Brands in business-to-business

A qualitative research of brand influence in organizational buying behavior

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Abstract

Brands are well recognized to create trust and develop both cognitive and emotional ties with customers, but primarily in business-to-consumer (B2C) markets. Recent research acknowledges the fact that brands, despite the differences between B2C and business-to-business (B2B) contexts, may carry valuable features in B2B contexts as well. B2B purchasing is a combination of decisions made by individuals and their decision could many times be influenced by personal- as well as affective- and cognitive factors, although in an organizational setting.

This study intended to examine the influence of brands in a B2B purchasing context and is delimitated to the definitions made by the European Union (2013) for micro and small-sized enterprises (MSEs). The study was restricted to investigate products that were used for certain organizational purposes, e.g. products that are consumed in the daily activities of organizational functions. A distinction was made between high- and low involvement purchases.

For this study, a research model was based on recognized brand concepts and organizational buying behavior models. The model illustrates the underlying hypothesis that organizational buying behavior is differently affected by brands depending on product involvement. This research used a qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews to retrieve a deeper understanding of human behavior and the underlying reasons behind such behavior.

The result implies that substantial organizational buying behavior had ties to purchasers’ individual buying behavior and further implies emotions being a strong factor when the buyer lacks knowledge, motivation or interest in the product. Brand was initially stated to have limited influence on organizational decisions, which at further elaboration turned out to contradict the actual purchasing behavior.

Keywords: B2B, Brand influence, Brand consciousness, Brand preference, Brand importance, Brand sensitivity, Organizational buying behavior, Product involvement
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1. Introduction

This chapter presents an introduction of the investigated subject. It includes a background to introduce and provide a general understanding of the subject. The included problem discussion elaborates subject related problems, proposing the relevance for this research and ends in the research purpose.

1.1 Background

Branding is commonly seen as the process of adding value to a product or service. It facilitates the identification of businesses, services and products, as well as differentiating them from the competition (Farquhar, 1990). The conceptualization of a brand is universal and many researchers agreed this to be applicable to both business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) markets (Andersson & Narus, 2004; de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011). But even though the conceptualization is the same, the enactment of the brand will differ in each context (Ibid).

Whereas the influence of brands in B2C markets is commonly agreed upon, business marketers have for a long time considered brands as generally irrelevant (Andersson & Narus, 2004; de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011). This is as brands are strongly associated with personal features, such as emotional value and individual attachment. However, recent research acknowledges that despite the differences of B2C and B2B contexts, B2B- will, like B2C brands, most likely benefit from creating trust and developing both cognitive and emotional ties with customers (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011).

In this regard, previous research has mainly focused on consumer goods markets and only recently attention has been given to business markets (Cretu & Brodie 2007; Baumgarth, 2008; Alexander et al., 2009). Branding has been viewed by business
marketers as largely irrelevant and was believed to mostly be associated with emotional value (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004). But, the importance of psychological and emotional elements has recently been highlighted in branding literature; brands based on intangible and emotive characteristics are seen as more durable and less likely to suffer from downfall of competition (Ibid). B2B marketers’ interest in the potential of branding at a corporate level is also increasing, due to the growth of e-commerce and global competition (Mudambi, 2002).

Still, according to many arguments brands have a limited influence on organizational decision-making (Bendixen et al., 2004; Zablah et al., 2010). However, considering buyers in smaller companies are more likely to form stronger brand preferences than buyers in larger companies (Zablah et al., 2010). The reason seems to be that small companies have fewer resources to use in the search and evaluation stage of the decision making process (Ibid). It is therefore of interest to examine the influence of brands in a B2B decision-making context in micro and small-sized enterprises (MSEs).

1.2 Problem discussion
B2B brands like IBM, Cisco, Intel, GE, Oracle, and SAP are all among the world’s most successful brands according to prominent brand evaluation publications such as Interbrand (Forbes, 2013; Interbrand, 2013). Enlightening this ranking is essential as these are all mainly considered as B2B brands (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007).

Baumgarth (2008) considers the most obvious issue when studying brand management in a B2B context is the fragmented cluster of research already done. He argues an increased product homogeneity and product quality to be major arguments for the importance of future brand management in B2B relations (Baumgarth, 2008).

A study from de Lynch and de Chernatony (2004) investigates the role of companies’ decision-making units (DMUs) in B2B purchasing, and presents facts supporting B2B purchaser attitudes turning more to reflect attitudes related to B2C definitions. Evident similarities include cognitive and emotional ties to engage trust and loyalty. Lynch and de Chernatony (2004) further develop that emotions are proposed to be an evident and contributing factor for B2B buyers. Organizational buying may take place
in a formal group context, but B2B purchasing is a combination of decisions made by individuals. These individuals make decisions that might be influenced by both affective and cognitive factors, although in an organizational setting (Ibid).

Whereas the positive effects of brands are commonly argued, there is still a rather defensive attitude towards B2B brand management (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). Kuhn et al. (2008) states the lack of research to be the main issue of branding not being recognized as an important B2B matter. Leek and Christodoulides (2011) argues the lack of research to evolve from B2B branding is implied to be impractical. This as many B2B companies have thousands of products, which makes it difficult for both organizational markets and organizational purchaser to clearly acknowledge the brand relevance (Ibid).

This is an issue further elaborated by Leek and Christodoulides (2011) proposing brands being unequally salient in different purchase situations. Previous research further implies the involvement in a purchase to affect the relevance of brands (Traylor, 1981; Warrington & Shim, 2000). Zablah et al. (2010) propose future studies of brand influence in B2B to examine drivers of brand importance and context-specific variables. These variables may be found to be particularly relevant in understanding how brands operate or influence decision-making in business markets (Ibid).

A most contemporary issue is the insufficient knowledge on what influence brands have on both organizational purchasers and B2B marketers (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011). Hence, combining previous research to investigate the influence of brands on organizational buying behavior will therefore provide a theoretical contribution regarding brand influence in B2B contexts. It could also address managerial implications that will assist in the assessment of B2B branding efforts (Ibid).

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge of brand influence in organizational buying behavior.
1.4 Delimitations

This study restricts to purchases that are made for *organizational purposes*. This includes product or services consumed in the daily activities of organizational functions.

1.5 Outline of thesis

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Includes a shorter background and a problem discussion developing the purpose of the study.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical framework

This chapter discusses the relevance and the practice of theories within organizational buying behavior, decision-making units, emotions and brands.

Chapter 3 – Conceptualization

The Conceptualization chapter provides a research model developed from the literature review used to answer the research question.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

The methodology chapter presents and justifies the choice of research approach, research design, data sources, research strategy, data collection method, data collection instrument, sampling, data analysis method, and quality criteria.

Chapter 5 – Presentation of empirical data

Includes the transcription of empirical data collected in the four cases examined for this research.

Chapter 6 – Data analysis

The analysis chapter presents a cross-analysis of the empirical data. The analysis provides the correlation between collected data and applied theories.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion and Contribution

This chapter includes the research conclusion answering the research purpose. It also includes a broad discussion on theoretical implications, managerial contributions, limitations and suggestions for future research.
2. Literature review of the theoretical framework

This chapter provides a literature review of current research and science considered valuable to analyze the relevance of brands in a B2B context. Theories within organizational buying behavior provide necessary knowledge in organizational decision-making. Additional theories include brand importance, brand consciousness, brand preference and brand sensitivity, which all are elaborating the brand essence in the decision-making process. An operationalization of all theoretical concepts is presented in table 4, chapter 4.6.1.

2.1 Organizational buying behavior

Organizational buying behavior (OBB) is a theoretical framework defining the decision-making process used in formal organizations to establish the need for purchased products and services and identify, evaluate, and choose among alternative brands and suppliers.

Webster and Wind (1972) are seen as pioneers within organizational buying behavior and the article ”A general model for understanding organizational buying behavior” has been cited over 600 times.

In the article they describe industrial buying to take place in the context of a formal organization influenced by budget, cost and profit considerations (Webster & Wind, 1972; Webster & Keller, 2004). Organizational buying usually involves complex interactions among people in the decision process that have both individual and organizational goals (Ibid).

Research indicates that intangible attributes are important in business purchase decisions, but that the importance may differ depending on the purchase complexity (Mudambi, 2002). There can be large fluctuation in what they perceive to be important, what decision process they follow, or what kind of purchases that are made. Well-established models within organizational behavior often highlight the importance of the buyer characteristics, purchase characteristics, and decision processes characteristics to the purchase choice (Ibid). Lynch and de Chernatony
(2004) further develop the subject enhancing the necessity of understanding the characteristics of the purchase situation and the nature of the organizational buyer.

2.1.1 Decision-making unit

To better understand organizational buying behavior it is of significance to understand the structure of the organizational unit involved in the decision-making process.

Most organizational purchase decisions are made by decision-making units (DMUs) (Cheverton, 2012). Organizational buying usually involves many people in the decision process with complex interactions among people and among individual and organizational goals (Webster & Wind, 1972). This is enhanced by Leek and Christodoulides (2011) whom goes further into the subject and explains that the importance of the decision criteria will vary according to the role of each of these people in the decision-making unit.

There are many roles that influence the phases of the purchasing process, both before and after the actual decision itself (Wilson, 2000). Webster and Wind (1972) identified and classified five buying roles which are broadly accepted:

1. **Users** – Members of the organization who use the purchased products and services.
2. **Buyers** – Formal responsibility and authority for contracting with suppliers.
3. **Influencers** – Those who influence the decision process directly or indirectly by providing information and criteria for evaluating alternative buying actions.
4. **Deciders** – The ones with authority to choose among alternative buying actions.
5. **Gatekeepers** – Those who control the flow of information and materials into the buying center (Ibid).

2.1.2 Influences of organizational buying decisions

According to Webster and Wind (1972) there are several variables influencing and affecting organizational buying behavior.
Organizational buying is a decision-making process that is executed by individuals, that interacts with other individuals (Webster & Wind, 1972). There are four classes of variables that influences and determines organizational buying behavior; individual, social, organizational, and environmental (Ibid). Regarding the individual influences, Webster (1991) means that all organizational buying behavior is individual buying behavior, only individuals can define problems, decide, and act. Furthermore, the buying behavior is motivated by individual needs, desires, and perceptions, in interaction with the organizational goals (Webster, 1991). Individual influences are e.g. the desire to obtain lowest price, or personal values and needs (Webster & Wind, 1972).

Social influences concerns the buying center; here the group function is influenced by each individual’s personal characteristics and goals, by the structure and tasks of the group, as well as the nature of leadership within the group (Webster & Wind, 1972). In organizational influences there are four sets of variables to consider; technology, structure, goals and tasks, and actors (Ibid). Environmental influence concerns variables such as legal, political, economic, and technological. Moreover, these variables interact in order to decide organizational functioning and identify goals, expectations, assumptions, and attitudes for the individuals within the buying center which is used in their decision-making (Webster & Wind, 1972; Chisnal, 1989).

These four classes of variables are divided in two categories within each class; Task variables are directly related to the buying problem, factors that can affect the buying decision e.g. price, quality, and delivery (Webster & Wind, 1972; Chisnal, 1989). The other category, non-task variables, concerns variables beyond the buying problem, e.g. motivation, personal values, social and cultural activities (Ibid). The organizational buyer faces a complex interaction of economic and non-economic factors; there might also be a conflict between the organizational demands and the buyer’s personal needs (Chisnal, 1989).

2.1.3 Emotions in organizational decision-making

The limited research within business branding has largely ignored the role of emotion and how the organizational purchasers, like final consumers, may be influenced by emotional brand attributes (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004).
According to Lynch and de Chernatony (2004), emotions are proposed to be an evident and contributing factor for B2B buyers. They further enhance Wilson’s (2000) arguments that in relation to final customers, the B2B purchasers are seen as more rational and knowledgeable, about the products they purchase and the decisions they make. Undoubtedly many purchasers within B2B firms deal with complex buying situations characterized by group decision-making and multiple buying influences (Ibid). Hence, assumptions has been made that emotion is only a factor if the buyer lacks knowledge, motivation or interest (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004). Organizational decision-making may take place in a formal group context (DMUs), but B2B purchasing is a combination of decisions made by individuals. These individuals make decisions that may be influenced by both affective and cognitive factors, although in an organizational setting (Ibid). Individuals who are emotionally attached to a brand are also likely to have a favorable attitude toward it (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004; Thomson et al. 1999).

2.2 Brands in the decision-making process

*Brand consciousness, brand preference, brand sensitivity and brand importance were in the study of Zablah et al. (2010) investigated because of their general focus on relative importance of brands. They capture distinct facets of the decision-making process such as cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral undertones.*

Zablah et al. (2010) proposed that the four constructs; brand consciousness, brand preference, brand sensitivity, and brand importance are represented by a belief-attitude-intention-behavior. When it comes to explaining variation of brand importance across an organizational purchase decision, using these concepts are particularly well suited (Ibid). It captures the decision-making process in general, and is based on information processing, as well as persuasion theories (Ibid). These concepts has also been used to capture differences in brand-knowledge structure (e.g., Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995), it has also been effective when it comes to the creation of models for brand phenomena (Zablah et al., 2010). The more that branding pervades organizational buying behavior, the more likely that brands will become deciding factor in the organizational buying decision (Ibid).
2.2.1 Brand importance
Brand importance refers to the relative importance assigned to brand names in organizational buying decisions. It captures the actual behaviors by illuminating the extent to which DMU-members rely upon brand information when making a purchase decision (Hutton, 1997). Hutton (1997) studied what factors were most vital when considering a purchase. As seen in Table 1.1 he concluded that support services, functionality, brand name, logistics and distribution, price, and technology used were the most important factors. Zablah et al. (2010) developed these and used them as an item to rank brand importance in relevance to the other attributes.

Table 1. Ranking of attributes. Adopted from Zablah et al., (2010). Re-modeled by the authors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>E.g., pre-sale and post-sale services including training, maintenance, call center support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functionality</td>
<td>E.g., precision, strength, durability, reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand name</td>
<td>E.g., reputation, how well known the organization is, how others view it in general terms, company history, associations, loyalty level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics and distribution</td>
<td>E.g., availability of product, ease of ordering, delivery reliability and convenience, capacity to handle the order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>E.g., quoted price, degree of discount, financial support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>E.g., innovativeness, upgradeability, compatibility, ease of use, latest technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.2 Brand consciousness
Brand consciousness is cognitive in nature and refers to the organizational belief that well-known brands are superior to lesser-known brands (Zablah et al., 2010). Nelson and McLeod (2005) states that consumption attitudes are assessed by examining brand consciousness and investigate how brands play an important role in the psychological process that precedes the buying act.

Brand consciousness is different from the more commonly used brand awareness (Zablah et al., 2010). Zablah et al. (2010) concludes that just because the brand is known or recognized as a member of the category does not mean it will come to mind in buying situations, making the cognitive measurement of brands more relevant than
the awareness measure. Keller (1993) explains how strong brand awareness and familiarity might be a prerequisite for certain types of cognitive aspects such as thoughts, feelings, or attitudes to occur.

Another vital differentiation between awareness and consciousness in the sense of brands is that brand awareness reflects the salience of brand recognition, existence and availability of a company's product or service (Aaker, 1996; Zablah et al., 2010), and is nowadays often taken as a given (e.g. ‘everyone knows Coca-Cola’ mentality). Consciousness on the other hand is considered to be the buyers’ ability to relate certain products/services to specific brands (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). To ensure that a brand continues to be noticed and considered an option to buy requires an understanding of an increasingly aware customer base. This is a growing segment, as new brands will appear on a regular basis, leaving customers to be more selective (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004). The concept of brand consciousness might therefore be to understand consumer socialization processes and investigate consumer-based positioning of brands (Nelson & McLeod, 2005; Zablah et al., 2010).

2.2.3 Brand preference
According to Moschis et al. (1984) and Ratchford and Vaughn (1989), brand preference refers to what extent or degree an organization views a brand as more desirable than comparable alternatives. In this sense brand preference is seen as an attitude (Zablah et al., 2010). Comparable alternatives could further be described as products or services with equal price and availability. Higher brand preference usually indicates or leads to more revenues and profit. Brand preference could be achieved through building the reputation of the company as a long-established and trusted name in the industry. This might in the end lead to customers choosing this brand over other brands in any category (Ibid). While smaller firms are more likely to purchase less than their larger counterparts, it may be more profitable to serve small firms in the long run. This because small firms tendency is to form strong preferences towards ‘already used’ brands and because of their limited bargaining power (Ibid).

2.2.4 Brand sensitivity
Kapferer and Laurent (1988) made a study regarding a comparison between different types of brands, where the purpose was to measure how brand importance varies from one buyer to another and one category to another. However, such a measurement was
lacking – therefore the brand sensitivity construct was introduced (Brown, 2007). Kapferer and Laurent (1988) refer to the concept as to the degree to which brand names or corporate associations are actively considered in organizational buying deliberations. Moreover, Zablah et al. (2010) explains that brand sensitivity reflects the degree to which the buyer center intends to rely on brand information for decision-making purposes.

According to Lachance et al. (2003) brand sensitivity, a construct of psychological character, relates to the decision-making process of a buyer. Furthermore, if a buyer is referred to as brand sensitive, it means that brands play a significant role in the psychological process that precedes the buying act (Ibid). In Hutton’s (1997) study concerning organizational buying, brand sensitivity was operationalized as “the probability of buying a well-known brand instead of an unknown or generic brand of product, based on differences in product and situational variables”. Organizational buyers are probably brand sensitive and will therefore select well-known brands under certain conditions, especially when there is a high risk of personal or organizational consequences (Hutton, 1997).

2.3 Product involvement

Traylor (1981) suggests some products to have a significant and positive relationship between product involvement and brand commitment. This correlation is supported by Warrington and Shim (2000) as they suggest that high levels of involvement often are associated with a strong brand commitment.

Zaichkowski (1985) defines product involvement as the perceived relevance of a product class based on the consumer’s inherent interests, values, and needs. Another, similar definition provided by Antil (1984) is that involvement is the level of perceived personal importance or interest evoked by a stimulus within a specific situation, i.e. that it varies from situations and products as well as individuals. Furthermore, Antil (1984) determines that the ranges within involvement vary from high to low. Warrington and Shim (2000) suggests that high levels of involvement often are associated with a strong brand commitment.
According to Warrington and Shim (2000) involvement is a function of three factors; individual characteristics (needs, interests, values), situational factors (purchase occasion, risks concerning purchase decision), and characteristics of the object or stimulus (communication media, variations within product class). Traylor’s (1981) study showed that for some products the relationship between product involvement and brand commitment was significant and positive, but for other products it was not. Both Crosby and Taylor (1983) and Zaichkowsky (1985) have suggested and established a link between product/purchase decision involvement and brand commitment. Beatty et al. (1988) determined that product involvement had a positive and direct influence on purchase involvement, which in turn had a positive and direct influence on brand commitment. However, they didn’t find any significant, direct link between product involvement and brand commitment (Ibid).

From this point on, high involvement and low involvement will be labeled as HI and LI.

LI refers to items that is habitually purchased and so the decision to do so requires little effort. It could also be defined as products/services that require minimal effort and consideration on the part of the consumer prior to purchase since they do not have a substantial effect on the buyer's lifestyle and hence are not that significant an investment (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

HI refers to items with high capital value or services that are psychological important to the buyer because they address social or ego needs and therefore carry social and psychological risk. The buyer is prepared to spend considerable time and effort in searching for the right and most suitable product. HI products are often expensive (Zaichkowsky, 1985).
3. Research model and research questions

*Based on the literature review, this chapter presents a research model and research questions used to provide the basis for the study.*

### 3.1 Proposed research model

The model includes, based on the literature review, critical features within organizational buying behavior, relevant brand concepts and product involvement. The model illustrates the underlying hypothesis that organizational buying behavior is differently affected by brands depending on product involvement.

The proposed research model was used to analyze the assumed relationship between organizational buying behavior, product involvement and brand concepts. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed research model.

*Figure 1. Research model*

### 3.2 Research questions

- **RQ 1** What attributes matter most for organizational buyers when purchasing products that are consumed in the daily activities of the company?
- **RQ 2** How do brand influence vary in organizational buying depending on the context of high- or low involvement products?
- **RQ 3** How is the individual purchaser influenced by emotional considerations?
4. Methodology

The methodology chapter presents and justifies the choice of research approach, research design, data sources, research strategy, data collection method, data collection instrument, sampling, data analysis method, and quality criteria. This is to clarify the structure and the course of action used to carry out the research. An essential part of the methodology chapter is the data collection method and data collection instrument, where the interview guide is developed and theoretical concepts are operationalized into measurable questions.

4.1 Research approach

4.1.1 Inductive vs. deductive research

Deductive together with inductive research are two general approaches used when acquisitioning new knowledge (Hyde, 2000). This research uses a deductive approach, which is a theory testing method that starts with established theory or generalizations, and seeks to see if the theory applies to specific cases. A deductive approach is to apply and investigate existing theories in a different context (Ibid). For this research it was done to clarify the role of brands in a B2B context using previously acknowledged theories. Inductive is the contrary approach, where research entails the collection and analyzing of observations and data collection to be able to state new possible theories (Bryman & Bell, 2010). Deduction and induction are not always mutually exclusive, as they tend to share some features. A deductive approach commonly includes some measure of induction (Ibid).

4.1.2 Qualitative vs. quantitative research

This research used a qualitative approach to retrieve a deeper understanding of purchasing behavior and the underlying reasons behind such behavior. The qualitative approach was also the most suitable as the research aimed to investigate how and why decisions are made. This study did not try to provide a general profile of the population; hence a quantitative approach was not performed.

Qualitative research and quantitative research are two different research methods of gathering data (Bryman & Bell, 2010). Many researchers and writers agree to the differences between the two methods in terms of research strategy (Hyde, 2000). But
social scientists are in agreement that the two methods lead to valid research findings in and of their own right. Neither approach needs to rely on the other one as a secondary source. Hyde (2000) simplifies the difference between the two methods and describes them as numbers vs. words.

The qualitative research aims to retrieve a deeper understanding of human behavior and the underlying reasons behind such behavior; it further investigates the why and the how of the decision-making (Marshall, 1996; Hyde 2000; Bryman & Bell, 2010). A qualitative research seeks to build an understanding based on the respondent’s ideas in order to describe complicated situations (Hyde, 2000). A qualitative study tries to identify the underlying concepts and the relationships between them (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996). It explains the particular rather than reaching a general profile regarding the study population.

Quantitative research emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman & Bell, 2010). It entails a deductive approach to the relationship between research and theory, in order to test the existing theories. According to Bryman and Bell (2010) the results are expected to be measureable and presentable in form of numbers and statistics, where measurement is central to the quantitative research. It aims to make generalizations based on the processed results of the investigation (Hyde, 2000). Compared to a qualitative research, the quantitative is more formalized, standardized, structured and controlled which means lower flexibility, but allows the research to easier be replicated than a qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2010). The amount of studied variables is usually small in a quantitative research, but performed on a large number of entities (Ibid).

4.2 Research design
There are three main designs used in a qualitative research, exploratory-, descriptive- and causal designs. The designs used in this study are exploratory and descriptive, as there is no evident problem at hand. An exploratory design provides the data needed to establish and clarify a research problem possible to further investigate, as it is commonly used when investigating the general nature of a research problem (Bryman & Bell, 2010). This design is typically used when there is little prior knowledge on the chosen issue, it is highly flexible and unstructured method commonly associated
with qualitative research. The absence of any deeper knowledge combined with the flexible structure makes this a useful design for gaining new knowledge to establish or clarifying a research problem (Bryman & Bell, 2010; Aaker, 2011). Secondary data analysis, focus groups and case studies are common methods to accumulate exploratory data (Burns & Bush, 2003).

Using a descriptive design embraces a large portion of marketing research with the purpose to provide an accurate snapshot of a certain market environment (Burns & Bush, 2003). According to Aaker (2011) a good example could be when doing a consumer evaluation of product attributes amongst competing products. This design can be used to answer who, what, where, when and how questions (Burns & Bush, 2003). However, a descriptive approach will not be able to present answers to “why”-related questions. In a descriptive design hypothesis often exists, but they will often be uncertain and speculative (Aaker, 2011).

Using a comprehensive and exploratory literature review presents required insight to a potential gap in previous research. This provides the authors good enough knowledge to perform a qualitative investigation to help solve the research problem (Bryman & Bell, 2010).

The aim of this study was not to investigate the relationship between different variables, hence a causal design was excluded. Causal designs are studies examining whether one variable causes or determines the value of another variable (Bryman & Bell, 2010). Using a descriptive design will provide information on whether different variables in someway are related or associated to each other (Ibid). This could be used for future causal researches to investigate how the variables are related (Aaker, 2011).

4.3 Data sources
There are two main kinds of data, primary and secondary. This study mainly collected data through the use of primary research, as there are limited researches within the area that goes in line with the specific purpose of this thesis. Primary data was also used because of its specified purpose, time efficiency and possibility to tailor-made. Secondary data was gathered through reviewing literature in order to gain knowledge
within the related or closely related areas of research. This kind of data source was also used when retrieving external data about the interviewed organizations.

Primary data is gathered directly from first-hand experience for the purpose of an investigation (Bryman & Bell, 2010). The primary data can be collected through different ways, like surveys, in-depth interviews, experiments, observations and case studies (Christensen et al., 2001). The information is up to date and the data is tailor-made for the specific purpose. Some disadvantages with the method are that it could be time consuming and could be costly (Bryman & Bell, 2010).

Secondary data is divided into two types, internal and external. Internal secondary data are gathered from inside of the company, like annual reports, sales figures, customer information and cost information (Christensen et al., 2001). External data could be information about a company from newspapers, web sites, blogs, forums, governments, television and so forth. Some disadvantages to secondary data could be that there are aspects in the study, which has not been studied before, and that the information could be out of date (Ibid).

4.4 Research strategy

An appropriate research strategy will assist the researcher when it comes to collecting relevant data, and also making it possible to answer the research questions (Yin, 2009). The main reasons to consider when choosing a suitable strategy to the study are the research problem and the focus and purpose of the study (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005).

In table 2 the three main conditions, which will help to determine what kind of strategy that is suitable for the study, are presented; (1) Form of research questions. (2) Requires control over behavioral events? (3) Focuses on contemporary events? These conditions are linked to five different research strategies; experiment, survey, archival analysis, history, and case study (Yin, 2009).
Table 2. Relevant situations for different research strategies (adopted from Yin, 2009, p.8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Form of research question</th>
<th>Requires control over behavioral events?</th>
<th>Focuses on contemporary events?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>How, Why?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Who, What, Where, How many, How much?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Analysis</td>
<td>Who, What, Where, How many, How much?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>How, Why?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>How, Why?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experiment aims to investigate if changes of variables result in different outcomes (Yin, 2009). The purpose is for the researcher to verify, falsify, or establish hypotheses (Ibid). Questions like “how” and “why” are supposed to be answered with this strategy, and it focuses on contemporary events.

Survey usually investigates a sample of a population, gather data and make statistical conclusions from it (Yin, 2009). Contemporary events are used and the aim is to answer questions like “what”, “where”, “who”, “how many” and “how much”.

Archival analysis attempts to investigate archives and documents – an observation of secondary data (Yin, 2009). The strategy focuses on contemporary and old events, and answers questions like “what”, “where”, “who”, “how much”, and “how many”.

The strategy called history concerns analyzes of historical documents and archives, i.e. an observation of secondary data. Contemporary events are not essential in this strategy (Ibid).

Since the research questions and purpose of this study strives to answer questions like “how” and “why”, survey and archival analysis can be excluded. The study also focuses on contemporary events, which excludes the strategy history. Experiment can
also be excluded, since the study doesn’t require control over behavioral events. Therefore case study is the most suited strategy for this study.

In the strategy case study, an individual unit is investigated, e.g. a group or an event (Yin, 2009). This type of strategy seeks to answer questions like “how” and “why”, and focuses on contemporary events. Case studies are often descriptive or exploratory (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). This type of research strategy is useful when the phenomenon that is investigated is complicated to study outside its normal setting, and when it is hard to quantify the concepts and variables of the study. Case study is a description of a management situation, and involves multiple sources to collect data, e.g. from verbal reports, observations, and personal interviews (Ibid).

4.5 Data collection method

When carrying out a time-limited study it is of great importance to wisely chose a suitable data collection method (Bryman & Bell, 2010). There are numerous ways of collecting data, and they vary due to the chosen research approach. As this is a qualitative research, methods considered to be merely quantitative, such as surveys, structured observations and structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2010) will be excluded. Using a qualitative data collection method provides empirical data suitable for a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of the topic at hand (Christensen et al., 2001). A qualitative design is naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in a real world setting without any attempts to bias the phenomena of interest (Patton, 2002).

Frequently used qualitative methods are interviews, focus groups, observations and archival/document analysis (Christensen et al., 2001; Patton, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2010). The primary data collection used in this research is in-depth interviews. The interviews were done as standardized open-ended interviews, sometimes known as “semi-structured interviewing” (Christensen et al., 2001; Cohen et al., 2011). The approach used in this study was an interview guide that provided exact wording and questions so that all interviewees were asked the same basic questions in the same order, which according to Cohen et al. (2011) increases the comparability of the responses. At the same time, as described by Patton (2002) and Cohen et al. (2011)
the use of open-ended questions offered flexibility to pursue the interviews in whatever direction appeared to be appropriate. This interview approach is supported by Bryman and Bell (2010), who proposes the underlying reasons for this approach to be strongly related to theories and concepts.

The in-depth interview evolves from the assumption that the perspective of the interviewee is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit. The purpose is to allow the researcher to get into another person’s perspective. The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the rigor in the methodological framework and the skills of the interviewer (Christensen et al., 2001; Patton, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011).

The reason for this research not using focus groups was the chosen population not being suitable for the collaborative setting a focus group requires. This as companies might find it both uncomfortable and inapposite to openly share information about purchasing behavior directly to other companies. Focus groups is when a group of people is asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards a specific subject. It might be anything from a certain product to a service, concept, idea or advertisement (Christensen et al., 2001; Bryman & Bell, 2010).

Another, commonly approach to do qualitative data collection is observation, which is used to provide detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviors, actions and a complete range of social interactions and organizational processes (Patton, 2002). It was not considered an appropriate data collection method for this research, as the outcome tend to constrain to what the researcher perceive from the observation. How people act is not always coherent with attitudes, beliefs, opinions or feelings (Cohen, et al., 2011).

4.6 Data collection instrument

4.6.1 Operationalization and measurement of variables
An operationalization is a set of procedures that describe activities to be performed to empirically establish the degree of existence of what is defined by a concept. Operational definitions are crucial in measurement (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005;
Bryman & Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). They tell what to do and what questions to ask in order to bring the phenomenon defined within the range of the researchers experience. To be able to test hypotheses in a real world setting it is necessary to operationalize theoretical concepts to make them understandable and measureable (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005; Cohen et al., 2011).

The process of operationalization is critical for a qualitative research. Conducting an interview requires making all the questions understandable for the respondent. This is done through the translation of a general research aim into specific, concrete questions (Cohen et al., 2011). Bryman and Bell (2010) defines the operationalization to be the process of taking the research to the real world.

This study used earlier research as a foundation for the interview questions, which according to Ghauri & Grønhaug (2005), makes the framework appear more conceptually sound. Hence, the statements of the interview were created in accordance with the scientific articles used in the literature review. All theoretical concepts were operationalized into workable questions with easily understandable words (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005; Bryman & Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). Eliasson (2010) underlines the importance of all interview questions being grounded in the theory used. This is done to increase the validity by making sure to measure what is supposed to be measured (Eliasson, 2010).

Table 3 is used to facilitate the understanding of the link between theories and interview questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Conceptual Definition</th>
<th>Operational Definition</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Buying Behavior (OBB)</td>
<td>Industrial buying takes place in the context of a formal organization influenced by budget, cost, and profit considerations (Webster &amp; Wind, 1972)</td>
<td>A measure reflecting the theory of buyers in smaller companies being more likely to form stronger brand preferences than buyers in larger companies.</td>
<td>2.1, 2.2, 2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making Unit (DMU)</td>
<td>Organizational buying usually involves many people in the decision process with complex interactions among people and among individual and organizational goals (Webster &amp; Wind, 1972)</td>
<td>A measure that reveals the construct of the decision-making unit in the organization.</td>
<td>1.1 1.2 2.1 2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions in organizational decision making</td>
<td>Individuals in an organizational group context are likely to make decisions that may be influenced by both affective and cognitive factors (de Chernatony &amp; Lynch, 2004)</td>
<td>Used to investigate the salience of personal emotions in an organizational buying context.</td>
<td>7.1 7.2 7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences of organizational buying decisions</td>
<td>An organization is influenced by a variety of forces in the environment - the four classes of variables: individual, social, organizational, and environmental determine the buying behavior of an organization (Webster &amp; Wind, 1972)</td>
<td>Is used to investigate what variables that influence the organizations in their buying decisions.</td>
<td>2.2 2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Importance</td>
<td>The relative importance assigned to brand names in organizational buying decisions. (Hutton, 1997; Zablah et al., 2010)</td>
<td>A measure that reflects brand importance in relation to the actual behavior. By revealing the extent to which DMU-members base their buying decision upon brand information.</td>
<td>3.1 3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Consciousness</td>
<td>Consumption attitudes are assessed by examining brand consciousness using the notion that 'brands play an important role in the psychological process that precedes the buying act (Nelson &amp; McLeod, 2005)</td>
<td>A measure that reflects brand consciousness in relation to organizational belief and that well-known brands are superior to lesser-known brands.</td>
<td>4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 4.5 4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Preference</td>
<td>To what extent an organization or buyer</td>
<td>A measure that reflects brand preference in</td>
<td>5.1 5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
views a brand as more desirable than comparable alternatives (Moschis et al., 1984; Ratchford and Vaughn, 1989) relation to the organizational attitude that the buyer contains towards a brand in the purchasing situation.

5.3

**Brand Sensitivity**

Refers to the degree to which brand names and/or corporate associations are actively considered in organizational buying deliberations (Kapferer and Laurent, 1988) A measure that reflects brand sensitivity in relation to the buyer’s intentions, i.e. whether to rely on brand information for decision-making purposes.

6.1 6.2 6.3

**Product Involvement**

Product involvement is the perceived relevance of a product class based on the consumer’s inherent interests, values, and needs (Zaichkowsky, 1985) A measure that reflects brand relevance in high- and low product involvement.

1.3 3.1-3.3 4.1-4.6 5.1-5.3 6.1-6.3 7.1-7.3

---

### 4.6.2 Interview guide

As the interview is a social encounter (Christensen et al., 2001), the interviewers tried to establish an appropriate atmosphere such that the participant could feel secure to talk freely. In accordance with Bryman and Bell (2010) each interview was relatively short, approximately 60 minutes, some of them with a shorter break. In addition to the respondent, three persons were present during the interview. One moderator leading the interview, one assisting the moderator with follow-up questions and one strictly responsible to take notes. The moderator was responsible for considering the dynamics of the situation, for example, how to keep the conversation going, how to motivate participants to discuss their thoughts, feelings and experiences, which by many is vital to gain qualitative data (Bryman & Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). Introducing the purpose for an interview is difficult in the matter that it might lead to desirability bias. Thoroughly testing the interview was assumed to have reduced risks of bias as well as minimized content weaknesses (Bryman & Bell, 2010).

Below are five critical aspects considered performing the interviews:

- Appear to be interested, that way motivating the interviewee to share essential information.
• Avoid giving signs of approval or disapproval as it might bias the interviewee.
• Be well prepared to keep the conversation going, hence being able to pursue the interview even if there is a indication of unwillingness to answer.
• Ensure that the interviewer understands all response, checking if necessary.
• Avoid the direct use of “Why?” as it tends to give many rational answers. Instead, act genuinely interested, it will make the interviewer more comfortable, hence more likely to specify attitudes, feelings and reasons. (Cohen et al., 2011)

Using a standardized interview guide reduces the risk of interviewer effects and bias. The use of open-ended questions together with a comprehensive literature review provides the researcher with enough theory to proficiently combine and analyze all empirical data (Patton, 2002).

Four interviews were held and each person interviewed approved for the interview to be recorded. Recording is done to help the researchers transcribe the empirical data as inclusive as possible (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Interview appointments were made by phone, where the respondent was briefly informed of the purpose of the interview. 
For a more detailed sample description, see chapter 4.7 Sampling.

Just as Bryman and Bell (2010) suggests, the transcription of collected data was done in direct connection with each interview to minimize risk of observations being left out.

On request by the respondent and the responding companies, all company names, titles and personal information on respondents were left out in the published version of this research.
See Appendix A for the full interview guide.

4.6.3 Pretesting
It is important to increase research validity, regardless which method or study that is used (Christensen et al., 2001). An interview guide is easier to manage and change than a survey if problems would arise, but still needs to be revised before put into use (Bryman & Bell, 2010). A pilot study that is based on the real question scheme can
help the interviewer to be more accustomed and secure in how to use the instrument when doing the real interviews (Christensen et al., 2001).

Questions could be poorly formulated, have insufficient instruction or be inconveniently located (Bryman & Bell, 2010). One might also discover questions during the pilot study that are hard to understand or that might cause a loss of interest from the respondent (Ibid). All of the above mentioned reasons can be managed and therefore help to increase the validity of the study (Ibid).

A pretest of the interview guide has been done. The guide was sent to four people in total. First off it was sent to the examiner and tutor of this thesis to further enhance the validity and contribute to spot potential content weaknesses. The guide was also sent to the authors of the book “Antecedents of positive word-of-mouth on social media”, in order to receive valuable feedback from people with good knowledge in the writing of a thesis within marketing. These people helped to determine whether the language was appropriate, if the questions were understandable and if they related to the written theory. To establish whether the target group could easily understand the questions and if they seemed the questions to be fit, a purchasing manager at an MSE was asked to look at the guide to provide feedback.

4.7 Sampling

There are two kinds of sample techniques; these are probability sampling and non-probability sampling. According to Marshall (1996) and Ritchie and Lewis (2003) the probability technique is rarely appropriate when conducting a qualitative research, hence it will not be used in this study. An overlap between the techniques of judgment sample and theoretical sample was used. The most productive sample was chosen by the authors along with using new research to compare with areas that had already been studied. This thesis did not try to generalize answers from the population, but rather developed an understanding between complex issues relating to human behavior.

Choosing someone at random to answer a qualitative question can be compared to randomly asking a passer-by how to repair a broken down car. Rather than asking a
garage mechanic, the former might have a good stab but asking the last mentioned is likely to be more productive and knowing (Marshall, 1996). A multiple-case sampling was used in this research as it according to Miles and Huberman (1994) adds confidence to the findings, and helps to understand single-case findings. This further strengthens the validity and the stability of the findings.

There are three broad approaches to select a sample for a qualitative study: these are convenience sample, judgment sample and theoretical sample (Marshall, 1996). Convenience sample involves the selection of the most accessible subjects and is the least rigorous technique. It is the least costly sample to the researcher in terms of time, effort and money, but may result in poor quality data and lacks in intellectual credibility. It could also be a risk that the sample might not represent the population as a whole, and might be biased by volunteers (Ibid).

According to Marshall (1996), judgment sample is the most common sampling technique and also known as the most purposeful sample. The most productive sample is selected actively by the researcher to answer the research questions. The results that are obtained from a judgment sample could to some degree be subject of bias. Theoretical sample is the process of choosing new research cases to compare with areas that have already been studied. It necessitates building interpretative theories from the emerging data and selecting a new sample to elaborate and examine on this theory (Marshall, 1996). Overlaps between the mentioned theories are quite commonly used.

4.7.1 Sampling frame
This study was delimitated to the definitions made by the European Union (2013) for micro and small-sized enterprises (MSEs). A micro enterprise is an enterprise which employs fewer than 10 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 million”. A small enterprise is defined as “an enterprise that employs fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover does not exceed EUR 10 million.” (European Union, 2013).

A criterion before booking an interview with a company was that the individual who were to be interviewed, confirmed that he or she was responsible for purchases
concerning products or services that were consumed in the daily activities of organizational functions.

The organizations were either established in, or had head office in Sweden. The companies were found on Allabolag.se (2013), a website that gathers information about all organizations in Sweden. The search tool of the website was used to pick out the correct sampling frame. First, turnover was selected in accordance with the definition made by the European Union for a MSE. The organizations were then further scaled down in relation to how many employees the organization had. After this the organizations were divided into categories of micro or small-sized enterprises. After this the companies were either randomly chosen from the sample or chosen because of previous contact with the organization. All the numbers were gathered from the financial statements and ratios from the year of 2011-2012 from Allabolag.se (2013).

4.7.2 Sample selection and data collecting procedure
An appropriate sample size for a qualitative research is one that adequately answers the research questions. Sometimes it is easier to determine sample size along the way as the study progresses to see whether more respondents are required or not to answer the purpose of the research (Marshall, 1996).

The first sample consisted of six organizations, which all were contacted by phone, but where only four buyers at four organizations were able to conduct an interview within the given time. Hence, four buyers at four different organizations in different fields were interviewed face to face.

The names of the companies were of ethical aspects kept undisclosed. This study wanted to capture the underlying reasons and behaviors behind the purchase situations without the buyer being affected by consequences of their answers. Thus, both the respondents’ names and the companies’ names were left out. Although a brief description of each company was given in relation to presentation of empirical data.
4.8 Data analysis method

A qualitative study results in a vast amount of empirical data that through data analysis must be examined, categorized, tabulated, tested or recombined. This to be able to draw empirically based conclusions (Yin, 2009). There are three commonly used ways of analyzing qualitative data; analytic induction, grounded theory and data reduction (Bryman & Bell, 2010). Bryman and Bell (2010) describes analytic induction to be when the researcher seeks a universal explanation by constant data collection until there are no cases that do not consist to a hypothetical explanation, which was not the case for this research. Grounded theory intends to formulate a theory or model from data collected (Ibid), which just as analytic induction is not applicable to the purpose of this study.

The most appropriate way to analyze collected data in this study was concluded to be data reduction. It could be considered a traditional model of research, where the researcher chooses a theoretical framework, and only then applies this model to the phenomenon to be studied (Bryman & Bell, 2010). Data were transcribed in direct connection to the interviews, as it is important to minimize the risk of essential data/observations being left out. All empirical data from the interviews are presented separately, whereas the analysis was done cross-analyzing all present cases. This was done in relation to the used theoretical framework, as it in accordance with Bryman and Bell (2010) enhances the generalizability and the understanding of the matter at hand. The analysis was completed by the use of three steps developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). These steps help to describe the process of data reduction and how to display data and draw conclusions.

The first step, data reduction, is the process where the data are selected, simplified and coded. The process of data reduction includes continuous revision structure, sharpen and improve the analysis to facilitate a final conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thoroughly referring back to the theoretical framework eased the process of data reduction, as it helped examine collected data in order to find out which information was relevant.

Data display is the second step, where data is displayed in an organized and
compressed assembly. Since a qualitative research most likely uses interviews it will provide a vast mass of information, effectively presenting the data in sections, tables and models is important for accurate conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To facilitate an effortless conclusion drawing and to effectively present data for the reader, analyzed data are presented in accordance with paragraphing in the theoretical framework.

The final step is Conclusion and verification. This is considered to be the process of highlighting patterns, regularities and causal flows in order to conclude the actual meaning or reason for things being as they are (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As the data from all cases were simultaneously reduced and displayed, the noting of patterns, uniformities and themes provided essential information to present a conclusion and answer the research questions.

4.9 Quality criteria

Reliability and solidity are important matters to be ensured when conducting a research. The concepts of validity and reliability is used to measure the quality of a research, and they strive to determine what levels of credibility and strength the study has (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Yin, 2007). Validity measures to what degree the study investigates what it is supposed to, reliability is concerning the measurement instrument’s stability (Bryman & Bell, 2010). The reliability along with construct validity, content validity, and external validity that is presented below, is used to ensure the quality of this qualitative study.

4.9.1 Content validity

Before the investigation starts it is essential to evaluate the content validity, this because it will give knowledge about the representativeness and clarify the content (McGartland Rubio et al., 2003). The interview guide with questions and the operationalization scheme were sent to persons with academic knowledge within the relevant field, and to an industry representative that matched the respondents, for a review. In accordance with Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005), persons with knowledge in the subject were chosen to increase the content validity and to ensure the research measured what was supposed to be measured. The quality of the interview questions
and the content validity overall was increased due to given feedback from people with good knowledge of the subject.

**4.9.2. Construct validity**

Adequate measures have to be created in order to guarantee the construct validity (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). To maximize the construct validity there was a pre-testing of the interview guide. The respondents received some of the interview questions beforehand in order to get rid of potential questions from the interviewee and to reduce misunderstandings before the interview took place. However, not all questions were sent beforehand, due to the risk of revealing too much and thereby affecting the respondent’s answers. To raise the construct validity further and minimize potential errors, all the interviews were recorded and the data collected was transcribed into text directly after the interview was finished. Moreover, in accordance with Yin (2007), multiple sources of evidence were used throughout the study, to gain further construct validity.

**4.9.3 External validity**

The external validity determines whether the study and result can be generalized and done again in another context, or tested in another group of the population (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Yin, 2007). For a case study to be generalized it needs to be repeated multiple times (Yin, 2007). One approach that somewhat contributes to the result of qualitative studies being applicable to more than an individual case, is the cross case-analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Multiple cases and cross case-analysis in this study strengthen the external validity of the results. Furthermore, the same interview guide was used in all interviews. This provides for the possibility of replicating the study, which according to Yin (2007) can make a study more generalized. However, the goal for a qualitative study is not to be generalized (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), therefore this has not been the objective for the study.

**4.9.4 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure, and as previously mentioned, the measurement instrument’s stability. The reliability influences to what extent a study are repeatable (Bryman & Bell, 2010). Likewise, reliability refers to the consistency
of measuring a specific concept (Ibid). The reliability in this study was ensured throughout the use of several interviews, this Yin (2007) proposes multiple interviews increasing reliability through the cross analyzing of many answers. The purpose of ensuring reliability is to decrease the risk of the research proposing false and incorrect statements (Yin, 2007).

Many researchers agree on qualitative studies often to lack transparency and for being hard to replicate due to unstructured data collection methods (Yin, 2007; Bryman & Bell, 2010). As this research was qualitative the reliability was increased in accordance with Yin (2007), using case study protocols, a detailed interview guide and a detailed description of the data collection method. Conducting multiple interviews also increased reliability.

4.10 Research methodology summary

Table 4. Research methodology summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Methodology</th>
<th>Approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Approach</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
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<td>Research Design</td>
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<td>Research Strategy</td>
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<td>Validity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reliability</td>
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</table>
5. Presentation of empirical data

This chapter presents empirical data gathered from the four cases included in the study. Data from each individual case is presented separately. A brief but anonymous description of each company is given, as all companies wished to be anonymous in the published paper

5.1 Company 1

The first company consisted of 28 employees and had a turnover of 6 799 000 SEK. The company’s operation was described as a company that conducts social care and nursing activities with particular focus on hiring out staff in elderly care, social care and related activities. The respondent was one of the founders of the company and also the strategic manager responsible for purchases.

Organizational buying behavior

The respondent early stated the company to be carefully cost efficient. They did not have any clear DMU structure as most of their tasks were performed in projects, hence run by temporary project groups. These projects carried their own cost, but with some guidance from the company board. The respondent referred to the amount of 40,000 SEK as a limit of how much a project group might spend without the consent from the board.

Asking the respondent to define HI and LI purchases seen from a company perspective, he underlined the functionality and price aspects. A product/service he considered not to carry any particular functional value was never given any deeper consideration pre-purchase. He positioned office supplies as well as eatable and drinkable goods consumed in the office as LI purchases. These were goods that always had to be at hand, but that was about the only thing considered when performing a LI purchase. If the product/service carried any significant function that was required for tasks to be efficiently performed, the purchase was considered HI. The respondent drew parallels to their acquirement of IT products/services. Buying IT products/services always started off with a comprehensive requirement specification.
During the interview the respondent repetitively underlined that it was important for the company not to fall in to unjustified consumption and that each SEK saved was worth more than each SEK earned. Focus were on paying employees good salaries and making the rent, not having extraordinary furniture.

**Brands in the decision-making process**

An obvious aspect considered when making purchases within the responding company was the price. No matter what product is bought, the cost had to be justified.

Early on, the respondent referred to his personal opinion on brands as an influencing factor when making a purchase. As a B2C consumer, the respondent was indeed affected by the brand, and that it could be a critical factor choosing between similar products. As a B2B purchaser, he believed himself to be less affected by brands, and more influenced by company requirements. Quality and functionality were both key factors when making a HI purchase, whereas the price and availability was crucial when making a LI purchase.

The respondent claimed that it was of importance to differentiate himself as a private consumer and as a business purchaser. But that this could differ depending on what business the company was in. As for IT-consultants, Media- and Advertising agencies, they might benefit from using certain products/service/brands, as it would stronger reflect in their own brand image.

Products and service were bought as they were perceived in a certain way, everything should feel extremely cost efficient. The respondent believed the company being able to position itself together with other brands by acting cost conscious and simple. If the respondent took a taxi to a customer visit, he would try to avoid getting out in front of the customer to once again fortify the perception of the company and the brand as cost-efficient. According to the respondent, the use of luxury cars would make customers believe that they were the ones paying for the cars, not for the services the company delivered.

Referring back to a HI purchase situation, the respondent admitted that even though the first step was to set up specific requirements for what was needed, the selection of
potential suppliers often landed at world's leading brand, strong local brands or brands with the environmental aspect, brands with good looking and appealing products. It was important that the company felt locally, to have some type of connection that could be considered to strengthen the company. The respondent stated that it could well be personal values that shined through, but also that it was good for the company to be associated with something local and something real to have close ties to.

The table show the respondent’s rank of brand importance in relevance to the other purchase related attributes.

*Table 5.1 Respondent 1 ranking of attributes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>LI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Support Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Functionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Logistics and distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Company 2

The second company consisted of 3 employees and had a turnover of 59 149 000 SEK. The company’s operation was described as a company within e-commerce, which sells cosmetics on the Internet. The respondent had the position as purchasing manager.

Organizational buying behavior

The interview started with the respondent differentiating between HI and LI purchases and applying them to purchases made in the responding company. Talking about HI purchases the respondent referred to the company website that was recently bought, and their ERP-system as it was currently considered somewhat insufficient. HI purchases included products and services that were considered having a significant influence on the company economy. The pay-off and the added value to everyday performances within the company were to be seen as the most important aspects buying any HI product/service. Performing a HI purchase most likely required an extensive dialogue between the purchaser, the CEO and other departments involved. But the main liability was still considered to be detained by the purchaser and the CEO. The respondent explained the process of buying the website to be a central issue, and to be a purchase with a lot of preparatory research.

LI purchases were considered to be office furniture, fruit, coffee and other unspecified products daily consumed in the office. Moreover LI purchase was concluded to be associated to the purpose of the product/service in relation to the price. The decision-making process when performing a LI purchase was rather decentralized as a LI purchase did not have any noteworthy influence on the business economy. Hence the respondent argued that buying a LI were not to include too much consideration, as that would not result in any noteworthy economical benefits for the company anyway. The approach used when deciding on what furniture to use in the office, and what coffee and fruit delivery company to sign did not include any considerable reflections or preparatory purchase analysis. The decision was simply made from what choices they knew and what brands they considered rather well known brands. The furniture was modestly bought from IKEA, and the fruit and
coffee delivery was the most commonly used in the area.

**Brands in the decision-making process**

Referring back to the respondent’s statement of how the present ERP-system being insufficient he was asked to elaborate on how to approach a purchase of a new system. First, he underlined the importance of the new system to be able to smoothly integrate on top of the present system. To find appropriate suppliers the first step was most likely to benchmark competitors within the same industry to what they use and how well that seems to work for them. The respondent argued the ERP-system to be such a vital part of the company; hence using well-known ERP-vendors with a good reputation will provide some sort of security.

The approach is the same approach used to find a suitable supplier for the recently acquired website. Suitably, many of the board members at company 2 were well-informed within the field at hand, hence able to provide a rather clear selection of website suppliers qualified for the job.

When asking about the responding company’s use of supplier brands to somewhat add value to their own business the respondent referred to their payment-service and logistic partner. These were considered as HI services, as they played a central role of everyday activities within the company where they also played a significant economical role. The respondent made it obvious that the choice of those services’ was active decisions to offer a complete and secure solution for their own customer. They were pleased to present partners with well-known and successful brands to the customer, as they believed it to raise trustworthiness for their own business.

When discussing questions regarding how the consumption of certain products/services might influence the customer image of the company the respondent first argued it probably to be non-existent. On the other hand, asking how he personally perceived suppliers in regard to their office interior and any perhaps company cars he argued it to have an notably influence of how he perceived the brand.
During the interview the respondent was asked to differentiate between him as a B2C customer and B2B purchaser, without the interviewer referring to any brand aspects. The answer was mainly referred to how HI and LI purchases are differently defined. As a B2B purchaser buying a computer or a TV could be considered a LI purchase, as it did not involve spending any significant amount of time and/or money. Whereas this was probably to be considered a HI purchase if he was doing the purchase as a B2C customer. Moreover, the respondent stated he was not notably influenced by person references as a B2B purchaser.

At the end of the interview the respondent was asked about his personal opinion on brands influence on purchase decisions. The respondent now considered it to play a key role in the selection phase of a purchase. He quickly referred to the purchase of a television, where he stated he never bought a television from a brand he was not familiar with. When further asking him how this would affect him if asked to buy a television on behalf of the company, he admitted that he would most likely base the decision on his personal perception of available brands. He justified this transition of personal values on the fact that he could rely on the quality and performance of the product regardless of personal or professional use. He also referred back to the fact that it company wise would be considered a LI purchase were it would not be economically justifiable to spend time evaluating options.

The table show the respondent’s rank of brand importance in relevance to the other purchase related attributes.

Table 5.2 Respondent 2 ranking of attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>HI</th>
<th>LI</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>E.g., pre-sale and post-sale services including training, maintenance, call center support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Functionality</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>E.g., precision, strength, durability, reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>E.g., reputation, how well known the organization is, how others view it in general terms, company history, associations, loyalty level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third company consisted of 3 employees and had a turnover of 3 232 000 SEK. The company’s operation was described as a company that imports and exports computer accessories and computer-related products. The respondent was co-founder, chief executive officer (CEO) and purchase manager of the organization.

**Organizational buying behaviour**

The respondent was the president of the company and also carried the title of purchaser/buyer for both final products and products that were consumed in the daily activities of organizational functions. He was responsible in all purchase situations and was not dependent nor did he carry influence from someone else at the firm.

The company positioned themselves as the "top quality"/"top of the line" brand within their working field. Multiple times the respondent enhanced the importance of products that were purchased in his firm, had to be a good investment and have a long lifetime length. He also emphasized the benefits of buying multiple items at the same time because of discounts and better time efficiency. When the respondent was asked to mention earlier purchases of HI the first case was the organizations computers. Two out of seven employees used Mac while the other five used PC. The respondent further elaborated that it was mostly the personal preferences amongst the employees that decided what computers were to be used during their working hours. The company did not really interfere with the purchases as long as the employees kept themselves within the frames of reasonable cost.
The respondent described office supply and office furniture as LI products that very little thought was put into before purchase. Almost all furniture was bought from IKEA because of price and convenience. When discussing consumable material such as papers and office supply the most important factor was cheapest price for the fast growing company. But also that larger volume was ordered to be well prepared if raised demand on the market.

The respondent felt that his buying behaviour as a private consumer reflected on his role as a buyer at the company. Regarding emotions in the buying decision process the respondent said that he tried to keep it out of the picture at all times but that quite often this wasn’t possible.

**Branding in the decision-making process**

Another previous purchase within HI was business trips. The company didn’t have a company car, hence they always rented cars from the car rental company AVIS. The reason behind choosing this brand was because of good relations and previous contact with the firm and that they always offered a good price all over Sweden.

Flight tickets can be seen as a rather large expense item because of the employees’ frequent flights to the USA and Asia. Whether the brand mattered or not in these purchases the respondent considered it to have very little affect on the purchasing decision. The most important aspects were the duration of the flight and the price. The respondent had travelled with many different airlines and did not see any reason to determine differences between the brands. The respondent described its organizations “brand-thinking” as; a lot like Red Bull. Meaning that when the company show their brand towards its surrounding it is of great importance to stand whole heartedly behind every single project and never do anything mediocre. In the same way as the respondent mentioned that a brand tells a lot about a product or service, he could also see that this was applicable on his company’s brand.

The respondent was willing to pay more for brands provided that he did not have any prior knowledge of the product or service. He further developed that the brand could work as a risk minimizer and could help to ensure a faster and better decision. The respondent, whom told the interviewers that his insight within the product category
was limited and that most cameras fulfilled the wanted requirements, brought up an example of a previous purchase of an SLR-camera. In this purchase the alternatives came to be between the two most famous brands Nikon and Canon, where Nikon was selected because of previous contact with the brand and with positive associations from this. The respondent drew parallels to Internet sites as Pricerunner and Prisjakt (where brands and products are rated) – a good grade within in a certain product category generates a trust for the brand in another product category as well.

The respondent asserted that the brand meant very little when the purchase concerned large sum of moneys or when the purchase took long time. He further developed the answer and explained that function, price and technology was of much greater importance when a lot of money was involved. He continued his reasoning that the brand might work as a first filter, but if the product category already was well known the brand mattered very little. He also mentioned relations as a considerable importance regarding these kinds of purchases.

The respondent meant that the importance of the brand mattered depending on situation and that he personally often let specifications and function help him towards a decision and not the brand. The respondent was asked to assume a future purchase of a car and what importance the brand would have in this decision. The respondent answered that if the purpose of the car was to take him from place A to B, then the deciding factors would be, lowest price, lowest gas consumption and lowest service cost. He elaborated that brand would not matter much. But if the car would be used in marketing purpose to be seen towards customers and suppliers then the brand of the car would matter a lot.

Cell phones were brought up as an example of products within HI; at the moment the company was about to purchase phones and subscriptions for all employees. Also in this case the respondent said that the brand of the operator and the phone mattered little as long and once again the focus aimed at price and function. The most important preference was that the subscription would allow the company to call internationally as cheap as possible because of all the travels made by the employees. He further developed that this took a lot of research of operators since the ones that were perceived, as the cheapest in Sweden maybe weren’t as cheap abroad. The
employees were allowed to choose phones themselves as long as it was within reasonable limits.

When the interviewer asked about products with LI the respondent mentioned that he didn’t really pay attention to brands in low involvement segments and put as little time as possible in research before the purchase. The respondent further elaborated that, as a small IT company there’s not that much LI products when comparing to other bigger companies in other markets. Coffe, milk, soda and beer were described as spontaneous purchases where the employees bought whatever they wanted. According to the respondent the brand mattered very little when the product or service was consumed behind closed doors. In further elaboration it appeared that the respondent cared a lot about which coffee or drink that was served/offered at the company to subcontractors and customers in order to retain a certain image by using nitched-, local- or ecological products and brands.

Table 5.3 Respondent 3 ranking of attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>HI</th>
<th>LI</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Functionality</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brand</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Logistics and distribution</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviewer asked the respondent to make a comparison of brand importance between HI and LI products. He felt that the brand didn’t matter at the first purchase but that it mattered more when you were an already existing customer. On the
contrary, he then mentioned as an example that if he were to buy fancy lady shoes then the brand and the design would determine the purchase to one hundred per cent.

He explained it with the following words: “Where you can not compare specifications and details, the brand is of great importance”. The respondent felt that his buying behaviour as a private consumer scrutinizes his role as a buyer at the company. The television in the gathering room of the office is a Sony and he said that this was because he had previously bought an equal one at home, and wanted to use the same strong brand in his office area.

5.4 Company 4

The fourth company consisted of 38 employees and had a turnover of 87 957 000 SEK. The company’s operation was described as a company that conducts wholesale business relating to office supplies. The respondent was one out of three responsible purchaser at the firm.

The respondent was one out of three responsible buyers of the organization. He did not alone have single influence on purchases concerning products or services consumed within the daily activities of the company.

The company belonged to a larger group of several organizations and was therefore in some manners controlled by the group. They replaced ERP-system almost a year ago and decided themselves what system to purchase. There was no particular reason why they chose the system they did, mostly because of function and connection between the different companies within the group. The most important attributes were according to the respondent the distributor and the importance of high certainty of delivery. He further developed that price is of course an important factor but not the most important one.

When the respondent was asked to rank the importance of the different attributes in a purchase situation, he was having a hard time deciding what order to place them in since it, according to the respondent, mattered a lot depending on what was purchased.
The table shows the respondent’s rank of brand importance in relevance to the other purchase related attributes.

*Table 5.4 Respondent 4 ranking of attributes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>HI</th>
<th>LI</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Functionality</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Brand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Logistics and distribution</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

The respondent stated that he did not really put focus on brands in the buying process but stated that the brand matters more in HI purchases than LI purchases. Shortly after this the respondent mentioned that better known brands have an advantage in the sense that you know what you are buying and that it works as a guarantee that the product functions. He further develops that the brand could work as a risk minimizer and that he could definitely see himself pay more for a brand he knows better.

The respondent further elaborated that he believed his personal consumption outside of work was reflected back on purchases made inside the company.

The company positioned themselves as an organization that creates totally satisfied customers. They did not position themselves as the cheapest actor on the market, something that was put thought behind when designing the office. The respondent
could not remind himself of a situation where he bought a product because of the brand.

When purchasing furniture for the office it was important that quality would be top of the line along with the feeling of exclusivity. When the respondent was asked if the brand was align with the furniture of the office the respondent agreed. The furniture was in this case considered as a HI purchase for the organization as there was a lot of money invested and lots of time put into the purchase.

Concerning other HI purchases, the company’s cars, they used both Volkswagen and Volvo; cars that the respondent also stated were aligned with the brand of the organization. He saw it as very important for the company to give the right impression when visiting customers. A really fancy car that would according to the respondent probably be perceived as negative and could also lead to the customer asking why they spend money on expensive cars instead of cutting their prices. But the respondent also stated that they needed a certain standard and quality of the cars to represent the organization in an attractive way. The budget for the cars was restricted within a certain budget.

As an end B2C-customer the respondent said that he buys what he always has bought and perceives the brand to be more important in his personal life than the brand is for his role as an organizational buyer. He further evolves that since he has been in the business for many years it has definitely affected his purchasing decisions in his private life, explaining that he compares and benchmarks his purchases more and more in his personal life nowadays.

The interview slid into a discussion about LI products concerning purchased televisions at the organization where the interviewer asked the respondent what brand their television had and if the brand mattered. This question was asked because the interviewer saw that the TV was placed just in front of the entrance for every visitor to see. The respondent answered that he did not know which brand they had but definitely hoped they had a well known brand since that gave a better image of the company than what a low cost brand does. (After the interview the TV:s were examined by the respondent and the interviewer, turning out to be one LG and one
Samsung, which eased the respondent as he felt the brands were well known and strong."

The respondent said that in products that the customer sees, the brand matters much more since it reflects how the company is perceived. Once again he emphasized the importance of the products that the sales people used and how they were perceived.

Computers were bought in by the executive buyer and were not controlled at all by the employees. The company used PC because of the simple reason that it was assumed to work best with their ERP system. Asking the respondent about cellphones, the respondent stated that they were not allowed to choose phones themselves and therefore was not involved in the purchase. The respondent explained that they definitely looked at environmental aspects and social responsibilities, something that was even more important among their subcontractors. The company worked with environmental issues in many ways and tried to affect their customers in helping them act in an environmental friendly way. The respondent further evolved that they did look at environmental aspects in their everyday purchases for products that are consumed in the daily activities of organizational functions.
6. Data analysis

The analysis chapter attempted to clarify the relationship between the theoretical framework and the empirical data. The analysis was structured in accordance with the theoretical framework to clearly provide any implied relationship. Separately analyzing organizational buying behavior and applying brand influence on such behavior provided a structured basis to support conclusive statements. The analysis consistently related buying behavior to product involvement.

6.1 Organizational buying behavior

The analysis of organizational buying behavior provided an understanding of the organizational structure, influences and emotions, considered valuable for the analysis and application of brand influence into such structures and behavior.

It was implied that the buyers acted in different ways depending on what situation they were facing or what prerequisites they had. In the investigated MSEs it was clear that the decision-making unit and the buying process had limited amount of people involved, in these cases only one or two responsible individuals. Mudambi (2002) mentioned that there could be a large fluctuation in what the buyers perceived to be important, what processes they follow or what kind of purchases they make. The research of Mudambi (2002) was applicable for this study, as the buyers perception of purchases widely varied depending on what was bought and what the purchasers previous knowledge was about the product or service.

The buying behaviour also seemed to vary a lot depending on how the company was positioned and what their characteristics were. Meaning there is a difference if it was e.g. a low-price and cost efficient company, or if it was a company that sold high-end products with a lot of focus on quality and functions. There seemed to be more restrictions in the buying process applied on the company that aimed to be more cost efficient. This further reinforces what Lynch and de Chernatony (2004) developed regarding the characteristics of the purchase situation and that this fact does influence the nature of the organizational buyer.
6.1.1 Influences of organizational buying decisions

When buying anything considered a LI purchase, the purchaser often had the desire to obtain the lowest price, which according to Webster and Wind (1972) can be referred to as individual influence. As for purchasing HI products or services, economic variables influenced the purchase in some cases. But there were also examples of organizational purchasers who were under the influence of organizational variables, i.e. which just as Webster and Wind (1972) described, had restrictions regarding the range of choices where they had to follow the organizations goals and tasks.

In the majority of the selection processes, especially the HI purchases, it was indicated that the buyers’ personal values and needs influenced the choice to a high degree. Moreover, the individual influence was implied to have highest influence on the decision-making regarding the selection process. However, it was indicated that in the final choice of product or service from the selection, the individual influence was put aside to some extent.

As for the fact that all respondents were part of small and rather centralized DMU it became evident that much organizational buying behavior had ties to purchasers individual buying behavior, supporting Webster’s (1991) theory that individuals were the ones defining problems, deciding, and acting. As for most cases in this research, the DMU did not include more than two persons, and for some even just one. Hence, relating to Webster and Wind’s (1972) and Webster’s (1991) model of DMUs being influenced by each individual’s personal characteristics and goals; suggesting MSE’s purchasing decisions to expectedly be influenced by personal values.

6.1.2 Decision-making unit

The DMUs of the chosen MSEs were not very extensive concerning the amount of people involved. But it was still of significant value to know what kind of role the buyer had in order to know how strongly they controlled or influenced the purchases in the company. When using the model classified by Webster and Wind (1972) to identify different roles, it was noticed that an organizational buyer in a MSE in many ways acts as every role. The criteria: user, buyer, influencer and gatekeeper were strongly fulfilled by the interviewed buyers in accordance with the definitions. The buyers were all members who purchased products and services, they had the formal
responsibility and authority for contracting suppliers, they influenced the decision process directly or indirectly and they controlled the flow of information and materials into the buying centre. The only role where a smaller contrast could be seen was the role of the decider. The term decider was defined as the one with authority to choose among alternative buying actions. However, the buyer could at times be controlled or influenced by the president of the firm, other purchasers within the organization, or the board.

6.1.3 Emotions in organizational buying behaviour

Because of the fact that only one or two persons were deciding, it can be hard for buyers not to involve their emotions in the buying process. Lynch and de Chernatony (2004), and Wilson (2000) argued that the B2B purchaser was seen as more rational and knowledgeable about the products they purchased and the decisions they made. Similarities can be found with the buyers included in this study. The buyers mentioned the main importance in a buying decision-making to be function and price of the HI products, both attributes which are clearly rational and knowledgeable. In line with Lynch and de Chernatony (2004), this study indicates that emotions could be considered a strong factor when the buyer lacks knowledge, motivation or interest in the product, which often is the case in purchase of LI products. In most cases emotions and personal beliefs seemed to be put aside to some extent when the purchases concerned HI products where much time and money was put into the final decision-making process.

All the respondents were asked about their personal involvement and emotions in their role as a B2B buyer. The respondents stated that to some extent their emotions and beliefs were involved in the purchases, something that the authors also found to be subtle in all of them. More and more as the interviews progressed it was noticed that the attitudes and intentions, which the respondents had in the beginning, did not really cohere with their actual behaviour, especially considering the questions regarding the importance of a brand.

6.2 Brands in the decision-making process

*Brand consciousness, brand preference, brand sensitivity and brand importance were analyzed with a general focus on influence of brands in the decision-making process*
relating to behavioral, cognitive, and attitudinal undertones.

6.2.1 Brand importance

In the beginning of the interviews the respondents were asked to rank attributes in the buying decision process in order for the research to determine the importance of the brand. All attributes were presented before the interview went deeper and more comprehensive into the essence of the brand. Figure 1 shows the primary expressed importance of these attributes in both HI and LI purchases. The ratings varied between the respondents but could in a summarized manner indicate that price and functionality mattered the most.

![Attribute Importance Graph](image)

*Figure 2. Attribute Importance*

Brand was seen as one of the least important attributes in both HI and LI purchases. This stated ranking was something that for many respondents later on in the interview came to stand in contradiction with their actual beliefs and behavior when retrieving a deeper understanding of their relation to brands and its importance.

6.2.2 Brand consciousness

As stated by Nelson and McLeod (2005), consumption attitudes could be examined using brand consciousness to investigate how and when brands play an important role in the psychological process that precedes the buying act. This research indicates, by contrasting different levels of purchase complexity, that brands are to be unequally important depending on the involvement in the purchase.
When conducting a HI purchase, the respondents argued that to find appropriate suppliers the first step was most likely to benchmark competitors within the same industry to what they used and how well that seemed to work for them. This was predominant when making a purchase of a product or service when there was little or no previous knowledge. Zablah et al. (2010) describes brand consciousness to be an organizational belief that well-known brands are superior to lesser-known brands, which in this study is supported as the respondents maintain that a well-known brand provided a certain level of security. Using well-known and successful brands to create added value for the customer were believed to raise trustworthiness for the own business.

Consciousness is considered to be the buyers’ ability to relate certain products to specific brands (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). The respondents mediated different aspects to be more important as a decisive factor, but they recognized the fact that the sample selection for potential suppliers many times derived from themselves or someone in the company knowing certain brands to deliver certain products. This relation was most noticeably for many HI purchase situations.

On the other hand, when conducting a LI purchase, the relation to brand consciousness were vague. Being aware of the brand may play a certain role, as there was little or no pre-purchase consideration. The respondents more or less just bought the first available product/service within a reasonable price range. This could in accordance with Nelson and McLeod, (2005), and Zablah et al. (2010) provide evidence of consumer-based brand positioning to be a present feature in the decision-making process for somewhat more complex purchases.

6.2.3 Brand preference
Moschis et al. (1984), and Ratchford and Vaughn (1989) refer brand preference to what extent or degree an organization views a brand as more desirable than comparable alternatives. The findings present products and services to be bought because the brand was perceived in a certain way. Multiple respondents argued well-known brands and leading brands to most likely be successful due to good performance and a good reputation within a certain product category. Also generating trust for the brand in other product categories as well. But just as for brand
consciousness, these statements mostly related to HI purchases, where there was noteworthy consideration pre-purchase.

As proposed by Zablah et al. (2010) smaller firms are more likely to purchase less than their larger counterparts, mostly because their tendency is to form strong preferences towards ‘already used’ brands and because of their limited bargaining power. Most of the respondents justified the transition of personal values into a B2B context with the fact that they could rely on the quality and performance of the product regardless of personal or professional use. As for a LI purchase it was not economically justifiable to spend time evaluating options.

Price and functionality were by the respondents considered to be key factors when making a HI purchase, whereas the price and availability is crucial when making a LI purchase. Moschis et al. (1984), and Ratchford and Vaughn (1989) state brand preference could be achieved through building the reputation of the company as a long-established and trusted name in the industry. Which was confirmed by the respondents referring to good relations and previous contact work as a risk minimizer and could help to ensure a faster and better decision. This might in the end lead to customers choosing this brand over other brands in any category (Moschis et al., 1984; Ratchford and Vaughn, 1989).

6.2.4 Brand sensitivity

Some buyers claimed that they selected products due to their specifications or price; however when there was little knowledge about the products the choice fell on the most well known. Hence, in these particular cases of purchases, especially HI, the brand most likely played a significant role in the psychological process that preceded the buying act, as Lachance et al. (2003) described it.

One could also argue that the buyers selected a well-known brand to decrease the risk of personal or organizational consequences. Several HI products was selected because they were well-known, in these cases the organizational buyers probably associated the brand name, and actively considered it in organizational buying deliberations, as explained by Kapferer and Laurent (1988).
When it came to other products, both HI and LI, several buyers strived to be as cost efficient as possible, both due to the company’s budget, and in some cases their image. Therefore, most buying decisions depended on the price of the product or service. When it came to buying a cheap brand to enhance the company’s cost-conscious image, many brands had to be eliminated in the process. Moreover, this could indicate that the buyer actively considers and seeks brands that are associated with cost efficiency, and thereby more sensitive to these kinds of brands.

Some buyers described how they didn’t consider the brand for the most part in LI purchases, in these cases the cheapest and most convenient products was selected. In HI purchases the buyers often claimed that the brand didn’t affect the choice, however further into the interview their past selections, behavior, and reasoning revealed that this wasn’t always the case. Overall, there were indications that purchase situations that mattered more, i.e. HI purchases, the brand sensitivity could be viewed as more apparent. This can be correlated to what Hutton (1997) described, that when there is a high risk of personal or organizational consequences, organizational buyers will probably be brand sensitive and select a well-known brand. As for purchasing LI products or services, the brand sensitivity of the buyers can be interpreted as less evident.
7. Conclusion and contribution

This final chapter presents this research's conclusions based on the analysis. All research questions were answered separately to clearly present key findings on each topic. Finally, the chapter provides theoretical contributions, managerial implications, a discussion regarding the limitation of this research and suggestions for further research.

7.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to gain knowledge of brand influence in organizational buying behavior. Theories within organizational buying behavior provided necessary information in organizational decision-making, while the theories of brand importance, brand consciousness, brand preference and brand sensitivity, elaborated brand influence in the decision-making process. The thesis consistently related buying behavior and brand influence to product involvement. Analyzing organizational buying behavior and applying brand influence on such behavior provided a structured basis to support conclusive statements.

**RQ 1** What attributes matters most for organizational buyers when purchasing products that are consumed in the daily activities of the company?

The results of this study showed that the attributes that mattered most for organizational buyers varied depending on what was bought and what previous knowledge the buyer had about the product or service. When doing HI or LI purchases the price and the functionality was ranked as most important attributes in both aspects. Brand was initially stated to be one of the least important attributes in both regardless of product involvement. Comparing the respondents’ ranking of brand importance to brand influence and the actual purchasing behavior provided an obvious contradiction. Brand influence had a higher presence in the actual purchasing behavior than what was initially stated.
RQ 2 How do brand influence vary in organizational buying depending on the context of high- or low involvement products?

By contrasting different levels of purchase complexity, brands seem to be unequally important depending on the involvement of the purchase. However, it was maintained that a well-known brand provides a certain level of security along with added value for the customer. It furthermore raised trustworthiness for the own business independently of the level of involvement. When purchasing LI products or services, the brands importance for the buyers were proven to be less evident and the relation to brands were vague. Most respondents more or less bought the first available product or service within a reasonable price range. Regarding HI purchases, when there was a high risk of personal or organizational consequences, organizational buyers will most likely select a well-known brand. Regardless of the purchaser being an individual consumer or a purchaser in an organizational setting, individual influence was indicated to propose well-known brands to work as a risk minimizer in the selection process. This implies the selection process to be less time consuming for the purchaser and that brands can be considered having the ability to facilitate features influencing organizational buying behavior. Additionally suggesting recognized brands to probably receive primary consideration in the selection process.

RQ 3 How is the individual purchaser influenced by emotional considerations?

This study further strengthen the indications that emotional considerations were present to a stronger extent when the buyer lacked knowledge, motivation or interest in the product, which often was the case in purchase of LI products. Whereas, emotions and personal beliefs were put aside to some extent when the purchases concerned HI products, where much time and money was put into the final decision-making process. The transition of personal values into a B2B context was supported with the fact that the respondents could rely on the quality and performance of the brand regardless of personal or professional use.
7.2 Theoretical contribution
This research could contribute to the research field by further acknowledging the matter of brand relevance in B2B markets. Evidently brands are to be considered an influencing aspect in B2B purchasing decisions. The research also presents support of brands being a relevant matter in B2B relationships other than in a purchasing context. Considering the fact that most theories used for this research, and most acknowledged theories available concerns B2C matters, the result of this investigation would propose several branding theories being applicable in a B2B context.

The research also contributes to the research field by showing the bearing of the purchase complexity being essential for determining what aspects are more important. Knowing this would provide a basis for further more specific research on brand relevance in specific product or service classes.

Another identified implication is that there could be said to be insufficient studies on the influence of emotion and personal influences on organizational-decision. This would not only ease further studies on brand influence in a B2B context, but also provide a useful theoretical framework for further understanding of organizational behavior.

7.3 Managerial implication
Based on the findings of this study, a number of both internal and external recommendations can be given. Internal refers to implications regarding the purchasing organization whereas external considers managerial recommendations from the seller’s point of view.

7.3.1 Internal
The research implies that managers might gain from evaluating company expenses. As for now, most MSEs seem to have limited insight to everyday purchases. Most MSEs appears not to have the resources needed to thoroughly evaluate purchase options, especially for LI purchases. The research shows how the purchaser undoubtedly propose price to be the most essential aspect to consider when making LI purchases. At the same time state it not to be economical justifiable to spend time evaluating options. In theory this could mean they most likely end up buying market-
leading brands, as they are the ones that probably appear first. This study represents a step towards developing a better understanding of when brands are most likely to matter for purchasers in organizational buying behavior.

7.3.2 External

Considering external recommendations it indicates that brands are a definite aspect to consider in a B2B context. The finding justifies brands to be of significant matter in some purchasing situations. How brands will be part of a purchase are still difficult to conclude, as it seem to relate to what kind of product or service is bought, and how it is perceived by the purchaser.

It is recommended to thoroughly maintain good relationships with MSE customers, as relationships and previous use of products or services many times will be a decisive factor for future acquisitions. This do not necessary refer to repeatedly purchasing of the same product. Satisfied customers tend to create positive associations to the brand bought, which in this study has shown to overlap to other products or services from the same brand. An early relationship to MSEs might then create good conditions for long-term relationships as the MSE might grow.

Another recommendation is for companies to actively present what brands they might be using. This as the research indicates brand values to transmit to companies using the brand, especially for some HI purchases. Given examples are logistic services and IT services. Where the use of a certain brand tend to increase trustworthiness for the company using it.

Moreover the research has shown reference marketing to have significant influence on B2B markets. This as for purchases where there is considered to be insufficient in house knowledge of the product or service, or just a lack of interest, the purchasing company will most likely benchmark competitors. Hence, stating brand as a vital aspect in the sampling process, as purchases probably will start of considering well-known and commonly used brands. Also, justifying this sampling with that they undoubtedly is well known due to high-quality product or services.
7.4 Limitations of the study

A limitation for this research was the limited resources in terms of a narrow time frame given to carry out the research. This affected the research to only include a smaller sample consisting of four respondents, which could be considered a quality weakness. A rather small sample size, and a qualitative approach constrain the result to not being generalizable to a broader perspective. This limitation could be related to the restriction of investigating MSEs, leaving out bigger purchasing organizations. Also, this study only considered purchases consumed within the purchasing company, not used for further production or sales. This restricts any generalization to include only certain purchasing situations.

The authors held limited expertise in interview-technique, and as proposed by many acknowledged researchers (Christensen et al., 2001; Patton, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011), the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the rigor in the methodological framework and the skills of the interviewer. To compensate for the lack of interview skills, the methodological framework was thoroughly revised by published authors and by a PhD in marketing teaching research methodology.

Another significant limitation would be the difficulty to find respondents with the appropriate pre-knowledge required. The role of a purchasing manager is almost solely associated to purchases associated with production or sales. It has been found problematic to find people within organizations with exclusively responsibility for purchases only consumed in the company. It is often dependent on the involvement, which mediates where in the organization the purchasing decision is made.

Further limitations of this study are connected to the theoretical framework. Many theories within brands evolve from a B2C setting; conveying them into a B2B context might not present these theories as completely appropriate. Theories previously used in a B2B context could be considered to lack reliability due to a low amount of citations. This presents a lack of research of brands in B2B, further discussed under the chapter suggesting future research. Another limitation related to the lack of
research on individual cognitive and affective influence on organizational decision-making, restricting the conclusion in this study to be merely speculative.

7.5 Suggestions for future research

This study being qualitative provides no applicable generalization on brand influence in the B2B context. Therefore it would be of interest to do a quantitative study within a similar framework. Findings in this study indicate that a quantitative research could provide further implications of how brands are perceived in an early stage of the purchasing process. This study implies contradictions in expressed beliefs and actual behavior.

Further use of a quantitative research could explain the influence of branding for different stages of the decision-making process by a more reliable result of expressed beliefs, hence providing evidence for a new qualitative research concentrating on actual buying behavior.

Another interesting approach for additional research evolves from the conclusion in this study implying the relative importance of functional and emotional brand values to B2B buyers. Just as brands and its recognized effects in B2C markets, emotions seem to have been somewhat neglected aspect of organizational buying behavior. Further research should focus on the salience of personal emotions in organizational structures, especially within DMUs. As for now, there is a lack of research available to conclude any evident relationship between brands, emotions and organizational buying behavior.

Additional research could preferably explore brands as a mediator in B2B relationships, and how brands might act like a mark of quality and security, positioning the brand as the obvious choice, hence creating a basis for long term relationships.

Moreover, it would be of interest to separately investigate different levels of product involvement as a mediating factor in purchase behavior and decision-making. This could provide a more reliable standing of what variables having the most influence on purchase decisions. Proposing there is a significant difference in how brands are
unequally important between HI and LI purchases, it would suggest a more precise facilitation of marketing- and relationship activities.

As several researchers previously proposed, there is an obvious research gap in the general importance of brands in a B2B context. On the other hand, as many earlier implied, B2C brand theories might in many cases be applicable in a B2B context, providing plenty support for further research on the subject.

Essential to consider is this study’s restriction to MSEs. And even though there is a lack of research on brands in a B2B context, previous research frequently focuses on bigger enterprises. Hence providing an adequate basis to do a similar study comparing MSEs to bigger companies, or conducting a research probing brand influence in OBB within bigger firms only.

Lastly, it is also important to remember that this study emphasize on products consumed within the buying company, not used for further development, production or sales. This more or less excluded all subcontractor purchases. It might therefore be of relevance to investigate brand influence in subcontractor relationships. This relationship could be investigated using all the proposed research approaches in this chapter.
8. References


9. Appendix

Appendix A. - Interview guide

Organization:
Name of respondent:
Position of respondent:

Two questions were asked when scheduling interview appointments to secure the interviewee to be sufficiently involved in the organizations’ buying process.

| 1.1 To what extent are you involved in purchasing these for your company? (Purchasing involvement) |
| 1.2 Do you have the utter responsibility of buying these products? |

Introductory information for the interviewee’s consideration
“The questions concern products that are consumed in the daily activities of organizational functions. High- and low involvement products will be defined and explained to the opponent. Examples of such products will be given to the respondent in order to establish what specific purchases the interview questions will refer to. The respondent chooses which products that has been purchased and that matches the definitions.”

Definition Low-Involvement Products
A low involvement product can be an item that is habitually purchased and so the decision to do so requires little effort. It could also be defined as products/services that require minimal effort and consideration on the part of the consumer prior to purchase since they do not have a substantial effect on the buyer's lifestyle and hence are not that significant an investment (Zaichkowsky 1985).

Example of low-involvement products:
Office supplies (pens, staples, paper, etc.), coffee, working clothes (Ibid).

Definition High Involvement products
Products with high capital value or services that are psychological important to the buyer because they address social or ego needs and therefore carry social and psychological risk. The buyer is prepared to spend considerable time and effort in searching for the right and most suitable product. High-involvement products are often expensive (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

Example of low-involvement products:
Office design, technological infrastructures, advertising, cars, ERP-systems, computers (Ibid), gym-card.

| 1.3 Please give examples of high- and low involvement purchases within your organization. |
### Organizational Buying Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.1 How would you describe your decision-making unit and your purchasing operation?</th>
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<tr>
<th>2.2 Are you dependent or under the influence of other departmental units or areas inside the organization? (Restrictions regarding budget, time, rules etc.)</th>
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<tr>
<th>2.3 Do you have any clear cut rules such as methods or process as a reference on how to conduct purchases for these kinds of products? If yes, please describe it to us. (Procedural control) – (Extent to which established policies and procedures guide a buying center’s purchase evaluation)</th>
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### Brand Importance

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<tr>
<th>3.1 What are the most important aspects to consider in a purchase situation?</th>
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<tr>
<th>3.2 Scale from 1-6 (where 1 is least important and 6 most important) between the following attributes in terms of relative importance they play(ed) in the product selection process. (Fill in one for High- and one for Low-Involvement)</th>
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<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
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<tr>
<td>High/High Involvement (HI)</td>
<td>Low/Low Involvement (LI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>E.g., pre-sale and post-sale services including training, maintenance, call center support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functionality</td>
<td>E.g., precision, strength, durability, reliability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand</td>
<td>E.g., reputation, how well known the organization is, how others view it in general terms, company history, associations, loyalty level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics and distribution</td>
<td>E.g., availability of product, ease of ordering, delivery reliability and convenience, capacity to handle the order</td>
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<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>E.g., quoted price, degree of discount, financial support services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>E.g., innovativeness, upgradeability, compatibility, ease of use, latest technology</td>
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From here on, the questions will be referred to the previously mentioned purchase situations of high/low involvement.
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Brand Consciousness</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.1</strong> Do you pay attention to the brand when making a purchase?</td>
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<td><strong>4.2</strong> Does that vary depending on what you are purchasing?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.3</strong> Does the brand tell you anything about the product? How?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.4</strong> Are you willing to pay more for certain brands? If so, why is that?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.5</strong> Do you generally associate the most recognized brands as a good choice or a bad choice? Develop.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.6</strong> Is it necessary for a product to be the best amongst its competitors to satisfy your organization?</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Brand Preference</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5.1</strong> Did you in any of the previously mentioned purchases select a brand that had the same specifics as another brand? If yes, why did you choose the one that you selected?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5.2</strong> Did it make sense to buy the brand that you selected instead of other competing brands? If so, why?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5.3</strong> What differs this brand from other brands?</td>
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<th><strong>Brand Sensitivity</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6.1</strong> Did you choose this product based on the brand name?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6.2</strong> With this purchase, was the brand name important to you?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6.3</strong> When evaluating products like this, do you prefer well-known brands?</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Emotions in organizational decision-making</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7.1</strong> How would you consider personal emotions to be involved in your role as an organizational purchaser?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7.2</strong> Can you give any example of when your personal emotions might play a role in business related decision-making?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.3</strong> How would you describe the difference between you as a B2C consumer and a B2B buyer?</td>
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