Multidimensional Perspective on Integrated Marketing Communication
facilitated by

CONSUMER BASED INTERACTION

How can knowledge regarding consumers’ perception of brand touch-points improve the integrated marketing communication strategy for innovative and disruptive products and concepts?

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Word-count:
Table of contests (3p), Master thesis (77p) and Bibliography (3p), text: 171.197 characters
9 models and 2 tables, 8.800 characters. Total of 179.997 characters with spac.
This Master Thesis (MT) is focusing at how knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points can improve the integrated marketing communication strategy, when marketing innovative and disruptive products. This is done by profound analysis of existing theory within two core-concepts, A: Concept of Brand Touch-points; and B: Concept of Diffusion, and based on qualitative research, regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points, depending on stage on innovation adoption curve.

Qualitative research (QR) design: In-depth interviews with 40 respondents equally distributed along innovation adoption curve. Core-content in questionnaire based on Aaker/Brand *personalities* (1997) and Fournier/Brand *relationships* and their *qualities*. 3 hypothetical constructs is presented.

Key findings QR: Consumers across categories tend to perceive passive brand touch-points and touch-points of a human nature in a more positive manner, and relate here to in an more enduring manner, than active brand touch-points/ or of non-human nature (Symbolic meaning in aggregate model, p.46). This indicates how knowledge regarding consumers’ perception of brand touch-points can bring further nuance to the understanding of consumers’ complex behaviour in the interaction with company. Detailed findings in appendix G1,2,3,4.

Key findings /discrepancies theory: Interpretation of innovation adoption curve is crucial, since an elaborate understanding of whether basis for curve is ‘relatively free flow of information’ (curve is a continuum) or more 'characterised by persuasion' (curve is interrupted by gaps/chasms) might direct focus for marketer. Furthermore is it crucial to enter the curve in an optimal manner, I.e to regard ‘innovators’ as a 'conceptual point of entry' to other segments along innovation adoption curve. Innovation-decision-process as a hierarchical process is nuanced by marketers input in terms of dynamic processing and attitude-formation. Key assumptions, derived from discussion and based on above findings: Knowledge regarding consumers’ perception of brand touch-points indicate that diffusion of marketing information and messages might be improved by applying core principles within diffusion at the brand touch-points themselves. Diffusion of marketing information and messages might furthermore benefit from marketers understanding of how the respective segments perceive brand touch-points in similar manners, and not only how they perceive differently.

A model ‘Consumer based interaction’ is thus presented p. 49, which act as the remedy to improve and facilitate a Conceptual Multidimensional IMC-model, p. 77 and 78.
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1.0 Introduction

Successful technology-companies of today are driven by their capability to innovate and present innovative and disruptive products and concepts to the consumers. The capability to innovate is however only valuable to the company, which at the same time has the capability to take the innovative and disruptive product or concept to market, in an appealing way.

This requires, that the company is 'in-touch' and interacts with the consumers in a meaningful manner. In marketing, we refer to 'Brand touch-points' as the scene for this interaction; but how about the consumers? How do they actually perceive these brand touch-points?

This master thesis will seek to explore how knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points can improve the 'Integrated marketing communication' strategy for innovative and disruptive products and concepts.

2.0 Problem Identification

A substantial amount of research has been dedicated to suggest how companies can conduct market research, amongst others to minimize uncertainties and to provide for insights to design an optimal marketing strategy (e.g. Hair et al, 2009). Research regarding e.g. how to design the optimal message, how to obtain optimal positioning within the mind of the consumers and how to execute in an optimal creative manner (e.g. Percy et al, 2008) has been conducted too. Research regarding overall value creation (e.g. Keller, 2008) and integration of the marketing tools (e.g. Belch, 2007) has been conducted, and have brought enormous value and insights for both academia and practitioners.

The following research-question(s) and the subsequent research, analysis, discussion and recommended implications should therefore be regarded as supplementary to the above, and in some cases as suggested up-dates of existing models.
The actual brand touch-points have been subject to research, in terms of e.g. “Brand-building: finding the touch-points that count” (Hogan et al, 2005) However, not much research has been conducted regarding, how consumers perceive the brand touch-points in themselves (symbolic meaning) and specifically how consumers perceive brand touch-points when related to marketing innovative and disruptive products and concepts.

Most recently have Moore (2008) and Burns (2009) touched upon some of the challenges, when marketing innovative and disruptive products or concepts. They discuss how the (technology, Moore, 2008) innovation adoption curve suffers from gaps or chasms between the stages, i.e. the penetration/adoptions of the innovative and disruptive product might stop, since the needs and behaviours of 'majority'-consumers differ substantially from the needs and behaviours of 'innovators' or 'early adopters'. Burns (2009) is occupied with the challenges for the salespeople in order to gain foothold in a desired marketplace, and relates observations to the innovation adoption curve as well. However, are both authors mainly focusing on the business to business market, with only sporadic analysis of how actual interaction with consumers is likely to take place, and how consumers perceive this interaction, e.g. in order to improve the adoption and diffusion of marketing information and messages in the overall marketing strategy.

Based on the above reflections, does this Master Thesis thus focus on: Brand touch point in themselves, Diffusion of marketing information and messages, and How consumers, dependent on stage on innovation adoption curve, perceive brand touch-points (symbolic meaning); with the overall objective to present how this knowledge can improve the 'Integrated marketing communication' strategy for innovative and disruptive products and concepts.

**2.1 Research Question**

How can knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points improve the integrated marketing communication strategy, for innovative and disruptive products and concepts?
2.1.1 Related Sub-Questions

The below sub-questions are formulated to catalyst a nuanced and best possible answer of the above research question:

**Sub-questions:**
1. How do consumers perceive brand touch-points, depending on stage on innovation adoption curve?
2. How can the company improve the interaction with consumers, based on knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points?
3. How can marketers improve diffusion of marketing information and messages, based on knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points?

*Research question* is hereafter referred to as RQ and *sub questions* as SQ. *Master Thesis* as MT.

2.2 Limitations and Definitions

**Limitations**

The MT will focus on the Danish market in terms of primary data-collection. Examples, cases and theory are international to provide for high-quality input and inspiration.

The focus is on technology products on the business to consumer market, which is relevant due to increased and still increasing offerings in terms of both volume, complexity and diversity (ref. a) The technology products for private persons or households are categorised within the broad category of “lifestyle products”, since it can be observed how the majority of the actual technology-offerings on the business to consumer market are such products (TV, mobile-phones, personal computers etc) (ref. b)

Focus is on perception of brand touch-points in relation to innovative products and/or concepts of disruptive nature, i.e. marketing of improved products or concepts are not included.
Legal aspects are regarded beyond the scope of this MT. The company's capabilities (e.g. organizational, cultural and financial) of actually developing the innovative and disruptive products and concepts will not be fully covered, but only referred to in order to connect internal processes to optimization and improvement of the integrated marketing communication strategy.

Theory regarding 'perception' is not included due to limitation in pages. The topic is briefly touched upon in MT 4.0 (Qualitative Research) due to aspects of conscious / sub-conscious perception.

Definitions (Use and meaning of terms)

*Brand touch-points*: Brand touch-points are in literature described in several ways, by referring to 'the interaction', 'the connection' or simply the 'point of contact' between company and consumer. The definition in this MT, should be irrespective of both time, place and situation, why brand touch-points thus are regarded as “moments of interaction between company and consumer”.

*Active / Passive (brand touch-points)*: The notion 'active' is used when a brand touch-point is interrupting or disturbing consumers in their (other) primary activity (also referred to as 'intrusive'). The notion 'passive' is used when a brand touch-point not is interrupting or disturbing consumers in their ( eventual other) primary activity, i.e 'made available' to consumers (De Pelsmacker et al, 2007).

*Human factor*: The notion 'human factor' is used when a brand touch-point is providing 'personal interaction' (Vandermerwe, 2003).

*Diffusion*: This being a MT within marketing, will the focus be on diffusion of 'marketing information and messages'. Diffusion is in literature defined as: “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (Rogers, 2003, p.5).

*Integrated marketing communication*: (Hereafter IMC) The term is widely used in literature, and definitions are numerous. In this MT will the term operate within the broad definition:”*Integrated marketing communication is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable persuasive brand communications programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, employees, associates.....”* (Schultz, in Belch et al, 2009, p. 11).
Thus will the MT seek to explore how 'knowledge regarding consumers’ perception of brand touch-points' can improve the above business process, however focusing at 'communication programs with consumers' and aspects of 'complementary advantages', 'consistency' and 'synergies' (Keller, 2008, p. 267) since these aspects provide for specificity.

2.3 Outline of Master Thesis
The MT will unfold as illustrated in model ‘Outline of Master Thesis’, app.2.3.

2.4 Methodology
Methodology; 3.0 Theory
The choice of theory is based on two triangulations (A and B) reflecting RQ and SQ. Furthermore does section 3.0 present C: Theoretical Foundation for qualitative research set-up.

A: Concept of Brand Touch-points. Triangulation A.
’Concept of brand touch-points' is approached from several perspectives to secure a profound and elaborate understanding of the concept. The selection of theory for 'A': ‘Concept of brand touch-points' is based on a triangulation with the purpose to encapsulate what has been found to affect and form brand touch-points. The triangulation takes it point of departure in three dimensions: the * consumer, the * company and the * marketplace, in which the brand touch-points are to perform.

The theoretical approach 'A' will concentrate mainly on the left axe * company --- * consumer, since 'brand touch-points' in themselves could be argued to reside exactly between the two. However is the * marketplace of importance due to e.g. competition, technological development and emerging concepts of inspirational potential (to the consumer and company), why theory regarding marketplace will be referred to as well, but to a more limited extend.
Consumers. Brand touch-points are analysed in a “customer-focus context” (Vandermerwe, 1993, 2000, 2003, 2004), which is presented in literature by the customer activity cycle (Vandermerwe, 1993, 2000). The customer activity cycle is supplemented with notion of brand touch-point continuum (Hogan, et al., 2005) in order to provide for reflections related to brand touch-point chain (Hogan et al, 2005; Sannung, 2009) which give way for analysing similarities and differences (and strengths and weaknesses) between existing models. The “customer focus context” leads to academia's reflections regarding creation of experiences, why this more holistic approach will be highlighted as well. (Vandermerwe, 1993, 2003; Pine et al, 1998; Prahalad, 2004).

The 'human factor' in brand touch-points is amongst others touched upon by Vandermerwe (2003) and Hogan et al. (2005), and importance hereof in the eyes of the consumers is stressed. The notion 'human factor' leads to reflections regarding how interaction between human beings might be /can be substituted or stretched by e.g. Internet-based solutions (Vandermerwe, 2000) and furthermore how 'migration' or diffusion of (marketing) information and messages in a population is found to
take place due to human factor, from a contemporary perspective (Andersen, 2005; Hardey 2010, Kozinets et al, 2004).

Aspects regarding 'active/passive' brand touch-points in relation to critical and conscious consumers (Andersen, 2005; Hardey, 2010) is furthermore a dominating aspect in literature regarding brand touch-points, why this notion also will be included.

Marketing academia referred to, tend to write mainly from company perspective, why the *consumer-perspective is extracted from the articles mentioned, I.e. theoretical findings and reflections are extracted from a typically broader context.

**Company.** Theory regarding brand touch points is analysed in relation to how the company can include brand touch-points in the value-creation which is structured around the *brand value chain* (Keller, 2008) and *customer based brand equity*-model (Keller, 2008) as representatives for the traditional company-approach. This is done with the purpose to question and clarify the current presence and role of brand touch-points in this structured brand value creation, and to pinpoint how this process might be different, when the aim is to brand innovations in opposition to traditional products. How the company can and must *take ownership over innovations* via branding (Aaker, 2007) is included to sharpen focus on the challenges in marketing innovative products and concepts from a company perspective.

Brand touch-points are also referred to in literature regarding *brand metrics* (Munoz et al, 2004) regarding whether, how and under which conditions companies can measure brand touch-points. Static and linear approach (Sannung, 2009) versus dynamic and holistic approach is presented, to be able to discuss and suggest (MT 5.0; 6.0) how the company can optimize use of brand touch points in the IMC strategy. Dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007) and establishment of innovation-platforms (Jonash et al, 2007) are included due to the inspirational potential in these conceptual frameworks, which thus will serve as mental constructs in the process of encapsulating 'Concept of brand touch-points'.
Marketplace. The brand value creation process is supplemented with aspects of *co-creation of experiences* (Prahalad et al., 2004) supplemented with contemporary requirement for *meaningful experiences* (Norton, 2003) and related to *brief reflections* regarding, marketplace logics and paradigm's possible influence on brand touch-points. (e.g. Pine et al, 1998, Kim et al, 2004).

The main challenge with the above selection of theory (and existing theory in general) is the lack of specificity regarding brand touch-points or lack of complete articles regarding brand touch-points from the consumers' point of view. This might at the same time be the opportunity to discuss and suggest, how brand touch-points could or should be considered to be more visible and included in dynamic models in the future; and to argue for the qualitative research conducted (MT 4.0)

**B: Concept of Diffusion. Triangulation B.**

The topic 'diffusion' is characterized by input from several lines of academic work. Sociologists, marketers and anthropologists are examples of academia, who all have contributed with relevant input within their own field and to others. It is as such a difficult task to embrace every aspect, why the triangulation B's foremost important task is to combine and encapsulate the topic in a meaningful way to marketer's, ref. RQ/SQ. This does by no means exclude academia from other fields, but actually highlights how marketers can benefit from insights, stemming from other or parallel academic studies of a non-commercial nature.

The triangulation 'B' is based on the same three dimensions (as 'A'), but converted to relevant terminology for the purpose of encapsulating 'Concept of Diffusion'; I.e (consumers) * adoption of innovations, (company-) * strategy and, (marketplace) * trends/epidemics.
The theoretical approach 'B' will focus mainly at the right axe * Adoption of innovations ---
* Trends/Epidemics, since 'diffusion' traditionally is occupied mainly with reflections regarding the
two, and as such could be argued to reside between the same two. This axe is at the same time
assumed the potential learning for marketers, who traditionally are quite familiar with formulation
of strategies. The third, * Strategy, will therefore be referred to as the managerial part, and literature
stemming from this part of the triangulation will act as the academic evidence from the company-
perspective.

Adoption of innovations. The adoption process itself, is thoroughly presented by several authors;
Rogers (2003), Moore (2008), who in different ways present their reflections regarding how and
why human beings / consumers adopt, or do not adopt, innovations. These reflections will form
theoretical anchor for this part of the triangulation. An illustrative model of complex Segmentation-
Targeting-Positioning (STP) is presented, since the differences between the segments along
'innovation adoption curve' are repeated amongst academia, however from differing perspectives.
Core principles of adoption of innovations are highlighted, due to their apparent recognition and approval amongst academia in general, i.e., 'five aspects to determine quality of innovation' and the 'ability of the innovation to reinvent itself' (Rogers, 2003). 'Innovation decision process' is included as representing static approach (Rogers, 2003), and contrasted by (dynamic) approaches (e.g., Knutsen, 2009; Foote et al in Belch et al, 2007; Petty et al, in Belch et al, 2007; Percy et al, 2008).

The notion 'human factor' will be included, this time with the purpose of clarifying how academia have found that human interaction affect and facilitate adoption of innovations and diffusion of marketing information and messages. Rogers (2003), Geroski (2009) refer to principles of homogeneous populations versus heterogeneous populations (homo-philic versus hetero-philic, in Rogers, 2003), as reference-points in how and why human interaction is likely to take place. This section will furthermore include brief reflections regarding opinion-leaders and peer-to-peer conversations, as found of importance in literature (Rogers, 2003).

The role of brand touch-points in the innovation adoption process will be highlighted (Rogers, 2003), (Moore, 2008) to provide for best possible degree of specificity. For maintaining focus is the Bass Forecasting model (Mahajan et al (1990) in, Rogers, 2003) referred to, which illustrates importance of mass- versus interpersonal communication.

The consumer perspective, i.e., *Adoption of innovations, is of an organic nature and is growing seamlessly into the other end of the axe; *Trends/Epidemics, which traditionally also is rooted in consumers’ adoption of (innovative/disruptive) products and concepts, but treated from another perspective.

Trends/Epidemics. Academia who are occupied with trends and epidemics spin around the notion 'critical mass' which furthermore is repeated by practitioners, who are occupied with this topic. 'Critical mass' is as such presented from academic sources (Vejlgaard, 2009; Geroski, 2000) and supplemented by knowledge, derived from interview with company 'First Movers' (Poulsen, 2010).
who are experts in observing how critical mass is building and emerging in a society. These reflections will be contrasted by Moore (2008), who obtains a different perspective. Findings regarding brand touch-points' ability to contribute in an epidemic scenario will be highlighted to provide for specificity in relation to SQ/RQ. Thus will notion by Geroski (2009) regarding diffusion of 'hardware' and 'software' information add specificity to the reflections.

**Strategy.** Finally, will reflections regarding possible advantages like “first-mover advantage” (Liang et al, 2009), “pioneer-advantage” (Fernandez et al, 2007, 2009) or access to “Blue Ocean Markets” (Kim et al, 2004), and how brand touch-points have been found to contribute in these strategies be presented.

The main challenge with the above selection of theory for 'B' is the diversity and the fact, that some input (e.g. Rogers, 2003) to a great extend are based on findings from even very distant fields of a non-commercial nature like e.g. development of agriculture in Africa. These differences in perspective are however regarded as less important amongst academia, and the findings have been widely referred to by academia in their work (e.g. Knutsen, 2009; Geroski, 2004). These differences in perspective might at the same time be of great inspirational and knowledgeable quality to marketers, which underscores the likely relevance of these articles. Moore (2008), Burns (2009) and Vejlgaard (2009) might be regarded as 'popular' from an academic perspective. However are the work of these authors recognized valuable, ie. based on solid empiric research, why they are included.

**C: Theoretical foundation for qualitative research**

The research design and development of hypothetical constructs is based on Hair et al.(2009). The data collecting method is too based on Hair et al (2009) whilst the formulation of core content in research is inspired by Fournier (1998) and Aaker's (1997) work regarding brand personalities and brand relationships. This body of theory relating to research set-up, will be elaborated in MT section 3.0.
Methodology; Section 4.0 Qualitative research-design. Hypothetical constructs I, II and III.

The focus of the research is how consumers perceive brand touch-points dependent on respective consumer's (respondent's) stage on innovation adoption curve. (RQ/SQ)

The search for knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points calls for a design which is relevant for analysing “customer mindset”. “The power of a brand lies in what resides in the minds of customers” (Keller, 2008, p.48) A slight adjustment of the Keller-quote to “The power of a brand touch point lies in what resides in the minds of customers” frames the essence of what this research has to unveil. ”Beware: You can not measure the mindset except as hypothetical constructs/variables” (Biune et al. 2009) For analysing perception and customer mindset, elaborated and extended expressions and explanations from individuals are required to provide for elaborated, nuanced and colourful answers. This points to an exploratory research design, which in this case will unfold by collecting data via qualitative method: In-depth interview. The in-depth interview consists of both unstructured and semi-structured elements (Hair et al, 2009), with the purpose to confirm, adjust or reject the following hypothetical constructs, where the independent variable is 'respondent's stage on innovation curve' (Innovator, Early adopter, Mainstream (early+late majority), and Laggards) (Appendix A: Definitions of respondent-categories); and dependent variable is 'perception of brand touch points'.

Perception of brand touch-points, depending on stage on innovation adoption curve, possible relationships. Hypothetical construct I, II and III.

I: The symbolic meaning of brand touch-points as an expression of how consumers in the before mentioned categories (independent variable) will characterise the respective brand touch points in terms of brand touch-point personality. “Brand personality refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand.” (Aaker, 1997; elaborated in MT 3.0) Factors: Sincerity, Competence, Sophistication, Excitement, Ruggedness (and 15 underlying facets) (Aaker, 1997, p.352). Factors are elaborated via nuanced explanations by respondents for full understanding of
perception. Possibility to reject characterization of certain brand touch-points as 'personalities' to avoid respondent's blocking.

**Hypothetical construct (I): Brand touch-point personality.**

Mainstream consumers perceive in general brand touch-points in a more positive and elaborate manner, than early adopters, who again perceive brand touch-points in a more positive and elaborate manner, than innovators. Laggards are hypothesised to perceive in a manner which is neither positive nor elaborate.

**II:** The symbolic meaning of brand touch points as an expression of the relationship between consumers in the before mentioned categories (independent variable) and the respective brand touch-points. “Brand (touch-point) personality as … the relationship role enacted by the brand (-touch point) in its partnership capacity.” (Keller, 2008, p. 388; Fournier, 1998) (Fournier, 1998, Table 1; elaborated in MT 3.0). Relationship-forms : Marriage, Friendship, Dependency, Flirt or Habit (inspired by Fournier, 1998). Relationship-forms are elaborated via nuanced explanations by respondents for full understanding of perception. Possibility to reject characterization of certain brand touch-points as partners in 'relationships' to avoid respondent's blocking.

**Hypothetical construct II: Brand touch-points as relationships partners.**

Innovators are hypothesised to be more critical than early adopters, who again are more critical than mainstream consumers. Thus, will innovators engage in fewer relationships (but of stronger, enduring and voluntarily nature), than early adopters, who again will engage in fewer relationships of stronger, enduring and voluntarily nature, than mainstream consumers. Mainstream consumers will engage broadly in relationships of both enduring and temporarily nature and of both voluntarily and non-voluntarily nature. Laggards are hypothesised to engage, based on recommendations from other people, e.g. friends or family members, why the actual brand touch-point often will be found in existing actual relationships with persons in private-sphere. Laggards' relationships are thus hypothesised to be of an enduring but not necessarily voluntarily nature only.

The reason for building this research with inspiration from both the trait-based brand touch-point personality (Aaker, 1997) and the more actionable brand relationship-measure (Fournier, 1998), is
the need to understand both, the bare or flat perception of brand touch-points in the eyes of the consumers and the need to connect these perceptions to marketing (RQ/SQ) “Fournier argues that this relationship role view of brand personality provides more actionable guidance to managers … than does the trait-based view” (Keller, 2008, p.388). Furthermore has the two concepts been introduced in one conceptual model, which “provides the basis for understanding how the strength of consumer-brand relationships may be affected directly and indirectly by different brand personalities” (Aaker et al, 2004, p.3) This article points to the dependence inter concepts, why both concepts are used as inspiration in this research, too.

III: The symbolic meaning of brand touch-points as an expression of the quality of the relationship between consumers and brand touch-points, expressed towards respondents as the 'driver' in the relationships. The quality of the relationship is measured, inspired by the work of Fournier (1998),(elaborated in MT 3.0) Quality, as drivers for the relationship: (Fournier, 1998, p.366): Love/Passion, Commitment, Intimacy, Self-concept connection, Ritual, or Partner quality. The six dimensions are supplemented with elaborated explanations by respondents for full understanding of perception. Possibility to reject characterization of certain brand touch-points as driven by one of the qualities suggested, to avoid respondent's blocking.

**Hypothetical construct III: 'Driver' in consumers’ relationships with brand touch-points.**

Innovators' relationships with brand touch-points are mainly driven by stronger factors (product-driven), why driver is hypothesised to be mainly 'commitment'; early adopters' relationships with brand touch-points are driven mainly by stronger factors (product-driven) too; whereas mainstream-consumers' relationship-ships are driven by other, weaker factors (market-driven), why drivers are hypothesised to be mainly 'self-connection' 'ritual' or 'partner-quality'. Laggards' relationships with brand touch-points are hypothesised to be driven by (emotional) stronger factors, due to the assumption, that brand touch-points are consisting of actual existing relationships, in private sphere, why main-driver is hypothesised to be 'love/passion'.
Possible alternative primary data-collection-method and bias

Most important bias are commented here. (Overview, Research Methods, Advantages /Disadvantages, appendix B).

The in depth interview. Other applicable method for primary data collection, via qualitative method could have been e.g focus-group. Due to the objective of the research (MT p. 15) and formulation of the actual questionnaire, the focus group was considered less applicable due to bias related to e.g. group-pressure and/or passiveness of certain members.

The qualitative method in exploratory research-design does not provide representative sampling and results, and there will be no ability of generalizing or comparing the findings. (Hair et al, 2009). When choosing the data collecting method “In depth interview” where the researcher chooses the respondents, conducts the interview and interprets the results, there will be bias and weaknesses due to researcher’s sub-conscious impact on respondents and researcher’s ability to interpret answers in a neutral manner. (Hair et al, 2009).

Formulation of hypothetical constructs I, II and III, in an elaborated and detailed manner, as presented in MT p. 15- might lead to neglect of derived findings, however should the elaborated and detailed formulation to a greater extend secure focus and provide for equally detailed findings.

Methodology; Section 5.0 Discussion

The discussion sets out by illustrating how the process of posing 'diagnostic questions' in order to unveil consumers' perception of brand touch-points leads to a sum of knowledge. This is illustrated by the model ‘Consumer Based Interaction’ and ‘Brand Touch-points from a consumer-perspective’. The content in discussion is built in three steps, by discussing 1) how knowledge derived from qualitative research conducted (MT 4.0) might be translated to strategic improvements. This is done by relating hypothetical constructs and findings to literature. Discussion continues by re-visiting 2) 'Concept of Brand touch-points' and 3) 'Concept of Diffusion'. The main
objective is to discuss how the findings in qualitative research (MT 4.0) can improve current knowledge in relation to these concepts (RQ/SQ), leading to MT 6.0. (RQ).

**Methodology; Section 6.0. Final discussion. Implications. Further discussions and final remarks.**

This final section is of a conclusive nature, however also presenting reflections regarding possible further discussions. The structure will thus be built accordingly to outline of MT by reverting to the objective of this MT, the key findings and key assumptions, followed by possible theoretical and practical implications and finally by suggesting a ‘Multidimensional IMC-model for innovative and disruptive products’. The ‘Multidimensional IMC-model’ is presented as an illustration to marketers, who are working with innovative and disruptive products and concepts (*Illustrative Multidimensional IMC Model for innovative and disruptive Products and Concepts*), and as a conceptual model (*Multidimensional Perspective on IMC*) for eventual further discussions regarding IMC and consumers’ perception of brand touch-points. The section MT 6.0 will thus be ended by reflections regarding possible further discussions and a few final remarks.

**3.0 Theory**

**3.1 Triangulation A: Concept of brand touch-points.**

Consumer ---- Company. “there is a customer relationship continuum – the before, during and after..” (Hogan et al, 2005, p. 13). This quote reflects one dominant aspect, which academia have discussed from various perspectives. Vandermerwe (1993, 2000, 2003, 2004) is occupied with customer-focus and presents the idea of how companies in a structured way can map the points of interaction – or the touch-points. The 'customer activity cycle' (Vandermerwe, 1993, p. 52; 2000, p. 33) is based on “the simple logic: only when corporations see their products from the outside in, (they) can really understand what should be happening from the inside out” (Vandermerwe, 1993, p.56). Vandermerwe (1993) discusses how companies only by an increased and profound understanding of the customers' (consumers’) activities can deliver the holistic experience (and not only a product) at the right time and place, which from the consumer/customer perspective is argued
to be the value added. The perspective and possibilities in delivering value and experience to consumers/customers on top of the functional benefits of the product, is expressed by Vandermerwe (1993) as “only a 'total' product concept can fulfil their (the consumer/customers’) needs at the much deeper level they are after..... Their expectations are thus rapidly becoming more holistic, complex and diverse.” (Vandermerwe, 1993, p.47). Drucker (in Vandermerwe, 1993) pinpoints the essence of the above reflections, in one brief sentence, “the results exist only on the outside”, referring to the pitfall of companies to focus within company borders instead of focusing at the consumers/customers. The customer activity cycle is supplemented with the notion of “value gaps” meaning, ”Any interruption in the flow of the customer-activity cycle creates value gaps or discontinuities, that open access to competitors, unless the company fills the gaps first with value add-ons” (Vandermerwe, 2000, p. 31) These value gaps, “interruptions or discontinuities in the customer's experience, can be a threat – or an opportunity” (Vandermerwe, 2000, p. 32) in the sense, that these gaps represent an opportunity for the company to expand the interaction with the customer. Vandermerwe, 2000, is also occupied with the idea of “customer lock-on” (in contrast to product lock-in) where it is the customers, who freely choose the company over other companies.”In contrast, customers who lock on select the enterprise as their sole, dominant or first choice because of ongoing, superior value at low delivered cost. So another vital component of customer focus is to get a critical mass of customers locked on. With lock-on, it is not the product that keeps competitors away, nor is it the technology: it is the customers.” (Vandermerwe, 2000, p. 29).

Other authors have been elaborating on topics regarding 'delivering of experiences' (Pine et al, Gilmore, 1998), and how to obtain a scenario, where competition is 'kept away by customers', Le 'Blue Ocean' (Kim et al, 2004), which however are regarded as marketplace–related, and as such will be referred to beneath. (MT, p.24).

Brand touch-points from a consumer or customer perspective is also presented by Hogan et al (2005), who highlights the “Customer relationship continuum” and the “Touch-point-chain” (Hogan et al, 2005, p. 13) which both are linear models or concepts and as such lack dynamism, as sought introduced via the loops, “Self-Reinforcing Loops make a competitive strategy” (Vandermerwe,
Despite the static approach in the models as such, does the findings in the article by Hogan et al (2005) “that many touch-points have little upside impact on brand equity but can destroy brand equity if they fail” (Hogan et al., 2005, p. 14) sharpen the focus at the topic, i.e. the brand touch-points themselves. The perspective of Hogan et al (2005) is, how successful brand-builders “resist investing everywhere that their brand touches their customers. Instead, they identify and spend aggressively only on the interactions they know will have the most impact on revenue growth and profitability” (Hogan et al., 2005, p. 11). Hogan et al (2005) list several examples of companies' experiences with different types of brand touch points, which with RQ/SQ in mind are illustrative for the marketers; like: “Most electronic forms of interactions do not delight customers, but they have great potential to destroy brand equity if they fail.” (Hogan et al, 2005, p. 14) who continues by stressing how “The interactions with the greatest potential for delight are those that involve people, who can resolve customer problems, empathize, smile, and provide unexpected levels of service. Companies that entirely replace people with machines may run a great risk with their brands. For most companies, the answer is to manage the mix of people and automation.” (Hogan et al., 2005, p. 15). The perspective of Hogan et al (2005), as referred to above, lead to a pipe-line approach as how touch-points can and should be monitored in terms of conversion-rate, which point of view is shared with Sannung (2009).

The above theoretical models and concepts take their point of departure in how the company should map, identify, choose and measure relevant (more and optimal) touch-points. Both Hogan et al (2005) and Vandermerwe (1993, 2000) agree that perception of a certain brand or company will be an aggregated sum of experiences through several touch-points, e.g.: “In effect, a brand is the sum of the customer's experiences with the product or company. It is transmitted in every interaction with the customer over the lifetime of the relationship.” (Hogan et al., 2005, p.12) However is consumers' perception of the actual touch-points on a symbolic level not analysed nor discussed, which could be interesting as input for how to increase “the sum of customer's experiences”.

Vandermerwe highlights the “human factor” and that there “is no substitute for face-to-face contact and dialogue with customers to get the level of trust necessary for relationships which span
their activity cycles” (Vandermerwe, 1993, p. 59) which is in line with reflections by Hogan et al (2005), above. However is Wandermerve (2000) highlighting how “The interactivity of the Internet enables companies to deliver ongoing personalized value while avoiding trade-off's that in the past left customers on the losing end. Gone are the tensions between giving customers personal attention and saving on expenses.” (Vandermerwe, 2000, p. 35), who at the same time reinforce the importance of customer lock-on, why use of internet (and other technological substitutes) must be within the notion of 'delivery of superior value to customers'.

Both Hogan et al (2005) and Vandermerwe (1993, 2000) discuss touch-points as an interaction between company and customer, and touch only very briefly on touch-points, which by nature migrate from person to persons, Ie “word-of-mouth” or “virals”. This might relate to, that the development in social media has taken place primary within the last decade. However is this aspect of touch-points which develop to; or are intended to, be out of control of the company interesting in the eye of current academia, (e.g. Andersen 2005; Hardey 2010; Kozinets et al, 2010), as it has been in the eyes of academia before them. (Rogers, 1962; Ryan et al, 1943). The notion 'word of mouth' marketing is as such not new, but has with the advent of the Internet and the possibilities here-in developed rapidly; “Marketers have become interested in directly managing word of mouth activity through one to one seeding and communication programs, with the Internet allowing unprecedented new levels of management and measurement. Thus, word of mouth communications are co-produced in consumer networks ” Illustrated in the model 'C: The Network Co-production Model'. (Kozinets et al, 2010, p. 72)

The distinction between active (intrusive) and passive (not intrusive or 'on demand') is furthermore regarded as relevant by academia (Andersen, 2005; Hardey, 2010), who point to how active touch-points might be directly damaging to marketers' attempt “to target consumers with specific campaigns .....such practice could be viewed as 'intrusive' and risk alienating or changing consumer behaviour” (Hardey, 2010, p. 564)
From the company-perspective is the brand value creation process visualized by academia by integrating Keller's (2007) 'brand value chain' and 'customer based brand equity' model. This conceptual approach to value creation / measurement of brand value is overarching in its nature from marketing-investment to shareholder-value. “The brand value chain is a structured approach to assessing the sources and outcomes of brand equity and the manner by which marketing activities create brand value.” (Keller, 2007, p. 317) The approach includes brand touch-points without being specific of the exact role of touch points. Keller (2007) refers to importance of 'feedback-loops, non-sequential' use of brand value chain and finally the 'diffuse effects that manifest over the long term', which is regarded as a premise for meaningful use of concept of brand value chain. The company, which brings innovations to market have a natural interest in taking ownership over the product/brand (I.e in the mind of the consumers). Aaker (2007) argues how branding can make the difference: “... a brand strategy can be critical to the success of an innovation, particularly in the long-term. There are times where a firm literally needs to brand it or lose it.” (Aaker, 2007, p. 9), and as such reinforces the above conceptual approach by Keller (2007), by stressing that the company should formulate a dynamic and non-sequential strategy to succeed in taking ownership over the innovation.

Measurement of actual brand touch-points have been approached mainly indirectly by academia. The major attraction has been, to measure the brand value, which is regarded interesting and in an overall market-place, where actual products (ie. functional benefits) can be easily copied by competitors, and where the consumers at the same time get more and more complex in both behaviour and demand (Van dermerwe, 1993, 2000; Teece, 2007). “What is not measured, is not managed” (Munoz et al, 2004, p.381) as an expression for both the need for, and the possibilities in, knowing exactly where, how and when the value creation takes place in the company and the brand building process. Munoz et al (2004) introduce the concept of “Brand Metrics” ie. “Three classes of measurement – perception metrics, performance metrics and financial metrics” (Munoz el al, 2004, p.382) and reflects over touch-points themselves; “One of the biggest challenges marketers face is in understanding the causal relationships between brand perception, brand performance and financial impact. Causality is derived from understanding the key drivers of demand, knowing at
which touch-points (or moments of customer interaction) perceptions and behaviours are generated. “ (Munoz et al, 2004, p. 383). The importance of knowing which touch-points generate the perceptions and behaviours desired and most profitable to the company has led to systematic approaches like conversion-rates, measured per touch-point in a pipeline-like approach (e.g. Sannung, 2009) This approach is not necessarily in alignment with the above mentioned point of views (MT, p. 24), and the holistic nature of perception/behaviour formation as pointed to by other academia (e.g. Vandermerwe, 1993, 2000), nor necessarily in line with IMC cornerstones, i.e creation of synergies, consistency and complementary qualities, ref. MT 2.2.

Jonash et al, (2007) are occupied with the idea of how companies can leverage and sustain innovations via the establishment of platforms. The concept of platforms - as a tool of focusing the efforts within company-borders – is regarded beneficiary when managing also the touch-points, which after all are the point of connection between the consumer and the innovation. The entrepreneurial aspects as highlighted by Teece (2007) are regarded an inspirational framework for managing the actual touch-points in a way that “is unique and difficult to replicate” in an understanding that the notion of 'dynamic capabilities' is complex and overarching, but therefore also a likely appropriate point of departure in the search for an improved handling of brand touch-points.

The role of touch-points has been developing as the logics and paradigms in the market-place have changed (production to service to experience). The model by Pine & Gilmore (1998) “Progression of economic value” is e.g. an illustration of how academia regards the development in the market-place. From the formulation of this model and up till today further development has taken place, i.e the requirement for “meaningful brand experiences” (Norton, 2003) and meaningful relationships with customers and consumers. The thoughts about value-creation via consumer-experiences (Vandermerwe, 1993, 2000) are shared and developed by Prahalad et al, (2004) who argue, that “The interaction between the firm and the consumer is becoming the focus of value creation and value extraction. As values shift to experiences, the market is becoming a forum for conversation and interactions between consumers, consumer communities, and firms” (Prahalad et al, 2004, p.5)
and continues by “High-quality interactions that enable an individual customer to co-create unique experiences with the company are the key to unlocking new sources of competitive advantage.” (Prahalad et al, 2004, p. 7).

3.2 Triangulation B: Concept of diffusion.

Adoption of innovations ---- Trends/Epidemics. Moore (2008) presents the 'technology adoption curve' and refers hereto, as an illustration of how adoption of technology products takes place in a population. Of particular interest are the gaps or even chasms pointed to by Moore (2008, p.18) “The real news, however, is not the two cracks in the bell curve, the one between the innovators and the early majority, the other between the early and late majority. No the real news is the deep and dividing chasm that separates the early adopters from the early majority”. The cracks or chasm pointed to by Moore (2008), are found interesting from several aspects. First, they symbolize the end of one segment, 'innovators' and the beginning of 'early adopters' and again the beginning of a new segment 'mainstream' ('early and late majority) and finally the segment 'laggards'. Moore (2008) highlights how this implies that the segmentation process is far more complex and demanding, since the marketer must be able to define the different segments along the curve, target them respectively at the right time with a relevant message to succeed the optimal positioning within the mind of consumers (see STP-model, beneath) Moore (2008) mainly refers to the scenario via examples from the business to business environment, thus to a great extend, leaving challenges on the business to consumer-market unanswered. Second, does the notion of chasms and gaps symbolize the potential insufficiency of a marketing plan, even if it has been designed to cater to the respective segments along the curve. To succeed, the marketer must furthermore secure that the marketing information and message diffuse from one segment to the next (I.e overcoming the gaps and chasms). This diffusion-process is however not fully elaborated by Moore (2008). The above aspects as presented by Moore (2008) are of strategic potential to the company, and relates as such also to the company-dimension in triangulation 'B'.
The adoption of innovations are by academia found to be influenced by several factors, which to a great extend obviously relate to the actual innovative product/concept. Rogers (2003) highlights the following five aspects as the 'quality of the innovation' (p. 229) : 'Relative advantage', 'Compatibility with existing values and practices', 'Simplicity and ease of use', 'Trial-ability' and ' Observable results'. These five factors form according to Rogers (2003) a suitable frame for a successful innovation. It should however be noted, that even the five factors mentioned do relate to the innovation (product/concept) itself, it is the perceived value by the consumer in any aspect, that determines whether the innovation will be adopted successfully.(Rogers, 2003).

The ability of the innovation to 'reinvent itself' horizontally along the innovation adoption curve, is referred to by Rogers (2003, p. 180), as crucial for adoption by consumers. The ability to reinvent the innovation is crucial since the segments identified have different needs and motives to adopt the innovation. Rogers (2003, p. 170) has found the adoption process to be consisting of five stages, in what he refers to as the 'Decision Innovation Process', and which the consumer is argued to undergo. This process is presented as a hierarchical process, and could as such be argued to relate to hierarchies of effects (e.g. AIDA) and contrasted by other/some dynamic models (e.g. FCB-grid, ELAM.-model or the Rossiter-Percy Grid) (in Belch, 2007; Percy et al, 2009) which are familiar to marketers.

Current marketing academia are amongst others occupied with studies on how adoption of technology-products process not necessarily is linear and based on 'user's high-cognitive
involvement’ or prior awareness of a certain innovation. “This is so as awareness in these cases does not exist prior to use but is first triggered as the user is able to monitor and process cues emanating from own or others' actual service use…. In turn this can fuel cognitive engagement” (Knutsen, 2009, p. 135) which contrasts and nuance the linear model (above) and reflections regarding order of awareness/need-recognition, as presented by Rogers (2003).

The adoption process itself is furthermore found to be relying on 'human factor'. Originally was the innovation adoption curve presented by Sociologist Everett Rogers (1962), where he introduced the concept of diffusion as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system.” (Rogers, 2003, p. 5). The 'channels' referred to by Everett Rogers were originally not necessarily marketing-channels like print, TV or other communications-channels, but the 'channel' or window through which an individual perceive and receive input. Rogers (2003) bases the reflection on the findings, that individuals, when given the free choice, prefer to interact with persons, with whom they share Lifestyle, social status, education and more; i.e. principle of 'homo-phily' and the opposite 'hetero-phily'. Referring to Rogers (2003) is the optimal condition for diffusion, presence of homo-phily between individuals. I.e except in knowledge about the innovation. These reflections could be inspirational to today's marketers, who are looking for ways to catalyst diffusion via various types of 'diffusion-hubs', i.e. touch-points suitable for serving the above mentioned representation of individuals. Originally does the notion of homophily and heterophily relate to human interaction; which however might lead to a discussion whether human interaction can be 'stretched' via technological substitutes.(MT, 5.0)

Rogers (2003) points furthermore to opinion-leaders as mediators of diffusion, the importance of peer-to-peer conversations and peer-networking (Rogers, 2003, p.300), i.e. factors which have the 'human factor' in common. The personalized two-way conversation instead of one way communication, is well in line with current marketing academias' attention to co-creation of experiences (e.g. Prahalad, 2004), and notion of co-production networks related to word of mouth. (e.g. Hardey, 2010, Kozinets et al, 2010) (MT, p.24).
The importance of 'human factor' in diffusion (especially in relation to majority consumers) is illustrated in the 'Bass Forecasting Model', which illustrates 'adoptions due to mass media' contrasting adoptions due to 'interpersonal communication'. (Mahajan, Muller and Bass (1990) in, Rogers, 2003, p. 210).

It should finally be noted, that Rogers (2003) has a different view on diffusion than Moore (2008) does, particularly in relation to the gaps and chasm's referred to above MT p.26. Where Moore (2008) regards the innovation adoption curve as interrupted by gaps, does Rogers (2003) regard the innovation curve as a continuum, however he recognizes the segments. The perspectives of the academia referred to here, being high-tech marketing (Moore) and sociology (Rogers) form basis for further discussion in MT 5.0, due to the assumption, that a change of perspective might contain applicable ideas and solutions to marketers.

Trend forecasting and studies of epidemics have been pointed to in literature as means of predicting where to find the financial lucrative mainstream-markets, and is based on the idea, that if a company can successfully decode behaviours of the innovators (amongst the consumers), they can encapsulate which tendencies in mainstream-markets will follow. (Vejlgaard, 2008). This approach suggests to replace traditional market research, since the logic is, that the market goes, where the trend-setters go, why the focus according hereto, should be to analyse the Life-style, behaviour and perception amongst innovators. Poulsen (2010) expert in observing and analysing 'First Movers' behaviour argues: “Being an innovator is a Lifestyle! It is nothing you can learn or decide to be. Innovators are extreme in their absorption of newness. It is an ability they possess, an 'ability' which is transformed into an extreme, visible behaviour, conducted by innovators, only” and continues: “You (the company) can not cater to, or produce to innovators, but you can observe their Lifestyle!” (Poulsen, 2010. Interview B, app. H)

This line of thinking is challenged by Moore, (2008), who argues “in particular, the relationship between an early market and mainstream market is not unlike the relationship between a fad and a trend. Marketing has long known how to exploit fads and to develop trends. The problem, since these techniques are antithetical to each other, is that you need to decide which one – fad or trend –
you are dealing with before you start.” (Moore, 2008, p. 6) Moore, (2008) is pin-pointing that it is not a given thing, that the mainstream-market will follow early adopters and innovators due to cracks and chasm referred to. Furthermore, it should be noted that according to Moore (2008) marketing (ie. the company) can 'develop trends', which contrasts the above reflections by Vejlgaard (2008) and Poulsen (2010). Moore (2008) refers to a product-driven versus market-driven demand. (Moore, 2008, p.152) and pin-points specific brand touch-points, which are likely to drive this 'evolution'. What however remains unanswered is how the diffusion and the evolution from product-driven to market driven actually takes place.

Other academia with interest in 'epidemics' has the following notions of how trends and epidemics evolve. Geroski (2000) sets the scene with an illustrative, opening remark; “The problem of understanding how long things take to happen also reflects the inherent difficulty of the question: Social phenomena involve many people making choices, often in an interdependent manner, and there are no basic reference points which can be used as a metric to measure the passage of time in such processes.” (Geroski, 2000, p. 603). Geroski (2000) refers to the S-curve as an example of an epidemic model, and as an illustration of how adoption of technological products can form differently depending on levels and types of information perceived by the individuals in the population. Level and types of information are referred to, since it is found relevant to distinguish between 'hardware' (the product itself) and 'software' (use of product) information. “Thus, while the common source model may usefully describe the transmission of information about the existence of a new hardware, it may not accurately trace flows of information about the associated software. And, without good software knowledge, many potential users will not adopt the new technology, however aware they are of its existence.” (Geroski, 2000, p. 605) and suggests 'word-of-mouth information diffusion-process', as the way 'software-information' diffuses. Geroski (2000) points to the aspect of 'critical mass' (before any word-of-mouth information diffusion-process is possible). Finally, it should be noted that Geroski (2000) also underscores homophilic (versus heterophilic) populations (MT p. 28, in line with Rogers, 2003) as a premise for successful diffusion and points in an absolute manner to how the basic premise for an epidemic model is “that information diffusion drives technology diffusion” (Geroski, 2000, p. 609).
A reflection, relating to the third and last dimension in triangulation 'B' (company-)strategy, is made by Geroski (2000) “However, the important point is that once one begins to think seriously about diffusion as a process of persuasion rather than simply as a process of spreading news, the analogy with epidemics begins to break down” (Geroski, 2000, p. 609) and refers to scholars who have reworked the model and focuses on risk or uncertainty, which in the eye of Geroski (2000) not is a fruitful path. This contrasts foremost the approach by Moore (2008), and is to a greater extend in line with Rogers (2003).

From an innovative company perspective, academia have amongst others been occupied with strategies based on e.g. notion of 'first-mover advantage' (Liang et al, 2009) or pioneer-advantage (Fernandez et al, 2007, 2009) as competitive advantages in e.g. an innovative field of business. The findings spin around competitive strategies for e.g. the pioneer company, which is found to benefit from a pure differentiation strategy (in opposition to follower, which was found to benefit from price-based strategy) (Fernandez, et al, 2009), and findings which question the quality of being 'first' (e.g. in opposition to fast second). “In fact, industries with a fast pace of market evolution and technological evolution find first mover advantages are highly vulnerable and tenuous” (Liang et al, 2009, p. 146) and points furthermore to how many real Life examples “involve a Blue Ocean Strategy where there are no initial competitors in sight” (Liang et al, 2009, p. 147), however does this approach imply constant initiatives from the company to remain in this attractive ocean / market place, which inherently highlights the challenges of being 'first'.

3.3 C: Theoretical foundation and actual qualitative research set-up
The qualitative research set-up via in-depth interview falls in three parts, ie. the sampling process, the development of questionnaire and the interview-process.

The actual sampling plan is based on a selection of demographic criteria (app. C, Questionnaire) for each of the four categories described in MT 2.4 (independent variable). The sample contains 10 respondents in each category (I.e 10 Innovators, 10 Early adopters, 10 Mainstream, 10 Laggards),
with the purpose to secure some degree of diversity in the sample (Hair et al, 2009) (Respondent categories; app. A) ie. a total of 40 respondents.

An important possible bias regarding age-criteria should be noted, since the issue of innovativeness and disruptiveness probably are perceived differently depending on age. A native-technology respondent (e.g. native internet or mobile phone consumer) will probably have far more absorptive capacity than a respondent, who have learned to use the internet or mobile phone at a mature age. The nature of the products, being technology for private households or private persons, points to the broad term “Life-style products”, like mobile phones, computers, television etc. Thus should Life-style criteria be optimal in the selection of the respondents. The Life-style criteria is however extremely diverse and complex, why it is regarded not realistic to conduct a meaningful, to just some degree ‘representative’ sampling based on Life-style criteria from scratch, when the goal is to interview relatively few respondents (10 in each of four categories). This is as such not fully in alignment with Hair et al, (2009).

To correct for the above aspect of Lifestyle criteria, is the existing Life-style segmentation model, “Gallup Kompas“ (ref.c) used to give background information regarding existing groupings/segments in Danish society.

**Four categories:** The sample reflects the five groups on the Innovation Adoption Curve. For the purpose of having an operational sampling plan, the following four categories was defined: Innovators, Early Adopters, Mainstream, and Laggards. To adjust for element of relativity in the process of categorizing respondents, and to provide for objectivity, consistency and relevance, definitions for the respective categories were formulated, based on Moore (2008) and Rogers (2003); and supplemented with typical statements, to relate to actual respondents. (Respondent categories, app. A). Clarity is enhanced by reducing the number of categories from five to four (Gustafsson, 2010). The reduced number of categories will give clearer indications and reduce blurred results. The reason for maintaining Innovators and Early Adopters separately is the gap
pointed to by Moore, 2008, and thereby their specific respective characteristics (Moore, 2008; Burns, 2009), why differences in the responses should appear.

**Equal representation of the four categories:** The purpose with this research is to analyse perception of brand touch points, being an Innovator, Early adopter etc. According to theory might an approach which reflects the bell-curve (Innovation adoption curve) in terms of each group’s relative size be applicable (in line with Hair et al, 2009), this would however lead to a scenario, where e.g. the Innovators share of voice would be as low as only 2.5%. Bearing the focus of the research in mind, all categories should be be equally researched and analysed. (assumption)

**The sampling was made by the researcher,** which is in alignment with Hair et al, (2009 p 312, p.322). The sampling was made via two non-probability-sampling methods: *Judgement sampling* which relies on researchers intuitive belief, that certain respondents fulfil requirements of the research, - in this case; the aim of best-possible diversity of Life-styles represented. The requirement of equal representation of the five stages on the innovation adoption curve was secured by an introductory screening of respondents. It proved difficult to find sufficient number of respondents, who are Innovators and Early Adopters, why *snow-ball sampling* was used in these categories. (Hair et al, 2009, p. 322, 323)

**Development of Questionnaire**

The questionnaire is structured in compliance with Hair et al.(2009) and designed to appeal to consumers with no specific insights on marketing and marketing-terminology. The questionnaire is designed to be administered by the researcher, as an in-depth interview. Maximum interview-length: 45 minutes. Language: Danish. (Questionnaire, app. C). The questionnaire is built via un- and semi-structured questions in a best possible flow to secure screening of respondents, comfort-zone, core content and final remarks. (Hair et al, 2009)

The actual questions regarding perception of brand touch points, are developed, based on, and inspired from the work of Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) regarding brand personalities and brand relationships (below). The focus of the research is to unveil consumer-perception, i.e. not a
listing of e.g. simple brand touch-points-characteristics or consumers simple like or dislike of particular brand touch points. The work by Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) introduces a “language” or framework for analysing the topic in a far more interesting, relevant and elaborate manner.

**Brand touch point personality – 5 factors and 14 underlying facets**

Aaker's (1997) framework regarding 'brand personalities' is an academic perspective which is relevant due to its ability to provide for the elaborate language sought for. Furthermore does the work of Aaker (1997) bring structure and content to the actual procedure of conducting the interviews.

The five factors are maintained the same as in the original framework, developed by Aaker (1997). The number five, is considered optimal, based on reflections by Jennifer Aaker. In her development of these factors she stands on theory concerning the “*Big five* human personality-structure to develop a theoretical framework of brand personality dimensions.” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347) which as such is considered a sufficient number to provide for diversity and nuance. The factors chosen in Aaker's (1997) original brand-personality framework are not the same as the “Big five” (i.e.Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience), but was developed via extensive descriptive analysis, which made the “framework and scale generalizable across product-categories” (Aaker, 1997, p. 348), i.e when analysing brand personalities. However; are the factors in the original framework considered relevant categories, due to an even more interesting group; i.e the facets. “facets are not factors in and of themselves, but rather “used to select and refine items.. to improve the scales, not to revise the constructs” (Church et al, 1994 in Aaker, 1997 p. 351). The facets express the refined content of the factors which implies, that the respondents should be presented for the selection of facets (and not only the factors) since the facets work as means to select the appropriate factor.

In this research is the original facet “outdoorsy” replaced with “strong” since some brand touch-points actually are outdoor (e.g. billboards) why this original facet might be misleading (assumption). The facet “upper-class” is replaced with “glamorous”, since Danish society traditionally is considered class-less, and might lead to misunderstandings. The facet “Up-to date” is
left out, since it is interpreted (assumption) to be too indicative of technology, and as such misleading. The two replacements (strong, glamorous) are chosen, since they both are among the original facets (traits), that scored “highest Item to Total Correlation” in the original development of facets, based on a broad selection of traits (Aaker, 1997, p. 351).

The brand touch point personality framework (beneath), (Based on Aaker, 1997, adjusted by researcher), is thus used as the possible 'personality-factors' which the respondents can use to characterize the brand touch points by (Collection of brand touch points app. D). NB: Both 'brand touch- points' and ' personalities-factors' are presented to respondents in a randomized manner to adjust for bias due to order of presentation (Hair et al, 2009). Respondents’ characterization of brand touch points as personalities are supplementary to respondents' elaborated and nuanced explanations (Hair et al, 2009). The ‘NB’-point made, does apply also for subsequent parameters, ie ‘relationship-forms’ and their ‘qualities’.

**Relationships between consumers and brand touch-points and quality of the relationship**

In order to establish research, which from an academic perspective is regarded managerial to marketers and furthermore is regarded as an applicable other way to express perception of brand (touch points) is Fournier's (1998) work regarding consumers' relationships with brands, and the
quality hereof. It is considered relevant due to its ability to elaborate on the already mentioned personalities (Aaker, 1997), in a structured and meaningful way, i.e. the actual interview is directed into a path, which should generate findings, which from an academic point of view is considered more concise and managerial to marketers.

The original work by Susan Fournier was conducted in two steps. First, she identified 15 forms of relationships (Fournier, 1998, table 1), and hence identified 6 brand relationship qualities and possible effects on relationship stability (Fournier, 1998, p. 366). The research for this thesis follows this approach, however it is not unfolded by conducting Life-story-research (Fournier, 1998), but by conducting in-depth interviews, standing on the findings of Fournier (1998), and adjusted by researcher to be relevant for analysing brand touch-point relationships. The original list by Fournier (1998), is reduced and grouped in 5 relationship-forms: Marriage, Friendship, Dependency, Flirt and Habit. This reduction of relationship-forms is made, since the in-depth interview form requires a more managerial or operational set-up (in opposition to e.g. Life-stories), where the respondent within a relatively short time frame must be able to overview the topic. (Hair et al, 2009)

The quality of the relationship is analysed by asking the respondents, what drives the respective relationships, based on the original 6 dimensions (Fournier, 1998). In the original model by Susan Fournier, she included “effects on relationship stability” due to “the meaning of a given construct is dependent on its relationships with other constructs” (Fournier, 1998, p. 366) i.e. the relationship is affected by other factors, that lies outside the relationship itself. This holistic approach is probably optimal, but considered too ambitious to be fully revealed in this research.

The framework 'brand touch point relationship-forms and their qualities' (next page) (Based on Fournier, 1998, adjusted by researcher), is thus used as the possible 'relationships' and 'quality of relationship' which the respondents can use to characterize the brand touch points by (Collection of brand touch-points app. D.)
Total collection of brand touch points, is inspired by Customer Activity Cycle (Vandermerwe, 1993, 2000) and Brand touch-point continuum (Hogan, 2005) and based on definition (MT, 2.2) The actual collection of brand touch-points is developed by researcher in alignment with the just mentioned, and presented to respondents in randomized order, to prevent bias due to order of presentation.(App. D: Collection of brand touch-points)

The interview process. The questionnaire is designed to engage and involve the respondents by giving the respondents an opportunity to participate actively by freely characterizing brand touch-points by explaining and elaborating on the brand touch-points as personalities, partners in relationship-forms and their qualities. (Hair et al, 2009; Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998). The structure of the questionnaire is first an introduction, establishment of comfort-zone and trust (Hair et al, 2009), then questions related to Life-style, then questions regarding technology products (by asking to experience with/knowledge about certain innovations and supplemented with consumers own
suggestions) and core content, ie. questions about perception of brand touch points. Interview regarding perception of brand touch points is conducted in a three-step approach, which should help respondents to consider brand touch points in a more abstract way, and at the same time reinforce findings. (Hair et al 2009) (Aaker, 1997) (Fournier, 1998).

The interview is administered by the researcher (Hair et al, 2009) and conducted in Danish.

**Possible bias in research set-up (research design is covered in MT 2.0)**

* In this research, it is sought to unveil perception of brand touch-points. However, respondents might be biased by specific creative executions, when and if they refer to actual commercials, displayed on/via specific brand touch points.

* The research is based on work regarding Brand Personalities (Aaker, 1997) and Brand Relationships (Fournier, 1998) and inspired by the work of both authors in 1998, regarding evolution of consumer-brand relationships. These articles are based on extensive research of both descriptive and explorative nature, and tailor-made to answer their respective hypotheses and foci. When building new research, based on the works of others, and with new hypotheses and foci, there will be biases, e.g. due to use of terminology. (In an optimal scenario should the adjustments made by the researcher to e.g. “facets” (Aaker, 1997) and “types of relationships” (Fournier, 1998) be thoroughly tested for respondents’ interpretation, as conducted in academic research). 'Personalities' (Aaker, 1997) are characterized by being far more positive (4 out of 5) than negative, which might impede bias (brand touch points will be characterized more positively, than they would without Aaker's (1997) pre-defined personalities).

*In order to secure alignment with the respondents of what a brand touch point is, a complete collection of brand touch points is displayed (randomized), which might lead some respondents to mention more brand touch points, than they would have, in case no collection was displayed. Here it is considered more relevant and important to secure alignment of the understanding of the terminology ie. the meaning of the term 'brand touch-point'.

*The abstract nature of core content of the research might provide for possible bias due to respondents acceptance, understanding and interpretation of the meaning of the actual questions. Furthermore does the research unveil respondents' conscious answers and explanations, which might be biased by respondents' need to look good in the eyes of themselves and others. The research does as such not unveil sub-conscious levels of perception of brand touch-points.

*Finally it should be noted, that the demographic criteria aimed at, were not possible to fulfil in real life, which however did not seem to cause uniformity or bias, due to fairly successful broad representation of Lifestyles in overall sample (App. E, Rep. of diversity in Lifestyle/sample).

### 4.0 Qualitative Research  Qualitative Research Overview (Table):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Design (Methodology)</th>
<th>Research Set-Up (Theoretical Foundation)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Explorative design</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative data collecting method via in-depth interviews (Hair et al, 2009)</td>
<td>Un – and semistructured. Core-content in questionnaire, ie regarding perception brand touch-points by 3 parameters:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothetical constructs</td>
<td>Perception of brand touch-points as personalities (insp. Aaker, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identification of independent and dependent variables, and elaborated, detailed hypothetical constructs. (Hair et al, 2009)</td>
<td>- Perception of brand touch-points as partners in relationships (insp. Fournier, 1998)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample 40 respondents, ie. 4 segments on innovation adoption curve in equal representation by 10 respondents each. Demographic criteria guide sample. Diversity in optimal Lifestyle criteria is aimed at. (Biune et al, 2009, Hair et al 2009, SNS Gallup 2010)  

Respective brand touch-points identified based on Vandermerwe (2003)/Hogan et al (2005)  

Interview-procedure  
Screening and subsequent categorization of respondents to obtain equal representation of the 4 segments on innovation adoption curve.  
Establishment of optimal flow (Hair et al, 2009) (Comfort zone, introductory questions, core content, final remarks)  
Language: Danish  
Randomized order of presentation of respective brand touch-points by 3 parameters (column to the left) (Hair et al, 2009)  
Elaborated explanations by individuals + mapping of perception in schema + (Hair et al, 2009)
4.1 Findings in Qualitative Research

Findings are related to respondents' stage on innovation adoption curve (Independent variable) to determine outcome of hypothetical constructs, as presented in MT 2.4, p.16. The evaluation of hypothetical constructs will be based on the elaborated answers given by respondents and supplemented with outcome of the mapping of perceptions of brand touch points, expressed via symbolic meaning of brand touch points. I.e. Characterization of brand touch-points in terms of 'brand touch-point personality', 'brand touch-point relationship' and 'quality of relationship'.

Scales occurred by silent observation of respondents’ organizing of 'personalities', 'relationships' and 'qualities of relationships', from left to right; most to least positive re. personalities (in alignment with original scale, Aaker, 1997) and from left to right; strongest to weakest re. relationship-forms and qualities of relationships (Fournier, 1998).

The groupings of brand touch-points, as it can be observed in appendix D, is made by researcher, to reflect contemporary collection of brand touch-points in a systematic manner.

Hypothetical constructs/Evaluation, overview (Table):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothetical construct I: General perception of brand touch points</th>
<th>Hypothetical construct II: Brand touch point as relationship-partner (nature and strength of relationship)</th>
<th>Hypothetical construct III: Driver in consumer's relationship with brand touch-point (degree and strength of engagement)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluated: By respondent's elaborated explanations per resp.category and across resp.categories (independent variable) guided by randomized presentation of brand touch-points and personalities. Supplemented by outcome of mapping of perception of brand touch-points as personalities. Scale; from left to right, most positive to least positive: Sincere, competent, sophisticated, exciting, rugged, as observed to be an applicable scale.</td>
<td>Evaluated: By respondent's elaborated explanations per resp.category and across resp.categories (independent variable) guided by randomized presentation of brand touch-points and relationship-forms. Supplemented by outcome of mapping of perception of brand touch-points as relationship-partners. Scale; from left to right, strongest to weakest relationship-form: Marriage, friendship dependency, flirt, habit; as observed to be an applicable scale.</td>
<td>Evaluated: By respondent's elaborated explanations per resp.category and across resp.categories (independent variable) guided by randomized presentation of brand touch-points and driver, I.e qualities. Supplemented by outcome of mapping of perceived driver in relationship. Scale; from left to right, strongest to weakest driver / quality: Love/passion, commitment, intimacy, self-connection, ritual, overall partner-quality; as observed to be an applicable scale.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Documentation for quotes (beneath) from in-depht interviews in Appendix H:

**Hypothetical construct I** (p.15): General perception of brand touch-points. Brand touch-point personality.

The findings show, that mainstream consumers do perceive brand touch-points in a more positive and elaborate manner than early majority and laggards, but not more positive and elaborated than innovators, why hypothetical construct I should be revised in case of further research studies.

Mainstream-consumers’ perception of brand touch-points is well represented by the elaborated answer by e.g. mainstream-respondent “M5” who said: “I like to know, what is going on! In general I appreciate to be informed in an easy way, and do not feel ‘cheap’ because I get information from e.g. door-to-door distributed commercials.” In opposition hereto is the early adopters (EA), who apparently perceive general exposure to brand touch-points as a violation of their personal freedom and to some extent as being in conflict with their values. EA3 formulated it as follows “I am not occupied with commercials. I have better things to do, and I am fully capable of seeking up the information I need myself!” EA7 made the following contribution, which too underscores the perceived uselessness of some brand-touch-points: “When I enter shops, I seldom seek advice (with the salesperson) since I typically know more, than they do, thanks to informations on the Internet and informations from my own net-work. I typically look through home-pages, use relevant search-engines and then - of course - I talk to friends and/or people in my network, who I know are knowledgeable within the specific field”. Laggards (L) is the category which is most dis-connected, when it comes to brand touch-points. L9 described it as “I do not consume much. Commercials are waisted on me. If I have to buy a more complex product, lets say a computer, I ask my colleague to buy it for me. If I have to buy something myself, I talk to my family and friends, and then order it at the internet.” Finally, the innovators (I) were found to perceive brand touch-points in a very positive and elaborated manner, which should lead to a corrected hypothetical construct I in case of further research studies. Innovators expressed in general great interest in anything, that could carry information to them, and showed less irritation towards interruptions, as long as the interruption was worthwhile in some aspect. I1 reflected, that “I really enjoy studying a phenomenon. I am of course critical toward the source, but love to be inspired ... If I want to know more about a certain
product, I always browse the internet, - the home-pages, the forums etc. I love to have a good
discussion, with salespeople in certain shops and with people in my network. “ This was supported
by I4, who explained “The network is my second family, with whom I discuss interesting topics like
technology-products. I do of course discuss acquisitions of complex products with my 'real' family
as well, but I will typically do the research.... and then just present possible solutions to them.
I have 'un faible' for old school touch-points like buses and trains, - I do not know why,- perhaps due
to the innocence they represent to me. Scaffolds and billboards are often cool as well”

Please see appendix F1 for mapping of perception of brand touch-points as personalities, which
support the above findings. Perception per brand touch-point group: Appendixes G 1,2,3,4

Finally, it should be noted, that the findings do not conflict with the indications made in Lifestyle
segmentation (profile of segments) KOMPAS by Gallup (ref c), which also contain general attitudes
toward media.

**Hypothetical construct II (p.16): Brand touch-points as relation-ships partners.**

Findings showed, that innovators actually engage in surprisingly many brand touch-points (which is
in line with the above findings regarding general perception/ brand touch points personalities
(Hypothetical construct I). Innovators seem to engage in more relationships, than early adopters and
in as many as mainstream consumers do engage in (and remarkably more than laggards). This
finding means, that hypothetical construct II should be adjusted, in case of further research. Early
adopters are the most selective category, and express deep reservation towards brand touch-points
which are *active*, which in some cases might lead to refusal of touch-points. Mainstream consumers
are broadly oriented towards brand touch-points, but are to a greater extend than other categories
oriented towards human/personal touch-points of a professional nature. Laggards are the category
which is most disconnected, in the sense, that they mainly focus on touch-points within their
personal spheres, i.e. existing friends and family.
The finding of how innovators are willing and presumed able to engage in relationships with brand touch-points from various touch-points groups, is illustrated by I1, who explained “I am really thrilled about the possibilities on the internet to search for information etc. However, I get a lot of inspiration from e.g. specialist-magazines, some physical and others electronic, - either way, no regard of media, I am looking for content, - just as in people! By the way, I love to meet new people” The early adopters tended to select very few touch-points in the categorization. This indicated unwillingness or lack of ability amongst early adopters, to identify touch-points to be categorized into (‘personality’ and) ‘relationship-form’ was e.g. expressed by EA1, who said “Since I know, what I want to buy, I do not have to engage in a lot of touch-points. I only check the price at the internet, I.e. at home-pages, forums and recommendations from professionals. That's why, I am only selecting few touch-points right now.” In contrast hereto, were the mainstream consumers in general both willing and able to categorize wide selections of touch-points into various types of (personalities and) relationship-forms. M8: “This is fun. I have to say, I enjoy to relax, reading Lifestyle magazines. It is my 'good friend' - I think you could say we have a 'relationship'!”

Laggards, proved to be as disconnected, as hypothesized, i.e. they close themselves around already existing touch-points in their personal spheres (family and friends), which is well illustrated by e.g. L2: “I do not spend time on engaging in 'touch-points'. I ask my knowledgeable friends, so.... “

Please see appendix F2 for mapping of perception of brand touch-points as relationship-partners, which support the above findings. Perception per brand touch-point group: Appendixes G 1,2,3,4

**Hypothetical construct III (p.17): 'Driver' in consumers' relation-ships with brand touch-points.**

The third step of the semi-structured part of the interview gave good insights regarding how respondents perceive the quality of the relationship to the personalized brand touch-points, however to a limited extend, since this parameter was rejected more by respondents than previous parameters ‘personality’ and ‘relationship-form’. What actually drives the relationship to various brand touch-points was found to be perceived differently, depending on stage on innovation adoption curve, as follows:
Innovators (I) tended to express strong feelings e.g. in the research-phase for a new product or concept, which means, that hypothetical construct III has to be revised in case of further research studies. I2 is a good example of how innovators regard interaction with some brand touch-points, when researching for a technological innovation: "I love to visit the home-pages, run the search-engines etc. at the internet. It is a thrill!" The strong feelings also showed in another form, as elaborated by I4: “I love to have a good discussion with other knowledgeable people. This discussion can take place either in the shop (that is, if the sales-person is knowledgeable), in my forum at the internet or with my friends. It should be noted, that I have the strong experience, that an optimal network requires face-to-face meetings on a regular basis, why I meet several times a year with my internet-based network. It is not enough to 'meet' at the internet!”, which indicate importance of presence of human interaction. I2 indicated how a broad (and evolving) selection of touch-points played a role at the emotional level “I am enthused by technological progress, and love to do research before an acquisition of a new product. It is a pleasure to read as much as possible about it, preferably at the internet, in specialist magazines etc. and to discuss the product with other people”. This means hypothetical construct III should be revised regarding the driver for innovators’ relationships with brand touch-points to be 'Love/Passion'. The early adopters (EA) indicated in general a more rational approach in their relationships with different brand touch-points, which could be well illustrated by EA2, who explained that she e.g. narrowed the research to a pre-decided selection of touch-points “I read certain magazines, search the internet and watch 'So Ein Ding'. By the way print-adds in the magazines have no effect on me, since I focus at the articles only.” It was furthermore the impression, that early adopters could be over-represented in refusing door-to-door distributed commercials, since they to a great extend expressed that they by choice did not receive this media. The more rational approach was also explained by EA4, who said “I think I mainly relate (to brand touch-points) due to 'commitment' or because it is some kind of 'ritual'. I only 'love' my actual family and do not regard them as 'brand touch points' as such.” The mainstream-consumers (M) seemed to confirm the hypothetical construct, i.e. they expressed mainly other, weaker factors as driver(s) in relationship with some brand touch-points, like M6, who expressed thankfulness and loyalty towards brand touch-points of both human and non-human nature, that had proved reliable: “I am really glad, that search-engines and forums exist at the
internet exist. It has made Life so much easier. But I must ad, that I really appreciate to go to the shop to feel the product and to have the opportunity to ask impulsive questions to the salesperson. It is just too bad, that they (salespeople) quite often are extremely laid back, as if they couldn’t care less..... When I experience good service, I stick to that sales-person!” . Finally, are indicative findings in research pointing to the laggards (L) being the category, which is by far the most passive and isolated amongst the four categories defined. Laggards (L) expressed mainly neutrality or neglect when it came to identifying, what could drive relationships with brand touch-points. L10 is a good example of a laggard, who do not perceive herself, as partner in something as 'commercialized' as a brand touch-point: “I see the majority of the brand touch-points or media as something irrelevant, and therefore, I am not able to name actual 'drivers'. I 'love' my family of course, and I am 'committed' to my friends. That's it!” It was also found that laggards do relate to e.g. Lifestyle-magazines, driven by 'self-connection-quality'. However, it was indicated that laggards would not buy a technological product without being presented to the idea from a friend or family-member. L1 confirmed this isolated nature of this category by expressing, that: “Despite I am an experienced jogger and have spent a substantial amount of money on the outfit (clothes), I only own my runner's watch, because I received it as a present from my husband... bought, based on advice from our neighbour”. These final indications support the last part of the hypothetical construct, that laggards are relating emotionally to brand touch-points, i.e to actual persons in existing relationships.

Please see appendix F3 for mapping of actual perception of relation-ship qualities / drivers in relation-ships with brand touch-points, which support the above findings. Perception per brand touch-point group: Appendixes G 1,2,3,4

4.2 Symbolic meaning of brand touch-points

Due to both the un- and semi-structured nature of the questionnaire, built on presentation in randomized order of first, selection of brand touch-points and second, the suggested 1) personalities; 2) relationship-forms; and 3) quality of relationship; the above elaborations from respondents can be supplemented with the outcome of the total mapping of actual perception, i.e.
how respondents perceive brand touch-point on a symbolic level, built on and inspired from Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) (MT,3.0).

The dominating findings of how consumers perceive brand touch-points at the symbolic level, is illustrated in aggregate model, next page. 'Dominating' finding is equal to: Exceeds 50% of respondents in category. All findings are of indicative nature due to qualitative set-up. (Full mapping of all findings, please see appendixes F, 1,2,3. Symbolic meaning of brand touch-points in details, per brand touch-point-group, please see models in appendixes G, 1,2,3,4)

The aggregate model gives the following indications:

- The distinction between passive and active brand touch-points might be an appropriate first discriminator, due to tendencies of consumers perceiving brand touch-points of a passive nature as 'sincere' and to a great extend as 'competent', while brand touch-points of an active nature are perceived 'sophisticated', 'exciting' or 'rugged', i.e. a pattern can be observed, derived from the notion passive/active, as presented by academia (MT, 3.0). This might suggest an elaboration of this notion i.e. knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points might offer further explanations, as why consumers prefer passive brand touch-points and to some extend refuse active brand touch-points, that goes beyond current presentation in literature. (MT, 3.0)

- The distinction between human and non-human brand touch-points might be an appropriate second discriminator, due to tendencies of consumers perceiving brand touch-points of a human nature as 'sincere' and to some extend as 'competent' , while brand touch-points of an non-human nature are perceived 'sophisticated', 'exciting' or 'rugged'; i.e. a pattern is also observable in this dimension. This might thus also suggest an elaboration of the notion 'human factor' as presented in literature (MT, 3.0). It is interesting to observe how the factor 'sincerity' is connoted by respondents to relate mainly to actual human-beings, which as such also might offer further explanations of why difficulties might arise in attempts of building relationships with consumers, when based on technological solutions as substitutions for ‘human factor’. These aspects have also been pointed to amongst academia (MT, 3.0). Respondents did express perception of e.g. home-pages to be 'sincere'
however to a certain extend. This might indicate possibility of stretching the notion 'human factor' via certain, well-defined substitutes/touch-points of a technological nature, which might bring more nuance to presentation in current literature (MT, 3.0). (Text continues p. 47)
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• The strength of the relationship tends to be strong ('marriage', 'friendship') with brand touch-points of passive and/or human nature, and weaker ('flirt') with brand touch-points of an active and non-human nature. As pointed to by academia (Fournier, 1998; MT, 3.0) does this part of the research give potential insights of a more managerial nature to marketers, why the findings here might be indicative of confirmation of the above reflections, also in a managerial interpretation. For marketers it might be valuable to gain further insights of why certain brand touch-points offer better possibilities of building 'relationships', since it might not be a question of certain attractive functional attributes in the touch-point (like e.g. optimal visual presentation) that support the building of a relationships between two partners, but more a matter of substance, I.e a question of whether the brand touch-point itself is of a nature worth spending energy, effort and time at.

• The quality of the relationship tends to be strong ('love') for relationships with brand touch-points of passive and/or human nature, and weaker ('ritual' or none) for brand touch-points of an active and non-human nature. This third and final dimension in the core-content in research is by academia (Fournier, 1998) also connected to the more managerial potential input to marketers, since this dimension imply, that respondents thoroughly consider what actually drives the relationship. The indications made, does as such re-confirm the distinction between active/passive and human factor/ no human factor, and might furthermore offer potential explanations to why consumers behave differently towards a given brand touch-point. This means that such knowledge e.g. might be valuable in determining the use of brand touch-points towards different segments/target-groups. It should however be noted, that this parameter was rejected by respondents, to a higher degree than 'personality' and 'relationship-form'.

• The active – old school - brand touch-points (e.g. TV, door-to-door distributed commercials and newspapers) are not represented in a convincing manner, I.e. they have not been perceived by respondents as one of the personalities suggested. Of interest is however, that they tended to be perceived by respondents as included in their lives. This might indicate, that the old school, active brand touch-points mentioned are found to be of some 'quality' since respondents to a great extend referred to this kind of touch-points, as being driven by 'rituals'.

• Finally, might the findings of how different segments perceive certain brand touch-points in the same way, (however relating in different ways, and driven by different qualities) offer insights
regarding possible diffusion-hub's. This assumption is based on the following: 1) Brand touch-points which both innovators, early adopters and mainstream-consumers (and to some extend also laggards) have pin-pointed as personalities and relationship-partners (of which some, with special quality), are all equal of some interest to all categories on the innovation adoption curve 2) The presence of all four categories in one brand touch-point might indicate possibility of interaction, also across categories, e.g. internet-forums or the physical shop. This leads to the last tendencies as follows:

- Diffusion-hubs are probably characterised by being brand touch-points of passive and/or human nature. This indication is very well in line with theory regarding diffusion (MT, 3.0) as the importance of 'personal interaction' is often pointed to. This indication might thus be a confirmation of how the presence of homo-philic scenario in an otherwise heterogeneous population, might be of value in a diffusion-process. Put into this research - context might knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points thus offer possibility of identifying specific brand touch-points of diffusion capability, and at the same time offer potential insights regarding differences, as how the respective segments relate to the specific touch-point, and what drives this relationship.

- Diffusion-hubs are mainly characterised by being brand touch-points, characterized as 'sincere' or 'competent', with strong relationship-form ('marriage', 'friendship') and of high-quality ('love', 'commitment'). This indication do as such follow the path as noted above MT p.49, since there seems to be a connection between how consumers in general perceive brand touch-points (personality) and the likely relationship-form and quality. This might indicate, that a diffusion-process could be improved due to marketers ability to identify brand touch-points, which are perceived in a positive manner to secure 'substance', with which consumers tend to relate to, in a stronger manner, driven by higher quality, which all equal should facilitate diffusion, I.e as pointed to in literature, regarding co-production networks (MT,3.0) and also in the delivery of ‘superior value’ from company to consumers and ‘co-creation of experiences’ (MT.3.0).
5.0 Discussion

The discussion sets out by illustrating how the process of posing 'diagnostic questions' in order to unveil consumers' perception of brand touch-points leads to a sum of knowledge. This is illustrated by the model ‘Consumer Based Interaction’ (CBI-model) and ‘Brand Touch-points from a consumer-perspective’. CBI-model is presented within the context of qualitative research conducted in MT 4.0 and provides as such a possible conceptual frame with the objective to unveil ‘a sum of knowledge’. In this case, is the total sum of knowledge illustrated in aggregate model: Symbolic meaning of brand touch-points, MT p. 46, in app. G,1,2,3,4 and in MT 4.2, findings. ‘Brand Touch-points from a consumer-perspective’ is thus an expression of how and which brand touch-points consumers along innovation adoption curve do perceive in a dominant manner within the structure of CBI-model.

Unveiling complexity -> A sum of knowledge

**Diagnostic question no. 1**
How will you characterize the (respective) brand touch-point? (Personality in order to unveil general perception)

**Diagnostic question no. 2**
How do you relate to the (respective) brand touch-point? (Relationship-form in order to unveil strength and nature of relationship)

**Diagnostic question no. 3**
What drives your relationship with the (respective) brand touch-point? (Relationship-quality in order to unveil degree of engagement)

**Technological**
- Passive touch-points
- Active touch-points

**Old School!**
- Active touch-points

**Out of Home**
- Passive touch-points
- Active touch-points

**Actual Persons**
- Passive touch-points
- Active touch-points

As indicated in MT 4.2
Brand touch-points from a consumer-perspective:

What remains, is a discussion to bring critical aspects, nuanced perspectives and new possible insights and assumptions forward.
5.1 How can knowledge be translated to improvements?

Bearing the RQ and SQ in mind, it might be beneficial to discuss how a sum of 'knowledge' can be translated to actual 'improvements' of IMC strategy', I.e. discussing which, and how specific parameters are likely to contribute in this process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of knowledge</th>
<th>Which and how do specific parameters contribute?</th>
<th>Actual improvements</th>
</tr>
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</table>

The above qualitative research (MT, 4.0) is in its core-content based on the work of Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998). The work of respective academia differ in several aspects, due to overall focus, but more interestingly in one aspect referred to in MT, 2.4, p.17 regarding 'bare or flat perception' (Personalities, Aaker, 1997) in opposition to 'managerial qualities for marketers' (Relationship-forms and their qualities, Fournier, 1998). It might thus be tempting to skip the research aiming at unveiling perception in terms of 'personalities' and focusing at the suggested managerial perception in terms of 'relationship-forms and their qualities'.

When studying the hypothetical constructs and the findings, it is however indicated, that it apparently not is sufficient knowledge that a consumer relates to a brand touch-point in a given manner (e.g by ‘friendship’). This parameter expresses the nature and strength of the relationship, which absolutely is interesting due to aspect of reciprocity (Fournier, 1998) and to aspects of 'co-creation of experiences' (Prahalad, 2004; Vandermerve; 2003, Hogan; 2005, MT, 3.0), and which from a company perspective could be regarded as a strategy to build relationships. From a consumer perspective is the building of a relationship, however most likely depending on the substance of the potential partner, I.e. does the consumer perceive a suggested partner as worthy enough for a relationship (and what kind of relationship?). In the aggregate model, ‘Symbolic meaning of brand touch-points’ (MT, 4.2, p. 46) are indications illustrated ie. how the respondents tend to relate strongly (e.g. ‘marriage’ or ‘friendship’) to brand touch-points they perceive as being 'sincere' and 'competent'. The unveiling of perception in terms of 'personalities' might thus offer extended explanations to why consumers have strong relationships with certain brand touch-points, and not
with others. Such combinations of parameters might be where the potential insights and thereby input for improvements of the IMC strategy reside.

The parameter 'relationship-quality' is of a combining nature in itself, since it is 'born' as the twin parameter to 'relationship-forms' (Fournier, 1998). As observed in the qualitative research conducted, did this parameter however not yield as many explanations which might be due to several aspects; either due to order of presentation of parameters (3.step (last step) in core content/qualitative research) or due to the simple fact, that respondents to some extend did not accept this parameter in relation to brand touch-points (mentioned by respondents). This might thus impede marketers to be cautious in the effort to translate ‘knowledge’ into ‘improvements’, since the basic premises for the knowledge gathered, must be accepted by those, contributing to the sum of knowledge. The above thus indicate, that there might be limitations to the usefulness of all of the parameters chosen and illustrated in above CBI-model.

This line of thinking, i.e. that the possible inputs for improvements is found by combining parameters, is in line with academia like Fishbein et al (1976), who has contributed to literature with e.g. Expectancy-value- model, which however takes a more mathematical approach.

Furthermore does the above line of thinking highlight the insufficiency of CBI-model and the hypothetical constructs as researched upon in MT, 4.0, since the aspect of diffusion apparently not is directly, fully integrated and combined in neither hypothetical constructs nor parameters to a sufficient degree. (cont.MT 6.0)

Thus, might the 'sum of knowledge' gathered, be translated to

- fairly good first indications of how consumers, depending on stage on innovation adoption curve, perceive brand touch-points in terms of personalities and relationships, which, combined might give input to marketers of how to improve 'concept of brand touch-points' (and thereby the IMC-strategy)
to some extent first indications of what drives (‘quality’ of) consumers' relationships with brand touch-points, however did this parameter not seem to be fully compatible with research on brand touch-points, why other parameter and hypothetical construct might be considered, in order to generate input to marketers, that can be fully translated to improvements of 'concept of brand touch-points' (and thereby the IMC- strategy)

reasonable assumptions regarding how 'diffusion of marketing information and messages' can be improved, based on knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points depending on stage on innovation adoption curve. This should thus give inspiration to improve the strategy for innovative and disruptive products and concepts. However probably beneficial to revisit theory regarding diffusion in order to rebuild hypothetical constructs and parameters to fully integrate and combine also notion of diffusion in eventually other qualitative research. (see also MT, 6.0)

5.2 'Concept of brand touch-points' revisited. Discussion: How can knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points improve 'concept of brand touch-point’?

5.2.1 The interaction

In literature is one of the major topics the notion of 'before-during-and after purchase', as illustrated in Customer Activity Cycle (Vandermerve, 1993) and Touch-point-chain (Hogan, et al, 2005) (MT, 3.0). The Customer Activity Cycle in itself is based on and developed with the customers in focus, however does the customer focus in the terminology of Vandermerwe (1993, 2000, 2003, 2004) not include how customers perceive the interaction/touch-points, which might make the customer focus more equivalent to what could be referred to as customer-observation, rather than focusing on customer-understanding. Vandermerwe (1993) does refer to an 'outside-in approach' (MT, 3.0), which aims at understanding customers. However does the Customer Activity Cycle not include customer-perception as an explicit parameter, which might be beneficial to include, to fully understand the reasons for customers' behaviours, ie. their activities. Furthermore should an elaborated understanding of why the customers behave as they do, all equal increase the potential in exploring the value gaps referred to by Vandermerwe (2000) (MT, 3.0). These reflections could be
related to notion of Customer Based Brand Equity model (Keller, 2008), which exactly is rooted in the understanding of customer-perception in the overall process of brand-value creation, Le Brand Value Chain (Keller, 2008) (Combined, Flinck et al) (MT, 3.0). This could too form a strong argument for including consumer-perception in Customer Activity Cycle (or similar model) due to common aspects of value-creation.

The terminology of Vandermerwe (1993, 2000), who is consistent in using the term 'customer' and never 'consumer' might give the impression, that the Customer Activity Cycle is aimed at customers (i.e. existing customers) mainly, and do not embrace the special challenge of attracting new customers. This might be a matter of terminology, however would a clarification of how the Customer Activity Cycle (or similar brand touch-point model) also embrace attraction of new customers be beneficial. The just made reflections are in particular important for the company, who market innovative and disruptive products and/or concepts, due to the earlier-referred to segments on the innovation adoption curve (MT, 3.0), and simply because an innovative and disruptive product by nature is new. It appears as such a necessity for the company to understand how the respective segments perceive the touch-points, since the segments along the innovation adoption curve seem to perceive these differently, as illustrated in model, ‘Brand touch-points from a consumer-perspective’ and in MT, 4.2( findings), aggregate model, MT p. 46 and appendixes G1, G2, G3, G4. This might thus suggest, that the Customer Activity Cycles should be repeated along the innovation curve as part of the STP-process for innovative/disruptive products, which would be in line with Moore (2008), Rogers (2003) (MT, 3.0).

On the other hand, is The Customer Activity Cycle (Vandermerve, 1993) valued especially due to its conceptual strengths, which are indisputable. In the research conducted (MT, 4.0) there were no signs or expressions regarding respondents perceiving brand touch-points in a specific manner related to activities or phases. It is of course possible and likely, that e.g. Home-pages is especially important in research-phase, however is it also possible that consumers of innovative, technological products and/or concepts would seek advice at the same Home-page, in case of after-purchase challenges. Hogan, et al, 2005 points to how the inter-personal interaction is especially important in
case of need for solving problems, which seems likely from a logical point of view. However were these nuances not expressed in the qualitative research (MT, 4.0). This might be due to, not asking for respondents' eventually differing perception related to these phases; or perhaps more likely, due to the fact, that consumers do not perception-wise discriminate and expect more or less in certain phases or connected to certain activities. Fournier (1998, p. 367) offers a good mental construct: “Consumers do not choose brands (red. or brand touch-points), they choose lives”, ie brand touch-points are at any time subordinated Lifestyles, thus included in everyday Life as experienced by consumers. The only people, who could be expected to take interest in ‘perception of brand touch-points’ as such, are thus marketers on a mission.

Vandermerwe (1993, 2003) or Hogan et al (2005) have not included this parameter regarding consumer-perception of brand touch-points. This might relate to the original objective of models, since both authors are writing with the purpose to illustrate how the company can grow the business by identifying the points of interaction, and by identifying value gaps (Vandermerwe, 1993, 2000). Vandermerwe (1993, 2003) is as such not occupied with the perception-wise quality of the specific brand touch-points, being a premise for the interaction. This distinction might be important, since it highlights how a simple add-on or inclusion of 'parameter regarding consumer-perception' in relation to a model like Customer Activity Cycle or similar model, not necessarily is meaningful. This is also apparent above, where the discrepancy between the notion 'before-during-after purchase' and parameter of 'consumers' perception of brand touch-points' is highlighted. This might thus suggest, that the CBI-model and the knowledge gathered in qualitative research should be integrated in another way, than simply applying it at an existing model like Customer Activity Cycle, or other static model, only.

5.2.2 Creation of experiences
Marketplace issues, like competition and need for differentiation via other parameters, than functional attributes in product (MT, 3.0) and e.g contemporary consumers, being selective and demanding (MT, 3.0) have led to substantial amount of literature regarding 'creation of experiences' (Pine et al, 1998; Prahalad, 2004; Vandermerve, 2003), which in different ways spin around brand
touch-points. The interaction, which leads to customers' perceived 'superior value delivered by company' is attractive from several perspectives; ie. value-adding (Pine et al, 1998), co-creation (Prahalad, 2004) and a path to obtain customer lock-on (Vandermerwe, 2004) with the further purpose of setting of to a Blue Ocean scenario (Kim et al, 2004). It might thus be worthwhile to consider, how brand touch-points, which after all are the scene for interaction, are perceived by consumers, to obtain improved creation of experiences. Furthermore does the perspective by Norton (2003) stress, how increasingly important it is, that the experience is perceived meaningful, both related to the individual and the product. (MT, 3.0)

In qualitative research conducted (MT, 4.0) it appeared how the segments along innovation adoption curve seem to perceive brand touch-points differently. It might thus be a reasonable rationale, that the experience, which *always* resides with the consumer, and which is perceived meaningful, not necessarily is the same along the innovation adoption curve neither. For example might it be a great experience to an early adopter, to visit a home-page, where you can assembly parts to a mobile-phone, whilst mainstream-consumers would perceive it as a great experience to choose between colours and (mainstream-) applications. This is well in line with Rogers (2003) who advise specifically on how to 'work with' the different segments along the innovation adoption curve (and in line with core-principles of adoption of innovation, MT, 3.0), and is very well in line with how consumers depending on stage on innovation adoption curve (and e.g home-pages, which is illustrated in model ‘Brand Touch-points from a consumer perspective’ (and app. G1). Whilst e.g. early adopter relate as in a ‘friendship’, i.e. assumable willing to spend time and energy, does mainstream consumers relate as in a ‘flirt’, i.e not that strong or enduring, why the experience delivered, probably should be scaled to meet these examples of willingness to relate, in order to make experience work as intended.

It can however be observed, how innovative companies make a 'one size fits' all approach, which not is in line with core-principles regarding adoption of innovations (Rogers, 2003), nor Moore (2008) (MT, 3.0). (Further discussed in 5.3, Concept of Diffusion). The observed marketing of e.g. 3D Television for private households, is a good example of a (too?) fast to market-approach, where the supplier (Samsung) caters to mainstream-segments, even the concept is immature, (ref d.) and
not yet taken to market by several leading players, i.e. providing for market evidence (Moore, 2008) (MT, 3.0). The touch-points chosen by Samsung, of which TV could be observed to be dominant, imply furthermore most probably a problem since the touch-point in itself might devalue the marketing-information and message. It is not necessarily a meaningful way to deliver an immature, innovative 3D experience via a 2D mainstream touch-point. There might be a risk of leaving mainstream-consumers more confused than enlightened, since they typically not have recognized any need for 3D television (yet) and might see barriers in terms of 3D-glasses etc.

One dominant aspect in literature regarding brand touch-points is how consumers' perception and behaviours are formed via “the sum of the customer's experiences with the product or the company. It is transmitted in every interaction with the customer over the lifetime of the relationship.” (Hogan et al, p. 12). This quote highlights how we might interpret 'creation of experiences' since a single 'experience' via a certain brand touch-point, not is likely to form enduring perception and desired behaviours from consumers.

This might suggest how the above CBI-model and hypothetical constructs in qualitative research (MT 4.0), are insufficient in terms of bringing insights regarding holistic approach, based on synergies forward. In an ideal research scenario, it might thus be beneficial to integrate and combine research regarding consumer's perceptions of how certain constellations of brand touch-points create synergies and provide for sum of experiences.

5.2.3 Human factor – can it be stretched?
Several marketing academia (MT, 3.0) agree how 'human factor' is of importance in the contact between company and consumers. Diffusion-theory (Rogers, 2003), theory on epidemics (Geroski, 2004; MT, 3.0) also univocally praise the importance of 'human interaction' as a remedy and precaution for a successful diffusion-process. At the same time does current discussions in media, reflect a society in which human interaction is sought reduced to a minimum (ref e) however with a limited success. The consumers value the ease and transparency on the internet with increased
turnover via the internet-shops. Still, common reflections are made, how come 30% of all visitors at the internet-shops are window-shopping only, thus not completing the transaction (ref f).

These blurred input give inspiration to discuss 'human factor' and the perception of touch-points, which carry 'human factor' in opposition to touch-points which are 'substitutes' (technological solutions with a human voice/face, like e.g. answering devices on hot-lines, or streaming with CEO at home-pages) or touch-points which are 'non-human' but equipped with technology to provide for human interaction (like e.g. opportunity to blogg via home-page).

The research conducted (MT, 4.0) indicates how consumers across categories are far more able to engage in strong relationships with actual persons, especially when these actual persons, are persons from private sphere (friends/family) (illustrated in aggregated model, MT, p. 47 and app. G4). This is not a surprise since both marketing-academia and practitioners have pointed to the power of 'word of mouth' or 'virals' (MT, 3.0) and academia, interested in diffusion of innovations/ epidemics, have pointed to same mechanism (MT, 3.0). The power of 'word of mouth' or virals have been subject to a lot of interest amongst both academia and practitioners (e.g. Kozinets et al, 2010), and the observed power has been exploited and sought integrated in the communication strategies amongst a great variety of companies, with a tremendous amount of creativity. The concept is however in no aspect new. It has been discussed e.g. in original literature regarding diffusion (Rogers, 1973) and related also to principle of homogeneous versus heterogeneous populations. (MT, 3.0).

The 'new' is the technology that provide for '1 to many in network' as e.g. illustrated in The Network Coproduction Model (by Kozinets et al, 2010) (MT, 3.0), which is intertwined with development in devices (mobile phones, computers etc.) which carry the technology for the interaction mentioned.

Thus, how stretchable is 'human factor'?

Vandermerwe (1993, 2000) (MT, 3.) offers conflicting expressions, which might be due to technological development, and thereby updated input from academia. On one hand does Vandermerwe (1993, p. 59) claim that there is “no substitute ...for face to face contact and
dialogue” and at the other, in 2000, p. 35, expressing how the internet has “enabled companies to deliver ongoing personalized value”. This last expression might benefit from further nuance, due to 1) other academia (MT.3.0) who are contemporary and express importance of the human interaction (e.g. Hogan, et al, 2005); 2) empiric literature, which have analysed the importance of (physical) salespersons in e.g. the diffusion of GPS for private persons (Twice Retail Guide, 2007) and diffusion of digital TV (Shapiro, 2005), where the communication-skills, knowledge and professionalism of salespersons have been referred to as crucial in the diffusion-process, due to conviction and point-of-sale, especially for the mainstream-consumers; 3) distinction between 'soft-ware- information' and 'hard-ware-information (Geroski, 2009) (MT, 3.0), and 4) finally the findings in qualitative research conducted (MT, 4.0), where importance of human factor is illustrated in aggregated model, MT, p. 46 and app. G4, and where it can be observed that the importance of human factor, does differ, depending on stage on innovation adoption curve (e.g does early adopters apparently despite sales-people in physical shop, whilst mainstream-consumers and laggards perceive them in a positive manner and relate in enduring manners), as illustrated in above model, Brand touch-points from a consumer-perspective.

It thus seems, that the notion of human factor should be treated in several layers; ie the ability to stretch ‘human factor’ depends on aspects relating to 'can the company actually deliver superior value (an experience) via substitute?', 'what kind of information? (soft or hard?); and finally, 'who are we interacting with? (ie. How does the prospect perceive brand touch-point and notion of ‘human factor’?)

Finally, does the research conducted (MT, 4.0) indicate that consumers across categories perceive e.g. home-pages (inclusive related blogs, forums, chats) and internet-forums as competent, and relate in an enduring manner, driven by relatively high quality, even the interaction is electronic and human interaction is at arm’s length, with anonymous persons, not within private sphere. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that, 'human factor' is stretchable, however preferably within the set-up of a 'passive' brand touch-points.
Facebook and other social media, is in the research conducted (MT, 4.0) only referred to, on a limited extend, and mainly by early adopters and mainstream segments under the age of 35. This might be an expression, of how this type of media is perceived more 'a hub' or a remedy for human interaction within younger generations, than an actual brand touch-point. The indisputable success of e.g. Facebook, measured in growth/profiles and in activity does suggest qualities regarding viral campaigns due to 'diffusion-hub' characteristic.

5.2.4 Active and passive brand touch-points

As highlighted by both academia and practitioners (MT, 3.0) are active touch-points often regarded as ‘intrusive and as leading to subsequent negative/undesired consumer-behaviour’ (MT, 3.0). In opposition hereto, are passive touch-points, regarded as touch-points where the information is ‘made available to consumers’ (MT, 3.0), and as such regarded as a less aggressive way to interact with consumers.

The qualitative research conducted (MT, 4.0) might however offer some additional insights for discussion regarding the notion of 'active' versus 'passive' touch-points, since the research (MT, 4.0) is rooted in how consumers perceive the actual touch-points, in opposition to eventual research regarding 'active' versus 'passive' touch-points.

Whether the consumer is in control, and thereby not interrupted is an often referred to argument, when explaining benefits of passive brand touch-points. (vice versa for active brand touch-points). As it can be observed in aggregate model (MT, p. 46) do the consumers tend to perceive passive brand touch-points as 'sincere' and 'competent', whilst active brand touch-points are perceived mainly as 'sophisticated', 'exciting' or 'rugged'. It can furthermore be observed, that consumers tend to engage more strongly in brand touch-points that are perceived as 'competent' or 'sincere', and driven by higher quality. This difference in perception-pattern might nuance and add to the notion. Passive touch-points do as such seem to possess the potential of delivering more to the consumers, than just the opportunity of being 'in control and not interrupted'. This further nuance might bring inspiration to marketers, ie. why consumers act as they do in relation to passive brand touch-points,
as reflected broadly in literature (MT, 3.0). The finding in aggregate model (MT, p. 47) does also bring further information and nuance to the notion of active touch-points. Consumers were found to perceive this kind of touch-points as less positive, and to engage more superficially with low or no quality. The possible improvements for the ‘concept of brand touch-points’ thus seem to reside in obtaining a deeper understanding of the consumers’ complex behaviours in relation to brand touch-points by deriving nuance beyond current literature as described in MT 4.2 (findings).

Permission marketing can be observed, to be sought exploited by companies of a great variety. Probably since it is a way to interact /seek interaction with consumers via active touch-points, due to the assumption, that when consumers have engaged by giving their permission (typically to be exposed to SMS, E-mails or Direct mails), they will welcome the SMS, E-mail etc. and that the touch-point as such is 'de-activated'. The research conducted (MT, 4.0) however indicate, that consumers do not perceive the touch-points referred to as less 'active' (intrusive) despite the permission given. This might relate to the circumstances, under which the consumers often 'engage' in permission-marketing, e.g. tempted by possibilities of winning competitions or special reductions. Consumers' memory is short-lived and the research conducted (MT, 4.0) indicates how consumers are perceiving this type of active touch-points as intrusive indeed, which should suggest caution for use in IMC

5.3 'Concept of diffusion' revisited. Discussion: How can knowledge regarding consumers’ perception of brand touch-points improve ‘concept of diffusion’

‘Cater and Connect, Diffusion of marketing information and messages’, (model, appendix ‘I’) has the purpose to illustrate points made.

5.3.1 How to enter the curve? ‘Inventor’ in opposition to ‘innovator’.
Academia and practitioners referred to (MT, 3.0), recognize ‘innovators’ as the first, important and unavoidable segment on the ‘innovation adoption curve’. ‘Innovators’ do in any interpretation represent the gateway to the commercially interesting markets further down the curve, - however
does the interpretation of what an ‘innovator’ actually is, differ amongst the academia and practitioners referred to. Thus, should it be worthwhile to discuss, what an ‘innovator’ is and represents in order to enter the’ innovation adoption curve’, in a way, which is likely to optimize diffusion, and thereby improve ‘concept of diffusion’.

A popular saying offers a good introductory understanding; “Innovation is the ‘conversion of a good idea into cash’ in opposition to invention, which is ‘conversion of cash into a good idea’.” (Source unknown/Wikipedia). Quite often will the ‘invention’ precede the ‘innovation’, i.e. the innovation (e.g. a technological product, could be applications for mobile phone) stems from the invention (e.g., the technology that provide for the application). ‘Innovation’ is as such the subject, which appears interesting from a marketing perspective, since this represents ‘the product and/or concept’.

Moore (2008) tends to present ‘innovators’ more as ‘inventors’ by referring directly to famous inventors (Moore, 2008, p. 31), and suggests (along with e.g. Rogers, 2003) to work with the innovators by inviting them to participate in Research & Development activities within company borders, to hire them as educators and other activities, which will tie the ‘innovator’ to the company to a mutual benefit, based on e.g. exchange of technological knowledge (Moore, 2008, Rogers, 2003, MT, 3.0). This line of thinking could be argued to relate more to concepts of user-driven innovation, and lead-user theory instead of marketing. The question is however, whether technological skilled inventors, necessarily will facilitate diffusion. Inherently, lies the question whether the gap pointed to by Moore (2008) between ‘innovators’ and ‘early adopters’ does occur because Moore’s (2008) point of entry is characterized by being more ‘inventors’ instead of ‘innovators’ (and actually is skipping a link in the diffusion-process), and thereby is widening the curve in an unfruitful manner, which not necessarily facilitate diffusion for a marketing-purpose. (As touched upon in MT, 3.0, does Moore (2008) write from a high-tech business to business perspective, and is as such on a professional market, which might explain focus on technological skills.)
Poulsen (2010) offers an alternative viewpoint by stating, that ‘inventors’ from a marketing perspective not are interesting at all. (MT, 3.0). The distinction as referred to by Poulsen (2010), introduces the innovators as a limited group of consumers, who lead their lives in an innovative way, driven only by their inner motivation and ability to either, combine existing items in a new way, or by developing new concepts for their own use and purpose. The great difference between ‘inventors’ and the commercially interesting ‘innovator’ are the way, they lead their Lives. This discipline of ‘trend-forecasting’ is at the other hand conflicting with the notion made by Moore (2008), who argues that development of both fads and trends can be developed and interfered by the marketing-activities of the company. (MT, 3.0).

The above two viewpoints (from two commercial, and marketing oriented sources) could hence represent the outer poles on a spectre, representing the concept ‘innovators’. In between these outer poles do other academias reside, e.g. Rogers (2003), who has a more flexible interpretation of ‘innovators’ including aspects of both Moore (2008) (on how to work with innovators, by e.g. inviting innovators inside company borders) and Poulsen (2010) (regarding extrovert Lifestyle, and extreme absorptive capacity regarding newness).

The concept ‘innovators’, being the entry point on the ‘innovation adoption curve’ is thus not a well defined size in literature, why it might be helpful for marketers to establish a mental construct, ie. a conceptually ‘point of departure’ for diffusion of marketing information and messages, when entering the innovation adoption curve.

In the qualitative research conducted (MT, 4.0) it was found necessary to revise hypothetical constructs related to innovators, in ways, which support mainly the idea of Poulsen (2010). Le the innovators are extreme in their absorption of newness and perceive brand touch-points in positive and elaborate manners, by relating in enduring ways, to a surprisingly great variety of brand touch-points. This might relate to the specific sample in qualitative research conducted, however in a convincing manner.
5.3.2 Interpretation of the innovation adoption curve

As highlighted in MT 3.0 does the interpretation of innovation adoption curve differ amongst academia. Some regard the process of ‘diffusion’ as an unbroken chain, i.e. a continuum, whilst others regard the process as a process, which is broken or interrupted by chasms and gaps. For marketers who are to market innovative and disruptive products and concepts, is might thus be useful, to discuss the premises for the innovation adoption curve, and why these differences in interpretation might occur. This, in order to gain full understanding, with objective of improving ‘concept of diffusion’.

Rogers (2003) sees the curve as a continuum, where the key-principle for diffusion is ‘re-invention’, and the five aspects, that frame the quality of the innovation (MT, 3.0) i.e. diffusion will according here to unfold optimally as long as the product or concept is (being) re-invented to suit the needs of the segments along the innovation adoption curve, and adhere to the five aspects, just referred to. The basic premise is however, that the perspective of Rogers (2003) is ‘relatively free flow of information’ (Geroski, 2009) similar to notion of homogeneous population (Lazardsfeld, in Rogers, 2003) (MT, 3.0). Rogers (2003) does refer to Bass Communication model (Rogers, 2003, p. 210; MT 3.0), which emphasize adoption due to respectively mass and interpersonal communication, however on an aggregate level. The Bass Communication model does not illustrate exact touch-points as diffusion-agents, which as such leaves this question unanswered.

In relation to diffusion of technology does Geroski (2004) state how ‘information diffusion drives technology diffusion’ (MT, 3.0), which points to academia, who are writing from a marketing perspective; i.e. when the focus is technology on the business to consumer market, since information here to a great extend can be observed to be provided by marketing-efforts.

Moore (2008) writes from a marketing perspective (high-technology) and regards the curve as interrupted by gaps and chasms, and regards it as a task of the company to communication-wise cater to the different segments, depending on their characteristics. This is more similar to ‘act of persuasion’, than to ‘free flow of information’ (Geroski, 2004). Moore (2008, p. 152) introduces
the model “Positioning the evidence” (MT, 3.0) as basis for overcoming the gaps and chasms pointed to. Moore (2008) suggests e.g. ‘technology –evidence’ as remedy to position itself towards innovators, ‘product-evidence’ as remedy to position itself towards early adopters etc. And does suggest specific touch-points per segment, which from a marketing-perspective seems applicable and straight forward. Moore (2008) does as such offer solutions regarding how communication-wise to appeal to the different segments on innovation adoption curve, and refers to the ‘evolution of desired evidence’ (Moore, 2008, p. 152). It would however be a fair assumption, that an argumentation, which is rooted in consumer’s perception of these touch-points would support the model ‘Positioning the evidence’. The model might furthermore benefit from clarifying how diffusion of the information or message itself takes place, I.e apply argumentation for the ability of the touch-points to act as diffusion-agents, to support the ‘evolution’. (I.e marketing-wise the ‘diffusion of marketing information and messages’).

From a marketing perspective, it might be tempting to adopt the approach by Moore (2008) (or by Burns et al, 2009, who also writes from a marketing perspective, based on Moore, 2008) due to its conceptual strengths and applicability. There is no doubt, that the points made by Moore (2008), are of great impact, which might be due to both vocabulary (no marketer want a chasm in any penetration-process) and due to the profound and business wise important findings regarding the differences between the segments along the ‘innovation adoption curve’ (confirmed widely in earlier diffusion theory, but presented by Moore (2008) in an appealing marketing-context).

This difference in the interpretation of the ‘innovation adoption curve’ does probably relate to the quite different perspectives and backgrounds of the academia mentioned. More importantly for marketers, who are working with innovative and disruptive products (and thereby is likely to use the innovation adoption curve as a tool), is however the discussion regarding the distinct difference between the perspective, when rooted in the innovation (Rogers, 2003), which differs significantly from, when rooted in marketing the innovation (Moore, 2008). (continues beneath)
5.3.3 What might marketers learn from sociologists?

How might dominant principles for diffusion (Rogers, 2003) relate to 'diffusion of marketing information and messages'.

As an extension to the above discussion regarding ‘interpretation of the innovation adoption curve’ does the following discuss specific inputs to marketers, by focusing on, how recognized and valued principles for diffusion might improve 'diffusion of marketing information and messages'. This has the further objective of improving hypothetical constructs in case of further qualitative research. (MT, 6.0).

Rogers’ (2003) profound and important work regarding diffusion of innovations is a fountain of principles and examples regarding adoption and diffusion of innovations. Rogers (2003) writes from the perspective of the sociologist and draws on great variety in the empiric material, spanning from tangible commercial products, to intangible concepts and public communication. Based on empiric material of this width, it is assumed reasonable to draw on core principles (MT, 3.0), and discuss how these findings might work in relation to brand touch-points.

Reinvention (Rogers, 2003, p. 184); MT, 3.0) as a concept of how successful innovations are proved to be dynamic, i.e. they change/ or are changed over time to fulfil the specific needs of the specific segment; is widely accepted and repeatedly referred to by academia. This, together with reflections regarding which qualities that make innovations spread i.e Relative advantage, Compatibility with existing values and practices, Simplicity and ease of use, Trial-ability, Observable results (Rogers, 2003, MT 3.0), is probably the foremost accepted 'pair' of theory regarding 'diffusion'.

Of importance is however, that the above principles are regarded as brilliant by academia and practitioners due to the premise, that it is the consumer's perception of what is relevant e.g. 'fulfilment of need', as it is the consumer's perception of whether a certain innovation has e.g. 'relative advantage' and the additional four qualities, referred to above.

It might therefore be inspirational to apply the above principles, when judging brand touch-points' ability to act as diffusion-agents in themselves, and from an IMC-perspective apply an overall benchmarking methodology in designing the constellation of brand touch-points. Referring to Bass
Forecasting model (MT, 3.0) which in its aggregate nature include both mass-media and interpersonal communication should the application of the above principles inherently suggest a critical approach in the selection and design of brand touch-points, which in a structured manner would add focus on brand touch-points' ability to act as diffusion-agents (and not only on brand touch-points functional attributes).

In the research conducted (MT, 4.0) is was found how consumers, depending on stage on innovation adoption curve seem to perceive brand touch-points differently. The integration and combining of research regarding how consumers perceive brand touch-points ability to act accordingly to the above core-principles would add more specificity to which brand touch-points, that are specifically suitable as diffusion agents.

The qualitative research conducted (MT, 4.0) might provide indications, based on the parameters already used, by changing the perspective, ref. 'Interpretation of innovation adoption curve' in previous section. With the focus being 'diffusion of marketing information and messages’, it is thus probably more interesting how certain brand touch-points, are perceived in similar manners, (than those perceived differently). This is illustrated in model 'Cater and connect, Diffusion of marketing information and messages' (appendix I). This assumption is based on principles regarding homogeneous and heterogeneous populations, where the brand touch-points, which are perceived similar, do represent homo-philic traits in an otherwise heterogeneous population (MT, 3.0)

A good example are home-pages, which across categories, are perceived as 'competent'. This might indicate positive presence of consumers along innovation adoption curve, however overrepresented by innovators and early adopters. The segments do relate in different manners (from 'marriage' to 'friendship' to 'fart'), which might resonate well with the need to apply core-principles (as referred to above) in order to cater to the segments and evolve horizontally on innovation adoption curve, I.e secure, that the home-page itself (the brand touch-point itself) is dynamic and changes to meet the specific needs of the segments (I.e adhering to the core-principles of diffusion above), as the adoption is proceeding in the overall population.
5.3.4 What might sociologists learn from marketers?

How is the Decision Innovation Process (Rogers, 2003) similar and different from a 'Hierarchy of Effects' or 'Model of Persuasion'?

This part of the discussion will revert to marketers’ home turf by discussing perspectives of e.g. hierarchies of effect, related to adoption of innovative and disruptive products and concepts. This is done, with the purpose of discussing Rogers’ (2003) Decision Innovation Process (MT, 3.0).

Rogers (2003) argues how consumers (the individual) pass through five stages in the Decision Innovation Process, which is presented in a linear manner, being Knowledge, Persuasion, Decision, Implementation, Confirmation. Rogers (2003) does introduce the Catch 22 discussion regarding the order of 'what comes first, need or awareness?' (Rogers, 2003, p. 172), which however not is answered in an univocally manner, due to complexity and the individual's different pre-dispositions in regard of selective perception. What is interesting from a marketing-perspective is how Rogers (2003) relates mental cognitive activity to 'knowledge' and the mental affective activity, to 'persuasion', ie. as cognitive activity always should precede affective activity. This approach has been challenged by marketing academia in various dynamic models, like the FCB-grid (Foot et al, in Belch et al, 2007), built on distinction between rational/emotional and high/low involvement, thus suggesting how processing not always is linear. This difference might very well also be an expression of the different perspectives inter disciplines. Rogers (2003) is mainly occupied with the innovation (product/concept), whilst marketing is occupied with the innovative product + added value = innovative brand. This added value is often based on emotional parameters why consumers (in case of successful positioning) is found to correspond accordingly, as illustrated in a substantial amount of literature regarding branding and e.g suggested by Aaker (2007) in companies' need to take 'ownership' over innovations via branding.

Traditionally is acquisitions of technology regarded as high-involvement (Belch et al, 2007), driven by rational considerations with consumers. This is however questioned by other academia (Knutsen, 2009) who question also the notion 'adoption' and highlight the pitfall of equate adoption with 'everyday use' (or simple acquisition). A good example might be acquisition of I-phone or other
smart-phones, which often were referred to, in the qualitative research (introduction-section, I.e not a part of core-content) as bought due to emotional/brand-driven factors, and thus typically not were fully explored in terms of all functional attributes nor bought due to rational factors. Aspects of high- versus low-involvement also came forward in the qualitative research conducted, e.g. in expressions by Laggards, who just asked other people to buy e.g. computer for them. (L9)

For the company, which is marketing innovative and disruptive products and concepts, does the above reflections thus lead to a complex set of challenges, which should be considered in the IMC-strategy. First, does the aspects as presented by Rogers (2003) form the premise; an innovative product/concept does by nature represent 'newness' and 'associated uncertainty' (Rogers, 2003, p. 169), which as such should lead to a decision-process based here upon for the individual. Second, is it most likely, that the (overall) branding-strategy conducted by the respective company, after all will impede a decision-process with the individual consumer, which not necessarily is linear, but dynamic.

The brand touch-points themselves are not especially visible in current marketing literature regarding hierarchies of effect. The elaboration-likelihood model as a model of persuasion (Petty et al, in Belch et al, 2007) is an example of how brand touch-points are regarded of some importance, I.e as peripheral cues in the attitude formation process, with the consumer. It is highlighted, how an active consumer (central route to persuasion) will focus on message and message-content, whilst the not active consumer (peripheral route to persuasion) is likely to make short-cuts in the attitude formation based on peripheral cues like channel, media, presentation, I.e. the touch-point. Knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points should therefore be of some value in order to improve the attitude formation, by selecting brand touch-points which are perceived in a positive manner and to which consumers relate in a desired manner, driven by high quality. It might thus be worth considering to incorporate these aspects as well, since the IMC perspective also carry synergies in the sense, that the marketing information and message, and point of interaction should support each other. (Belch et al, 2007) (MT, 2.0)
6.0 Final discussion. Implications. Further discussions and final remarks.

This section is of a concluding nature and will act as the final section of this MT.

6.1 Objective of master thesis, key findings and key assumptions

The core objective of the MT was to explore how 'knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points' can improve the integrated marketing communication strategy for a company, which markets innovative and disruptive products/concepts.

It was found, that consumers do perceive brand touch-points differently, depending on stage on innovation curve. Across respondent-categories (consumers) are passive brand touch-points perceived in more positive manners, and consumers across categories relate here to in more enduring manners, - in opposition to active brand touch-points. It was furthermore found that consumers tend to perceive brand touch-points characterized by human interaction in more positive manners than brand touch-points of a non-human character. It was however indicated that 'human factor' can be stretched in terms of technological substitutes, preferably within set-up of passive brand touch-points. By scrutinizing and discussing findings it was found how research regarding consumers perception of brand touch-points can bring further nuance to the notion of 'interaction', 'creation of experiences', 'human/non-human' and 'passive/active’ brand touch-points', that might go beyond current literature.

It was discussed and assumed how the first segment on the innovation adoption curve should be regarded by marketers as a 'conceptual point of entry' focusing on diffusion-potential, and how change of perspective from 'act of persuasion' to 'free flow of information' can direct marketers challenge in a fruitful path, in terms of facilitating diffusion of marketing information and messages by identifying homo-philic traits in an otherwise heterogeneous population (as along innovation adoption curve) derived from knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points. It was furthermore discussed and assumed, that when companies apply core principles for diffusion in the process of selecting and designing specific brand touch-points and in deciding for constellation of brand touch-points (in IMC palette), they will benefit from improved ability to diffuse marketing information and messages, due to brand touch-points own (and in constellation) ability to act as diffusion agents. By reverting to marketers home turf, I.e. to attitude formation, as a basic premise
for adoption for the company's specific brand, it was discussed and assumed how knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-point would improve this act, and highlighted how the decision-process and attitude formation for a innovative *brand* on not necessarily is sequential as is otherwise argued in innovation-literature.

### 6.2 Implications in relation to Theory and Practice?

#### 6.2.1 Theoretical implications

**Requirement for 'dynamism' and 'no best practice'**

As stated by Hogan et al (2005) does it not make any sense to adopt “best practice”, i.e. when the best practice is adopted from another company: “*The mistake, of course, is in thinking that their best practices can automatically become your best practices*." It should be noted, that Vandermerwe (1993; 2003) does not suggest 'best practice', why the above reflection by Hogan (2005) primarily serves to highlight the potential pitfall of interpreting frameworks and models as 'ready-to-go' business-plans. The tendencies in literature and amongst some practitioners of describing how to benefit the most from respective brand touch-points are in general, that the models or frameworks are quite static and occupied with the functional benefits of the brand touch-points (Percy et al, 2008). This tendency has been, and still is, challenged by visionary academias, like Hogan et al (2005) and Teece (2007) amongst others (MT, 3.0).

Teece (2007) has introduced the notion of 'dynamic capabilities', where the entrepreneurial aspect and unique combinations are highlighted as ways to establish a sustained competitive situation for the company. Teece (2007) is not referring specifically to brand touch-points, however does the reflections by Teece (2007) seem to be highly relevant and inspirational as input to an updated framework of how to approach the concept of brand touch-point in a dynamic manner. Teece (2007) is however concentrating the reflections inside the company (culture, management, production), leaving the consumers/customers as the target outside the company. The underlying concept of creating a situation where the customers/consumers are attracted via unique features is in line with Vandermerwe's (2003) notion of customer lock-on (e.g. in order to obtain Blue Ocean
strategy), which however still requires a dynamic approach and a 'no best-practice' adoption in the companies. For the innovative company, which cater to segments as identified along the innovation adoption curve (Moore, 2008; MT 3.0, 5.0) and according to principles of re-invention and innovation qualities (Rogers, 2003, MT 3.0, 5.0) does the above reflections of 'dynamism' and 'no best practices' imply, that Vandermerwe's Customer Activity Cycle (1993, 2003) or a similar model, should be repeated along the innovation adoption curve, since 'unique features' and notion of 'before-during-after purchase' apparently will be different for the segments on the innovation adoption curve.

The notion of repeated Customer Activity Cycles, does in order to obtain diffusion of the marketing information and message, lead to increased demand for a full understanding of how consumers perceive brand touch-points, and to benefit from insights regarding homophily and heterophily (MT, 3.0, 5.0) in order to diffuse marketing information and messages in an optimal manner from one circle to the next.

As touched upon in MT discussion 5.0 is the objective of the Customer Activity Cycle (Vandermerwe, 1993) and Brand Touch-point Chain (Hogan et al, 2005) value creation, built on the mapping of activities and identifying value gaps. The discussions in section MT 5.0 has another focus and is thus not in every aspect compatible with the Customer Activity Cycle (MT, 5.0). At this point in MT 6.0 ‘final discussion’ it might be illustrative to introduce how brand touch-points might be presented in the value creation in a visible and relevant manner. A suggestion could be to introduce a ‘zone of interaction’ surrounding the CBBE-model, since consumer’s (conscious/subconscious) ‘mental brand response’ should only occur through some kind of touch-point. It is thus suggested to illustrate this metric in the combined model, (presented by Flinck et al, inspired by Keller et al (appendix J)), which is a conceptually integration of CBBE model in BVC. Here, it is thus suggested to regard Consumer Based Interaction (CBI), as a precaution for CBBE. As mentioned in previous sections, is the topic 'brand touch points' not elaborated much in current literature. When the topic is elaborated, it is quite often in relation to the measurement of brand touch-points (eg. Munoz, 2004) (MT, 3.0) and the dream scenario would be to develop a theoretical model as presented by Hogan, 2005 or Sannung (2009), which with its pipeline approach and
conversion rates would be extremely managerial and straight forward. This approach does however conflict with the notion of 'non-sequential use of models' (Keller, 2008), 'requirement for dynamic capabilities' (Teece, 2007) and 'dynamic loops' (Vandermerwe, 2003) which also would apply when measuring the value of the actual brand touch-points. Furthermore is one of the core principles in the integrated marketing communication strategy, the creation of 'synergies', which due to its diffuse nature makes the measurement of the specific brand touch point less interesting, since it is the outcome of the combination of brand touch-points that is interesting (Belch, 2007) (MT, 2.0). Munoz et al (2004) has described how the company can benefit from measuring the value of their brand via three types of metrics (Perception, Performance and Financial metrics)(MT, 3.0). This approach is in literature suggested to be executed on the operational level by using a 'Brand Performance Scorecard', and the challenge of identifying at which “touch-points (or moments of customer interaction) perceptions and behaviours are generated” (Munoz et al, 2004, p. 383) is repeatedly stressed by the authors, however without introducing an applicable method here fore. It might thus be beneficial to introduce a proactive measurement, aiming at measuring the foremost dominant characteristics of the brand touch-points, (and constellations here of) in a way that exceeds bare functional attributes. This could thus imply to include a measurement in 'perception metrics' regarding how consumers perceive brand touch-points, which supports the idea of inclusion of CBI-model above, MT p. 73.

The actual content of this measurement will depend on the actual challenge, faced by the company, ref. 'no best practice' and 'dynamism' above. For the company, who e.g. markets innovative and disruptive products and concepts, it might be foremost important to gain insights regarding how consumers in the various segments perceive brand touch-points (e.g. personalities, relationship-forms and quality) in order to evaluate which brand touch-points consumers in the respective segments perceive as more positive; and relate to in an enduring manner, with the purpose to scrutinize findings and identify e.g. thresholds for active/passive brand touch-points, indications regarding how stretchable 'human factor' is within the respective segments, with the purpose to improve the 'interaction' and the 'experience delivered' as perceived by the consumers. Furthermore should indications regarding homo-philic traits in an otherwise heterogeneous population, prove to
be useful knowledge in a scenario, where ‘diffusion of marketing information and messages’ is crucial; as would indications of how the brand touch-points, and in constellation, should adhere to core principles of diffusion in themselves, in order to be reinvented in a manner, which is relevant and meaningful to the various segments along the innovation adoption curve. As touched upon in MT discussion 5.0 does the research conducted (MT, 4.0) not unveil all aspects in an optimal manner, which will be elaborated in further discussions beneath.

6.2.2 Practical implications

The practical implications are as such consequences of all of the aspects researched and discussed in previous MT sections. This section will thus focus on the foremost important practical implications, however in a summarized manner and supplemented with visualization ‘Illustrative Multidimensional IMC-model based on CBI for Innovative Company’ beneath, illustrating how theoretical implications become quite practical.

The Integrated Marketing Communication Agenda (insp. by Jonash, 2004)

1. Get the perspective right

For marketers, who are to design an IMC strategy the first reflections and challenges traditionally spin around issues like segmentation, creative strategy, creation of synergies and consistency in the communication in order to fulfil the objective of the communication campaign itself, which traditionally should be ‘awareness’ and ‘formation of attitude’ (Percy et al, 2008) and sometimes also behavioural objectives like ‘purchase’; and to fulfil the overall objectives of the IMC strategy. This approach might impede marketers to focus mainly at the respective segment(s)’ characteristics and conduct a well defined Segmentation-Target-Positioning-process per segment/target-group, thus not offering enough attention to adoption-rates and the diffusion-challenge, when marketing innovative products and concepts. Furthermore might the overall traditional perspective of IMC strategy impede marketers to focus at a general level, thus not offering enough attention to perception-wise similarities and differences amongst the same segments and the attached complex issues:
First issue relates to the repeated STP-process (MT, 5.0), however not only in the sense of identifying how one segment is different from the other, and repeat the process along the innovation adoption curve but also by identifying similarities inter segments in order to obtain diffusion, i.e. spreading information (free flow) in opposition to persuasion (MT, 5.0).

Second issue relates to 'point of entry', due to possible further potential in regarding the first segment at the innovation adoption curve as an 'conceptual point of entry' rather than an exclusive group of inventors, (MT, 5.0) since this latter group not necessarily share many homo-philic traits with subsequent segments, and obtain diffusion-qualities.

Third issue relates to the presentation of the traditional cornerstones in integrated marketing communication strategy, being ‘creation of synergies, complementary qualities and consistency; as the dominant guidelines, when selecting the IMC-tool /palette (Belch, 2007, MT,2.2). The marketing strategy for innovative and disruptive products and concepts might benefit from introducing an additional cornerstone, which should be palette of brand touch-points' ability to adhere to dominant 'principles of innovation' in themselves (MT, 5.0) in order to be able to re-invent and diffuse due to changing nature of the interaction itself, depending on the consumers' stage at innovation adoption curve. This might thus imply a new complexity in IMC cornerstones. The creation of synergies, complementary qualities and consistency should probably be directed per segment along the innovation adoption curve (due to their profound differences), whilst the overall IMC-strategy should have the single brand touch-point, and brand touch-points in constellation, 'ability to diffuse and carry the image-message’ as main cornerstone. (STP-model, MT p.27) (Critique, further discussions, MT, 6.2).

2. Unveil the complexity, by gathering knowledge, which can be translated to improvements

In order to deliver accordingly to above issues, and to operational challenges as discussed in MT 5.0 regarding active/passive, human factor, the need for creation of customer lock-on/ creation of experiences, and also the need for understanding how attitude formation is likely to take place for an innovative brand, the marketer should benefit from including consumers' perception of brand touch-
points in the planning, just as it is the case with other metrics. (MT, 6.1, p. 73). It is repeatedly
stressed in literature how it is the *brand touch-points*, which set the scene for the delivery of
experiences, form the attitude/behaviour and even makes consumers decide for purchase. This
should impede marketers to, in a proactive manner, include and search for knowledge regarding
consumers' perception of brand touch-points, and use these insights in order to design an IMC
strategy of a dynamic and entrepreneurial nature (Teece, 2007) based on CBI-model.

3. *Stay unique and relevant to consumers*

The notion of ‘dynamism’ (above) does in this context imply, that marketers on an ongoing basis
update the knowledge gathered. In a business environment, where technological solutions and
applications are of a tremendous nature, width and development-pace; marketers have all
possibilities of developing creative and state-of-the art strategies. They are however only valuable, if
the consumers perceive the interaction in a favourable manner, or as delivery of ‘superior value’.
This should impede companies to look within company-borders in order to establish ‘innovation
platforms’ (Jonash, 2007), which should be monitored and modelled regularly, depending on how
consumers, at that specific time and with that specific challenge, perceive the brand touch-points in
the IMC strategy.

This imply an approach which is multi dimensional, ref. two beneath models: ‘*Illustrative Model:*
Multidimensional IMC Model for innovative and disruptive Products and Concepts’ and
*Conceptual Model: Multidimensional Perspective on IMC.*

6.3 *Illustrative Model*: (next page, p.77)

**Multidimensional IMC Model for innovative and disruptive Products and Concepts**

The model aims at illustrating the challenges for the marketer, as reflected in previous sections.
Illustrative Multi-dimensional IMC Model
for innovative and disruptive Products and Concepts

CONSUMER
Out of Company's Control
Mental and behavioural response
Formation of perception
Processing of stimuli / Formation of attitude
Adoption-decision-process
Innovative Brand
Activities before-during–after event purchase

Zone of INTERACTION
Modelling of perception based on Consumer Based Interaction

IMC
Creation of synergies and consistency

Own production with inspiration from academia MT, 3.0
6.4 **Conceptual Mode: Multidimensional Perspective on IMC**

A conceptual model has been developed from the above ‘illustrative model’ in order to provide for clarity and further discussions.

6.4 Conceptual Model has been developed from 'illustrative model' in order to provide for clarity and further discussions

**Multi-dimensional Perspective on IMC**
6.5 Further discussions and final remarks

In this MT has the focus been, how knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch points can improve the IMC strategy, when marketing innovative and disruptive products which has been limited to Lifestyle-products within technology. It would be interesting to repeat the research within other types of products and concepts of an innovative/disruptive nature (like e.g. concepts aiming at changing consumers' behaviour in regard of 'green' or 'health' initiatives) and also within not innovative products and concepts i.e basic products and concepts (e.g. simple Lifestyle-products or other types of everyday-products). Such alternative perspective might provide for different pattern in ‘diffusion of marketing information and messages’, since untied from sequential adoption-rates of actual product/innovation.

The qualitative research conducted (MT, 4.0) is in this MT built from independent variable being consumers' stage on innovation adoption curve. It might however give useful insights to design a research set-up based on Life-style criteria to reflect the products, being Lifestyle-products. A research based on Lifestyle criteria might furthermore add to findings and assumptions of how marketing information and messages diffuse in a population. The research conducted (MT, 4.0) operates furthermore at respondents' conscious level. Further research regarding consumers' perception at sub conscious level might add to understanding of complexities referred to in MT.

As touched upon in MT 6.2, does a multi-dimensional IMC-strategy suggest, that creation of synergies, complementary qualities and consistency not necessarily is the overall cornerstones only, in an IMC strategy, catering to segments, which are differing substantially. The reflections in 6.2 are not sufficiently nuanced, due to aspects of e.g. communication regarding image in opposition to campaigns for specific products. These aspects of e.g. diffusion and synergies should thus be included in an eventually repeated research, e.g. based on Lifestyle criteria as pointed to above.

Aspects of diffusion would probably benefit from a deeper research built from diffusion-theory (MT,5.0), to elaborate and eventually confirm the assumptions made in this research. The core-content in interview (based on Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998)), should in case of further
research-studies be further refined, and to a higher degree contain also more negatively loaded expressions of personalities and relationship-forms, since this probably would generate a broader picture of how consumers perceive brand touch-points, ie. rejection-rate from respondent's should all equal be lower. Since this field of interest seem to be little explored, it might also be beneficial to conduct research rooted in work of other academic lines (e.g. semiotics, Barthes; or archetypes, Jung), in order to explore how to generate best possible explanations and elaborations from respondents.

Finally it should be stressed, that further research-studies in order to refine the qualitative research-set-up would be a precaution for an eventually repeated qualitative research and eventually subsequent descriptive research design, with ability to confirm, generalize and compare findings. An eventual descriptive research would probably give input to refine the core models presented, I.e 'Consumer Based Interaction (CBI-model) ' and the two 'Multidimensional IMC-models' with the perspective of developing future managerial frameworks and models to further improvement of the integrated communication strategy, based on knowledge regarding consumers' perception of brand touch-points.

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**Interviews**

Interview A: p. 4-5. All quotes from Qualitative Research as referred to in MT, 4.0. Appendix H

Interview B: Kirsten Poulsen, First Movers. Appendix H, last page