market by accomplishing this through various campaigns, such as influencer collaborations and digital-based promotions. In practice, the intent is to present the client's company and its offerings to an interested group without directly encouraging them to make a purchase. Moreover, according to Agency X, it is important that a definitive target for this initial step be based on reaching a specific number of people who have seen (are aware) of the company. This lines up with Aaker's view that brand awareness is not just about getting people to buy a product, but also about creating a positive brand image that resonates with consumers

(Aakers, 1991). By acquiring a superior understanding of the factors that contributed to brand awareness, companies can tailor their campaigns to create brand recognition, recall, and top-of-mind awareness.

Reviving Brand Recall (Think)

In this “Think” step, the goal is to stimulate customers’ interest in the brand and encourage them to consider making a purchase. This step could be connected to the second level of Aaker’s “Awareness pyramid”, which is brand recall. It focuses on empowering customers to think about the brand when they are contemplating a purchase (Aaker, 1991). Agency X adopts a theoretical approach by investigating the factors that stimulate cognitive processes among users and determining essential measures to optimize clients' websites. To effectively execute the “Think” stage, companies should put resources into building and maintaining strong brand awareness and recall. Brand recall is the degree to which a customer’s ability to retrieve the brand from memory when thinking about a specific product category without external input is assessed (Keller, 1993). According to Aaker (1991), a firm with high brand recall and recognition in their home markets has an advantage in the internationalization process. Agency X agrees with this, as they are constantly trying to strengthen brand recall, making it easier for customers to remember the brand.

Actionable Awareness (Do)

In the “DO” step, the focus is on converting potential customers into purchasers, which aligns with Aaker’s concept of top-of-mind. This level focuses on encouraging customers to take action and make a purchase, giving the brand a competitive advantage (Aaker, 1991). Agency X implements the theoretical approaches by optimizing clients' websites and highlighting unique features to drive customer engagement. They simplify the purchase as much as possible to increase the likelihood of a successful sale. Moreover, Agency X adapts branding strategies to the local context, consumer behaviors, and market trends. This localization strategy plays a crucial role in internationalizing top-of-mind awareness (Cavusgil et al., 2019). An example of their localization efforts is seen in adapting payment methods to suit local preferences, such as using Swish in Sweden. Additionally, understanding price sensitivity and assessing the target audience's needs are essential for forceful internationalization.

5.3 Company Y - Internationalization

In line with the gradual internationalization approach suggested by the Uppsala model, Company Y aimed to become more familiar with the Swedish market and establish relationships with local suppliers and partners. This approach allows companies to gather market knowledge and adapt their strategies accordingly (Johanson and Vahlne, 2003). By embracing this strategy, Company Y demonstrated their commitment to understanding the local business culture and meeting the expectations of their new partners in Sweden.

Company Y's internationalization approach aligns with the network model theory put forth by Johanson and Vahlne. According to this theory, companies should prioritize markets where they have existing relationships and contacts. However, Company Y deviated from this approach by choosing to internationalize to Sweden, despite lacking a pre-existing relationship in that market. Their decision was based on the potential for development opportunities, particularly in the market for solar panels and conservatories. This demonstrates Company Y's willingness to explore new markets and capitalize on growth prospects. On the other hand, it has created challenges in maintaining brand recognition, which is the lowest level of brand awareness.

Network challenges

The network theory proposed by Johansson and Vahlne, emphasizes that a network is a set of relationships between actors that enable companies to exchange information and resources (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). These relationships are often built over time and are based on trust, shared values, and common goals. Johansson and Vahlne (2003) further highlight the importance of trust in establishing long-term success. However, the study of Company Y's internationalization to Sweden highlights the challenges of establishing new relationships and building trust with local suppliers and partners.

They had to learn about the local business culture and adapt their approach to meet the expectations of their new partners. This required a significant investment of time and resources, which could have been a barrier to entry for smaller firms. Trust with local partners is a critical component of network theory, as it takes time to establish (Johansson and Vahlne, 2003). Company Y had to prove its reliability and commitment to its new partners before it could build the trust necessary to create long-term relationships. To navigate the regulatory

environment and cultural nuances of the Swedish market, Company Y formed partnerships with several local businesses. This approach aligns with Cavusgil et al.'s (2019) theory on localization strategies. By leveraging the expertise of local companies, Company Y was able to tailor its messaging and creative assets to better fit the needs and preferences of Swedish customers.

5.4 Company Y- Branding Strategies

Company Y's branding strategies have played a significant role in their internationalization efforts, particularly in terms of brand awareness in foreign markets, such as their expansion to Sweden. Although they faced challenges and did not fully achieve the desired level of brand awareness, their strategies have contributed to increasing visibility and recognition among their target audience.

The branding strategies implemented by Company Y have indeed contributed to their brand awareness in foreign markets, specifically in the case of their internationalization to Sweden. While they faced some challenges and did not fully achieve the desired level of brand awareness, their strategies have played a significant role in increasing their visibility and recognition among the target audience. Company Y's focus on brand recognition and market research resonates with the theories proposed by Aaker (1991) and Aaker's "Awareness Pyramid" theory (2002). Market research helped them identify the needs and preferences of their target audience, enabling them to tailor their messaging effectively. However, despite their marketing efforts, they acknowledge that the desired level of brand awareness in Sweden was not fully achieved. To enhance brand recognition, Company Y invested in digital marketing and optimized their website and social media presence. By creating localized content and implementing targeted advertising, they expanded their online visibility and reached a wider audience. Additionally, they recognized the significance of staying updated on cultural differences and trends, leading to extensive market research and collaboration with local marketing agencies.

The emphasis on sustainability and quality craftsmanship aligns with Keller's (1993) branding theories, allowing Company Y to differentiate itself and establish a reputation for excellence. By showcasing their values and commitment to environmental responsibility through partnerships with local enterprises, sponsorship of sustainability-focused events, and

collaboration with environmental organizations, they were able to connect with their target audience and foster customer loyalty.

The branding strategy of Company Y aligns with several prominent branding theories, including Keller's brand identity theory (1993). According to this theory, establishing a strong and consistent brand identity is crucial for differentiation and creating a positive image in the minds of consumers. In line with this theory, Company Y has prioritized quality craftsmanship and sustainability to set itself apart from lower-quality competitors and establish a reputation for excellence. Their powerful and unified brand identity is evident in their marketing materials, website, and conservatory designs, which feature organic and verdant hues and a stylized solar panel logo. By consistently utilizing this logo across all marketing channels, Company Y maintains a cohesive brand image. This focus on a strong and consistent brand identity helps Company Y stand out in a competitive industry and effectively reinforces their sustainability message to prospective customers.

Additionally, Company Y's partnerships with local enterprises and commitment to sustainability align with the brand equity theory (Keller, 1993), which suggests that brands should aim to build a strong and positive reputation in the market. By working with local environmental organizations and sponsoring sustainability-focused community events, Company Y has been able to showcase its values and commitment to environmental responsibility, thereby enhancing its brand awareness and reputation. This approach has also helped the company establish a loyal customer base that values its sustainable practices and commitment to the local community.

5.5 Case Comparison

It seems like Agency X and Company Y both recognize the importance of internationalizing their operations beyond their domestic markets. However, they approach internationalization and branding strategies differently. Agency X's approach reflects the gradual internationalization pathway proposed by the Uppsala model. They support clients with internationalization efforts, focusing on branding strategies through a gradual and incremental approach. They emphasize gradual internationalization and leveraging insights and experience in foreign markets to increase their chances of success in new markets. They assist their clients in investing in education and resources to support their internationalization efforts. Agency X follows the Uppsala model and focuses on collaborating closely with clients to

develop effective long-term branding strategies. The difference is that Agency X established offices in various countries, demonstrating a steady approach to internationalization as they adhere to the Uppsala model's idea of increasing commitment and involvement in international markets over time

On the other hand, Company Y undertakes its own internationalization process and prioritizes branding strategies to create brand awareness and build a positive reputation, particularly in the context of sustainability. However, despite their efforts, they did not fully achieve the desired level of brand awareness. It is important to note that the network mode theory, which suggests prioritizing markets with existing relationships, was not entirely relevant to Agency X's approach. Company Y chose to internalize its operations to Sweden, even through pre-existing relationships, based on the potential development opportunities in the solar panels and communications market. They adopted a gradual approach to becoming familiar with the Swedish market and establishing relationships with local suppliers and partners.

Regarding branding strategies, both Agency X and Company Y recognize the significance of brand awareness in their internationalization efforts. Agency X implements a See-Think-Do framework, focusing on the customer journey and stages leading to a purchase decision. They invest in creating brand awareness through various campaigns. They incorporate principles and concepts from established theories while introducing their own terminology for better comprehension and relevance within their organization. Similarly, Company Y acknowledges the importance of brand awareness in their branding strategy. They see these theories as valuable insights and guidelines for enhancing brand awareness. They intend to achieve the desired level of brand awareness and view theories as complementary to their branding strategy. Both companies understand the importance of practical implementation and empirical evidence.

It is important to note that due to the differences in geographical location and industry focus, there may be variations in the findings and practices between the two companies. Each company prioritizes aspects that are most relevant to its specific industry and organizational goals. Comparing the two companies may present challenges due to these variations, but it also offers valuable insights into the different approaches and strategies adopted in the context of internationalization and branding strategies.

6. Conclusion

In this section, a summary of the key findings and conclusions of the research will be presented. It will address the research question, highlight theoretical contributions, provide practical recommendations, and lastly, discuss the limitations of this research to suggest avenues for future research.

6.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of branding strategies during internationalization and their influence on effective marketing in foreign markets. To summarize, the study has been explored and addressed through theoretical insights and empirical evidence. The study highlights the contrasting experiences of two companies: one that effectively executed brand awareness strategies in international markets and another that faced challenges due to a lack of knowledge and involvement in such strategies. As mentioned previously, the comparison underscores the significance of investing in strategies that enhance brand awareness among the target audience. It emphasizes the difference between a company that adopts a comprehensive approach to brand strategies and one that solely focuses on practical aspects. All the participants in the interviews emphasized the significance of brand awareness for successful brand strategies during internationalization. However, they also perceived it as one of the most challenging aspects to achieve. This finding is quite interesting because the interviewees possess knowledge of how to implement branding strategies during internationalization, yet one of the companies finds brand awareness to be a difficult task. Agency X appears to have a better understanding and grasp of the situation compared to Company Y, which seems to be somewhat lost. This observation is not surprising considering that Agency X has more experience helping numerous companies, whereas Company Y may lack the same level of expertise and exposure. In addition, the interviewees talked about their digital content marketing strategies. These strategies align with the benefits and usage of digital context marketing as recommended by the theories.

They mentioned that digital marketing is a way to reduce costs when internationalizing. In the analysis section, it was observed that Company Y combines digital and relational internationalization strategies, while Agency X focuses solely on digital marketing. Agency X incorporates some customer engagement but does not use other relational strategies like forming partnerships in foreign markets. This differs from Company Y's approach, which incorporates both tactics. While it is important to note that having digital marketing as a branding strategy has been consistently improving and gaining relevance over the years, it is not recommended that Agency X abruptly change its approach. Digital marketing and branding are still highly effective for their businesses. However, for Company Y, it is valid to encourage a stronger focus on digital marketing to expand its brand and establish more networks.

The research question is: ***How can branding strategies be managed during internationalization?***

Returning to the presented research question, this study addressed and provided valuable insights into branding strategies during internationalization. The findings demonstrate that effective brand awareness strategies play a crucial role in internationalization. The findings also highlight several key insights.

Firstly, acquiring a thorough understanding of the target market emerged as a key factor in effectively managing brand strategies during internationalization. The study emphasized the importance of investing in knowledge and insights into local market dynamics, consumer behaviors, and cultural nuances. This understanding serves as the foundation for developing tailored brand strategies that resonate with the target audience while remaining aligned with the company's core values. Secondly, the study also highlighted the role of digital marketing and strategic campaigns in establishing brand awareness during internationalization. Creating localized content and leveraging online channels such as websites and social media were key to engaging with customers. The effectiveness of targeted advertising and search engine optimization in enhancing online visibility and attracting a diverse audience was emphasized. Furthermore, forming partnerships with local suppliers and collaborating with local entities is significant. The study's findings confirmed that these strategic alliances significantly contributed to building brand recognition in international markets. The access to local networks and distribution channels provided by the partnerships helped increase brand

visibility and reach a wider audience. By leveraging the local expertise and market knowledge of their partners, companies were able to effectively position their brands and establish a strong presence while internationalizing.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of investing in knowledge, tailoring branding strategies, and understanding local market dynamics to effectively manage internationalization efforts. Leveraging digital partnerships with local entities is essential for establishing brand awareness and expanding global presence during the internationalization process. These findings provide access to foreign markets through effective branding strategies.

6.2 Theoretical contribution

The theories discussed in this study provide valuable insights into the challenges and strategies of managing branding during internationalization, which are particularly relevant to the research purpose. One notable theoretical contribution is the utilization of Aaker's (1991) framework for categorizing brand awareness in participants' strategies. The study reveals that while there may be some variance among respondents regarding their preferred level of brand awareness, it is crucial to avoid consumer neglect and maintain consistent communication to uphold brand awareness. These findings emphasize the vital role of clear and ongoing communication in strengthening brand awareness, regardless of the company's position within Aaker's pyramid.

Furthermore, the study highlights the substantial value of brand recognition, even as the most fundamental form of brand awareness. Brand recognition directly influences consumers' purchasing decisions, aligning with Aaker's (1996) concept of a brand. Clear brand associations play a facilitative role in strengthening brand awareness within consumers' cognition. Therefore, it becomes imperative for companies to conduct a comprehensive analysis of potential associations, including emotions, perceptions, and imagery, that can be associated with their brand.

Some theories were not utilized due to various reasons, such as the focus and scope of the research, the availability of relevant literature, or the specific objectives of the study. However, the chosen theories on brand awareness in this study, such as Aaker's (1991) framework, have been effectively connected to the broader context of branding strategies and

their impact on effective marketing in foreign markets. The importance of these theories lies in their ability to provide a framework for understanding and analyzing brand awareness, its dimensions, and its significance in consumer decision-making. To further enhance the understanding of brand awareness and its connection to branding strategies, other theories could be considered. For example, the theory of consumer behavior, particularly the concept of information processing and decision-making, can provide insights into how consumers perceive and process brand information. This theory could be connected to the importance of clear and consistent communication in upholding brand awareness, as discussed previously. Moreover, the theory of cultural branding could be explored to understand the role of culture in shaping brand perceptions and preferences. As mentioned, cultural differences and nuances play a significant role in international markets. Therefore, incorporating this theory could provide insights into adapting branding strategies to different cultural contexts and enhancing brand awareness in foreign markets.

By connecting these additional theories to the main theory of brand awareness, the thesis could provide a more comprehensive understanding of branding strategies during internationalization and their impact on effective marketing. It would highlight the interplay between brand awareness, consumer behavior, brand equity, and cultural factors, offering valuable insights for companies seeking to expand their presence in foreign markets and enhance their brand awareness efforts.

6.3 Managerial recommendations

Companies develop more effective branding strategies to improve their brand image and cultivate customer loyalty.

The results of the Company Y study indicate that it is important for companies to conduct in-depth market research to gain deep insights into the distinctive characteristics of each target market. By analyzing consumer behaviors, cultural norms, and regulatory requirements to formulate effective branding strategies that resonate with local consumers. In addition, the company should actively pursue local partnerships and networks to establish a strong presence in the market and enhance brand awareness among the local population. As Company Y's successful venture demonstrates, businesses can learn a lot about market dynamics and consumer preferences by fostering strong relationships with local partners.

In addition, the results of the Agency X study indicate that companies should create a clear vision and unified goals that are in line with the company's overall brand strategy. This will provide a sense of direction and purpose, ensuring that all stakeholders are working together towards a common goal of increasing brand awareness and recognition in international markets. Therefore, it is recommended to implement the See-Think-Do model to design and execute well-structured and targeted marketing campaigns. This model prioritizes leveraging digital channels, in line with the contemporary emphasis on digital marketing in the brand landscape. By leveraging data from these channels, companies can set specific goals and assess the effectiveness of their campaigns in line with the previously discussed performance measurement theories.

The results of both studies indicate that a strong presence on social media platforms and a well-optimized website can help build brand recognition and overall brand awareness in international markets and within the target market. In addition, it is crucial to optimize their website for search engines and ensure user-friendly navigation. In today's complex communication landscape, companies should adopt a holistic approach to brand communication that takes into account different channels and touchpoints. Although social media, influencers, and events play a significant role, direct customer interaction in-store and the response from staff also influence brand perception.

In conclusion, to gain brand awareness as a branding strategy during internationalization, companies must develop communication strategies that take into account each country's unique preferences and challenges. Hamid et al. (2012) highlighted the potential for branding strategies to set businesses apart from rivals, build brand equity, and increase customer loyalty.

6.4 Limitation

This study centers on examining the influence of limited brand recognition, particularly brand awareness, on the process of internationalization. It specifically explores the role of branding strategies in facilitating internationalization. To ensure a focused and conclusive outcome, this study sets limitations that narrow the scope of research.

- Geographical scope: The study does not focus on any particular geographical location; this case study involved companies based in Sweden and the Netherlands. These companies initiated their internationalization process in nearby countries. While these

cases provide valuable insights, it is important to recognize that the findings may not be universally applicable to companies operating in different regions.

- **Timeframe:** The study primarily examines the current branding strategies used by the two selected companies. It does not explore the historical development of branding strategies or consider the potential future branding strategies during internationalization. By focusing on the present, the study is anticipated to provide relevant insights into contemporary practices.
- **Sample size:** The study is limited to two companies. One is a larger agency that specializes in helping firms with the internationalization of their branding, while the other one is a comparatively smaller company implementing its own internationalization and branding strategies. Although these cases offer valuable perspectives, it is important to acknowledge that the findings may not fully capture the experiences and practices of all companies engaged in international branding strategies.

6.5 Future Research

To enhance the understanding of branding strategies during internationalization, we recommend that future studies consider the following suggestions:

- **Expanding the geographical scope:** Future research should encompass companies from diverse regions and industries to gain insights into international branding strategies across different cultural and market contexts.
- **Quantitative research:** Conduct quantitative research by surveying a larger number of companies. This approach would allow for the creation of extensive context data sets, providing valuable insights into the strategies employed by organizations during internationalization. For instance, this could be conducted by asking relevant questions about specific branding strategies used, it could be identified best practices and challenges related to brand awareness in different markets.
- **Focused on one industry:** It would be beneficial to focus on one industry rather than multiple industries, allowing a deeper exploration of industry-specific branding strategies. Comparing multiple companies in the same industry would provide insight into the similarities and differences in their international branding efforts.

- Exploring the historical development: By studying the historical context, researchers can gain more valuable insights into the evolution of branding practices and identify trends or patterns that emerged in international markets.

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8. Appendices 1

Interview guide

1. Describe the company and what they do?
2. Can you describe the types of companies that you typically work with, and what their branding needs are?
3. How important is brand awareness to the success of a company's internationalization efforts?
4. What are some common challenges that companies face when internationalizing the brand, and how do you address these challenges?
5. Can you describe any specific branding strategies or campaigns that have been particularly successful?
6. How do you measure the success of your branding efforts when internationalizing, and what metrics do you use to evaluate brand awareness?
7. How do you stay up-to-date with cultural differences and market trends in different regions, and how do you incorporate this knowledge into your branding strategies?
8. Can you share any insights or lessons learned from your experiences with international branding efforts?
9. What do you see as the future of branding and marketing in the global marketplace, and how is your agency/company preparing for these changes?

