

CORPORATE IDENTITY VS. IMAGE – A CASE STUDY OF RYANAIR IN THE EYE OF THE PANDEMIC

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Resumé

Covid-19 pandemien raser stadig og har sat mange ferieplaner i bero eftersom flere flyruter har været lukket ned. Flere luftfartsselskaber har været nødsaget til at aflyse de fleste flyruter mod mange turistdestinationer. Det har betydet at luftfartsselskaberne har oplevet en massiv nedgang i antal rejsende, hvilket har kostet dem milliarder af kroner og dermed efterladt luftfartsselskaberne i den værste tilstand. Mens det forventes at det bliver en langsom ombygning af de normale tilstande hos luftfartsselskaberne, leder de efter muligheder for at gøre sig bedre og mere attraktive end konkurrenterne. Især når det forventes at det er rejse sultne forbrugere, som venter på at det igen bliver godkendt at tage på ferie i udlandet. En af disse metoder er for luftfartsselskaberne til at have en stærk virksomhedsidentitet, som forbrugerne er enig med. I denne opgave afspejler denne metode sig i interessen for at undersøge hvordan luftfartsselskaberne har fastholdt eller ændret sin virksomhedsidentitet under pandemien, og hvorvidt forbrugerne har samme opfattelse af virksomhedsidentiteten der er præsenteret for dem. For denne opgave har fokuset været på Ryanairs ageren i forhold til at opsætte en virksomhedsidentitet under Covid-19 pandemien. Valget af Ryanair skyldes deres allerede dårlige image i det offentlige rum. Dermed var det interessant at se om Ryanair har udnyttet pandemien til at udbedre deres image ved at etablere en virksomhedsidentitet, som deres forbrugere kan acceptere. Det ledte til denne problemformulering:

”Hvordan har Ryanair præsenteret deres virksomhedsidentitet under pandemien og flugter den hvordan deres forbrugere forstår Ryanairs image?”.

Formålet med specialet er således at undersøge hvilken betydning en stærk virksomhedsidentitet har for Ryanairs image i det offentlige rum, og hvorvidt pandemien har givet Ryanair anledning til at ændre på sin virksomhedsidentitet for at forbedre det nuværende image af luftfartsselskabet. Dette speciale tager derfor udgangspunkt i et casestudie, hvor der vil blive inkluderet materiale fra Ryanairs virksomheds- og forbrugerhjemmeside, artikler og pressemeddelelser, der vil blive brugt til at undersøge hvordan Ryanair har prøvet at ændre sit image i det offentlige rum.

For at kunne besvare specialets problemformulering, tages der udgangspunkt i tre områder for undersøgelsen: 1) En undersøgelse af Ryanairs virksomhedsidentitet, 2) En undersøgelse af skellet mellem forbrugernes opfattelse af Ryanairs image og Ryanairs virksomhedsidentitet, 3) En

undersøgelse af Ryanairs benyttede image reparations strategier i pressemeddelelser og deres effekt på forbrugernes opfattelse af luftfartsselskabets image, samt alternativer.

Specialets videnskabelige ramme er socialkonstruktivismen, hvor der tænkes ud fra ideen om, at alle fænomener skabes i menneskets bevidsthed og udvikles i sociale relationer. Sådanne fænomener kan i specialet findes i skabelsen af en virksomhedsidentitet, der kræver en fælles forbindelse mellem lederskabet og medarbejderne, samt i dannelsen af meninger, der skabes gennem mellemmenneskelige interaktioner og refleksioner i forbindelse med dannelsen af forbrugernes opfattelse af Ryanairs image. Der tages desuden udgangspunkt i interpretivismen, da undersøgelsen vil tage afsæt i forbindelsen mellem forsker og de adspurgte. Dertil vil interpretivismen blive benyttet som arbejdsværktøj gennem hele specialet, da der arbejdes ud fra en proces, hvor forståelsen for emnet bygges på tolkning i enkeldele og helhed i undersøgelsen.

Med afsæt i de ovenstående undersøgelser konkluderes det, at Ryanairs virksomhedsidentitet til dels ikke flugter med den forbrugerne opfatter. Ydermere, har Ryanair fejlet i at forbedre deres image i det at forbrugerne og medarbejderne hos Ryanair ikke danner positive anskuelser om Ryanair og deres virksomhedsidentitet. Derudover har Ryanair misforstået forbrugernes forventninger til hvordan luftfartsselskabet skal agere i det offentlige rum, og dermed dannet sig et værre image end tilfældet var før pandemien.

Character count: 4.071

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1. Introduction

Lockdowns and closed borders have forced travel-hungry consumers to stay at home and enjoy their vacations in their own country. The lockdowns have also grounded most planes and airlines are limited by the restrictions from most countries around Europe. As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to rage all over the world, airlines have been forced to cancel almost every tourist destination and have experienced a decline in active consumers, which has affected the industry negatively. A report from the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) presents how air traffic has been affected by the pandemic and concludes that the airline industry has experienced a 60 percent decline in passengers and a 371 billion dollars loss (ICAO 2021). Therefore, airlines have been left vulnerable to the consequences of the pandemic with passengers forced to keep their travel wishes at bay. The deterioration of the airline industry has led to the airlines looking for solutions but where should the airlines begin with the current state of the industry and the future aspect looking like it will be a slow recovery? (UN News 2021). Having no product authorised to be a part of the current world, it can be difficult to ensure the consumers that they have to invest in future travels with the current situation looking awfully dire. However, a report by Amex Trendex from 2020 (American Express 2021) showed that 78% of the respondents wanted to travel again to ensure their well-being after admitting that their mental states have challenged by the lockdown. Additionally, 87% of the respondents have made travelling plans for the future to ensure that something positive will happen in the future after the pandemic (Fortune 2021). With the negative financial situation in the airline industry and consumers looking forward to travelling again, airlines will be looking for getting an edge over the competition to ensure that the consumers will choose their airline over the others.

Malär et al. (2012) argues that companies need to be relevant to the consumers to succeed in increasing the performance of the company. Without the relevance, the company can become meaningless (Knapp 1999). As stated before, the airlines are all already relevant to many consumers as they miss travelling but the airline must create a greater relevance through such attributes as its product, personality, values, and the position the company wants to occupy in the mind of the targeted audience (Roy and Banerjee 2008). Therefore, I found it interesting to understand how the airlines have made it through the pandemic, and how their corporate identity and image have withstood throughout the pandemic in light of the difficult situation in which the airlines are entangled in. Moreover, I found it interesting to understand how airlines tries to keep their consumers' interest in their company as many travel routes are cancelled and countries are closed for travellers. So, how can

airlines present themselves as ready to overcome the results of the pandemic and be ready to assist the hungry travellers of the world? Many companies have been pushed by the pandemic to take unwanted decisions that might bring negative opinions with it. Therefore, I found it interesting to examine whether the corporate identity of an airline has been accepted or rejected by consumers and aligns itself with the perceived image established during the pandemic. This revolves around the understanding of how the consumers perceive a specific airline's actions during the pandemic and whether or not it will be perceived as acceptable in the eyes of the consumers. In this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the situation at the airline, Ryanair. The reason for my choice derives from the specific situation of airlines general and Ryanair's already stained public reputation (Trustpilot 2021). A public image that has become known to the world's population because of the age of social media and the accessibility of information on the internet. Many of the social media profiles can be seen as the airline's stakeholders, and they are becoming more aware of how to make use of and expressing themselves on social media. This has led to companies being under the scope and vulnerable to negative opinions that can be hurtful during and after crises (Horn et al. 2015, 194).

The objective of this thesis is not to identify right or wrong doings, but rather analyse how Ryanair has chosen to present their identity during the pandemic to change the current image. Moreover, I will analyse Ryanair's corporate identity and how it is perceived in the eyes of their stakeholders. Knowing the image of the company beforehand, I will conduct an analysis of the perceived image of Ryanair during the pandemic, and if Ryanair has chosen any image repair strategies to influence their tainted image positively to change the mind of the consumers. This led me to this problem statement:

1.1 Problem Statement

“How has Ryanair presented their corporate identity during the pandemic and does it align itself with the perceived image of the airline in the eyes of the consumers?”

2. Presentation of Case

In the following chapter, an overview of Ryanair's profile will be presented to understand the experience and the cultural background of the airline. In addition, an outline of former positive and negative situations surrounding Ryanair will be presented to understand the current image before the Covid-19 pandemic took its toll on the airline industry.

2.1 Ryanair's Profile

The Irish airline Ryanair was founded in 1985 starting with small planes travelling between Waterford in the southeast of Ireland to London Gatwick. After a few years flying the route, Ryanair became one of the low-fare missionaries and challenged other airlines such as British Airlines by establishing low-cost routes throughout Ireland and Great Britain. Throughout the 1988-1989, Ryanair established its first international routes, but it was in 1996 when EU completed 'Open Skies' deregulation that led airlines to compete freely throughout Europe. This created a low-fare war with Ryanair in the centre. Throughout the next years, Ryanair establishes European routes to low-fare prices that expanded from year to year. In 1997, Ryanair obtained a stock exchange quotation and became a public company. In 2001 and 2002, the first and second Continental European of Ryanair was established in Brussels and Frankfurt respectively. Through the years, the number of passengers grew by many millions. By 2004, Ryanair acquired the airline Buzz, and in 2018, Ryanair became majority shareholder of the Swiss airline, Lauda. Ryanair has more than 2,100 daily departures from 72 bases scattered throughout the world. The airline connects over 240 destinations with each other with 470 aircrafts at their disposal (Corporate Ryanair 2021, 'History of Ryanair').

2.1.1 Positive Mentions

As mentioned in the introduction, the thesis is based on the concerns that Ryanair has a stained reputation, but it has not always been the case. By 1998 Ryanair was chosen as the 'Best Managed National Airline' by the magazine Aviation Week. As per 2002, Ryanair was one of the highest scores regarding customer satisfaction with the provided services from their airlines. This was followed in 2004, where Ryanair was the most searched airline (Corporate Ryanair 2021), which can be an indication that Ryanair was a popular airline at the time. In terms of number of customers choosing Ryanair, the airline has experienced a steady growth from the 1996 until 2017 (Ibid.).

2.1.2 Negative Mentions

Ryanair have been involved in negative situations with both its consumers and employees. Describing themselves as a low-fare airline, it seems that the costs are enhanced otherwise through bag fees and check-in fees (Independent 2019). This has on multiple occasions been addressed by consumers and become a negative discourse that surrounds Ryanair from the consumers' perspective. The negative perception comes to fruition on Which?¹ where Ryanair has been voted the worst airline in the UK from 2013 to 2019 according to the asked consumers (Which? 2020), underlining the issues between Ryanair and its consumers. The relationship between Ryanair and its consumers became even more frosty as Ryanair in 2017 had to cancel over 2,100 flights during the period September 2017 to Marts 2018, because of a scheduling issues with the pilots' vacations that resulted in anger and distress during holiday season (NewYorkTimes 2018).

Regarding its employees, Ryanair has had its fair share of issues. Firstly, Ryanair has been involved in legal issues with the employees at its headquarters in foreign countries. The legal reasons for the issues came to floriation because of the neglection of unions. The first case was a union dispute with the Danish headquarter in Copenhagen. The issue was that the Danish employees argued that they were legally bound by the employees' rights laws of Denmark, which did not align with how Ryanair's neglection of unions as part of their company profile. The result was closing the headquarter in Copenhagen and instead move it to Lithuania (Eurofond 2015). The second case revolved around the Belgium employees arguing that they were legally bound by the employees' rights law in Belgium even on the flights, and not the ones in Ireland, despite it being the argumentation from Ryanair (Reuters 2017). Ryanair lost both disputes in court. Moreover, Ryanair was in a legal dispute again in 2018, when a strike from its pilots and cabin crews left passengers with cancelled flights and holidays cut short. The Civil Aviation Authority took legal actions towards Ryanair when the airline failed to compensate thousands of consumers (BBC 2018). The refusal of compensating for the cancelled flights created a turmoil towards Ryanair's handling of their consumers that were already concerning.

Another issue addressed on multiple occasions is Ryanair's choice to hire its pilots and cabin crew through third party agencies. This became an issue when Ryanair only wanted to pay the crew for its

¹ The Consumers' Association is a registered charity and is responsible for all Which? campaigns and the development of Which? policy. The majority of the research included in the various Which? publications is also undertaken by the Consumers' Association.

time on the flights but only the time in the air. Even if delays meant that the pilots and cabin crew were stuck in the given airport (DailyMail 2017). Furthermore, stewards are charged above 2,000 pounds just for their training and have to pay for uniforms. In addition, they will have to pay a fee if they quit. The staff can even experience that superiors might threaten to relocate them if they are not meeting expectations in terms of sales during flights. Moreover, the staff of Ryanair are experiencing financial setbacks at the airline. Firstly, some of the staff can experience to be forced to take up to three months of unpaid leave in the offseason. Secondly, the staff is forced to be available for the standby days with a salary of 3.75 pounds per hour, which is half the minimum wage (Ibid. 2017). All of the above have been a part of reasons for the strikes mentioned before.

As seen from the negative mentions, Ryanair's tainted image has not appeared out of nowhere. Instead, the airline has taken decisions which has obstructed Ryanair's establishment of its corporate identity, and lead to the corporate image to be encased in a negative sphere by the public.

2. Clarification of Corporate Identity and Image

In the following chapter, an overview of the literature concerning corporate identity and image will be reviewed and clarified. The concepts of corporate identity and image are presented and compared, as well as the understanding of this thesis' regarding these concepts and its relation to the theoretical approach will be clarified. Following this, I will explain the Brand Identity Prism created by Jean-Noel Kapferer, and how the prism will be used to as a tool to analyse Ryanair's corporate identity. Following this, the concepts of corporate image will be explained and elaborated as a tool of analysis to understand the perceived image of Ryanair in accordance with the consumers. Lastly, the Image Reparation Theory by William A. Benoit will be presented as a means to understand how Ryanair have made use of image repair strategies to change the consumers' perceived image of the airline.

2.1 Literature Review

Corporate identity has been examined and used in a variety of research, where it has been a subject of attention through the past few decades (Aaker 1991; Melewar 2003, Hatch and Schultz 2004; Powell 2011; Cornelissen 2017; Devereux 2020). Despite this, the concept of corporate identity has been used more fluently and differently by researchers, which means that the concept itself can be perceived to be a multidisciplinary concept (Cornelissen et. al. 2012, 1093-1094). The intangible concept is in some cases replaced or connected to the concept of organizational identity, which will therefore be addressed in the following segment in this thesis. Furthermore, a presentation of the theoretical foundation of corporate identity that has inspired this thesis and the choice of theory will be conducted.

Corporate Identity can be argued to be an entirety of meanings revolving in a company that is depicted through the company's product, organization, symbols, and persons. Furthermore, the corporate identity is part of the company that confirms the promises to the consumers set by the company itself and define the associations in which the company wishes the consumers to obtain in regard to the company (Aaker 1991). Additionally, the corporate identity is what makes a company unique and ensure that there is a distinctiveness between the company itself and its competitors. A strong corporate identity provides a company with clear advantages over those companies that do not have a strong identity as it will be easier for the consumers to understand the quality and values of the

company. Additionally, it establishes reasons for the consumers to interact with the company because the mentioned attributes are engaging for the consumers (Kapferer 2004). Hatch and Schultz (2004) see corporate identity as a relational construct that is formed in interactions between individuals that can span from managers to consumers.

While corporate identity is viewed as created by the companies, corporate image is established by the consumers as they ‘un-wrap’ the ‘wrapped’ up identity of the company to form the perceived image of the company (Nandan 2005). In other words, the consumers decode the attributes presented by the company through the corporate identity. The corporate image can create certain connections that fuels either positive or negative feelings and attitudes towards the company (Porter and Claycomb 1997). Kotler et al. (2003) defines this as a set of belief about a specific company from the consumers point of view, which will become the true meaning of the corporate identity and replace the one put forth by company itself. According to Aaker (1991), corporate image can be divided into five key elements that the company has to have in mind. Firstly, the corporate image is retrievable and can be processed by the consumers at the given time needed. Secondly, the corporate image must create a distinctiveness about the product that positions the company better with the consumers. Thirdly, the attractiveness of the corporate image offers a strong reason to interact and buy. The fourth element connects to Porter and Claycomb (1997) idea of the corporate image, which is the corporate image creates positive attitudes and feelings about the company itself. Lastly, the corporate image aids the company’s extendibility as it determines how far a reach the company can have in regard to consumers. This means that a great corporate image can end up appealing to new consumers to interact with the company despite not being the actual targeted audience (Aaker 1991).

2.1.1 Corporate Identity vs. Organizational Identity

As stated in the above, the concepts of corporate and organizational identity have been used intangibly in some literature. In some instances, the definitions of them both are in close comparison with one another other, while they differ in others. Therefore, it is important to make a distinction, so that a clear understanding of the concept of corporate identity for this thesis is presented.

Firstly, Devereux et al. (2020) argues that organizational identity is to be perceived as a part of the corporate identity. Thereby, the organizational identity revolves around the point of view on the

organization from the internal view of the organization itself, which means that the organizational identity is formed by shared interpretations of the organization's choices and doings (Devereux et al. 2020, 415). Hence, organizational identity will be considered to be an internal perspective and part of the organization that affects the representation of the corporate identity.

Corporate identity's foundation is concerned with a company's own understanding of what type of organization it is (Cornelissen 2007, 7; Devereux et al. 2017). Furthermore, Devereux et al. argues that corporate identity is seen as 'holistic' and 'multidisciplinary'. This means that the corporate identity concept revolves around every part of the organization, and also concerns the actions expressed and communicated about the organization (Devereux et al. 2017, 112). The construct of corporate identity is anchored by a variety of elements that is used in different variations depending on the organization. The elements include nationality, strategy, founding, technology, knowledge base, operating philosophy, organization design or geographical placement of operating (Ibid.; Cornelissen, 2007, 7). Additionally, the corporate identity acts as a presentation of the organization's public image and is communicated towards stakeholders, such as consumers, to influence their perceived image of the given organization (Cornelissen, 2017, 90). Hence, the corporate identity is understood to be a company's external communication (Ibid., 84). Referring to corporate identity throughout this thesis will therefore be based on this view.

2.2 Corporate Identity

Based on the above, the corporate identity will be examined with the understanding that it is multidisciplinary. Furthermore, Melewar et al. (2005) describes some considerations that connects to corporate identity. Here, Melewar et al. argue that corporate identity refers 'what the organization is', what it stands for', 'what its does', 'how it does it' and 'where it is going' (Ibid., 61). Considering this, I have chosen to examine the corporate identity of Ryanair by applying Jean-Noel Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer 2004) as the analytical structure of the analysis. In this thesis, the concept of brand identity will be referred to as the same as corporate identity because of the similarities between the two. A brand can be defined as a collection of elements that identify who a company is. These elements are things such as symbols, logo, name, wordings and sentences, and helps companies to distinguish themselves from competitors (Investopia, 2020). As the definition of a brand has a close resemblance with the definition of corporate identity, the brand identity prism can

be used as a tool to examine the corporate identity of Ryanair with the theoretical concept of corporate identity in mind.

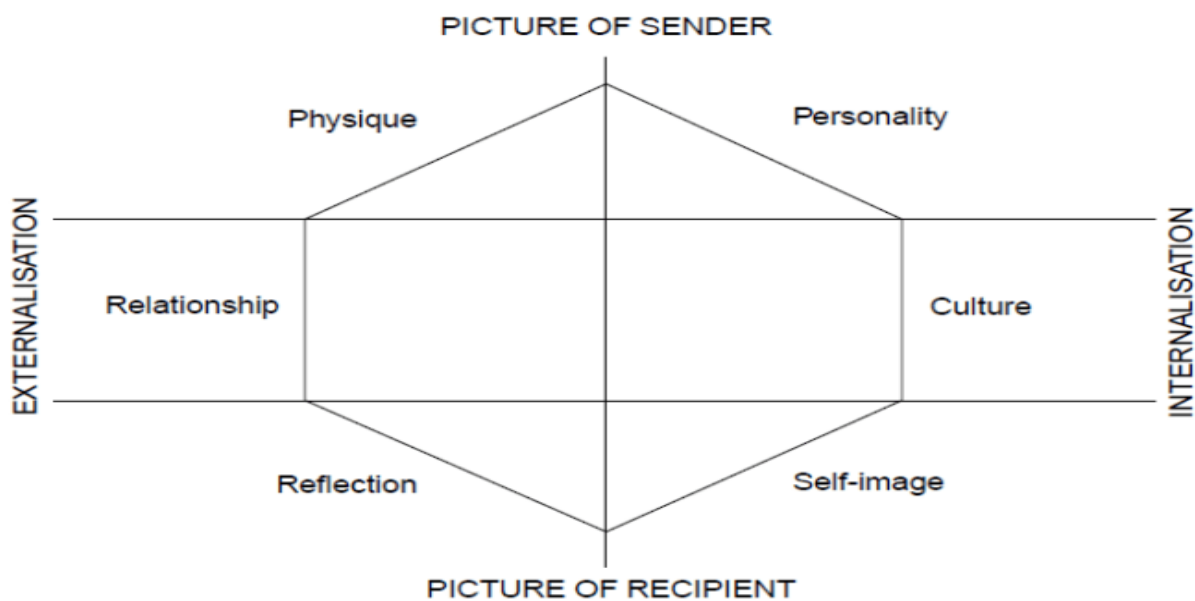
2.2.1 Brand Identity Prism

Companies are not always aware of their own identity. Kapferer (2004) argues that many companies are not always certain of who they are, stand for, and what establishes a uniqueness to their corporation. Therefore, Kapferer dares companies to answer questions that confronts the normalcy in the company to reflect what the company's identity stands for and whether it is in accordance with the actions taking by the company at hand. This means that the company has an idea of what it wants to become but that does not necessarily connect to the daily actions occurring within the company. Therefore, the company need to reflect over the connection between the daily workdays and what the company wants to become. Hence, the company must establish a connection between advertising campaign and the company itself, as well as communicative changes that lets the corporation remain true to itself (Kapferer, 2004, 95). Moreover, the company has to acknowledge that the corporate identity distinguishes from the corporate image (Ibid., 98). Corporate identity differs itself from corporate image in the sense that the identity is the company's own definition of itself, while the image is created by the views from a certain group of receivers that decodes cues shared to the public by the company (Ibid., 98-99).

Kapferer argues that a company's corporate identity can be affected by external factors, which Kapferer refers to as 'noises'. One of these noises emerge when uncertainty occurs, and a company does not have a clear understanding of its own brand. This can lead to the company imitating its competitors' identity and their successful communicative choices with the public. A second noise emerges when the company is obsessed with becoming too appealing to the public. In other words, the company tries to establish a perceived and favourable image by accommodating each of the receivers' expectations. By adapting the external factors, Kapferer argues that companies will end up creating an opportunistic image that can have a negative impact on the receivers' perception of the company. Everything will be perceived as untrustworthy and becomes a 'meaningless cosmetic camouflage' (Ibid., 99). Noises interfere with the identity of the companies. Therefore, companies have to avoid the noises from interfering with their identity and perceived image through establishing a defined identity and do not deflect from its doings. According to Kapferer, a defined identity is

crucial to companies because of three reasons; a company needs to be resistant, communicate with its audience through coherent messages, signs, and the product itself, and create a realistic ideology. This will help companies to ignore the noises and keep their own identity (Ibid., 106).

In 1992, Kapferer introduced a tool he called Brand Identity Prism. The tool is used as a means to guide brands through the considerations and determinations in regard to their identities and stick to it under any circumstance. The model is shaped as a hexagonal prism with six different aspects of the brand's identity. Beneath the model, a clarification of each aspect will be presented.



Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer 2004, 107)

Physique: One of the clearest visible traits of a company with its connection to the products from the company. The products act as representatives of the qualities from the company, and products are important to the consumers' interactions with the company as they react to the displayed products (Ibid., 107).

Personality: The personality aspect refers to the communication from the company towards its stakeholders regarding the company itself. This is often expressed by the chosen tone of voice, design, public opinions, and values presented in marketing material and visual traits (Ibid, 108)

Self-Image: In this aspect, the consumers' own ideal self is important to acknowledge because the consumers have to picture themselves using the given company's products, when picturing their ideal self. The company can interfere with the consumers' narration of their ideal self by contributing to the values of what the consumers aspire to be, but only if the company realises how their consumers' self-image is constructed and how their products can be important for the consumers' creation of the ideal self (Ibid., 110-111).

Reflection: In this aspect, the company reflects and idealises a specific consumer-type that fits with the stereotypical perception of a likely consumer. The consumer-type is created from a persona and therefore, it can differ from the actual target group (Ibid., 110).

Relationship: This aspect of course revolves around the relationship between the company and its consumers. The relationship is represented in the services which are provided by the company. The quality of services can prolong the relationship between the company and consumer before any actions have been taken by the consumer. Furthermore, it is the interhuman relationships which the products may be associated with (Ibid., 109-110).

Culture: In the last aspect, the company's basic principles are presented. These represent the value system of the company and include the country of origin. However, the company may choose to embrace or ignore the company's origins if it is not suitable (Ibid., 108-109). An example of this can be the earlier examples of Ryanair when trying to incorporate their business into foreign countries, which have resulted in legal actions because the culture in the given country does not accept the handling of employees.

When the six facets of Kapferer's prism are clarified and applied in connection with one another, it establishes a durable and clear corporate identity. Kapferer presents the model as defining the boundaries which the company is free to alter or develop in accordance with its development, the society and culture surrounding the company itself. Each facet influences one another to create the

corporate identity. Furthermore, Kapferer argues that companies can only exist if they communicate, which the Brand Identity Prism are used to facilitate. By using the model, it guides the company to understand the essence of the sender, defined as the company itself, key products, culture and values and the receivers. Thereby, the Brand Identity Prism aid a company to define the sender and receiver of its communication. This will enable the company to use its corporate identity as communication channel to create its desired image in its consumers' perception (Ibid., 111).

2.2.3 Considerations

Applying the Brand Identity Prism, I have to acknowledge that the prism is a mere tool to analyse the corporate identity and is not as theoretical based as other similar concepts. However, the model includes similar considerations as other corporate identity researchers. One of those is Balmer's Affinity Audit (van Riel and Balmer 1997, 343). As Balmer has examined corporate identity through many years (1997, 2003, 2007, 2012, 2013, 2017) it can be argued that his research is acknowledgeable in terms of the concept of corporate identity. Balmer's Affinity Audit puts forth four stages that corporate identity is based upon (van Riel and Balmer 1997, 344).

1. Establish the corporate mission and strategi.
2. Reveal the dominant systems of values and beliefs in the organization/company.
3. Evaluate such systems of values and beliefs against the corporate mission and strategy.
4. Nurture those values and beliefs which support the corporate mission and strategy.

Besides Balmer's Affinity Audit, Melawar and Jenkins (2002) presented what they called the Corporate Identity Construct which is a means to examine companies' corporate identities. According to Melewar and Jenkins, the Corporate Identity Construct is based on four subconstructs that companies have to consider, when creating their corporate identity (Ibid., 86).

1. Communication and Visual Identity
2. Behaviour
3. Corporate Culture
4. Market Conditions

These substructures include several of different elements such as employee behaviour, nationality of the company etc., which is important to recognize if a corporate identity is to become strong (Ibid.).

Considering the two other theoretical perspectives, the reason for choosing the Brand Identity Prism has relied heavily on the substructures and stages presented in the above because the prism involves all of the different elements from both of the theoretical perspectives. Despite the model only being a mere tool for analysing the corporate identity of Ryanair, it acknowledges previous work from other corporate identity researchers. Therefore, the Brand Identity Prism was found to be useful for this thesis.

As this thesis do not only wants to understand how Ryanair tries to establish their corporate identity, but also wants to examine how the corporate identity is perceived by the public, which is also referred to as the corporate image (Cornelissen 2020), it is important to understand how corporate identity and image is connected. This will be elaborated in the following section.

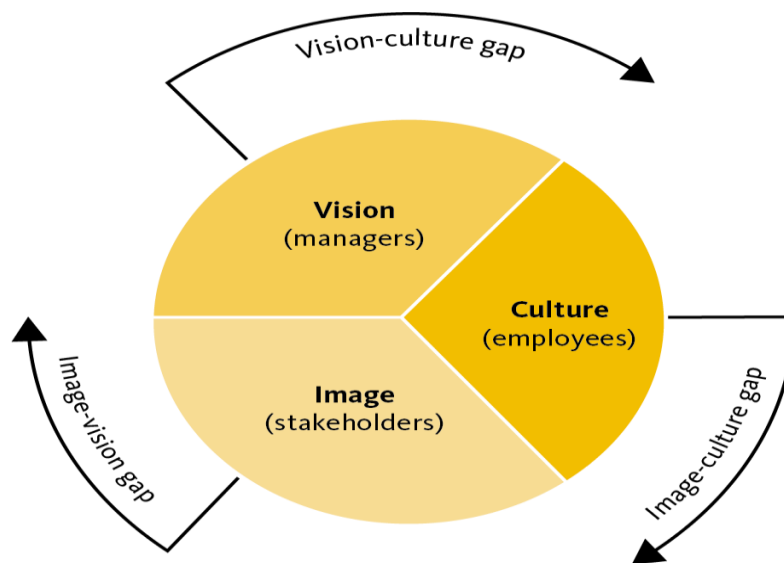
2.3 Corporate Image

When considering the corporate identity, it is important to recognize the corporate image as well. Presenting a corporate identity to stakeholders can in some instances create misalignments between what is presented by the company and what is perceived by the consumers, which can also be defined as corporate image. Therefore, it is important to understand the differences between these concepts, and how they affect a company and its stakeholders (Cornelissen 2020, 87). Corporate image is partly constructed internally. However, it contradicts corporate identity through operating with external stakeholders to form and maintain the image and establish an impression of the corporate identity at a specific point in time (Feldman et al. 2013, 55).

Corporate image management offers companies an extra dimension to its corporate communication. According to Joep Cornelissen (2017), the corporate image is a symbolic creation which is manufactured and projected by the company's stakeholders. Moreover, a corporate image offers an opportunity for companies to develop advantages for themselves. The company establishes a form of distinctiveness about them that will guide stakeholders to locate and recognize the company. Furthermore, a correct use of corporate image management can lead to a company experiencing an impact in the sense that stakeholders might be more likely to favour the company. Moreover, a successful establishment of a corporate image is likely to create consistency throughout the company

with both managers, employees and stakeholders aligning themselves with perceived image of the company (Cornelissen 2020, 87-88). In this thesis, corporate image is therefore understood to be constructed on the outside in the public sphere i.e., stakeholders.

Corporate identity and image are of course very connected to each other. In 2003, Hatch and Schulz (2003) created a model to act as a tool for a company to understand and examine how to align its vision, culture, and image, also referred to the VCI-model. The model also refers to ‘gaps’ between these elements as presented beneath (Ibid., 96-97).



VCI Model (Hatch & Schultz, 2008, 11)

Hatch and Schultz argue that a company must ensure an alignment between the elements as misalignments between the elements will have a negative impact on the company’s identity and image. A misalignment between vision and culture occurs when the gap between management and employees becomes too massive. In other words, the management implement initiatives which the employees cannot comply with, because it is too ambitious. A misalignment between the culture and the image is when confusion occurs in the stakeholders’ minds and cannot grasp what the company actually stand for. Lastly, a misalignment between the image and the vision occurs when companies do not include and accept its stakeholders’ opinions. Thereby, the stakeholders’ perception and expectations of the company does not align with the presented actions of the company (Ibid., 97-98). In this thesis, only the Culture-Image Gap and Image-Vision Gap will be addressed because the focus of this thesis is to examen the image of Ryanair.

2.3.2 Considerations

When discussing corporate image, it can be important to acknowledge the closeness between image and reputation because the two concepts have been used interchangeably from the perspective of various of researchers (Barnett, Jermier & Lafferty, 2006; Feldman, 2013) and therefore, they can still be difficult to differentiate from each other (Feldman, 2013, 54). However, distinctions exist between the each of the concepts as illustrated by Walker (Walker, 2010).

	Organizational Image	Corporate Reputation
Stakeholders: Internal or external	External	Internal and external
Perceptions: Actual or desired	Desired	Actual
Emanating from inside or outside the firm	Inside	Inside and outside
Positive or negative perception of the firm possible	Positive	Positive or negative
Relevant question	"What / who do we want others to think we are?"	"What are we seen to be?"

Model 3 - Walker 2010

The model depicts that image is only the positive perception of the company and indicate what is desired by the company. Furthermore, image connects to what a company want its stakeholders to think of the company. The image definition differs from reputation in the sense that the reputation actually depicts the real perception of the company from its stakeholders' view. Moreover, corporate reputation concern what are the company seen to be rather than what the company want to be perceived as. Thereby, the corporate reputation is constructed through both internal and external stakeholders and not only through external sources. Despite the differences, this thesis will make use of concept of image as a collaboration between the concept of image and reputation. The reason can be found in Hatch and Schultz (2008) understanding of image which includes how a company is perceived from both internal and external stakeholders. Furthermore, the thesis will accept the idea that both a positive and negative views of a company exist through the concept of image. Considering this, the VCI-Model and Image Reparation Theory by Benoit (1995) will be applied as a analytical structure to examine the corporate image and the creation a corporate image by Ryanair. To elaborate, the use of specific image reparation strategies will be examined to understand how Ryanair tries to answer the questions 'what do we want others to think we are' and 'what are we seen to be'.

2.4 Image Reparation Theory

The Image Repair Theory, also known as Image Restoration Theory, was developed by William L. Benoit in 1995 (Benoit 1995, 95). Since the theory was created, Benoit has used the strategies in practice by applying it to different company cases. The strategies are used as a way to examine how a company reacts and responds to crisis (Benoit 2015, 13-14). However, in this thesis, Benoit's model will be used to examine which strategies Ryanair have applied into their responses to specific situations during the pandemic to repair their already tainted image.

2.4.1 Benoit's Concepts

According to Benoit (2015), the theory is based on two assumptions taking root in the rhetorical and sociological world. First assumption is that 'communication is a goal-directed activity', which revolves around the idea from the old Greece and Aristotle's rhetorical considerations which concerns the creation of persuasive messages (Benoit 2015, 14). Here, the assumption can be difficult to accommodate in some instances because communicators may have multiple goals which can interfere with one another. Furthermore, it can be difficult to address and define the sender's goals, motives and purposes, which may be an obstacle for communicators. Additionally, the personal engagement of each consumer is an unclear factor because the time spent on communicative materials by the consumers cannot be defined or ensured by the communicators. Therefore, the communicators try to devote as much cognitive effort as possible into the production of the goal-directed discourse to establish material that is more likely to influence consumers. However, the communicator can try to communicate a certain goal in which he/she/it hopes that the consumers will engage themselves with (Ibid., 15-16).

The second assumption is that a key goal of communication is to maintain a favourable image (Ibid., 16). Therefore, Benoit argues that companies are willing to apply both preventive and restorative approaches to deal with possible image problems (Millar and Heath 2004, 263). Different reasons can lay the foundation for image problems occurring, but Benoit define two key components that characterize whether image problems occur or not. Firstly, the act that has occurred is considered offensive by the audience or stakeholders. Secondly, the accused is the one being held responsible for the offensive act occurring. If both components exist, the image and reputation of the given company is at stake (Ibid., 264). Furthermore, the size of the undesirable actions is important to recognize as it enhances the magnitude of the case and can result in more negative publicity as more

people are affected by the undesirable actions. Thereby, have a greater impact on the image and reputation (Ibid., 265).

When repairing a damaged image, different strategies can be adapted. According to Benoit, there are five general strategies; Denial, Evade Responsibility, Reduce Offensiveness, Corrective Actions and Mortification. Three of the strategies offers the opportunity for the use and considerations of different tactics to be implemented, when using the given strategy (Benoit 2015, 22).

Denial

The first strategy, denial, concerns the accused denying that he/she/it was involved or had anything to do with, what Benoit defines, as an undesirable action. The strategy offers the accused two possible tactics. First one being simply denying the fact that the accused have taken part in the undesirable action, which in some cases are supported by explaining other damaging facts or lack of supporting evidence. The second one concerns the question, “If it wasn’t you, then who?”. In other words, the accused tries to shift the blame and instead point the suspicious at someone else. The tactic opens up for the targeted audience to change their initial thought surrounding the accused. Therefore, this tactic can be more effective than simple denying the undesirable action because the targeted audience will experience more doubt, when a new suspect is presented (Ibid., 22-23).

Evade Responsibility

The second strategy, evade responsibility, concerns the opportunity for the accused to evade or reduce their apparent responsibility in the undesirable action if they cannot deny their involvement directly. The strategy offers four different tactics for the accused to use, when using the ‘Evade Responsibility’ strategy.

The first tactic is provocation which revolves around sharing the blame and explain the accused’s actions were only made on the basis of another part’s wrongful act. The second tactic is defeasibility. The tactic is based on lack of information about or control over specific considerations in the situation. The accused tries to distance himself/herself/themselves from the responsibility of the undesirable action through the lack of information known by the accused. Furthermore, the accused tries to argue

that he/she/it had little control over the undesirable actions. Thereby, the accused hope to argue that he/she/it cannot be held fully accountable for the actions. The third tactic is defined as accidents. The tactic concerns the accused accepting that the undesirable actions has occurred but tries to find information to reduce the direct involvement of the accused part in the undesirable actions. Mainly due to an accident or something similar. The last tactic is good intentions which concerns the reasoning for the undesirable actions to be taken by the accused. The accused accepts the actions but argues that all choices was made based on good intentions rather than evil which will deem the accused to not be fully responsible for the undesirable actions occurring (Ibid., 23-24).

Reduce Offensiveness

The third strategy, reduce offensiveness, concerns the accused to attempt reducing the degree of ill feelings experienced by the audience because of the undesirable actions. This strategy offers the accused to make use of six different tactics to adjust the ill feelings from the audience (Ibid., 24).

The first tactic is called bolstering. This tactic is used in the sense that the accused tries to offer a positive view of himself/herself/itself by presenting positive actions performed in the past. However, the negative perception might persist despite the use of the tactic, but Benoit argues that it increases the positive feelings and reduce the negative feeling towards the undesirable act. Thereby, improving the targeted audience's perception of the accused. The second tactic is minimization which refers to the accused trying to justify the undesirable actions as being not as bad as firstly perceived. Benoit argues that the tactic may ease the negative public view of the act and aid the accused to repair their image. The third tactic is differentiation which includes other acts performed by other companies or persons with similarities to the accused's case but with even more dire consequences. Thereby, the accused lessen the severity of the case and decrease the negative feelings toward the accused and the case. The fourth tactic is transcendence. The tactic is used to try and establish a positive context surrounding the accused and the case to improve the circumstances of the case as well as lessen the severity of the case. The fifth tactic is attack accuser which revolves around attacking the credibility of the accuser. Here, the accused tries to divert attention away from the accusations and instead create doubt about the integrity of the accuser. This may reduce the damage to the accused image. The last tactic is compensation which revolves around the accused trying to recompensate the victims of the undesirable actions to help decrease the negative view of the actions. However, Benoit clarify his

concerns with the tactics as it can be perceived as a form of bribe, so the accused have to balance the use of the tactic to repair the image and not damage it more (Ibid., 24-25).

Corrective Actions

The fourth strategy, corrective action, revolves around the accused motivation to solve the issue that have occurred in the undesirable actions. The strategy tries to make amends with the audience by investigating the source of the undesirable actions and implement changes to ensure that the undesirable actions do not occur again. Benoit argues that using the strategy can restore the situation to the state before the occurrence of the undesirable actions in a way (Ibid., 26).

Mortification

The last strategy, mortification, concerns the accused acceptance of the occurrence of the undesirable actions. The accused thereby accepts and admits being at fault for the undesirable actions and may ask to be forgiven for he/she/it's involvement. However, it is important to acknowledge that the audience's perception of the apology can be uncertain, but if they find it to be sincere, it may regain some of the positive views of the image. But the accused also has to acknowledge the risk of accepting the blame for the undesirable act as it will always connect the accused to the case. Therefore, Benoit argues that the accused has to consider sketching a plan for correcting the problems linked with the undesirable actions to not experiencing a larger backlash (Ibid., 26).

According to Benoit, the strategies are used to shape the targeted audience's existing beliefs or create new beliefs of the company. Furthermore, Benoit argues that it will be more effectively to make use of multiple strategies to ensure the wished effect on the audience and repair the image of the accused or the company. But if one strategy is perceived to be particularly effective towards the audience, it will be better to make use of the one (Ibid., 29).

2.4.2 Considerations

Using the Image Repair Theory, I have to understand that the theory is mostly used in connection with crisis communication and not directly connected to corporate identity. However, as explained in

the above, corporate image is created by the consumers' feelings and attitudes towards the company. Those are created by materials from the company that is accessible to the consumers. Thereby, it can be argued that the Image Repair Theory can be used to analyse whether presented materials from the company have an effect on the consumers' perceived image of Ryanair. Furthermore, adapting Benoit's image repair strategies in relation to a company, such as Ryanair, it is important to acknowledge that the audience can include other than the intended audience. The different audiences may choose to be involved with the company because of different interests, views and concerns (Ibid.). In this thesis, the image of Ryanair is constructed by many different audiences but is important to look at stakeholders such as employees and former and current consumers. However, it is also important to acknowledge that avoids addressing and dealing with human behaviour to some degree. In other words, the strategies are not defining because it cannot ensure the audience to act in a specific way. Furthermore, it could be a concern that the theory first was developed with individuals in mind, not companies, but Benoit argues that both individual and corporate image repair efforts are based on the same options (Ibid., 44-45). This means that the companies often will make use of strategies that reflects the companies' perception of what the consumers will accept. Despite the criticism, it can be argued that the Image Repair Theory is still functional and valid due to the fact that Benoit is aware of the problematics connected to the complexity of human behaviour and the wide acceptance of his theory in the academic world.

In the following section, the theoretical framework and analytical choices of this thesis will be explained and the connection between the theoretical and methodological choices will be elaborated.

3. Theoretical Framework

To examine the corporate identity of Ryanair, this thesis will make use of the concepts from the Brand Identity Prism as a foundation to conduct an analysis using the Multi Modal Analysis method. In this thesis, the multi modal analysis will be based on the approach by David Machin (2007). The analysis method will be used to understand Ryanair's corporate identity and how it is presented to the consumers as well as how it is perceived.

3.1 Multi Modal Analysis Method

Every company addresses its consumers through the use of visuals and written material to communicate the ideas and products of the given company. Therefore, it is important to understand how the compositions of a company's communication is constructed and what it means to the perception of the company such as its identity and image which this thesis is concerned with.

The multimodal analysis is an analytical tool to be used to examine both the visual and written materials from companies. Multimodal analysis is a social semiotics approach which means that it allows to examine the used components, both written and visual, and how they are jointly used. Additionally, it concerns with examining the relationship between the components on the visual or written material and how it creates meaning (Machin 2007, viii).

According to Machin, there is two different semiotics systems: the simple one and the complex one. The simple one focus on the use of signs to create meanings, while the complex one addresses the need for something to release the potential from the used signs to create meaning. The middle component is referred to as 'grammar'. Machin argues that the used signs by itself does not bring meaning but is instead connected to a system that is defined by individuals' perceptions of it. Thereby, the meaning is established by the meaning we give it (Ibid., 3). Language is a complex semiotic system. Machin acknowledges the importance of signs but argues that wordings construct the connection between signs and meanings. In other words, the wordings are used to reveal the system of the sender's choices to steer the receiver towards the wished meanings (Ibid., 3-4). Semiotics researchers (McCloud 2000; Kress and Leeuwen 2001; Machin 2007) argue that the way communication is conducted is changing. Visual and written materials have long been apart from each other but communications towards receivers are changing by making them intangible (Machin 2007, 16-17). Kress, Leeuwen and Machin all argue that communications are based on different

semiotic systems that were divided but have been ‘merged and combined’ into semiotic systems that include both visuals and language. These semiotic systems are used differently by companies but can fulfil three basic metafunctions that can help companies to address their communications towards their receivers (Kress and Leeuwen 2001 PP; Machin 2007, 17).

Firstly, a semiotic system must have an ability to represent ideas understandable to the receiver. In other words, the semiotic system has a metafunction that symbolically addresses something well-known in the receivers’ mind, such as a specific colour representing a country or an object. This type of metafunction is defined by Machin as the ideational metafunction (Ibid.). Secondly, the semiotic system can fulfil the requirements of what Machin defines as an interpersonal metafunction. These type of functions acts as a bridge between the sender and the receiver. Thereby, the sender tries to make use of wordings and symbols to create a relationship with the receiver (Ibid.). Lastly, the semiotic system can fulfil requirements of what Machin defines as a textual metafunction. This type of metafunctions makes the semiotic systems form a more coherent unit between the wordings and symbols. In other words, the sender makes use of cohesive resources like references, conjunctions, and substitutions to create a flow in the structure of the message (Ibid., 18).

3.1.1 Analytical Considerations

Working with images and wordings in messages, Machin (Ibid.) argues that there are different strategies to consider in one’s analysis. According to Machin, images present physical objects, events or persons and not directly ideas. However, they *denote* which means that they document specific persons and places, and the actions occurring around it. When considering the denotation, the sender has to consider how to show who did what in the situation, and where and when did it happen. Thereby, creating a reality through the use of the image(s) and the choices connected to its pick (Ibid., 23). Still, the sender has to establish some expectations of how the receiver will perceive the image. The receiver must have some idea of what the image depicts to understand its value and meaning (Ibid., 24). Images do not only have the purpose of denoting but also *connotate*. This means that images depict objects, persons, and events to lead the receiver towards specific and even abstract ideas. Thereby, the sender tries to create meaning and value to the messages imbedded in the images. Moreover, the sender has to consider which signifiers should be presented in the image(s) to activate the receivers’ understanding of imbedded meanings and values of the image(s) (Ibid., 25). In this

thesis, the denotation and connotation of used images by Ryanair will be examined to understand Ryanair's use of images to create their identity and strengthen their image.

In the following chapter, the methodological choices of this thesis will be accounted for and explained how these choices will help to answer the problem statement of the thesis.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I will account for the methodological choices of this thesis. The section will be structured in five segments. First part will revolve around the philosophy of science of this thesis. Secondly, the structure of this thesis will be explained through the research design. Afterwards, the data sampling used for this thesis will be presented, while the last part will present the data collection, which will be used for the analysis.

4.1 Philosophy of Science

The theory of science of this thesis is chosen on the basis of how the reality is perceived. Thereby, the ontological foundation of this thesis is guided by the notions from social constructivism. The presumptions from a social constructivist perspective revolves around the idea that the current reality, our society, are not defined and locked by the human nature. Instead, the assumed reality is constructed by the basis of social interactions, where knowledge and reality are perceived and defined in the social context in which they exist (Jacobsen, n.d.).

Furthermore, social constructivism can be summarized through three assumptions surrounding reality, knowledge, and learning. Firstly, humans construct their belief of the assumed reality through actions where individuals within the society, in correlation with each other, mould the properties of the world (Kukla, 2004). Secondly, it revolves around how knowledge is socially and culturally fabricated by humans (Collin and K ppe, 2014, 421). This leads to the last assumption in which learning is understood to be a social process. Thereby, the learning process is not an isolated process from individual to individual but instead individuals in the society learn in correlation with one another to shape a shared view on the society (Ibid, 444-445). By that, the aspects of social constructivism revolve around the idea that individuals establish their own conceptions and interpretations of the society. This is not only created through these social interactions with the society but also through the past experiences of the individual that resides in the individuals' perception of the world (Kukla, 2004).

In this thesis, the choice of social constructivism as the ontological foundation was based on how Hatch and Schultz's understand corporate identity and image. They view it as being a relational construct that is formed in interactions between individuals that can span from managers to consumers (Hatch and Schultz 2004). Thereby, the concepts of identity and image can be argued to be

constructed through individuals sharing perceptions and interpret what is shared in the society. This means that what is considered to be normal is defined by the larger population in the world and when they perceive a phenomena and behaviour as being common (Collin and Kjøppe 2014, 420-421). Through time, the perception of the phenomena or behaviour can be change or altered, which means that what was perceived as 'normal' might change its meaning if people surrounding the phenomena or behaviour will collectively agree to change the old perception of the 'normal' (Ibid.). In this thesis, the social constructivist approach will be present as I will explore phenomena and behaviour that might be considered normal. To elaborate, the thesis will investigate phenomena and behaviour from Ryanair and whether these are considered to be perceived as 'normal'. This will allow me to critically review different materials that illustrate Ryanair's conduct and communication towards the public during the pandemic, and whether this conduct is perceived as 'normal' by the consumers of the airline. Furthermore, it will be considered whether the corporate identity of Ryanair and the airline's used image repair strategies are accepted by the consumers as being 'normal' as there is a certain expectation of how international companies, such as Ryanair, should behave in the public sphere. In this thesis, these expectations are perceived to be socially agreed upon by the consumers. Thereby, the social constructivist approach will be understood to be a useful philosophical position as it allows me to understand and establish awareness of phenomena and behaviour in the scope of the subject of this thesis.

The epistemological foundation was chosen based on how I would conduct my examination of my problem statement. Therefore, interpretivism was chosen as the principles of the epistemological foundation in this thesis. Interpretivism revolves around the notion that knowledge is socially constructed, which connects to the concept of social constructivism. Using interpretivism as the epistemological foundation, the approach defines the research as both subjective and interactive, as the research is to be manufactured in a correlation between the researcher and the researched. In other words, the subjectivity concerns the researcher as he/she/it has to be subjective in interpreting the findings from the interactions with the researched. But the findings are also affected by the choices from the researcher such as understanding the theoretical concept of the chosen theories as well as analytical capacities of the researcher applying the chosen theories (Potrac et. al. 2014, 34). The findings of this thesis will be generated through interpreting the used images and wordings from Ryanair's corporate and consumer webpages as well as the airline's social media images from Instagram. Furthermore, the findings will consist of interpretations of the answers from my chosen

interviewees regarding Ryanair and the handling of specific cases. These findings will aid this thesis to understand the corporate identity of Ryanair, and how the airline's image is created by the consumers by examining the perception of Ryanair and their handling of problematic cases.

Furthermore, in connection to the philosophical foundation of this thesis, the multimodal analysis can be perceived to be constructed in social context between individuals. To elaborate, analysing wordings and images from a company or medias are affected by the perception of both the companies' and the medias' interactions in the social world. In other words, the individuals perceive one thing about the wordings and images but learn from what is said and pictured from the companies or medias. Furthermore, the analysis will be conducted on the basis of interpretivism because the findings from the articles, images and interviews will be interpreted in regard to the topic and the theoretical choices.

4.2 Qualitative Research Method

The research strategy of this thesis will be structure on the basis of a qualitative approach. The qualitative work revolves around analysing the data that consist of words, both written and spoken, and the interpretation of these words. Thereby, the research strategy does not concern itself with numbers and statistics such as a quantitative research strategy would (Bryman 2012, 383). When applying a qualitative research method, Bryman (Ibid.) argue that the individuals being studied should be perceived to be capable of reflecting on the social world. The qualitative research then must make use of this reflection of the social world from the individuals and interpreted how it influence the object of the study (Ibid., 399).

In this thesis, this will be applied through the use of interviews and the multimodal analysis as the chosen methods of analysis. The methods will be used to interpreted how Ryanair present their corporate identity to the public, and how the public perceive the image of Ryanair and the actions connected to the creation of both the corporate identity and image. Both methods are important to answer the problem statement of this thesis.

4.3 Research Design

In this section, the chosen research design of this thesis will be presented to outline my chosen methods and how these will contribute to the overall analysis of my problem statement. For this thesis, there was an uncertainty surrounding how to conduct the examination of this study but ultimately it

became clear that interviews, press releases, articles, reviews, and images were suitable data for examining the problem statement in this thesis. The problem statement is an important component to have in mind, when choosing the research design (Yin, 2009, 27). Moreover, a research design is meant for providing a framework for the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2016, 46). In this thesis, I have applied the case study research design, which revolves around examining a single case, such as one organization or community, intensively with many details. Because of the focus on only Ryanair and their corporate identity and image, it was more suitable to make use of a case study design to focus on and examine the unique features of Ryanair because of their tainted image before the pandemic. Additionally, the researcher acknowledges that the case itself is an object of interest and the goal of the examination is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the organization or community, and search and present unique features of the case. Bryman defines this approach as an idiographic approach (Ibid., 60-61). According to researchers (Yin 2009; Bryman 2016), a case study has to accommodate certain factors. The factors are measurements that might define how well a case study will fare. Validity, replicability and reliability are all important factors for evaluating a case. Mostly it concerns whether the researcher accepts external validity² or perceive the case study research as generalisation and can be applied directly to other cases. As argued by Bryman, this is not the case, but the case study research can present important information to the certain community in which the examined organization is a part of (Ibid., 62).

To ensure that researchers can distinct between the concerns of external validity and generalisation, Yin (Yin 2009, 47) presents five typical types of case studies to guide the researchers to consider the reason for the conducting the case study. Despite this thesis being a qualitative study, I still have to acknowledge that the interviewees' interpretation of the chosen cases of Ryanair's actions can have a general usefulness, as it focuses more on the image repair strategies used and how they are perceived in the certain situation. Therefore, Yin's typical types of case studies are important to understand. First one is a critical case. Here, the case surrounds itself with testing a well-formulated theory to examine the credibility and usefulness of the theory in practice. The second one revolves around an extreme or unique single case. This type of case study examines a case so rare that it can provide an insight to future study around a specific case. The third case study is concerned with a representative or typical case. Here, the motivation is to examine a case which is defined by the circumstances and conditions occurring in the case. The four type of case study is called revelatory case. This type of

² External validity in case studies concerns how one case can become representative for the field in which the case resides in, despite the focus being on the uniqueness of the case at hand.

case study examines an opportunity that has occurred to observe and analyse what Yin defines as a ‘phenomenon previously inaccessible’. The last type of case study is called longitudinal case study. Here, the objective is to examine a case in more than one point in time, which means that the goal of the study is to observe and analyse changes over time and intervals (Ibid., 47-49). In this thesis, the type of case study chosen is typical or representative case. The reason can be found in the examination of Ryanair. As mentioned in the theoretical section, corporate identity and image have been examined in many instances, and airlines have been used before as cases for examining corporate identity and image. However, this thesis can be informative to the industry with the situation of the pandemic and the current tainted image of Ryanair in mind, it is an interesting adaptation of corporate identity and image in this special situation.

4.3.1 Limitations of Research Design

When using a case study as my research design, I have to consider the limitations of this particular research design. One of the most common critiques connected to a case study design is that the findings from the research design cannot be used in a generalizing way. Mainly because of the restriction of the using the findings from the study representatively because it accepts that it only concerns one case, and you cannot generalize the findings towards other populations or similar companies (Bryman 2012, 71), which in this case is airlines. Despite this, one could argue that the case study can be used as a tool for similar cases. The reason can be found in the uniqueness of the case and adapting one’s corporate identity to one’s consumers’ perceived image of a company can be important to understand in the airline industry. Furthermore, every airline makes use of different image repair strategies when communicating to its consumers, and therefore, it can be important to understand how consumers react to different strategies as this thesis will examine. A concern, which also connect to a case study design, is the theoretical reasoning of the research. Here, the concern arises when considering whether the gathered data is sufficient enough to support the theoretical foundation chosen for the research design (Ibid.). This means that I have to consider whether the data is sufficient enough for a valid examination of the problem statement of this thesis with the theoretical foundation in mind. Therefore, this thesis acknowledges the concern and consider the connection between the theoretical choices and the case of Ryanair. Thereby, the thesis will be vigilant and try to create a coherency between the theoretical foundation and the case in question in this research.

4.3.2 Theoretical Considerations

To examine my chosen case, I had to the research design is constructed on the basis of a case study design. Therefore, I had to consider how to make use of a theoretical point of view to examine my case. As presented in my classification chapter, I have chosen to include the Brand Identity Prism, the VCI-model, and the Image Repair Theory. All these provide an important aspect to the case study and guide the study towards answering the problem statement of this thesis. The Multimodal Analysis will take basis in the Brand Identity Prism and will help to examine the corporate identity of Ryanair and how it is presented to the stakeholders. This will be important to understanding the gap between Ryanair's own defined identity and the image perceived by its stakeholders, which will be examined by examining reviews, articles, and applying answers from the chosen interviewees to the VCI-model. Moreover, answers provided by the interviewees will be used, when examining how image repair strategies from the Image Repair Theory are perceived when applied in press releases, and whether they have a positive or negative effect on Ryanair's already stained image. Thereby, understanding the effect of using the specific strategies to change a perceived image.

4.4 Data Sampling

Before conducting my analysis, I have to define in what way I want to gather data. In this thesis, I have chosen the approach of what Bryman (Bryman 2016) defines as purposive sampling for gathering my qualitative data. Bryman defines that the selection of unites should have a direct reference to the asked research questions or problem statements (Ibid, 416). However, Bryman depicts that different purposive sampling approaches exist. In this thesis, the typical case sampling approach will be applied. The typical case sampling approach is defined as sampling cases because it exemplifies a dimension of interest (Ibid., 409). The approach will be applied through the gathering of the press releases, articles, reviews, answers from interviewees, as well as images and wordings from Ryanair's social media webpages and its corporate and consumer webpages. Furthermore, the approach will be applied because the data collected will be used to exemplify and examine a dimension of interest, which is Ryanair's corporate identity and image. The units of the analysis will be based on the problem statement of this thesis and will help to exemplify the creation of corporate identities and problems concerning an image gap between companies and consumers. Additionally, the units will aid the analysis of the choices made by Ryanair to repair the image gap between the

airline and its consumers. Thus, I have selected specific units of analysis because they will provide me with the required information to answer my problem statement.

4.5 Data Collection

In this thesis, I will focus on images and wordings from Ryanair's corporate and consumer webpages and the airline's social media pages on Instagram and LinkedIn. Furthermore, I have selected three press releases published by Ryanair that will be used in the interviews in regard to the questions surrounding the use of image repair strategies. Additionally, I have chosen to include two articles that will be used in the analysis of the gap between Ryanair's identity and image. Almost all the materials dates to 2020 and some to the beginning of 2021. The materials are chosen to analyse how Ryanair have established their identity, how it is perceived by the consumers, and lastly, how Ryanair have managed their image using image repair strategies.

4.5.1 Interpretating Documents

Examining documents can be conducted through different approaches. As stated earlier, the multimodal analytical method will be used by applying it to the Brand Identity Prism. The multimodal method will focus on the semiotic approach of interpreting on documents. The semiotics approach concerns analysing signs or signifiers with an underlying and valuable meaning for a document. In this thesis, both the denotative and connotative meanings will be examined. The denotative meanings are the most obvious meanings, while the connotative meanings are more underlying meanings that connects to social contexts in some way and can be seen as an addition to the denotative meanings (Bryman 2012, 559).

4.5.2 Press Releases

This thesis will make use of three different press releases that depicts the handling and commenting of three different situations in regard to the Covid-19 situation. The reason for including the press releases is due to the direct opinions from Ryanair and the airline commenting on situations that can be perceived differently by consumers. First press release concerns Ryanair's view on airlines possibility of receiving state aid in lockdown period. Here, Ryanair took it to court because the airline found the state aid to benefit airlines such as Air France and SAS more than Ryanair. Ryanair do not

define themselves as locked by a national corporation such as the other airlines but lost in court. The press release therefore underlines Ryanair's opinion towards the ruling (Appendix 1.) The second press release concerns Ryanair commenting on a situation with the Irish Travel Agents Association (I.T.A.A.) in regard to the difficult situation with refunds (Appendix 2.). The last press release concerns Ryanair extending their decision to keep zero-change fee until the end of June (Appendix 3.).

The press releases have been chosen based on the different types of image repair strategies that they are based upon. The first press release is based on the image repair strategy, 'Evade Responsibility', while the second press release is based on the strategy, 'Denial'. The last one is based on the strategy, 'Corrective Actions'. The press releases will be useful to understand how these strategies have an effect on the consumers and whether it can change the perceived image of Ryanair despite its tainted image.

4.5.3 Articles

To examine the perceived image of Ryanair, this thesis will make use of two different articles to understand the vision-image gap between Ryanair and its consumers and other stakeholders. The first article is concerned with Ryanair's newest commercial being banned for inappropriately trying to lure consumers to buy a flight ticket after they have been vaccinated. The commercial was banned by the Advertising Standards Association (ASA) as it was misleading consumers with a reassurance that being vaccinated would allow the consumers to go on vacation without restrictions. The second article is concerned with a survey by Which?, which concludes that many former and current Ryanair consumers are unhappy with the services provided by the airline. However, the survey was not well-received by Ryanair, who calls the survey for 'fake-news'.

4.5.4 Images

To examine the identity of Ryanair and their way of changing their current image, this thesis will make use of different images. Firstly, one image from the corporate webpage and one image from Ryanair's LinkedIn has been chosen because it illustrates an important aspect of the values of Ryanair (Appendix 3). Secondly, three images from the airline's Instagram as they portray the physical product of the company (Appendix 4). Thirdly, three images from Ryanair's consumer webpage have been chosen because they are useful to understand the targeted audience set by Ryanair (Appendix

5). Lastly, five screenshots of work review from former and current employees at Ryanair have been chosen to show their opinion surrounding the management at Ryanair (Appendix 15). All images will be important to understand and examine the corporate identity of Ryanair and the perceived image of the airline.

4.5.5 Interviews

In this thesis, I have chosen to conduct nine interviews through the construct as a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is constructed by the researcher by creating a list of questions or somewhat specific topics that are going to be covered throughout the interview, also referred to as an interview guide. However, the semi-structured interviews allow for more flexibility and do not always follow the questions or specific topics already written down by the researcher. With this said, the interviews will mainly be concerned with using similar wordings from the outlined questions from interviewee to interviewee (Bryman 2008, 438). The construct of the interviews was chosen based on the usefulness and flexibility of the interviews that is appropriate for this thesis. The flexibility also comes to fruition through the interviewees as they can adjust the interviews. To elaborate, the interviewees can emphasis on topics in regard to the case which they find relevant. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview opens up for the possibility of asking follow-up questions that can provide this thesis with more detailed answers (Ibid., 437).

To ensure that every consideration, concerning the interviews, will be addressed, this thesis will make use of the interview guide created by Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). To create a qualitative interview, Brinkmann and Kvale have established seven steps, which explains the process of an interview (Ibid., 130-131). The seven steps will be accounted for beneath.

1. Thematising an Interview Project

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) argues that the interviewer has to ask him/herself important questions to enclose and thematize the interviews. The first question concerns ‘why do we do this study’, the second question concern ‘what pre-knowledge do we have regarding the topic’, and the final question concerns ‘how do we examine the topic’. All three of the questions should guide the interviewer to become familiar with various of aspect in regard to interviewing such as theories and techniques. By

becoming familiar with these aspects of interviewing, the interviewer will establish a better understanding of how the interviews connects to the analysis (Ibid., 131-135).

The reason for conducting this study sparked from the interest in the situation concerning the airlines lack of departures around the world during the pandemic. As mentioned in the introduction, the first impulse was to examine the crisis communication but instead wanted to examine how a company, such as Ryanair with an already tainted image, has used the pandemic to try and present their corporate identity better to the public and the company's stakeholders. The considerations just mentioned, I already had some insight into Ryanair's situation and their current image. Furthermore, my pre-knowledge consisted of experience with corporate identity and image from my previous studies during my time at the university. However, my pre-knowledge is still limited and therefore, I had to make a further research of the topics.

2. Designing

This step concerns the considerations when designing the interviews. Brinkmann and Kvale defines the tone and structure of the interview as an important aspect. The tone of the interview can be defining when considering which type of connection, the interviewer wants with the interviewees (Ibid., 136-142). In this thesis, the interviews will be using an informal tone to create an environment for the interviewees that will make them feel like they are participating in a normal conversation. Furthermore, it makes the interviewees more comfortable with the interview and might be more openminded when answering the asked questions from the interviews. As stated earlier, I have created an interview guide to have a specific structure that will help me to establish the thoughts of my interviewees surrounding Ryanair and their handling of the presented cases beneath in the article and press release segment.

3. Interviewing

Here, the step concerns the number of interviews made and how these were conducted (Ibid., 155 – 166). In this thesis, ten interviews were conducted in order to examine the problem statement. The interviewees were all randomly chosen, while the interview guide was adapted to the theoretical and methodological choices to focus on the key interest points. Despite this, the interviews have been constructed as a romantic interview (Ibid.), which lets the interviewees answer the questions with

his/her opinion. Furthermore, before starting each interview, every interviewee was informed that everything said would be confidential.

4. Transcribing

In this step, the way that the transcriptions of the interviews have been conducted will be explained (Ibid., 203-214). As mentioned before, the transcriptions of these interviews will be used as the empirical data for this thesis. The transcriptions will include small markers with a ‘*’, when the chosen cases are presented to the interviewees to exclude unnecessary double fillings.

5. Analysing

This step concerns how the transcriptions will be analysed and used as a means to answer the problem statement of a study (Ibid., 215-247). In this thesis, the transcriptions will be analysed through the chosen theories from Hatch and Schultz and the Image Reparation Theory from Benoit. The interviews will be used to define the perceived image from the interviewees as well as how the applied image repair strategies are received by the interviewees. This will allow me to understand whether or not Ryanair has taken the right decisions to accommodate their already tainted image from before the pandemic.

6. Verifying

Here, the step concerns how the data from the interviews can be verified to be accepted as useful for the study (Ibid., 277-300). In this thesis, the data from the interviews have been verified in the sense that the structure of the interview guides opens up for the interviewees to elaborate on their answers and thereby, various of opinions have been collected. Moreover, the questions were connected to the problem statement which means that the intel can be determined to be valid and reliable.

7. Reporting

The final step revolves around the reporting of the data and findings from the interviews to establish a link between the study and the interviews (Ibid., 301-328). In this thesis, the findings will be

presented through the analysis and ultimately in the conclusion where the findings from the analysis will be elaborated and put into context to the problem statement.

4.5.5.1 Limitations

Interviews are also limited in some ways. Therefore, the researcher must consider the limitations in which the answers, provided by the interviewees, can be validated and be perceived as acceptable. In this thesis, the interviewees have been randomly chosen and because of their accessibility given the short time period in which the interviews had to be conducted. This means that pre-knowledge of the subject was not necessary, but Ryanair is a well-known airline and the likeliness of the interviewees knowing about the company was high. Thereby, the interviewees might be bias in some ways because of what they have of pre-knowledge of Ryanair. However, interviews are must likely to be affected by biases from the interviewees, but the bias can be important to include as the object of this thesis is to understand the differences between Ryanair's own corporate identity and the corporate image perceived by the consumers.

The chosen interviewees are only of Danish origins which do not portray a multinational view from the consumers point of view. As the airline operates in multiple countries, it is of course important to acknowledge that the interviews will only establish the gaps between Ryanair and its Danish consumers. However, Ryanair was in 2019 the third biggest airline to operate from Copenhagen Airport (ClaimO 2019), which indicates that many Danish consumers use Ryanair when travelling abroad. Thereby, the findings from the interviews can be useful to establish a connection between Ryanair's corporate identity and the consumers' perceived image of the airline.

4. Analysis

In the following chapter, I will conduct my analysis that consist of two parts. The first part consists of an analysis of the corporate identity of Ryanair by using the Brand Identity Prism and examining each aspect of the prism in regard to Ryanair. The second part consists of an analysis of the corporate image of Ryanair which is perceived by the stakeholders of the airline. Here, the analysis will also be divided into two different segments, where the first analysis will examine how an image gap might have been created by Ryanair and its stakeholders, while the second analysis will be examining the use of image repair strategies applied by Ryanair during the pandemic, and how the chosen strategies affect the consumers' perception of the company.

4.1 Analysis of Corporate Identity

As stated in the above, this analysis concerns Ryanair's own projection of their identity towards the public. The analysis will be important to understand how Ryanair define their corporate identity to be as well as how the airline projects it to the public. Thereby, understanding the foundation for the public's creation of Ryanair's image.

4.1.1 Analysis of Ryanair's Identity

As explained earlier, this analysis will be conducted through the use of Jean-Noel Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism. Therefore, each step of the prism will be used as the structure of this analysis, which means that each step will be accounted for separately.

4.1.2 Physique

As Ryanair is an airline, the physical trait of the company is arguably the planes themselves as the company's product is based on taking travellers to foreign countries and domestic cities. However, the physical trait is presented in different ways as Ryanair include different views of the whole travel experience. In Appendix 5 (Image 1-3, Ryanair Instagram), the examples show how Ryanair presents the travel experience at their airline and what the consumers and other stakeholders can expect from Ryanair, when travelling with the company.

The examples provide different aspects to the way the physical traits are presented. The first one (Appendix 5, Image 1) presents the experience when flying with Ryanair through depicting the view from one of the flights over one of their destinations. This use of images presents the view from the airplanes as a quality trait of the product to the consumers and other stakeholders. This type of images has been used frequently on Ryanair's Instagram profile (Instagram 2021, Ryanair) and brings an exotic twist to the corporate identity. The second example (Appendix 5, Image 2), as specified before, presents the product directly by showcasing the company's airplane. These types of images are used to present the aircrafts and Ryanair's proudness of having these aircrafts in their stable. This proudness is something that Ryanair also tries to include in their corporate identity. The last example (Appendix 5, Image 3) is used to underline that it is safe to travel with Ryanair. This type of examples are more frequently used during the pandemic (Instagram 2021, Ryanair) and the reason might be to ensure that Ryanair and its airplanes is ready for the consumers to travel again.

4.1.3 Personality

As the personality aspect revolves around the tone of voice, values, public opinions etc., it is more important to examine the wordings connected to Ryanair's created material that is presented to the public. Taking a starting point in the two examples, the tone of voice used is often informal as it connects better with the consumers and created sort of a bond with them. However, as social media have progressed and have been divided into several types of platforms, it can be difficult to define a definitive tone of voice from Ryanair. As stated before, the tone of voice in the two examples from Instagram are more informal and inclusive, while examples from LinkedIn show a more formal approach (LinkedIn, Ryanair; Appendix 4, Image 1-2).

These indicate that Ryanair is adaptable and tries to connect with the consumers in the ways that the platforms dictate. In other words, the corporate personality of Ryanair is concerned with being inclusive.

The values of the company are depicted through the wordings used by Ryanair. On its Instagram, Ryanair refers to their product as an adventure (Appendix 5, Image 2). This indicates that Ryanair defines its flight routes as adventures accessible to the consumers. Thereby, one can argue that creating adventures for consumers is part of the values of Ryanair. Despite this, the values of Ryanair are not directly referred to as other companies. However, the values can be deduced from their front

page on their corporate webpage (Corporate Ryanair, Appendix 4, Image 1). Exploring it further, the corporate webpage shows that four key values are presented:

- **Giving back to communities**
- **Environment**
- **Customer Care**
- **Punctuality**

First value is presented through their ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’ page, where Ryanair writes:

“As Europe’s favourite airline, we believe that it is our responsibility to give back to charities and organisations that make a difference in the communities they serve” (Corporate Ryanair, ‘Charities Partners’ 2021).

Here, the importance of acknowledging the communities surrounding Ryanair is presented, and Ryanair acknowledges the responsibility that the company have towards the communities in which the airline operates. The airline implements the value in some cases such as the involvement with The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) and Pequeño Deseo (‘Little Wishes’) (Ibid.). Both of these non-profit organizations work towards bettering the life of children.

The second value has been under the scope in the later years because of the CO² emissions from airplanes (OurWorldindata 2020). Ryanair has agreed a deal with Trinity College Dublin to establish the ‘Ryanair Sustainable Aviation Research Center’ (Corporate Ryanair 2021, ‘News’), which is an example of some of the activities Ryanair is conducting. Furthermore, Ryanair defines their environmental work through three important points (Corporate Ryanair 2021, ‘Environmental Policy’):

1. Operate only point-to-point routes with industry leading load factors.
2. Continuously invest in fuel-efficient new aircraft and improved engine technology
3. Conduct the most efficient operational procedures in the industry.

Here, the environmental value is shown to have deep roots in the airline as it becomes part of the operations of the workdays.

The third and fourth values revolve around Ryanair's commitment to apply the best customer care services to their attributes. Ryanair explains how important it is for the airline to provide the best customer service:

“Ryanair is committed to providing our customers with low fares, on-time flights and the best customer service, the key pillars of our Customer Care Charter” (Corporate Ryanair, Customer Care 2021).

Both the importance of great customer services and punctuality is included in this statement and provide an understanding of how Ryanair tries to implement these values into their operations on a daily basis. Furthermore, Ryanair highlights how punctual its airplanes are with showcasing it with enlarged statistics on the Customer Care page (Ibid., Appendix 4, Image 2).

4.1.4 Self-Image

As stated earlier, the third aspect, Self-Image, concerns how the company's consumers view their ideal selves. On the consumer website, many images are used with people in different settings and in different locations. Some of the images showcase families together on vacations enjoying their time together (Ryanair US/GB, Appendix 6, Image 1-3). Therefore, a self-image of being happy with the family, might be how Ryanair sees its consumers self-image, but it is not the only type of self-image seen by Ryanair. On the consumer webpage, Ryanair also make use of images that depicts happy couples in love (Ryanair US/GB, Appendix 6, Image 6). Hence, a self-image of being together with your loved one(s) in one way or another, can be how Ryanair perceive its consumers' self-image. However, such self-image is not specific and connects to most of the world's population. On its corporate and consumer webpage, Ryanair have focused on being a low-fare airline since their first international contract (Corporate Ryanair 2021, 'About Us – History'). Therefore, it becomes clear

that Ryanair does not only focus on simply one type of self-image but instead address hopeful travellers trying to find a cheaper vacation. This also connects to the presented self-image of families and young couples as they are likely to consider the financial aspect of their vacations. But as the images indicate, not one specific self-image is preferred and opens up for couples and families exploring their own adventure on their vacations with their financial possibilities in mind. Thereby, not one specific self-image is favoured but instead there is a focus on securing every individual a possibility of creating their personal adventure by travelling with Ryanair.

4.1.5 Reflection

The fifth aspect of Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism concerns the reflection. As stated earlier, Kapferer argues that the reflection concerns the company's idea of who its consumers are, and how the consumers aspire to feel when making use of the product. As briefly touched in the self-image analysis, Ryanair makes use of images that depicts different type of family structures. One of those is families with children. Ryanair uses images where the families are experiencing things together and also images with children rollercoasting and learning to swim (Ryanair, Appendix 6, Images 2-3). Additionally, Ryanair focused on the younger couples experiencing new or old places together (Appendix 6, Image 5). These used images indicates that the Ryanair does not have focused much on the older generations, thereby, shaping a stereotypical consumer shaped as the younger segment with a wish for new experiences. It can be argued that Ryanair might have marked the younger segment as its reflected consumer because of the need for new experiences and their low-fare travels. However, as not all older generations are financially strong, the financial aspect might be uncertain and problematic to include in the considerations. Despite this, it is most likely that Ryanair has defined its reflected consumers as people that is financially limited and seeks to enjoy the world despite of it. On another note, Ryanair's consumer webpage makes use of both males and females in the images with great variety. However, the variety changes when it comes to the diversity in terms of races. Ryanair mostly uses persons from what can be defined as classic European heritage and do not grasp onto the diversity within many European countries. Therefore, Ryanair's reflected consumers are defined as being racially limited.

4.1.6 Relationship

As stated in the introduction, the pandemic has grounded many airplanes. Therefore, the consumers have not had the opportunity of buying a vacation to their wished travel destination. Hence, the relationship between Ryanair and its consumers has been difficult to withhold during the pandemic. However, Ryanair has tried to be inclusive in the sense that consumers are allowed to send images to Ryanair of their favourite destination or an older image of an experience with Ryanair (Instagram 2021, 'Ryanair', Appendix 5 image 1-3). This means that Ryanair tries to keep the relationship with its consumers through the common goal of travelling again. Despite this, the relationship between the two has been tainted and in some ways negative because of the problematic situations mentioned in the case Description. In some instances, the services provided by Ryanair have been perceived to be of poor quality and lack of understanding with the situations that the consumers find themselves in. Hence, the relationship was broken, and Ryanair has used the pandemic to include and involve its consumers and other stakeholders through the sharing of former experiences with Ryanair. Additionally, Ryanair lets its consumers share their feelings about missing the 'adventures' with Ryanair (Appendix 5, Image 4).

4.1.7 Culture

As stated earlier, Kapferer argues that culture is an important part of the company's identity and the company is heavily affected by the culture in which it was established. The culture is almost certain to affect the values of the company and therefore, culture and personality close in comparison. As explained in the analysis of Ryanair's personality, the airline is highly involved with the ISPC and it indicates that the airline remembers its origins. Furthermore, Ryanair's structure has been affected by its Irish origin. This can be seen in the court cases, presented in the History paragraph, in which Ryanair was involved in. The Irish structure of how to exclude unions and hire through third party hiring companies was not accepted in other countries, which then led to the court cases. The same situations have occurred during the pandemic, where other airlines have received state support to survive the financial problems that many airlines experienced during the pandemic. The Irish state did not have the financial strength to help as the other nations could, which led to Ryanair starting a new court case over this individual support (Appendix 1). Thereby, Ryanair has respected its origins problems and instead try to push for a common support for airlines.

On Ryanair's corporate webpage, there is not many indications that the airline is of Irish origin as it does not showcase any Irish elements beside the airline's logo, which is an Irish harp. The harp is the official symbol of Ireland (AskaboutIreland 2021). Besides the logo, a sub-page, 'History of Ryanair', outlines the history of the airline and its beginning in Dublin, Ireland, in 1986 (Corporate Ryanair, 'History of Ryanair 2021). On Ryanair's consumer webpage, it is possible to choose Irish-English, which is not common among other airlines. Thereby, Ryanair remembers its origins and its original consumers. Taking all into account, it can be argued that Ryanair accepts and remembers its Irish origins, and also respects it as the airline uses the national symbol as a logo. A logo is very defining for the identity of a company, so using the national symbol indicates pride over the airline's heritage. However, not much marketing material and presented materials on Ryanair's social media platforms does involve or mention the Irish origins. Hence, Ryanair is more focused on addressing international consumers and connect to a broader audience.

4.2 Analysis of Ryanair's Image

In the following, the analysis of Ryanair's corporate image will be examined by examining the gap between Ryanair and its consumers will analysed to understand how this gap has occurred and whether it is unrepairable. In addition, I will try to understand the influence of specific image repair strategies on the airline's consumers. The analysis will help to account for reason for the image gap between Ryanair and its consumer and whether the current use of image repair strategies is useful for Ryanair's image.

4.2.1 Analysis of Image Gap

As stated earlier, this analysis will be based on the VCI-model presented by Hatch and Schultz (2008) and will examine on each aspects of the model: vision-culture, image-culture, and image-vision. As explained in the data collection paragraph, the first part, vision-culture, will be examined through the use of reviews made by former and current employees from Ryanair. The second part, image-culture, will be examined by accounting for collisions between Ryanair and its employees through articles from the time period during the Covid-19 pandemic. The third part, image-vision, will be based on answers from the interviewees in regard to their perception of important parts from the previous analysis of Ryanair's corporate identity.

4.2.1.1 Vision-Culture Gap

As mentioned in the clarification paragraph, the vision-culture gap appears when there is a misalignment between the vision of the company and the culture in which the employees work. As stated in the data collection, this analysis will be based on five work reviews made by former and current employees at Ryanair from Indeed.com (Indeed 2021). Furthermore, the reviews were chosen because of the focus point, which is the management, and are the latest reviews regarding Ryanair's management.

As Image 1, 2 and 5 from Appendix 15 indicate, the upper management show little interest in their employees' well-being. Additionally, the management seemingly does not want to have their employees go through the ranks to quickly despite them showing more than just promise. This can create a misalignment between the management and their employees as the employees will be confused by the lack of actions taken by the management in terms of work rate and reward. Thereby, it can lead to the gap between the vision and the culture at Ryanair expanding, which can become problematic to Ryanair, when trying to change their perceived corporate image.

The misalignment between the management and their employees is underlined further through Image 3 from Appendix 15. Here, the concern revolves around the management and culture of the airline. The management, again, show little interest in the employees' well-being and expect more than the wages correspond with. Furthermore, the review indicates that the whole structure of the airline is problematic with managers 'harassing' and 'bullying' the employees. When the employees then search for help at HR, there is no help to receive. This expands the misalignment between the management and the employees as HR normally act as an aid to ensure the employees well-being but in this case, the aid is nowhere to be found. It can become frustrating and confusing to the employees that they cannot seek aid at the normal source and thereby, the gap between the vision and culture at Ryanair expands.

The work environment is problematic at Ryanair and it is further underlined by the last image (Image 4, Appendix 15) which indicates that the management of Ryanair is finding it difficult to not stress their employees with high expectations. To elaborate, the upper management focuses on the onboard

sales and the concern for sales is pressured onto the employees, with the management expecting them to be a top seller. Sales is properly not the motivation for the many employees in Ryanair and simultaneously, the management only seem to promote the highest sellers and the employees that will call others out for mistakes to the management. The greater focus on sales is troublesome for Ryanair because the management seem to establish a level of ambition that is too high for the employees to accommodate. Thereby, the misalignment between the vision and culture at Ryanair expands further and results in a greater gap between the corporate vision and the actual culture within the airline.

To sum up, the vision-culture gap can undoubtedly be perceived to be immense. The Ryanair management seem to find it difficult to create a fine line between the well-being of the employees and their expectations of what the employees can do. Therefore, the image of the airline can be perceived to be negatively influenced by the vision-culture aspect as there is a clear distinction between what the management expect and what the employees can handle. This is also underlined through the management's higher level of ambition when it comes to sales, which the employees cannot accommodate, and thereby, the misalignment between the two is simply too great.

4.2.1.2 Image-Culture Gap

This analysis will be structured as the corporate identity analysis from the previous segment. Thereby, the analysis of the image-vision gap will be based and structured on the six aspects from Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism. However, as reflection concerns Ryanair's own perception of its consumers, and therefore, it will be excluded from this analysis.

Physique

As it was concluded in the previous analysis, personality concerns Ryanair's airplanes themselves but also the interior of the airplanes. In the previous analysis, Ryanair's Instagram profile was using many images of their airplanes with some proudness of their product's quality. However, according to a couple interviewees, the seats on the airplanes are not of the best quality:

"And now, I did not have to fly that long, so I thought... the comfort of the seats is not that great but it was fine" (Appendix 13, ll. 20-21).

“I think that I am more inclined to say ‘ok’ if I only have to fly two hours, then it would be ok that it is a little discount. But if I had to be on a plane for 7 hours on my way to Sri Lanka, then maybe I would like to have some extra goods to enjoy on the flight and at least just sit well with some legroom” (Appendix 9, ll. 63-66).

Both statements are supported by another interviewee, who is concerned with the quality of the airplanes.

“... and the airplanes are also just like... they look quite cheap. It is not like fancy” (Appendix 10, ll. 12-13).

The quotes above indicate that there is some concern with the physical aspect of Ryanair’s corporate identity, which is problematic considering it is the product of the airline. As Ryanair’s routes are mainly in Europe, the misalignment between the perceived image and the culture at Ryanair might not be affected as much by it. However, it is more likely an issue that Ryanair wants to sell the whole travel experience to its consumers but cannot accommodate something needed for relaxation, comfort. Furthermore, the reason for travelling is often to go on a vacation and starting your vacation of with a bad experience with a thing, such as comfort, can have a negative impact on the vacation as the consumers might experience tiredness or their body being sore from the flight. Thereby, widening the misalignment between the consumers’ perceived image of the airline and the culture of Ryanair. The image-culture gap between Ryanair and its consumers are, therefore, expanded by the different perception of the physical traits of the airline’s products, which in this case is the airplanes itself.

Personality

As the corporate identity analysis showed, the personality of Ryanair was based on four different elements: Giving back to communities, Environment, Customer Care and Punctuality. However, this is not what the interviewees perceive of the company. Being asked whether they would associate

customer care with Ryanair, most of the interviewees would not associate customer care with Ryanair. Mainly, because of the lack of aid when issues occur. One of the interviewees explained her experience with Ryanair after receiving a fine after failing to online book in time:

"... no, I don't think their customer services are very good and I can remember us being met by a rude... what is it called... sales clerk, who we spoke to when we experienced that situation. Well, I don't think that their customer care is a ten out of ten" (Appendix 8, ll. 34-36).

This issue has also happened to another interviewee who had the same experience and was frustrated over by the process:

"It was like very annoyed because you have... well, if I had done it 20 minutes before then the check-in would not have been closed. It was a bad experience with it (Ryanair) because you have to do so much yourself through Ryanair" (Appendix 13, ll. 26-28).

These quotes indicate that Ryanair are not focused on customer care as they make the consumers do most things themselves, and when help is required, they have trouble stepping up their responsibility. Instead of assisting frustrated consumers with their bookings, Ryanair creates more frustration by adding extra fees. This indicates that there is an underlying issue with how to handle frustrated customers, when these fees being imposed on the customers. However, some of the interviewees show some acceptance that these fees exist as the tickets are already very cheap:

"Again, because it is discount, and you can't expect the assistance to be totally great if you are to get into trouble maybe" (Appendix 9, ll. 37-38).

"Well, you get what you pay for ... I would dare to say that people also do that... well, sometimes you want to pay 100 kr. but then you expect 1000 kr. services. Well, I know quite well that if 100 kr. for tickets ... then I also expect services for 100 kr" (Appendix 14, ll. 36-39).

As the quotes indicate, the consumers understand and accept the 'discount' structure of the airline. This may lessen the misalignment between the consumers perceived image of Ryanair and the actual culture at the airline in regard to the customer care value. However, one interviewee explained an experience with Ryanair, where both the values of customer care and punctuality were somewhat non-existing:

"First, we were informed that the airplane was 15 minutes delayed. Then, we were regularly informed that now it is an hour delayed, after which we are informed that the airplane was cancelled, and then we thought: 'Ok, will we be informed of which airplane we are to travel with now?'. No, we were not informed. Then 15 minutes passes and we are informed that it was not cancelled but instead moved three hours. ... Again, we are subsequently informed that it was cancelled. And after four hours, we receive a last call on the gate about the airplane actually being there and ready to take off, but no passengers had received any information about it at all"

(Appendix 12, ll. 39-45).

Being the one responsible for the airplanes, it is an issue that Ryanair fail to communicate with its consumers. Especially, when punctuality is such an important part of the values at the airline. The statement, from the interviewee, indicates that the customer care and punctuality of the airline are in doubt as they fail to communicate properly with the consumers and ensure a smooth travel experience for the consumers despite focusing on punctuality.

In regard to the environmental value of Ryanair, none of the interviewees perceived the Ryanair to be caring about the environment, when asked whether they would associate Ryanair with the words environmentally conscious. However, many of the interviewees would not use environmentally conscious, when referring to airlines in general. Despite this, two interviewees pointed out that filling up the airplanes and making sure that consumers bring less baggage with them could be perceived to be somewhat environmentally sound:

”But you can say that they force many people to travel light, so in that sense maybe they get something out of it, like indirectly” (Appendix 14, ll. 52-53).

”So, they fill up the airplanes and if they are not filled up, then they lower the prices, that is my experience in any case, to get as many people as possible with the airplanes. You can say that it is a little environmentally friendly instead of flying with empty airplanes” (Appendix 12, ll. 52-54).

The quotes indicate that there is some sort of acceptance that Ryanair have considered its environmental responsibility in the industry and thereby, Ryanair has an opportunity to lessen the image-culture gap by promoting its environmental initiatives better with the two perceptions above in mind.

Self-Image

As it was learned from the corporate identity analysis, the self-image is not certain to be only defined to be a specific one, and instead it can be multiple. From the analysis, the self-images, which Ryanair perceives its consumers to be, are mainly young people and young families looking for their next adventure and to explore new destinations but with a limited budget. Through the interviews it became clear that the interviewees were all part of the group. Asked what the objective was when going on vacation, six out of seven interviewees (Appendix 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14) all said that the objective of the vacation was to experience new cultures in some sense and to experience something new, which fits with Ryanair’s perception of its consumers’ self-image.

Furthermore, the economic factor is also present in the answers from the interviewees, when asked which factors would make them choose an airline. However, some of the interviewees argue that the economical factor will always be considered but depends on the distance to the destination:

“Only if it was a long flight. If it is just a couple of hours, then I would not care. Then it would more likely be the price” (Appendix 11, l. 55).

"If I just had to travel around Europe and not a long journey, then I would probably just choose depending on the price" (Appendix 8, ll. 57-58).

"Well, definitely the price. You do not want to spend money on travelling from A to B. So, if you could get it (tickets) cheap, then it would be the best" (Appendix 10, 52-53).

Considering the quotes above, the economical factor lessens the image-culture gap between Ryanair and its consumers in the sense that there is a connection between the corporate identity of Ryanair and the corporate image perceived by the consumers. Furthermore, it can be argued to actually be an important tool to ensure that the image-culture gap between Ryanair and its consumers become less than the current state with Ryanair's tainted image from before the pandemic.

Relationship

As mentioned earlier, it has been difficult for Ryanair to keep its relationship with its consumers as many airplanes have been grounded due to the pandemic. As the analysis of the corporate identity indicated, Ryanair has tried to keep its relationship with its consumers through interactions on social media platforms. Asked which words first comes to mind, when thinking about Ryanair, many interviewees had some different answers but mainly agreed that it the cheap prices was one of the first things to come to mind. However, some of the interviewees depicted the relationship or perception of Ryanair to be more ethically concerning:

"So, yeah, I am a little sceptical towards them but in some way, I also like them because they are cheap. I am a student. I require it to be cheap to travel anywhere. But on the other side, I also know... I think, I have heard a lot about those who work there have some pretty bad working conditions and such things. So, of course you do not want to support that" (Appendix 10, ll. 26-29).

"I think I would say neutral because I can accept that you have do what you have to do to compete with the prices on a severely pressured market. But maybe a little over in the negative department..."

Neutral with a little tilt towards negative maybe... because you have to treat people right”
(Appendix 11, l. 17-19).

”It is an easy airline to travel with if you feel like you are a little poor at any rate and might want to pay a little more for the actual destination rather than the transport in some way. And it works really well but I am not completely blind towards their involvement in some controversies and such things” (Appendix 10, ll. 23-26).

These quotes show that it can be troublesome for Ryanair to create a relationship with its consumers if the doubt about the quality of the employees’ work environment continues to be present in the mind of the consumers as it will likely lead to the consumers’ perception of the airline being negatively affected. The quotes indicate that there is an ethical dilemma within the consumers’ mind which expands the image-culture gap between the airline and its consumers. Mainly because it creates an uncertainty about the human qualities of the airline, and thereby, creating doubt about the consumers’ wishes to interact with the company in a positive manner.

Culture

Given the opportunity to choose any airline of their choice, the interviewees choices were mostly different but showed that the cultural aspect does not seem to matter. Five out of seven interviewees (Appendix 8, 9, 10, 11, 13) all choose either Emirates or Qatar Airways, which indicate that the consumers feel that there are no cultural bond or obligation to choose a specific airline. However, two interviewees choose Scandinavian or Northern airlines as they ‘knew’ which quality they could expect:

”SAS given that it is Scandinavian. The same with Norwegian. And also, just the level of service, I think” (Appendix 12, l. 68).

”Well, I have flown with them (KLM) a couple of times... well, sometimes, and I must honestly say that it works every time. It would either be them, Lufthansa or Norwegian. I think that it would be them. A little of the best from all markets... Well, I know that they are more expensive, but I also know that the quality is present, and I also know that it works. And I know that it is some of the best... well, I know what I pay for” (Appendix 14, ll. 72-76).

With the above quotes in mind, Ryanair has to acknowledge that the cultural aspect does reside in some consumers and despite being a multinational company, it can be difficult to change these national advantages. However, as the five other interviewees’ answers indicated, it can be argued that the cultural aspect has no larger influence on most consumers. Thereby, it can be argued that the image-culture gap between Ryanair’s corporate identity and the consumers’ perceived image of the airline is not negatively influenced.

4.2.1.3 Vision-Image Gap

As stated in the clarification chapter, the vision-image gap often appears when a company fails to listen to its consumers, and thereby, create a misalignment between the vision of the company and the perceived image of it. Additionally, as stated in the data collection paragraph, two articles (Appendix 16 and 17) and one of the chosen cases (Appendix 3) will be used to understand Ryanair’s motivation to listen to its consumers.

In Appendix 16, Ryanair has been forced to remove one of its commercials called ‘Jab & Go’. The reason for its removal was because of 2,370 complaints from British consumers. The complaints were all based on the structure of the commercial as the plot revolves around the vaccine rollout and ordering a vacation after the ‘jab’. The concern was that it would push people to buy their vacations despite not knowing how the vaccines would be rolled out. Something that the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) agreed with to some extent. Despite many consumers being appalled with the commercial, Ryanair called the complaints baseless (Appendix 16, l. 50), which indicates that Ryanair has listened to their consumers but failed to understand their point of view. Thereby, a misalignment can be argued to have occurred as Ryanair has not directly listened to the opinion of its consumers and instead just followed the restrictions from ASA. The lack of understanding is underlined in the

press release from Ryanair, where the airline presents its ‘zero change fee’ for changing booked flights to another date (Appendix 3). In the press release, the marketing director of Ryanair uses the same arguments as the plot from the commercial:

“The acceleration of the vaccine rollout programmes will see the high-risk/elderly groups vaccinated by the start of summer, which we believe will lead to an easing of travel restrictions and an increase of travel demand to the beaches of Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal” (Appendix 3).

The quote clearly shows that Ryanair ignore the concerns from its consumers and does not listen to the point made by both the complaints and the ASA. Therefore, it can be argued that a misalignment occurs between the vision of Ryanair and its consumers’ perceived image of the airline. Thereby, the perceived image of Ryanair is negatively influenced by the handling of the case from Ryanair. Especially in a time, where much uncertainty still exists around the vaccine rollout and the Covid-19 situation in general. Furthermore, Ryanair fails to understand that not all countries are at the same point in regard to the vaccine rollout, which is concerning as the airline is a multinational company.

In Appendix 17, Ryanair fails to recognize its consumers’ bad experience with the customer service from Ryanair as they define a survey, created by Which?, as ‘false news’. Ryanair fails to understand the consumers clear opinion and their unhappiness with the customer services provided by Ryanair and the problems with refunding of cancelled flights. Again, Ryanair seems to expand the image-vision gap as the airline do not listen to the consumers’ opinions and does not trust the survey from Which?, which presents consumers’ opinions about Ryanair. Here, the misalignment is clearly stronger as the survey is including actual Ryanair consumers and still Ryanair does not recognize the issues presented in the article. Therefore, this misalignment is creating a greater gap between the perceived image of Ryanair and the vision of the airline as Ryanair fails to recognize facts presented in front of it and with many consumers involved. Thereby, resulting in a more negative perception of the airline’s image.

4.2.1.4 Summary

As the analysis indicated, Ryanair's corporate image is very affected by the lack of consideration for its employees. The misalignment between the corporate vision and the culture within the airline has a costly influence on the image as the employees feel that the management does not share values with them and does not respect their work. Furthermore, the ambitions set by the management in terms of sales is creating confusion and frustration in the employees, and thereby, broadening the gap between the corporate vision and the culture within the airline. The analysis also showed that the consumers raise concerns regarding certain aspects of Ryanair's corporate identity that do not align with the perception of how the airline is and should be. However, the analysis indicated that the low-fare travels are very attractive to the consumers, which can be defined as consumers with the self-image perceived by Ryanair. Last, Ryanair shows little intend to listen to its consumers and other stakeholders (travel agencies), which can troublesome as it creates a misalignment between the perceived image of the airline and Ryanair's own vision. Together, the many instances with misalignments between Ryanair and the aspects from VCI-model have provided Ryanair with a mostly negative view.

4.2.2 Analysis of Image Repair Strategies

With the above analysis in mind, how has Ryanair tried to change the negative view connected to the perceived image of the airline? As explained in the clarification chapter, Benoit presents image repair strategies that can help a company to address situations in the specific way that is defined by a chosen strategy. This analysis will examine three chosen strategies, which Ryanair has used in three different cases that were presented in the methodology chapter. The objective is to examine which effect the strategies have on the consumers. As stated in the data collection paragraph, the analysis will be based on three cases and the answers from the interviewees chosen for this study. The strategies are normally based on the company's own misconduct but in this thesis, they have been adapted to the current pandemic situation and how Ryanair has responded to different situations connected to it.

4.2.2.1 Case One

As presented in the data collection paragraph, the first case revolves around Ryanair's frustrated with the financial aid in which other airlines have received from its national states and the non-action taken by the EU.

For this case, Ryanair choose to evade responsibility and additionally, apply the strategy of defeasibility. This means that Ryanair choose to present themselves as not having control over the situation and instead shift the blame towards the other airlines. Here, Ryanair cannot control the investments of the other nations and tries to single out themselves in the airline industry as a victim. Something some interviewees found to be unnecessary:

“My initiate thought is that they put themselves in a role as a victim to a great extent” (Appendix 8, 1. 76).

“They are obviously tired of being overlooked and not receiving the aid in the same manner as the other airlines do. So, in this context, role as a victim 100%” (Appendix 9, ll. 98-99).

“They assume a role as a victim, I think. They are like ‘oh, why can’t we have that?’” (Appendix 13, l. 94).

The quotes above underline that Ryanair is playing the victim in this press release, and the quotes indicate a somewhat negative attitude towards Ryanair’s position in the press release as playing the victim role is often perceived to be negatively used. Thereby, it can be argued that the position of Ryanair has not helped on the perceived image of the airline as they use a specific role that the interviewees’ do not find suitable for the interaction with the public. This is underlined by all of the interviewees, who felt that Ryanair had to change the perspective of the press release. Instead, Ryanair should have accepted the situation and focused on how the consumers would be affected as all the interviewees showed sympathy towards Ryanair’s situation but felt that Ryanair choose the wrong position to begin with.

However, some of the interviewees found the position to be more aggressive than it needed to be, when addressing the decision made by the EU:

“... because they try to make it sound like somebody is doing something wrong rather than they are in the worst situation possible. So, they try to be aggressive instead of being defensive ...”

(Appendix 14, ll. 108-109).

“They have really chosen to go into the offensive. I would probably have chosen to be the wondering about how they are allowed to do it given that it is twisting the market. ... I would probably seek the dialog in some way instead of portraying. Because it also portrays Ryanair in a negative light from the view of all of those, who flies with the other airlines. They will probably distance themselves from Ryanair to a greater extent with such a statement” (Appendix 12, ll. 106-109).

Again, the quotes underline the troublesome position of Ryanair in the statement and that the interviewees perceive that Ryanair has made the wrong choice when addressing the public with the decision. The quotes also underline an issue within the organization of the airline as Ryanair choose not to take the opportunity to begin a dialog with the EU-Commission and its fellow airlines. However, it is important to acknowledge that the airline industry is competitive, and the pandemic has not bettered the situation. Therefore, it might explain Ryanair’s decision not to seek the dialog with its fellow airlines. As do one interviewee, who can understand the point of view from Ryanair:

“Well, I actually think that it is a very fair way to position it. And it is obviously clear that they have to protect themselves and the industry they are in” (Appendix 10, ll. 65-66).

In addition, the interviewee is positively surprised by the statement from Ryanair:

“... I think it is formulated okay. In some way, it is not as childish as I would have expected them to come out and... Because I think that I have heard something about their communication and marketing not being that good. So, I am positively surprised” (Appendix 10, ll. 67-69).

With the quote in mind, Ryanair's chosen image repair strategy has succeeded in changing the mind of a consumer as Ryanair shows a different side to them, according to the interviewee. Despite this, the other interviewees' opinion of the statement seems to be more negative. Therefore, Ryanair seems to have chosen the wrong strategy as the interviewees think that the strategy is used to call out the EU-Commission and the other airlines as the 'bad guys' of this case. Furthermore, Ryanair's victimization of themselves were not received well as they do not take into account the difficult situation the pandemic has put every country in and instead focus on receiving a piece of the cake.

With the above quotes in mind, it seems that the interviewees would have preferred a 'mortification' type of statement, where Ryanair accepts the decision of the EU-Commission and to do better and seek the dialog with the fellow airlines. Using this strategy would have helped Ryanair to improve their perceived image in the public as they show to understand the full complexity of the situation.

4.2.2.2 Case Two

As presented in the data collection paragraph, the second case revolves around Ryanair's reply to the accusations from the ITAA about being the reason for the slow refunds of cancelled flights.

In this case, Ryanair has applied to the accusations by using the image repair strategy, denial. To be more specific, Ryanair has used the second type of denial, which means that the airline has chosen to deny their involvement in the issues with the refunds and instead shift all the blame towards, what Ryanair defines as, the 'unauthorised' travel agencies. A strategy that has divided the interviewees, when asked whether it was the most appropriate approach Ryanair has chosen. Three interviewees feel that Ryanair does not take responsibility for their involvement:

"... here you can see that Ryanair completely relinquish all responsibility. I think it is actually a little ridiculous" (Appendix 8, ll. 113-114).

"... because I am not so sure that it is as prejudiced as they might make it appear. So, I would probably say that it seems to be very superficial, and it also seems to be half childish in some way"
(Appendix 9, ll. 121-123).

“Well, they are really quick to push away the responsibility. Like crazy. They are not taking any part of the responsibility at all, where I think that it is a bit over on their shoulders (Appendix 10, ll. 85-86).

While the above quotes indicate that the interviewees have a problem with the image repair strategy used by Ryanair and feel like the airline is neglecting its involvement in the issue, two interviewees are actually understanding and accepting the response from Ryanair:

“Well, I actually think that I can understand them. At least partly” (Appendix 12, l. 117).

“Here, they actually deal with it as what I think... as I talked about last time (fact based). It is exactly it, that they are referring to, you know, if they (consumers) want something then they (Ryanair) can possibly share their customer verification forms. They refer accurately to specific areas, and they emphasize on strong ... arguments...” (Appendix 14, ll. 135-137).

With all of the quotes in mind, it can be difficult to assess whether the used image repair strategy have any influence on the consumers’ perceived image of Ryanair. However, the quotes indicate that the used strategy is wrong for the discussion as it ends up being Ryanair and the ITAA accusing one another of foul play and the uncertainty is something that can be instrumental to how the consumers will perceive the statement. In other words, the uncertainty might make the consumers side with the ITAA as the tainted image of Ryanair will influence their decision to choose. One of the interviews was concerned by the uncertainty on Ryanair’s behalf:

“If it is Ryanair who is lying, then it will be difficult for them to defend it to the consumers, even in the future. Because if something similar happened, then you will have no faith in getting your money back. But if it is the national travel agency who is accusing... without knowing the correct facts... then it looks bad for them (Ryanair)” (Appendix 12, ll. 139-142).

The quote clearly indicates that the interviewee believes that the ITAA has greater trustworthiness about it as it is the national travel agency association of Ireland. By applying the denial strategy, Ryanair might find it difficult to change the perceived image of the airline as they show no indication of taking responsibility for the delays with the refunds. Additionally, the consumers might interpret the statement badly as two of the interviewees point out:

“I will believe that they put some of the blame onto the consumers themselves, in some way, given that they book their flight without thinking and something like that” (Appendix 9, ll. 141-142).

“... I would focus more on this with what the consumers can do to get their money back. ... Well, I think that I would take this fight with the ITAA a little... what can you say ... not public or what to say” (Appendix 13, ll. 133-135)

As the quotes underline, the consumers have become a second fiddle to the ‘fight’ between Ryanair and the ITAA. Instead of being the subject of the ‘fight’, the consumers are blamed for not considering the cost of using a third-party agency, which can have a negative impact on the perceived image of the airline. Considering one of the examples from the previous analysis (Appendix 8, ll. 34-36), it indicates that Ryanair has a tendency of shaming the consumers for making questionable decisions, which can make the consumers question the integrity of Ryanair and thereby, the airline’s image will be subjected for more negativity.

Again, it seems that the interviewees wanted Ryanair to own up to their responsibility and choose the mortification image repair strategy. Considering the above quotes, it can be argued that Ryanair should have to accepted some of the responsibility of the case as it still was the airline’s tickets that were bought. Using this strategy would have helped Ryanair to improve their perceived image in the public as they show to want to help the consumers with the annoying situation with the delayed refunds.

4.2.2.3 Case Three

As presented in the data collection paragraph, the last case revolves around Ryanair's initiative to extend their zero-change fee if flight tickets are bought before 30th June. In this case, Ryanair has applied the image repair strategy, corrective actions. The corrective actions strategy has been used in the sense that it is an initiative taken by Ryanair to accommodate the current situation with the pandemic and the uncertain future for holidays travellers.

Unsurprising, the interviewees are positive towards the initiative from Ryanair as it creates an opportunity that is needed with the current situation in mind.

“Well, my initiate thought is that it is a fine starting point to give your consumers the opportunity of changing their flight tickets if something occurs in regard to Covid-19” (Appendix 8, ll. 139-141).

“I actually like this approach. Especially, that they extend the period where you can alter your flight tickets to another date without surcharge if changes occur in regard to the vaccinations, and what we are currently seeing, vaccines being postponed or withdrawn again” (Appendix 12, ll. 155-157).

“I think that it is a good offer ... Well, they do something for their consumers given that you may not be able to go because you have not been vaccinated yet, and you can then... Well, you can postpone without costing you anything” (Appendix 13, ll. 162-164).

As the quotes indicate, the interviewees are actually very positive as Ryanair has found a way to consider its consumers' need in contrast to the other two cases. Therefore, Ryanair has helped itself as the perceived image would be positively influenced by the concern for the consumers' wish to travel by implementing corrective actions into the airline's communication. Despite this, some of the interviewees raise some concern on the dates and what it might lead to.

“It is a good idea but maybe just a little half ignorant in terms of the Covid situation itself. I feel that nobody knows how the prospects with Covid will be in the future” (Appendix 9, ll. 163-165).

“You could say that even with the implementation of the vaccines now, then 30th of June is still a little early to plan a summer vacation because you don’t know exactly how it (vaccination) will roll out. Maybe you could do it in Denmark, but the problem is that you have no idea how the destinations propound in terms of the vaccinations” (Appendix 14, ll. 183-186).

The above quotes indicate that there is a concern surrounding the bigger picture of the vaccinations rollout and that Ryanair forgets to take the destinations into account. Instead, Ryanair is only focusing on the success of the vaccination rollout in Great Britain. Something that influences the message negatively as it is not certain that all of the mentioned countries are ready for tourists to arrive. Thereby, the corrective actions might be premature and the time to order a vacation has become forced onto the consumers. To elaborate, the time period to order a vacation is not that long and with the short decision time, consumers might feel forced to order their vacation despite the uncertain future with Covid-19. One interviewee expressed her concern regarding consumers feeling forced to book a vacation just to have the flexibility of changing their tickets if something happens:

“They write that you have to have ordered before 30th June. So, its like ‘you have to hurry booking anything if you want this flexibility” (Appendix 8, ll. 141-142)

If the consumers feel like they are being pushed or pressured into booking, it might have a negative influence on the perceived image of the airline. Especially, with the current pandemic in mind, Ryanair has to consider that many of their consumers’ finances have been negatively affected because of the pandemic and do need time to consider the financial part of booking a vacation.

On another note, one interviewee was concerned how the elderly segment was portrayed in the statement:

“... but therefore, I think that if it had been the elderly, whom they focus on and it has to be confusing, then I think it is strange that they call them ‘high-risk elderly group’ in the beginning”
(Appendix 14, ll. 219-221).

The quote indicates that Ryanair could have referred to the elderly segment in a different manner if the goal is to lure them in. But as learned from the corporate identity analysis, Ryanair has no interest in the elderly segment and instead wants younger people and families to book their next vacation at the airline. Thereby, it comes at no surprise that Ryanair uses ‘high-risk elderly group’ when referring to the elderly segment as the airline might accept that the elderly group has a negative perception of the airline’s corporate image.

Despite some negative opinions of the dates and considerations missing in the statement, six of the interviewees (Appendix 8, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14) would not change much about the statement as they feel that Ryanair has included the most important information and has chosen to consider many variables in terms of the Covid-19 situation. The positive perception of the statement can be summed up by a quote by one of the interviewees:

“I actually think that, in terms of what image I normally have of Ryanair, they make it clear that if you book before that date, then you have the opportunity to be flexible or re-book your flight ticket easily. So, I think that they do something different than what they usually do, where there is a lot of hidden fees and terms and so on... but it seems okay offhand” (Appendix 8, ll. 149-153).

The quote underlines the positive view of the statement as everything seems to be presented by Ryanair and the solution is found to be suitable for the current Covid-19 situation. However, the tainted image from before the pandemic still lingers in the consumers’ mind and therefore, it is a shaky acceptance of the corrective actions by Ryanair. But ultimately, it can be argued that Ryanair has chosen the right image repair strategy for the situation, which will be important to change the tainted image of the airline. Especially, considering that many have missed being on vacations, so the time for Ryanair to implement positive strategies is now.

4.2.3 Summary

To sum up, the two first cases were negatively received by the interviewees as they felt like Ryanair had chosen the wrong position and image repair strategy for the cases. According to the interviewees, Ryanair quickly victimized themselves in both of the cases, which was not perceived to be a good choice. In the first case, the problem was that Ryanair failed to understand the bigger picture and instead act childish as the airline was not given the same financial support as the other countries. Thereby, the interviewees perceived the chosen image repair strategy as wrong for the case and instead the interviewees indicated that the image repair strategy, mortification, would have been better for the situation.

In the second case, the problem was that Ryanair failed to accept its responsibility in the case with the delayed refunds. Instead, Ryanair choose to make use of the image repair strategy, denial, which the interviewees thought to be totally misplaced as Ryanair has a responsibility towards the consumers and in some way, entangled with the ‘unauthorized’ travel agencies. The tainted image before the pandemic also played a part, as the interviewees found it difficult to distinct who was right and wrong. The interviewees were certain that Ryanair had a responsibility in terms of the delayed refunds despite Ryanair arguing that the airline was at no fault. Therefore, the interviews, again, indicated that Ryanair should have applied the image repair strategy, mortification, as it was more suitable than just pointing fingers at the accuser. Thereby, Ryanair’s chosen image repair strategy failed to change the perceived image of the airline and instead the chosen strategy has a negative impact on the airline’s image.

In the third case, Ryanair chosen image repair strategy, corrective actions, was positively received by the interviewees as they find the initiative by Ryanair to be suitable for the Covid-19 situation and the vaccination rollout. However, some of the interviewees found it to be a bit ignorant to think that every country will be finished with the vaccination rollout at the same time and that means that some destinations might not be ready or safe to travel to over the summer. Despite this, almost all of the interviewees would not change much about the statement as it includes all necessary information and take many variables, such as the vaccines, into account. Thereby, Ryanair’s chosen image repair strategy had a positive effect on the tainted corporate image.

5. Conclusion

Applying the Brand Identity Prism, the corporate identity analysis showed that Ryanair's corporate identity is structured on the foundation of the six aspects. First, the physical trait of the airline has not changed during the pandemic as the product is still the airplanes themselves and the adventures connected to the consumers' vacation. The physique aspect of Ryanair's corporate identity is not perceived from a negative point of view by the consumers. Therefore, Ryanair has not succeeded in making the consumers accept the physical trait of the airline's corporate identity. The second aspect, personality, has suffered the same fate as the consumers do not perceive the personality traits of customer care, punctuality, and environment to be connected with the corporate identity of Ryanair. Thereby, it causes the perceived image to be negatively perceived by the consumers as their experiences with especially the customer care services provided by Ryanair have been faulty. However, it is primarily the customer care and punctuality in which Ryanair is perceived badly as the negative perception of the environmental values of the airline is not isolated to only Ryanair but instead the whole airline industry. The third aspect, self-image, is actually on point regarding Ryanair's perception of its consumers' self-image. Primarily because the consumers want to experience new cultures and adventures but wish to spend as little money as possible on the actual flights from A to B. Thereby, Ryanair's low-fare structure and many different destinations included in the airline's flight schedules. This is important to Ryanair's perceived image as an alignment between the corporate identity's self-image and the consumers' self-image can become vital to influence the perceived image in a positive way and change the tainted image from before the pandemic. As stated, the fourth aspect, reflection, is not influential on the perceived image as it is Ryanair's own reflection of the airline's actual consumers, who is most likely to be financial considering consumers that want to spend little on the flight and more on the destination. Furthermore, it is most likely to be families as they want to spend money on experiences at the destinations for the children to explore. The fifth aspect, relationship, is problematic for Ryanair as the consumers' experiences and ethical concerns make it difficult for Ryanair to be considered reliable in a sense. Ryanair tried to involve its consumers through the use of images from consumers on the airline's social media but with the consumers' feelings towards Ryanair, in terms of unreliability and morally wrong, it will be difficult for Ryanair to establish a good relationship with its consumers. And that will have a negative influence on the perceived image and not improve the tainted image. The last aspect, culture, is not as conclusive as the other aspects as the culture seems to have little meaning for the consumers and instead it is about

the quality and services from the airlines. Ryanair's culture is very based on the Irish culture and fundamentals in the sense that Ryanair's business structure is based on those of Ireland.

With all this in mind, the misalignment between Ryanair's culture and the perceived image is at a high note as the consumers' have a different perception of Ryanair in three of the six aspects. Furthermore, the cultural aspect does not have much affect on the consumers as quality and services are more important to them. Thereby, the misalignment between Ryanair's culture and the perceived image of the airline has not improved during the pandemic.

Based on the findings from analysis of the vision-culture gap between Ryanair and its employees, it can be concluded that Ryanair has failed to change the management culture and not create a common tread between the upper management and the crew members. An issue that was commonly known before the pandemic, as stated in the negative mentions paragraph, and has caused Ryanair to have its tainted image. Failing to address the issue, Ryanair has dropped an opportunity to change the vision-culture gap and instead, the misalignment between the two still exist, which ultimately continues to have a negative effect on the perceived image of Ryanair.

Based on the findings from the analysis from image-vision analysis, Ryanair has failed to fully listen to its consumers and other stakeholders. Firstly, they ignore the concerns raised by the consumers of the company regarding the 'Jab & Go' commercial and instead presents a press release that includes similar semiotics. Secondly, Ryanair fails to accept that many consumers is unhappy with the services provided from the airline during the pandemic and instead, Ryanair simply denies a survey that involves many of former and current consumers. This broadens the misalignment between the perceived image of Ryanair and the airline's vision, and thereby, influences the perceived image in a negative way.

Based the analyses, Ryanair has not changed their perceived image from before the pandemic. Instead, it can be argued that Ryanair has worsened the situation and its image as not many improvements have been made. However, it is to be considered whether Ryanair has chosen the right image repair strategies, when communicating with the public.

Looking at the analysis of the three cases, Ryanair's used image repair strategies have not been used very well and it can be concluded that the consumers are not impressed with Ryanair's choices. For the first case, Ryanair used the image repair strategy, evade responsibility, which the consumers found to be wrongful as Ryanair did not consider the bigger picture in terms of the Covid-19 situation. The

second case, Ryanair made use of the image repair strategy, denial, which the consumers found to be wrongful in the sense that the consumers felt that Ryanair failed in taking responsibility for their involvement with the case of delayed refunds. However, the last case, where Ryanair extended the zero-change fee date, the consumers actually were satisfied with the statement and the chosen image repair strategy, corrective actions.

Based on the findings from this analysis, it can be concluded that Ryanair has failed to use the correct image repair strategies to improve the perceived image of the airline as Ryanair failed to take other countries' issues into account and only focus on itself in the first case. In the second case, the responsibility could be shared between Ryanair and the travel agencies, and Ryanair should have focused on the consumers' problems. Instead, Ryanair chose to deny any involvement in the delayed refunds issue. Despite the last case mainly being perceived positively, the image-vision gap analysis showed that many consumers found Ryanair's communication about the vaccination rollout and vacations to be unnecessary and harmful, which also resulted in the 'Jab & Go' commercial to be banned. Therefore, it can be concluded that Ryanair has failed to make a positive impact on the airline's image during the pandemic and instead, it can be argued that Ryanair has widened the gap between Ryanair's corporate identity and the perceived corporate image. The reason might be found in the many 'noises' in which Ryanair's identity persists. To elaborate, Ryanair's corporate identity is likely to be affected by the second type of noise, which Kapferer explains to emerge when a company is obsessed with becoming too appealing to the public. In Ryanair's case, trying to victimize the airline in the first case, brushing all responsibility aside with the refunds delay, and ultimately trying to initiate a corrective action despite the uncertainty of the vaccine rollout, has led Ryanair to use strategies that are chosen to make the airline more appealing to the public. In other words, Ryanair has tried to establish a positive image with no wrong doings and great initiatives just to appease the public, which has created an opportunistic image of Ryanair that is negatively perceived by the consumers. Thereby, Ryanair has failed to create an alignment between its corporate identity and the consumers' perceived image of the airline as the chosen strategies are perceived as somewhat meaningless cosmetic camouflage.

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