Co-creating A Brand Personality
- An empirical case study on how a firm personifies its own brand by collaborating with other enterprises at the market

Master’s Thesis 30 credits
Department of Business Studies
Uppsala University
Spring Semester of 2015

Date of Submission: 2015-05-29

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Abstract

To build and maintain a strong brand personality has for long been considered as an important asset for almost any company to refine and are nevertheless highly significant in today's world of prolific brand alternatives. A considerable amount of previous research on brand personality have mainly focused on how a company could proceed as to create its profile by its own efforts and by turning to traditional marketing tools. The objective of this paper is to enlarge this understanding by investigating how a firm also can reinforce its own brand personality by collaborating with a number of partnering brands. This is a scientific ambition that is accomplished by employing a single case study approach on the Swedish grocery retailer brand Coop through which data is collected through the use of both primary and secondary data. In addition, data is extracted from interviews with Coop's partnering brands as to contemplate the kind of value that they are co-creating - even if the prime focus is directed towards one focal brand. The findings illustrates how Coop as the green and family-oriented brand have selected partners that both strengthens and complements its profile. The empirical findings hence points to the importance of integrating a co-creating aspect within theories on brand personality as to give a complete picture of how it could be formed and implemented.

Keywords. Brand Personality, Co-branding, Co-creation of Value, Service Dominant Logic.
Preface

What is the worst thing you could possibly say about another person? Think about it. What about saying that s(he) have no personality? This seems pretty reasonable - because who would want to spend time with a person that is so boring that (s)he is described as having no personality? Exactly the same could be said about brands. For sure, it may sound like another advertising pitch but in fact, having a personality is equally as important for brands as it can add that little distinctive dimension that the product alone cannot convey. Still not convinced? Well, how about the fact that some people are preferring Coca-Cola over Pepsi? Is it really just the sweetened soft drink water that makes all the difference for a customer's patronage or could it perhaps also be related to some associations of Coke as being a little bit cooler than Pepsi?

For this particular study it has however not been necessary to examine the importance of having a brand personality or how the personality is formed by traditional marketing tools - because this is already addressed in a plethora of interesting studies. For my study, it has rather been interesting to examine how a company could team up with other brands for reasons that not only relates to rational and financial outcomes but also to the reinforcement of a certain brand personality. I sincerely hope that you will enjoy the reading and that you will leave it yet a little bit more inspired by the multifaceted nature of branding!

Louise Åberg, 29th of May 2015
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1. Introduction

The opening scenes within a well-renowned advertising campaign by the Swedish grocery retailer brand Coop is centered on moving snapshots that shows agricultural pictures of beautiful arable lands and a farmer, that proudly demonstrates her harvest in front of the camera. The scenes are accompanied by a female voice that declares that the demand for organic food lately has grown exponentially in Sweden. Shortly thereafter, a dilemma is however verbally portrayed whereby the female states that the transition to eco farming have been static due to uncertainty in relation to political commitment. In the final sequence it is therefore declared that Coop within the upcoming period for the Swedish elections, will probe each of the parliamentary parties what they aspire to do as a way of stimulating production and consumption of organic food within the borders of Sweden. In order to guide its eco-conscious customers in the upcoming elections, it is then promised that the remaining results from the inquiries will be accessible at Coop's website. "Ekolöftet" reads the advertising hashtag in the end - altogether the exact images and the exact personality that Coop aspires to deliver for its audience (Frank, interview 150409).

Firms are constantly searching for business opportunities that enables them to establish a desirable profile at the market - much in similar to how Coop approached its marketing campaign in 2014, that would turn out to be nominated by customers as the years "most durable and brand building campaign" (handelstrender.se). According to a McKinsey consulting report, the most successful brands manage to identify and to convey a personality that is important to consumers as well as quite differentiated from those of competitors. The consultant behind the report particularly urge practioners to invest resources in building a strong and distinct personality as it can reap a considerable loyalty on part of the customer, alongside a competitive advantage that are durable over time (McKinsey insight, 2011). This is also an argument that is supported by a number of scientific scholars such as Freeling and Forbes (2005) and Arora and Stoner (2009) who claims that brands with unique personality traits more easily can be differentiated in the mind of customers and affect their purchase intention and loyalty. Following the example of Coop, it has for long been important to establish an organic, sustainable and family-oriented personality that lies in near proximity with the preferences of their customers. The rationale for making considerable investments in building a strong brand personality however makes a powerful argument for almost any
company these days and not only the grocery industry per se. The need to stand out from the crowd has become even more important in today's world where there literally is an explosion in the number of available brand alternatives as well as a proliferation of ways of communicating them. Moreover, converging product performance and service levels in many industries have made it increasingly more difficult to sustain associations in the mind of customers by simply focusing on product attributes. To rise above the 'clutter' without breaking the budget hence requires companies to get smarter about branding and for a multitude of firms this challenge have been directly addressed by revisiting how the personality of their brand is conveyed to customers (McKinsey; Forbes, 2011). The foregoing line of reasoning naturally puts brand personality high on the agenda for practitioners as well as for academicians. Due to the involved complexity for a company nowadays to differentiate a product based on functionality, scholarly attention have expanded into the arena of brand personality - recognizing it as an important asset for almost any company to refine (Veryzer, 1995). A considerable amount of extant research within this field, deals with how companies strategically could proceed as to create a distinct profile at the market. In this respect, it could especially be observed that traditional marketing tools that are under the direct control of a company such as sponsorships, advertising, product attributes and celebrity endorsements often is at the centre of attention when it comes to strategies that are perceived to create a certain brand personality (Grohmann, 2009; Aaker, 1997; Diamantopoulos et al., 2005).

1.1. Problem Formulation

While the traditional tendency of brand scholars to emphasize marketing tools remains significant for the formation of a brand personality, it gives a somewhat limited understanding on how it can be created. A fewer amount of research assembles could be found while seeking to discern how a company could form a profile by collaborating with other individual brands. A perspective of co-creation is in other words missing within contemporary theories on brand personality which appears to be a gap (Grohmann, 2009; Lin, 2010). This, as it is likely to assume that other strategies of a more collaborative nature also may be adopted by a company that aspires to consolidate certain personality traits. The preceding line of reasoning holds a powerful argument for at least two reasons. First and foremost and as briefly mentioned by Elyas and Mohamed (2013) it is likely to assume that collaborations with other brands could be seen as a necessary step for a company that aspires to change the meaning of its profile in some way or to enhance an already established personality. A strategy adopted by the
engineering company of Siemens have for example been to install partnerships with the luxury automotive brand of Porsche and the Italian design house of Alessi for reasons that relates to the design of certain home appliances. According to Rolf Vikander, a former Siemens executive of business and communication, the partnerships have not only been undertaken for the sake of reaching financial outcomes, but also to consolidate certain complementary associations for its leading profile. "Basically, we share the aspiration with our partners at Porsche and Alessi to demonstrate a multifaceted and leading character of our respective brands. What Porsche and Alessi seeks from the partnership is to be associated with a firm that is leading at technology and for Siemens it is obviously compelling to be associated with more sophisticated traits. So in 2009 we simply decided to do something about our ambitions in unison!" (Vikander, interview 150328). Contemporary theories on brand personality appears to be poorly informed about the aspect of co-creation which may play a role for the overall formation of a profile. This especially appears to be the case with regards to practical examples like Siemens, in which it becomes evidently clear that a company is partnering up with other brands for reasons that, alongside rational values, also could be related to the implementation of a certain brand personality.

A second argument that underpins the proposed gap could be related to the fact that research on brand personality seem to lag behind the general development of brand theories that for over the past decade has evolved towards a new conceptual logic. As were previously discussed, antecedents of brand personality have to this date been discussed in light of traditional marketing variables. Moreover, stakeholders, beyond end-customers, have been treated as exogenous in the sense that they have not been seen as having any critical effect on the formation of a brand’s personality (Grohmann, 2009; Aaker, 1997). More specifically, the reason for why this mindset within brand personality theories appears restricted, is because the logic of branding in other research - outside this particular topic - have started to shift attention. In this case they have shifted from the conceptualization of brands as simply being a firm-provided property, to brands as being collaborative and value co-creating activities of firms and all of their stakeholders (Merz, He and Lush, 2009). This could be witnessed in a number of research assembles that have emerged from the 2000’s and forward, to address collaborations with e.g. customers in brand communities (e.g. McAlexander, Schouten et. al, 2007) and with partners within ingredient branding (Desai and Keller, 2002) and co-branding (Park, Sung and Shocker, 1996) etc. This evolving brand logic, that have started to gain legitimacy within some research, in turn mirrors the more general development taking place
in marketing thought, which commonly is referred to as the service dominant logic (S-D logic). One of the key characteristics of the S-D logic is that it is relational and collaborative to its nature: encompassing a view that takes into account more aspects than simply limiting the analysis to a single company that competes in atomistic markets against other actors. Accordingly with the S-D logic, value is always co-created with all stakeholders rather than unilaterally created by the firm and then distributed (Vargo and Lush, 2004). The absence of some brand theories, like those on brand personality, to treat the co-creating aspect is also recognized by scholars. For example, in the concluding remarks of the article by Merz et. al (2009) researchers are encouraged to use the S-D logic to build future brand research. More specifically, they urge to investigate how different aspects of brand value could be co-created with all or some specific stakeholders (Merz, e-mail conversation 150501). Brand value in itself is a very encompassing concept that deals with the entire experience of a brand (ibid) which thus makes it possible to degrade the concept into many different constituting components. In this way it is reasonable that a brand's personality is one among these aspects that contributes to the value of a brand. Therefore a study that treats the co-creation of a brand personality has the possibility to address the issue call by Merz et. al (2009).

However, in order to investigate how a brand personality is co-created, it will need to be combined with some sort of co-creating concept. In this case, co-branding represents a concept that treats co-creation between brands which turns it into a candidate to fulfill this aspiration. The concept of co-branding represents a strategy where individual brands collaborates to jointly promote a product (Park et. al 1996) and partially it elucidates the perspective of co-creation as seen within the S-D logic. This similarity could be seen in that co-branding entails two or more brands that collaborates for the sake of reaching some sort of mutual benefit. However and by way of contrast to the S-D logic, researchers in this field have mainly examined how the interconnection with other brands could promote success of a common product or service. In this way, associations of other brands are seen to be leveraged on to primarily co-create financial and rational value of each individual brand. No consideration is shown for how co-branding, with its involved secondary associations of other brands, also could be seen as a feasible way of influencing a certain brand personality. The co-creation of value as seen within the S-D logic is more liberal in that sense that it is not restricted to pure financial outcomes or products. Rather, it opens up for a larger interpretation with regards to the value that is seen as being co-created between actors (Vargo and Lush, 2004).
1.2. Purpose

Thereby, to approach the concept of co-branding with an integrated S-D logic, allows to investigate how a brand personality could be seen as being the value that a focal firm aspires to co-create with partnering brands. To investigate how a practicing firm attempts to build a stronger brand personality by the help of others, represents an interesting means for addressing a more encompassing view on how a company could proceed as to implement a brand personality. Hence, the purpose of the thesis is:

*To investigate how a firm reinforces its own brand personality by collaborating with partnering brands.*

The purpose of the thesis is achieved by using Coop as a lens. Today Coop distinguishes itself as a brand that only recently have installed a co-branding arrangement which thus opens up for the prospect of investigating how it is co-creating its profile by the help of others. This study is expected to contribute with updated knowledge to bridge the gap in brand personality theories that currently lacks a perspective on co-creation. Although focus primarily is on one focal brand, the study will also investigate the kind of value that its partners are co-creating. However, by showing how a focal brand personality is co-created between a firm and a number of partners, it is possible for this study to update extant research that narrowly tend to emphasize marketing tools as being a firm's ideal way of reinforcing a profile. Altogether, this study has been assembled as a direct response to the special issue call by Merz et. al (2009) that encourages an investigation on how different aspects of brand value could be co-created between a number of actors.
2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Personality

Central for this study is to investigate how a certain aspect of brand value, in terms of a brand personality is co-created between a firm and a number of partnering brands. This objective is particularly built on the premise that brand value should be seen as being co-created with all stakeholders of a firm and not simply by a company alone or through dyadic relationships with end-customers (Merz et al. 2009). To provide a background account of the concept will hence be necessary as to enlarge the understanding of the reader as to why a brand personality should be considered as being of strategic importance for a company. Moreover it will be important to equip the reader with a background in order to illustrate how it subsequently will need to be complemented by theories that makes it possible to carry out the investigation of the study.

The very notion that an inanimate object such as a commercial brand could have its own personality traits have received a burgeoning interest among marketing academicians for over three decades (Aaker, 1997; Duboff, 1986; Durgee, 1988). The concept of brand personality was discussed by Martineu as early as in 1957, but Aaker (1997) provides the most well-known definition of the concept as "the set of human characteristics that are being associated with a brand". Following this analogy, it is said that brands in similar to people have personality characteristics that customers often imbue with personality traits. A brand's human-like characteristics have been acknowledged within research as being an important tool for a company that seeks to differentiate its brand from those of competitors (Freeling and Forbes, 2005). Maehle and Shneor (2010) argue that a company that aspires to build a strong brand personality will have to take into consideration of those personality traits that are being important to customers and keep this in mind while undertaking certain strategies. The rationale for this could be related to customers tendency of selecting those brands that have a personality that is congruent with their actual or ideal self-concept. This view is furthermore confirmed by Malhotra (1988) and Sirgy (1982) who argues that the greater the congruity between the human characteristics that describe an individual's actual or ideal self and those that describe a brand, the greater the preference will be for the brand. Hence it is important for a company to possess a strong knowledge of its customers and to bear this in mind while participating in different business activities that potentially could have an effect on the formation of a brand's personality (Maehle and Shneor, 2010).
Given the importance of the brand personality construct in research, a growing number of studies have been conducted as to test its application both theoretically and practically (Aaker, 1997; Benet-Martinez and Garolera, 2001). Aaker, (1997) renewed the interest in the concept and was the first to propose a valid and reliable measurement instrument of brand personality. The result of Aaker's (1997) factor analysis suggested that consumers perceive brands to have five distinct personality dimensions, corresponding to the "big five" human personality structures once developed by Norman (1963), in terms of: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness, which in turn could be operationalized into 15 different facets:

- **Sincerity** typified by traits such as wholesome, down-to-earth, honest, cheerful
- **Excitement** typified by traits such as daring, up-to-date, imaginative, spirited
- **Competence** typified by traits such as reliable, intelligent, successful
- **Sophistication** typified by traits such as upper-class, charming
- **Ruggedness** typified by traits such as outdoorsy and tough.

Aaker (1997) claims that the three first traits tap an innate part of human personality, whereas sophistication and ruggedness represents dimensions that individuals desire (such as belonging to upper-class and being tough) but do not necessarily have. While a considerable amount of research has been initiated as to clarifying the concept of brand personality in this way (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Halliday, 1996) a second category of studies focuses on the direct outcomes of a brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Sirgy, 1982; Fournier, 1994). In this respect, consumer behavior research suggests that numerous benefits may accrue to brands with strong and positive brand personalities. A favorable brand personality in the mind of customers is believed to increase consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982; Aaker, 1997), product differentiation and quality (Plummer, 1984, Ramaseshan and Tsao, 2007), purchase intention (Wang and Yang, 2008) and levels of loyalty and trust, (Fournier, 1994). Furthermore, as brand personality appears to be less imitable than for example product attributes, brand personality may yield a sustainable competitive advantage which is durable over time (Ang and Lim, 2006). Finally, a third category of studies examines different strategies for implementing a brand personality such as advertising, spokespersons, celebrity endorsements (Grohmann, 2009; Eisend and Stockburger-Sauer, 2013), employee behavior (Wentzel, 2009), sponsorships, brand extensions (Diamantopoulos et al.2005) and product attributes (Aaker, 1997). Finally, a somewhat smaller research assemblage have investigated the moderating effect of country of origin (Basfirinci, 2013; Eisend and Stokburger-Sauer,
phonetic symbolism embedded in brand names (Wu, Klink and Guo, 2013) as well as distribution channels (Lin, 2010) that is seen as having an effect on the actualization of a certain brand personality.

The key-take aways from this part of the chapter - which also is essential to bring to the next sections of the literature review - is to particularly keep Aaker's (1997) definition of brand personality as well as her five dimension measurement scale of brand personality in mind. What is possible to conclude from the review is that no scholar have investigated how a personality could be co-created between a focal firm and partnering brands. By consideration for the purpose of the thesis it is therefore appropriate to combine brand personality with a concept that at least on the most fundamental level treats some type of co-creation between brands. The following section will show how co-branding represents a suitable concept to combine with brand personality when it integrates a S-D logic perspective.

2.2. Co-branding

In today's world of endless choice and prolific product options, brands are inescapably confronted with the challenge of gaining mindshare in the form of public awareness and market penetration. The costs of introducing new products or entering new markets has skyrocketed due to intense competition (Thompson and Strutton, 2012). While some have addressed this challenge by using brand extensions into new product categories, other firms are increasingly turning to other and more collaborative strategies to counter the complexity of the market. An alternative for developing new products and to 'do-it-alone' is the strategy of co-branding which have seen a dramatic increase in use over the past decade (James, Lyman and Foreman, 2006, Leuthesser, Kohli and Suri, 2002). A number of firms across a wide range of industries have entered into co-branding arrangements including restaurant chains, automotive brands, hotel businesses and airlines. However, these examples only represents a fraction of all companies that have embarked on the strategy of co-branding. A particularly brand intensive environment where co-branding has grown considerably in popularity is the fast-moving consuming goods (FMCG) sector and mainly for the grocery industry (Washburn et. al, 2000). Marketers within this type of sector have been forced to be innovative to create unique offerings and to diversify their products from competitors. Some grocery retailers have adhered to this strategy as it provides prospects for differentiation at the market (ibid).
To this date, there is no universally accepted definition to be found while considering the concept of co-branding. Within the field of marketing and brand literature, the term has been used interchangeably with labels such as 'brand alliance' (Senechal, Georges and Pernin, 2013) 'ingredient branding' and 'composite branding' (Leuthesser, Kohli and Suri, 2002) which consequently testifies for a lack of consistency among researchers (Desai and Keller, 2002). In a broad sense, co-branding has been described as any pairing of two or more brands in a marketing context for the purpose of jointly promoting advertisements, product placement, products, services and distribution outlets. (Keller, 2003). However a narrower definition that have been used frequently is one in which co-branding is seen as "a kind of cooperation in which two or more individual brands are presented simultaneously to create a unique product or service" (Park, Sung and Shocker, 1996). Despite the absence of a universal agreement on its definition, the co-creation of a single product or service appears to be the most often used definition to specifically distinguish co-branding from other types of strategies (Ibid; Levin and Levin, 1996; Washburn et. al, 2000).

There are currently a lot of discussions among scholars with respect to the different benefits that potentially could accrue from co-branding. What is actually seen as being leveraged is however somewhat variable when looking into contemporary theories on co-branding. According to Keller (2011) one goal of co-branding could be related to a company's aspiration of leveraging on what he refers to as "secondary brand associations". More specifically what he means is that all brands that enters into a co-branding arrangement have their own knowledge structure that have been implemented in the mind of customers before. While linking brands together, consumers may thus assume or infer that some of the associations that characterize one brand also may be true for the other partnering brand when they are visible together. However, what Keller (2011) and a clear majority of other scholars narrowly tend to emphasize is a perspective in which co-branding and its secondary associations of other brand(s), primarily are seen to jointly promote a product and thereby help each individual brand to co-create rational and financial values. This, while paying lesser attention for how it potentially could affect other aspects such as a brand's personality (Blacket and Boad, 1999; Prince and Davies, 2002). Some scholars such as Blacket and Boad (1999) contend that co-branding of a product or service potentially could lead to increased profits since co-branding can offer consumers with increased benefits and an enhanced perceived value. Prince and Davies (2002) and Rao and Ruckert (1994) extends the preceding line of reasoning by further arguing that considerable profits could be made on part of the involved
parties since brands, by allying with each other, can increase mutual exposure and get access
to a considerable larger customer base than otherwise would have been possible. However, to
ally with the right partner that possess complementary skills is required for reaching these
outcomes (ibid; Lebar, 2005).

Although researcher's lack a consistency with regards to what actually is seen as being
leveraged on within co-branding, they share a basic understanding in that co-branding
partners have realized that the potential worth of the whole may be greater than the sum of the
individual brands. This is a premise that in many ways resembles the Service dominant logic
which is an emerging perspective on how one should reflect upon the overarching objectives
with institutions, markets and societies at large (Vargo and Lush, 2004;2014). Accordingly
with the S-D logic: "all actors are resource integrators who depends on each other's
competencies and will have to co-create value with one another". This is simply because an
actor - whether it is producers, firms, consumers, brands or suppliers - never will be totally
self-sufficient in the sense that they have all required resources under control in its domain to
obtain maximal outcomes. Each actor has their own unique resources which could be related
to knowledge, special features, competencies or other things that it is possible to accomplish
something with and that can be of interest for some other actor to exchange. In similar to co-
branding theories, the S-D logic similarly acknowledge that collaborating with other actors
can be advantageous and lead to a competitive advantage provided that the firm cooperate
with other actors that has the relevant complementary knowledge and competencies (Vargo
and Lush, 2004; Gröönros, 2006; Harker and Egan, 2006).

The S-D logic is however different to co-branding in the sense that it allows for a more open
interpretation with regards to the value that is seen as being co-created between actors.
Accordingly with a S-D logic, co-created value between actors is simply not restricted to
products or financial outcomes like in the case with theories on co-branding, but could be
related to almost anything that an actor finds a need or aspiration to co-create. To approach
the concept of co-branding with a S-D logic on value co-creation, hence represents a means
for investigating how a brand personality could be seen as being the value that a firm is co-
creating in this type of arrangement. Essential in this case is yet to show awareness for the
fact that a considerable part of the S-D logic often deals with how a firm co-creates value
together with customers (Vargo and Lush, 2004). Vargo and Lush (2011) however states that
value is co-created between many different actors and that it therefore is possible to limit the
analysis to the kind of value that is co-created between stakeholders in a B2B context - such
as between brands. Even if customers should be considered as constituting a large part of the S-D logic it is therefore possible for this investigation to integrate a S-D logic perspective within the concept of co-branding - without for that sake being required to take the customer into account in this specific study.

With background this the second part of the literature review it has become clear that it is necessary to integrate a S-D logic perspective in the definition of co-branding in order to investigate how a brand personality is co-created. Rather than restricting the definition of co-branding to the mutual creation of a product or service as explained by Park et. al (1996) a more appropriate definition for this study is rather one that merge the definition of Park et. al (1996) with the S-D logic by Vargo and Lush (2004). In this way this study redefines the concept of co-branding to rather be a cooperation in which two or more resource integrating brand suppliers are presented simultaneously to co-create value with one another. This kind of theoretical unification of the co-branding concept and the S-D logic, opens up for a lot more opportunities to investigate how other values, such as a brand personality potentially is the co-created value. This is something that would not be possible by simply adhering to the traditional definition of co-branding that is provided by Park et. al (1996) that simply focuses on the co-creation of products and rational values.

2.3. Theoretical Integration and Contribution

The individual sections of the literature review have demonstrated that (1) it is possible to get use of the definition of Aaker as it is and her five dimension scale to carry out the investigation. However theories on brand personality in general lacks a perspective on how a firm could turn to collaborative strategies as a way of forming a certain profile at the market. (2) Therefore it is necessary to combine the notion of brand personality with a modified definition of co-branding that integrates a S-D logic perspective on value. This combination and integration of concepts are essential as to ultimately address the purpose of the thesis that is formulated as to investigate how a brand personality is co-created. The modified definition of co-branding where the co-created value in this study mainly is related to a focal brand personality could be seen as manifested in model 1 below.
Model 1. Illustrating how a focal brand personality is co-created in dyadic relationships

As could be observed from the illustrated model, a co-branding arrangement is portrayed with dyadic linkages which usually would appear in a traditional stakeholder model. However what is different within this model is that it includes the variable of a focal brand personality at the very centre of attention, which in turn is thought of as being what a particular brand aspires to co-create in a co-branding constellation. Furthermore and as manifested on the left hand side of the model, the focal brand personality is here seen as being formed by some of Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality. Turning focus to the right hand side of the model one will observe the real contribution and the enablers of the study: the bidirectional arrows. The arrows shows the dyadic linkages between a focal brand and each of its specific partners which are assigned to as A, B and C. The arrows illustrates how two resource integrating brands, in complete isolation from other partners and potential network effects, are co-creating value with one another which thus represents the modified definition co-branding. The open interpretation of value in this case makes it possible to investigate how a focal brand personality is co-created by leveraging on the personalities of its partnering brands. Depending on what type of personalities partner A, B and C has, a focal brand is thought of as either consolidating new and complementary personality traits or reinforcing its profile by collaborating with similar personalities. In similar to the focal brand, the personalities of the
partnering brands are thought of as being formed accordingly with Aaker's (1997) five dimensions. Although, however, interest will be on the co-creation of a specific brand personality, the bidirectional arrows allows to contemplate the kind of value that the partner at the other side of the partnership aspires to co-create which is possible due to the S-D logic. In the contemporary, the aspired co-created value of the partners is unknown and therefore each partner is not thought of as having any pre-proposed value. To investigate what kind of value that is being co-created on both sides of each partnership is important when adopting a S-D logic perspective which therefore will be assumed in the following empirical data collection. However, and as previously illuminated, an imperative will be placed on one specific brand and its proposed and co-created value in terms of a brand personality. Altogether, the theoretical integration of concepts supports the following empirical data collection and contributes with a larger understanding with regards to brand personality formation.
3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research design of the study have been chosen based upon the purpose which in turn have been formulated as to investigate how a firm can reinforce its own brand personality by collaborating with partnering brands. With respect to the formulation of the purpose, comprising of the classical "how"-character, a qualitative research in terms of an explorative design have been adopted since it best have allowed to gain a deeper understanding of the purpose (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The strength of a qualitative research is that it provides rich information and that it contributes to an increased understanding of social processes and contexts - which is something that have paralleled the ambition of the inquiry (Holme and Solvang, 1997). Furthermore, a single case study approach have been selected as it corresponds to an instrument that is well-equipped for investigations that are based upon a contemporary phenomenon. Moreover a case study approach represents a suitable strategy when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident and when the character of the research in itself requires a more thorough understanding (Yin, 2009). With regards to the purpose, the case study strategy have therefore been seen as beneficial to implement for the study.

3.2 Selection of Case Firm

While selecting a case, a great precision have been directed towards making the correct decisions for the sake of ensuring that the best possible conditions have prevailed for collecting relevant data to the study. Yin (2003) stresses the importance of identifying specific reasons for why the case should be selected rather than simply finding the most convenient solution from which it is possible to collect data. This advice have been assumed and the strategy of a purposive research sampling have been adopted as it have allowed for the needed autonomy when approaching a focal firm that collaborates with other individual brands with a potential consideration for its brand personality (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The Swedish grocery retailer brand of Coop have been selected for the case study as it represents a suitable lens through which the co-creating and collaborative gap of brand personality theories potentially could be informed and because it shows high prospects for securing validity. A co-branding initiative have only recently been implemented by Coop through its new loyalty program MedMera, which aims to jointly promote personal offerings and favorable prices with other partnering brands (coop.se, 2015a). Awareness has been shown for the fact that the
different partnerships within MedMera not only should be seen as being established for the sake of creating a personality. However and alongside the most obvious goal of generating loyal and lucrative customers, it has been of interest to examine how the different brand collaborations have been installed for specific reasons that directly relates to the reinforcement of Coop's brand personality. Furthermore, Coop have been recognized as reflecting the phenomenon of the study in a very good way as it for a considerable period of time have intended to establish a distinct brand personality at the market. For many years Coop have been ranked as the second most sustainable brand in Sweden with its private label 'Änglamark' and its marketing campaign "Ekolöftet" which makes it evidently clear that the grocery retailer invests considerable resources in brand building. Thereby Coop represents an intriguing example and have been considered to support the aspiration of the study well (mynewsdesk.com). Importantly, the aim with the study have not been to secure external validity by generalizing results to other brands in a similar situation as Coop but rather to examine the phenomenon within a specific and real life context (Saunders et. al, 2012). Although a particular focus have been directed towards Coop's focal brand and its partnerships, the author have examined a lot of different characteristics regarding the specific case which could be considered as a strength as the phenomenon as such have been thoroughly investigated (ibid).

3.3. Choice of Firm Representatives

The interview respondents have been selected based upon the previously mentioned criteria in terms of a purposive sampling. With respect to the purpose of the study, the author have been inclined to include company representatives that are both situated at the headquarter of the focal case firm Coop but also to include some representatives from three of its partnering brands. Moreover, a senior business consultant that have been involved in developing the new member program and responsible for setting up contracts between Coop and its partnering brands, have been included as she was considered as being able to enrich the study with a different angle. The first point of contact with Coop was initiated by phone with a strategic campaign manager who was identified as an appropriate candidate for fulfilling the study's aspiring discussions around Coop as a brand. As a direct consequence of a personal meeting that took place at the headquarter in Solna Business Park, the advertising and campaign strategy manager announced that he supported the investigation - something that also made him keen on introducing the managing director of MedMera and a key account manager (KAM) that is responsible for the overall strategic partnerships of Coop. All three respondents
were considered as having the required knowledge for being able to contribute with valuable insights for the study while they have different positions which increases the validity of the study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Moreover and by permission of the KAM, it has been possible to include some of the partnering brands within the study.

Although focus mainly have been directed towards an investigation of Coop, it have been necessary to also include some of its partnering brands in order to gain a larger insight of the mutual incentives for collaborating which is important in the S-D logic (Vargo and Lush, 2004). While investigating how Coop attempts to reinforce its brand personality with the help of others, it is in other words critical to scrutinize the profile of the partnering brands and what benefits they are experiencing from collaborating with Coop. After carefully examining the available alternatives among Coop's partnering brands that today are included within the MedMera loyalty program a selection had to be made. All partnering brands are active in different types of industries. The total number of partnering brands is included within appendix 6.4 except for Coop's campaign driven partners that only appears for a certain period of time and that therefore not have been of interest for this particular study.

The decision shortly fell on including three of Coop's partnering brands that are active within the tourism & travel industry: Fritidsresor, SAS and Gustavsvik Resorts. This choice was primarily made because the three demonstrates different aspects of collaborations and because they are three and relatively different brand personalities that are interesting to examine while investigating how Coop can reinforce its own brand personality by the help of others. Fritidsresor and Gustavsvik were chosen because their personalities could be assumed to be family-oriented, which nevertheless seems to be important for Coop. SAS was also included because it does not primarily profile itself as either family-oriented and green and therefore were seen as needed a further examination. Moreover, the rationale for having a number of three partnering brands have been seen as twofold: first and foremost, the purpose with the study have been to provide an example on how Coop attempts to create its brand personality with other actors. Secondly, the author have been forced to operate under some time-constraints which therefore have made it appropriate to only focus on a smaller number of analytical units for the benefit of a greater depth in the study. Moreover it has not been of interest for the author to provide an exhaustive identification over the entire partnerships of Coop and their different impacts on the brand personality of Coop but rather to provide an example that is more in-depth (Saunders et. al, 2012).
Overall with respect to both Coop and its partnering brands, a great precision have been adopted as to only include people that have the required knowledge and profession for being able to discuss around the partnerships in a broad sense and through their own and more individual perception. This approach have contributed to the fact that the material that have been generated through the interviews have shown to be representative with regards to the purpose of the study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In order to obtain an holistic overview over the companies and interviewees that have been included in the study, the reader are encouraged to examine Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company/Brand</th>
<th>Interview object/Professional role</th>
<th>Time and Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coop Sverige AB</td>
<td>Jonas Taube, Advertising &amp; Campaign Strategy Manager</td>
<td>2015-04-14 Headquarter of Coop, Solna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coop Sverige AB</td>
<td>Mikael Ahlqvist, Managing Director of MedMera, Management</td>
<td>2015-04-16 Headquarter of Coop, Solna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coop Sverige AB</td>
<td>Johanna Frank, Key Account Manager, Strategic Partners</td>
<td>2015-04-15 Headquarter of Coop, Solna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XLENT Strategy - Consulting Group</td>
<td>Bi Kreimer, Senior Business Consultant on behalf of Coop AB</td>
<td>2015-05-05 Phone Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fritidsresor AB</td>
<td>Malin Ström, Partner Sales Manager</td>
<td>2015-05-04 Phone Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAS AB</td>
<td>Petra Jura, Partnership Manager Loyalty</td>
<td>2015-05-06 Phone Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gustavsvik Resort</td>
<td>Marcus Wirén, Marketing and Sales Director</td>
<td>2015-05-04 Phone Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Overview of included brand suppliers and company representatives.
The author have employed a primary data collection method in the form of interviews with the selected firm representatives that are outlined in Table 1. As a method for data collection, interviewing is considered to be very good when gathering knowledge on complex issues (Ringdal, 2001). Interviews are especially suitable when there is a need to understand people's feelings, perceptions and thoughts and the flexibility of the method sometimes allows for probing in order to gain a rich scope of information which sometimes makes it superior to less informative methods like for example a questionnaire (Bryman, 2002; Daymon and Holloway, 2011; Sekaran and Bougie, 2010). The selected interview approach for the study have been conducted in accordance with a semi-structured interview which according to Saunders et. al (2012) is suitable for explorative studies where the investigators seeks to formulate questions in advance by capturing certain theoretical themes. Although it have been necessary to ask the same kind of questions to all respondents for the sake of ensuring validity of the study, a semi-structured interview still makes it possible to adjust or omit some questions depending on what organizational context that are being encountered in relation to the research topic (Saunders et. al, 2012). A smaller modification of questions have been necessary to make in this study while interviewing Coop and its partnering brands since its related firm representatives works at different layers of each organization. The semi-structured interview approach has moreover been considered as appropriate to employ as it gives the respondent freedom to express his or her experiences and thoughts related to the studied subject - without being interfered by the interviewer too much (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The author have conducted personal in-depth interviews with all respondents individually because it have enabled the author to get more detailed answers without having to risk that the respondents are influencing each other (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the three individual company representatives from Coop and took place at Solna Business Park which is the location for Coop's headquarter. With the business consultant at Xlent Strategy and the partnering brands, interviews have been conducted over phone due to time and geographical constraints. Even if it was harder to interpret facial expressions for the other respondents than Coop it was still preferable since it reduced the risk of influencing the respondents to answer in a biased manner. These circumstances can be considered as having a positive influence on the reliability of the research (Bryman, 2002). Before any interview took place, the author made sure that each respondent received the interview guide a priori to when the actual interview took place. For the interview with Coop
representatives, the author brought with her a paper on which they was encouraged to illustrate their different partnerships and mainly those of Fritidsresor, SAS, and Gustavsvik. This was considered to be beneficial as it gave the author an initial overview over each collaboration that connects Coop with its partnering brands. All interviews have been tape recorded by permission of the respondents (Bryman and Bell, 2011) which have been seen as critical for the sake of securing a correct picture of what has been said during the interview. The interviews took on average forty minutes to carry out.

3.5. Operationalization of Theoretical Concepts

The author formulated an interview guide before scheduling any interviews with the respondents. This was especially necessary due to the fact that all interview questions had to originate from three theoretical themes in terms of: brand personality and a modified definition of co-branding with an integrated S-D logic perspective. All of these themes were acknowledged as to represent what the author intended to measure and was in turn decomposed into three main question with a few and accompanying questions which will be explained shortly. In line with the arguments of Bryman and Bell (2011) the author have maintained the importance of formulating questions by what is comprehensible and relevant to the people that have been interviewed at the same time as the interviewer have avoided to ask leading questions (Saunders et. al, 2012).

In order to secure that the investigation have measured what it has been intended to do and that its remaining results are credible, it have been critical to conduct an operationalization. By conducting an operationalization, the author have been able to translate the study's desirable theoretical concepts into specific questions (Saunders et. al, 2012). By employing the method of semi-structured interviews, the study have aspired to capture what is central for the different theoretical concepts and what they have been intended to measure. The questions that were used in the interview guide have been divided into the two and previously mentioned categories of: brand personality and a modified definition of co-branding that integrates a S-D logic perspective (see appendix 6). By having the interview guide connected with certain theoretical concepts, systematic errors have been avoided in the study at the same time as the author have made sure that the study actually have measured what it has intended to measure. The questions have been formulated out of the operational definition for each of the concepts. In extension, this is something that lends a considerable validity for the investigation. Due to the fact that all interviews was conducted in Swedish and inquiry
requires the findings to be presented in English, Brislin's (1980) translation process has been followed. The interview guide have been supported by the use of bilingual translators that is well familiar with the research source and the target languages. Accordingly with the suggestion of Brislin (1980), one have translated forward whereas the other one has translated backwards without having seen the original text. The back-translation process have been repeated iteratively until no mistakes in meanings have been found. The remaining result from the operationalization could be examined in Table 2, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Key References</th>
<th>Operational Definition</th>
<th>Example Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Personality</td>
<td>Aaker (1997)</td>
<td>&quot;The set of human characteristics being associated with a brand&quot;</td>
<td>How would you describe the current profile of X at the market place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>If X were a person, how would you describe it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-branding</td>
<td>Park et. al (1996) and Vargo and Lush (2004)</td>
<td>&quot;A cooperation in which two or more resource integrating brands are presented simultaneously to co-create value with one another&quot;</td>
<td>Which brand(s) are included to cooperate with X and why from a branding perspective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How can the mentioned actor(s) reinforce the profile of brand X?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Operationalization of theoretical concepts into measurable variables**

3.6. Secondary data collection

Case studies typically involve multiple methods for collecting data (Yin, 2003). Using multiple sources of data can act as a way of triangulation to ensure consistency in the information being collected and was needed as the interviews have been based upon subjective opinions. Furthermore, this way of collecting data also helps to secure that the total validity of the data gathered is of high quality (Eisenhardt, 1998 and Ringdal, 2001). In
addition to interviews with key individuals at Coop and at their partnering brands, the ambition of the author have been able to complement the analysis with a considerable scope of secondary data. Secondary data sources is considered a good data source of information when performing primary data analysis through interviewing (Ringdal, 2001) which is why the author considered it as beneficiary for the given study. The author have to a certain extent made use of information from the organization's web pages and any newspaper articles that was related to the different partnerships within Coop's loyalty program of MedMera. While reading and gathering secondary data, the author was well aware of the possible bias that could influence their contents and thus a critical mindset was adopted as to examine their origins and actual use value. This additional data was used to understand Coop's partnerships to a larger extent before the interviews took place and to corroborate the findings from the primary data as a way of minimizing the risk of misinterpreting the information gathered from the interviews. Having multiple sources of data helps secure the reliability of interviews (Eisenhardt, 1998).

3.7. Processing and Analysis of Data

The investigation have assumed a deductive research approach where the intention have been to apply existing theory on the findings that have remained from the interviews. Building on the purpose, it has been desirable to reach a different angle to existing brand personality theories by investigating how a personality could be co-created between a focal firm and a number of partnering brands. The data for the empirical study, have been tape-recorded which have been seen as beneficial in order to correct natural limitations of memory and nevertheless to obtain a more thorough examination of what the respondents have said both concurrently and in retrospect. By having the interviews tape-recorded it have been possible to be highly alert on what has been expressed during the interview, to follow up on interesting points that have been made and to draw attention to any inconsistencies in the interviewees answers (Heritage, 1984; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Bryman, 2002). In close proximity to each interview occasion, the author have then transcribed each recording into written words and summarized the remaining findings for the sake of coding and finding appropriate connections between what has been said and the study's theoretical themes. Thereafter, data have been sorted into the conceptual categories that have been highlighted within the frames for the operationalization while at the same time, irrelevant or useless information have been ignored. In other words, a content analysis have been conducted which represents an excellent strategy for analyzing data in qualitative interviews (Denscombe, 2010; Bryman and Bell,
To summarize data in this view is according to Saunders et. al (2012) beneficial for the sake of becoming more familiar with the subject and to facilitate the following process of the researcher. Finally, all respondents have been able to receive a draft of the finished theory in which they have been able to submit potential corrections to what the author have expressed in the empirical analysis. This has been critical as to protect those who have participated in the research and to safeguard that correct information have been included before publishing the thesis (Saunders et. al, 2012).

The following empirical analysis will be structured accordingly with the concept of brand personality and the study's modified definition of co-branding that integrates a S-D logic perspective on value. The empirical chapter will first direct its focus towards the focal brand personality of Coop; what is the personality of Coop and how do the company internally work as to establish its profile. Then, the empirical analysis will proceed to the next section that introduces Coop's recently installed co-branding arrangement and how it helps them to co-create its personality both in a general sense but also by paying a particular attention for three different partners which will be organized accordingly with separate headings. Throughout the second half of the empirical analysis it will also be room for the kind of empirical evidence that informs about the value that has been co-created on part of Coop's partnering brands. The accompanied analysis will continuously evaluate the empirical findings against the study's theoretically constructed framework.
4. Empirical Analysis

4.1. Coop - Sweden's most Sustainable Personality

While visiting the headquarter of Coop, it becomes evident that the overall theme of the interior is carefully conceived as being one of a family-oriented and sustainable character. The colors of the chairs and the tables in the restaurant area of the building are consistently green and oak colored as well as the cheerful and seven meter high slide that is located just in the middle and adjacent to where employees are having their daily lunch and coffee breaks. The building, which every day accommodates around 550 employees, is impressively high with a number of floors that contains light and flexible office spaces in the same green color that also is found on Coop's logo. The whole interior of the building evokes a feeling of modernity while at the same time being combined with a surrounding environment that is strikingly calm and harmonious for the one who resides in the building. Jonas Taube, Johanna Frank and Mikael Ahlqvist are three different employees at Coop who all share a moderately to long background within the business and that nevertheless are keen on sharing their perspectives and experiences for the benefit of the inquiry. Although a sense of Coop's profile is mediated just by staying at its headquarter, it is still essential to know more about their individual perception of the brand. Regarding the question on how they perceive the profile of Coop from a brand perspective, they are all very determined as to point out that the brand mainly is equal to family and sustainability. According to Jonas Taube, who works as an Advertising and Campaign strategy manager at Coop, the brand has a tradition of being the "greenest" alternative at the market that aspires to assist the customer in making a good choice:

"As compared to our competitors, I would say we are the "green" player at the market; our vision is to be recognized as the "the good force" within the Swedish grocery industry and everything we do should kind of be accommodated within that vision - At the end of the day it's all about doing a little bit better than our competitors. Everything we do is based on the fact that we want to create something that is good for you and your family and the environment. I believe Coop as a company takes on a little bit more responsibility in that sense than our competitors. We are not driven by exactly the same profit incentives as others at the market which quite simply makes it possible for us to have a little bit more latitude in our business conduct"

Jonas Taube, Advertising & Campaign Strategy Manager
The journey towards becoming one of Sweden's most sustainable brands is however something that has proceeded for a long period of time and it actually stretches back as far as to the 19th century when the cooperative first was established. While regarding some short recap of it history, it becomes evident that Coop has been little of a pioneer within this field which also lends a greater understanding as to where its brand profile comes from:

- The cooperative, that we today know as Coop, was established as early as in the year of 1899, which really is a long time ago. The reason for why it started was because the Swedish market at this time desired pure and unadulterated goods at the market: in the end of the 19th century the market was preoccupied with so much counterfeit goods. It was not uncommon for traders to mix flour with sand and a number of similar oddities was made and being sold. So the basis for why the cooperative was established was related to an aspiration of getting away from the cheating with food that previously had characterized the market - and this is nevertheless a highly relevant topic that still motivates us in our business today.

Jonas Taube -Advertising and Campaign strategy Manager

Overall, the respondents formulates different examples as to point out the importance of the family and sustainable orientation for the personality of Coop. However and particularly from the interview with Johanna Frank, who works as a key account manager at Coop, it becomes evident how deeply rooted these traits really are for the contemporary personality of the brand:

"We share an aspiration for Coop to be profiled as the green family-oriented brand as compared to our competitors and our mindset of sustainability begins already here - at the headquarter. All chairs and tables that surrounds us here in the restaurant area and in the overall office are specifically selected to be of a durable material. Our restaurant is every day serving organic food that our employees can bring home to their families after work - which we consider to be a beneficial way of reducing food waste. Moreover, Coop cherishes issues related to its personnel by showing a sincere interest for how we feel, how and whether we exercise, what we are eating and whether we have prospects for balancing a functioning family life with our daily work. Sometimes it is very much to do around here you know and then you will simply need some time for recovery. I mean it is sustainability even in that sense - and this is something that Coop really understands.

Johanna Frank, Key Account Manager
The sustainable and family-oriented mindset is however not only apparent within the immediate walls of Coop's headquarter, but could also be considered as an integral part of its overall business conduct. The family-oriented trait in itself is given, as it represents Coop's main target group, and it is therefore visible in almost any business activity ranging from TV commercials, cookery books, proposed recipes at the website and in sponsorships (Taube, 150414). Sustainability is also visible in a range of different activities and have received an increasingly prominent role, especially in recent years. In a survey that was administered in 2014, 37 percent out of Coop's 3.5 million members expressed that they wanted to know what the parliamentary parties in Sweden will do as to increase the availability of organic food. As a direct response to that call, Coop launched the campaign of "Ekolöftet" the same year with the aim of promoting organic production and for making politicians more engaged in the question. The campaign was later on nominated by customers as the most durable and brand building campaign of the year (Coop.se, 2014a). According to Sirgy (1982) and Aaker (1997) a favorable brand personality is believed to increase differentiation and consumer preference, which it evidently have done in the case of Coop by it being ranked by customers at a yearly basis as the most sustainable brand in Sweden (handelstrender.se; Coop 2014b). Jonas Taube proudly acknowledge the contemporary ranking of Coop among Swedish customers by sharing the following statement:

"Coop has, for several years, been nominated as the most sustainable brand within the category of Swedish retailers while simultaneously captured a second place in the ranking among all companies in Sweden! Coop have today the largest assortment of organic and eco-labeled groceries with its own private label of Änglamark which have become increasingly popular and been appointed as one of Sweden's "greenest" brand within its category. To address sustainable issues becomes increasingly important - especially among the younger segments and families at the market that we aspire to reach.

Jonas Taube, Advertising and Campaign Strategy Manager

Moreover, after the brand campaign of Ekolöftet was launched, Coop's organic sales portion increased by 40 percent (Coop, 2014c) which in a sense reflects the statement by Wang and Yang (2008) who claims that a favorable brand personality can lead to a higher purchase intention on part of the customer. Moreover and according to Taube (150414) Coop regularly conducts member surveys to stay ahead of customer preferences. In this way, it shows that Coop seeks to increase the congruity between the customers actual or ideal self with the
The sustainable way of thinking also becomes evident in Coop's environmental friendly way of transporting goods by own trains to its 700 "Krav" certified stores as a way of minimizing its yearly footprint of carbon emissions (Coop, 2013; gp.se, 2014). Furthermore, it could be witnessed in its sponsorship for healthy events such as "Vårruset" which is a running competition for ladies (varruset.se, 2015) and by its campaign "Veckans Eko" which entails significantly reduced prices of organic fruits and vegetables every week. Within the advertising campaign that promotes Veckans Eko, Coop is doing a real experiment with a regular family to test whether they have chemical pesticides and similar substances in their bodies after having consumed food that is not organically produced. From the test, it later on turns out that some of the family members have substances such as insecticides and fungicide in their body. After having the family to consume organic food for two weeks and then remake the test again - their values proves to be in a much better condition (Coop.se, 2015b). Finally the sustainable mindset could be witnessed in the way the cooperation sets out to reduce food waste by donating food to the homeless (allwin.nu, 2015) and by steadily engaging in questions that addresses animal welfare (djurensratt.se, 2015).

Altogether and in line with Aaker's five dimension scale of brand personality, it becomes evident that Coop place itself as having a sincere and competent personality. This type of personality seems legitimate to attribute to the brand because of the many business and marketing activities that points to Coop's personality traits as being down-to-earth, honest and a reliable choice for its customers (Aaker, 1997). In similar to previous research on brand personality (Grohmann, 2009 and Aaker, 1997) the foregoing section has shown that Coop indeed is trying to build its brand personality by traditional marketing variables that are being under the direct control of its own company. Critical for this study is however that Coop also is trying to build its personality together with partnering brands through its new loyalty program MedMera, which will be elaborated in further detail within the following paragraphs to come.

4.2. Co-branding for a Brand Personality

As with any big retail chain, Coop have its own loyalty program that only recently have been remodeled as to include a score system which in turn is supported by a co-branding arrangement with different kinds of partners. On July, 1 in 2014, the old bonus system of Coop were replaced in favor of a new program that was perceived as being more beneficial in
the sense that it gave the customers a modern and more personalized experience from its membership. The program today allows members to gather scores on their grocery purchases and also at some of Coop's partners which then, at a certain level, can be redeemed either into goods, services and/or experiences both inside and outside the stores of Coop. All purchases at Coop gives one score per purchased crone on the loyalty card and at different pre-determined levels it is then possible for the member to redeem its earned stock of scores to either book a travel, to get hold of some hotel nights, buy clothes or whatever the member prefers to use them for. Even if it is still possible for a member to get discounts based on purchase history, a considerable part of the MedMera loyalty program includes this kind of co-branding arrangement in which it is possible to distinguish between what Coop refers to as (I) earning partners, which is partners that allows members to collect MedMera scores by purchasing something (II) campaign driven partners which only appears for the members at a certain point of time and (III) far-reaching partners that entails a closer cooperation over time and that allows members to redeem their scores into different partner offerings. For a MedMera member, it is possible to redeem and collect scores at the following partnering brands: SAS, Fritidsresor, Swebus, Nordic Choice Hotels, Polarn & Pyret, Akademibokhandeln and Brothers. For the partners Gustavsvik and Tallink Silja it is however only possible to redeem MedMera scores for a specific offering. Overall, this is a kind of co-branding arrangement where Coop and its partners simultaneously are presented for the customer - both within distribution channels belonging to Coop and its partners - to jointly promote discounts and various offerings (coop.se, 2015b). At the most fundamental level, this arrangement is therefore in line with the traditional definition of co-branding which holds that two or more brands are collaborating for the sake of jointly promoting a product or service (Park et. al, 1996).

With regards to the incentives for Coop to arrange its co-branding initiative, it appears that a mix between hard and soft values have been considered. In line with the traditional perspective that continues to permeate theories on co-branding, rational and financial values (Park et. al, 1996; Blacket and Boad, 1999; Prince and Davies, 2002; Rao and Ruckert, 1994) are inevitably a desirable outcome for Coop, as for any business enterprise. To attract more customers to make their purchases at Coop and to gain a larger market exposure is obviously an integral part with the ambition of MedMera (Frank, 150415). However, and what appears to be of interest for this study, is that it also appears to be a lot of considerations that have been dedicated towards the prospects for building and reinforcing Coop as a brand by the help
of others. This becomes evident while getting hold of Coop representatives recounts as to why different partners have been included within the program. All Coop representatives are consistent as to claim that it is a very crafted idea behind the selection of each partners. The first criteria for selecting a partner is that it should be interesting for a wide range of people and mainly for Coop's target group in terms of families but also that it should be found and accessible all over the country. Coop conducts regularly surveys to stay ahead of the preferences and experiences of their members which is important as the members are the real owners of the cooperation. Moreover considerations are dedicated towards brand building. Mikael Ahlqvist, the managing director of the MedMera loyalty program provides a more detailed explanation in this respect that also manifests these different selection criteria's in further detail:

If we have a look on those partners that allows the member to collect MedMera scores, they should be part of the daily expenditure that a household holds which, alongside our own core product of food, could be everything from electricity, communication, gasoline, fuel, and travels. If we then turn focus to look at those partners that makes it possible for our members to redeem their points into partner offerings, we look at a mix between rational and emotional values. Rational redemption is for example a voucher on a purchase and the emotional part entails travels, cinema visits, hotels, flights, travels and all that stuff that everyone wants and that creates emotional values. Then it becomes important to find relevant partners that match these aspirations. At the next level, and then we talk about categories of opportunities we must check whether the partnering brands are in line with our own brand, that is - what we stand for - and whether they can help us to reinforce and build our own profile at the market”

Mikael Ahlqvist, Managing Director of MedMera

In this way it becomes apparent that while selecting partners to be included in the program they all in some sense have been weigh against Coop's prospects for reinforcing and building its brand personality:

Basically, it's all about the fact that 1+1 equals more than 2 in terms of both the brands and the business that we are undertaking together. If we enter into a collaboration with a partner, it is truly a common exchange we are undertaking both on a brand level and in pure financial terms. So in summary and from the perspective of Coop, I would say we have a look at: market/business prospects, customer value and brand building potential when looking for a partner”.
Consequently and at least at this point, Coop seem to represent an example that updates the traditional definition of co-branding which mainly places an imperative on rational and financial outcomes as being the far most important values remaining from co-branding (Keller, 2011; Blacket and Boad, 1999; Prince and Davies, 2002). Coop proves, with these arguments, that there also are other values in terms of the reinforcement of a brand personality that is of interest while undertaking their loyalty program which reflects the modified definition of co-branding as simply not being restricted to pure rational and financial outcomes (Park et. al; Vargo and Lush, 2004). Bi Kreimer, who works as senior business consultant and that have been involved in negotiating Coop’s partnership agreements, further confirms this view:

"For sure we look at a mix between business opportunities and customer value but we also look at prospects for brand building. At the most fundamental level you know, Coop builds and reinforces its own brand through separate marketing activities in stores, by sponsorships and through their own label and selection of goods - but at the same time they are also trying to build their brand and to give proof for its specific profile by the choice of specific partnering brands. Most definitely".

Bi Kreimer, Senior Business Consultant Xlent Strategy

According to the respondents, each and every partner is evaluated carefully against certain requirements that have been set up as to prevent any damage to Coop's brand personality at the market. This is an activity that parallels the argument by Vargo and Lush (2004) and Gröönros (2006) who claims that the collaboration with other actors could lead to a competitive advantage, provided that they have relevant/complementary competencies and knowledge. According to both Taube (150414) and Ahlqvist (150416) it is very important to only include partners within the member program that matches the brand of Coop and that can help to build and reinforce it. Ahlqvist (150416) provides an example with regards to the sustainable mindset of Coop and how that aspect will need to be reflected in the partner selection in order to build Coop as a brand:

"For us, who deeply cares about issues related to sustainability, it would not be possible to collaborate with, let's say Shell since it is so deeply rooted for some customers that they are an environmental villain in the mind of customers. It could hurt our brand in the long run. By way of contrast, Coop would be much better off to collaborate with for example OKQ8 that for long have had a conscious sustainable strategy and that also is an old cooperative, like us."
If we then have a look on the electrical industry it would in similar not be acceptable for us to collaborate with let us say Vattenfall that is engaged in coal power in for example Germany and Poland. Conversely God EI and Telge Energi, that has a clear environmental profile, would work great for us”

Mikael Ahlqvist, Managing Director of MedMera

In a similar way, Frank (150415) argue that it is important to only collaborate with partners and companies that have a well-crafted strategy and matches Coop's profile as being family-oriented and sustainable, as it otherwise could cause a confusion among Coop's customers. Each respondent provides examples of some of its partners as to point out how the reasoning have looked like when they have selected to include a partner within MedMera. The following description is provided by Frank (150415):

"Nordic Choice Hotels which is one of our partners, is a company that works extremely much with issues related to sustainability: all of their hotel facilities are certified, they only use eco-labeled detergents and the owners of Choice travels around the world to give presentations on issues related to the climate and to eat healthy. All companies that we collaborates with keeps these issues close at heart. Polarn & Pyret also works with the sustainable aspect within their production of organic baby clothes and with their own eco-label. In a similar way, Swebus have their own buses that are driven by biofuel which entails an energy efficient travel with low environmental impact and low levels of carbon emissions".

Johanna Frank, Key Account Manager

Throughout the interviews with the included Coop representatives, especially three partnering brands are of interest which in turn provides a deeper understanding on how Coop is trying to build its profile by collaborating with their specific partners. Although a considerable focus will be directed towards the brand of Coop, discussions have also circulated around partnering brands and the kind of incentives and values that they perceive to co-create with Coop which is possible with the modified definition of co-branding (park et. al, 1996; Vargo and Lush, 2004). A more detailed overview of these three partnering brands will be discussed in the following and the three partnering brands will be presented in a chronological order by starting with the partner that have been included within the MedMera program for the longest period of time. The following sub-chapter will especially provide an account on how the modified definition of co-branding (Park et al, 1996; Vargo and Lush, 2004) could be seen as
applying to some or all of Coop's partnering brands and whether the personalities seem to match or not.

4.2.1. Fritidsresor AB

Coop have had an active and close collaboration with Fritidsresor ever since the year of 2012 when Coop's former refund program still prevailed (travelnews.se). However, in 2014 the partnership with Fritidsresor was renegotiated and given a different implication as Coop launched its new loyalty program that now would entail a score system as compared to the former that was driven by discounts. The partnership with Fritidsresor today allows a member of MedMera to both redeem a certain stock of scores into travels, to get vouchers from Coop while booking a travel regardless of scores and/or to collect scores on the MedMera loyalty card by booking a travel at Fritidsresor. The co-branding arrangement between the two brands makes itself visible both in Coop's channels through the application or website but also within distribution channels belonging to Fritidsresor, which mainly is on their website (Coop.se; Fritidsresor.se). Fritidsresor entails a good business opportunity for Coop as it is one of Sweden's largest travel agency and thereby can generate more loyal customers to Coop and bestow a larger market exposure (Frank, 150415). However, while examining a little bit closer why Coop selected to include Fritidsresor within their program, a lot of perspectives emerge which informs the inquiry and confirms that not only rational values is co-created but also their brand personality (Park et. al, 1996; Vargo and Lush, 2004) has been taken into account:

"We consider Fritidsresor to be a partner that parallels our brand while it also can act as to strengthen our profile at the market and provide our members with the kind of experiences they have requested in our surveys. The family-perspective is visible in almost everything they do and it more or less permeates the whole organization of Fritidsresor with activities such as 'Bamseklubben', 'Blue Village', 'Fun breaks' etc. Moreover and at each of their facilities they arrange activities which aims to get children to physically move their bodies, learn how to swim, dance and they also arrange exercises for the grown in the family - we want our own brand to signal health and we aspire to be attractive to families with children which therefore makes Fritidsresor an excellent choice for us. When our members visit our supermarkets and perhaps stands in long queues they know that when they pay they collect scores that gradually can be converted into a few days in the sun with their families - memories that they will not only associate with Fritidsresor but also with Coop. And this is where the brand building potential lies"
Johanna Frank, Key Account Manager

Coop has however not only initiated a partnership with Fritidsresor because of the family-oriented mindset but also because of the environmental and green profile that Fritidsresor visibly demonstrates for its guests:

"Fritidsresor actually works with sustainability throughout their whole customer cycle which makes them so interesting for us. They work with certification of their hotel facilities and they actually have some ecological hotels that a customer can choose among. They have also been appointed as Sweden's greenest travel agency which obviously matches us with our title as being the greenest grocery retailer. The fact that they are being rated so high among Swedish customers shows that we really have done a perfect choice with Fritidsresor for our own brand building".

Mikael Ahlqvist, Managing Director of MedMera

For Malin Ström, who have worked as a Partner and Sales Manager at Fritidsresor since 2009, a similar perspective emerge while she sets out to describe the current profile of Fritidsresor. This in turn is something that gives proof that Coop have been fully aware of the most essential associations belonging to Fritidsresor:

"Fritidsresor stands for pleasure, I would say. We talk a lot about "the days you remember" and we profile ourselves as the brand that you associate with fantastic days together with your family, when you are exited and when you have collected memories for life - we want to be associated with happiness. While Coop is a place for shopping groceries, we are situated in the memories of our customers and you remind yourself that "oh, Fritidsresor - soon I will travel with my family to Thailand " which evokes harmony, happiness, family, excitement! Basically: we stands for all the fun and exciting in life. When our customers think about Fritidsresor, they should get a big smile on their lips!"

Malin Ström, Sales and Partner Manager Fritidsresor

With background to the description of Ström, it could be concluded that Fritidsresor has a personality of excitement and sincerity in accordance with Aaker's (1997) five dimensions. The exciting part of the personality could be found in their projected dream of traveling with all of what that entails. Moreover, they demonstrate a sincere personality in that they visibly show their guests an interest for health and sustainability. This personality is something that
both parallels the personality of Coop with its pronounced sincerity. However, it also adds the dimension of excitement which Coop does not have but reportedly aspires to have according to Frank (150415). In this way, Coop co-creates its own brand personality by associating itself with the brand Fritidsresor that both parallels and complements Coop's profile.

While then considering what incentives that have motivated Fritidsresor to collaborate with Coop and thereby what kind of value they are co-creating, it becomes evident that it even for this organization involves a mix between values that both is rational and financial, but also to attain a certain brand profile at the market. According to Ström (150504) the most important distribution channel for Fritidsresor is the internet. In this respect it is important for them to collaborate with another strong and credible partner who also is talented online and has a large group of customers who have no problems whatsoever to search for information online and to book its travel online. In this regard, Ström (150504) claims that Coop fulfills this aspiration:

"Coop is a very well-known organization; it has a large customer base, it is associated with loyal customers, it can act as to strengthen our credibility with regards to issues related to sustainability, it is wide and it is available from everywhere in the country - in other words, it has a large spread regionally which appeals to us. Today, Coop is one of our key online partners. For us, Coop is an excellent partner also because they have the opportunity to build loyalty in a customer's everyday life and to reach their customers, at least every third day and that is something that we cannot do with our customers since they are not travelling every day. We do not have such a frequent contact with our customers as Coop and here I would say that we really complement each other and exchanges something. By partnering up with Coop, we get to be in our customers consciousness more in the everyday life when they collect MedMera points and they are longing for a certain stock of scores that allows a trip to Thailand".

Malin Ström. Sales and Partner Manager Fritidsresor

While regarding the incentives for Fritidsresor for entering into a collaboration with Coop it appears that an emphasis has been put on financial and rational values like the traditional definition of co-branding entails (e.g., Keller, 2011; Blacket and Boad, 1999). However, Ström also mentions that Fritidsresor have perceived Coop to be a beneficial partner due to its strong and reliable brand personality (Park et. al, 1996; Vargo and Lush) by stating that Coop lends Fritidsresor with credibility in issues related to sustainability. In this way, Fritidsresor
not only co-creates rational and financial value but also in some way its own brand personality.

4.2.2. SAS AB

By the 1\textsuperscript{st} of October in 2014, Coop announced that it would undertake a partnership with SAS and that its members of MedMera would be able to redeem their scores either into flights or by switching scores between MedMera and SAS loyalty program of "Eurobonus". More specifically what the latter entails is that if a member also is involved within SAS loyalty program, it is possible to convert an earned Eurobonus stock into MedMera scores and the other way around (svd.se). With respect to the selection of SAS as a partner the Coop representatives are all very determined as to point out that it entails good prospects for business opportunities, and that travels is something that is high on the agenda for families. However, they also claim that SAS stands for something that Coop as a brand aspires to reconcile itself with which also points to the fact that they are co-creating its brand personality:

"SAS is strongly associated with the dream of traveling which is important for our target group of families and in an overall perspective it is a very strong brand that we find a desire to work with. By collaborating with SAS we can attract Eurobonus members to select us over other grocery chains because the scores that are collected each month on their grocery purchases can be redeemed into a travel to New York or to the sunny beach at Mallorca where they can spend time and create memories with their children!"

Johanna Frank, Key Account Manager

What however may seem peculiar for the eyes of the beholder is that Coop, which markets itself as the sincere personality at the market, still is prepared to collaborate with an airline carrier such as SAS which often is associated with a lot of harmful emissions for the environment. Similarly while looking into the field of co-branding research, scholars emphasize the importance of teaming up with other brands that is complementary in some way (Lebar, 2005). The noticeable disconnect between the brands is also something that have been remarked upon by a number of stakeholders which to varying degrees have expressed their despair against the collaboration. Coop have only recently received complaints in media, from "Naturskyddsföreningen" and customers that the collaboration with SAS is perceived to be inconsistent with the grocery giant's environmental profile (Etc.se, 2014). Ahlqvist and Frank is however keen on sharing a slightly different perspective with regards to this matter:
"Our 3.5 million members are our owners. They have a huge influence on who we ultimately decide to work with and what has been most demanded lately is discounts on air travels and we listen to them. We have received a lot of complaints from some members with regards to our involvement with SAS and Swebus but they are really working a lot with sustainability and are in many ways to be considered as leading in their respective industries. What I think is peculiar is that someone that complains about SAS and Swebus do not complain about our collaboration with Fritidsresor. In this case, members tend to isolate between SAS as a transportation company and Fritidsresor as a travel agent but the situation is still the same, right? In order to reach to Thailand with Fritidsresor within a reasonable time I presume it will be hard to go there by train or a bicycle".

Mikael Ahlqvist, Managing Director of MedMera

"SAS upholds an active environmental program for climate compensation and there are some things that SAS really do to mitigate its climate impact: For example SAS changes its aircraft fleet and replaces some components on their aircrafts to reduce its environmental impact. We continuously undertakes investigations on our partners and what we have observed is that SAS actually is a company that do the best they can with regards to environmental issues within their specific industry. However, the industry in itself is not to be considered as environmental friendly and at that point you simply will have to do a trade-off. There is however a fear of airlines to talk about issues related to the environment from a PR perspective as it immediately will be questioned".

Johanna Frank, Key Account Manager

In similar, Bi Kreimer gives an explanation from her perspective as to why SAS have been included within the MedMera loyalty program and withholds that Coop have been well aware of the fact that SAS personality is a little bit different from theirs:

"When we choose a partner we are looking very much on aspects of health and sustainability. But when it comes to SAS we have made the assessment that we want to follow what is popular among a majority of Coop's members in terms of travels and we have therefore been interested in collaborating with a company that can offer travels. In this particular case we assessed that the benefits were greater than the potential disadvantages of including them. SAS can of course never claim that it is environmental friendly and we are well aware of this. But still they are working the best they can based on their circumstances to address issues
related to sustainability. SAS, in turn is trying to select partners that are credible with regards to the environment”. I think this will become a issue of interest for SAS in the future: that is, how to undertake different climate compensations. However today this is not a prioritized question.

Bi Kreimer, Senior Business Consultant Xlent Strategy

While having a discussion with Petra Jura, who works as a partnership manager at SAS, it becomes evident that SAS primarily stands for other values and that the environmental focus is less prioritized due to industry conditions:

"Basically I would say that SAS as a premium brand stands for reliability, quality and then I would say that SAS have a strong Scandinavian character - in other words, the foundation on which SAS leans on. Additionally we want to be associated as something joyful - to travel with SAS should not only entail transportation but rather be a general experience. Besides, SAS represents excitement with travels. Our ambition is that you not only should associate SAS as being punctual but also as giving you a remarkable service and that you should enjoy to go for a flight with us up and above the clouds"

Petra Jura, Partnership Manager SAS

Accordingly with Aaker's (1997) five dimension of personality scale, SAS particularly places its brand personality as being one of sophistication, excitement and competence and lesser on sincerity which highly characterize the brand of Coop. Sophistication could be attributable to SAS because they are positioning themselves as a premium brand; excitement because they in some sense represents "the dream of the travel" which could manifest itself in for example a long-awaited trip to New York. Finally competence is attributable to SAS as they represent a reliable and timely alternative for the passenger. These traits can act as complementary to Coop, however, the sincere personality is lesser attributable to SAS which creates a mismatch with Coop. With regards to the indignant reactions among customers towards the partnership with SAS, Coop have involuntarily reduced the congruity between the customers actual or ideal self with the personality of Coop which in a way creates a confusion on part of its brand (Malhotra, 1988 and Sirgy, 1982). In this way it is possible to state that Coop is co-creating its brand personality by associating itself with SAS complementary personality trait of excitement. Moreover, the competent personality trait of SAS reinforces Coop's personality.
With respect to the motives for SAS to enter into a co-branding arrangement with Coop, a lot of different perspectives emerge as to testify for SAS way of reasoning around their partner selection. At the most fundamental level, the inclusion of Coop has to do with a strategy around their loyalty program. Due to the fact that their Eurobonus loyalty program is a type of coalition program, the idea is that their member should be able to collect Eurobonus points at many different places and not just by purchasing a travel at SAS. In this way it becomes natural to include other partners:

"When we have selected partners to be included in our program we have made the decision to undertake a strategic approach in the sense that we not only want to be in our members consciousness when they are going for a travel. We want to be in their conscious at an everyday basis and then it have been natural for us to look at 'the everyday spend' of a member and then obviously, food is top of mind. What attracts us with Coop is their strong loyalty program and their distribution channels that on a weekly basis reach their large customer base of 3.5 million members either through e-mail or one-to-one offers. Moreover we perceive them to be a brand that can lend us a little bit more credibility when it comes to our interest in sustainable issues. premium brand in the sense that they think ecologically and communicates the joyful moments of food which in some way is in line with our brand's 'joyfulness' "

Petra Jura, Partnership Manager SAS

As with regards to the incentives for SAS to collaborate with Coop it appears that they have mostly been driven to co-create rational and financial values but also in some way its brand personality (Park et. al, 1996; Vargo and Lush, 2004). By collaborating with Coop, Jura (150506) states that they can leverage on the their credibility and that SAS is concerned for sustainability even if the company in itself finds it hard to undertake environmental initiatives. Regarding the question on how SAS works with sustainability, as it lies at the core of Coop's personality, Jura (150506) points to the fact that it is a fairly complicated in issue to address in the aircraft industry and that she does not think that there is something Coop has prioritized in the case with SAS:

"I would sincerely like to assure you that SAS has a very strong environmental focus but unfortunately I can't and I do not think that Coop have chosen us based on that. It is not one of the main questions at our agenda, no" Petra Jura, Partnership Manager SAS
4.2.3. Gustavsvik Resort AB

Gustavsvik Resort represents a newcomer to Coop's loyalty program and the appropriation of the collaboration was announced in January 2015. Gustavsvik has undergone a big change over the years and today it comprises an water adventure park with Sweden's longest slides, modern holiday cottages and a wellness center with gym and massage. For the future there is also some plans on building a hotel business in the same area which can facilitate more visitors. For the children in the family it is however not only a water adventure park but also a wide range of experiences such as treasure hunts, wild rivers, mysterious things, statues talking and rain and thunders inside the water park which makes the resort a little bit more an innovative experience - Angkor Wat in Kambojja has been a source of inspiration when the water adventure park was re-build and newly opened in 2015 (coop.se, 2015c). Gustavsvik is today a partner that allows MedMera members of Coop to redeem their scores into offerings at Gustavsvik such as two days nights in a cottage with free access to baths for the children. In this way it is not possible to collect scores while booking a visit to Gustavsvik separately. Accordingly with the perception of all respondents from Coop, Gustavsvik represents good business opportunities and complements the current brand profile of Coop in a very good way with regards to Coop's main target group in terms of families that seeks for experiences. Ahlqvist perhaps conjures the most clear picture as to why Gustavsvik have been selected as a partner:

"When it all comes down to it, our desire is to be a larger source of attraction for our members than just being a grocery chain where you undertake your daily grocery shopping. Based on our family-oriented profile and our given target group, Gustavsvik with their "we have something for the whole family" complement us extraordinary well with activities that really appeals to families who wants to give their children a stay with swimming and play that most really enjoys. Moreover, Gustavsvik have a well-crafted strategy for issues related to sustainability which really appeals matches our brand".

Mikael Ahlqvist, Managing Director of MedMera

While investigating the current brand profile of Gustavsvik it is of value to get hold of a perception from a representative at this actual company as to get a more holistic picture over its current personality. Marcus Wirén today works as a sales and marketing director on behalf of Gustavsvik and have worked within the business since 2009. The road has been long to
establish a profile of the brand Gustavsvik which in turn have been built on customer insights. Today, Wirén claims that the brand profile of Gustavsvik is very clear:

"In terms of a brand profile I would say that Gustavsvik is a very happy, open and positive personality. It is near to laughter both internally among our own employees and externally among our guests that are staying at Gustavsvik. When asking our customers what they like the most with Gustavsvik they always come back to feelings, memories, experiences and the whole surrounding atmosphere of the visit. They speak warmly about when their four year old child learned how to swim at Gustavsvik and lesser about the interior like "wow what a great slide at Gustavsvik!". So I would say that we live on experiences and happy children in some sense".

Marcus Wirén, Sales and Marketing Director Gustavsvik

Recalling the fact that Coop is profiled as the green alternative within the grocery industry and have talked a lot about that a partner will have to match these traits, it is also interesting to know more about Wirén's individual perception with regards to how Gustavsvik is working with sustainability in its daily business conduct:

"If we for example have a look on our restaurants we usually buy locally produced meat and vegetables. Moreover, we have also decided to work with a local supplier here in Örebro rather than a supplier in Västerås, which definitively not is the most cost-efficient option for us. But even if it is a little bit more expensive cherishes issues related to sustainability and to provide a good quality of our ingredients at the restaurant. Internally we drive with environmental friendly cars at the resort; in the water adventure park we have invested around 40-50 million to change old systems in control rooms and in ventilators to recycle and to take advantage of our contained energy etc. Moreover, and in contrast to other bath facilities we inform our guests in a much better way about why they should shower before entering any swimming pool and this is simply related to the fact that if you don't shower you will bring bacteria to the pool which makes chlorine to react and to be used to a larger extent. Our guests are therefore informed that by showering they will help to reduce the usage of chlorine and thereby decrease our overall impact on climate changes".

Marcus Wirén, Sales and Marketing Director Gustavsvik

With respect to Aaker's (1997) five dimension of brand personality scale, Gustavsvik represents a personality of excitement and sincerity which in similar to Fritidsresor both
parallels and complements the personality of Coop. In this way Coop co-creates its brand personality by both reinforcing its contemporary trait of sincerity but also to complement it with the exciting trait that is attributable to Gustavsvik. With regards to the incentive for Gustavsvik to collaborate with Coop, that is: what value it co-creates, it is related to a mixture between both financial objectives and brand prospects. Wirén informs that the collaboration have much to do with their aspiration of achieving a larger number of guests to their facility. Today there is around 550,000 visits on Gustavsvik at a yearly basis and their goal is that they on a yearly basis should attract around one million visits at their facility by the year of 2020. Then, as Wirén states, the question remains how to reach and attract an additional number of 450,000 guests to come visit Gustavsvik.

"With our target of it have been seen as beneficial to collaborate with a partner. In this context, we turned our focus to the everyday spend category and the grocery industry where we finally had to decide whether we wanted to collaborate with either ICA or Coop. Our CEO Magnus had earlier experience of collaborating with ICA since he previously had worked at Kolmården where ICA was included as a partner. However both of us perceived Coop as a better option; Coop is green which I think attracts our younger target group more and that also can lean us a great deal of credibility. For those customer who is not as familiar with us I also think that we will be a more legitimate choice by appearing together with Coop that is well-known and reliable. Moreover Coop have a strong loyalty program with loyal customers and you can simply never say that Coop stands for something bad. However when it comes to their rival you can still be a little bit annoyed over the fact that some ICA dealers not only have one Porsche but five and that much of their business is controlled by hungry shareholders!"

Marcus Wirén, Sales and Marketing Director Gustavsvik

By the explanation of Wirén it appears like even Gustavsvik represent an example that act in line with the modified definition of co-branding (Park et. al, 1996; Vargo and Lush, 2004) in that they have entered into a partnership with Coop not only because of their target of visits but also to get credibility from Coop's personality.
5. Concluding Discussion

The objective of this research assemble was to investigate how a brand personality could be seen as being co-created between a firm and a number of partnering brands. To accomplish this scientific ambition it was therefore necessary for the inquiry to combine the notion of brand personality with a co-creating concept in terms of co-branding. A S-D logic perspective on value was integrated within the traditional definition of co-branding which led to a new definition of co-branding that enabled the study to contemplate how a brand personality could be seen as being the co-created value between collaborating actors. With background to this framework, a case study was then undertaken on the grocery retailer brand Coop that currently have initiated a co-branding arrangement with a number of partnering brands. First and foremost, the result from the inquiry shows that Coop works with its brand personality formation by traditional marketing tool that parallels what extant research stipulates. However, this research assemble shows that Coop also have initiated a co-branding constellation with other brands for the sake of consolidating and giving proof for its particular family-oriented and sustainable/green personality. The exemplification of Coop thereby demonstrates that partnerships not only have been initiated for the sake of reaching rational and financial values - which often is emphasized within the traditional view of co-branding theories - but also to exhibit a certain brand personality. In order to assess how Coop have co-created its profile it is possible to examine model 2 below and the bidirectional arrows.

Model 2. Illustrating how Coop co-creates its brand personality in dyadic relationships.
In this context it could be concluded that Coop's personality in accordance with Aaker's (1997) five dimensions is one of sincerity and competence (left hand side). As could be witnessed from the model and arrows, Fritidsresor and Gustavsvik parallels and complement the brand personality of Coop in a very good way as they both adds the personality dimension of "excitement" that the retailer in some way lacks. Furthermore, both of these partnering brands visibly demonstrates an interest for issues related to sustainability for their customers which also parallels and complements the personality of Coop. In this case, perhaps Fritidsresor stands out the most as it have been nominated as the most sustainable travel agency among customers. However in the case of Coop's partnership with SAS, the empirical data have demonstrated that brand personality has been less prioritized with regards to at least the sustainable aspect which also have been expressed by surrounding customers and stakeholders. SAS sophisticated traits is not perceived as being sought after by Coop. However what should be noticed is that SAS complements Coop in a good way with its exciting personality dimension that in some way conveys the dream of the journey which is sought after among members of Coop (Frank, 150415). Due to the fact that the MedMera loyalty program not only has been established for the sake of consolidating a certain personality it is reasonable that Coop have been forced to prioritize certain selective criteria's over that of brand building potential which obviously should be taken into account. While seeking to contemplate the value that Coop's partnering brands are co-creating it has appeared to be a mix between rational/financial values and their brand personalities. A common denominator for all partners has however been that they aspire to be associated with Coop's sincerity and in some way transferring that trait to their own profile. Altogether, the results of the empirical findings however adds to the research call by Merz et. al (2009) while at the same time adding to contemporary theories on brand personality by confirming that a brand personality could be seen as being co-created with other brands. The result from the empirical findings have shown that Coop have aspired to not simply be recognized as a grocery retailer but also as something that delivers experiences for its target group - which mainly is related to families. Together with its partners Coop have co-created a brand personality for itself that is sincere, exciting and competent.

5.1. Theoretical Implication

The concept of brand personality have received a burgeoning interest among scholars for the past decades because of its great potential to influence the competitive advantage and differentiation of a company. It has been clear from the literature review that a somewhat
large amount of extant research within this field particularly have been initiated as to examine how a firm strategically can reinforce its own brand personality by undertaking those traditional marketing variables that are being under the direct control of a company (Aaker, 1997; Grohmann, 2009; Wentzel, 2009; Wu et. al, 2013; Lin, 2010). The present research assemble however sets out to update and inform contemporary theories on brand personality by introducing it together with a new conceptual framework where the concept of co-branding integrates a S-D logic perspective on value co-creation. In contrast to the traditional definition of co-branding (Park et. al, 1996) the new conceptual framework have presented co-branding as being a cooperation in which it is possible for brand suppliers to co-create any type of value than simply rational and financial values. More specifically, by adding a S-D logic perspective to the traditional definition of co-branding, a more open interpretation have been possible to be made with regards to the co-created value between brand actors. This conceptual framework of co-branding have thereby made it possible to investigate how a brand personality could be seen as being co-created between a particular firm and a number of partnering brands, which have been believed to both update and inform contemporary theories with regards to brand personality formation. Indeed, the results from the empirical case study have provided a lot of intriguing aspects that sheds a different light on theories regarding how a brand personality can be implemented at the market.

By the use of a single case study approach it has first and as anticipated it have been possible to establish that the grocery retailer brand Coop certainly is forming its brand personality by getting use of traditional marketing tools. The family-oriented and sustainable brand personality of Coop has been shown as being diligently invested in by for example launching advertising and marketing campaigns (Aaker, 1997; Grohmann, 2009). However and what appears to be essential for contemporary research on brand personality, is that the case study with Coop also confirms the relevance of the new conceptual framework in that Coop additionally have aspired to build its profile by initiating a co-branding arrangement. In this way, Coop have not only implemented its brand personality by traditional marketing variables but also with the help of other brands. Moreover, Coop has selected its partnerships not only by upholding consideration for how to co-create rational and financial values but also because of its aspiration to implement a certain brand personality for itself. The result from the case study should however not be interpreted as the value in terms of a brand personality is superior in any way to the aspiration of Coops as to co-create rational and financial values with its partners. Rational and financial values, like more loyal customers, profitability and
market exposure have inevitably been a desirable target for Coop as for any business enterprise. The result from the empirical study however withholds the importance of approaching a wider and more encompassing perspective with regards to the formation of a brand personality. The same could also be said about the three partnering brands that have entered into a collaboration with Coop which have expressed considerations for both rational/financial and brand building prospects. Due to the fact that the conceptual framework has proven to be valid by the given exemplification of Coop and its partners, it has also been possible to examine whether the partnering brands really seems to complement and reinforce the personality of Coop.

5.2. Managerial Implication

The question regarding how to implement a strong brand personality is important not only for academicians but also to managers as it preserves the opportunity to increase customer patronage and loyalty over time. It is therefore not surprising that prior research have attempted to address this question (e.g., Mishra and Mohanty, 2014; Aaker, 1997; Grohmann, 2009; Wentzel, 2009; Wu et. al, 2013; Lin, 2010). Broadly defined, this research assemble have suggested that it is becoming apparent that addressing brand personality formation properly requires a more holistic perspective that takes into account of stakeholders as being a potential asset rather than a passive environment. More specifically, the analysis suggests that managers not only need to make use of internal resources to establish a brand personality but that they could benefit from approaching a co-branding constellation with other brand suppliers, to either give proof for a certain personality or to consolidate complementary associations. With that being recognized, managers might want to start to acknowledge that other individual brand suppliers could be seen as active brand co-creators rather than threatening competitors that with all means will have to be defeated. Brands are not best characterized as a property that unilaterally is created by the firm but rather as a co-creating and collaborative activity of firms and all of their stakeholders. This research also propose that managers who is considering co-branding as a way of forming a personality should be aware of the necessity for selecting a brand partner that shows for good prospects of brand building. Finally, the analysis suggests that this aspect is important to consider because the focal brand personality otherwise could be challenged and questioned.
5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Considering the fact that this research assemble have been undertaken in accordance with a qualitative and single case study there exists some limitations that opens up for directions that can serve as a future research agenda. First and foremost, the theoretical framework in study have been applied to the particular context of Coop which in turn is situated within the specific industry of groceries. Additional research is therefore needed to further validate and confirm the theoretical framework but within other business contexts that resides outside the specific business category of Coop as well as to incorporate generalizability. Furthermore, the theoretical framework in this research assemble have been restricted to a firm perspective and made a delimitation within the S-D logic to exclude the customer which therefore opens up for more opportunities to also include the customer within a future investigation. In this respect it could be of interest to investigate how the customer as an additional and included actor experiences that his perception of a brand personality have been reinforced or changed by a co-branding arrangement between a focal firm and a number of partnering brands. This particularly shows for interesting prospects as the customer should be considered as the true "judge" and the one who ultimately will assess whether the brand personality have succeeded to increase the congruity with the customers ideal or actual self. Moreover, network effects have not been possible to distinguish in this particular case study of Coop and among its partners which obviously could be of interest to further investigate. A future research assemble could for example investigate how network effects could play a role for partnering brands to enter into a co-branding arrangement and how their interconnection can play a role for the formation of a focal brand personality. Finally, a qualitative research have been conducted on this case study which makes it interesting for further research to statistically test whether the theoretical framework holds scientific support or not in a particular business context.
Acknowledgements:

This Master Thesis constitute the final piece of my education within the program of Business and Economics at Uppsala University. Along the road for my thesis writing I have learned a lot - not only about branding as my field of interest, but also in many ways about myself. I would like to direct my greatest gratitude to assistant Professor David Sörhammar from Uppsala University for his support and guidance of my study. Furthermore, I would like to thank my fellow classmates during this spring and all respondents at Coop and Xlent Strategy as well as their strategic partners who willingly have participated and thereby enriched my study with invaluable information. Last but not least, I would like to thank my boyfriend and my family who patiently have encouraged me to do my best and provided me with an unconditional support all along the journey.


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**Interviews**

Siemens, Rolf Vikander - former Director of Business and Communication, March 28, Stockholm. Phone Interview.

Coop, Jonas Taube - Advertising and Campaign Strategy Manager, April 14, Stockholm. Personal Interview.

Coop, Johanna Frank - Key Account Manager of Strategic Partners, April 15, Stockholm. Personal Interview.

Coop, Mikael Ahlqvist - Managing Director of MedMera/Management, April 16, Stockholm. Personal interview.

Xlent Strategy, Bi Kreimer - Senior Business Consultant, May 5, Stockholm. Phone Interview.

SAS, Petra Jura - Partnership Manager, May 4, Stockholm. Phone Interview

Fritidsresor, Malin Ström - Partner Sales Manager, May 4, Stockholm. Phone Interview.

Gustavsvik Resort, Marcus Wirén - Marketing and Sales Director, May 4. Phone Interview

San Jose State University, Michael Merz - Associative Professor, May 1. E-mail conversation.
7. Appendix

7.1. Interview guide - Coop

Background information.

➢ Please describe the main tasks that are being associated with your position at Coop?
➢ For how long have you worked within the business?

Brand personality

➢ How would you describe the current profile of Coop at the market place?
➢ If Coop were a person, how would you describe him/her?

Co-creation of value

➢ Please describe for how long the loyalty program of MedMera have lasted?
➢ Which impact would you say that the program of MedMera have had in terms of activity among members?
➢ Which actors are included to cooperate with Coop within MedMera today?
➢ Why, would you say, have collaborations been initiated with these specific actors?
➢ How could the collaborative process respectively be described for each partnership? (generally speaking and for the accessed partnering brands of the study: Who did initiate the partnership, for how long have it been an integral part of the loyalty program etc.).
➢ In which way do you think your partners are perceiving it advantageous to collaborate with Coop?
7.2. Interview Guide - Partnering brands "X"

Background information.

➢ Please describe the main tasks that are being associated with your position at X?
➢ For how long have you worked within the business?
➢ What made you originally keen on joining the company?

Brand personality

➢ How would you describe the current brand profile of X at the market?
➢ If X were a person, how would you describe him/her?

Co-creation of value

➢ Why have a collaboration been initiated with Coop?
➢ How could you describe the collaborative process with Coop within MedMera? (for how long have it been an integral part within the business of brand X, who initiated the partnerships etc.).
➢ In which way do you think Coop are perceiving it beneficial to collaborate with brand X?
7.3. Intervjuguide på svenska - Coop

➤ Jag vet att du har befattningen som X skulle du kunna berätta mer om vilka arbetsuppgifter som specifikt är förknippat med din tjänst?

➤ Hur länge har du arbetat på Coop och vad fick dig en gång att söka dig till företaget?

Brand personality

➤ Hur uppfattar du Coops varumärkesprofil på marknaden?

➤ Om Coop var en verklig person, hur skulle du beskriva det då?

Co-creation of value

➤ Eftersom min uppsats behandlar samarbeten mellan olika varumärkesleverantörer så är jag väldigt nyfiken på Ert lojalitetsprogram MedMera. Hur länge har medlemsprogrammet funnits och vilket genomslag har det haft? (T.ex. genomslag uttryckt i aktivitet, hur många använder sig av programmet?).

➤ Vilka aktörer samarbetar ni med inom MedMera idag?

➤ Varför har samarbeten inlemts med just dessa specifika aktörer ur ett varumärkesperspektiv? (Hur kan de hjälpa Coop att stärka sin profil på marknaden?)

➤ Eftersom jag har fått tillåtelse att intervju tre av era partnerföretag så är jag lite extra intresserad av att veta hur processen har gått till för just dessa samarbeten dvs. vem som initierade samarbetet, Om vi börjar med (1) Fritidsresor (2) SAS (3) Gustavsvik?

➤ På vilket sätt tror du att era partners kan se en fördel med att samarbeta med Coop utifrån ett varumärkesperspektiv?
7.4. Overview over Coop's Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coop MedMera Partnerships</th>
<th>Industry Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fritidsresor AB</td>
<td>Tourism &amp; Travel Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordic Choice Hotels AB</td>
<td>Tourism &amp; Travel Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) AB</td>
<td>Tourism &amp; Travel Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gustavsvik Resorts AB</td>
<td>Tourism Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swebus Express AB</td>
<td>Travel Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarn &amp; Pyret/ RNB Retail AB</td>
<td>Baby Clothes Apparel Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers AB</td>
<td>Male Apparel Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akademibokhandeln AB</td>
<td>Retailing Industry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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