



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

# The Role of Customer Magazines

**Customers' perceptions of the Volvo Trucks  
Customer Magazine**

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**Bachelor of Science Thesis in Media and Communications  
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## Abstract

**Title** The Role of Customer Magazines - Customers' perceptions of the Volvo Trucks Customer Magazine

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**Course** Bachelor thesis in Media and Communication studies

**Semester** Spring semester 2010

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**Aim** The purpose of this study is to investigate how the readers perceive the Volvo Trucks customer magazine, and if these perceptions correspond with the magazine objectives

**Method** Qualitative interviews

**Material** Four conducted telephone interviews with customers from South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Argentina

**Main results** The main results of this research study show that the general perception of the customer magazine is positive, and that the image of Volvo Trucks as a technically driven company should be further emphasized throughout the magazine. Furthermore, the consensus among the respondents indicates that the interpretation and perception of the magazine is primarily derived from the respondents' professional job role, rather than being influenced by individual or cultural norms and values.

**Conclusions** Publishing customer magazines has been a way for Volvo Trucks to establish and obtain fruitful and strong relationships with their customers, but how the magazine is perceived by the readers has up until today been unknown to the organization. Gaining knowledge of the role the customer magazines play as an information source, providing advice and entertainment, is of great significance to Volvo Trucks in their ongoing efforts to develop constructive communication strategies.

Acknowledging the outcome of this research, Volvo Trucks will have a better understanding of how to create content and messages that correlate with the preferences of the intended target groups. Managing this, would consequently strengthen the relationship between Volvo Trucks and their customers, ultimately resulting in achieving the overall customer magazine purpose of reinforcing the brand and supporting the business of Volvo Trucks.

## Executive summary

The customer magazines from Volvo Trucks should be permeated by technology.

There is a consensus among the respondents that Volvo Trucks, which are highly associated with research and technology, should put even more emphasis on these company characteristics in their customer magazines. The undivided perceptions regarding the focus of the magazine, suggests that the influence of work and job role is superior to cultural and individual norms and standards, when interpreting and comprehending the customer magazine. These findings are particularly interesting as the respondents originate from three culturally and socially diverse markets.

Communication is an essential tool for organizations when differentiating themselves from competitors, aiming for a higher market share, and, not least when trying to build strong customer relations. Conveying the right message to the right target group is fundamental for succeeding with the organizational communication efforts, but is however not easily done. In 2007, Volvo Trucks, International Division, launched a new customer magazine concept to create a common base for the magazine as a communication channel on all of the customer magazine markets. By doing that, the magazine is a way for Volvo Trucks to establish and obtain fruitful and strong relationships with their customers, but how the readers actually perceive the magazine has up until today been unknown to the organization. As the magazine is the only frequent communication channel to the company's customers, this knowledge is vital. Furthermore, if unaware of the customers' opinions and attitudes towards the magazine, the organization cannot establish whether or not the magazine is filling its explicit purpose to reinforce the brand and support the business of Volvo Trucks.

To review the customers' opinions about the magazine, this study has been conducted with the purpose to investigate how the readers perceive the Volvo Trucks customer magazine, and if these perceptions correspond with the magazine objectives. The research has been conducted through four qualitative interviews on the three diverse markets of Argentina, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

The main results disclose that the general perception of the customer magazine is positive, and that the image of Volvo Trucks as a technically driven company should be further emphasized throughout the magazine. Furthermore, the consensus among the respondents indicates that the interpretation and perception of the magazine is primarily derived from the respondents' profession, rather than being influenced by individual or cultural norms and values.

The knowledge of the magazine as being a source of information to the customers, providing practical advice and entertainment, is significant to Volvo Trucks in their ongoing efforts to develop constructive communication strategies. By acknowledging the outcome of this paper, they will gain a better understanding of how to create content and messages, which correspond with the preferences of the particular target groups. By managing this, they would consequently strengthen the relationship between the organization and its customers, which ultimately may result in attaining the overall customer magazine purpose of reinforcing the brand and supporting the business of Volvo Trucks.

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# 1. Introduction

*In this introductory chapter, I will explain the background of this thesis as well as the background of the Volvo Trucks International Division customer magazine project. There will also be an outline of the purpose of this paper and the research problem. Furthermore, I will also present the delimitations of the study and other prerequisites given to conduct this report (Volvo Trucks International Division will henceforth be referred to as Volvo Trucks ID or Volvo).*

As a means to establishing and obtaining customer relations - as well as serving the purpose of brand building, the International Division of Volvo Trucks publish customer magazines on seven of their international markets. However, as the magazine has not yet been evaluated on these markets, the customers' opinion of it is still unknown. Neither do Volvo know its' function as a relationship-building communication channel, or whether or not the customer magazine is serving its purpose. Gaining knowledge of the role the customer magazines play as a communication channel, and a relationship-building instrument, is of great significance to Volvo Trucks in their ongoing efforts to develop productive communication strategies. The assignment I have been given is therefore to investigate the role of the customer magazine as seen from a reader's perspective. This paper aims at investigating how the customer magazine is perceived by the readers, and how these perceptions correspond to the established customer magazine objectives.

## 1.1 Background of the customer magazine

Volvo Trucks ID is a division within the business area of Volvo Trucks and a part of the Volvo Group. The ID head office in Gothenburg support the market companies in South America, Northern Africa –Middle East, Southern Africa and Australia-Pacific (see appendix 1).

In 2007, a decision was taken by the Volvo Trucks ID management to renew the structure of the customer magazines, with the purpose of finding a common view of

the magazine's role in the marketing communication mix on the different markets<sup>1</sup>. Previously, customer magazines were developed and produced independently on the different markets, consequently resulting in large inconsistency and discordance.

The new concept was developed in cooperation with the concerned markets to create a shared basis for the customer magazine as a homogeneous communication channel, with a distinct profile with regard to both content and design.

The main purpose of the customer magazine is to *reinforce the brand and support the business of Volvo Trucks* (customer magazine guidelines). In order to achieve this, the following five objectives have been framed:

- The magazine should be perceived as added value and strengthen the relationship between Volvo Trucks and the customers
- The magazine should communicate Volvo's core values: quality, safety and environmental care
- The magazine should stress Volvo's Scandinavian heritage
- The magazine should show how having Volvo as a partner can improve the customers' business
- The magazine should inform about and inspire to purchase Volvo products and services

These five objectives are fundamental in this research study, and will subsequently be part of the determined research questions.

Today the customer magazine is published on seven of the ID markets in five different languages (See Table 1.1).

### **The magazine concept**

The editorial platform of the magazine consists of a mixture of common and local pages, which together compose the structure of the content. In order to give the magazine a distinct profile, a consistent rhythm and balance is needed. A number of recurrent modules are therefore developed to gain continuity throughout the magazine.

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<sup>1</sup> Markets here defined as the markets which receive the customer magazine: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Morocco, Peru, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

Some of these recurring modules are based upon common pages, which are produced centrally by the Volvo Trucks head office, and have the similar content in all magazines in the same edition, independent of market. The rest of the content is made locally on each of the different markets that are utilizing the customer magazine concept.

The customer magazine concept consists of a large, medium or small concept, where the large concept material is produced 50% centrally and 50% locally, the medium concept contains 70% centrally and 30% locally made material, and the small concept consist of 90% centrally and 10% locally produced material (See Table 1.1).

Today, Australia, Brazil, South Africa and Peru have the large magazine concept, Argentina and Morocco the medium one, and Saudi Arabia has the small concept. In Peru and Argentina, the language of the magazine is Spanish, in Morocco French, in Brazil Portuguese, and in Australia and South Africa English. In Saudi Arabia the magazine is produced in one English and one Arabic version (See Table 1.1).

<b>Market</b>	<b>Concept/Pages</b>	<b>Central/Local</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Title</b>
Australia	Large 36	50 / 50	English	Road talk
Argentina	Medium 24	70 / 30	Spanish	Yo ruedo
Brazil	Large 36	50 / 50	Portuguese	Eu rodo
Peru	Large 36	50 / 50	Spanish	Yo ruedo
Morocco	Medium 24	70 / 30	French	Volvo Moroc
Saudi Arabia	Small 20	90 / 10	Arabic/English	Volvo Trucks World
South Africa	Large 36	50 / 50	English	Volvo News

**Table 1.1** Customer magazines, concept and language matrix

## **Target groups**

The primary target groups of the magazine are the following: truck owners, fleet owners, owner operators, truck drivers and prospects (C M guidelines). These are the groups, towards which the content is aimed at and intended for.

However, the customer magazine is not the only media directed to these groups, it has to compete for the readers' valuable time, and fight for the attention among all other media that, on a daily basis revolve around these customers. In order to convince the customers that the magazine is worth reading at all, it must reward them by containing some particular benefits that are perceived as valuable for the recipient. To do so, the rewards of usefulness, entertainment and identification should be offered and hopefully recognized by the customer throughout the magazine (C M guidelines).

If the magazine is perceived to be useful to the customer, it is believed to have created an important incentive for continuous reading. Being entertaining is a prerequisite for the willingness of even reading the magazine – stories must therefore be appealing. By letting the target groups themselves be visible, for instance through representation in articles and stories, the readers should experience some kind of identification with the scope, which possibly could create a feeling of belonging and VIP-club (C M guidelines).

## **Distribution**

The responsibility of printing and distributing the customer magazines lies solely on each of the different Volvo Trucks markets, hence, information regarding the distribution channels and actual receivers of the magazine is unknown to the central organization of Volvo Trucks in Gothenburg.

Some of the Volvo Trucks market companies have different structures depending on the integration of other Volvo Group companies in the particular market, such as Volvo Buses, Volvo Construction Equipment and Volvo Penta. For the markets, there is a possibility to include stories, offers and content concerning these companies in the magazine as well, as some target group readers –even if rather exceptional - may be existing customers to other Volvo companies as well. It is, however, desired from a Volvo Trucks head office perspective to tailor-make the communication to the clearly defined vehicle target groups mentioned above. However, In case of adding extra

material from other Volvo companies, this will be done locally, as only the common pages of the magazine are provided by the central organization.

## 1.2 Purpose and research questions

*The purpose of this study is to investigate how the readers perceive the Volvo Trucks customer magazine, and if these perceptions correspond with the magazine objectives*

The following research questions aim to answer the above stated purpose:

1. What are the readers' opinions and attitudes about the magazine?
2. How is the magazine perceived in terms of being valuable to them and their business?
3. How is the magazine perceived in terms of communicating Volvo's core values of quality, safety and environmental care?
4. How is the magazine perceived in terms of showing Volvo's Scandinavian heritage?
5. How is the magazine perceived in terms of showing how having Volvo as a partner can improve their business?
6. How is the magazine perceived in terms of informing about, and inspiring to purchase Volvo products and services?

## 1.3 Research problem definition

In today's organizations, communication is not only a means to inform and retain customer contacts –it also plays a vital role in reaching the overall business objectives (Heide, Johansson, Simonsson 2005:17). The increasing need of coordination and managing relations between the organization, its stakeholders and society, have led to a renewed understanding of communication. Using integrated communication is a way of creating and building a strong corporate identity, conveying homogeneous messages and differentiating the organization from its competitors, thereby getting a

competitive advantage (Cornelissen 2008:29; Heide et al 2005:181; Kotler et al 2005:727).

The recent years of great technological progress in society have created new opportunities for organizations to utilize communication in their everyday contact with employees, customers and other stakeholders, as well as for long-term strategic purposes. In a time when competition for existing and potential customers is becoming tougher, it also becomes highly important to convey the right message, at the right time, and to the right target group (Alessandri 2008:56; Melewar 2008:4).

Establishing and obtaining a close relationship to one's customers can be conducted in numerous ways, whereby publishing customer magazines, is one way of forming these connections. However, simply publishing and distributing the magazine do not guarantee that the receivers perceive it as valuable or relationship building. As the magazines have never been evaluated on the ID markets, the customers' opinions and perceptions regarding the magazine are unknown to Volvo today. The lack of knowledge regarding the output of the magazine also result in uncertainty concerning whether or not the objectives of the magazine are achieved. Additionally, the customers' opinions of the magazine will be important, as the central organization of Volvo Trucks ID is considering launching the customer magazine online.

By investigating the customers' opinions and perceptions regarding the magazine, Volvo will not only receive valuable information and knowledge about the readers' viewpoint on the magazine itself, but also gain awareness of the correspondence between the customers' experiences and the magazine's overall objectives. By achieving the overall objectives, the magazine's main purpose of *reinforcing the brand and supporting the business of Volvo Trucks* would be fulfilled (C M guidelines).

From an academic research perspective, the relation between sender and receiver is fundamental in all mediated relationships, and it is essential to understand what determines a specific media behavior. The creation of meaning is "*never fixed or predictable*" (McQuail 1997:19), nevertheless, is the understanding of how messages are being interpreted crucial, when it comes to examining and understanding the audience's perception of a particular media and its value.

Using customer magazines as an instrument to build relations with the organization's customers necessitates that the readers' perceive the magazine as intended and desired by the company. The individual behavior towards seeking and processing information is crucial to this research study, as the level of problem recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement are vital aspects of the readers' perception of the customer magazine (Grunig and Hunt 1984:149).

In addition to establishing the aspects of seeking and processing information, the dimension of how audiences make media selections are highly important, when aiming at understanding how to create a bond with the recipient and how to attain reader loyalty. Investigating the degree of interaction, correlated with perceived degree of identification, are the two most important factors to consider when it comes to audiences making media choices (McQuail 1997:120). Additionally, McQuail suggests the following aspects of: normative ties to media, social milieu and rational consumer behavior, to be reviewed, when examining the audiences' choice of media and evaluation of the same.

There has been little found within the research field of customer magazines, and their function as an instrument in building fruitful customer relationships. In this research study, the readers' opinions and perceptions of the Volvo Trucks ID customer magazine will be investigated, as well as an attempt to correlate the perceptions with the established magazine objectives.

#### 1.4 Delimitations

As stated before, the aim of this paper is to *investigate if the readers' perceptions of the customer magazine correspond with the magazine objectives*. The investigation's limitation to the selected customers' thoughts, opinions and attitudes, will be the main scope of the interviews. Hence, the results are not intended to be used for generalization purposes.

Furthermore, this study will only investigate the common pages of the magazine, not the local pages, as these are produced by the different markets, and thereby, are not generic.

This study does not aim at mapping out the distribution of the customer magazine or the local production. There may be differences in production and distribution routines, as well as to whom the magazine is addressed to.

The limitations of the theories selected may contribute to the fact that some aspects of this scope have not been covered. However, various fields of research have been included to substantiate the complexity of this research problem and the various elements that needs to be considered.

The seven weeks of allocated time for this research study has limited the selection of method choice, as well as the number of interviews conducted. These limitations will be further discussed in chapter 3 (Method).

## 2. Theory

*The theoretical platform in this paper is based on various fields of research within the areas of communications, audience research, reader value, corporate identity, brand and cross-cultural communication. These are all aspects I find to be crucial when examining the sender – receiver relationship in terms of the readers' perception of the customer magazine, and to what extent their experiences correlate to the established objectives of the customer magazine.*

*The outline of this theoretical chapter will consist of separate categories, where theories, relevant to the respective heading, will be considered and discussed. Nevertheless, some of the subject matters are closely related to each other and will therefore be incorporated accordingly when appropriate. Due to the fundamental aspect of cross-cultural communications in this research study, it will not be handled under a separate heading; thus, it is integrated with the respective subjects accordingly. The chapter will end with a summary of the main theoretical aspects, which are found to be of importance to this study.*

### 2.1 Function, pattern, shape & content

Irrespective of communication purpose, it is crucial to understand how the function, pattern, shape and content of the communication will have an impact on the messages that are sent and received (Svensson 1988:24). Establishing this, it is equally important to realize that these elements are in no way excluding, but rather deeply interconnected, and they have a large impact on one another. The composition of function, pattern, shape and content can be described as the instrument used to fill the gap between sender and receiver.

#### **Function**

On a personal level, the function of the communication may be of social, expressive or amusement character, whereas, when it comes to organizational communication, the functions of information, influence and control are of greater significance (Svensson 1988:25). As one of the objectives of the customer magazine is that it should be perceived as added value and relationship building (C M guidelines) it

evidently emphasizes the aspects of having an informative or/and influential function rather than being of a controlling nature.

### **Pattern**

As for the pattern, the vertical or horizontal relationship and hierarchy between the sender and receiver affects the direction of the communication in terms of who is taking initiative, informs and sets the agenda (Svensson 1988:26; van Ruler 2004:126) The relationship between Volvo Trucks and the customers is by definition asymmetrical<sup>2</sup> when it comes to the customer magazines. As Volvo Trucks, being the sender and the customer being the receiver, the direction of the communication is vertical, and hence, asymmetrical (van Ruler 2004:126). On a more profound level, McQuail states that the distance between participants in a communication process<sup>3</sup> is inevitable, and this gap between sender and receiver needs to be bridged if the communication should continue being meaningful, effective and satisfying. Ultimately, these common understandings will become the terms and conditions, on which the sender and receiver will communicate with each other (McQuail 1997:109). In this case, the conditions for the customer magazine as a communication channel have been established by both Volvo Trucks and its customers, regarding not only pattern and function, but also shape and content.

### **Shape**

The shape of the communication has up until recently often been referred to dichotomies such as: oral – written, verbal- non-verbal et cetera. These polarities could be useful when it comes to defining how the features of the communication are determined by the communication prerequisites at hand (Svensson 1988:24). However, as technological progress has contributed to an extensive change when it comes to the prerequisites for communication, it has also come to change the shape of the communication –today it is hard to define a mobile phone as being just a phone

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<sup>2</sup> Asymmetrical communication can be defined as “something organizations do to, rather than with, people” [...] “Symmetrical communication means that each participant in the communication process is equally able to influence the other” (van Ruler 2004:126).

<sup>3</sup> All factors contributing to the act of communication. A non static process (Dimbleby and Burton 1999:284).

for calling purposes. Organizations such as Volvo Trucks, as being significantly affected by these technological progressions, are developing new strategies to meet up to their stakeholders. In the efforts of establishing and obtaining successful customer relations, Volvo Trucks ID is considering launching the customer magazine online in order to get closer to the customers. As the shapes of communication have come to change, so have the functions, patterns and not least, the contents of it.

## **Content**

The content of communication is not only what is said or done explicitly, but also what is *not* explicitly said or done. The implicit meanings are always interpreted subjectively, as receivers have different frames of reference, which they use when decoding the meaning of a message (McQuail 1997:101; Svensson 1988:27). The communication process is a complex procedure, which contains several steps that can affect the expected outcome of the process (Usunier 1993:104ff; Cateora and Graham 2007:479). The most critical step when it comes to cross-cultural communication is that the message is encoded in one culture with its' cultural symbolism, and then decoded by the receiver with their cultural interpretation of the message. Different cultural contexts will increase the probability of misinterpretation (Cateora and Graham 2007:480ff). The aspects of cultural differences and cultural influences on interpretation are crucial when it comes to investigating the readers' perception of the customer magazine. The target groups of the customer magazines on the ID markets are by definition a diverse audience, which will receive and interpret the magazine content based on their own frames of reference, which in turn are derived from individual experiences, values and cultural aspects (Heide et al 2005:36). Additionally, the cultural dimension will be particularly vital as the scope of this research will be limited to the perceptions of the common pages of the customer magazine, which are centrally produced in Sweden for all customer magazine markets.

The awareness of the above mentioned factors may be of particular importance in a time when the number of communications channels has rapidly increased over the last decade.

## 2.2 Identity, image and brand

### **Identity**

Communication is a prerequisite for organizations existence (Heide et al 2005:17), however, an organization carries by definition a complexity and ambiguity which makes it difficult to interpret as well as lead (Bolman & Deal 2005:68). The societal changes and the emergence of globalization have contributed to an increasingly complex environment in which organizations must compete and act (Dibb & Simoe 2008:67). Additionally, as products and services have become more and more standardized, organizations such as Volvo Trucks, needs new approaches to distinguish themselves from its competition (Kotler, Wong, Saunders, Armstrong 2005:549; Melewar & Vella 2008:04). This is not least of importance as stakeholders have become more interested in who is behind the product or service, which they purchase (Dibb & Simoe 2008:67).

With a distinct identity, the organization has the opportunity, not only to differentiate itself from competitors and gain a sustainable competitive advantage, but also to convey distinct messages to its stakeholders and society (Alessandri 2008:56; Dibb & Simoe 2008:67).

Corporate identity was originally defined as, and referred to, merely as the visual representation of the organization (Stuart and Kerr 1999:169). Today, there are numerous definitions of the concept of corporate identity, Melewar and Vella presents some of the established definition such as *“the set of meanings by which a company allows itself to be known and through which it allows people to describe, remember and relate to it”* (Melewar 2008:9 referring to Topalian), or *“the ways a company chooses to identify itself to all its publics”* (Melewar 2008:9 referring to Zinkhan, as cited in Simoes). Heide et al argues that the definition of corporate identity resembles the English definition of profile, where the organization presents itself through the visual means of design, corporate symbols and logotypes (Heide et al 2005:174). Melewar and Vella in turn, asserts that the corporate identity has a more profound dimension, and argues that the corporate identity is closely related to the products and services the organization supplies, as well as to the formal and informal communications of the company. Furthermore, they mention that employee and managerial competence and commitment also have an impact on the corporate

identity. They conclude, “*Corporate identity is about how an organization presents, positions and differentiate itself visually and verbally at corporate, business and product levels*” (Melewar & Vella 2008:9).

The function of corporate identity can be described as a channel, where the organizations’ distinct features are presented to its stakeholders, consequently serving the purpose of differentiating the organization from its competition. As the corporate identity is transmitted externally, the stakeholders create images of the organization, which in turn will form the basis for the organization’s reputation (Melewar & Vella 2008:11).

### **Image**

Just as the definition of corporate identity is ambiguous, the discourse among researchers regarding the conception of image is highly debated (Heide et al 2005:175; Melewar 2008:119).

According to Melewar, “*image refers to how stakeholders perceive and interpret the ways in which an organization manifests itself. It relates to the experiences, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, associations and impressions that each stakeholder has about an organization*” (Melewar 2008:11). In contrast to corporate identity, image lies in the eye of the beholder; however, identity is the foundation on which the corporate image is built upon (Melewar 2008:11).

Heide et al claims, that the definition of image presupposes a certain distance between the stakeholder and the organization, and the more personal experiences a stakeholder have, the less they will have an image of the organization. Hence, stakeholders without any personal experience of an organization are more likely to have images of a company that corresponds with the company’s profile (i.e. corporate identity, author’s note) (Heide et al 2005:175). When it comes to stakeholders who have a personal experience of a company, they, according to Heide et al, have a more profound perception of the organization, and by that, one should talk about corporate reputation rather than the more vague conception of image (Heide et al 2005:175). Applying this reasoning on the research of this study, the customers who do not have a close connection to Volvo Trucks would be more likely to have an image of the company that corresponds to the corporate identity, than the customers who have

personal experiences of the organization. Hence, these perceptions regarding the company's image or reputation may consequently be derived from the customers' perception of the customer magazine.

The relationship between image and reputation is also discussed by Melewar and Vella, who do not talk of an presupposed distance, however, argues that the dimension of corporate reputation is a result of stakeholders' long-term observations and experiences of an organization, and by that is more deeply rooted than an image, which easily can be changed (Melewar and Vella 2008:13).

As everything an organization does will consequently communicate the corporate identity, the aim of managing corporate identity is to get a favorable image among the stakeholders to gain a good reputation and get a favorable position in the minds of the stakeholders (Melewar and Vella 2008:11). Being a communication channel, the customer magazine transmits the corporate identity of Volvo Trucks to its readers accordingly. Hence, investigating the readers' perception of the customer magazine may be derived from the dimensions of image, reputation and position of Volvo Trucks in the minds of the customers.

## **Brand**

According to Balmer, there is a misconception that corporate brand and identity are synonyms for each other, which he falsifies, by claiming that the identity definitions can be applicable to any type of organization, whereas the definition of brand requires a corporate brand, which not all organizations have (Balmer 2008:45).

The connection between brand and corporate identity can be described as [...] *“corporate identity provides the platform upon which a corporate brand emerge“* [...] (Balmer 2008:44). He further states, that the corporate brand is a distillation of the *“core corporate identity values”* (Balmer 2008:45).

Another aspect on the definition of brand is what type of research field that is applied. According to de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, the brand play different roles depending on the area of business in which it is utilized (economy, strategy, marketing et cetera), hence, the meaning of it is closely correlated with its particular purpose (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1998:87). This may suggest an ambiguity when it comes to the communication aspect, which de Chernatony and

Dall’Olmo Riley recommend is attended to by creating different types of communication programmes. This, in turn requires correctly specified definitions and expectations on the role of the brand, for the possibility to communicate it effectively (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley (1998:87).

As it is getting harder to differentiate a company by its products and services, additional features are created to offer customers and prospect a clear image of what can be expected (Kotler et al 2005:549). The main purpose of branding is to create an advantage by adding value to the company’s core products or services which ultimately would be perceived as beneficial in the eye of the customer (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley 1998:90; Kotler et al 2005:549).

From the customers’ perspective, the brand is used as orientation, “*differentiating competitive offerings, facilitating choice and reducing risk*” (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley 1998:88). If serving the purpose of reinforcing the Volvo Truck brand, the brand must be perceived as clear and distinct in the magazine, in order to assist the orientation for the customers. Hence, the magazine is an operative instrument in clearly communicating the Volvo brand and achieving the overall objective accordingly.

Another valid aspect of the brand is the role it plays as meaning makers in the consumers’ mind, and as a marker for social position. What a person buys or consumes is in many ways an act of deliberately taking stand, which expresses a particular style, group belonging or wealth (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley 1998:91; Kotler et al 2005:256). Hence, succeeding in branding may give the customer associations, which correspond with the attitude and visual statement the customer want to express.

### **Integrated marketing communication**

Integrated communication is the coordination of all marketing, sales and communication efforts (Kotler et al 2005:727). This approach not only facilitates the task of meeting the different market prerequisites, but also helps conveying homogeneous messages (Heide et al 2005:181).

By using an integrated marketing communication (IMC) approach, distinct messages are sent to the market through a variety of separate communication channels, which

will make a larger impact on the stakeholders and add value to their image of the organization. Although, it is argued that the audience tends to view the organizations communicative approaches as one flow rather than as several mediated channels (Alessandri 2008:58; Stuart and Kerr 1999:171). As organizations are becoming more aware of the benefits of using integrated (marketing) communication as a part of their communication strategy, many types of media has become traditionally used as a channel for this purpose, for example: signs, clothing, stationary, websites and event and sponsoring (Alessandri 2008:59). Integrated market communication is best achieved when it is built upon the features of the corporate identity (Stuart and Kerr 1999:171). Using an integrated communication strategy (corporate communications), Volvo Trucks aim at conveying uniform brand messages throughout all their channels, the customer magazine being one of them. How the brand is perceived in this particular media lies however in the minds of the readers.

To be able to implement all communication strategies made by the organization, it is crucial to have a clearly defined positioning and organizational identity to communicate about (Cornelissen 2008:29). In the organization of Volvo Trucks ID, seven different markets are receiving the customer magazine, all of which have very different market conditions and prerequisites that needs to be taken into consideration. These diverse prerequisites, however, necessitates even more distinct communication efforts, in order to establish a solid reputation through the communication of core values and brand identity.

### 2.3 Creating value

Delivering superior value to customers is essential in today's business as a satisfied customer in turn will lead to customer loyalty, giving a strong competitive advantage, and, ultimately resulting in a higher market share (Ulaga and Chacour 2001:526).

Identifying and managing the value creations of a company such as Volvo Trucks, is for this reason utterly important.

## Defining value

Ulaga and Chacour states, that the most important area when it comes to the concept of value, is the one of industrial business relationships, where research has experienced a shift of paradigm –from transactional marketing<sup>4</sup> to relationship marketing– hence, the significance of the value concept has increased accordingly (Ulaga and Chacour 2001:526). *“In fact, delivering superior value to customers is a key to creating and sustaining long-term industrial relationships”* (Ulaga and Chacour 2001:526).

The authors further argues, that value can be created within three different fields: value through supplier relationships, value through partner alliances, and value through relationships with customers (Ulaga and Chacour 2001:526). Applying their reasoning on this study, the magazine objectives of being perceived to add value, strengthening the relationship, and showing how Volvo as a partner can improve the customer’s business, can be derived from the ideas of relationship marketing.

The magazine is an organizational attempt from Volvo Trucks to create value for the company’s customers, leading to customer loyalty and eventually a higher market share.

The discourse of the concept of value is extensive, however, Ulaga identifies four frequently mentioned aspects, which can be identified as central characteristics:

*“(1) Customer value is a subjective concept, (2) it is conceptualized as a trade-off between benefits and sacrifices, (3) benefits and sacrifices can be multifaceted and (4) value perceptions are relative to competition”* (Ulaga 2003:678).

The conception that value exchange is based on the transaction of benefits and sacrifices is also stated by Lapierre, who further adds the social dimension of value as being equally important as the company’s economical and technical objectives, when it comes to creating value for the customers (Lapierre 1997:392).

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<sup>4</sup> Transactional marketing focuses on profitable transactions between buyers and sellers in an open market, where the communication is directed from firm to market. Relationship marketing is defined as emphasizing the creation of strong, value-laden relationships with customers and other stakeholders (Kotler 2005:746ff).



comes to conducting qualitative research (McQuail 1997:19). The readers create meanings and value through their perceptions of a particular message, however, this meaning creation is “*never fixed or predictable*” (McQuail 1997:19) Nevertheless, is the understanding of how these messages are being interpreted, crucial when examining the readers’ perception of the customer magazine and its ability to fulfill the customer magazine objectives. Hence, understanding the reading audience is of great importance as it is a means to build a fruitful relationship with the customers of Volvo Trucks.

### **Intercultural implications on value**

As stated before, communication based on the receiver’s conditions, necessitates knowledge of the receiver’s preference, which, when it comes to media usage, is primarily made upon interest and social background, but can additionally “*be very specific and unpredictable*” (McQuail 1997:79). Relating to international media research, McQuail states there is a large deviation in media use, even in countries which otherwise may be considered similar when it comes to social and economical standards (McQuail 1997:54). Ethnicity is indirectly affecting the media use and routines, as it has an impact on interpretations, attitudes and values, rather than affecting the specific media behavior (McQuail 1997:95).

In this research, the selected customers are originated from diverse markets, where the media usage can be presumed to vary depending of different prerequisites. As media messages can be described to be polysemic, that is: “*have multiple meanings which are open to several different interpretations*” (McQuail 197:19), the various articles in the customer magazine could be expected to be interpreted differently in each of the seven market where the magazine is published.

However, media is a vital instrument to strengthen collective identities and allegiances (McQuail 1997:147). Consequently, “*audiences for a particular media often comprise separate ‘interpretive communities’ that share much the same forms of discourse and frameworks for making sense of media*” (McQuail 1997:19). This suggests, that despite the fact that the readers of the magazine are geographically and culturally diverse, they visibly share a common interest in vehicles and the transport

industry, which may serve as a collective point of reference when decoding and interpreting the magazine messages. Hence, the culturally and linguistically diverse audience of the customer magazine is likely to interpret messages in the same way, as they share a common point of reference to the subject –vehicles and transport industry– of which the magazine consist.

Another dimension to this reasoning, is the elements of personal taste and preference regarding content. (McQuail 1997:106). The individuals' perception of value is often influenced by one's personal values, however, the audience can, and also do tell apart what they regard as the objective quality of content and their own personal preferences (likes and dislikes) (McQuail 1997:106).

### **Online value**

Due to technological advance, the increasing number of communication channels has lead to a fragmentation of channel supply on the sender's side, and by that, an individualization of the recipient's channel usage (Hadenius, Weibull, Wadbring 2008:384). Thence, to be able to reach one's customer, it becomes crucial to identify and select the communication channels best suited for that particular customer's need and media usage. As the variety of choice increases, people get more selective, differentiating their choices by interest and needs, which are primarily based upon education, age, gender, et cetera (Hadenius et al 2008:346ff; McQuail 1997:55).

McQuail argues, that audiences' easily incorporate new types of media into their every day media life of experience, perception and behavior. Despite adapting fairly quickly, new media channels also create new problems of choice for the audience, demanding new routines, but don't fundamentally change behavior (McQuail 1997: 145). In addition, today's adults will always be digital immigrants, which suggests that a fundamental change in media behavior will not be imminent (Hadenius et al 2008:146). The readers' media behavior will consequently have an impact on what kind of media channels and shapes they prefer. Launching the customer magazine online can, as argued before, only be beneficial if it is perceived to fill a need among the target groups.

Adding to this reasoning, Heide et al asserts that new technology, individualization and globalization have contributed to organizations' one-sided way of dealing with,

and adapting to, these new prerequisites. Recommending a two-way dialogue is not always preferable (Heide et al 2005:72). By managing the shape, function, pattern and content of the communication, the communicative prerequisites can be related to the societal conditions it is dependent on (Heide et al 1988:24).

*“New media technology is not only an alternative to other types of media, but also a way of extending ones business”* (McQuail 1997:139). As mentioned previously, new technology and formats have even further increased the possibility for involving the audience in the interactive communication of the organization (McQuail 1997:118). Using the web as a communication channel will strengthen both sender and receiver, as it clears the way for new possibilities for having an active relation between organization and customer (McQuail 1997:146). Nevertheless, according to McQuail, technological progresses will have little impact on minimizing the cultural and linguistic barriers that exist (McQuail 1997:139).

If publishing the customer magazine online, it would provide a supplementary aspect to the issue of using the magazine as an instrument for involvement and identification. It would facilitate the interaction between Volvo Trucks and their customers, adding another dimension to the objectives of adding value and strengthening the relationship between the organization and its customers –but only if it is considered to be valuable from the customers’ perspective– and not changing their routines in an undesirable way. As McQuail concludes, *“society has not changed as much as technology”* (McQuail 1997: 147).

## 2.4 Reader loyalty

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, understanding the customers’ perception of the customer magazine requires various aspects of communication, organizational image, value creation and audience definition that needs to be considered. Additionally, to be able to apply the readers’ perspective on this study, the characteristics of the audience will be further investigated below.

### **The reader as target**

An organization has multiple audiences, which it needs to be aware of and identify (Grunig and Hunt 1984:145). McQuail states, that audiences are divided into niche audiences created by organizations –subgroups– to be able to match a specific media message to a specific audience or subgroup, which ultimately will result in a predestinated and desired response (McQuail 1997:92). This process of corresponding media messages with suitable customer segments also has a financial dimension as it is a way of building up markets and increase market share (Kotler et al 2005:391ff: McQuail 1997: 116) The customers who receive the magazine in the ID markets, are all included in the target groups defined by Volvo Trucks (truck owners, fleet owners, owner operators, truck drivers and prospects) Consequently, there are no differentiated subgroups among these readers. However, indirectly, there is a dimension of the customers being a subgroup as a whole, as they are distinguished from other stakeholders who do not receive the customer magazine, additionally, they are grouped according to job role, which may suggest that there is a difference in what kind of information that is being sought. The content and messages in the magazine are created and aimed directly to the reading customers in the target groups, which consequently are expected to respond in a desired manner. Thus, some of these expected responses are the previously mentioned customer magazine objectives of added value, strengthened relationship, show how Volvo can improve their business, and inform and inspire to purchase Volvo products and services.

### **Degree of information seeking - problems, constraints & involvement**

Adding to the reasoning of target groups, the matter of information seeking behavior is vital when considering the readers perception of the relevance of the customer magazine. The individual behavior towards seeking information can be described in terms of: problem recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement (Grunig and Hunt 1984:149). The conclusion is, that the higher the level of problem recognition, the more likely is the public to actively seek information. Hence, the higher level of problem recognition among the reading public regarding, for example, a specific topic in the customer magazine highly relevant to the customers own business or interest, the more likely it is that the customers feel the need of seeking

and processing information about it. The level of constraint recognition, will accordingly determine the likelihood of seeking information, as a high recognition of constraint would lessen the probability of seeking information, whereas a low recognition of constraint consequently would increase it. The level of constraints is relevant when it comes to the perception of access to the customer magazine in terms of frequency and distribution and language barrier.

The level of involvement refers to the extent to which the public can relate to a specific situation. The more the readers of the customer magazine can relate to, and identify with, articles and other content of the magazine, the more likely it is that they will feel motivated to seek information. Hence, the customer magazine objective of added value is closely correlated with the reader's perception of relevance of magazine. Defining the readers' behavior towards seeking information can furthermore be derived from the perception of value of the customer magazine.

### **The degree of emotional attachment**

As mentioned, the individual's behavior towards seeking information (problem recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement) will help determine to what degree the reader will seek, take in and process a mediated message (Grunig and Hunt 1984:149). Additionally, to create a bond with the reader, some kind of deeper attachment or involvement is required.

The degree of involvement from the audience's side can differ, from being a casual spectator to having a high personal commitment to the media. Nonetheless, *“Voluntarily attention and routinely positive attitudes do not in themselves entail any emotional commitment, [...]”* (McQuail 1997:119). As a consequence, McQuail states, it may be empirically difficult to discriminate real attachment from a synthetic one (McQuail 1997:119). This conclusion is critical in this research study, as the purpose of investigating the perception of the customer magazine necessitates an examination of attitudes and opinions. However, as a qualitative method is selected for this purpose, there is a possibility to attain a more complex image of the readers' conceptions.

### **Loyalty defined - consistency, exclusiveness & personal commitment**

Reader loyalty can be characterized by consistency, exclusiveness and having a dimension of personal commitment from the reader's side (McQuail 1997:84). For the sender, the ideal-type of loyalty-reader has a certain element of fandom, created by social bonds and other close connections. A loyal reader is in this perspective defined as being active in terms of extensive reading, exclusive attention, reflection and response to the media and its content. (McQuail 1997:85). As one of the objectives of the customer magazine is to be perceived as added value and strengthen the relationship between Volvo Trucks and the customers, the magazine is an instrument in order to create this mutual bond between the organization and its customers by providing articles of interest to the target group, intended to give the reader a feeling of inclusiveness and VIP, and a personal commitment to the magazine.

However, McQuail concludes, "*audiences are rarely what they seem*" (McQuail 1997:86). Despite the complexion of the audience, what makes a loyal reader is mostly determined by occasions where media and audience have mutual satisfaction –which can not be accomplished through manipulation or publicity acts– but must come from deeply rooted social needs, or a correspondence of media performance and audience preference (McQuail 1997:86).

A way of minimizing the gap between the sender and receiver, as well as contributing to provide identification, is to attract attention and to promote feelings of personal involvement on the part of the reader. By having a representative part of the audience actively involved in the particular media, an "*intimacy at a distance*" (McQuail 1997:117) is promoted. By involving customers in the articles of the magazine, Volvo aims at providing a dimension of identification and familiarity among the readers.

This aspect of personal commitment is also substantiated by Linde, who, in her thesis "*Att skapa en kundtidning som stärker kundrelationen*", claims that the degree of personal commitment to a customer magazine is at its highest when reading about other customers in the editorial content of articles and pictures. Furthermore, this customer participation suggests a higher standard of credibility when reading about other customers in the customer magazines (Linde 2009:41).

Miller, referring to Glaser, states that reader inclusiveness can be directly connected to reader loyalty, as when people are included and are a part of the publication, it ultimately results in repeat readers who are more deeply engaged. *“When people contribute and feel they are a part of a community, there is a loyalty that comes from that.”* (Glaser, cited in Miller 2008:33).

When reading about others in the same business, industry and situation as yourself, Volvo expect these element of identification with other customers to correspond with the magazine objectives of adding value and showing how having Volvo as a partner can improve the customers’ business (C M guidelines).

As stated, to get the audience personally involved in a media, a high degree of interaction must correspond with a high degree of identification. The evaluative attitude (see Figure 2.1) and the degree of emotional attachment are the two most important factors to consider when it comes to audiences making media choices (McQuail 1997:120). Additionally, McQuail suggests the following aspects of: normative ties to media, social milieu and rational consumer behavior, to be reviewed, when examining the audiences’ choice of media and their evaluation of it.

### **The influence of normative ties, social milieu & rational consumer behavior**

The normative ties to media refer to the normative frameworks of morals and principles, which, still today, have a large impact on people’s attitudes towards media, dependent on culture and country. Primarily this concerns public media, which has been influenced by political and religious views, reflected in different media channels and formats. As mentioned previously, even though ethnicity primarily has an impact on interpretation and values (McQuail 1997:95), as each country have different norms and traditions in media use and attitudes towards media, this may still have an impact on the individual’s fundamental image of media and its purpose. (McQuail 1997:123). The aspect of normative ties to media based upon cultural differences is central in this research study, as it may be a determining factor to the readers’ presumptions of the customer magazine. The culturally and religiously diverse sample of interviewees will necessitate a consideration of this aspect.

Apart from the previously mentioned aspects of the large deviation in international media use, and the fact that ethnicity has an impact on interpretations, attitudes and

values, rather than affecting the specific media behavior (McQuail 1997:54ff), the social milieu adds another dimension –the one of the individual. The social milieu creates the frame of reference for the individual when it comes to choice of media, media patterns, and what types of content that is preferred (McQuail 1997:120). Accordingly, this frame of reference –often unconsciously– becomes integrated and associated with the individual’s own identity (McQuail 1997:120). As individuals, the readers of the customer magazine are characterized by their social milieu (upbringing, education, work et cetera), which is culturally and socially very differing per se. Hence, not only the readers’ culture has an impact on the selection and interpretation of media, furthermore, their individual frame of references also form the preferences and dislikes of media and media behavior. Distinguishing what in the readers’ opinions and attitudes that is derived from cultural factors, and what comes from their individual preference may be important when analyzing the interviews.

With rational consumer behavior, McQuail makes reference to how the audience in this perspective has the same characteristics as a market consumer. The audience is looking for suitable products, getting value for their money, a certain amount of quality and reliability. As a rational consumer, they evaluate their experience and will substitute a product or supplier if dissatisfied (see Figure 2.1). However, as consumers, McQuail concludes, they also express clear expectations and do develop product and brand loyalty (McQuail 1997:122). The readers’ opinions of the Volvo Trucks brand and image, as well as its reflection in the customer magazine, may not only be derived from culturally and individually rooted perceptions and preferences, as it also can be a consequence of their rational behavior as customers to Volvo Trucks.

## 2.5 Summary theory

Communication is the organization’s means to distinguish itself from competitors, as well as conveying messages to stakeholders and society (Alessandri 2008:56; Dibb Simoes 2008:67). The organization identity can be described as the channel through which, the organization’s distinct features are presented to external stakeholders, which thereby, will create an image of the organization, and form a basis for the more deep-rooted opinions of organizational reputation (Melewar and Vella 2008:11).

As it is getting harder to differentiate a company by its products and services, advantage is created by adding value to the company's products and services, incorporating a dimension of particular benefits of the company brand (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998:90; Kotler et al 2005:549). The brand plays an important role in the customer's mind as meaning makers, as a particular brand is associated with social position and status (de Chernatony 1998:91).

The aspect of organizational identity, and moreover, the created image in the eye of the consumer, will in this research study be vital, as the readers' opinions and attitudes towards the customer magazine are consequently derived from their conceptions of Volvo Trucks. As the magazine objectives of communicating the core values and the Scandinavian heritage of the company, are derived from the organizational identity, the readers' perceptions of them should be considered accordingly.

Integrated marketing communication serves the purpose of coordinating all sales, marketing and communication efforts, in order to conveying distinct and homogeneous messages (Kotler et al 2005:727). An integrated communication approach will consequently make a larger impact on the stakeholders, as there is a consistency in the messages conveyed throughout all the communication channels used by the organization. Additionally, an integrated marketing communication strategy requires a strong organizational identity to communicate around (Cornelissen 2008:29). The customer magazines, being one of Volvo Trucks' communication channels –and the only frequent channel of communication to their customers–, serve the purpose of transmitting a clear and distinct image of Volvo Trucks to the customers.

Value can be described as “*customer value is generally defined as the trade-off between benefits (what you get) and sacrifices (what you give) in a market exchange*” (Ulaga 2003:678). Delivering superior value to customers is essential in today's business as a satisfied customer in turn will lead to customer loyalty, giving a strong competitive advantage, and, ultimately resulting in a higher market share (Ulaga and Chacour 2001:526).

Value perception of media use can be described as an expectancy value, which is the outcome of previous expectations of a media, and the perception of the benefits received (see Figure 2.1) The outcome of media use is fundamentally resided in the attitudes and believes of the individual (McQuail 1997:74). The different cultural belongings should add a further dimension of the individual perception of value, as culture has a large impact on media attitudes, norms and interpretation (McQuail 1997:95). The value perceived through the customer magazine, should thereby, to a large extent, be derived from the individual reader's personal frame of reference, hence, be evidently diverse among the readers.

Nevertheless, a target group for a specific media can form "*interpretive communities*" (McQuail 1997:19) where commonly shared aspects becomes collective point of reference, which contradictory suggests that the readers shared element of interest in the transport industry, would make them more likely to interpret the messages and content of the customer magazine in the same way.

New technology and formats have increased the possibility for involving the audience in the interactive communication of the organization (McQuail 1997:118). As Volvo Trucks are considering launching the customer magazine online, it would facilitate the interaction between the organization and their customers, adding another dimension to the objectives of adding value and strengthening the relationship between the organization and its customers. But as the readers' media behavior will have an impact on what kind of media channels and shapes they prefer, an online edition of the customer magazine can only be beneficial if it is perceived to fill a need among the target groups. (McQuail 1997: 147).

The personal values, which have a large impact on media choice, are complex, implicit and hidden, consequently not easy for researchers to uncover. However, there is a strong influence of social and situation factors, which have a large impact on the choice and use of media (McQuail 1997:108). Identifying and managing the value creations of a company' such as Volvo Trucks, is for this reason utterly important.

The individual's behavior towards seeking information will help determine to what degree the reader will seek, take in and process a mediated message (Grunig and Hunt

1984:149). The aspects of problem recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement will entail the customers' prerequisites for reading the magazine and reflecting over its content.

Reader loyalty can be described as consistency, exclusiveness and having a dimension of personal commitment from the reader's side (McQuail 1997:84). Personal commitment to a customer magazine is best attained when the reader can identify with other customers represented in articles and pictures, which also adds a dimension of higher credibility (Linde 2009:41). Furthermore, including the reader in the editorial material of the magazine can be directly connected to reader loyalty, as personal contribution will result in deeper engagement (Glaser, cited in Miller 2008:33).

The element of identification is central in this research study as it corresponds with the magazine objectives of adding value and showing how having Volvo as a partner can improve the customers' business (C M guidelines).

Reader loyalty can be stated to consist of the expectancy value of a media, combined with the degree of personal attachment. Additionally, the influences of normative ties to a particular media, the audiences' social milieu and rational consumer behavior are vital aspects to consider when investigating the readers perceptions of the customer magazine, as they all have an impact on the individual's attitudes.

### 3. Method

*The methodology will be presented here in chapter three, where the choice of conducting a quantitative research study is presented, based on the prerequisites of the assignment given from Volvo Trucks. The sample of interviewees and the aspects of reliability and validity are also further discussed here.*

#### 3.1 Research design

The method chosen for this study is a qualitative research design, consisting of telephone interviews with selected customers. Research serving the general purpose of examining attitudes, opinions and descriptions are preferably conducted with a qualitative research approach (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson and Wängnerud 2007:283ff; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:17) As the purpose of this paper is to investigate how the customers perceive the customer magazine, the selected method is considered to be most suitable to fulfill this aim accordingly. This choice of research design is also advocated by McQuail, who states that when conducting audience investigations, market research is often inadequate when it comes to expressing views and feelings (McQuail 1997:111).

As the central organization of Volvo Trucks lack information regarding reading habits or distribution of the customer magazine, it would have been beneficial to investigate these fundamental circumstances quantitatively, prior to this qualitative study. That information would have been valuable, in terms of having a valid preconception, closely related to the organizational research problem. Consequently, this would have facilitated the design of the interview guide (see appendix 2), by contributing with applicable questions and topics derived from previous empirical material. The lack of information regarding fundamental knowledge of distribution, reader frequency et cetera will be discussed in chapter 5.2 (Further Recommendations).

An explicit disadvantage with qualitative research is the subjectivity of the research method (Bryman and Bell 2007:423). As the method per se aims at investigating and understanding underlying factors –which in this research study primarily concerns attitudes and opinions that may have an impact on the readers perceptions of the customer magazine– the subjectivity in making decisions of what is regarded as relevant or not relevant, is evident. Narrowing down empirical findings to valid

factors or themes is a consequence of the researcher's highly subjective choice (Bryman and Bell 2007:423ff). However, being aware of this, the selection of the most relevant findings and their consequences are attempted to be as transparently displayed, and clearly motivated as possible.

The interviews in this qualitative research study, have been conducted by phone, as limitations in time and resources have not allowed personal interviews. Even though personal interviews would have been preferable, as it would exclude many of the perceived barriers between interviewer and interviewees to be discussed below, the phone interviews may have removed the risk of personally affecting the interviewee, hence, to a certain point securing the source of bias response (Bryman and Bell 2007:215).

In business research, when it comes to qualitative research methods, the most commonly used collective strategy is a structured interview (Bryman and Bell 2007:209). However, this interview guide was created as being semi-structured, as it will allow the interview to be flexible and giving new perspectives dependent on the respondent's answers. This approach is suitable as the purpose of the study is to investigate the customers' perceptions and opinions, characteristics, which may not have been recognized if conducting a completely structured interview (Bryman and Bell 2007:213). Although the interview guide has been created to be of semi-structured character, the nature of conducting a telephone interview do not allow it to be as equally semi-structured as if conducted face-to-face (Bryman and Bell 2007:487). The natural interplay between interviewer and interviewee, such as eye contact, natural pauses, body language et cetera, will not be detectable during a phone interview, which is the motive for having a semi-structured framework design, which in some respects is more guided than general. Furthermore, this decision is grounded in the specific topic of the research, whereas the customer magazines may not be an easy subject to speak freely about.

### 3.2 Sample selection

The sample of interviewees for this study is based on a strategic selection (Esaiasson et al 2007:260), based upon organizational prerequisites and research character.

Firstly, the sample available for this research is by nature limited to the customers who receive and read the customer magazine. As the information regarding distribution is not known to the head office in Gothenburg, the involvement from the local market companies is a prerequisite for being able to make a relevant selection at all. To establish a valid sample, the local market companies have supplied a list of potential interviewees (see appendix 3). This selection has in itself contributed to the fact that not all customers have been a part of the sample.

The issue of the local market companies having made the first selection of samples is complex, and will be further discussed in the following paragraph 3.3.

Secondly, Volvo Trucks would favor a spread in the sample, when it comes to including different customer profiles, such as diversity in markets, job roles and industry segment, which additionally gives the selection a strategic character. However, as the selection of interviewees is solely made upon the sample received from the markets, this prerequisite has limited the ability to select readers from the different target groups of the magazine. Therefore, the empirical sample in this research consists of truck fleet owners or readers on a managerial level. Having had a larger spread and diversity among the interviewees, including truck drivers and prospects may have given another outcome in the results of this study

Another prerequisite, as well as a theoretical limitation of the sample, is the language barrier in some of the markets. To be able to conduct these interviews within the allocated time frame, English speaking customers were required. After selecting the customers for an interview, an information letter was sent to the respective respondents, in order to present myself, inform about the upcoming interview, and confirm the time and date for the telephone call (see appendix 4).

Based on these prerequisites, the final sample consisted of a selection of four customers from three of the seven markets, which publish the customer magazine: Argentina, South Africa and Saudi Arabia.

## **Respondents**

*Director* (male) Industry segment: General Cargo. Does not receive any other customer magazines from other truck makes.

*Owner/Director* (male) Industry segment: Long haul/Tipper. Been on a customer visit to Sweden. Previously portrayed in the customer magazine. Receives customer magazines from other truck makes.

*Owner* (male) Industry segment: Construction & Mining, Sand, Supply & Abnormal transportation/ Construction equipment. Been on a customer visit to Sweden. Previously portrayed in the customer magazine. Regularly receives customer magazines from Renault, Mercedes and MAN.

*Manager* (male) Industry segment: General Cargo & Food. Been on a customer visit to Sweden. Does not receive any other customer magazines from other truck makes.

The respondents originate from the three markets of Argentina, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

## **3.3 Reliability and Validity**

### **Reliability**

My personal experience of Volvo Trucks as an employee is important to recognize. The knowledge I have of the organization and organizational culture has in many ways facilitated this research study, as I have been familiar to the routines and organizational procedures. It has also been beneficial as I have some knowledge of the products and services supplied by Volvo Trucks, as these have been frequently discussed and exemplified by the respondents during the interviews. This has made it easier for me to understand the customer, their business and their business needs, hence, a valid understanding of the customer magazine's role is acquired. Without having experience of the Volvo Trucks vehicles, which the customers purchase, my understanding of their perception of the magazines' role would have been more limited. When conducting research, the transparency, devoid of value judgments, and

the subjectivity of the researcher should always be scrutinized (Esaiasson 2007:24). In this case, my personal experience and consequences thereof, is openly declared. Dealing with value judgments and subjectivity are always crucial factors to consider. By having a reflexive objectivity to what my own contributions entail (Kvale 2009:260), I aim at disclosing the choices made, and the reasons behind them, as transparently and explicitly as possible. As I am no longer an employee of Volvo Trucks, I find that my own experience of the company has been beneficial when it comes to securing the reliability of this research study, rather than being disadvantageous and biased.

Before conducting the interviews, a presupposition of my knowledge of the research problem was made, in order to be able to identify information that was to be considered as acquired through the empirical interviews. This serves the purpose of facilitating the analyze process and securing the assessment of the value of the respective interviews (Esaiasson et al 2007:289).

As states above, the local markets companies of Volvo Trucks have been involved in the first selection of customers for this research study. The reason for this is both practical and theoretical, as the central organization lack of information regarding which customers who receive the actual magazine, and to what extent these customers are English speaking. As a consequence of this, I have not been able to control the whole selection process, and the customers chosen by the different market companies may have had preconceptions in favor of Volvo Trucks. By that, the sample is not secured to be unbiased. Being aware of this possible aspect, I furthermore made my own first selection based on getting a spread of customers, with regards to both market, industry segment and job role. The first selected sample of interviewees was seven different customers represented not only from Argentina, South Africa and Saudi Arabia, but also from Australia and Brazil. However, due to external factors and the limitations of the allocated time, the two latter markets had to be excluded from this research study. Accordingly, this may have affected the outcome of this analysis. During the interviews, it came to my knowledge that two of the customers had themselves appeared in the magazine. This further substantiates the argument that the sample of interviewees suggested to me by the markets may have had preconceived, favorable images of Volvo Trucks. The aspect of favoritism has been

seriously considered throughout this whole research study, not least when analyzing the interviews, and concluding the results.

When it comes to the reliability of the interviews, they have been recorded and transcribed in order to establish the authenticity of the conversations (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:193). Furthermore, the interviews have been transcribed literally to secure the interpretation of the responses and the context in which they have been expressed. However, due to technical and geographic barriers, the quality of the records is uneven, whereby the reliability of the interview quality may not be fully secured.

### **Validity**

Previous to the actual interviews, the interview guide was piloted in a trail interview, in order to secure the validity of the questions. After this, a revised version was constructed and used during the interviews.

The telephone interviews were from my part conducted in a secluded environment, and recorded (Bryman and Bell 2007:481ff). However, conducting telephone interviews cross-culturally and cross-linguistically involves several barriers, which may affect the interpretation and comprehension of the conversation (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:237). Recording the interviews has been a way of minimizing the risk of misconceptions, but the dimension of the barriers mentioned can nonetheless be dismissed. The awareness of these barriers has, however, been a prerequisite from the start of this investigation, and has consequently been considered throughout this research.

Another aspect of telephone interviews, is that they are beneficial in a way that the interviewer cannot influence the respondent in the same way as when conducting personal face-to-face interviews, which may reduce the potential source of bias (Bryman and Bell 2007:215).

As when dealing with international research, the barrier of language is crucial. Despite the prerequisite of English speaking customers for the interview, one of the interviews was conducted with a translator. As the translator was a representative from Volvo, this may have impacted not only the interviewee's response in terms of being affected by the translator's presence, but also the degree to which the

translations have impacted the evidence and validity of the questions and answers. As the interview was recorded, it has been possible to review the material afterwards, and take out the contexts, which can be stated as valid empirical findings.

When it comes to generalization, the purpose of qualitative research study is to generalize to theory rather than to population, as the interviewees should not be seen as representatives, or a sample, of the total population (Bryman and Bell 2007:424). Generalizing qualitative research is to a high degree based on the theoretical conclusions that can be made out of the qualitative data attained (Bryman and Bell 2007:426). Even though the purpose of this research study is not to generalize as if the sample was representative for the entire base of customer magazine readers, there is a point in recognizing the specific attributes of the interviewees, as the outcome of the interviews are not unaffected by the individual's own characteristics or subjectivity.

Despite the fact that generalization is not primary in a qualitative research study, the empirical findings of qualitative research are nevertheless possible to generalize to a certain degree (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:180). In this research study, the purpose of gaining knowledge of the readers' opinions of the customer magazine, implicates that the results are not transferable to other context than the aspects investigated (Bryman and Bell 2007:413). Nevertheless, as the empirical findings are an outcome of the respondents' opinions and attitudes regarding the magazine, their statements are valid in terms of gaining an understanding of other readers in the same contextual setting (Bryman and Bell 2007:413; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:281).

As mentioned, the empirical basis of this research study originally consisted of seven interviews on five different markets. Due to external factors, which resulted in less interviews than expected, the outcome and analysis may be affected accordingly. Additionally, the barriers of culture, language and distance (the latter, in this case having additional negative consequences as being an obstructive barrier for the former two), may have had impact on the validity. However, these mentioned aspects of validity are well recognized and also visible in the analysis below. Furthermore, as this research study is based on the established objectives of the customer magazine, the construct validity of definitions is reliable (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:264). Despite concerns with these discussed prerequisites, I argue that the interviews

conducted have reached theoretical saturation (Bryman and Bell 2007:460; Esaiasson 2007:190ff). Recurrent aspects of opinions and attitudes regarding the customer magazine have resulted in themes or categories, which I consequently have build my empirical analysis upon.

### 3.4 Empirical processing

As previously mentioned, the empirical findings of the interviews have been re-listened, and the interview material has been transcribed in its entirety. Since the interview guide was created to correspond with the research questions, the identification of themes has been fairly uncomplicated as there has been a consistency in the construct validity (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:264). The results consist of the compiling concentration of themes and recurring aspects, which have been related to its accordance with the research questions. All results are analyzed and discussed in accordance with relevant theories to the subject, as well as acknowledged from a research critical view with regard to its validity.

## 4. Results and analysis

*As a prerequisite of this research study, the investigation of the readers' perception of the customer magazine is conducted on the different markets of Volvo Trucks ID. Thereby, the cross-cultural aspect is permeated throughout this analysis and the recurring themes. The disposition of this results and analysis chapter will follow the outline of the theoretical chapter, consequently reviewing the research questions accordingly. The results and analysis will be alternated correspondingly.*

*The aim of this chapter is to analyze the results in the light of the theoretical aspects previously discussed. Additionally, distinguishing and defining what in the readers' opinions and attitudes that can be derived from cultural factors, individual preference or profession related behavior, is of outmost importance when discussing the significance of the results, and to what degree they can be used to draw any conclusions from.*

### 4.1 Aspects of function, pattern, shape & content

Despite not aiming at mapping out the publishing and distribution of the customer magazine, investigating the perceptions of the magazine necessitates an understanding of the issue of availability and frequency among the individual respondents.

The customer magazines are today issued and published three times per year in the Volvo Trucks ID markets. From the interviews conducted, all of the respondents state that they receive the customer magazine on a regular basis, and they also get it delivered to their personal office or their office building. The frequency of the magazine is discussed, and there are some who states that three times per year is enough, while others wish for five to six issues per year. As mentioned in the background of this paper, there are variations between the markets when it comes to the concept sizes, hence the size of the magazine on the different markets may correlate with the amount of information perceived, and also wished for, by the interviewees. Having a large concept edition of the magazine may indicate that the amount of information and frequency is on a satisfactory level.

When it comes to the allocated time of reading the magazine, there are some differences between the respondents, but they all claim to read it several times.

*“I read it no more than half an hour, I don’t have the time. But I read it two, three times, the things that are related to my job.” (Manager, General Cargo & Food)*

*“An hour, I read everything. It’s nice and thick.” (Owner/Director, Long haul & Tipper).*

#### 4.2 Aspects of identity, image & brand

As stated earlier, image lies in the eyes of the beholder, and is fundamentally based on the corporate identity (Melewar 2008:11). The aspect of image includes not only the perceived communication of the Volvo Trucks core values: quality, safety and environmental care, but also the Scandinavian heritage.

When discussing image, the respondents mention different corporate features such as quality, new technology and strong support as characteristics of Volvo Trucks. When explicitly talking about how the corporate image corresponds with the image perceived in the customer magazines, they all agree that the magazine corresponds well with the image they have of Volvo Trucks as a company, even though there are thoughts about how this should be even more visible.

*“I definitely think Volvo is one of the best. In the past they were always in front of new technology. The image goes hand in hand with the magazine. The articles are also based on quality, after sales et cetera.”(Owner Construction & Mining)*

*“I think about strong stuff, strong support, safety. Yes, it matches. In the magazine, I can see maintenance, safety...but I think there could be more, Volvo, I think, is the number one in safety.” (Manager, General Cargo & Food)*

*“Yes, definitely. When I think of Volvo, I think technology. I really get the impression of Volvo as dedicated in managing the fuel consumption. I remember seeing articles of environmental care and development, you can see it in the magazine all the time.” (Director, General Cargo)*

As brands are also being used to distinguish different companies and products from each other (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998:88), the importance of communicating distinct messages have been stated to get a strong competitive advantage, which in turn will reinforce the brand. The respondents claim to perceive Volvo Trucks as a strong, reliable brand associated with support, quality and technical development, which are also characteristics they perceive as being reflected and represented in the customer magazine as well. Consequently, their image of the magazine corresponds with the images they have of the company.

When discussing the origin of Volvo Trucks, there is a fundamental concordance in the fact that the Scandinavian heritage is beneficial, and associated with various features that enhance the image of Volvo Trucks as a reliable quality brand. When it comes to the representation of the Scandinavian heritage in the customer magazines, the overall opinion is that the origin should be reflected. However, the respondents want the focus of the Scandinavian culture to be technically or industrially oriented.

*“It covers the relevant history of Volvo, but there should be more about how Volvo progress in technology.” (Owner/Director, Long haul & Tipper)*

*“Its good to mention the culture of the region, but at least let it be something technical. Volvo doesn't have anything related to the industry in the heritage section. There should not be articles about food...food and engines on the pages next to each other...I don't know...” (Manager, General Cargo & Food)*

The interviewees are in many aspects to be considered as diverse, in terms of language, culture and not least as individuals, since these factors are stated to have a fundamental impact on the interpretation of messages that are sent and received (McQuail 1997:101; Svensson 2988:24). Three of the four respondents have been on a customer visit to Sweden, experiencing the culture of the company and the country of Sweden. Accordingly, they have a deeply-rooted relationship with Volvo Trucks, which could have an impact on their conceptions of Volvo, as being more based on deep reputation than superficial image (Melewar & Vella 2008:11).

Concerning image, the respondents' perception, with regards to both organizational image and the Scandinavian heritage, is not distinguishably differentiated by cultural impacts. Instead, the readers appear to have a common frame of reference when it

comes to the characteristics of Volvo Trucks and the customer magazines. All of the respondents consider themselves to be very technically focused and to be ‘technology geeks’. As stated by McQuail (1997:29), this may suggest that the readers share a collective point of reference, which ultimately - in this aspect of technique- would be superior to the impact of the readers’ own cultural values, personal taste and preference.

### 4.3 Aspects of value

Value is very much subjectively perceived, and mediated messages are interpreted depending on the social context and previous experiences (McQuail 1997:18ff; Ulaga 2003:678). According to the theory of ‘Expectancy value’ (see Figure 2.1), the definition of the value of the customer magazines is the result of the readers experienced benefits offered by the media and the perceived values of those.

As value is intrinsically a subjective and individual perception, different people appreciate value in different objects and actions. Discussing the aspect of value perceived through the magazine, three specific values are recurring: (i) the value of giving the customer good advertising, (ii) the aspect of providing useful and hands-on advice, and (iii) being entertaining.

*“It definitely added some value. As I have been in the magazine, it has worked as advertising for my company, as other people, not just people who get the magazine, will read about me and my business.” (Owner/Director, Long haul & Tipper)*

*“First of all, I feel proud. I have the same brand. The value is the marketing to my name. Secondly, if I have a technical issue, I can take copied of the magazine and show others how to operate...do you see how that adds value?” (Manager, General Cargo & Food)*

*“ As I said before, it gives me really good answers to my problems. In this magazine I read advice that has been excellent for me and very useful. [...]It’s a good magazine to read, you read it all, you don’t skip any part. With other magazines, I just read half and then throw it away, but this one, it’s good. (Director, General Cargo)*

*“I like it too much, I keep one on the table next to a picture of my wife.” (Manager, General Cargo & Food)*

When asked about their most important information need from Volvo Trucks, the respondents are of one mind. i.e. technology. Additionally, they also think it is important to know the financial status of both Volvo Trucks and the parent company AB Volvo, as the customer makes large investments when purchasing the company’s vehicles. To the question of whether or not these needs of technology are being met in the customer magazine, the interviewees answer that they are somewhat dissatisfied with the technology information and think it should be more visible in the magazine. Because they are owners and managers of companies in the transport industry, the need of technical information is vital, and in this case, seems to go beyond cultural or individual context. There is a visible gap between what the customers want, and what they perceive to be delivered.

Moreover, the respondents perceive a lack of information when it comes to information about products, parts, services and financial solutions, which correlates with the magazine objective of informing and inspiring to buy Volvo products and services.

*“Aftermarket and financial solutions are not much covered in this magazine, I am a technical guy so I would like to have more of this. Mercedes, MAN and other competitors have more of this in their magazines. ” (Owner/Director, Long haul & Tipper).*

*“Nothing is mentioned about parts, not even pictures.” (Manager, General Cargo & Food)*

*“That’s the key for me, I would like to have more financial solutions, that would be excellent information, besides reading about other experiences and development.”(Director, General Cargo)*

*“We don’t use Volvo financial services, but it’s good for planning future buying...”(Owner, Construction & Mining)*

From an organizational perspective, the recognition of delivering superior value when creating long-term relationships in the industrial business is crucial (Ulaga and Chacour 2001:526). The divergence in the need of information and the perceived information attained, should be reconciled. For the customers, the opinion of insufficiency concerning the most important information need, may consequently lead to a perception of a lower expectancy value from the customer magazine (see Figure 2.1).

*“The most important need for me is technology, what they are doing. What Volvo is going to look like, the technical side of it.” (Owner, Construction & Mining)*

*“I think technical information, for me that’s the essential part. I would like to read more of that” (Director, General Cargo)*

*“It’s very important to understand how the company is going, the financial status...” (Owner/Director, Long haul & Tipper).*

*“First I’d like to read the news, what’s going on and what’s in the future. Secondly, technical, technical, the technical is very, very week in the magazine. Sometimes we hear what Volvo do, but it’s not published in the magazine” (Manager, General Cargo & Food)*

The consensus of technology as the primary information need, suggests that the interviewees do share a common point of references (McQuail 1997:19), which in this case seems to be superior to the individual need, preference or cultural influences. The aspect of value concerning the magazine content is closely associated with the commonly shared interest in technology. However, it is difficult to establish whether or not this frame of reference is derived from their professional job role of being managers, or if it derives from their explicitly stated interest in technology. In all likelihood, these two aspects coincide.

The magazine is also perceived to be of value in terms of being a good source of information. In many cases it is the only way the customers receive information, and is therefore considered valuable. When it comes to the issue of launching the customer magazine online, none of the interviewees want an online version instead of the paper version. However, they do not see it as a constraint if launched as a

supplement to the paper edition. Nevertheless, the interviewees prefer the existing shape of the magazine as it is.

*“It’s not for me. It would be good idea, but I prefer it in the magazine form” (Owner, Construction & Mining).*

*“I think we should improve our technology here, but in this case, as the magazine is developed, I really like it, and I really like to read it as I do now.” (Director, General Cargo)*

*“I’m old school. Don’t really use Internet that much. I prefer the printed version, you can always pick up an old magazine, even if it’s three, four, five years old.” (Owner/Director, Long haul & Tipper).*

*“Yes, I would like to have an e-magazine. I want both. Here, not everyone uses a computer. You need something that will remind you of Volvo Trucks. You can have it in the office, on the table....it’s a different thing to feel the magazine.” (Manager, General Cargo & Food)*

The overall preference of a printed version of the magazine may be derived from several aspects. The interviewees have different habits of using computers and the Internet, which naturally will have an impact on their personal view of an online magazine. Even the respondents who claimed to use the Internet several hours per day, preferred to read the magazine as it is today. Regarding the online question, the interviewees’ individual technical prerequisites for using a computer, together with the personal taste and preference of a paper magazine is essential. Hence, the perceived value of shape lies in their preference of touching and feeling. After having read the magazine, the four respondents say they use it as a manual for searching advice when technical problems or other issues occur. Additionally, they seem to think it is a nice magazine to have in the office, and they pass it on to their colleagues, employees, customers and family. Doing this, the magazine is utilized as a communication and marketing channel, not only for the intended target groups, but also for their stakeholders. The customer magazine is indirectly a marketing channel to the customer’s customers and other non-stakeholders to Volvo Trucks.

#### 4.4 Aspects of reader loyalty

As stated earlier, when it comes to the aspect of seeking information, a high level of problem recognition would indicate a higher degree of the need of seeking and processing information regarding a perceived relevant topic (Grunig and Hunt 1984:149). The respondents say that they feel that the magazine and its content is aimed and directed towards them and their business, as it provides useful advice, but also it provides testimonials from other customers to which they can relate. The latter suggests that the respondents perceive a level of involvement, which they can relate to and identify with.

*“As it is an international magazine, you read about other parts of the world and see how they do it. Many times you learn a little bit from what they are doing.” (Owner, Construction & Mining)*

*“I like the mix. The fact that you can see what is happening in other parts of the world, what operations they are doing, configurations...” (Owner/Director, Long haul & Tipper).*

*“It’s good to see the local differences. It’s an opportunity for our colleagues to show some of their business development. I would like to have more interviews, experiences from different terrains and other geographic parts of the world. “ (Director, General Cargo)*

The positive perceptions of the magazine providing identification with other customers and their businesses, is closely related to the objective of how Volvo can improve the customer’s own business. Additionally, reading about other customers in the editorial content creates a degree of personal commitment and emotional attachment, which provides a feeling of community and “*intimacy at distance*” (McQuail 1997:117), which the respondents seems to appreciate.

The inclusion of customer testimonials and participation in the magazine is also suggested to give the magazine a higher level of credibility (Linde 2009:41). When being asked about the credibility of the magazine, the respondents agree that the magazine is a reliable source of information.

*“We have a very good relationship with Volvo, they have never failed us, so when I read I think ‘this must be true’ as the same thing has happened to me. It’s a good source, I never doubt what is written there”. (Director, General Cargo)*

*“It’s like a brochure when it comes to technical specifications, and a newspaper in terms of reading. It’s a mix of enjoyable reading on one hand, and statistics on the other. I’m not disappointed in any of the articles.” (Manager, General Cargo & Food)*

*“It is even, unbiased articles” (Owner/Director, Long haul & Tipper).*

The aspect of reader loyalty seems to stem from the perception of practical use and information found in the magazine, which is reflected through both customer testimonials and technically oriented hands-on information, additionally perceived as the most valuable information need required. The appreciation of reading about other customers is a common feature identified through the interviews. The issues are closely related to the respondents’ own business, whereby, the common frame of reference of job role and interest in technological concerns in the transportation industry seem to be superior to any distinguishable cultural or religious norms or individual tastes and preferences.

#### 4. 5 Summary results and analysis

The customer magazines are issued three times per year in the Volvo Trucks ID markets. The respondents state that they receive the customer magazine on a regular basis, and they also get it delivered to their office. The respondents allocate a different amount of time to read the magazine, but they all read it several times, as it is both perceived to be entertaining, as well as providing advice and information. In contrast to McQuail’s reasoning about the large deviation in international media use, there has not been an evident difference in the usage or perception of the customer magazines. The magazine is also much appreciated in its current shape, whereas an online magazine is not perceived to fill the same function of being both entertaining and a practical information manual.

The readers' perception of corporate image, brand and heritage being visible and reflected in the customer magazine can be connected to the magazine objectives of communicating the Volvo core values and the Scandinavian heritage. The attributes that the respondents perceive in the corporate image are accordingly reflected in the magazine as well. The Scandinavian heritage is also perceived to be reflected in the magazine, but there are explicitly expressed opinions regarding the focus, which, according to the respondents, should be more technically oriented.

The customer magazine is regarded to add value to the reader and their business by giving practical hands-on information and advice, and being portrayed in the magazine has been good advertising for the customer's own business. Another value acquired from the magazine is that it is considered to be a good source of information, providing information about products, services and advice. In many cases the magazine is also the only source of information that the customer gets from the company, if not actively seeking information themselves. The interviewees are positive towards adding a version of the customer magazine online, even though, all of the respondents would still prefer to read it in the paper version, which is considered to be valuable in itself, in terms of being a physical item to hold, pass on to colleagues, customers and family, as well as to look through as a manual when facing a technical problem or issue. The mentioned aspects of perceived value can be derived from the magazine objectives of added value and strengthen the relationship between Volvo and the customers.

Regarding the value aspect, the respondents seem to have a common standing when it comes to what is perceived to be of value, and what kind of information which is desired. The mentioned value generated characteristics of the magazine seem to be derived from the readers' professional job role and interest more than being rooted in cultural and individual attitudes and norms. However, in this case, it is difficult to explicitly distinguish the job role of the respondent from their individual personality.

The objective of informing of and inspiring to buy Volvo products and services can be related to the readers opinions regarding the largest need of information, which also perceived to be of a technical character – specifications, practical information and information about products, services and parts. However, the interviewed customers consider the amount of technical information in the magazine to be

somewhat lacking, and wish for more of this in the magazine. The kind of technical information desired by the customers may be connected to their expressed interest in technology, but is also a fundamental and an important aspect in their professional job role, as well as the industry in which they operate their business.

The respondents perceive the magazine and its content as being aimed at them and their business, providing useful and practical advice. The content of articles with testimonials from other customers is also appreciated and they feel that they can easily relate to these issues. The information attained through the identification with other customers and their problems and solutions, is closely related to the magazine objective of showing how Volvo as a partner can improve the customers own business as well as adding value as the testimonials give the readers practical advice. The identification with other customers in the magazine is a way of creating a degree of personal commitment and attachment, which ultimately results in reader loyalty (Glaser, in Miller 2008:33). As reading about other customers is perceived to be one of the most appreciated parts of the magazine, it is likely that this aspect, together with the aspect of providing useful information, creates an attachment to the magazine, which ultimately can be considered as reader loyalty.

## 5. Conclusion and further recommendations

*This final chapter will further discuss the analysis of the results, their implications, and what conclusions can be drawn from these findings. Furthermore, their significance will be put in relation to the organizational research problem and the purpose of this conducted research study. To conclude, recommendations for further research and practical advice to Volvo Trucks will be presented.*

### 5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to *investigate how the readers perceive the Volvo Trucks customer magazine, and if these perceptions correspond with the magazine objectives*. By conducting qualitative interviews with four customers, who originate from three different markets, this aim has been attempted to be fulfilled.

The empirical findings of the conducted interviews have disclosed the readers' opinions and attitudes towards the magazine, which consequently have been put in relation to the established customer magazine objectives. By applying the theoretical perspective on the results, the analysis shows that the findings are substantiated by the respondents frame of reference when it comes to the perception of the magazine. Having had a larger sample of respondents, the findings in the results may have generated in additional conclusion to this research study.

As the purpose is not to generalize, the results of the findings cannot, and should not, be used for generalization purposes. The empirical findings are an outcome of the respondents' subjective opinions and attitudes regarding the magazine, which makes their statements valid in terms of gaining an understanding of other readers in the same contextual settings. The limitation of sample selection consequently affects the transferability of the results to other readers in other contexts. As the professional job role seems to have a deep influence on the respondents' opinions, the outcome of this study may have differed if conducted with readers from other target groups. What can be explicitly determined and transferred from this research study is the consensus among the readers on a managerial level of the explicit needs and wants of technology

in the customer magazine –whether it concerns Scandinavian heritage or editorial articles with customer portraits– it should all be more technically focused.

Answering the research questions and fulfilling the purpose accordingly, this research study can conclude two major findings, which are highly interconnected to each other: (i) the interviewed readers emphasize the focus of technique throughout the magazine, and (ii) this consensus suggests that technology is a common frame of reference, shared by the respondents, which may be derived from the respondents' professional job role and industry of business.

### **Perception permeated by technology**

*“When I think of Volvo, I think technology,” (Director, General Cargo)*

Primarily, this research study has shown that technology is fundamental and central to the readers. Technology is not only what is perceived to be the most important information need, but also what is perceived to be lacking.

Even though the respondents may be characterized by differentiation, in terms of culture, religion, social context and geography, they all share a common point of reference in terms of having a job role on a managerial level, acting in a transport industry business. Being owners and managers of companies in the transport industry, the need of technical information is explicit and essential, and in this case, seems to go beyond cultural or individual frames of reference. Nevertheless, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the respondent's individual and professional opinions and attitudes, as they appear to coincide and be closely integrated.

### **Technology superior to culture**

The explicit comments about being personally interested in technology adds another, individualistic dimension to the subject. However, as individual preferences are incorporated with the social milieu of education and working conditions (McQuail 1997:120), distinguishing the individual role from the professional role, is in this research study neither possible, nor intended for. Furthermore, it can be discussed whether or not a differentiation of individual interests and job roles is even desirable, as some kind of interest in technology among the respondents can be assumed to exist as they operate in an industrial-focused business environment. Additionally, their

expectation of a technology focus in the customer magazine may be derived from the nature of Volvo Trucks itself, as being a high-technology company operating in the manufacturing and transport industry. What can be stated is that the impact of culture seems to have less influence on the interpretation and perception of the magazine than the job role, since the aspect of technology has been the common denominator throughout this research study.

Communication is no longer just a means for organizations to propagate information, but also an instrument for gaining competitive advantage and reaching the organization's overall business objectives, and the significance of communication per se has increased among organizations (Heide 2005:17). As competition for customers and market share have increased, consequently the use of communication to convey homogeneous messages to customers and other stakeholders has become an essential part of the organizational mission. The recent years of technological progress has facilitated the practical prerequisites for communication, but has not undividedly made it easier to reach the intended target groups, as the increasing supply has contributed to a wider selection of media for the recipient to choose from (Hadenius et al 2008:384). The tendency of more individualistic media behavior demands a greater understanding of the particular media use and preferences of the target groups to which the organization aim their communication efforts.

The findings of this research study have not only fulfilled the purpose of investigating the perceptions of the magazine and the correlation of these to the established customer magazine objectives, but has also disclosed some common features, which will contribute to greater knowledge of the readers' preferences, as well as serving as a basis for further research to map out the distribution and reading habits of the customer magazine.

In the beginning of this paper, it was stated that in a time when competition is getting tougher, it becomes increasingly important to convey the right messages, at the right time, and to the right target group (Alessandri 2008:56; Melewar 2008:4). When the new customer magazine concept was created in 2007, the purpose was to create a common base for the magazine as a homogeneous communication channel with a distinct profile. Publishing customer magazines has additionally been a way for Volvo Trucks to establish and obtain fruitful and strong relationships with their customers,

but how the readers perceive the magazine has up until today been unknown to the organization. As previously described, the analysis of this study has shown that the magazine is perceived to be both valuable, entertaining and a good source of information giving the reader hands-on advice. The customers' preference of receiving a paper magazine as opposed to reading the customer magazine online indicates not only the value of the physical object of the magazine, but is also an expression for the customers' reading habits. The knowledge of these opinions will be beneficial to Volvo Trucks as they are considering launching the customer magazines on the web. Additionally, there is a common wish for more technology focus – throughout articles and other editorial content. As the interviews produce subjective opinions, these statements may not be valid for all readers of the magazine, even though the second conclusion of this research is that culture is inferior to the profession and work environment of the respondents, as the analysis probe a cross-cultural consensus among the interviewees. This may further suggest that all target groups of the magazine share a similar frame of reference, if not to the same job role, then at least as workers within the transport industry. This is recommended to be further investigated in future research by Volvo Trucks.

McQuail stated that the receiver's preferences can "*be very specific and unpredictable*" (McQuail 1997:79). By acknowledging the conclusion of this research, Volvo Trucks have the possibility to better understand the role of the magazine, not only according to themselves as senders, but also from the readers' perspective. Hence, they will get a better understanding of how to create content and messages that correlate with the preferences of intended target groups. This will consequently strengthen the relationship between the organization and its customers, and may ultimately result in achieving the overall objective of reinforcing the brand and supporting the business of Volvo Trucks.

## 5.2 Further recommendations

Recommendations to Volvo Trucks International Division, is first and foremost, to map out the distribution of the customer magazines, in order to obtain knowledge of if and how the target groups receive the magazine. Establishing the frequency and reading habits of the receivers, would primarily indicate if the intended target groups

are the actual receivers and readers, but also facilitate a further investigation of other target groups than the ones investigated in this research study. As previously stated, the conclusions in this thesis are fundamentally based upon opinions and perceptions made by managers, owners and directors; these conclusions cannot be stated to be valid and transferable to target groups with other professions. Particularly not since the aspect of the respondents' professional job role has been identified to be superior other influences of culture and individual preference. Nevertheless, the common frame of reference to the transport industry may suggest that all of the magazine's target groups have an explicit interest in technology and practical hands-on information. The attitudes and opinions of other target groups is suggested to be further investigated by Volvo Trucks in order to establish the width and transferability of the results in this paper.

### **Aspects of the customer magazine objectives**

What can be concluded is the superior conception of technical focus in the magazine, which indicates that the magazine is considered to be of importance and valuable to the respondents as it provides useful and practical information.

The aspect of technology is also recognized in the image of Volvo Trucks as a company driving technical progress and being in front in R&D. This image is also perceived to be reflected in the customer magazine, visualized through the core values of the company. In alignment with the wish for more technical focus, the customers also want more focus on products, parts and services, in both text and images. The aspect of Scandinavian heritage is perceived to be beneficial to the company image, however, the focus of the origin in the magazine should be more technically oriented.

The value appreciated from the magazine is that it is a good source of information, including giving practical hands-on information and advice, as well as showing other customers and their testimonials. Launching the magazine online is generally considered to be a good idea. However, neither of the respondents wish to substitute the paper magazine for online reading. There is a perceived value in the physical magazine per se, which cannot be replaced by a web edition.

Based on this, the following summary is concluded:

- Volvo Trucks is positively associated with technique and R&D, the Volvo characteristics should be more visible
- Technical information and specifications - the most important information need, more focus on this throughout the whole magazine
- Advice and practical –hands on information is much appreciated
- More focus on products, parts and services
- Entertainment –the magazine is enjoyable, can be read several times
- The magazine is a good and credible source of information
- The magazine adds value, gives useful and practical information, also helps to build their own business with the good publicity of being in the magazine
- After reading, the magazine is handed over to colleagues, friends and customers
- The physical magazine has a perceived customer value which cannot be replaced –but rather supplemented– by an online edition

Considering the readers' perceptions regarding the customer magazine content and shape, would benefit Volvo Trucks in their continuous efforts to build a successful communication channel to the company's customers.

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## Appendix 1 Organizational chart



## Appendix 2 Interview guide

### **Interview guide for selected interviewees regarding the customers' perceptions of the customer magazine**

I would just like to introduce myself, and thank you in advance for agreeing to do this interview.

My name is Veronica Nyblom, and I am conducting this research regarding "*the customers' perception of the Volvo Trucks customer magazine*" as part of my thesis before graduating from the University of Gothenburg.

I got this assignment from Volvo Trucks as they want to investigate how their customers' opinion of the C M

As this is a scientific research study, the interview material:

- will not be handled by anyone else but me

- will not be used for any other purposes than this specific research. Names etc. will not be published.

I would also like to ask you if it is ok for me to record this interview so that I don't have to take notes at the same time and can fully concentrate on the situation here. It would very much facilitate my transcription and collection of data.

#### **GENERAL**

**1) In (country) the customer magazine (name) is issued 3 times per year. How often would you say you read?**

**2) Do you have an estimation of how many minutes you spend reading the magazine?**

**3) What do you think of the frequency of the magazine? Too many, too few?**

**4) Is the magazine addressed/sent directly to you?**

**5) Do you have other truck makes in your fleet? (which)**

**6) Are you receiving customer magazines from other truck makes?**

**7) How long have you been a Volvo Trucks customer?**

#### **(IDENTITY)**

8) What is your image of Volvo Trucks? (What does Volvo Trucks mean to you? comes to mind when you hear Volvo Trucks? What are your associations when you hear Volvo Trucks?

9) Do you think the customer magazine matches your image of Volvo Trucks as a whole? (how)

10) What do you perceive as being good with the magazine?

11) What do you perceive as being not so good with the magazine?

**(READER VALUE)**

12) How would you describe your relationship to Volvo Trucks? Frequent contact with Volvo staff? Retailers? Getting support? Other

13) What are your thoughts about the magazine when it comes to:

- Giving you useful information
- Being entertaining
- Being aimed at you and your business
- Being a source of information regarding new products and services?
- Being a credible source

14) Is there anything you would like to have more of/less of in the magazine?

(Back up for me)

- Volvo Trucks research & Development
- Volvo Trucks history and Scandinavian heritage
- New laws and legislations within the transport industry
- Articles about Volvo's Product news / service news / business solutions (financial)
- Articles with other customers –national or international

15) What would you say are your most important information needs from Volvo? What do you want/need information about from Volvo?

16) Do you think these needs are met in the magazine? If no, how could it be done differently to suit your/ your business' needs?

**(OBJECTIVES)** The C M have a number of objectives, which I would like get your personal opinion on:

17) Do you perceive that the magazine in some way add value to you or your business? If yes, exemplify. If no, why not, or in that case, what is missing?

18) As you might know, the core values of Volvo Trucks are Quality, Safety and Environmental care. How do you perceive these core values in the magazine? (How do you think they are integrated in articles and texts?)

19) How do you perceive the presence of Volvo's Scandinavian heritage in the magazine? How do you think they are integrated in articles and texts?

20) What is your opinion when it comes to information about products /services/business solutions in the customer magazine? (Are they presented in a way in which you that you feel they are of interest to you and your business? )

If yes, why? If no, why not?

21) What do you think about the design and layout of the magazine? How would you say the “look and feel” of the magazine match your image of Volvo Trucks?

22) What is your opinion of the credibility in the articles?

#### ONLINE

23) What can you say about your Internet habits? Do you use it frequently?

24) What do you think about publishing an online version of the customer magazine on the Internet?

25) Do you think an online version of the customer magazine would fill a purpose or gap that the printed version today can't?

#### ADDITIONAL

26) Do you have anything else you would like to say regarding this?

### Appendix 3 Information letter to markets

Dear all,

In 2007 the new customer magazine concept was created to reinforce the brand and support the business of Volvo Trucks. Now, a couple of years later it is interesting to find out how this investment has progressed.

Therefore, during this spring, the Volvo Trucks ID customer magazine will be evaluated on some of the existing markets. The purpose is to get an idea of the customers' perception of the magazine. We thereby need some help from you to get a list of customers suited for this research.

After receiving your input, we will make a selection of customers suited for an interview and get back to you for further contact.

The qualification profile:

- The customer GETS and READS the customer magazine
- Customers from different branches
- Customers with different fleet-sizes
- Customers with different job roles within the company
- English speaking customer

Please help us by sending a list of 3-5 customers who fit the profile described.

Specify the customer with; *name, job role, size of fleet, branch.*

We aim for a maximal variety of customers in this research in order to get a dynamic and representative sample of the ID customer magazine readers.

If any questions at this stage, please contact XXXX

## Appendix 4 Information letter to interviewees

Dear Mr XX,

I would just like to introduce myself, and thank you in advance for agreeing to do this interview.

My name is Veronica Nyblom, and I am conducting this research regarding "*the customers' perception of the Volvo Trucks customer magazine*" as part of my thesis before graduating from the University of Gothenburg.

This interview method is chosen, as it will allow free scope for opinions and thoughts, which cannot be covered in a web or mail survey.

It would be very good if you have the possibility to look through an issue of Volvo News before our interview. It might also be good to have a copy at hand at the time. The interview will last for approximately 40 minutes.

As this is a scientific research study, the interview material:

- will not be handled by anyone else but me

- will not be used for any other purposes than this specific research.

Names etc. will not be published.

I will phone you on **Tuesday 4th of May at 15.00** (CET and your local time). (I am waiting for your phone number from Volvo Trucks).

If any questions, don't hesitate to call or email!

Looking forward to our phone conference!

Best regards  
Veronica Nyblom

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**Phone: +46 31 323 50 42**