LAPPEENRANTA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

School of Business

International Marketing Management

Eveliina Tarvainen

STORYTELLING AS A BRANDING TOOL IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Supervisor/Examiner: Professor Sami Saarenketo

Examiner: Assistant Professor Anssi Tarkiainen

ABSTRACT

The objective of this thesis is to describe what storytelling is, how it can be utilized in building of brand equity, and what are the special characteristics of storytelling in social media environment. Previous publications assist in creating a theoretical framework, which explains the concepts' influence on one another. The research suggests that storytelling potentially strengthens all dimensions of brand equity, primarily due its engaging content, its ability to enhance the formation of an emotional connection, and its capabilities in improving recall and recognition.

Qualitative content analysis is conducted to investigate how often and in which ways storytelling is currently being used in social media. The sample is composed of stories found from top one hundred most popular Facebook brands' pages. The findings implicate that the amount of company-originated stories in social media is still quite low. The stories can be categorized according to story types previously established in literature. Most of the stories aim to evoke feelings of admiration and nostalgia in the audience, but several also attempt to make the audience laugh by presenting humorous incidents and unexpected events. The interactive nature of storytelling in social media is emphasized and implications are offered for both branding practitioners and future researchers.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on kuvailla tarinankerrontaa brändin rakennuksen välineenä, ja selvittää mitkä ovat tarinankerronnan erityispiirteet sosiaalisessa mediassa. Aikaisempien teorioiden ja julkaisujen avulla kootaan viitekehys joka osoittaa käsitteiden vaikutukset toisiinsa. Tutkimus osoittaa tarinankerronnan vaikuttavan vahvistavasti kaikkiin brändipääoman ulottuvuuksiin, lähinnä tunteita herättävien ja muistettavuutta lisäävien ominaisuuksiensa ansiosta.

Empiirisessä osiossa selvitetään laadullisen sisällönanalyysin keinoin kuinka yleistä brändien tarinankerronta tällä hetkellä on, ja kuvaillaan millaisia tarinoita yritykset kertovat. Aineisto koostuu sadan suosituimman brändin Facebookissa jakamista videomuotoisista tarinoista. Tutkimus osoitti, että brändien tarinankerronta sosiaalisessa mediassa on toistaiseksi melko vähäistä. Tarinat voidaan luokitella kirjallisuudesta tuttujen tarinatyyppien mukaisesti. Suurin osa brändien esittämistä tarinoista pyrkii synnyttämään yleisössä ihailun ja nostalgian tunteita, mutta useat tarinat myös sisältävät humoristisia piirteitä.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The first chapter explains the background of the study, defines the research gap and research questions, introduces central definitions, presents a short literature review and the methods of research, and describes the limitations of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

Storytelling has reached a significant status in companies' branding efforts. As the modern society becomes more and more communicative and the markets are saturated, companies need to take extra measures in order to differentiate themselves and to make their message memorable. Consumers demand products which provide unique experiences that appeal to their emotions. In academic literature, there is a strong belief in benefits of storytelling in marketing and branding (Marzec 2007; Love 2008; Woodside et al. 2008; Fog et al. 2010). Storytelling has a manner of reaching consumers in unconditional ways by going beyond facts and information to resonate on a deeper level (Baker & Boyle 2009, 81). Storytelling is a powerful tool which can be used to bring business messages to life and to engage audiences through its authentic approach (Love 2008, 27). The physical product no longer makes the difference but the difference lies in a story, which enhances the emotional bond between the consumer and the brand.

The tools and strategies of communication have changed significantly within the last decades. The rise of social media introduces substantial changes to the interaction between companies and consumers. In the last few years, the use of social technologies has become an extensive cultural, social and economic phenomenon. Hundreds of millions of people have adopted new behaviors using social media. All the rituals and rites in which individuals and groups in society participate – from personal events to political activities

and global happenings – play out on social platforms. More than 1.5 billion people around the globe have an account on social networking site, and almost one in five online hours are spent on social networks. Social media sites have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior and post-purchase communication and evaluation (Mangold & Faulds 2009, 358). Businesses are also changing the way they operate. Social media allows companies to engage in timely and direct contact with consumers at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than could be reached through more conventional communication tools (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 67). The digital technologies facilitate the sharing of stories, maintaining storytelling's position as an effective way for brands to interact with consumers (Adamson 2008, 87). (McKinsey Global Institute 2012)

"Nowadays, when getting anyone to pay attention to your message is harder than getting a teenager off of Facebook, marketers continue to push creative boundaries to engage people using the newest innovations from games to branded content. While these emerging forms of communications are often based on the latest technologies, it's ironic that the hottest trend in marketing today just might be the ancient art of storytelling." (Johnson 2012)

1.2 Research gap and questions

This research contributes in combining three components; branding, storytelling and social media. The purpose of the study is to build a bridge between the components and to summarize what storytelling is, how it can be utilized as a branding tool and what the characteristics of storytelling in social media are.

The primary research question is: *How is storytelling being used as a branding tool in social media?*

In order to answer the main question thoroughly, the following sub-questions are presented:

Research question 2: *What are the characteristics of building brand equity in social media setting?*

Research question 3: *What are the benefits of storytelling in creation of brand equity?*

Research question 4: *What are the fundamentals of storytelling in social media?*

Construction of the sub-questions in the context of the three key concepts is presented in the below model (Figure 1). Each link between the components is investigated separately in order to gain a deep understanding of the subject.
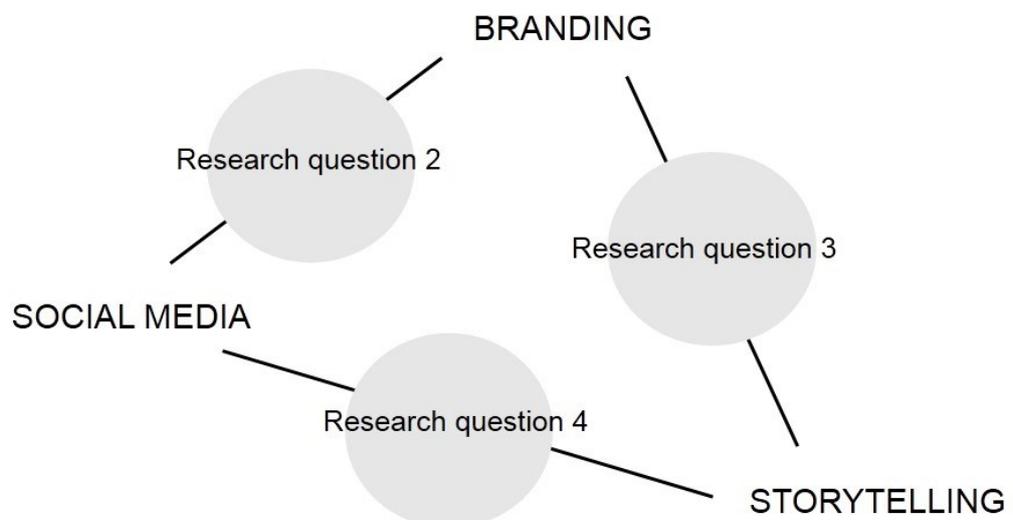
Figure 1. The structure of the sub-questions.

1.3 Key definitions

The central terms directly related to the research gap are defined in this chapter.

Brand, branding and brand equity

A brand is an asset of a company; a guarantee of quality, origin and performance. Brand facilitates the identification of products, services and businesses as well as differentiates them from competition, and the brand should be recognized as a basis of competitive advantage and long-term profitability. *Branding* is the process of expressing the core values of a brand, in an effort to position the brand as unique and valuable. *Brand equity* is a set of assets which creates value in a variety of ways to both the company and to the customers. (Aaker 1996; Saltzer-Mörling & Strannegård 2004; Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006)

Storytelling

Story is a verbal account of actions and events (Salzer-Möring & Strannegård 2004, 229), an account of events that are casually connected (Denning 2011, 13). In a branding perspective, story is a value statement in which company relates what it is and what it stands for, communicating the benefits and values of the product or service through appealing stories. *Storytelling* allows companies to inspire and motivate, educate and shape as well as engage and drive (Love 2008, 27). According to Fog et al. (2010, 32) four elements make up the core basis of storytelling: message, conflict, characters and plot. The elements can be mixed, matched and applied in a variety of ways depending on the context in which the story is told, and the story's purpose.

Social media

Social media has also been referred as *consumer-generated media* (Mangold & Faulds 2009) or *user-generated content* (Christodoulides et al. 2012). It encompasses a broad range of online forums and websites, discussion boards and social networking sites (see Table 1) which can be used by both consumers and companies. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 61) define social media as "*a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of consumer-generated content*".

Table 1. Social media platforms and their purposes (McKinsey Global Institute 2012).

Social networks	Keep connected through personal and business profiles
Blogs / microblogs	Publish and discuss opinions and experiences
Ratings and reviews	Evaluate and rate products, services and experiences; share opinions
Social commerce	Purchasing in groups, on social platforms, and sharing opinions
Wikis	Search, create and adapt articles; rapidly access shared knowledge
Discussion forums	Discuss topics in open communities; rapidly access expertise
Shared workspaces	Co-create content; coordinate joint projects and tasks
Crowdsourcing	Harness collective knowledge and generate collectively derived answers
Social gaming	Connect with friends and strangers to play games
Media and file sharing	Upload, share and comment on photos, videos and audio

1.4 Literature review

As this thesis aims to present three widely discussed elements from a novel perspective, a thorough review of past literature was conducted. The main theoretical source of the study is the previous literature on brand equity, storytelling and social media. Storytelling as a branding tool is quite a new phenomenon and as such has not been an origin of comprehensive academic research yet. This chapter presents the central scholar papers and selected textbooks on the subject.

The research on brand building and brand equity lies heavily on two academics; David A. Aaker and Kevin Lane Keller. Both have presented their sets of assets required for building of customer-based brand equity, and both theories will be discussed in chapter two. Brand equity is such a complex concept that although studied extensively, the literature is largely fragmented and inconclusive (Christodoulides & de Chernatony 2010). A comprehensive literature review has been conducted by Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010) with regard to brand equity conceptualization. More recently several academic papers have focused on describing the changes in branding process in the social media era (Faust & Householder 2009; Sheehan & Morrison 2009; Barwise & Meehan 2010; Edelman 2010; Bruhn et al. 2012; Christodoulides et al. 2012; Hudspeth 2012).

Hype surrounding social media has resulted in an abundant amount of literature from self-help books to corporate strategy manuals. Adamson (2008) gives practical advice on branding in the digital environment, including an emphasis on storytelling and brand relevance. Smith and Zook have published a fifth edition of *Marketing Communications* (2011), as the online marketing tools have gained importance related to the more traditional offline tools. Academic papers have mostly focused on defining the characteristics of social media (Hoffman & Fodor 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein 2010) and explaining the position of social media in the overall marketing mix (Mangold & Faulds 2009; Hanna et al. 2011).

The textbook that describes storytelling as a branding technique most thoroughly is *Storytelling: Branding in Practice* by Fog et al. (2010). The writers give practical guidelines and tools for developing stories for branding purposes. Fog et al. (Ibid) address the permanent change in balance between companies and consumers due the current technological development; one way communication from company to market is gone, and through social media, anyone can take on the role of a storyteller and

reach a global audience (Fog et al. 2010, 185). Various academic papers have been published on storytelling; defining the technique and examining its usage in branding practices (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård 2004; Denning 2006; Papadatos 2006; Herskovitz & Crystal 2010; Sevin & White 2011; Chiu et al. 2012). Lundqvist et al. (2013) investigated how a story influences consumers' brand experience. The findings indicate that consumers who have been exposed to a brand story describe the brand in more positive terms and are willing to pay more for the product, compared to those who have not been exposed to the story. The study demonstrates how brand stories can be used to create and reinforce positive brand associations.

1.5 Methods of research

In chapter two, the three main concepts of this thesis are investigated from an academic point of view, creating a theoretical framework. In chapter three, a qualitative content analysis is conducted in order to analyze real-life examples of stories found in social media environment. Facebook sites of top hundred most popular brands in Finland are reviewed in terms of their story-typed company-originated videos, and all the obtained stories are categorized and further analyzed based on characteristics identified in storytelling theory. As the categories used are derived from an existing theory, the methodology can be described as theory-based analysis. Theory-based analysis methods are often used when assessing previous knowledge in unfamiliar contexts (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 97). The research process and the decisions made are explained in detail in chapter three. These methods together will lead to a comprehensive understanding of the study's research gap and form a reply to the research questions.

1.6 Limitations of the study

As the field of research is international marketing management, this study will focus on storytelling as a branding tool, although storytelling is also being utilized commonly as an educational instrument.

Although researching storytelling from both perspectives – the stories generated by consumers as well as the stories generated by companies – would be highly motivating, the constraints on resources limit the empirical research to the brand stories produced by companies. As such, this thesis does not give an all-inclusive reply to the main research question. These limitations are considered in the final chapter of this study.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into two main parts; theoretical and empirical. First in chapter two, the theoretical aspects of the three main theories are discussed. Based on the previous literature and publications, a theoretical framework is formed. In chapter three, the theories are examined in a contemporary context, and the findings are reviewed and analyzed. The final chapter of the thesis presents the conclusions and proposes some implications for branding practitioners as well as for future researchers.

2. STORYTELLING AS A BRANDING TOOL IN SOCIAL MEDIA

This chapter explores the research topic as indicated in the research questions two, three and four, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the subject and a theory-based response to the research questions.

2.1 Branding in social media setting

As shortly presented in the previous chapter, brand reflects the complete experience that a customer has with a product or service, and when successful, a brand can be a valuable asset to the company. Brand comprises the both tangible and intangible attributes that differentiate products from each other. The notion that brand has as equity which exceeds its conventional asset value has been developed by financial professionals (Hong-bumm et al. 2003). Customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong and unique brand associations in memory (Keller 1993). The concept and measuring of brand equity has interested academics primarily due to the importance of obtaining an absolute competitive advantage in today's marketplace.

Companies' and consumers' interest in brands and brand equity has resulted in several conceptualizations of the subject, but Aaker's (1991, 1996) model has been widely accepted and employed (Hong-bumm et al. 2003). Aaker suggests four dimensions of consumer-based brand equity:

1. brand awareness;

2. brand associations;

3. perceived quality; and

4. brand loyalty.

These four serve as the set of assets required for building brand equity, and each asset creates value in a variety of different ways. (Aaker 1996, 8-9)

Another recognized branding guru, Kevin Lane Keller, has also presented a consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) model. The model has been developed to understand the different types of marketing communication required for brand building. According to the CBBE model, brand equity is fundamentally determined by the brand knowledge created in consumers' minds by branding programs and activities. (Keller 2009)

Below model presents Aaker's and Keller's findings of brand equity combined (Figure 2).
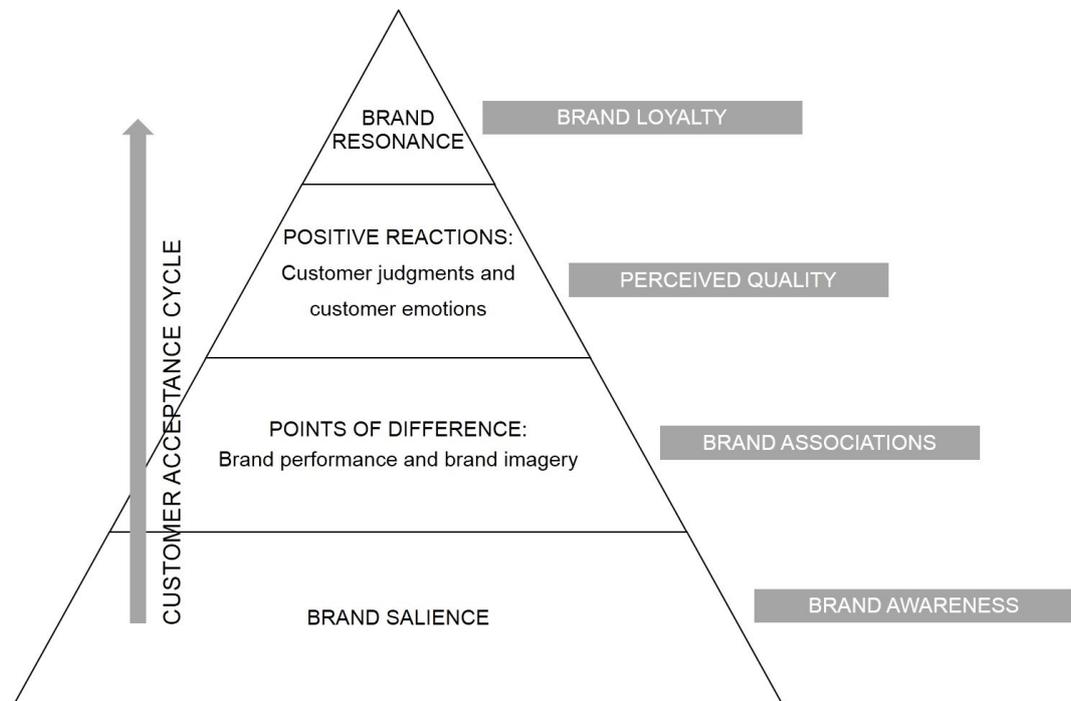
Figure 2. Customer-based brand equity model (Adapted from Kotler & Pfoertsch 2008, 167).

The model implies that a strong, valuable brand involves the customer over four steps:

1. Brand awareness – establishing a proper identity and awareness for the brand.

2. Establishment of points of difference – creating the desired brand meaning through strong, favorable and unique brand meanings.

3. Positive reactions – eliciting positive and accessible brand reactions.

4. Building brand relationships – creating relationships characterized by intense and active loyalty. (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006, 167)

In addition to the consumer-based viewpoint to brand equity, the value of a brand can also be estimated from a financial point of view. The financial perspective aims to extract the brand equity's value from the value of the firm's other assets for accounting purposes (Keller 1993; Hong-bumm et al. 2003). However, the financial value of brand equity is only the outcome of a consumer response to a brand name (Christodoulides & de Chernatony 2010, 46). This thesis is limited to discuss only the customer-based perspective of brand equity as the means to evaluate how the brand value is generated especially by storytelling techniques.

The building blocks of customer-based brand equity are presented in the next paragraphs, taking into consideration both the views of Aaker and Keller. The elements are also evaluated from the perspective of social media environment.

2.1.1 Brand awareness

Brand awareness, the first asset of brand equity and the lowest block on customer acceptance cycle, refers to the strength of brand's presence in a consumer's mind. Awareness is measured according to the different ways

in which consumers remember a brand, ranging from recognition to recall and from "top of mind" to dominant. Recognition reflects familiarity gained from past exposure, and can result in positive feelings towards nearly anything. Recognition requires that consumers correctly discriminate the brand as having been seen or heard previously (Keller 1993, 3). Consumers instinctively prefer an item they have previously seen to one that is new to them. A brand is said to have recall if it comes to consumers' minds when its product class is mentioned at a recall situation. The ultimate brand awareness level, brand name dominance, exists when most consumers can only mention a name of a single brand. At the current situation of highly commoditized markets and consumers being bombarded by marketing messages each day, companies must get consumers to recall and recognize their brands and thus considerably enhance the brand equity. (Aaker 1996, 10-17)

Keller (2009) refers to brand awareness as brand salience. Salience indicates the degree of how easily and often consumers think of the brand under various purchase or consumption situations. As per Thackeray et al. (2009), creating awareness is one of the primary reasons why companies operate in social media. According to Keller (2009), social media platforms can improve both breadth and strength of brand awareness. The internet allows very specific targeting of potentially difficult-to-reach groups, facilitating the creation of strong brand awareness for online customer segments. In terms of salience, one of interactive marketing communication's key advantages is the ability to reach customers when they seek information through search engines, thus heightening awareness at potential purchase opportunities. (Keller 2009, 143, 148)

Traditionally, brand awareness is measured through surveys and studies. Online however, companies have a number of ways to assess awareness. In social media setting, every time a consumer uses an application of the

company, the company gains increased exposure to its brand, often in highly relevant context. Usage of varied social media appliances enhances and strengthens associations of the brand in customers' minds through increased exposure. (Hoffman & Fodor 2010)

2.1.2 Brand associations

According to Aaker (1996, 25), the key to building strong brands is to develop and implement a brand identity. As per de Chernatony (1999), brand identity consists of vision and culture, which drive its desired positioning, personality and the subsequent relationships, all of which are then presented to reflect different stakeholders' actual and aspirational self-images. Brand identity guides brand associations, the second element of brand equity. Aaker suggests an identity-based perspective when considering brand associations. It takes into account both the brand perception of external stakeholders, referred to as brand image, and the self-reflection of the brand by internal stakeholders, referred to as brand identity. The identity-based brand approach stresses the brand's interaction capability, and is essential when examining brand equity in social media environment. (Aaker 1996; de Chernatony 1999; Arnhold & Burmann 2010)

Keller (2009) separates the customers' brand associations into two blocks; brand performance and brand imagery. Brand performance focuses on how well the product or service meets the customers' functional needs, whereas brand imagery defines the brands' attempts to meet customers' psychological or social needs (Keller 2009, 143). In his research on brand equity, Keller (1993) emphasizes the role of brand image as a reflection of the brand associations held in consumers' memory. Brand awareness affects consumer decision making by influencing the formation and strength of brand associations in the brand image. Associations vary according to their favorability, strength and uniqueness. Not all associations however are relevant and valued in a purchase decision – although associations may

facilitate brand recognition or awareness or lead to conclusions about product quality, an association may not always be considered a meaningful factor in a purchase decision. The evaluations may be context-dependent and vary according to consumers' purchase aspirations. (Keller 1993)

The difference between brand identity and brand image is essential in the evaluation of brand equity. Identity is how the brand looks, including the logo, graphics and colors; "the visual narrative". Brand image on the other hand is the perception of how the consumer understands the identity and signifies the associations linked to the brand. Identity helps consumers to remember a brand, recognize it, and eventually build associations with the brand. In short - identity is reality, whereas image is perception. (Smith & Zook 2011, 39)

In order to create an effective brand story, Fog et al. (2010) highlight the importance of a company to be fully aware of both; its identity and image. If the story has to be consistent in the context of all stakeholders, the company's identity needs to be streamlined with the external perceptions of the company. The gap between identity and image – the differences between internal and external data – could be caused by a communicational problem which could be quite easily fixed, or by a substance issue, which would require radical changes to the company's business plan. For the brand story to be able to express the essence of the company's brand, the identity and image must complement each other in order to create a one holistic brand and a solid foundation for a brand story. (Fog et al. 2010, 79-81)

Online tools can assist to establish a number of key brand performance and brand imagery points-of-parity and points-of-difference versus competitors on prices, designs and performance. Websites can convey rich accounts of history, heritage and experiences and help to establish brand personality

through creative content (Keller 2009, 149). According to Adamson (2008, 22), the key to successful branding in social media environment is to get a better understanding of how modern online applications should or should not be integrated into the overall branding mix, in order to create positive brand associations and to mitigate any negative associations.

Rowley (2004) emphasizes that brand is a complex concept, and the challenge of branding is to develop a set of meanings or associations for the brand that can resonate with the variety of perspectives that consumers might adopt in formulating a brand image. In an online environment, a concept of brand experience is often promoted. This concept highlights that the customers' brand image is formed not just by a product or service and its attributes or values, but by the total experience that they associate with a brand, including all sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli (Rowley 2004; Lundqvist et al. 2013). Positive experiences can lead into preferential treatment towards a brand. The possibility of such evolvement is based on the argument that brand related experiences have a tendency to become a part of a person's long-term memory in shape of brand associations, and thus it is possible that some of these associations play a significant role in building attitudes such as brand preference, satisfaction and loyalty (Shamim & Butt 2013).

2.1.3 Perceived quality

The third factor of brand equity, brand's perceived quality, is often a major strategic thrust of a company, and the key positioning dimension and the defining point of differentiation for corporate brands. Among the other brand associations, only perceived quality has been shown to drive financial performance. Many companies consider quality to be one of their primary values and include it in their mission statement. (Aaker 1996, 17-19)

Customers' perceptions of the brand are closely related to perceived quality. It is at the center of what customers are purchasing, and in that sense, it is a bottom-line measure of the impact of brand identity. Even if the brand identity is defined by functional benefits, most studies show that perceptions of the benefits are associated with perceived quality. Nevertheless important to a company, measuring of perceived quality is often impossible. At first, company must gain a comprehensive understanding of what quality means to different customers segments, and enable the organization to deliver quality products and services. The perceived quality may however differ from the actual quality for a number of reasons. Customers may be influenced by a previous image of poor quality, and not open for a re-evaluation. Second, a company may be achieving quality on dimensions that consumers do not consider important. Third, consumers may lack capabilities necessary to make rational and objective judgment on quality, and as a result, rely on one or two cues that they associate with quality, which may be incorrect ones. Thus it is imperative for a company to understand what the consumers use as the basis for their evaluation of brand quality. (Aaker 1996, 19-20)

Keller (2009) emphasizes the depth of emotional response as a key for strong branding. He divides the customers' perceptions into two groups based on their focus; into brand judgments which focus on the customers' own personal opinions and evaluations which are based on previously mentioned performance and brand imagery, and into brand emotions which are focused on customers' emotional responses and reactions with respect to the brand.

As a result for rapid increase of user-generated online content, Christodoulides et al. (2012) have investigated how consumers' involvement with brand-related user-generated content affects consumers' perceptions of brands. The authors' findings indicate that consumers'

involvement in user-generated content positively affects brand equity and has a positive impact on brand perceptions. The findings also suggest that brand equity, through the four presented dimensions, has a positive impact on three drivers of user-generated content; co-creation, empowerment and community. The study further implies that consumers are more involved with user-generated content which relates to brands that help them define who they are and give them the tools to express themselves creatively. The authors suggest that equipped with the research findings, companies can utilize user-generated content to build brand equity through an interactive strategy to improve brand positioning according to consumer wants and needs.

Keller (2009) supports the notion that online marketing tools are utilized by companies when pursuing positive reactions from consumers. Interactive platforms can encourage attitude formation and decision making especially when combined with offline channels. Due their ability to deliver sight, sound and motion in all forms, interactive tools can create impactful and enduring feelings (Keller 2009, 149). As per Adamson (2008, 16-17) people have always connected more easily with brands that distinguish themselves by expressing an emotional motivation to believe their message, rather than relying on facts or figures. In an online environment the emotional point of difference has become a far more important success factor in standing out from the crowd, and brands must promise and fulfill a higher-order need in order to maintain their place in the minds of consumers.

2.1.4 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty indicates the degree of commitment that a brand has achieved among its customer base and beyond (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2008, 166). Brand loyalty has an important function in the brand asset creation as without a loyal customer base, a brand is vulnerable and has value only in its potential to create loyal customers. Highly loyal customer base can be expected to

generate predictable sales and profit streams. Further, the loyalty has a substantial impact on marketing costs, as it is often much less costly to retain customers than to attract new ones. The loyalty of existing customers also represents a substantial entry barrier to competitors due the mentioned cost factor. Loyalty can be enhanced by developing or strengthening the consumers' relationship with the brand, for example by loyalty programs such as frequent-buyer programs or customer clubs. (Aaker 1996, 21-23)

As per Keller (2009), brand loyalty has four dimensions which each capture a different aspect of brand loyalty; behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement. Keller calls these highest levels of brand acceptance as *brand resonance*. Brand resonance reflects the intensity or depth of a psychological bond that customers have with a brand, as well as the level of activity provoked by this loyalty.

Loyalty programs can also be managed online. Several companies engage customers for example in Facebook; Facebook users can demonstrate their affinity for a brand through using the "like" button. By "liking" a brand, consumers can express their interest to a particular brand, communicate positive associations about the brand to others, to stay in contact with the brand, or receive specific deals or promotions (Lipsman et al. 2012, 43). Brands are able to establish a social presence and engage with fans, helping to shape the consumers' brand experiences, and to leverage the consumers' voices for grater branding impact (Ibid). Social media applications can directly engage consumers by both producing and distributing information through collaborative writing, content sharing, social networking and social bookmarking, allowing companies more direct access to consumers with less dependency on traditional communication channels (Thackeray et al. 2009, 338). Thackeray et al. (2009) imply that in social media environment, consumers become creators or co-creators with the company and an active participant instead of a passive recipient. This

process can increase buying or loyalty as the consumers who are invested are more likely to purchase the product or service. In addition, they may be more likely to create positive word of mouth amongst their friends and associates. Online games and competitions provide a natural and obvious venue for engaging and entertaining, and provide users a sense of ownership (Mangold & Faulds 2009, 362). For example, Metro Newspaper (2013) held a competition in which readers took a photo of themselves with the newspaper, then uploaded the photo to the Facebook competition site and shared it with all the audience in order to win a backstage pass, VIP-ticket and a meeting with Justin Bieber. A Peruvian fifteen-year-old girl won the competition by 9,022 "like" votes. Pepsi (2013) shares consumers' tweets on their official website, and allowed consumers to participate in making of their promotional video Pepsi Super Bowl XLVII halftime show which was aired at the Super Bowl as well as online. Both campaigns encouraged a high level of participation and resulted in extensive media coverage and as well as substantial word of mouth communication.

The highly engaging social media campaigns involving user-generated content as the ones described above, are likely to generate commitment on the part of the consumer, reinforcing loyalty to the brand and making the consumer more likely to commit additional effort to support the brand in future (Hoffman & Fodor 2010).

As per Keller (2009), social media platforms are very useful in terms of creating brand loyalty in that it permits daily or frequent encounters and feedback opportunities for consumers with a brand. The area where interactivity has the most impact is active engagement. Social media allows consumers to learn from and teach others about the brand, as well as express their commitment to a brand and observe the brand loyalty of others. (Keller 2009, 149)

Several social media platforms are often measured according to their ability to create engagement. Definitions of engagement emphasize the dual roles of cognition and emotion in the creation of engagement. Engagement is argued to include feelings of confidence, integrity, pride and passion to a brand (Bowden 2009, 64). As per Smith and Zook (2011, 5), successful digital campaigns are based on producing engaging content, as the engaging content enhances the customer experience. The authors have created a framework – the engagement ladder – to assist companies in creating competitive advantage as the customers become more engaged and more loyal to the brand (Figure 3). The lower half of the ladder encourages customers to engage via product ratings, reviews and discussions. The upper half is dedicated to user-generated content which requires more involvement and encourages customers to become co-creators of the branded content. The highest level of co-creation occurs when customers co-create the products that they subsequently purchase. Moving of the customers and other stakeholders up the ladder of engagement strengthens brand loyalty and boosts sales. (Smith & Zook 2011, 18)
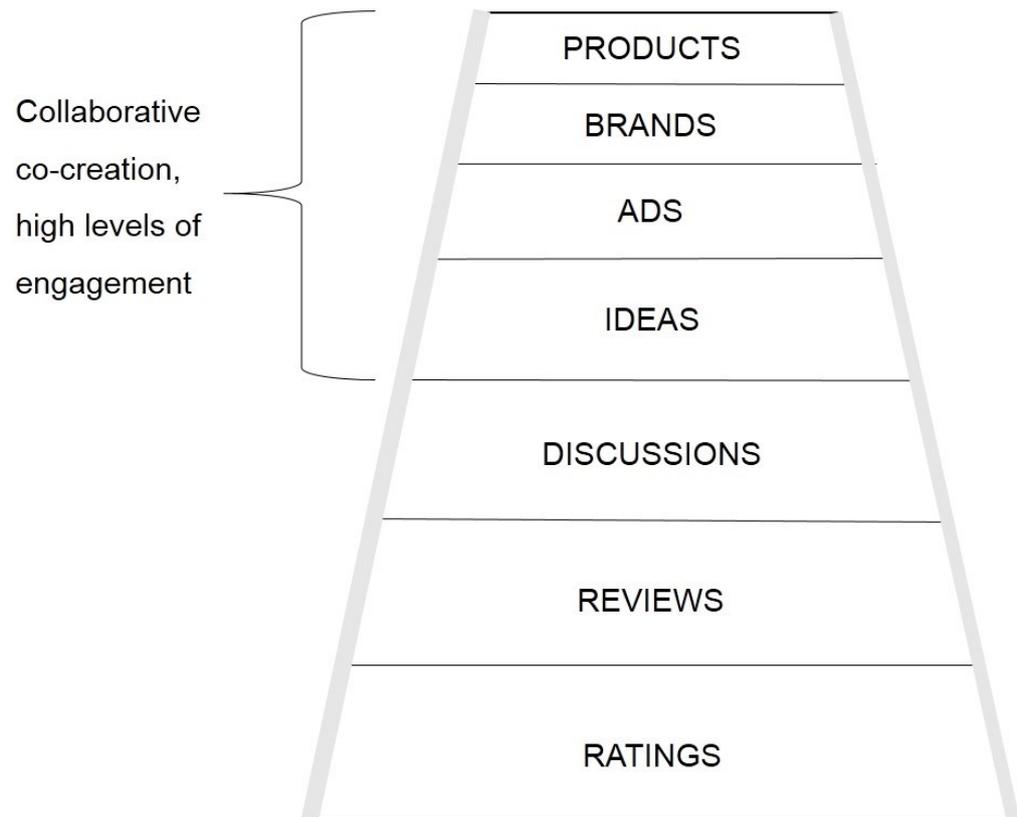
Figure 3. Ladder of engagement (Smith & Zook 2011, 19).

Hudspeth (2012, 30) agrees that social media platforms provide a very favorable venue for brands to engage in a dialogue with the customers, and if brands can use this engaging environment and content to excite and stimulate prospects, customers' trust will be gained and they will eventually become active customers as well as ambassadors for the brand.

Martin and Todorov (2010) have identified five levels of engagement that can be utilized in social media environment, and which determine the impact of brand engagement.

1. *The gag*, which essentially offers something fun to play with. Gags get attention quickly, disrupt activities and make the consumer laugh, but are usually very short lived.

2. *Utility* usually comes in a form of a task-oriented feature, such as calculator, recommendation engine or a price finder. With utility it is possible to leverage contextual data and provide contemporary value.

3. *Social connectivity* across platforms allows consumers to connect with brands and socialize with the brand offering. Giving the consumers the tools to help spread the message and influence opinions across social network can assist in converting customers into brand ambassadors.

4. *Brand customization* and the ability to express individuality builds stronger brand attraction and loyalty.

5. *Brand lifestyle* presents the highest level of engagement and arrives when brands provide everyday services, utilities, customization and social ecosystem that enable consumers to truly live the brand. The ultimate success is reached when a brand can create movement that unifies a group of consumers around a common goal or a feeling. (Martin & Todorov 2010, 63-64)

Traditionally the five levels are reached so that the consumer is first introduced to an engagement experience through entertainment, perhaps a game, a video or a song. As more features mark the experience, companies can deepen the engagement and the customer relationship in such a way that their offerings eventually take on the role of a utility. Over time, the utilities are perceived as tools and become necessities in the daily routines of the consumers. (Martin & Todorov 2010, 65)

2.1.5 Implications for branding in social media setting

Bruhn et al. (2012) conducted a study comparing traditional media and social media as the means to create brand equity. The findings imply that traditional media, such as TV and print campaigns, are better suited to increasing brand awareness, whereas social media sites are better in improving brand image and leading to strong brand associations. Thus,

companies should exploit both communication channels to achieve increased brand equity. The authors differentiate brand image into functional brand image (brand associations related to a product's attributes) and hedonic brand image (brand associations unrelated to any specific attributes). The study reveals that user-generated content in social media positively affects the hedonic brand image; consumers with high brand involvement are prepared to spend their free time commenting on their preferred brands' attractiveness and desirability on social media platforms. The user-generated content is perceived as credible and authentic, and the fact that communication about a brand takes place on a public platform increases the visibility of the communication and confirms the attractiveness of a brand as it becomes an object of discussion. On the other hand, company-created content in social media increases the functional brand image, but is not able to improve hedonic brand image. Company-created content can however be used to encourage user-generated content and generate word of mouth. For example, companies can set up a platform where consumers can express their opinions, experiences and information about a brand, or stimulate participation by regular updates of company website and brand profiles on social media networks. Companies can use traditional media to stimulate user-generated content creation by connecting traditional media campaigns with social media activities. Companies can also benefit from simply monitoring user-generated content and, in the process, gather useful information about a brand's advantages and disadvantages, which the company can then employ in future branding efforts. The study emphasizes that the user-generated content may be positively or negatively related to the brand, but it however increases brand awareness. Companies should influence consumers in both traditional media as well as in social media to manage brand awareness and functional brand image. Hanna et al. (2011, 268) support the view that companies should regard their approach to social media as an integrated strategy between traditional media and online platforms. The online methods expand branding's abilities to move consumers from awareness to engagement, loyalty and advocacy.

Barwise and Meehan (2010) reassure companies that although the rise of social media has caused a shift of power to the consumers, branding and marketing activities have not become irrelevant. Companies that keep up with social media developments and manage to reliably deliver on their brand promise, benefit greatly when social media amplifies their reputation. Social media assists companies to collect unmediated customer insights quicker than ever and provides powerful new ways to explore consumers' lives and opinions. Authors propose that companies follow four basic guidelines when experimenting with new media for branding purposes: offer and communicate a clear customer promise, build trust by delivering on the customer promise, continually improve the promise, and seek further advantage by innovating beyond the familiar. Companies should exploit the current social media opportunities while keeping a focus on protecting the brand and meeting customers' needs.

Edelman proposes a "consumer decision journey" (2010) which emphasizes that consumers remain engaged with the brand after purchase through social media, and companies must reflect this fundamental change in brand relationships in re-designing their marketing strategies. Edelman agrees with Barwise and Meehan (2010) that a clear brand promise is essential to brand's success, but emphasizes that as customers' touch points have changed in number and nature, profound changes are required in companies' marketing strategies. Marketers should target different stages in the decision journey to interact with consumers, and remember to consider both owned and earned (customer-created) media channels and budget on resources required for creating, managing, and monitoring content in both the channels. Also Social Media Report (Nielsen & NM Incite 2012) emphasizes the change in consumer decision journey – consumers' decisions and behaviors are increasingly driven by the opinions, tastes and preferences of a larger, global pool of friends, peers and influencers. More than a quarter of social media users say they are more likely to pay attention to an ad shared by one of their social connections. Additionally, more than

a quarter of consumers accept ads on social networking sites that have been tailored to them based on their profile information. Adamson (2008, 124-126) proposes that companies draw a map of the customers' journey with the brand, from the initial awareness of brand choices, to purchase consideration and to action. The journey is not linear, but being able to define the customer touch-points with the brand, enables companies to see where consumers engage with the brand and which interactions are more likely to reinforce strong relationships. The ability to keep track of where and how consumers interact with a brand is a competitive advantage that has only been magnified in the online environment.

2.2 Storytelling as a branding tool

This chapter presents the basic elements of storytelling, and investigates how they have been reflected in branding literature.

At current commoditized and saturated market situation the physical product no longer makes the difference, but consumers demand products that provide experiences and add to their expression of self. Stories are central to consumers' sense making process (Ardley 2006, 197), as stories help people link what occurs in their lives in a goal-oriented fashion that provides meaning and purpose (Escalas 1998, 273). When companies and brands communicate through stories they address the consumers' emotions and values. Brand stories gradually become synonymous with how consumers define themselves as individuals. (Fog et al. 2010, 17-24)

According to Papadatos (2006), storytelling brands are the best and most enduring brands, and she recognizes emotional attachment to a brand as an imperative competitive advantage between products or services. Brands need to communicate based on values, create experiences and clearly illustrate how they make a difference in order to build an emotional bond.

Storytelling and branding both originate from same starting point; emotions and values. A strong brand is built on clearly defined values, and stories can be perceived as value statements. A powerful story communicates the brand values in an understandable way and speaks to consumers' emotion. (Fog et al. 2010, 17-24, 69)

In branding theory context, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2008, 92) include brand story in the elements of a brand. The other key brand elements are name, logo and a tagline or slogan. The elements serve to identify and differentiate a product or a service, and together they form a crucial building block of brand equity.

2.2.1 The elements of storytelling

According to Fog et al. (2010, 33-34), a good story consists of four core elements: message, conflict, characters and plot. The elements can be mixed, matched and applied in a variety of ways depending on the context in which the story is told, and the story's purpose. The message needs to be clearly defined and have a strategic purpose in the brand's objectives. The message should work as an ideological or moral statement that works as a central theme throughout the story. As per Papadatos (2006), theme usually comprises of three core elements: hardship (the work or journey involved in overcoming obstacles), reciprocity (fair exchange of value) and the defining (life changing) moments.

Story is set in motion by a change or a fear that disturbs the harmony. These factors form the basis of conflict and force action to be taken. Conflicts address consumers' emotional needs to bring order to chaos. Conflict in storytelling is not however negative, but it communicates the storytellers' values and perceptions of right and wrong to the audience. (Fog et al. 2010, 35-36)

In the beginning of a story, the main character's life seems to be in balance, until he or she experiences an inciting incident. Conflicts arise which must be overcome to complete the journey and to achieve the desired goal. The character perceives an epiphany, a moment of sudden revelation, in a climatic situation of the story. The ending may include an interpretation of what has happened or reveal future events in the characters life. Feelings of failure and success occur in different phases of the journey. (Woodside & Megehee 2008)

Fog at al. (2010) present a model (Figure 4) which outlines the relationship between the conflict, the character and the flow of events in a story. The Y-axis indicates the conflict development, and the X-axis shows the timeline. A good opening catches the audience's attention and set the theme and the tone of the story. Next, the progression of change creates a conflict. The conflict escalates to a point of no return and builds up to a climax. The end of the conflict marks the story's fade out. (Fog et al. 2010, 45)
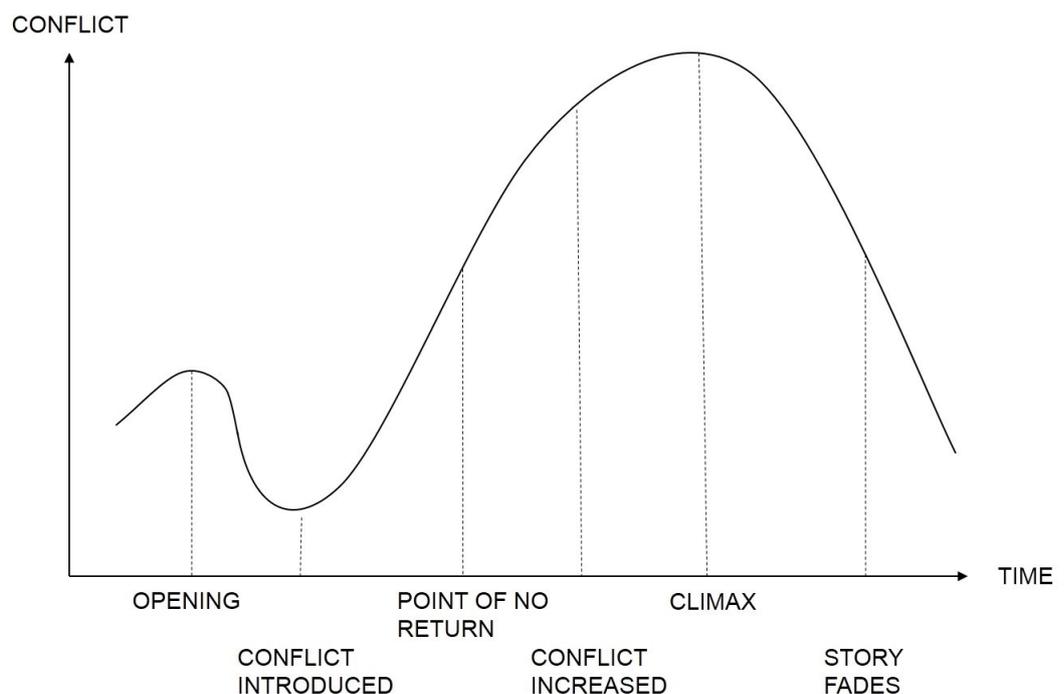
Figure 4. The story model (Fog et al. 2010, 45).

For example, Galderma (2013), one of world's leading dermatology companies, conducted a campaign online and offline, based on stories in which teenagers suffering from acne start using Galderma's products and find the courage to kiss the girl or boy of their dreams. The storyline follows a curve recognizable from conventional storytelling (Figure 4). A boy, the main character, pulls up a car in front of a girl's home after a date. Tension builds as the girl expects a kiss goodnight but the boy fingers his keys nervously and looks away. As the girl opens the car door and is about to exit, the boy finds the courage to grab her hand and to kiss her affectionately. As the boy in the subsequent scene puts away the acne medicine and smiles at his own image in the mirror (Figure 5), the narrator's voice advises not to let bad skin restrict your life, but to find help in the medicine. The story displays tension and a conflict caused by personal block, in which the character lacks the skills to perform an act necessary to reach the goal. Taking steps to overcome blocks such as seeking and gaining help from others occur frequently in stories. All the elements together serve to increase viewers' emotion and involvement in the story (Woodside et al. 2008, 101).
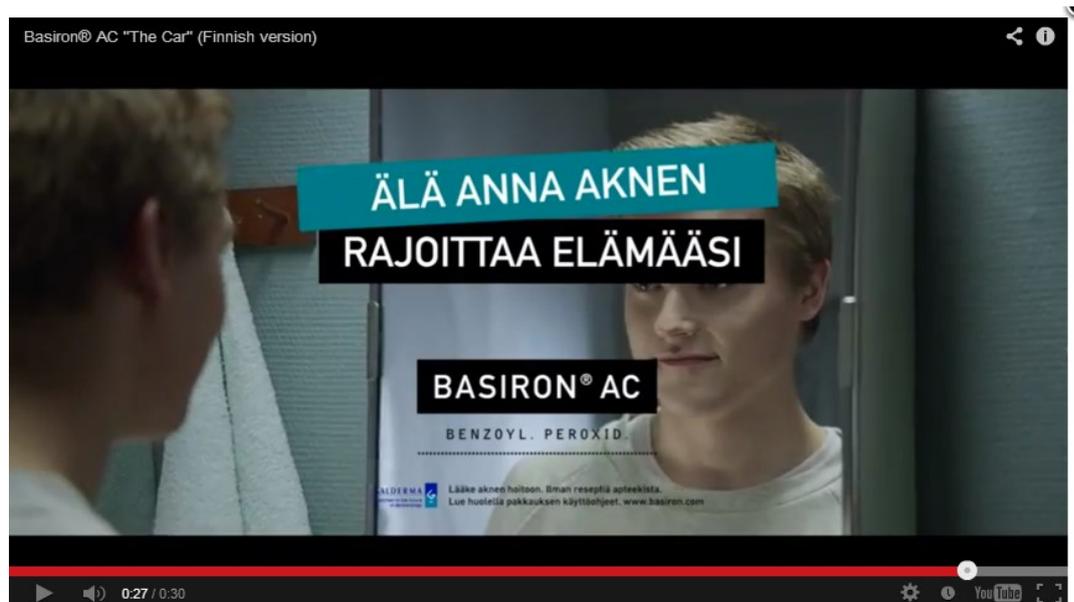
Figure 5. Screenshot from Basiron AC story (Galderma 2013).

As portrayed in the above example, and as a third element in storytelling theory, the story must have characters that the audience is able to associate with. Based on consumers' need for balance, consumers usually empathize with the character faced with a conflict. Consumers must also be able to understand the motivation behind the characters' actions. (Fog et al. 2010, 41)

Several academics emphasize the persona, often also referred to as the protagonist, as the most important element of the story. According to Herskovitz and Crystal (2010), a good brand starts with a strong, well-drawn and easily recognizable persona that creates a long-lasting emotional bond with the audience. The brand persona drives the continuity for the overall brand message and offers a point of reference that the audience can relate to. The brand persona reflects the audiences understanding of the brands values and behaviors. It can possess recognizable traits, such as imagination, persistence, curiosity or courage, which are tied to a clear intention or purpose. The personas can be portrayed as archetypes. Numerous archetypes have been recognized (Fog et al. 2010; Herskovitz & Crystal 2010; Woodside & Megehee 2010), but the most familiar ones include such as:

1. the "mentor", a teacher or a guardian

2. the "rebel" who stands up to an authority and breaks the rules

3. the "hero" who takes on a journey and goes through a transformation

4. the "antihero", the bad dude

5. "mom" who provides nurturing and safety

6. the "individualist" who follows his or her own ways

7. the "lover" who follows his or her heart and satisfies emotional needs

8. the "joker" who entertains others and enjoys life

9. the "underdog", a fighter who takes advantage of the fact that he or she is constantly underestimated (Woodside et al. 2008, 114; Fog et al, 2010, 94; Herskovitz & Crystal 2010, 22)

When people are able to relate to the character's thoughts and feelings and observe personal development, they are more likely to be drawn to the story. A narrative in which the protagonist's situation rapidly improves or worsens, or alternates between the two, is suggested to be especially good at generating emotional responses in consumers. (Escalas 1998, 280)

According to Herskovitz and Crystal (2010), people naturally connect and identify with a persona which is believable and consistent, and whose actions and words match. But while a good persona remains true to its core, it is also able to evolve with time and with changing situations. "As this happens, good brands come to evoke strong emotional responses from their customers, including trust, loyalty, and even devotion" (Herskovitz & Crystal 2010, 24). Also as per Fog et al. (2010, 167) a good story evolves over time as the characters develop their personality, and the audience gets to know them better. If the characters are well known, the audience is more likely to embrace the story.

Some companies have developed a story that is mainly based on their customer promise. These stories often speak about the company's character and may personify this through their founders. In each case, the status and respect of the company is enhanced by the exploits of and stories told by its representatives. (Dowling 2006, 92)

Fourth element, the plot, is vital for the consumers' experience. Story only exists as a progression of events, and as a sequence of actions. The difference between the concepts of story and plot are often misunderstood,

but as a story is a narrative of events in a linear time-sequence, a plot emphasizes the sense of causality internal to the time-sequence (Stern 1994, 603). Escalas (1998, 268) emphasizes chronology and causality as the two most important elements of a story. As per Papadatos (2006), the plot conveys the story's theme, and comprises of following four elements: Anticipation (sense of hope for the future), crisis (conflict or despair), help along the way (minor or major miracle) and the goal achieved (sense of accomplishment and satisfaction).

Several academics have attempted to create a universal categorization of plots (Brown & Patterson 2010, 544). For example, Frey's four categories of mythic plots derived from literature, but have since been applied to advertising appeals and consumption narratives (Stern 1995, 165). Frye's categories are *comedy, romance, tragedy* and *irony*. Gabriel's (2000) four story types are *epic, comic, tragic* and *romantic*, strongly resembling the categories of Frey. Booker (2004) has presented seven archetypal master plots that according to him recur in all storytelling. The plots are referred to as *rags to riches, rebirth, the quest, overcoming the monster, tragedy, comedy*, and *voyage and return*. Lambert (2010) has divided stories into seven different types with an emphasis on stories in a digital environment. The most impactful stories are the ones that contain more than one master plot, and the more master plots they contain the more impactful the stories are (Brown & Patterson 2010, 544).

Chiu et al. (2012) have studied previous literature on brand story elements and identified four characteristics that contribute to a good brand story. These elements are generally useful in engaging audience in evaluations of a product or service and strengthening their related feelings, in order to create positive correlations with brand attitude and purchase intention. The elements are:

1. *authenticity*, which is associated with genuineness, truthfulness and originality
2. *conciseness*, which reduces boredom and tedium from the story by excluding unnecessary words, phrases or details
3. *reversal*, which helps consumers to recognize problem-solving capabilities and implies actions to take; and
4. *humor*, which increases brand liking and possibly consumers' comprehension of the message. (Chiu et al. 2012)

In modern society, marketing creates tension between authenticity and inauthenticity. A more authentic brand story provides consumers with credible information which helps them acquire understanding of the product or service, and help them to judge it. In addition, when consumer perceives authenticity, he or she feels more connected with the story. As per Guber (2007, 55), authenticity is crucial to the success of a story and good storytelling is built on integrity. Authenticity does not however mean that stories need to be based on truth – they can be fact of fiction – but the relationship between the brand and the story needs to be authentic (Lundqvist et al. 2013, 286). In a fictional story, the company is however ethically bound to ensure that the audience is not misled in this respect (Fog et al. 2010, 173). Busselle and Bilanzic (2008) actually propose that the most engaging stories often are both fictional and realistic, and it is the engagement factor of the story that leaves consumers with a sense of authenticity. Only if consumers observe inconsistency in a story, they start to suspect its realism and authenticity. For example Crowmoor, a cider brand by Sinebrychoff, presents a traditional but mysterious, English-type image (Figure 6), although it has been always manufactured in Finland (Mäkinen 2011).
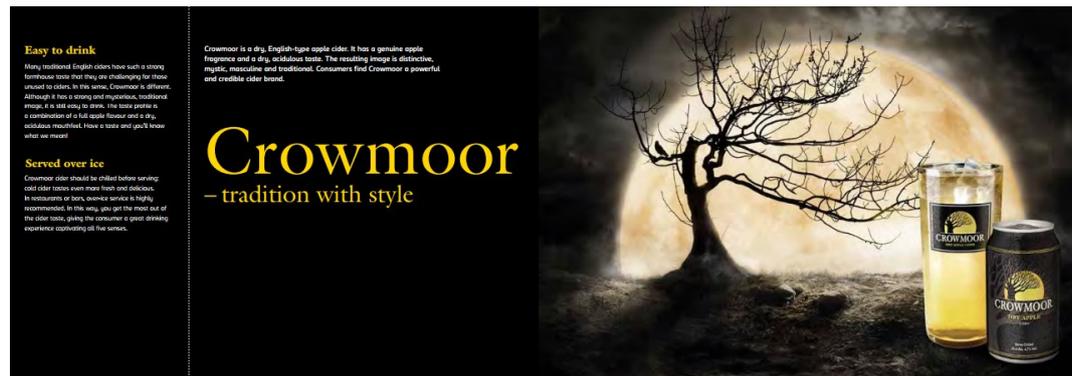
Figure 6. Crowmoor brand displayed (Sinebrychoff 2012).

When communicating with customers, companies should get the main message across concisely, as people neither have the time nor the patience to absorb an overly detailed story (Chiu et al 2012). The conciseness could be associated with simplicity. Adamson (2008, 92) endorses that the brand message must capture the essence of a brand's relevantly different brand promise to customers. In an environment filled with different brand touch-points on many different dimensions, the importance of making the central idea or message as simple as possible and as memorable as possible has become magnified.

Chiu et al. (2012) refer to the reversal also as "the inverted V plot", which highly resembles the storyline curve presented earlier in this chapter (Figure 5). Reversal story reveals the best way to solve problems or obstacles, which implies the action that consumer should take if faced with the same challenge. According to the authors, a positive ending of a story may create positive affect and induce greater liking than an ending that is not clearly resolved. Guber (2007) states that the audiences' emotional response is especially important what comes to the ending of the story; it is the first thing that the audience remembers. He however emphasizes that although the story should be emotionally fulfilling, it does not always mean the same as a happy ending (Guber, 2007, 57).

Chiu et al. (2012) suggest that humor increases the transfer of positive affect for a product or service, and enhances consumers' cognitive responses. Viewing humorous messages increases audience's attention and thus the possibility of their comprehension of the message. Humorous stories have the highest retention levels, and they are more easily absorbed by the audience (Dahlen et al. 2010, 342). However, as most products or services are not humorous by nature, humor should only function as a marginal element as opposed to the main message argument. Also, as humor is a difficult talent to master, a misunderstood joke can cause the audience to feel threatened or insulted (Dahlen et al. 2010, 343). Humor is however consistently found to be an effective way to catch audiences' attention, and research shows it generates positive affect and appreciation. (Kuilenburg et al. 2011; Chiu et al. 2012)

Although this chapter presented several essential elements of storytelling, there is no universal agreement of a story's structure. Some academics emphasize the sequential order of actions, whereas others emphasize the purpose or intention of the protagonist. While theories about the necessary elements vary, they consistently agree on the necessity of chronology and causality. That is, a story must contain a recognizable time-dimension, and there must exist a defined relationship between the story's elements. (Escalas 1998)

2.2.2 Storytelling through the building blocks of brand equity

As stated previously by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2008), a brand story is a distinctive branding element which serves as a creator of brand equity. This chapter examines how storytelling can contribute to the four assets of brand equity presented earlier in this thesis (Figure 2).

The first stage of brand equity, brand awareness, references brand recall, brand recognition and top-of-mind as levels of brand salience. According to Dowling (2006, 83), all company communication is designed to raise awareness. As per academics, stories serve as a fundamental aid to memory and assist individuals to remember important things (Ardley 2006; Herskovitz & Crystal 2010). Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) especially emphasize a well-defined brand persona as an instantly recognizable and memorable element of a brand story. Love (2008, 24) implies that stories are "sticky", and if a company's message is demonstrated through a simple, compelling and emotionally engaging narrative, the ability of the audience to recall the message will be much higher than if presented via non-narrative communication. She cites a study by London Business School, which illustrates that narrative messages have a retention rate between sixty-five to seventy percent, whereas only five to ten percent retention rate was achieved when solely traditional communication methods were used.

Marzec (2007) provides a deeper scientific understanding in what makes stories memorable and effective. He suggests that at most fundamental level, people learn through stories, and that neuroscientists have uncovered that three actions of human brains – processing, retaining and recalling of information – are all aided and enabled by storytelling. Humans' memory capacity can better manage information if it is inter-related. The story-format provides a framework to demonstrate the connections between different elements and concepts, and thus works as a natural mental organizing device.

Woodside and Megehee (2010, 419) also support the view that human memory is story-based. Information is indexed, stored, and retrieved in the form of stories. A story can cause implicit or explicit awareness and emotional connection and understanding in the minds of the audience.

The second element of brand equity, brand associations, represent what the brand stands for, and how it can be differentiated from the other brands of the same category. Brand associations, which can be formed from consumers' functional, emotional or self-expressive needs, form a basis for brand identity. Brand identity should help establish a relationship between the brand and the customer by generating a unique value proposition. Padgett and Allen (1997) suggest that advertising should aim at communicating both functional and symbolic meanings, and highlight that narrative form has several benefits as a conceptual foundation for advertising and building of brand image. The authors separate ads into two types; narrative ads which present a chronological series of events acted out by a character, and argumentative ads which present logically connected ideas not enacted by a character. The authors' findings indicate that the strength of argumentative ads is the conveyance of functional product or service attributes, but their weakness is the lack of information that would stimulate symbolic responses and thus build brand image. In contrast, the narrative ads present stories, demonstrate thoughts, feelings and behaviors and prompt consumers to construct symbolic meanings to interpret the advertisement. The narrative ad rather demonstrates than explains the functional elements of a product or service, and as such allows consumers to construct their own meanings and associations. The authors however notify that as narrative ad can generate a variety of associations between consumers, it can possibly increase the ambiguity of the brand image rather than strengthen it. To avoid that possibility, companies need to present narrative ads with similar structures that elicit the same theme. Thematic consistency is essential for the creation of consistent brand image. (Padgett & Allen 1997)

According to Chiu et al. (2012), a good brand story builds product knowledge and positive emotion, and allows the company to highlight its differences and reduce consumers' price sensitivities. Understanding of the brand and the positive emotions should imply a solution to consumers'

needs and as a consequence create a positive brand attitude and purchase intentions. (Chiu et al. 2012, 272)

Also as per Lundqvist et al. (2013), stories help consumers to understand the benefits of a brand, and add favorable and unique associations to a brand. Such associations can lead to an understanding of points-of-difference and increase customer-based brand equity. Brand stories can convey positive features of a product or service without being perceived as an actual commercial. A research conducted by Lundqvist et al. (Ibid) demonstrates that brand stories can be used to create and reinforce positive brand associations with a brand and increase the consumers' favorability with the brand. The authors suggest that stories offer a way to differentiate the brand by adding an emotional connection, which is difficult for competitors to match. The emotional connection cannot be achieved through attribute-oriented benefits, but can only be created by appealing to consumers' dreams and aspirations. Below model (Figure 7) indicates the development of brand equity assets from the perceived product or service attributes to brand value. (Lundqvist et al. 2013)

Figure 7. The effect of storytelling on brand value (adapted from Lundqvist et al. 2013, 293).

The third asset of brand equity is the perceived quality of the product or service, and the positive brand responses derived from the consumers' opinions, evaluations and emotions. According to Baker and Boyle (2009, 83) stories speak to both parts of the human mind, reason and emotion, but when something is felt, it is more likely to be shared with others. An emotional response is a binding force that can be achieved through

appealing to the audiences' senses and emotions. Through an effective emotional response, a company can transfer consumers into ambassadors of the brand (Guber 2007, 57). Escalas (2007) has proven that by structuring an ad as a narrative – including the basic elements of a story such as a plot and a character – the message can be more persuasive than an analytical illustration of a product's features. Also Padgett and Allen (1997) suggest that narrative ads are more likely to be successful than argumentative ads. With argumentative ads, consumers are more likely to create counterarguments.

Chiu et al. (2012, 266) suggest that one of the key elements of a brand story, humor, not only increases the transfer of positive affect for a product or service, but also enhances the customer cognitive process and helps understand product benefits. According to the authors' findings, a reversal story – that is a story that describes other consumers' similar problems and provides surrogate experience information – can elicit high levels of positive emotional responses. Love (2008, 24) supports the notion of humor; according to her a good story allows the audience to form an emotional connection which can be magnified by a dash of humor and self-deprecation.

As per Fog et al. (2010), information in stories is packaged into a meaningful context, making it easier for the audience to understand the depth and relevance of the information. Scientists believe that stories stimulate the use of both the logical and creative parts of the brain at the same time, meaning that the information is understood factually as well as visually and emotionally. (Fog et al. 2010, 153)

The highest level of brand equity is brand resonance, which indicates the degree of commitment that the brand has achieved, and in which brand relationships are characterized by loyalty. Keller (2009) identifies active

engagement – the willingness to invest personal resources to a brand – as an aspect of brand loyalty. Sheehan and Morrison (2009) exclaim that the traditional "mass message" model of advertising fails to recognize the importance of one-to-one engagement and interactivity. The authors see that people are inherently social and look to create and maintain relations not only with other people but also with brands. Brand stories provide ways for companies to engage more deeply with brands. From an interactional engagement perspective the brand story becomes part of a person's own story about him- of herself. (Sheehan & Morrison 2009, 41)

Baker and Boyle (2009) draw an example from the great leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi or Churchill, who used storytelling to paint a compelling vision of the future and shaped the way how people saw the world. By sharing their stories, the leaders made their audience more committed into making those stories real. According to Baker and Boyle (Ibid), a good story needs to be shared, so that people can be engaged by the story and in doing so, compelled to make it their own. Storytelling is a shared experience among equals in which the audience is just as active participant as the storyteller. When people are entrusted to construct their own meanings from the story, they will become more committed to the story. (Baker & Boyle 2009)

Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) see the brand persona as a central creator of long-lasting relationship between the brand and the customers. Loyalty and trust are built over time as a result of hundreds or thousands of well-preformed acts, and if the brand's message and actions match, they can assist to create an intrinsic and implicit emotional connection based on the predictability of the brand's behavior. (Herskovitz & Crystal 2010)

Sevin and White (2011) believe that storytelling is a feasible communication method to catch relevancy and encourage engagement in the audience, and

that branding projects should make use of real-life stories to be more relevant and engaging than traditional advertising campaigns for their audience. Writers agree with Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) that it is possible to establish a strong emotional bond between the brand and the audience through personal narratives and stories. (Sevin & White 2011)

The research conducted by Lindqvist et al. (2013) proves that consumers who have been exposed to a brand story, are more likely to respond positively to the brand. The authors present a graph which describes how the brand is experienced through the story and how the brand experience leads to brand value (Figure 5). Lindqvist et al. (Ibid) propose that due its relationship-building elements, storytelling is also suitable for customer-to-customer marketing. An effective story engages consumers to become ambassadors of the brand, spreading positive word-of-mouth and giving out positive recommendations. (Lindqvist et al. 2013)

Adamson (2008) presents an insight from Smirnoff vodka's Senior Vice President of Marketing, Philip Gladman. Smirnoff utilizes both traditional channels of marketing and social media platforms to promote the "unique Smirnoff way". As per Gladman: "People don't bond with the vodka because of how it's made. They bond with it because of its back story. The intent of our branding is to get people engaged in this story as a way to gain understanding of what makes our brand of vodka authentically different." (Adamson 2008, 244)

2.3 Storytelling characteristics in social media

Social media consists of a variety of new sources of online information, including social networking sites (such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn), social content sites (YouTube, Flickr, wiki), microblogs (including Twitter), social recommendation sites (Pinterest) and social bookmarking sites

(Google Maps) among others (Smith & Zook 2011, 24). The sudden growth of social media's popularity suggests almost primal appeal. It is fundamental human behavior to seek identity and "connectedness" through affiliations with other individuals and groups that share their characteristics, interests or beliefs (McKinsey Global Institute 2012).

The new media provides immense opportunities for storytelling for both companies as well as consumers. According to Adamson (2008, 18), the role of storytelling in company's brand building has been reinforced by digital technology. Through social media, consumers are brought together, and are able to share their opinions and experiences regardless of time and place. Anybody with an access to the internet can assume the role of a storyteller and have an influence on global audience. Companies can try to establish a dialogue in social media in which customers can actively contribute to the making of the brand – adding credibility and substance to the content. The modern culture is highly characterized by participation, interaction and dialogue, and companies' must take a careful look of their chosen communication strategies. (Fog et al. 2010, 184-188)

Today's brands are open books where there is no single author of the brand story. Although a company can try to create a story on their own, it is up to the consumers to embrace, alter or reject the brand's message. Digital technologies have greatly enhanced the consumers' control in brand building. A brand story should be written collaboratively between the brand and the consumer in an on-going process. Brands need to listen and encourage active participation in order to gain the consumers' trust and create brand resonance. Companies should not fear the loss of control in regard to its brand because of social media, but fully engage in the opportunities the new technologies have to offer and tap into its power (Waters & Jones 2011, 252). Companies must take more of a controlling interest in what consumers experience and the stories they share online.

The technological tools and the behaviors that consumer responses stimulate enable companies to get better information about customers, to reach consumers exactly when and how they would like to be reached, and to deliver products and services that have been improved based on the received input. (Adamson 2008; Quek 2012)

In the social media era, companies must earn the customers' attention, and achieve it by connecting profoundly to the consumers' aspirations and desires. As indicated in previous research papers as well as in magazines and social media itself lately, social media sites are eminently suitable in telling stories and engaging consumers, and storytelling is a powerful means to build lasting relationships with the customers. Companies are taking storytelling tactics seriously, and re-inventing their branding strategies and materials accordingly. The examples for storytelling practices in social media platforms are endless. Coca-cola adopted a new approach to its website in 2012, creating a "Coca-Cola Journey". The content has an emphasis on storytelling around the world, and it aims at engaging consumers and all other stakeholders in a meaningful way. According to Coca-Cola's director of digital connections and social media, Ashley Brown: "We're now stitching everything together: Twitter, YouTube, Google+, LinkedIn. Over the last four months our tweets, for instance, have become not about 'broadcasting' but engaging, and driving to real content that inspires". (Brady 2012; Elliott 2012)

Robertson (2013) provides an example of a storytelling campaign which is extraordinary in its level of engagement. Gatorade in the United States arranged two rival American football teams to take a rematch fifteen years after the teams had previously met. The brand invited the teams to participate in a demanding training schedule, and eventually staged a rematch which included the original cheerleaders and coaches. Gatorade documented the training via social media as well as by TV documentary,

making the players into co-creators of the story. After the sold-out game, Gatorade provided workout plans in Facebook and created applications in which consumers can arrange similar re-plays. Gatorade sales in the match region increased by sixty-three percent and the campaign generated three million USD worth of media coverage. Gatorade succeeded in telling a story about community, support and maintaining motivation, proving what people can achieve with true determination. The story had a wide emotional impact, and it demonstrated that when inviting the audience to interact with the brand, the engagement becomes so powerful that the consumers will want to bring the story forward. As per Robertson (2013), to achieve true engagement, brands must present their products or services in a story, not just about the brand but about the lifestyle associated with the product. The campaign should function as a catalyst for social dialogue and draw consumers to participate in the story. (Robertson 2013)

Social media endeavors, such as Coca-Cola Journey and Gatorade's re-play, that involve user-generated content and characters of interactive storytelling, are very likely to generate commitment on the part of the consumer, reinforcing loyalty to the brand and making the consumer more likely to commit additional effort to the brand in the future. Once the consumers are engaged, they are in a position to communicate their opinions to other consumers. Satisfied and loyal consumers communicate their positive attitudes towards the brand itself or towards a new group of consumers, online or offline. Dissatisfied consumers may also share their negative attitudes, and companies must be proactive or reactive in this regard. (Hoffman 2012)

Sheehan and Morrison (2009) have created a concept "confluence culture", where traditional advertising must adapt to embrace the new reality of interactive content, emerging media and changed media production and consumption methods. The authors recognize that many online users are

not content with accessing and viewing content from established sources, but want to interact with message content by adding to it or repurposing it for new or different uses. In order to succeed in the "confluence culture", companies must move towards providing content for consumers to create their own stories, by taking the information provided about the brands and mixing it with their own experiences. "Participation, remediation, collective intelligence, and bricolage encourage the development of many more messages, allow many more stories to be told, and enable users to become much more involved with the brands than ever before". Sheehan and Morrison (Ibid) believe that strong brand stories are a key element of social media, which can result in compelling characters that represent the brand and with which consumers are very likely willing to engage with long-term. (Sheehan & Morrison 2009)

Fundamental issue for companies is how to communicate the story forward. Companies struggle to tell their stories cost-effectively to as wide audience as possible (Dowling 2006). The current technology changes the way consumers receive messages, and the messages disseminated through social media platforms should consider specific peculiarities of the new technology, such as the ability to create and interact with information. One-way communication methods are no longer effective but individuals should be given an active role in the communications process. With the use of modern technologies, stories are transmitted in timely manner and target audiences have the option to both tell their stories and to interact with the stories of other individuals. The motivation of consumers to tell brand stories comes from the desire to share ideas and experiences as an advocate of the brand. (Sevin & White 2011)

Quek (2012) considers that it is not up to the selection of the medium which determines a story's success, but the story's content. The selection of the medium is important only in its speed – how fast the content is shared, and

how identical the shares are to the original source. The content has to be unpredictable, aim to surprise and be unanticipated by its audience. Quek's notion is academically supported by Escalas (1998, 280), who believes that stories should not confirm too rigidly to expectations, but include an element of novelty. Quek notes that the most contagious content are photos and videos; videos are shared twelve times more than links and posts combined in Facebook. Several other authors support Quek's opinion about the creative content; photos and videos are a useful way to add personality to the story and to make the message more distinctive and appealing (Krejci 2012; Leggitt 2012; Lord 2012; Quek 2012). According to Waters and Jones (2011, 249), the three V's of communication – verbal, vocal and visual – have the strongest effect on audience in terms of remembering the central message. Due video's ability to enhance retaining of information, and the fact that creating and publishing of online video has become easier in recent years, a study (Stelzh 2012) shows that a significant seventy-six percent of marketers intend to increase their use of video marketing in social media.

A concept of "digital storytelling" has been created to describe storytelling that takes place in a digital environment. As per Snelson and Sheffield (2009, 160), a classic digital story is a form of narrative, presented as a short movie using a series of images, first-person audio narration and sometimes a music soundtrack. Galderma (2013), a dermatology company referred to earlier in this study, also allows consumers to create their own digital stories online. The company has created an application called PhotoDiary (Figure 8), which consumers can download to their own devices. The application gives advice on skincare on a daily basis for eight weeks, and encourages consumers to take photos on their skin recovery during these days. At the end, the application creates a short film from the consumers own photos, demonstrating the healing process.

Figure 8. Basiron AS interactive application (Galderma 2013).

2.4 Theoretical framework

Strong theoretical evidence has been presented in this chapter that storytelling can be utilized for creation of brand equity, and that storytelling has reached new dimensions in the modern technological environment. The following model (Figure 9) demonstrates the findings in an explicable format.

BRAND EQUITY ELEMENT	STORYTELLING AS THE FACILITATOR	SOCIAL MEDIA AS THE PLATFORM
BRAND AWARENESS / BRAND SALIENCE	• Functions as aid to memory • Enhances recall and recognition • Improves message retention rate	• Improves both breadth and strength of awareness • Allows specific targeting • Intensifed through utilization of search engines • Amplified through verbal, vocal and visual elements
BRAND ASSOCIATIONS / POINTS OF DIFFERENCE	• Prompts to construct meanings and associations • Helps to understand benefits • Conveys positive features • Adds unique and favourable associations • Achieves differentation by emotional connection	• Allows increased exposure • Is assisted by creative content • Important element in creation of brand experience
PERCEIVED QUALITY / POSITIVE REACTIONS	• Elicits positive responses • Speaks to both reason and emotion • Narrative from has a more persuasive impact	• Assists in creating impactful and enduring feelings • Co-creation, empowerment and community have an positive impact on perceptions
BRAND LOYALTY / BRAND RESONANCE	• Promotes emotional attachment • Encourages engagement • Constructing meanings and sharing stories enhance commitment • Real-life stories catch relevancy	• Frequent encounters and interactivity • Online loyalty programs • Turns customers into co-creators and active participants • Establishes engagement and loyalty • Provides a sense of ownership

Figure 9. Theoretical framework of the study.

3. RESEARCH STRATEGY

The main research question of this thesis is: *How is storytelling being used as a branding tool in social media?* The empirical research answers this question by systematically studying a sample of company-originated promotional videos found in social media. Method of qualitative content analysis was selected as the study is largely exploratory in nature. The purpose is to investigate how brand stories currently occur in social media, and if they can be grouped according to the categories and elements identified in the previous storytelling theory.

Stories have often been used as research data for narrative analysis. The narrative approach is based on three premises; the idea that people cognitively process and communicate their lives as narratives, the belief that people also organize their brand experiences in the forms of narratives, and third, the notion that shared brand experiences develop brand systems, which organize consumers' expectations and social effects of brands (Ludicke & Gissler 2008). In marketing science, narratives have been acknowledged as a form of expression of consumption, where the subject writes down his or her thoughts or inner feelings (Pace 2008, 222), or where the researcher interviews the subject, asking questions which lead to a narrative of consumption (Stern et al. 1998, 198). As this thesis is based on storytelling theory, selecting narrative analysis as a research method would have seemed somewhat obvious. However, there is an evident lack of narrative analysis in the context of company-generated stories, as all academic literature on narrative analysis is based on consumer-generated narratives. Furthermore, as the stories which consumers share in social media, for example YouTube, are extremely varied, it may be difficult to reach a sufficient validity in the interpretation of the narratives. Due such constraints, Pace (2008) recommends that content analysis would assure more valid and reliable research results.

This chapter first presents the basics of qualitative content analysis and its recent developments, then explains the motives behind the selection of

analysis units and the data sampling. The research process is explained in detail, and the findings of the research are presented and analyzed. The validity and reliability of the research are evaluated at the end of the chapter.

3.1 Content analysis as a research method

Content analysis is an observational research method that is used to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication (Kolbe & Burnett 1991, 243). In the past, content analysis was primarily used as a quantitative research method, in which text data was coded into explicit categories and then described by using statistics. More recently, the potential of content analysis as a method of qualitative analysis has been recognized, leading to its increased application and popularity. Content analysis techniques have also been used increasingly to analyze content on the web (Herring 2010, 234). Research using qualitative content analysis focuses on characteristics of communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text. Text data may be in verbal, print or electronic form. The analysis method examines language intensely for the purpose of classifying texts into categories representing similar meanings. (Hsieh & Shannon 2005)

Qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for subjective interpretation of content of text data through systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1278). Deductive content analysis is based on previous theory on the researched subject (Elo & Kyngäs 2008), and can also be defined as directed content analysis. The goal of directed content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually an existing theoretical framework. The existing theory can provide predictions about the variables of interest or about the relationships among variables. Findings from a directed content analysis offer either supporting or non-supporting evidence for the previous theory. (Hsieh & Shannon 2005)

Elo and Kyngäs (2008) have divided the processes involved in qualitative content analysis into three phases: preparation, organizing and reporting. Tasks involved in each phase depend on whether an inductive or a deductive approach to the data has been selected. Despite the clear presentation of the content analysis process (Figure 10), the authors emphasize that the analysis randomly proceeds in a linear fashion but is more complex and difficult than quantitative analysis because it is less standardized and formulaic (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 113).

PREPARATION PHASE

Selecting the unit of analysis

Making sense of the data and whole

ORGANIZING PHASE

Developing structured analysis matrice

Data coding according the categories

Comparison to earlier studies

REPORTING THE PROCESS AND THE RESULTS

Model, conceptual map or categories
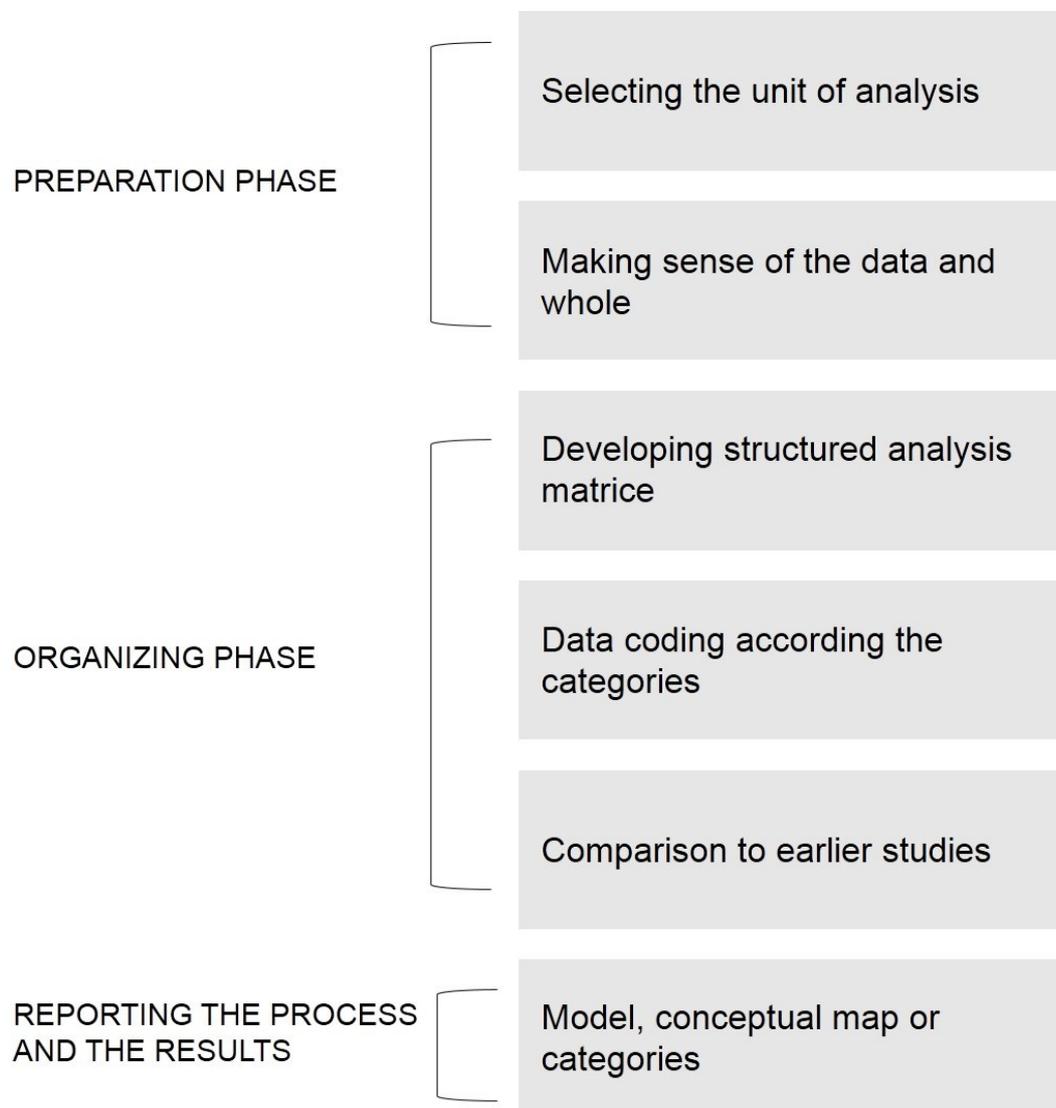
Figure 10. Preparation, organizing and resulting phases in the deductive approach to content analysis process (Adapted from Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 110).

McMillan (2000) and Herring (2010) have investigated the particularities that online environment presents to content analysis, due its rapid growth and fluctuating content. McMillan proposes that the context of the research should be found on existing or emerging communication theory, and that the sample should be selected within the constraints imposed by available knowledge on the phenomenon. The categories should preferably be from established categories of content identified in previous studies. Herring (2010) feels that the emerging phenomena of interest in the context of new media cannot always be identified prior establishing a coding scheme, but the channels of communication on websites may require novel coding categories. The dynamic nature and sheer number of units of internet analysis makes random sampling infeasible in many cases. Herring proposes an expanded, methodologically plural paradigm as opposed to the traditional content analysis. Defined as web content analysis, the method addresses the characteristics of web content in addition to the traditional elements of content analysis. The approach considers content to consist of various types of information contained in web documents, including themes, features, links and exchanges, all of which can communicate meaning. Herring reminds that innovation is a vital process in the evolution of any process paradigm, and especially needed when a new phenomenon presents itself. The particularities caused by online content represented above by McMillan and Herring are taken into consideration when conducting this study. (Herring 2010)

A few studies have been conducted in order to explore storytelling in an online environment (Snelson & Sheffield 2009; Morgan et al. 2010). In the studies, YouTube videos were categorized based on types of stories; whether they align to nine classic story types presented by Lambert (2010), and how interactive technological tools have been utilized. The studies acknowledged that the ability to capture a true random sample from online media cannot be done with certainty as the content is in continual flux. In the study of Snelson and Sheffield (2009), only fifty-five percent of sampled stories aligned with the pre-determined categories of classic digital stories.

Interactive tools such as comments, ratings and video response tools were used at a low level. Stern (1995) conducted a plot analysis of consumers' consumption narratives, based in Frey's taxonomy of plots. Stern's study revealed that the four plot structures are present in consumers' stories, and that the taxonomy offers preliminary evidence that consumer ideology can be interpreted by studying its form or content. Escalas (1998, 275-277) conducted a quantitative content analysis on advertising narratives, to discover the degree to which television ads contained narrative elements and the degree to which the ads unfolded over time. Approximately twenty-two percent of the ads reviewed contained well-developed stories and forty percent had a recognizable narrative structure. Escalas (Ibid) observed that the category of the advertised product has a significant effect on narrative structure, and especially beverage ads have a high narrative structure.

As per Elo and Kyngäs (2008), the challenge of content analysis is that it is very flexible and that there is no simple and "right" approach to conduct it. Each analysis is unique and the results depend on the skills, insights, analytic abilities and style of the researcher. (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 113)

3.2 Research process

Deductive content analysis comprises of three main phases: preparation, organization and reporting (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 109). The phases of this study are explained in detail in the following chapters.

3.2.1 Preparation phase

The preparation starts with selecting the unit of analysis. Deciding on what to analyze and in how specific detail are important factors before selecting the unit. The unit can be as small as one word, or it can be a theme. An analysis unit that is too narrow can lead to fragmentation, whereas a theme can contain several meanings and make the analysis process difficult and

challenging. According to Kassarjian (1977, 12), "theme is among the most useful units of content analysis because issues, values, beliefs and attitudes are usually discussed in this form". Kassarjian also proposes the use of a fictional character, or an item – which can be a speech, a news story or an advertisement for example – as a unit of analysis. The researcher must also decide whether latent content will be analyzed as well – that is silence, sighs, laugh etc. – as analyzing of hidden meanings involves subjective interpretation. (Elo & Kyngäs 2008)

For this research, promotional videos of companies active in social media were selected as the unit of analysis. Online videos have proven to be an effective media for reaching large audiences, and the role of online video for brands is developing fast (Stelzner 2012). Companies are increasingly using social media platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, to spread their promotional videos. Videos are a superior storytelling media, connecting emotionally with viewers more quickly and immediately than written stories (Clark & Stewart 2007, 478). As per Waters and Jones (2011), videos allow companies an opportunity to tell their story in a powerful, emotionally connecting way that enables them to build on brand identity and strengthen the relationship between different stakeholders. The level of participation and engagement on social media platforms is only restricted by the company's efforts, as consumers have the ability to embed company-originated videos on their blogs and social networking sites, and comment on and ask questions about the videos' content online in an interactive fashion.

The videos for this study were pulled from companies' Facebook sites. As per statistics, Facebook is the most-visited social networking site. It has one billion active users, one out of every seven people in the world (Nielsen & NM Incite 2012; Nielsen & Vizu 2013). Facebook accounts for ninety percent of all time spent on social networking sites (Lipsman et al. 2012,

40). In Finland, about forty-three percent of population uses Facebook, of which forty-seven percent are female and fifty-three percent male. Seventy-five percent of Finnish Facebook users are between ages eighteen to fifty-four years. Companies have an ability to embed a video, which they have uploaded in YouTube, into their company Facebook site, or they can upload the video directly to Facebook. Both approaches were accepted to the sampling. The videos were selected from the top one hundred brands that have most Facebook fans in Finland (see Appendix I). The videos had to be originated from the brand itself; for instance trailers of movies that a movie theater had uploaded to its Facebook site were not included, as they had been made by the movie producing company and not by the movie theater. Only videos that were uploaded to Facebook between weeks two to thirteen in 2013 were selected in order to limit the amount of videos to a reasonable sample size. The data retrieval resulted in 268 company-originated videos. (Socialbakers 2013)

For all the company-originated videos, only the ones that constituted a solid story could be qualified to the following categorization phase. Scaling developed by Escalas (1998, 276) was utilized to examine whether the videos included central components of a story. Videos were evaluated based on their elements: at first, the video had to show one or more characters engaged in actions to achieve goals, and the video had to have a distinct initiating event and an outcome. Second, the video had to have a temporal dimension – progression through time. Videos were graded on these two scales from one to five, and the scores of the scales were then averaged to form one final score. In order to be included in the next phase, the final score had to be at least 2.5. From the 268 videos, thirty-one videos had a score of 2.5 or above (see Appendix II). In conclusion, approximately twelve percent of all company-originated videos on Facebook sites of the selected brands included a well-defined story.

After deciding on the unit of analysis, the researcher must become immersed in the data by going through it several times and obtaining a sense of the whole (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 109). In order to become familiar with the data, all videos pulled from Facebook were viewed twice with the purpose of identifying whether the content could be classified as a story.

3.2.2 Organizing phase

Next in the deductive content analysis, a classification matrix was developed based on previous theory on storytelling. The classification of narratives and stories has been examined by many academics. The process involves identification of similarities and differences, and requires decisions as to what is important and meaningful and what is insignificant. Classification and theory continuously redefine each other – as one of them evolves, it necessitates adjustment in the other. According to Kassarjian (1977, 12), a content analysis is no better than its categories, as the categories reflect the purpose of the study and form the conceptual scheme of the empirical research. (Gabriel 2000, 59).

In this study, the stories were categorized based on the type of the story (Figure 11), referring to Gabriel's (2000) four story types. The categories are *comic stories, tragic stories, epic stories* and *romantic stories*. These categories were selected as they represent a taxonomy derived from literature, applied to an organizational setting. Gabriel also includes a specific approach to humor and different aspects of comedy, which were found as an effective factor of storytelling in previous academic literature. The categories appear comprehensive, but the study will show whether stories distributed in social media setting will align to the established groups. The purpose was to find a descriptive answer to the main research question of the study: How is storytelling being used as a branding tool in social media?
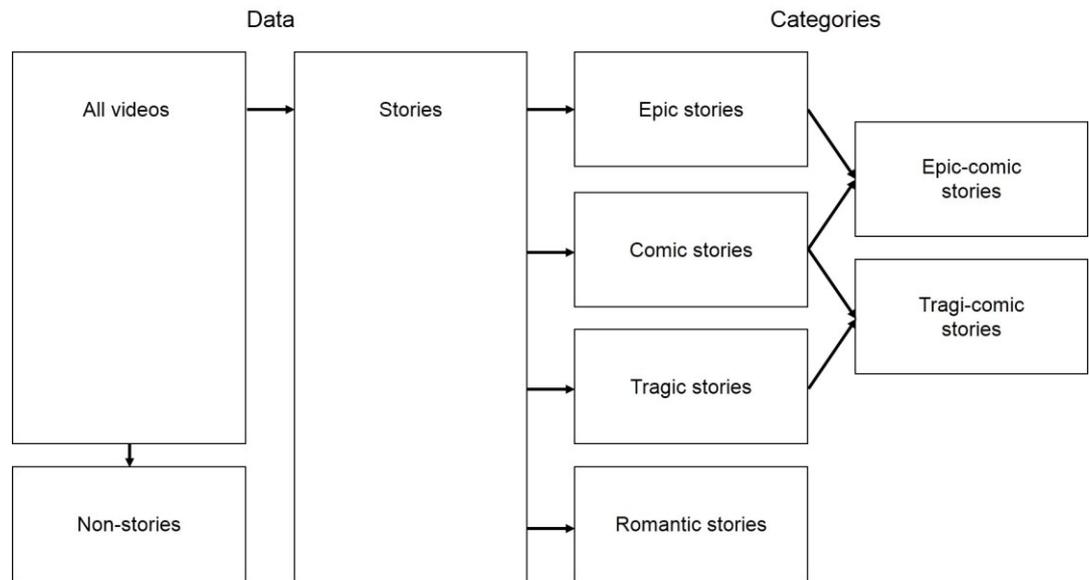
Figure 11. Data processing and categorization.

After the categorization matrix has been developed, the data is reviewed and coded according to the selected categories. Only the data that fits the matrix of the analysis is chosen. The data that does not fit to the categorization can be used to create new categories, based on principles of inductive content analysis. After the quantified description of data – the division of stories into categories – has been conducted, the researcher can interpret the findings in qualitative ways (Bell 2001, 27). (Elo & Kyngäs 2011)

3.2.3 Resulting phase

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the findings of qualitative content analysis offer supporting and non-supporting evidence for previous theory. The evidence can be presented by offering descriptive findings. The prior research used for the categorization will guide the discussion of the findings. If newly identified categories have been found, they either offer a contradictory view of the phenomenon or may further refine, extend or enrich the theory. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) depict some challenges in the deductive content analysis; when using an established theory, the researcher approaches the data with an informed, but nonetheless, strong

bias. Hence the researcher may be more likely to find evidence that is supportive than non-supportive of a theory. (Hsieh & Shannon 2005)

In the organizing phase, all the story-typed videos were viewed twice in order to determine their correct story type with certainty. Seventeen videos of the total thirty-one were categorized as epic stories, making the epic stories the most common type. The second most common type was the comic story with nine videos, including a few epic-comic and tragi-comic stories. Four videos were categorized as romantic stories, and only one as a tragic story. All the videos that constituted a story could be assigned to a pre-determined category, offering supportive evidence to the four main story categories presented by Gabriel (2000).

The results of the organizing phase are presented in below chart, demonstrating the occurrence of the four story types in the researched data (Figure 12).
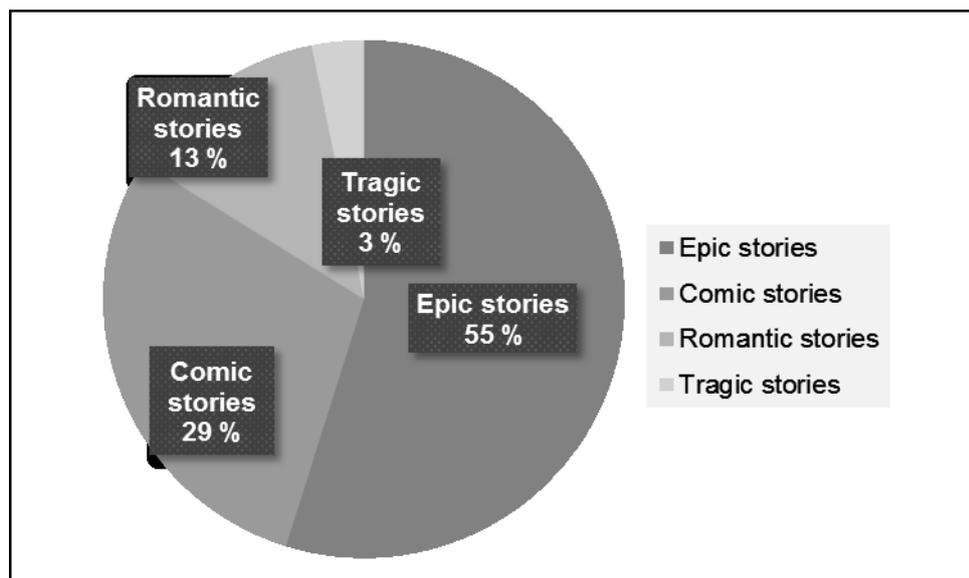
Figure 12. Occurrence of the four story types in the data.

3.3 Empirical findings

This chapter explains the four story types and their basic characteristics more thoroughly with examples found during the research process. The interactive aspect of stories is taken into consideration, made available by the comments contributed by videos' viewers' on the brands' Facebook and YouTube sites. Conclusions from the findings are drawn from the observations made during the empirical research, and reflected to previously presented storytelling theories.

3.3.1 The four story types

Epic stories focus on heroic achievements, such as missions accomplished, contests won, challenges met, or crises resolved. They highlight the resolution of the conflict through great acts of courage, force or wit. The epic stories generate pride, admiration and sense of nostalgia in the audience. The central character of an epic story – the hero – can have flaws, make mistakes and experience difficulties, but the overall integrity of his or her character cannot be doubted. The epic hero is often described as loyal, decisive, wise, controlled, dedicated and compassionate. (Gabriel 2000, 74–76)

A food and service company Fazer presents an epic story on its Facebook site – a pirate arrives at Finland in a quest to locate a well-known original salmiac confectionary, Merkkari. He explores modern Helsinki with his ancient map, dressed in a traditional pirate costume. Finally he is guided towards a train station and the city of Lappeenranta, where the factory is located. Once he finds the factory and the confectionary, he grabs an armful of candy and throws them to an enthusiastic crowd outside. The main character is portrayed as an ambitioned hero, taking on a journey. The plot is focused on a quest, and the main character's intentions are made clear. The storyline does not just present a single conflict, but the pirate confronts constant obstacles, which he overcomes with his courageous attitude. The

consumers' comments to the story vary between thrilled, nostalgic and thankful: "Thank you for bringing history to life", "Finally!" and "Oh, just as good as when I was a kid", whereas some criticize that the confectionary does not taste the same as it did years ago. Nearly all the comments are about the product itself and its return to the market, not about the story presented, proposing that the main message of the video – return of the Merkkari confectionary – has been noted, although the story might have been left unnoticed. The company has replied to some of the commentators, and continued the discussion in their blog.

A soft drink company Dr Pepper has produced as series of videos about inspiring individuals who have a one of a kind story to tell. Consumers can submit their own videos to enroll into the contest to become the next star in a commercial. The finalists are chosen by audience's votes, making the whole storytelling process extremely interactive. In one of the videos, Jen Mayfield tells a story how she started playing roller derby at the age of thirty-seven, being a mother of five, living in the suburbs of Chicago. She describes how she confronted a lot of prejudice, coming from a totally different background than the other players, and standing out from the other moms in the neighborhood. She however faced her fears and has enjoyed the sport enormously. The story has inspired some admirable comments, such as: "Hey I want to be like Jen!" and "Roller derby rocks". The story conveys the campaigns theme very well; it gives the audience a real-life character with who everyone can easily relate to and be inspired. The story falls into the epic category as it focuses on achievement and ambition, and encourages admiration and pride in the audience.

In another epic story, a sandwich chain Subway displays its history in a video called The Subway Story. The story presents the chain's founder who opened the first sandwich shop as a seventeen-year-old college student with a loan of one thousand USD, without any franchising experience, and

succeeded against all odds. The video also includes short presentations of other Subway franchisors, in an attempt to encourage new entrepreneurs to join the franchise. The plot focuses on achievement and nostalgia, and the main character, founder of Subway, can be associated with the character type wise old man, staying the test of time, promoting heritage and experience. The viewers' comments include such as: "So inspiring!" and "An amazing story from a great man".

History is also brought to life by a Finnish airline, Finnair. On its ninetieth anniversary, the company presents a series of videos portraying its history with life-changing events and characters. A video called "Celebrating 90 years of Finnair: A chapter in Finnish aviation history" tells a story of the company's founder Bruno Lucander. Old photographs and narrator's voice take the viewer back to the early days, describing the resourcefulness and hands-on attitude of Mr Lucander, as well as the innovative spirit of Finnair. Current employees of Finnair also share their thoughts and explain how the same passion and attitude is passed on between generations of pilots. The video has inspired tens of consumers to congratulate the airline and to show their support. The comments include: "Great production and fascinating story", and "My first airplane ride was as an unaccompanied six year old in a Finnair DC-3 from Helsinki to Jyväskylä in early fifties. That inspired me in to a career in aviation that lasted almost thirty years. Since then Finnair has been a trail blazer in innovation and customer service. Congratulations Finnair". The affection detectible in the viewers' comments, as well as in the video's performers, cause the story to be identifiable furthermore with another story category: the romantic story. The plot is however focused on heroic characters and achievement, placing the story into the epic category.

Comic stories usually focus on misfortune, and portray the central character as a deserving victim or a fool. As feelings of sympathy or kindness for the victim could otherwise undermine the comic quality of a story, the character

must be seen as bringing misfortune to him or herself. The character can be presented as pompous, vain, foolish, arrogant, greedy or overconfident. The difficulties met by the character cause amusement or contempt in the audience. In some stories however, the comic and epic types are combined in presenting the character as a trickster; a hero with humor. In such stories, the plot focuses on an unorthodox achievement or a display of wit, causing admiration and laughter in the audience. In some comic stories, the humorist becomes a hero in his or her own right. The funnier the joke and the greater the hardship, the bigger the audience's admiration becomes for the humorist. (Gabriel 2000, 61-62, 66, 77)

A mobile service provider Saunalahti has created a fictional family, "The Rich & Brainless", and produced a series of comic stories around the family members. The characters are displayed as extremely wealthy, foolish and egoistic. In the most popular video, the father of the family has built a sauna with golden seats and gets burned while seating on them. Due his arrogance, he cannot admit the pain to his lackey but suffers. As the characters appear so absurd and deserving to their own troubles, the viewers' comments are amused. All the videos of the series have the same thematic message – irrational spending is foolish, and the company can help its consumers to avoid such behavior. As the videos have also been aired on TV, the stories are short, concise and comprehensible, and the humor adds to the memorability. So far in the series the family members have not shown any signs of evolvement or growth, but the familiarity of the characters helps the audience to connect with the storyline.

In an epic-comic story produced by a soft drink brand Pepsi Max with professional racing driver Jeff Gordon, Gordon is disguised and taken to a car dealership for a test drive with a candid camera in his glasses. At first he acts like he does not know how to drive, but then he takes off to an incredible speed, freaking out the salesman on the passenger's seat,

pleading Gordon to slow down or stop the car. The story is a classic candid camera prank, portraying the central character as a trickster, stimulating both admiration and hilarity in the commentators: "This was hysterical", "Fake or real, I don't know. What I do know is this: if Jeff Gordon ever needs somebody to drive shotgun with him on another test drive, I'll do it", and "That was awesome! I can only wish". The plot of the story is simple and it does not have a defined crisis factor, but the comicalness of the situation increases audience's attention and intends to enhance positive responses in the video's viewers.

In another epic-comic story, a filming crew of home appliance producer Samsung is shooting a commercial for a washing machine out on a lake in wintertime, once a bear appears and approaches them. The crew runs further, scared, as the bear sniffs around the machinery. Surprisingly, the bear zips off his fur, strips down on his underwear, and throws the fur into the washing machine. The bear jokes around the filming crew's camp while the fur is being washed. Once finished, the bear puts on the fur which has now turned white, and transfers into a polar bear. The bear takes off, but the video shows a later scene in which tens of bears are lined up to get their furs washed. The video has resulted in plenty of amused comments, such as: "Hilarious, not what I expected", "I thought it was a real bear! It looked so real", and "It's the best funny advert I have seen in the last decade. Well done Samsung". As typical for an epic-comic story, in both the videos something unexpected but funny happens, causing the audience to laugh. Again, the humorous episodes are designed to increase the transfer of positive affect for the product, and to assist the customers to remember the product at a later stage, in order to strengthen brand salience.

Romantic stories are often compelling without exhibiting a conflict or a crisis. The plots revolve around romantic love, gratitude and appreciation, and contain lyrical qualities. At a deeper level, romantic stories represent a way

of dealing with suffering and misfortune, but instead of turning misfortune into deserved punishment like in comic stories, the romantic stories appear to proclaim that love and emotion conquer all. Romantic stories reinforce feelings of love, care, kindness, generosity and gratitude in the audience. (Gabriel 2000, 80-82)

As an example of a romantic story, Valio, the leading dairy brand in Finland presents a story in which a girl prepares a meal for a boy, inputting an ingredient which causes the boy to fall madly in love and to run frantically through forest to propose to the girl. The story portrays the character as a love object and focuses on a romantic fantasy. The comments left by viewers display affection, love and nostalgia: "Lovely… Just as the product… Nice feeling", "Sweet young love", and "Lovely genuine commercial". The plot shows a clear link between an action, a response and a desired outcome, and as originally produced for TV, the video is concise and easy to follow. The story can be described as a reversal story – it presents a problem-solution relationship and an understandable interaction between the main character, the product and the problem. A reversal story should result in a higher state of encouragement (Chiu et al. 2012, 266), as it presents its viewers some possible actions to take if confronted by a similar situation.

Another example of the romantic category flaunts an emotion other than romantic love – a jumpsuit manufacturer OnePiece presents findings of an experiment conducted in a British University Master course in an attempt to solve an increasing integration issue among students. In the story, a student wearing his jumpsuit goes to school, followed by his classmates and professor, all wearing jumpsuits. As per the narrator, the identical attires prevent formation of small groups based on social or cultural differences. The outfits brought the students together, and assisted in creating larger, more diverse study-groups. The relaxed atmosphere and the sense of unity

caused the students' grades to improve. The story centers on kind and caring emotions. The video has been shared in Facebook and YouTube, with controversial comments. Whereas some give "Thumbs up", and share their interest to a similar experiment, others speculate the story's authenticity. However as explained in chapter two of this thesis, the story can be fictional, but in order to be reliable, the relationship between the brand and the story must be authentic. This story also includes the elements of a reversal story – the relationship between the characters, the product and the outcome is clear, and the video encourages the viewers to conduct similar actions in order to resolve their problems.

Tragic stories share some features with comic stories – they derive from misfortune and portray the main character as a victim. In tragic stories however, the misfortune is undeserved, and accompanied by sorrow, pain, fear and anger. They play with audience's anxieties of safety or assurance (Dahlen et al. 2010, 221), and can make the audience feel guilty or even shameful about social injustice, or provoke compassion for the suffering members of the society. Some stories combine comic with tragic qualities; in these stories the misfortune leads to comic twists and unfortunate results. Tragi-comic stories stimulate amusement in the audience, but can also cause feelings of pity, guilt and sadness. (Gabriel 2000, 69, 73)

The only tragic story found during the research process was originated from a social development organization SOS-Lapsikylä, aiming to recruit new donors to their cause. The story serves as a textbook example of tragedy; it portrays an abandoned little girl in a third world country, suffering poverty, hunger and illnesses, evoking both sadness and pity in the video's viewers. Waters and Jones (2011) have proposed basic rules for non-profit organizations to follow in order to create effective videos, and the first rule is to tell a story which is focused, genuine, relevant to the audience, and which introduces the problem briefly. Organizations should also make use

of the interactivity of social media platforms, and the organization in question has done exactly that; it encourages discussion related to the video, and has responded to viewers' comments and questions, providing more information on the objectives and actions of the campaign. The video also includes a call to action for desired behavior, an element also recommended by Waters and Jones (2011). The video has been commented and shared on viewers' own Facebook pages several hundred times. Some commentators speculate whether the donations actually reach their target, whereas others share their experiences with relief work and other non-profits. The strategic purpose of the story is clear, and it includes a plot, although weak, in which the Ugandan girl goes from sleeping alone on the street, to being looked after in a home provided by the non-profit organization.

A video by H&M, an international clothing brand, includes both comic and tragic elements. The company has hired a famous football player David Beckham to promote their line of men's underwear. In the story, Beckham sees his kids off to a car in front of their home, and closes the car door. Unfortunately Beckham's bathrobe gets stuck between the car doors, and once the car accelerates, the robe gets ripped off and leaves Beckham standing in nothing but his underwear on the street. As his house's front door has been locked meanwhile, Beckham decides to run to catch the car and the robe. He takes ultimate measures to jump over fences and other obstacles while trying to reach the car. Once he realizes that his mission is impossible and stops in the street, a truck full of tourists arrives and tens of tourists start photographing Beckham in his underwear. Beckham seems embarrassed and very conscious of his lack of clothing and makes a run for it. The plot's focus is a basic tragi-comic story; a misfortune leads to comic twists and somewhat tragic results, from the perspective of the main character. Celebrity endorsements are commonly used in order to gain attention and to create positive associations leading to positive brand knowledge and distinctive brand images (Carroll 2009, 150). A good

celebrity endorser is an individual who enjoys public recognition and who should be knowledgeable and experienced in order to be perceived as an expert in the product category. The video displaying Beckham in H&M underwear aims at gaining increased attention in both sexes – male customers who qualify Beckham as a good judge on preferred underwear, whereas female customers focus on seeing Beckham less clothed. The selection of celebrity and the story itself have been proved successful, as the video has been very popular in social media, resulting in over seventeen thousand likes and hundreds of mostly amused comments such as: "Like it!", "Hot", and "More naked David – what a great day! Thanks H&M". The humorous end result of the story adds to the memorability of the video.

In another tragi-comic story by SodaStream, a manufacturer of home soda makers, two trucks arrive to a supermarket parking lot, clearly identifiable as trucks of Coca-Cola and Pepsi. The drivers notice each other and race to load their carts quicker than the other. Once they run towards the store pushing their carts, they both hit a threshold, causing all hundreds of bottles to explode. The narrator advises how by using the soda maker, hundreds of millions of bottles could be saved in a day. The strategic purpose of the video becomes clear at the end, and the story displays a logical sequence of events from an opening scene to an action, a response and an outcome. As typical for a tragi-comic story, the video arouses both feelings of pity and amusement in the audience. The video has stimulated some amused comments, but also irritation from the comparison between the soft drink brands. The provider of the video has not participated in the debate.

3.3.2 Discussion and analysis

Discovering that the predefined story types could be found in the researched stories, suggest that the story types established in literature and organizational context are also utilized in social media for branding purposes. The findings are consistent with the academics' implications that

stories in branding derive from the same ancient form of storytelling which has been employed in education, entertainment and engagement from the beginning of the civilization.

The fact that the most stories had epic characteristics implies that companies mainly want to provoke feelings of pride, admiration and nostalgia in the audience. Companies try to bring their core values and histories forward and to bring their organizational stories to life. Although epic stories function as the main incentives for nostalgia, these emotions can also appear with other story types, and most commonly with romantic stories. As per Gabriel (2000, 183-184), nostalgia is not a way of coming to terms with the past but an attempt to come to terms with the present, and people strive to come to terms with the present through fantasies about the past. In these romantic nostalgic stories the past is presented as a terrain of cherished objects and memories, and the stories are depicted with gratitude, love and generosity. As per Brown at al. (2003), the late twentieth century was characterized by a "nostalgia boom", and several academics have acknowledged the consumers' interest in nostalgic memories as well as the concept of history as a source of market value. Brands serve to connect consumers' to their past and can evoke strong feelings of belonging and caring in the communities that share those brands. In this sense, nostalgic brands are strong with brand associations, and lead to high brand equity. Also Fournier and Yao (1997) recognize nostalgic attachment as an important dimension in the consumer-brand relationship, and as a valuable creator of brand loyalty. The numerous examples of epic stories and nostalgia found during the research process support the academics' opinion on importance of heritage in companies' branding messages.

Companies also utilize humor to create a connection with the video's viewers and to make the brand memorable. As per Dahlen et al. (2010, 343), humorous stories create a positive mood in the audience, which lead to

positive brand associations. The positive associations facilitate attention, engagement, processing and comprehension, encourage recall and influence consumers' brand attitudes. As proven effective, humor is one of the most commonly employed communication strategies, and as per some academics it should be used whenever possible (Chiu et al. 2012, 263). The sampled videos exhibited different types of humor. Several stories presented a trickster or a humorist, who experienced a misfortune or an unexpected event, which led to humorous consequences. Some characters were humorous by nature, and trusted on the most traditional jokes and audience's preconceptions. The high ratio of comic stories in the researched sample suggests that companies agree with academics about the effectiveness of humor in storytelling.

Chiu et al. (2012) suggest that humorous stories are better suited for search products – that is products which are relatively easy to evaluate prior purchase decision, and which solve consumers' routine problems. For example clothing, foodstuff, furniture and magazines are such products. This thesis did not concentrate on comparing stories between product categories, but some conclusions can be drawn based on the findings. Half of all the comic stories found during this research are promoting foodstuff, mainly soft drinks. With such products, consumers attend to the story without explicitly intending to learn from the contents, but are attracted by the humor, which causes them to pay more attention to funny details and generate favorable product evaluations. Several comic stories were promoting electronics; a product category which is not as easy to evaluate prior purchase and as such often categorized as an experience product. However at the age of user-generated content and social media, the product or service quality information available online for the consumer is vast, and there are numerous new ways to learn about products prior purchase, making the distinction between search and experience products blurred (Huang et al. 2009). During the research, also services – mobile network providers and travel agencies – were found utilizing humor in their stories.

According to Chiu et al. (2012), such services should rather utilize reversal stories in storytelling, as a reversal story which describes others' similar problems and offers surrogate experience information can raise consumers' interest and engagement with the story.

In her content analysis about narratives used in TV advertising, Escalas (1998) discovered that ads promoting beverages have an especially high story-structure compared to other product or service categories. This study provides supporting data for the previous research – about twenty-two percent of the stories found represented beverage brands, and stories about all foodstuff brands, including beverages, accounted for forty-five percent of the story-typed videos. The amount of stories produced by beverages can however be partially explained by the amount of beverage brands in total in the top one hundred brands list – fifteen brands of the hundred can be classified as beverage brands.

The findings of this study also indicate that an advertising phenomenon which was first introduced in the late 1980s, the serial commercial, is being used also in social media environment. In a serial, the product and its features are set aside in the favor of the story that aims to entertain and involve the audience emotionally (Fog et al. 2010, 165). In the researched stories, one of the brands presented a story that continued from a video to the next one in an episodic matter. Several brands had the same characters engaged in different activities in subsequent videos, but the familiarity of the characters and their personalities assisted in addressing the target audience. Some brands presented completely separate stories of unconnected individuals, but the themes and structures of the stories stayed the same, creating a series of stories which the audience can easily associate with. As per Fog et al. (2010, 168), a recurring story will ensure fast recognition and strengthen awareness of the brand once the theme and the characters have been established in the minds of the audience.

The low number of romantic stories found could be understood as a difficulty for companies to convey sentimentality, and to choose a humorous story instead. Despite the findings of this study, the concept of *emotional branding* has been widely declared as a key to success, and it has been referred to as a highly influential brand management paradigm (Thompson et al. 2006, 50). Emotional branding focuses on brand personality and aims to interact and build a deep relationship with the consumer by communicating the brand's essence through emotional appeals and emphasizing emotional benefits (Holt 2004, 21). Dahlen et al. (2010, 269) mention Coca-Cola as an example of a company specialized in emotional branding – it balances nostalgia with contemporary relevance by using images of bonding and affection that are evident in polar bears, Santa Claus and various furry animals featured in the company's stories. As per academics, emotional branding evokes a high degree of consumer passion, which emerges when branding activities utilize narratives and tactics that demonstrate an empathetic understanding of customers' inspirations, aspirations and life circumstances and that generate warm feelings of community among the brand users (Thompson et al. 2006). The few romantic stories found during this research focus on exposing affection or sharing magical moments, but do not exhibit any endearing creatures. They can however offer emotional moments to the audience, eventually strengthening the bond between the consumer and the brand.

As tragic stories were not found in the research sample, except for the one video by a non-profit, suggests that companies perhaps want to avoid causing negative emotions or promoting undesired associations in their customers, however substantial their ability of building emotions could be. Tragic stories are told in order to provoke feelings of sorrow, pity, fear or anger, and the emotions are seldom the ones that companies wish to associate with themselves.

As the percentage of story-typed company-originated videos on social media was rather low (twelve percent), companies use videos on Facebook for other purposes than telling stories. Most of the videos found during the research process could be categorized as product presentations or tutorials. These videos were quite lengthy, inactive and unemotional – possibly implying that as the costs of producing videos has come down in the recent years, companies generate a lot of videos which they distribute solely in social media or on their own website, where the operating expenses are minimal. These videos are highly informative and educational in nature, but do not encourage engagement or loyalty in the audience.

Twenty-two of the total thirty-one videos that constituted a story were originated from the top fifty brands, and only nine from the brands between positions fifty-one and hundred. Finding entails that the storytelling brands are more popular in social media. The findings are consistent with the academics' testimonials presented in chapter two of this thesis, supporting storytelling's importance in companies' branding tactics.

3.3.3 Evaluation of validity and reliability

Validity is defined as the extent to which an instrument measures what it is purposed to measure (Kassarjian 1977, 15). In a qualitative study, the aim is not to measure anything but to seek for certain qualities that are typical for a phenomenon (Stenbacka 2001, 551). The purpose of this empirical research was to verbally describe storytelling which takes place in social media. The objective was reached through categorization of the data by the categories derived from storytelling theory. As all the story-typed videos could be assigned to a predefined category, it can be assumed that the four categories describe well the stories available in social media, and that the selected method was appropriate in order to reach the purpose of the study.

To increase the reliability of the study, it is necessary to demonstrate a link between the results and the data. In order to accomplish this, the researcher must aim at describing the analyzing process in as much detail as possible (Elo & Kyngäs 2008). In a qualitative research, an appropriate reliability is indicated by a thorough description of the whole research process, including preparation, data gathering and analysis (Stenbacka 2001, 552). In order to obtain a systematic, objective description of the content, the researcher's subjectivity must be minimized (Kassarjian 1977, 13). Content analysis holds some inherent weaknesses – the method is quite vulnerable to the effects of researcher's biases, which in turn can affect decisions made in the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data. The existence of these biases can affect a study's contribution to knowledge. (Kolbe & Burnett 1991)

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the dynamic nature of online environment proposes significant complications to the study. Companies can alter the content of their Facebook pages at any moment during the process, and customers have an ability to interact with the brand constantly. The conclusions reached solely demonstrate the findings obtained in that specific moment in social media environment. This study attempted to describe the research process in a descriptive, informative fashion, making a comparable process available to any forthcoming researchers. The decisions made were affected by researcher's own interpretations, as characteristic in a qualitative study (Schutt 2009, 321), and another researcher with different background could come to different conclusions in the same environment. In order to improve the reliability of the research, another researcher could have been employed in the analyzing process, to check whether the conclusions would have been the same. Unfortunately this was not feasible due the restricted resources when conducting the study. The reliability of the research is however strengthened by the fact that the companies had no influence on which brands were chosen to the sampling, but the brands were selected based on statistics of an external

independent party. Also, as there was no previous data on the researched subject, storytelling in social media, there were no assumptions made on if the chosen categories would prove suitable for the study, or if any of the categories would be more popular than the others, but the videos were evaluated with an open mind, aiming to avoid possible researcher bias.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents a summary of both parts of the thesis – theoretical review and the empirical research – reflected to the research gap and the research questions of the study. Theoretical contributions as well as managerial implications of the findings are suggested. Also the limitations of the research are considered. Finally, the thesis proposes further interest areas of research.

4.1 Summary of findings

The purpose of this study was to find out how storytelling is being used as a branding tool in social media. Three sub-questions were introduced in order to develop a thorough understanding of the subject. The findings of the research are now discussed and summarized, based on the presented questions.

What are the main characteristics of building brand equity in social media setting?

There are four dimensions of customer-based brand equity, and social media environment has an effect on each of them. Customers' awareness of the brand can be significantly improved through intensified brand exposure. Specialized social media platforms, designed to reach the correct customer base in all stages of customer decision journey, assist in locating the potential customers, and improving the breadth and strength of brand awareness. Academics emphasize the benefits achieved from search engine optimization – search allows companies to collect consumers' real-time insights, and to monitor consumer behavior online. In a way, interactive technologies do not just increase customer's brand awareness, but also the companies' awareness of customers, improving the overall management of branding activities. The ability to witness customers in action has considerably sharpened the quality of the insights that companies use in

generating new branding opportunities and in increasing customer-based brand equity.

Online applications also allow consumers to study differences between products and services more carefully than ever. Online tools accelerate the pace at which people can compare and discover the qualities or benefits that separate one brand from another, and the process of comparing and contrasting has become a natural part of the purchase process (Adamson 2008, 16). Online platforms can assist to establish a number of central points-of-difference for a brand, but achieving an emotional point of difference has become a far greater success factor. All the emotional and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli affect the customers' associations with the brand, and influence the customers' total brand experience. All branding activities must be articulated in a way which ensures that no matter how the consumer engages with the brand, the experiences created will reinforce the consumer's feelings about why the specific brand is meaningfully different and better.

The fact that companies are able to observe customers in action in an online environment, provides the companies genuine real-time information about the actual quality measures. Positive brand perceptions and brand equity can be further enhanced by allowing consumers to participate in the content creation. Interactivity and user empowerment assist in creating impactful and enduring feelings, leading to positive responses from the customers.

Interactive social media platforms and encouragement of customer participation can engage consumers and increase loyalty to the brand. Brands can effectively understand and optimize their presence in social media with the assistance of interactive platforms, and realize significant untapped benefits by understanding and focusing on reaching the most favorable customer base (Lipsman et al. 2012). Engaging content enhances

the customers' brand experience and deepens the customers' relationship with the brand. But as the technological instruments continue to evolve, it becomes more and more difficult for companies to manage the brand and to maintain consistency across multiplying brand touch points. The control of consumers has been greatly enhanced, and the digital technologies have made it possible for everyone to observe a brand's actions and to judge whether it is meeting its brand promise. Companies must take a deep controlling interest in consumers' brand experiences and responses in order to succeed in today's marketplace.

How can storytelling be utilized in creating brand equity?

The strengths of storytelling have a basis in basic human characteristics – human memory is story-based, and people tend to organize experiences into a narrative form. Such findings give strong support to storytelling as a creator of brand awareness; the ability of an audience to recall or recognize a message later will be much higher, if the message is presented in a story format. Memorability of a story can be further enhanced by using a recognizable character or humorous elements, and keeping the story simple, concise and emotionally engaging.

Story-format messages are efficient in creating brand associations in the audience. Stories allow the audience to interpret the communicated message from their own viewpoints, and to construct their own meanings from the story. Such process of interpretation and understanding creates a unique emotional connection between the consumer and the brand, and assists in adding favorable associations to the brand. Brand associations made can lead to an understanding of the points of difference and increase customer-based brand equity.

As per academics, a story-format message which is felt by the audience, is more persuasive than argumentative or analytical illustration of a product's attributes. As information is packaged to a meaningful, context making structure, it is easier for the audience to understand the depth and relevance of the content. A reversal story proposes a possible way to solve problems, and can elicit high emotional responses in the audience. Also humor increases the audience's level of attention as well as comprehension of the message, and generates positive affect and appreciation towards the brand.

Storytelling is a shared experience, which turns the audience into an active participant through the process of interpretation and construction. As consumers are entrusted to construct their own meanings from a story, they become more committed and engaged with the brand, and an emotional bond between the brand and the consumer is established. A story can function as a catalyst for dialogue, and attract and involve the consumers to the storytelling process. An effective engagement can transfer consumers into ambassadors of the brand, and establish a commitment of the highest degree. The motivation for consumers to tell stories comes from the desire to share opinions and experiences as an ambassador of the brand.

What are the fundamentals of storytelling in social media?

Telling a story has always been an effective way for brands to connect with consumers, but the relevance of good storytelling in brand building has been reinforced by current digital technologies (Adamson 2008, 18). In social media networks, stories are commented, passed along and complemented, and anyone can assume the role of a storyteller with an instant, global audience. The culture is characterized by participation, interaction and dialogue, and brand stories should be written collaboratively between the brand and the consumer in an on-going process.

An excellent example of collaborative storytelling was presented in chapter three, in which a soft drink brand Dr Pepper distributed a story in social media about a consumer who had a unique, inspiring story to share. The consumer had been selected to participate in the video by her peers – other consumers who took an interest to her story and wanted to know more. All parties had an active role in making of the video, and the story functioned as a creator of positive brand associations, emotions, engagement and customer-based brand equity.

Several brands in social media have developed characters which perform in a serial of stories. As the audience gets to know the characters better, an emotional bond is created between the characters and the audience. The characters develop over time as the story continues, making it easier for the audience to engage with the story. Social media provides an efficient but inexpensive platform for the distribution of stories, and the number of stories is only limited by the companies' interest in devoting a reasonable degree of creativity and effort into the storytelling process. If a brand maintains a steady flow of stories and involves some compelling characters which the audience can associate with, there is no reason why the followers of the brand should not engage to an interactive relationship with the brand, and become active ambassadors, sharing their experiences with the brand with others.

The empirical research discovered that all the types of stories that have been traditionally used for storytelling in literature, are also being used for telling stories for audiences in social media. Companies are especially focused in telling stories which provoke feelings of pride and nostalgia about the brand or its founder. These stories aim to emphasize the company's central beliefs and values, and educate consumers about the brand's heritage. Companies also frequently utilize humor and funny episodes in their stories, in order to increase customers' attention to the story and to

generate favorable product associations. Some brands trust in emotional branding tactics in their storytelling, presenting stories which embrace feelings of love, unity and companionship.

Overall, the amount of stories in social media, according to the research conducted for this thesis, is still quite low. More and more brands are enhancing their presence in social media in order to generate increased exposure, to develop more traffic to their site and to gather important market intelligence, but several brands are still lacking truly engaging content in their social media platforms.

4.2 Theoretical contribution

The three main theories this research builds on are first of all, the brand equity fundamentals provided by Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2009), secondly the storytelling basics provided by an assorted group of academics and practitioners (for example Chiu et al. 2012; Escalas 1998, 2007; Fog et al. 2010; Gabriel 2000), accompanied by the recent findings about branding in social media environment (Adamson 2008; Bruhn et al. 2012; Christodoulides et al. 2012; Lipsman et al. 2012). The research reflects on the studies conducted by Lundqvist et al. (2013) as well as Papadatos (2006), who have successfully investigated the effect of storytelling to customer loyalty and brand equity.

The main theoretical contribution of this thesis is the framework presented as a summary of findings at the end of chapter two (Figure 9). The framework assembles all the facts uncovered about storytelling as a creator of brand equity, and about social media's influence on the already established branding practices. This is the first study representing the theories summarized in a structured format, thus making it easier to

understand the benefits of storytelling and social media applications in brand equity building.

This study also contributes in producing evidence that storytelling, which takes place in social media, follows the same story type categories that have been established previously in literature and organizational surroundings. Company-originated stories, or other related content which is available in social media, have so far not been an object of systematic, academic research with similar methodology, so this thesis offers first-hand knowledge on the subject. The study furthermore provides guidelines to future researchers about feasible methods of research, when conducting a study in the context of social media.

4.3 Managerial implications

The central message of this thesis for practitioners is to ensure that storytelling is not just a buzzword, but an efficient branding tool, which should be regarded as a key differentiating element required to survive in today's saturated marketplace. Instead of functional benefits and features, consumers demand unique experiences which appeal to all senses, and storytelling is an approach to meet those demands. This thesis assist in transferring storytelling from an abstract concept to a functional, indispensable component of companies' branding activities.

In addition to sharing insights about storytelling, this research underlines the reasons why brands need to operate in social media environment, and to recognize the significance of current technologies. The evolution of online platforms from a primarily transactional medium to a relationship building device has been a substantial shift, affecting the brands' control, as well as the customer touch points with the brand. Companies have to take advantage of the technological developments and the behaviors it generates in order to make brands stronger and more valuable to both

companies and consumers. The digital platforms create new frameworks for exchanging of stories, and open up new opportunities for strengthening the brand (Fog et al. 2010, 188). This thesis shortly proposes insights and instruments which can potentially extend the scope and scale of a company's brand equity creation in social networks. Brands need to get actively involved in the dialogue in which the brand's stories are expressed and shared, and encourage the formation of a bond between the brand and the consumer.

4.4 Limitations and further research suggestions

There were a few issues in the study that were acknowledged but could not be addressed within the limits of the present research. Firstly, as social media is a dynamic environment which keeps changing by the minute, the calculations made during the research process and the results received could have been different if made at another point in time. The delimitation must be accepted as the fluctuating environment is typical for this type of context. Furthermore, as the list of top hundred most popular brands on Facebook is updated regularly based on consumers' online behavior, a selection of other brands to the sample could have affected the final result. A larger sample, collected during a longer time-period, could have also improved the authenticity of the findings.

As for implications for future research, there are a few key areas that could be studied based on observations made during this study. As social media is inherently an interactive environment in which both the parties – brands and consumers – are able to tell and share stories, it would be ideal to investigate also stories which have been originated by the consumers. A study which would be directed at consumer-generated stories, using content analysis, narrative analysis or other suitable research method could provide interesting insights about the other half of storytelling in social media. In addition, a research in which a corresponding sample would be collected but categorized with another perspective than the types of stories would

provide a welcome addition to the storytelling theory. Hopefully this research will inspire others to embrace the infinite research possibilities provided by social media platforms, despite the challenges caused by the novelty and unfamiliarity of the context.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The top one hundred brands on Facebook, based on the number of local fans (Socialbakers 2013).

Posi-tion	Brand	Number of local fans	Posi-tion	Brand	Number of local fans
1	Prisma	238831	51	Fanta	43799
2	Hesburger	215134	52	M&M's Suomi	41496
3	Fazerin sininen	206278	53	Marabou	40767
4	Fazer	189718	54	Maito - kansallisjuoma	40021
5	Suomen poliisi	177077	55	Viking Line Suomi	39975
6	Silja Line Suomi	157200	56	Canal Digital Finland	39606
7	Saunalahti	149124	57	Nelly.com	37288
8	Gigantti	148537	58	SOS-lapsikylä	36624
9	Aurinkomatkat	145642	59	Mountain Dew	36519
10	K-Citymarket	126085	60	Lomamatkat	36421
11	Valio	123547	61	Nissan	34291
12	Finnmatkat	117602	62	Pepsi Max Suomi	33953
13	DNA	117376	63	Herra Snellman	33630
14	Finnair	115118	64	Lumene Finland	32831
15	McDonald's Suomi	115077	65	Pepsi	32738
16	Spotify	114280	66	L'Oreal Paris Suomi	32727
17	Suomi	113135	67	Muumimaailma - Moominworld	32359
18	H&M	104095	68	Dr Pepper	32103
19	Finnkino	93754	69	Rockstar Energydrink US	31932
20	Sonera	89325	70	Kodin Ykkönen	31205
21	Subway	88739	71	Nokia Suomi	30948
22	OnePiece - Jump in	81571	72	SodaStream Suomi	30777
23	McDonald's	81306	73	VERO MODA Finland	30619
24	Ben & Jerry's	78949	74	Musti ja Mirri	30245
25	Ben & Jerry's	78919	75	Estrella Suomi	30207
26	Pingviini	76579	76	Sprite	29407
27	Anttila NetAnttila	76219	77	Pepsi Max	29105

28	Gina Tricot	76141	78	Wii	28937
29	Puma	76132	79	Garnier Suomi	28781
30	Verkkokauppa.com	75557	80	Haribo Suomi	28599
31	Elisa	74001	81	I AM Nikon Finland	28551
32	Nokia	72313	82	Oriflame Suomi	27691
33	Tjäreborg	71659	83	Sony Pictures Suomi	26369
34	Audi Finland	70467	84	Mercedes-Benz Suomi	26279
35	Musch	68326	85	Koskikeskus	25540
36	Lidl Suomi	64596	86	Iso Omena	24775
37	Samsung Suomi	64261	87	Fox Racing	24546
38	Monster Energy	63672	88	Lipton	23801
39	Paulig Cafe Suomi	62973	89	etnies	23567
40	Aino-jäätelö	60217	90	Original Long Drink	23228
41	DC Shoes	57444	91	Disney Suomi	22988
42	Tallink Suomi	56132	92	Eckerö Line	22634
43	Siwa	52478	93	Movember Suomi	22189
44	Xbox	50987	94	Ifolorkirja	22070
45	Subway Suomi	50070	95	Lidl	21946
46	O'boy	49477	96	Scandic Suomi	21238
47	Picnic	47395	97	Harley-Davidson	20868
48	Nomination	46417	98	Marabou Suomi	20810
49	Lensway.fi	45512	99	Jumbo	20414
50	IKEA Suomi	43990	100	Pågen Suomi	20351

Appendix 2. Details of videos classified as stories.

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
3	Fazerin sininen	TV-mainos 2013	298	22	42
Date	Length	Available at			
11.1.13	0:31	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixL7fx1mWMY			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
2	3	2.5		Romantic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
4	Fazer	Merkkarin odotettu paluu	1597	216	117
Date	Length	Available at			
31.1.13	2:31	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZUkfON9UGs			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
5	5	5		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
7	Saunalahti	Kultaiset lauteet	636		
Date	Length	Available at			
21.1.13	0:26	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Dg7uIqlbTI			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
3	4	3.5		Comic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
10	Valio	Valiojoukko	4819	836	312
Date	Length	Available at			
15.3.13	2:02	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2-kWvtBlOY			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
5	5	5		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
10	Valio	Arkistomainos	806	91	65
Date	Length	Available at			
1.3.13	0:47	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4nvMFO_kEY			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
5	5	5		Epic-comic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
10	Valio	Rakastuminen	480	55	74
Date	Length	Available at			

28.1.13	0:31	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOISBuW_tZ0			

Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
4	4	4		Romantic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
12	DNA	Miljoonas asiakas	147	3	27

Date	Length	Available at			
7.2.13	1:24	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NZOcrAOhPY			

Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
3	4	3.5		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
13	Finnair	Early days	547	103	30

Date	Length	Available at			
10.1.13	4:33	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFwm9v5sRXY			

Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
4	3	3.5		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
17	H&M	David Beckham	17335	3022	364

Date	Length	Available at			
6.2.13	1:41	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=il21FZu-IUY			

Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
4	5	4.5		Tragi-comic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
20	Subway	Herman episode #1	789	31	23

Date	Length	Available at			
11.3.13	4:48	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzsknpvHA_I			

Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
3	3	3		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
20	Subway	Subway story	3654	298	118

Date	Length	Available at			
21.2.13	3:00	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77eBQwPGgUA			

Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
4	2	3		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments

	OnePiece - Jump in	Improving grades	116	28	6
21					
Date	Length	Available at			
7.3.13	2:48	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5dUlJZgAEg			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
3	3	3		Romantic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
32	Tjäreborg	Kuntosali	19		
Date	Length	Available at			
28.1.13	0:21	https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10151297838412605&set=vb.61721892557&type=3&theater			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
3	3	3		Epic-comic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
33	Audi Finland	Audi RS moments of truth: 1983	263	44	7
Date	Length	Available at			
8.2.13	3:17	https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=5ty355ZmiK8			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
4	3	3.5		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
36	Samsung Suomi	Samsung unpacked teaser (part 2)	34738	5358	1475
Date	Length	Available at			
11.3.13	1:26	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qx6SgqIE3NI			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
3	5	4		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
36	Samsung Suomi	Samsung unpacked first teaser	6885	3249	580
Date	Length	Available at			
4.3.13	1:19	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Plna5j00eNw			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
3	4	3.5		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
36	Samsung Suomi	Allshare	14		
Date	Length	Available at			

	24.1.13		3:39	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2euzClibL0k			

Elements score	Temporal score	Final score			Category		
3	4	3.5			Tragi-comic		

Position	Brand	Video		Likes	Shares	Comments
36	Samsung Suomi	Bear at EcoBubble shoot		53	26	1
Date	Length	Available at				
16.1.13	1:59	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxEle-FCoKM				
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score			Category	
3	5	4			Epic-comic	

Position	Brand	Video		Likes	Shares	Comments
38	Paulig	Kahvijuomaa vauhdissa		483	16	33
Date	Length	Available at				
19.3.13	2:28	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u43xTzhyVl4				
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score			Category	
4	5	4.5			Epic	

Position	Brand	Video		Likes	Shares	Comments
38	Paulig	Paulig uudistaa kahvitauon		1017		
Date	Length	Available at				
27.2.13	4:42	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-2hxILRRLo				
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score			Category	
4	3	3.5			Epic	

Position	Brand	Video		Likes	Shares	Comments
38	Paulig	Juhla Mokka -kädentaitaja		129		
Date	Length	Available at				
29.1.13	1:10	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZAbsYoUePs				
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score			Category	
3	4	3.5			Epic	

Position	Brand	Video		Likes	Shares	Comments
43	Xbox	Playdate with Kumail Nanjiani part 1		8162		
Date	Length	Available at				
12.3.13	4:34	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBRbO7M539E				
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score			Category	
4	2	3			Comic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
57	SOS-Lapsikylä	Ryhdy kummiksi	2251	1002	135
Date	Length	Available at			
5.3.13	1:14	https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10151506046155236&set=vb.370901253347&type=2&theater			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
4	3	3		Tragic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
60	Nissan	Connected to the city	18		1
Date	Length	Available at			
15.1.13	0:41	https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=1P_MQYp-5f4			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
2	3	2.5		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
61	Pepsi Max Suomi	Testdrive	24		
Date	Length	Available at			
13.3.13	3:46	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5mHPo2yDG8&playnext=1&list=PLF6B97ACB3A3BEAEA			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
4	3	3.5		Epic-comic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
62	Herra Snellman	Kunnon lenkkimakkaran resepti	45	2	9
Date	Length	Available at			
11.2.13	0:35	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_iIofwXt0u0&list=PL6FF0787E3A0601B6			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
3	3	3		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
62	Herra Snellman	Kunnon lenkkimakkara on valmis	435	38	64
Date	Length	Available at			
4.2.13	0:35	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MMDjGbBjhE			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
4	3	3.5		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments

67	Dr Pepper	Jen Mayfield /1	1041	24	11
Date	Length	Available at			
17.1.13	1:52	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppZpM9KAyRI			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
3	2	2.5		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
70	Nokia Suomi	Vakioveikkaus Lumialla	27	1	
Date	Length	Available at			
8.2.13	3:32	https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=qPFcb6kDQMk			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
5	4	4.5		Epic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
71	SodaStream Suomi	Set the bubbles free	1521	202	183
Date	Length	Available at			
1.2.13	0:46	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68al-o2XSpE			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
5	4	4.5		Tragi-comic	

Position	Brand	Video	Likes	Shares	Comments
83	Mercedes-Benz Suomi	Unexpected	140	1	3
Date	Length	Available at			
27.3.13	0:30	http://www5.mercedes-benz.com//en/tv/unexpected-the-new-e-class/			
Elements score	Temporal score	Final score		Category	
3	4	3.5		Romantic	