

BI Norwegian Business School - campus Oslo

GRA 19502

Master Thesis

Component of continuous assessment: Thesis Master of Science

Final master thesis – Counts 80% of total grade

How can retail companies strategically build brand preference? A case study of Norwegian retail stores.

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Start: 02.03.2018 09.00

Finish: 03.09.2018 12.00

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Master Thesis at BI Norwegian Business School

How can retail companies strategically build brand preference? A case study of Norwegian retail stores.

Hand-in date:

02.09.2018

Campus:

BI Oslo

Supervisor:

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Programme:

Master of Science in Strategic Marketing Management

"This thesis is a part of the MSc programme at BI Norwegian Business School. The school takes no responsibility for the methods used, results found and conclusions drawn."

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to our supervisor, Professor Fred Selnes, for his support and valuable insights throughout the writing process. He continuously motivated us and allowed us to form our ideas while keeping us on the right track. Our sincere gratitude also goes to all companies participating in our study by sharing valuable insights. In addition, we would like to thank Svein Roar Hult and Jonas Østnes from Kantar TNS for guidance and sharing knowledge about the research topic.

The following thesis is a result of two years of hard work, interesting variety of courses, challenging discussions and successful cooperation.

Thank you,

Maiken Foyn Klingstrøm and Malene Knutsen

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Summary

The present study draws on in-depth expert interviews with seven retail company representatives to propose which firm-controlled variables that can serve as drivers for brand preference. Extant literature, secondary data, and representatives interviewed for this study view brand preference as a consequence of brand awareness and brand loyalty. In contrast with existing theory, this study proposes that focusing on having a consistent strategy, brand awareness, and customer experience serves as three prerequisites for being able to manage brand preference. In addition, the results suggest two drivers of brand preference: 1) Crafting and measuring goals, and 2) Brand strategy management. In crafting goals, the result suggests that having brand awareness and brand loyalty as parent goals, have a positive influence of brand preference performance. The study highlights the use of key performance indicators and marketing analytics as important in reaching the parent goal, and also increase brand preference. Findings related to brand strategy management propose five core marketing activities a company needs to implement in order to increase brand preference. These include: place optimization, product selectivity, consistent price strategy, differentiation, and omni-channel synergies.

Altogether, the results shed light on the link between firm-controlled activities and brand preference in a practical matter. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed to help managers and retail companies to get the most value out of their marketing activities

1.0 Introduction

The main objective of a marketer goes beyond making a singular sale to one customer. Hence, it is crucial to create durable relationships between the brand and customers that leads to a bond and stronger brand preference. Unlike focusing on making a single sale, the process of building a strong customer-brand relationship includes four main phases: Introduction, familiarity, preference, and loyalty (Alreck and Settle, 1999). Whereas the two first phases are mainly influenced by advertising and promotion, the two last phases are the most difficult to successfully manage as loyalty excludes relationships with rival competitors. However, developing brand preference is a process that can be both difficult to develop and maintain over time. Hence, it is not an easy task to know what actions to take as a marketer in order to influence customers brand preference.

Researchers within the field of marketing discuss brand preference from the consumer-perspective related to brand equity, brand image, brand knowledge, and brand awareness (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003; de Chernatony, 2003). Brand preference is also found to be positively linked to long-term performance (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, and Donthu, 1995). However, the research regarding brand preference from the company-perspective is relatively sparse (Alamro and Rowley, 2011).

A preferred brand is likely to perform better in the marketplace compared to a brand that is lesser liked. By using firm-controlled actions companies have the ability to strengthen their position in the market. As several studies supports a positive relationship between brand equity and performance companies can thereby exploit firm-controlled variables to strategically improve their performance (Yoo, Donthu, and Lee, 2000). Hence, there are several firm-controlled marketing actions companies can endeavour. The influence of marketing mix elements on brand preference has previously been recognized (Jedidi, 1999). As marketing mix and other firm-controlled marketing elements usually are the foundation used to differentiate the company from the competitors, it is interesting to investigate how marketers can take advantage of elements to

enhance brand preference. The relation between brand preference and actual market outcome is studied primarily in the context of the service industry (Kim and Kim, 2005; Kim et al, 2003). Contrary, there is a lack of contribution of firm-controlled elements impact on brand preference within the retail industry. The sparse literature has been addressed as a critical concern by managers, practitioners, and advertising scholars (Stafford and Day, 1995).

Retail is a major sector in Norway where companies spend millions of NOK annually on advertising, brand building, and building marketing capabilities. So far, most of empirical research address narrow and industry-specific issues, such as fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and fast paced technology industries. However, retail companies that are not restricted to such industry-specific issues will have difficulties applying the research.

Based on the identified gaps in the field of retail industry and ways of strategically increase brand preference, this study aims to identify drivers to improve brand preference with the use firm-controlled variables within the retail industry. To the authors current knowledge, this topic has not been studied in any previous work.

In conclusion, we propose the following research question for our study:

Which firm-controlled marketing variables leads to a significant shift in brand preference?

The aim of the present study is to provide a deeper insight of the concept of brand preference, with the intent to uncover firm-controlled variables that have a positive impact on brand preference. The goal is to contribute with an addition to existing theory from the company-perspective, and emphasise the importance of identifying how firm-controlled variables can be utilized to improve brand preference. Acquiring knowledge of such choice dynamics is crucial for marketing practitioners, and help retail companies to design a more efficient marketing strategy that increase the customer-brand relationship over time.

The paper is organized as follows. This study starts with a brief literature review, that among others, covers the fields of brand preference, marketing mix, return on

marketing investments, and points of difference and points of parity. We also draw on relevant literature to uncover possible drivers. Section 3 describes the method, data collection, and the individual results from each analysis. Section 4 presents the results of our study, and section 5, discuss the results that is aligned with relevant literature. Furthermore, the study also provides managerial implications for utilizing brand preference, present suggestions for further research, and limitations. Lastly, conclusions are presented in section 6.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Brand preference

Consumer brand preference is an essential step towards understanding consumer choice behaviour, and has therefore always received great attention from marketing managers. Researchers have conceptualized brand preference in different ways, with various relationships and branding variables. For example, Keller (2003) see brand preference as an antecedent of both brand equity and loyalty, whereas Chang and Liu (2009) see brand preference as a consequence of brand equity and loyalty. As the present study aims to uncover drivers of brand preference, we operationalize brand preference as a consequence of firm-controlled marketing variables. Thus, an operationalized definition of brand preference is used, and is defined as follows:

“The extent to which the customer favours the designated service provided by his or her present company, in comparison to the designated service provided by other companies in his or her consideration set” (Hellier, Geursen, Carr, and Rickard, 2003, p. 1765).

There are several aspects and factors connected to brand preference that have been studied. Past literature encompasses theory and aspects such as attitudinal drivers to brand preference (Bass and Talarzyk, 1972), brand- and country-specific drivers of brand preference (Halkias et al., 2016), and brand preference as a measure

(Agarwal and Rao, 1996; Sirgy et al., 1997; Sääksjärvi, 2007; Olson and Thjomoe, 2003). Previous research has also looked into advertising effects (DeVecchio et al., 2005), fast moving consumer goods industry, consumer perceptions, brand equity (Srivastava, 2009), and purchase intention. However, most research address the consumer-aspect of preferences.

Despite all the research conducted from the consumer-perspective side of preference, there is little practical research that can guide managers to increase brand preference with the use of firm-controlled efforts (Ebrahim, Ghoneim, Irani, and Fan, 2016). Srivastava (2009), stressed brand preference as the key driver to assess and improve brand strategy simultaneously. Furthermore, the study uncovered that brand strategy indeed influences brand preference and brand equity. Thus, brand responses to various marketing activities are reflected in consumers preferences. Therefore, measuring the effectiveness and evaluating outcomes of marketing activities have become a prioritized task for marketing managers (Baldauf, Cravens, and Binder 2003). Brand preference is greatly used to measure the effectiveness of brand equity as it represents consumers intention to purchase a brand (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Yoo et al., 2000). Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995), found that brands with higher equity generate greater preference toward the brand. Despite the efforts taken by researchers and the importance of the subject for practitioners, there still remains a lack in existing literature regarding which marketing actions a company can take to increase brand preference.

2.2 Brand Experience

Creating superior customer experience seems to be one of the central focus areas in today's retailing environment. Marketing and consumer research shows that brand experiences occur in phases where consumers search for products, when they shop, receive service, and when the products are consumed (Holbrook, 2000; Schmitt and Rogers, 2008). This highlights the importance of continuously improving all touchpoints of a customer journey. Consumers seek brands that create experiences and arouse them in sensorial, emotional and creative ways. Schwarts (2004), indicates that consumers rely on their experiences as trusted

sources of information to judge between alternatives and make choices.

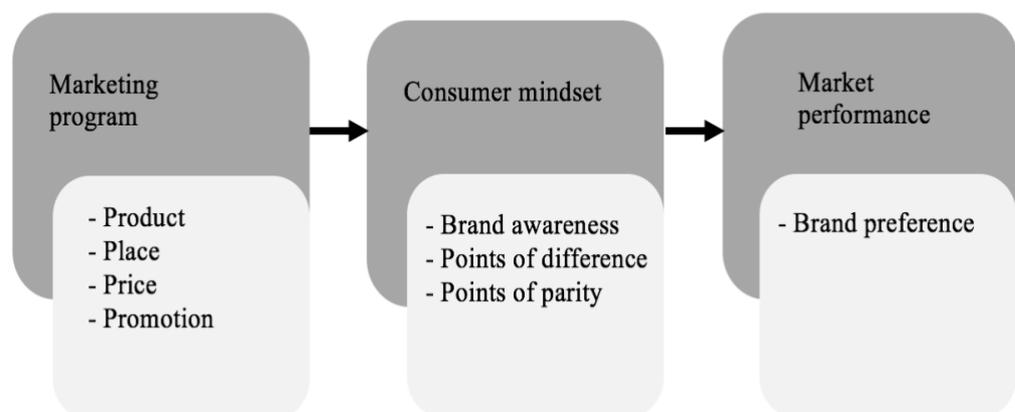
Consumers brand image is cultivated by the total experience a consumer has of a brand (Nandan, 2005), and it is therefore essential for a retail company to focus on forming good customer experiences in every touchpoint with consumers. The customer experience is also identified as a key factor for companies in building brand loyalty (Frederick, 1996; Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros and Schlesinger, 2009). Furthermore, consumers total brand experience is found to influence brand preference as it plays a role in evaluating the effectiveness of marketing activities.

2.3 Brand Value Chain

There have been several concepts that have tried to describe and explain the relationship between brand, marketing actions, and financial outcomes. One of the most well-known academic approaches is the brand value chain which is a structured approach that assess the way marketing activities create brand value. The approach was developed by Keller and Lehmann (2003) and roots from the concept of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). The brand value chain serves as a representation of the basic dimensions of brand equity (Anselmsson and Bondesson, 2015), where brand preference is one of the intangible values that is, as mentioned, used to measure a brands brand equity (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Yoo et al., 2000).

Figure 2.1

Brand value chain



The brand value chain is employed by both practitioners and researchers to separate tangible and intangible values from each other as shown in figure 2.1.

The first element in the brand value chain is the marketing program, which deals with firm-controlled actions that influence the customer mindset. Among others, this element deals with product, price, place and promotion, which is often referred to as the marketing mix (Keller and Lehmann, 2003). Nevertheless, activities in the marketing program influence the customer mindset. Strategic firm-controlled decisions under the customer mindset involves brand awareness and ability to differentiate a company from its competitors through points of parity and points of difference. The outcome of the customer mindset affects market performance, and as positive brand preference strengthens market performance, it is further interesting to investigate which of the actions in the marketing program and customer mindset that are firm-controlled drives brand preference.

2.3.1 Marketing program

Brand preference refers to a more favourable marketing response (Hellier, Geursen, Carr, and Rickard, 2003). The 4 P's in the marketing mix are identified as controllable elements that are likely to influence the consumers purchase and decision process in the marketing program (Kotler, 2003; Brassington and Pettitt, 2003). The four strategic marketing mix elements will be investigated further: promotion, price, product, and place. The chosen factors do not cover all varieties of marketing efforts, but we find them to be representative enough to demonstrate relationships between marketing efforts and the development of brand preference. This does not imply that other marketing mix factors are irrelevant, as the reason for selecting the four areas are purely related to the length and complexity of the study.

Promotion

Several researchers suggest that advertising is one of the most important promotional activities (Berry, 2000; Grace and O’Cass, 2005). Firstly, advertising has the ability to create and improve brand awareness (Rossiter and Percey, 1987; Aaker, 1992; Batra, Lehmann, Burke, and Pae, 1995; Keller 1993; Yoo et al, 2000). Secondly, advertising is found to increase a brands likelihood to be included in consumers consideration set, and thus increase the brand’s market performance (Krishnan and Chakravarti, 1993). Thirdly, according to Yoo et al. (2000) advertising exposure is also found to influence brand awareness and brand preference. Lastly, advertising activities influence consumer attitudes through information cues about the brand (Keller, 1993). Advertising investments have taken a bigger part of companies’ budgets, which indicates the increased importance of promotional activities (Keller, 2008).

Unique advertising messages, such as product differentiation for high-quality products and price promotion messages for cost-price leaders, facilitates a reduction in the receptivity towards competitors’ price promotion messages (Boulding, Lee, and Staelin, 1994). The extent of consumer response to marketing activities are affected by the content, and can influence the attitude either negatively or positively. Based on this, the more positively a promotional activity is evaluated by consumers, the greater the probability of a brand being preferred (Ayanwale, Alimi, and Ayanbimipe, 2005). This example shows that advertising and price strategies are heavily related and can strengthen a brands performance.

Price

Price is an important factor in brand purchase and consumer choice, and is encoded by the consumers to constitute an important component of monetary value perception (Zeithalm, 1988). However, consumers may differ in terms of the price they are willing to pay and the premium that brands are allowed to take versus competitive brands (Stewart, 2003). Additionally, consumers also differ in how they respond to permanent or temporary price adjustments. Price promotions may in fact motivate brand switchers and lead to an increased number of brand trials, and such product experiences in a way of enhancing brand awareness (Keller, 2008). There is conflicting literature related to price promotions effectiveness, most related to its short-term and long-term impact. Ataman, Van

Heerde, and Mela (2010), found that long-term price promotions hurts the brand's equity, whereas short-term price promotions have a small positive effect. Furthermore, unannounced price promotions and price cuts harms brand preference (Boulding, Lee, and Staelin, 1994). However, there are some contradictory findings in this field that may be due to different measurements and research contexts. The price effect is often related to other marketing mix variables that influence brand equity.

Price promotion may also play a role in decreasing price sensitivity (Stewart, 2003). On the other hand, discounting is typically found to decrease price elasticities as it pulls consumers attention on price-oriented cues (Mela, Gupta and Lehmann, 1997). Past research has highlighted the importance of separating responses to regular price changes and promotional price discounts. Moreover, a positive association between price level and perceived quality has been confirmed in several studies (Tellis and Wernerfelt, 1987; Yoo et al., 2000). Research suggests that companies should price their products based on their quality perception in the customer mindset (Alamro and Rowley, 2011). Thus, charging a premium price negatively impacts brand preference when it is not coupled with a high-quality product. On the other hand, when the price is set low and does not promise good quality, consumers may still expect a meaningful price-value relationship. A compromise between price and quality will therefore affect brand preference (Thompson, Strickland, Gamble, Peteraf, Janes, and Sutton, 2013).

Product

A product consists of a set of tangible and intangible attributes and benefits designed to satisfy consumer needs. Consumer perceptions of brand or product attributes positively affect their preferences and attitudes that affects consumers intentions and brand choices (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Bagozzi, 1982; Banks, 1950; Taylor, 2001; Corte et al., 2010). Further consumers perceptions about a brands physical, functional, and utilitarian attributes contribute to a brand experience (Gentile et al., 2007). However, consumer response can differ according to perceptions of benefits and attributes offered by the product or the brand itself (Stewart, 2003). Brands have the ability to enhance perceived quality, increase purchase likelihood, and build equity through product activity (Ataman et al., 2010). Several aspects related to product in the marketing mix have previously

been studied. For instance, several studies have suggested that product line length positively influence brand performance long-term (Ataman, Mela, and Van Heerde, 2008). It is also found that product line length is the most influential aspect among all marketing mix variables as it affects sales both long-term and has the highest total effect. Despite the importance of product line length, advertising and promotions have been researched the most compared to distribution and product of the marketing-mix variables.

Place

Retail distribution plays a significant role as products need to be offered for sale before a purchase can occur. Even though the quality of a product is perfect, it would never sell if the customers do not know how and where it is possible to purchase a certain item. A study by Wilbur and Farris (2013), states that distribution can generate awareness among consumers, and change the consumers perception about a retailer and the brands sold. Due to the critical role of distribution, several researchers have investigated the area heavily. Ataman et al. (2009), found that the sales elasticity of distribution is approximately six times larger than advertising elasticity.

Location may be a crucial factor for consumers as several studies propose that convenient location positively influence brand preference (Laroche and Manning, 1984; Duncan, 2002; Yoon et al., 2009). O’Cass and Grace (2004), suggest that location is an aspect that should be considered in the development phase of a brand. Despite all this work, a lot remains unknown regarding the what factors makes a location convenient.

2.3.2 Customer mindset

Points of Difference and Points of Parity.

Positioning a brand normally starts with establishing a frame of reference that reflects what consumers can expect to achieve by using a certain brand or product (Anderson, Narus, and Van Rossum, 20016). The decision of choosing a proper frame is crucial as it dictates what types of associations that are functioning as points of difference (PoD) and points of parity (PoP). According to Rintamäki and Kuusela (2007), points of difference and points of parity refer to a company’s

ability to differentiate and at the same time being able to have crucial attributes that is required to compete in the market. There are several different definitions of

PoD and PoP, but we have decided to implement definitions by Anderson et al. (2006), where PoD is:

“Points of difference are elements that make the supplier’s offering either superior or inferior to the next best alternative” (p. 94),

and PoP is defined as:

“Points of parity are elements with essentially the same performance or functionality as those of the next best alternative” (p. 94).

Points of parity changes over time aligned with the market and category. Therefore, managers of established brands need to reassess points of parity from time to time because attributes that once were differentiators can develop into requirements (Keller, 2000). On the other hand, marketers can hold off competitors point of difference by creating competitive points of parity. By attacking competitors’ points of parity, a company can draw attention to their own points of difference. Authors highlights that strong, favourable, unique associations that distinguish a brand from others are fundamental to succeed with brand positioning (Anderson, 2006). In developing an effective position, it is crucial that attributes do not contradict one another. For example, a company that positions a brand as “inexpensive” and at the same time assert that it is “of the highest quality”, will have smaller chances to succeed. Developing an effective position requires that a brands points of parity and points of differences are consistent at any point in time. However, as brands age, they have to make sure it stays up-to-date with consumers rapidly changing needs.

Analysis shows that there are three types of brand differences that brands can use to differentiate: brand performance associations, brand imagery associations, and consumer insight associations. Shortly explained, whereas brand performance associations relate to the ways in which a product or service attempts to meet

customers functional needs, brand imagery associations are typically established by depicting who uses the brand and under what circumstances. Lastly, consumer insight associations show consumers that the brand has insight to their problems or goals and show that their brand is the solution. This type of brand differentiation is generally used when a brands performance and imagery do not differ much from other competitors. However, authors of the study argue that using consumer insight as a point of difference is generally less attractive for positioning because insights into consumers goals are easy to emulate.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to whether consumers can recall or recognize a brand, or whether or not consumers know about a brand (Sarigollu and Huang, 2011). Brand awareness is also shown to affect consumer decision-making, especially for low-involvement package goods (Baker, Hutchinson, Moore, and Nedungadi, 1986). Brands that consumers know are more likely to be included in the consumer's consideration set. Marketing activities can improve both breadth and depth of brand awareness, and provide a learning advantage for the brand (Keller, 2008; Keller, 2009). A familiar brand has been shown to increase consumer confidence, positive attitudes towards the brand, and purchase intention (Stewart, Hoeffler, and Keller, 2003). Furthermore, the effect of familiarity mitigates a potential negative impact of a less favourable brand trial experience. Having the ability to reach the consumers when they seek information, and thus increase brand awareness at possible purchase opportunities are crucial (Keller, 2009). Brand awareness is positively related to brand preference and is also associated with increased brand market performance (Sarigollu and Huang, 2011).

2.4 Customer centricity

It is the customer who determines what a business is, what it produces, and whether it prosper (Shah, Rust, and Parasuraman, 2006). Clearly, many firms are still struggling to fully become customer-centric even though researchers, like Levitt (1960), have proposed that firms should not focus on selling products but rather on fulfilling customer needs. However, even though managers seem to declare their commitment to customer centricity, it is far less reflected in the reality (Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin, and Daym, 2006). Nowadays, most

brands seem to be running product-centric companies with hints of customer centricity. In other words, customer centricity seems to be easy to assert but difficult to build and sustain in large companies (Hart, 1999). As customer centricity enables firms to achieve a competitive advantage that has proven to be sustainable and not easily countered by competition, firms that have managed to succeed with customer centricity have gained superior performance and loyal customers (Shah et. al, 2006). The essence of marketing is to anticipate the behaviour of consumers and competitors. Sheth, Sisodia, Sharma (2000), have studied both the factors driving growth of customer-centric marketing as well as the consequences. Customer centric marketing emphasizes understanding and satisfying the needs, wants, and resources of individual consumers rather than those of mass markets or mass segments (Sheth et. al, 2000). Customer-centric marketing aims to assess each customer individually, and thus determine whether to customize a product or standardize the offering. Authors states that customer-centric marketing enhances productivity by focusing on profitable customers and reducing the subsidization of unprofitable customers (Steth et al., 2000).

2.5 Omni-Channel Marketing

An omni-channel marketing strategy has a customer-centric focus, which aims to enable a seamless customer journey irrespective of the channel used. Verhoef et al. (2015, p.176), define omni-channel as a:

“synergistic management of the numerous available channels and customer touchpoints, in such ways that the customer experience across channels and the performance over channels is optimized”.

It is crucial to optimize the performance in all channels to increase customer profitability. From a managerial perspective, knowing the return on investment from all advertising expenditures is necessary for developing an efficient marketing plan (Dinner, Van Heerde, and Neslin, 2014). Omni-channel marketing can also lead to cross-channel effects as consumers preferred purchase channel often differ from the search or advertising medium. This highlights the importance of a company to be visible in all relevant channels, and when it is managed successfully it is likely to expect cross channel effects. Blurring the traditional

cross-channel boundaries to create synergies is essential and require strategic actions (Brynjolfsson et al., 2013).

2.6 Key Performance Indicators

It is difficult for companies to aim for improvement if they do not measure the performance of each action taken. However, it is not an easy task to know what metrics to measure. A study by Pauwels (2015), finds that beyond performance metrics, such as sales and profits, companies should also include consumer and brand metrics, such as customer attitudes. Furthermore, marketing only becomes more accountable once you interpret metrics to take actions based on deep insight. Authors argue that companies only arrive better results if they change what they do (Koen, 2015). According to Germann, Lillien, and Rangaswamy (2013), companies obtain favourable and sustainable performance outcomes through greater use of marketing analytics. Thus, companies who deploy marketing analytics obtain 21% more Return on Assets (ROA) than companies that do not use marketing analytics. The more intense industry competition and more rapidly changing customer preferences, the more positive impact of the deployment of marketing analytics on firm performance (Germann et al., 2013). This highlights the importance and benefits of continuously use data and marketing analytics for decision-making.

2.7 Competitive strategy

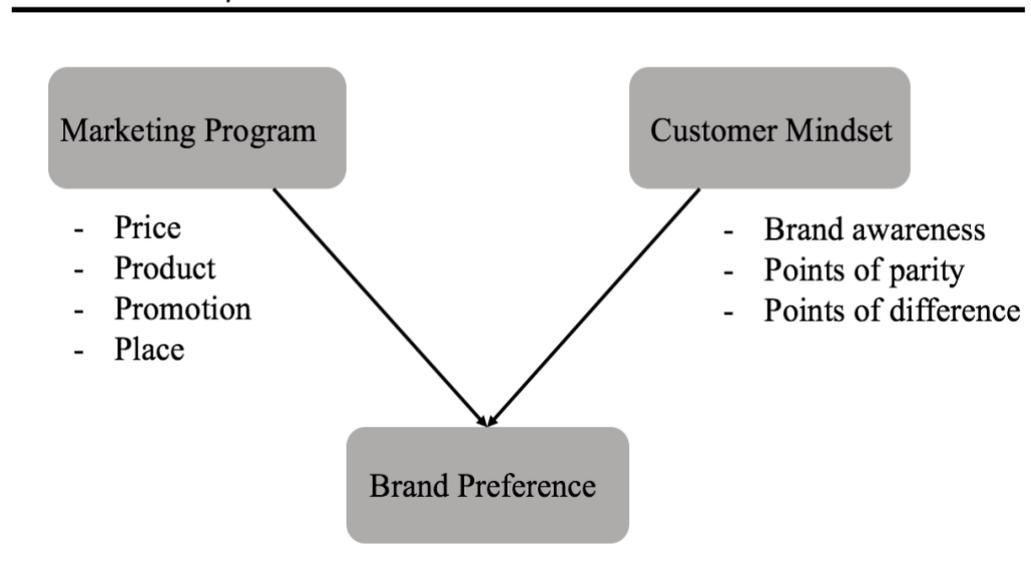
A company's strategy provides direction and guidance in terms of what the company should and should not do. According to Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble (2007), managers need to have a clear business strategy and action plan for competing successfully and operating profitably. The crafting of a strategy represents a managerial commitment to follow a particular course. Consequently, some companies strive to improve their performance by employing strategies aimed at achieving lower costs than rivals, whereas others pursue strategies aimed at achieving product superiority, personalized customer service, or quality dimensions that competitors cannot match. Furthermore, some companies opt for wide product lines, while others concentrate on a narrow product line length. A strategy stands a better chance of succeeding when it is predicted on actions,

business approaches, and competitive moves aimed at appealing to customers in ways that set a company apart from rivals. However, managers must be willing to modify the strategy in response to changing market conditions, new technology, competitor actions, shifting buyer needs and new ideas for improving the strategy. So, crafting strategy is not a one-time event but demands that companies adjust to consumers and markets.

2.8 Construction of the concept

The study aims to illustrate which firm-controlled variables that have an impact on brand preference. The flow of the concept for the present research is therefore shown in figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2
Research concept



Thus, this paper aims to uncover which independent elements of firm-controlled marketing variables that affects the dependent factor, brand preference. The area of focus will be the firm-controlled variables from the marketing program and the customer mindset that might influence brand preference over time.

A proper analysis can help uncovering which firm-controlled marketing strategies affect brand preference. Given the sparse literature, the present study tries to find out:

1. Whether firm-controlled variables influence brand preference
2. Which firm-controlled variables drive brand preference

We believe that having a successful firm-controlled marketing strategy could serve as a central core in increasing brand preference.

3.0 Methodology

We find it suitable to implement a case study approach as we are looking into deeper historical events of brand preference that have occurred in Norwegian retail stores in the period between 2012 and 2017. Given the relatively sparse theory on firm-controlled brand preference elements, we adopt a grounded theory approach (Zaltman, LeMasters, and Heffring, 1982; Glaser and Strauss, 1999). The method is useful in the process of formulating a new theoretical model in cases with lack of prior empirical research; as is the case of firm-controlled drivers of brand preference.

We employ a multiple case study approach as the qualitative methodology. The rationale behind selecting a case study approach is that the study aims to answer “why” and “how” questions (Yin, 2003). In addition, Yin (2009), stresses that the case study approach is applicable when the research focus on contemporary events that does not require control of behavioural events. Additionally, the approach enables an examination towards meaningful and holistic characteristics of real-life events of brand preference in the Norwegian retail industry.

In this study, firm-controlled marketing decisions across several retail companies are investigated to gain a better understanding of the key drivers of brand preference. As mentioned in the literature review, building brand preference is a time-consuming marketing activity, therefore, we obtained values between 2012-

2017 to ensure that the study captures accurate results of consumers brand preference scores related to each retail company. It was essential to include various companies to account for differences within each category.

3.1 Research Design

As mentioned, our study is based on a multiple-case design where multiple cases of the same phenomenon are used to identify cross-case results. Furthermore, Yin (2014), states that a multiple-case design allows the researchers to collect richer and stronger results of evidence than can be achieved by any single case-study. The case study approach was considered to be the optimal design as we are interested in finding cases that captures the evolvement of brand preference in Norwegian retail stores. It also enables a deeper understanding of the reasoning's behind the increased brand preference over a span of five years (Hanson and Grimmer, 2007).

3.2 Case information

The present study aims to cover a wide range of different industries within retail stores to secure for varieties within each category, and obtain a real representation of the retail industry in Norway. The importance of having a broad set of categories within the retail industry is to be able to further investigate and compare drivers of brand preference in later analysis. However, in the attempt to capture key drivers of brand preference, it is crucial that the data set consists of numbers from each time period being analysed. In order to maintain the consistency of the data, two data collection methods were used; documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews (Yin, 2014).

In order to increase reliability of this case study, an interview protocol was devised (Pettigrew, 1997). In each company, the main contact persons, such as CEO and Marketing- and Sales Managers were interviewed. Conducting the interviews with top management is usually a more reliable source than for people with lower ranks (Philips, 1981). Each separate interview was transcribed no more than 48 hours after it was conducted in regard to secure clarity and data saturation.

With the intent to increase the quality of the current study, we employ Yin's (2014), strategies to shine light on the concerns of construct validity and external validity. Construct validity was pursued by having multiple sources of evidence, whereas by matching proposed patterns to research internal validity was addressed.

3.3 Case screening

Given the nature of the chosen methodology a total of seven case studies were selected corresponding to the evolvement of their brand preference during 2012-2017. The cases were selected using theoretical sampling instead of purely relying on statistical reasons (Eisenhardt, 1989). The sampling is therefore not random, but is needed to uncover specific cases to extend existing theory. The case selection process is as follows:

Firstly, secondary data from Kantar TNS database called "Forbruker og Media" containing in total 220 companies in 22 different categories within the Norwegian retail industry was obtained. The database was used to conduct multiple push-pull analysis which contains measurements of brand preference and market share results for each category. The results from push-pull analyses can be found in appendix 2. In the Push/Pull analysis brand preference is measured on a scale from 0-100 for each category, where 100 is the highest score. Head of Digital and Technology Enabled Research in Kantar TNS confirmed that the Push/Pull analysis over several years is a good indicator of brand preference. We extracted the raw data from the database to obtain individual values for all companies in the 22 industries. Table 3.1 illustrates all retail categories that are a part of the database.

Table 3.1

Overview of retail stores categories

Pharmacy	Books
Children's equipment	Hardware
Car accessories	Paint shops
Electronic appliances	Jeweller
Kitchenware	Florist
Health food store	Interior
Clothing stores	Home & Furniture
Optometrists	Cosmetics
Travel goods	Footwear
Sportswear	IT & Communication
Music	Miscellaneous

Out of this, 50 retailers were removed because of missing data for some or all five periods. Of the remaining (N=170), we only selected retail companies that had a significant increase in their brand preference between the period 2012-2017. The percentage change in brand preference for each company was calculated. This provided an overview of the evolvement of brand preference over time. Whereas most companies had small developments, we could see a clear distinction between the companies that managed to increase brand preference with at least 15% over the 5-year period. After removing companies with less than 15% increase in brand preference, 16 companies in 11 categories were remaining in the database.

3.4 Expert interview process

Semi-structured expert interviews were planned and executed in order to uncover reasoning's for how the retail companies successfully managed to increase brand preference. The reasoning behind having the expert interviews semi-structured is

that the participants consist of busy executives, and that the goal is to obtain information on the subject of interest (Kumar, 2015). It also provides the possibility to clarify any doubts that the respondent may have during the interview process (Monk, 1987). This procedure is ideal due to the complexity of the topic and the information requirements.

3.5 Interview procedure

In order to ensure that the collected data is as unbiased as possible, we conducted a pre-test interview with an expert to ensure that the wording and questions were clear and had high quality. The wording in the interview questions were adjusted based on feedback from our test interview, supervisor, and Kantar TNS to ensure the quality of the questions. In order to avoid active listening, the questions were carefully worded to extract participants' responses in a nondirective manner (McCracken, 1988). The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1.

The 16 retail companies that were identified during the screening process were contacted by phone or email. To obtain correct information and high quality about each case, representatives with deep knowledge about the company and research topic was required. A total of seven semi-structured in depth-interviews were conducted of company representatives having the time, capacity and willingness to participate. In order to avoid language barriers, the interviews were conducted in Norwegian.

Prior to the interviews, each case was examined to increase our familiarity with the company and their overall brand preference evolution. The length of the interviews varied from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. The researchers loosely followed the interview guide consisting of 19 questions in total. To protect the anonymity of the participating companies and their strategies, company names are not identifiable. In the interest of transparency, the interviewees positions and the retail category are reported. More detailed information about the interviewees is shown in table 3.2. With permission, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure details and avoid possible misunderstandings, and later the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Notes were also taken by computer during all interviews,

which allowed us to take detailed notes. Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached (Patton, 2002). As a rule of thumb, five cases are needed to study complex issues and to accomplish sufficient saturation (Yin, 2009). We gained rich case information of firm controlled marketing variables impact on brand preference through the in-depth interviews. After close to little or no new information was obtained regarding the research objective, we decided that the point of saturation was fulfilled from the final two interviews. Sample details are provided in tables 3.2.

Table 3.2

Sample details

Profile		Interviews
Company	Category	Seniority of the interviewees
A	Jewellery	Marketing Manager
B	Books	Marketing Manager
C	Optometrists	Marketing Manager
D	Sportswear	Marketing Manager
E	Optometrists	CEO
F	Pharmacy	Sales Manager
G	Pharmacy	Sales Manager

The informants were asked “open” questions about their personal beliefs about brand preference throughout the interview, which enabled them to present their material and meanings on their own terms. These questions appeared interspersed with the intention to evoke greater insights into specific inquiries, such as detailed information about particular strategies and marketing programs.

As the collection of data from the interview process progressed, notes from the

interviews were reviewed. In joint discussions, emerging ideas were defined as well as specific themes and directions for subsequent research. In the next section, the participants' insights and themes we selected serve as a base for discussion on three different criteria's:

1. In terms of firm and category, is the insight or the idea applicable beyond a particular context?
2. Was the idea mentioned by multiple interviewees (Bendapudi and Leone, 2002)?
3. Does the idea provide more interesting and useful conclusions that goes beyond the "obvious" (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990)?

Ideas that are category specific or only mentioned in one case are not included in the analysis. For example, Company B, stressed the importance of having a good loyalty programme. As only one company mentions this aspect, it is not discussed further in the analysis. Similarly, we do not discuss obvious ideas, such as the importance of having skilful employees. Instead, the main focus is discussing factors that were reported influencing brand preference and factors that are not discussed in literature.

4.0 Results analysis

4.1 Database

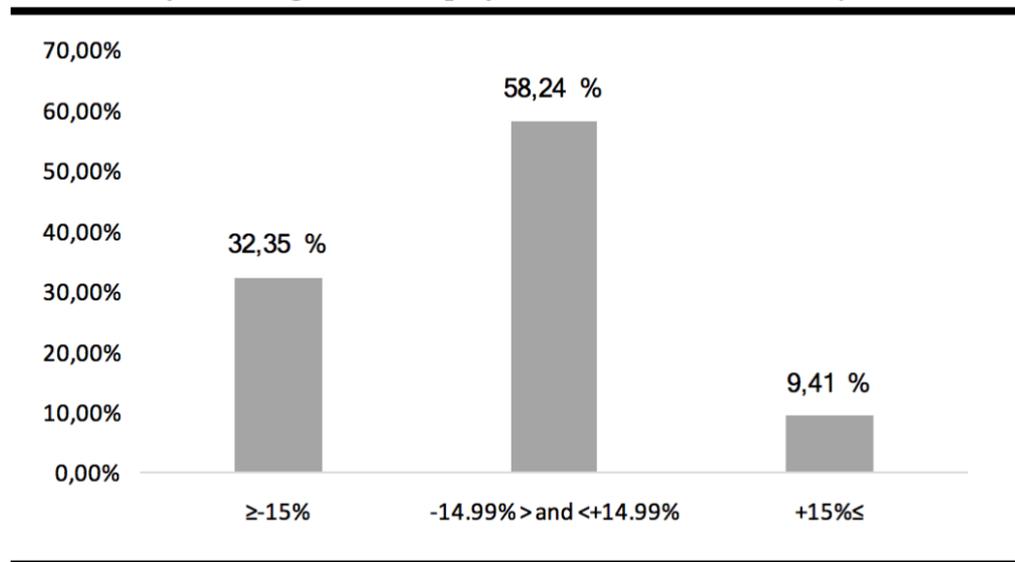
The database obtained from Kantar TNS had some interesting findings. By looking more closely at the individual brand preference scores, we can see that the scores vary from year to year. This supports the mentioned importance of looking at brand preference over a longer period of time to see the overall direction and evolution.

Out of the total database (N=170), consisting of all retail companies with reported brand preference scores in all periods, results can be found in figure 4.1. Less than 10% out of all companies had a significant increase in brand preference

(+15% \leq). One can see that 58.24% out of the companies in the database neither gained (+14.99% $>$) or suffered a big loss (-14.99% $>$) in brand preference over the period. Lastly, 32.35% have suffered a significant loss of 15% or more in the performance of brand preference. The development of brand preference from 2012 to 2017, shows that it has slowly decreased over time across all retail stores (-7.46%). As expected, the distribution shows that most companies do not manage to increase brand preference significantly, and is shown in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1

Overview of %-change in brand preference evolvment over 5-years



4.2 Comparison analysis

A comparison case analysis was conducted to identify and interpret similarities across the seven cases that was analysed. Firstly, on the basis of our data collection, we were able to identify possible drivers of brand preference. Table 4.1, highlights examples of firm-controlled activities taken by the companies.

Table 4.1

Examples of firm controlled activities

Company	Examples
Company A	Consistent price strategy with the main focus on being available for the customer when the need for the product arises. Location had a large impact on all marketing mix activities.
Company B	Predicted price strategy focusing on offering customer realistic and short-term discounts. One of the main focus areas throughout the period was to optimize all store locations.
Company C	Put a lot of effort in communication to reach a broader audience. Use consumer analysis to adjust accordingly to consumer needs. Consistent price strategy focusing on offering the best prices.
Company D	One of the main focus areas has been to have a large selection of attractive brands. Consistent price strategy with the main focus on offering the best prices and having the best short-term discounts Using market analytics to gain a deeper knowledge of what the customers wants.
Company E	Main strategy to differentiate itself from the competitors by having a consistent price premium strategy aiming for a niche market. Furthermore, having an exclusive and large assortment of products has been a main focus. Frequently investing in market and consumer research to use data
Company F	Highlights the importance of having a consistent price strategy and adapting the product assortment accordingly to customer needs. Focus on new segments.
Company G	The main strategy is to keep communication and price strategies consistent and using data to better understand customers. Tries to differentiate itself from the competitors by updating the store image.

Brand preference. This section captures results of the two first parts of the semi-structured interview where we got a deep understanding of the CEO, Marketing- and Sales Managers, thoughts around brand preference, brand building, focus-areas in the top-management, goals, and key performance indicators. Analysis and interpretation of the in-depth expert interviews show that six out of seven cases reported the importance of working strategically to improve brand preference. All companies, except F reported that they believe having a clear concise strategy is crucial in building brand preference:

“I believe sticking to the original strategy is the main reason behind our success in building brand preference. The main problem with the retail industry is that there is too much focus on lost revenues, which moves the focus away from the strategy and brand building. This destroys the opportunity to capture a clear position in the market” (CEO, company E).

Additionally, with having a clear strategy, company E and G highlights the importance of differentiate themselves from the competitors and argue this as an important factor to why they have succeeded.

“A few years back, brand analysis showed us that consumers did not have any associations with us. Therefore, we did not stand out at any point. We wanted to be a top-of-mind brand for consumers that enjoys fashion and wants to stand out. In order to succeed, you have to do research and play hard to reach your goals and to differentiate from the competitors” (CEO, company E).

It is interesting to notice that the majority of company representatives believe the customer experience as crucial in building brand preference. Further, company A stressed that customers are the company’s most important asset, therefore, it is important to adjust to their preferences.

When asked what the representatives believes are the drivers to brand preference company C, D, E and F answered “communication” as a one important key driver. However, when asked in the following question what they believe are the reasons for why they have managed to increase their own brand preference, it did not appear in any of the respondents’ answers. This result highlights the importance of having control questions. Contrary, there seem to be repeating reasons to why companies fail to build brand preference. Firstly, company A, B, and D strongly believes not being present where the consumers are, is one reason why companies do not succeed with brand preference.

“They do not manage to be present where the consumers are. They are used to put that advertisement in the paper, and fails to meet the consumers in the right channels with the right products. Consumers change all the time, so it is crucial to change along with them.” (Marketing Manager, Company A)

Secondly, another interesting argued reason from company D, F, and G is that companies fail when there is a distinction between communication and customer experience.

“Unfortunately, not everyone understands why it is important to have clear guidelines for managing communication. The customers will not have a good experience in-store if the experience does not reflect what is communicated through the use of various marketing activities. All marketing actions have to reflect what is true and need to be consistent” (Marketing Manager, Company G).

The present research suggests that building brand awareness and brand loyalty should be a goal with the marketing efforts.

Additionally, the companies mention building an omni-channel, good employment conditions, and product development as other goals they have had between 2012-2017. A common denominator for all companies is that they have long-term goals. Hence, all companies except company B mentions measurement of activities and the use of key performance indicators actively as one way they strategically work to reach their long-term goals. Even though companies measure tangible assets, several also invest in marketing and consumer analytics to gain insight about intangible assets regarding the brand and market knowledge.

Firm-Controlled elements. In order to strategically improve brand preference, it is important to investigate the firm-controlled variables that companies can take advantage of to increase brand preference. Firstly, all companies reported that being visible in multiple channels are key due to both the competitive landscape and being customer-oriented.

“Opening our online store enabled us to offer a more seamless customer journey across all platforms. Adapting technology and offer good solutions for the customers from the beginning is key. In order to be where the customer wants us, it is important to be visible both online and in stores when the need arises” (Marketing Manager, Company E).

As expected, all companies report an increased budget in digital advertising compared to traditional advertising. So, there seem to be a common opinion that digital platforms have become increasingly important over the years.

Place is found to be an important variable in the Norwegian retail industry. All companies reported that evaluating store location is a continuous process and have

to be evaluated frequently. Location is reported to be an important aspect, as it cannot be assumed that the chosen location is optimal:

“One main goal with our distribution has been optimizing store locations. We have made adjustments and opened several stores as well as closing some stores in less attractive market places across Norway. We carefully evaluate and consider new locations by looking at for instance the market, inhabitants, and the number of possible customer. We do not enter a new market or city in Norway if we don’t get the location we want” (Marketing Manager, Company A).

The interviewees highlight the importance of a good distribution strategy in terms of optimized store locations. In providing good customer experiences, being where the customers are and where they want is reported to be essential. All companies stressed that they strongly believe that store location is a driver of brand preference, as it is a such essential part of a company’s touchpoints with the consumers.

All companies further shed light to the importance of having a consistent main message in the communication on all platforms and the respective channels:

“We have purposefully decided to not make any drastic changes to our main message. For example, if the main message is changed drastically too often, the customers would end up being confused and have difficulties identifying with the brand” (Marketing Manager, Company D).

Price strategies seems to also play a role for the companies that have successfully improved brand preference. All companies also reported that they have kept their price strategy consistent in the analysed period. However, what type of price strategy the different companies have varies. Company A, B, C, and D reported to have a low-cost price strategy, whereas company E pursue a premium price strategy, and company F and G both have a best-cost price strategy.

“Our price strategy has stayed consistent where we aim to be the cheapest alternative. But, we have reduced the use of extreme and unrealistic offers and instead focused more on having realistic prices and short-term discounts that are less aggressive than some of our competitors. We have seen that price cuts and extreme sales hurts the brand more in the long-run.” (Marketing Manager, Company A).

This result indicates that there is not one single price strategy that drives brand preference. However, it should be pointed out that the way companies pursue the price strategy along with other marketing variables, such as advertising in the right channels, is proposed to influence brand preference.

As already mentioned, several companies highlighted a concise and long-term strategy, as an important factor in building brand preference. This also seem to apply for changes in the brand. All companies report close to no changes in the initial brand, except small changes in logos, upgraded stores, etc. Managers express a big fear to diminish the brand by doing big changes. However, even though participants are careful with touching the brand, all companies except companies A and F, have developed new segments and had a focus on targeting a broader customer-base.

“We have purposefully stayed true to the brand by not drastically change it as we previously had a brand that changed too much and that took a long time to build up again... So, making drastic changes to a brand without a purpose or a long-term strategy is very risky. We have however, focused on adjusting the brand to make it more attractive to the consumers by updating the store image and separate ourselves from our competitors” (CEO, Company E).

Along with new segments, the majority of the companies have also increased the number of brands. However, three out of seven companies report that they have become more selective to what kind of brands they allow into their portfolio.

“The number of brands has increased a bit over the years. However, we have become very good in evaluating and testing brands before they become a part of our portfolio. The process is carefully evaluated, and each brand is tested in a small selection of stores to see whether the brand performs or not.” (Marketing Manager, Company A).

Other explanations of brand preference. Finally, company C and D argue CSR as something that also could be an important driver of brand performance, and even be a decisive factor to why a consumer prefer one brand above another.

The themes that was uncovered during interviews are shown in table 4.2. The interviews carried out interesting findings that will be discussed further in the discussion part.

Table 4.2

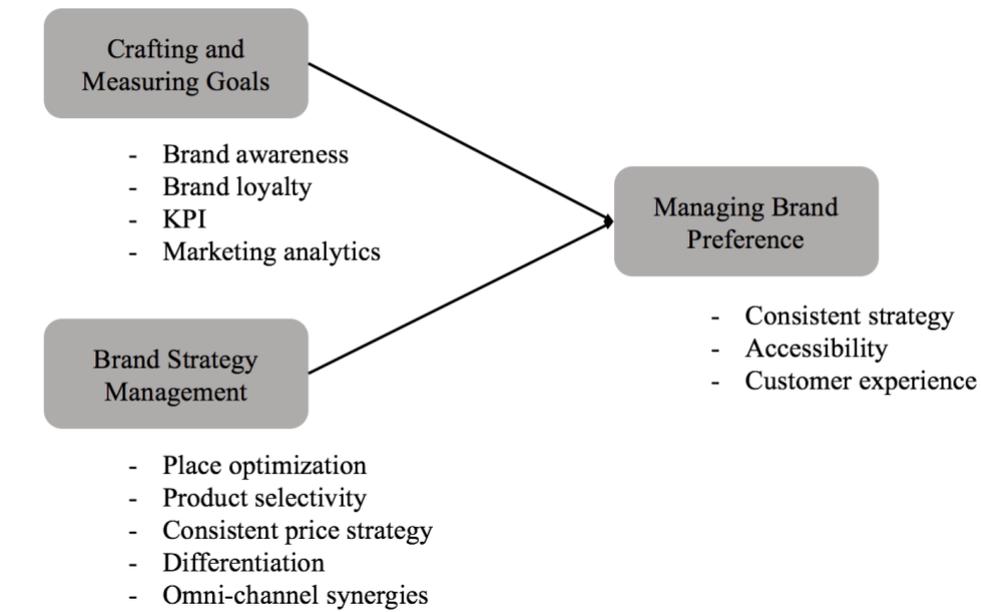
Themes uncovered during interviews

	Themes
Managing brand preference	Consistent strategy Accessibility Customer experience
Crafting and measuring goals	Brand Awareness Brand Loyalty KPI Marketing Analytics
Brand Strategy Management	Place optimization Product selectivity Consistent price strategy Differentiation Omni-channel synergies

5.0 Discussion

In extension to the existing literature on brand preference, we draw on communalities from the interviews, and propose a model for firm-controlled variables that influence brand preference. The model is illustrated in figure 5.1 As the study progressed, it became clear that some marketing activities influence brand preference long-term. Based on the findings, we propose a model with two drivers to managing brand preference: 1) crafting and measuring goals, and 2) brand strategy management.

Figure 5.1
Drivers of brand preference



5.1 Managing brand preference

Prior theory conceptualizes brand preference from the consumer-perspective as either an antecedent or a consequence of brand equity and brand loyalty (Keller, 2003; Chang and Liu, 2009). In contrast, the concept “Managing Brand Preference” conceptualize brand preference from the company-perspective and uncover firm-controlled prerequisites of brand preference that retail companies can manage and improve. First, the results demonstrate that a clear and consistent strategy is important in building brand preference. Aligned with existing theory, companies need to have a clear business strategy for competing successfully and operating profitably. It should also represent a managerial commitment to follow a particular course (Thompson et al., 2007). Secondly, company representatives argue that companies have to manage the customer experience in order to manage brand preference. According to Schwarts (2004) consumers rely on their experiences to judge between alternatives and make choices. Further, brand image, being the total experience a consumer has of a brand, is found to influence brand preference, and plays a role in evaluating the effectiveness of marketing activities (Nandan, 2005). Thus, our model proposes that managing customer experience as a second prerequisite for companies to build brand preference. Thirdly, in our study, we find that companies that have succeeded with

building brand preference are accessible on all platforms and offer a more seamless customer journey. Further, it is argued that the key is to adapt to new technology, offer good solutions for the customers from the beginning, and to be accessible both online and in stores. Hence, we draw on the commonalities among theory about brand preference, and propose that Managing brand preference is the basis of being able to build brand preference long term. Thus, three prerequisites for being able to manage brand preference is proposed: 1) Consistent strategy, 2) Accessibility, and 3) Customer experience.

5.2 Crafting and measuring goals

“Crafting and measuring goals” is identified as the first driver of brand preference. The concept covers the company’s goals and address actions taken to reach them. The concept is divided in two, where 1) “Crafting” defines what the goals should be and 2) “Measuring” involves how the goals should be measured. In our study, we find that a majority of the companies have a parent objective to increase both brand awareness and brand loyalty. Researchers finds that brand awareness can be measured by brand preference, and is often seen as a company objective (Cobb-Walgren, 1995; Sarigollu and Huang, 2011). Consistent with prior theory, brand awareness is often outlined as a desired outcome of performing marketing activities successfully. Similarly, prior studies have linked brand preference as either an antecedent or consequence of brand loyalty (Keller, 2003; Chang, and Liu, 2009). As both goals are linked to brand preference, this indicates that brand loyalty and brand awareness are long-term goals that also influence companies brand preference performance. It can be argued that both brand loyalty and brand awareness have a positive influence on brand preference.

The second aspect of crafting and measuring goals involves measurement. Most companies were found to actively measure the effect of all activities using various KPI’s. More specifically, we found that revenues, sales figures, and brand tracking were measured continuously. Furthermore, company representatives revealed that marketing analytics is important in their decision-making as it provides deep knowledge about the market and their customers. Previous research stresses the importance of interpreting metrics and use the insight to take actions (Pauwels, 2015). Additionally, the use of marketing analytics leads to better

performance (Germann et al., 2013). Having both the findings and theory in mind, we propose that measurements is an important element that influence brand preference.

Thus, two drivers that companies should include to succeed with crafting and measuring goals is proposed; 1) Brand awareness and brand loyalty, 2) KPI and marketing analytics.

5.3 Brand strategy management

The data collected from the companies strongly suggest that brand preference management depends on brand strategy management. The following brand strategy management drivers surfaced in the process of this study, and are predictors of brand preference: 1) Place optimization, 2) Product selectivity, 3) Consistent price strategy, 4) Differentiation, and 5) Omni-channel synergies.

Place optimization. We find that several companies emphasize the importance of optimizing store locations. Place refers to the extent to which a company is able to carefully evaluate new locations, and to what extent a company is able to be where the customers are to provide a good customer experience. Research shows that convenient location impacts brand preference positively (Laroche and Manning, 1984). Therefore, this study propose that place is one contributor within brand strategy management.

Product selectivity. The study demonstrated that companies have become more selective to what kind of brands they allow into their portfolio. This result provide support that consumer perceptions about brands physical, functional, and utilitarian attributes contribute to brand experience, and indicates that putting an effort in a careful evaluation when selecting brands will pay off (Gentile et al., 2007). Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) found that brand attributes affect brand preference positively, which is supported by our findings. We propose that product selectivity have an impact on brand preference within brand strategy management.

Consistent price strategy. Price refers to the extent which a company is able to have a consistent price strategy long-term. Several companies stated that their ability to keep their price strategy at a fair price level without large discounts over time as one important strategic action to build brand preference. Ataman et al. (2010), uncovered that long-term price promotions harms the brand and the company's performance. The trend among a majority of the companies, involves reducing the amount of using large discounts, and instead offer a more predictable and consistent price strategy to reduce confusion among consumers. The finding supports our thoughts regarding theory and therefore predicts price to be an important element of increasing brand preference.

Differentiation. Differentiation refers to how companies strategically work and aim to differentiate themselves from their competitors. In accordance with the theory, the majority of participants highlight differentiation as an essential part of managing brand preference. Looking at theory, Anderson (2006), states that brand preference is a benefit of being able to differentiate the brand from its competitors. Our study predicts that companies that are able to differentiate themselves from competitors appear to also manage a higher brand preference.

Omni-channel synergies. We define company's strategic actions to create a more seamless customer journey to match theory about omni-channel (Verhoef et al., 2015). In addition to creating synergies across platforms, the concept of omni-channel involves management and optimizing performance over multiple channels. This finding also highlights the importance of cross-channel marketing, as consumers preferred purchase channel may differ from the advertising or search medium (Dinner et al., 2014). This study thereby predicts that omni-channel synergies has a positive impact on brand preference.

Thus, five marketing activities is proposed to be drivers of brand strategy management, and should be implemented.

5.3 Managerial implications

From the academic point of view, this research deals with an existing gap in brand preference literature and opens up a broad range of research opportunities, as

much theory in the field of brand preference is studied from the consumer-perspective (Bass and Talarzyk, 1972; Ebrahim, Ghoneim, Irani, and Fan, 2016). The present study also offers several implications for marketing managers to consider. From the managerial perspective, this research provides important managerial implications as it proposes a model of key-drivers that should be implemented to successfully improve brand preference. Furthermore, this study provides managers scope to reflect on the importance of firm-controlled variables in improving value in non-tangible assets such as brand preference. Consequently, this study shows top-managements the importance of having marketing goals in addition to revenues and sales figures. Managers cannot expect to improve brand preference by only focusing on the financial benefits that brand preference is found to have on brand equity. Companies have to strategically work towards the goal without being impatient. Brand preference takes time to build and increase, and is not something that is developed after a short period of time. Being able to manage brand preference, companies have to work efficiently across several functions. Thus, companies should implement well-thought marketing activities with a long-term perspective to enable themselves managing brand preference.

5.4 Limitations

The present study also comes with some limitations. There are four limitations in the design of the study that may have prevented us from obtaining proper results.

First, the present study lack quantitative gauges, such as regression, due to the grounded theory approach. This restricted our abilities to uncover the importance of each identified driver and their effect sizes except the fact that they are likely to influence brand preference. However, the developed model is testable using quantitative methods.

Second, the categories of retail companies that was chosen for analysis may limit the generalizability of the obtained results. Since only a few categories are presented in the expert interviews, there might be underlying peculiarities in the categories of the study that are category-specific in the obtained sample. To optimise the study, all categories should be represented. As we only assess firm-controlled elements, other factors such as the external environment are not taken

into account. This does not mean that other variables are unlikely to also have an impact on brand preference.

Third, this study did not control for companies that did not manage to strengthen brand preference. Despite adding control questions during the interviews, this study did not include cases of companies that were unable to increase their brand preference. Adding a control group may lead to more defined dissimilarities and drivers of brand preference.

Finally, related to the expert interviews, interviewer bias may occur despite practising, and adjusting the wording to ensure questions were fully understood prior to the study. Further, by not presenting the questions on beforehand, interviewees might obtain knowledge about marketing activities that was forgotten at the time of the interview, which could be of importance for the present study. One solution to this limitation is to bring different perspectives to bear purposefully results (Flick, 2014). However, considering the extent and time limit of the paper, conducting several interviews with different representatives from each company was not within authors capacity.

These limitations should definitely be taken into account when interpreting our results. However, despite the current limitations, we believe that the present study offers several important contributions.

5.5 Proposition for future research

Our results uncover a proposed model of firm-controlled marketing variables that are long-term drivers for brand preference. From the academic point of view, this research deals with existing gaps in building brand preference literature from the retail company-perspective, and opens broad research opportunities. As our study mainly focus on construction theory instead of testing it, future research may test the results obtained in the model quantitatively to measure the effectiveness and the relationship between each driver. In addition, researchers could test for external factors and other non-firm controlled variables that are likely to have an impact on brand preference.

Moreover, this study did not investigate differences in brand preference within the different categories. Therefore, a proposed direction for future research is to uncover whether categorical differences affects the drivers of brand preference. In addition, future research would also benefit from including other industries to obtain more generalizable results. Existing literature has also stressed the importance of further contribution in this area (Ebrahim et al., 2016), and would therefore be an important aspect to further investigate to obtain more generalizable results.

6. Conclusion

Marketing managers spend billions of NOK annually on their marketing activities, but few studies address firm-controlled variables and systematically evaluate brand preference scores long-term. On the basis of the themes that emerged from the present research and ideas in the extant literature, we propose a new perspective on the concept of brand preference, and identify factors that influence consumer brand preference. A new model is proposed, and it includes two drivers of firm-controlled variables that influence brand preference.

Our results indicate that firm-controlled variables have an impact on managing brand preference, where “crafting and measuring goals” is the first driver and “brand strategy management” is the second. All drivers include steps and actions that could to be taken by a company and enable them to manage brand preference.

The present study shed light to several issues of managerial importance and propose several research issues that needs further investigation and clarification. We hope that the present study provides an impetus for future research regarding this important topic.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Intervjuer:

Dato:

Tid intervjuet startet: Tid intervjuet ble avsluttet:

Brief: Hei “Navn”, takk for at du tar deg tid til å delta i vår studie. Vi gjennomfører for tiden en studie med mål om å avdekke drivere til merkevarepreferanse i detaljvarehandelen. Målet med dette intervjuet er å avdekke hva de enkelte bedriftene har gjort, og om det er noen likhetstrekk blant bedriftene som har klart å styrke merkevarepreferansen. Vi ønsker å spesifisere at det er ingen gale svar, og all informasjon vil være til hjelp for å gjennomføre denne studien. Har du noen spørsmål før vi starter intervjuet?

1. Hva tror du er driverne til merkevarepreferanse? (som “Firma X” selv har kontroll over og kan påvirke)
2. Hva tror du er grunnen til at “Firma X” lykkes med å styrke (oppretholde) merkevarepreferansen i perioden 2012-2017?
3. Hva var målet med markedsføringen i perioden 2012-2017? (bygge kjennskap, merkeverdi, etc). Har målet/fokus endret seg?
4. Kan du kort forklare hvordan dere systematisk jobbet for å nå dette målet?
5. Hvordan benytter dere KPI'er for å måle resultatet av markedsrettede tiltak? (I så fall hvilke KPI'er? Er det noen KPI'er du skulle ønske dere målte?)
6. På hvilken måte har merkevarebygging vært diskutert i toppledelsen og med styret i perioden 2012-2017?
7. Har dere investert i markedsanalyser i perioden 2012-2017, og hvordan bruker dere innsikten? (for økt innsikt i for eksempel merkevare og forbrukere)
8. Hvorfor tror du de fleste firmaer ikke lykkes i å styrke merkevarepreferansen på lang sikt?
9. Hvordan var konkurransesituasjonen i markedet i perioden mellom 2012-2017? (var den sterkt preget av enkelte ting som mange nye aktører, netthandel etc, eller var den stabil?)
10. Har distribusjonen til “firma X” endret seg i perioden 2012-2017? (har dere åpnet flere butikker, lansert nettbutikk etc)

11. Har hovedbudskapet i kommunikasjonen blitt endret mellom 2012-2017?
(hva er den endret fra/til og hva var formålet bak endringen?)
12. Hva var “Firma X” sin prisstrategi i perioden 2012-2017? (Har det vært noen endringer i perioden, i så fall hvilke?)
13. Hvor stor andel av budsjettet har dere allokert til investering i reklame både tradisjonell og digitalt? (trenger bare ca. ande, har det vært noen store endringer fra et år til et annet? eks dobling av budsjett)
14. Har det vært noen merkelige endringer i merkevaren i perioden 2012-2017?
(nytt navn, nytt budskap, fokus på nye segmenter)
15. Hvor mange merkevarer distribuerer dere? (har det vært noen merkelige endringer i antall merkevarer i perioden 2012-2017?)

Kontrollspørsmål og avslutning:

16. Hva tror du er grunnen til at konkurrentene til “firma X” ikke lykkes i å styrke merkevarepreferansen mellom 2012-2017?
17. Er det noen områder du tenker kan være viktig mtp merkevarepreferanse som vi ikke har vært innom?
18. Er det noe mer du ønsker å tilføye før vi avslutter intervjuet?

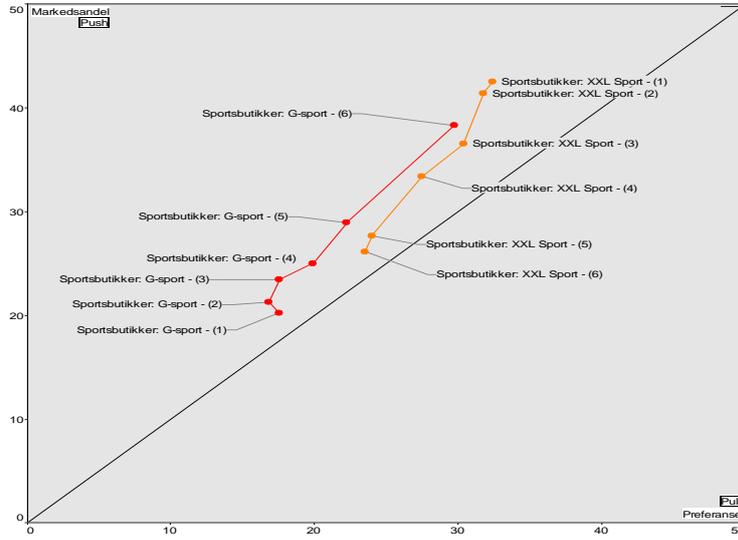
Vi ønsker å takke for tiden du har tatt deg til å hjelpe oss med vår studie.

Appendix 2: Push/Pull analyses

Nedbrytning: Hele befolkningen

Målgruppe: Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen
Målgrupp størrelse:

22. mars 2018



PUSH/PULL

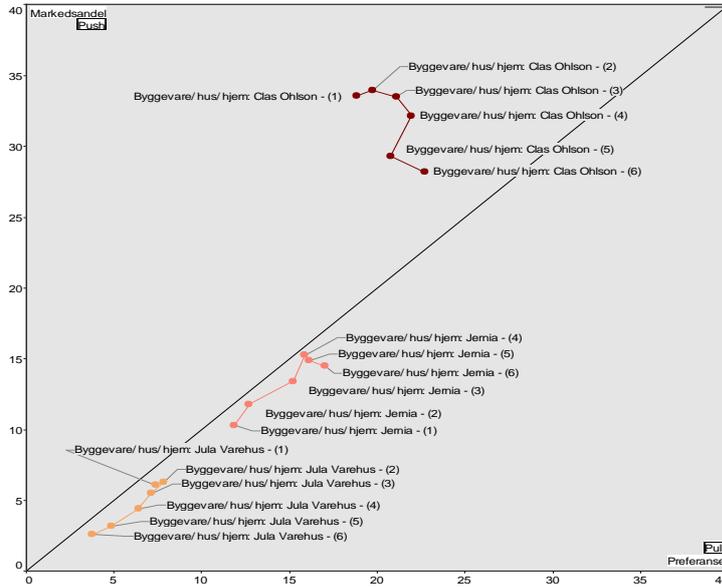
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Gallup PC 6.15-03 (Build date: May 15 2017)

Nedbrytning: Hele befolkningen

Målgruppe: Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen
Målgrupp størrelse:

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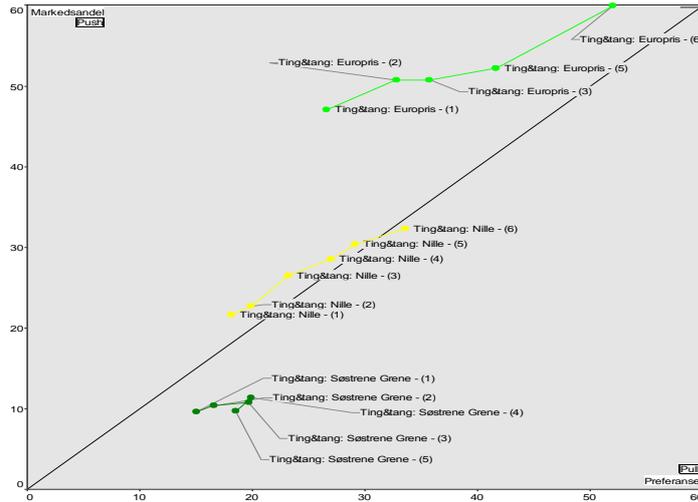
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Gallup PC 6.15-03 (Build date: May 15 2017)

Nedbrytning: Hele befolkningen

Målgruppe: Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen
Målgruppestørrelse:

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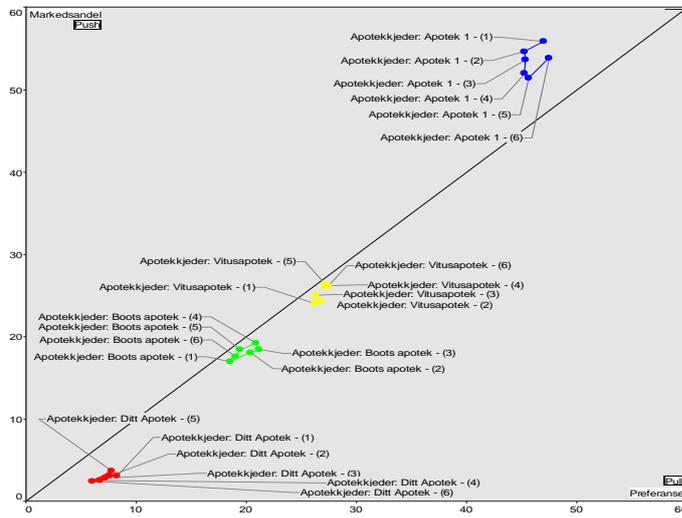
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Gallup PC 6.15-03 (Build date: May 15 2017)

Nedbrytning: Hele befolkningen

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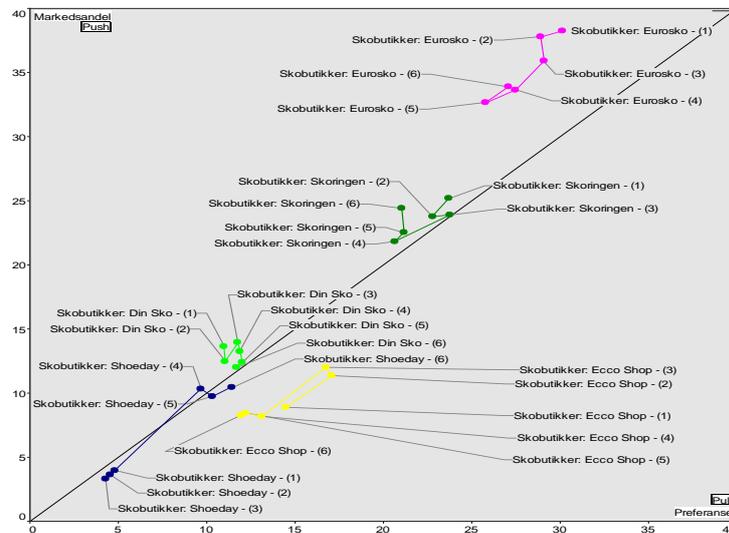
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Gallup PC 6.15-03 (Build date: May 15 2017)

Nedbrytning: Hele befolkningen

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Målgruppestørrelse:

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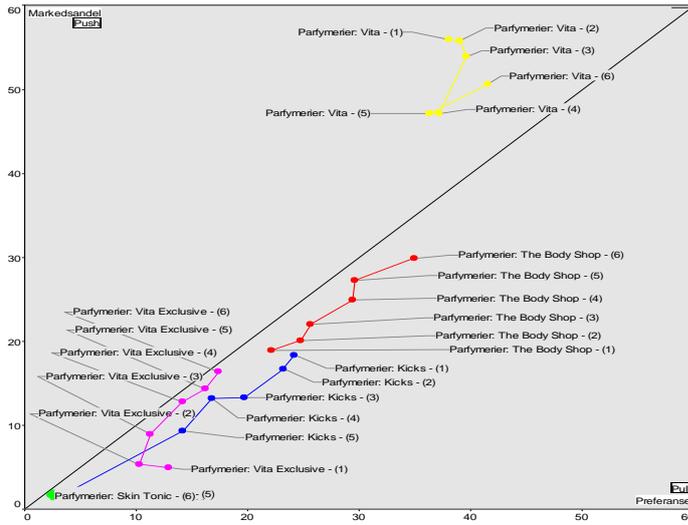
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Gallup PC 6.15-03 (Build date: May 15 2017)

Nedbrytning: Hele befolkningen

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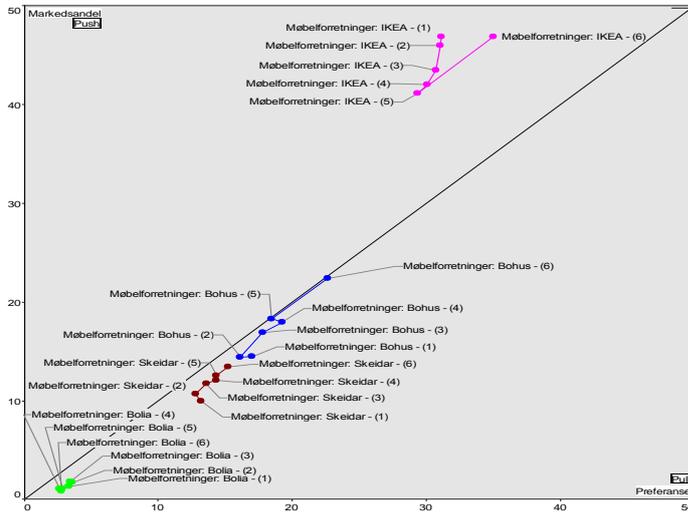
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Gallup PC 6.15-03 (Build date: May 15 2017)

Nedbrytning: Hele befolkningen

Målgruppe: Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen
Målgruppeterrelse:

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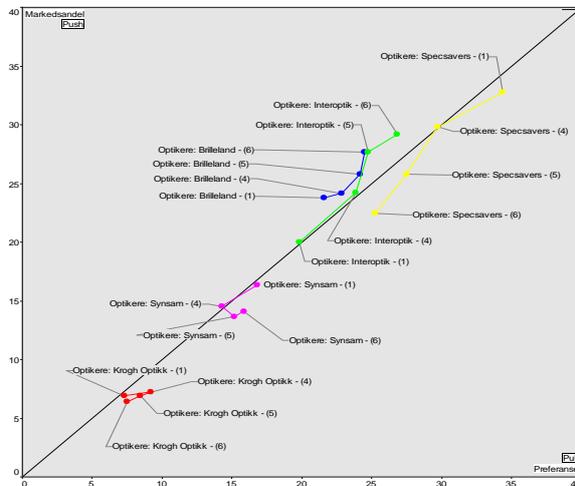
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Gallup PC 6.15-03 (Build date: May 15 2017)

Nedbrytning: Hele befolkningen

Målgruppe: Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen
Målgruppeterrelse:

17. april 2018



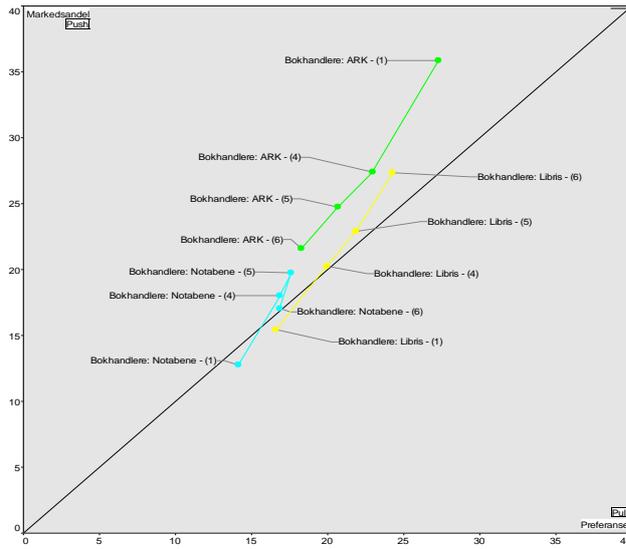
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Gallup PC 6.15-03 (Build date: May 15 2017)

Nedbrytning: Hele befolkningen

Målgruppe: Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen/Hele befolkningen
Målgruppestørrelse:

17. april 2018



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Gallup PC 6.15-03 (Build date: May 15 2017)