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Abstract

Brand research has concentrated more on B2C than B2B markets and the significance of brands in B2B has not been fully comprehended before the past years. Traditionally, brands have been thought to be irrational and emotional purchasing criteria on which B2B buyers and other decision-makers cannot base their choices. Copy paper is an example of a product used both in organizations and at homes. It is a rather challenging product to be branded since it is a basic commodity product to which consumers do not have strong emotions. Therefore marketing is focused more on B2B users and middle-men than on B2C and it is of interest how copy paper branding affects the buyers.

The purpose of this study is to answer the question if branding can create competitive advantage in a mature B2B market. The focus is on copy paper. The research problem is answered with the help of three sub research questions: 1) What are the importance and characteristics of brands in a B2B market?, 2) What is the competitive situation in the copy paper market, 3) How could the employer company gain competitive advantage in the market by branding?

The theoretical framework is built by using brand management literature and Porter's (1985) famous theory of competitive advantage. The empirical research of the study is conducted by using qualitative methodology and methods of case study and theme interviews. Experts from the employer company and product value chain were interviewed. The results and findings are mirrored to the theories and the market review presented earlier. The conclusions are drawn from the whole research. It emerges that brands do matter in the industry, but they are far from being the most important purchasing criteria. The market situation is intense and characterized mainly by the price competition to which competitors must adapt. The generic strategy to use should be based on differentiation. The importance of the corporate brand in B2B is remarkable. Finally, it is possible that brands create competitive advantage in the mature copy paper market.

Key words	brands, business-to-business marketing, competitive advantage
Further information	