FRAMES AND THE ONLINE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

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FRAMES OG ONLINE IDENTITETSKONSTRUKTION

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Thanks to:

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*For introducing us to the world of Social Constructivism, good criticism
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Agnete
For teaching me how to approach knowledge

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*Because you never left our side and for always giving us time,
room and space to write and think.*

Without you, none of this thesis would ever have seen the light of day…

Maibrith Kempka Jensen   Sebbastian Naerbout

Abstract

Vores identitet udgør på alle måder den basisplatform fra hvilken vi som individer møder vores omverdenen. Den er afgørende både for hvordan vi fortolker de signaler vi modtager fra andre individer og også for hvordan vi selv henvender os til verden omkring os. De seneste årtiers hastige udvikling af kommunikationsteknologier og herunder i særdeleshed internettets gennemsyring af det offentlige og sociale rum, har bevirket at individet i stigende grad orienterer sig virtuelt mod sin omverden. Vi kommunikerer med andre på alle tænkelige måder på alle tænkelige platforme, og de sociale medier udgør her en større og større del af de fleste menneskers liv, i en virkelighed hvor alle altid er online og mængden af information kun er støt stigende. Samtidig bombarderes vi med information fra organisationer og det er efterhånden en almen antagelse at det moderne menneske har opbygget en mental immunitet overfor uønskede kommunikationsbudskaber. I dette lys er identifikationsmuligheder et springende punkt for virksomheder, der ikke længere kan bero på at kunne informere forbrugerne efter forgodtbefindende, men tværtimod kan forvente at forbrugeren i stigende grad selv vælger hvilken information, der er ønsket. Dette betyder at et grundpræmis for effektiv kommunikation i denne medieintensive virkelighed er at individet kan identificere sig med organisationen og dens budskaber og – ud fra en socialkonstruktivistisk tankegang – at individet kan identificere sig med den sociale (co-)konstruktion af virkeligheden der skabes af organisationen. Det er i dette kommunikative krydsfelt mellem individ og omverden at dette speciale tager sit udgangspunkt.

På baggrund af en gennemgang af identitetsbegrebet set i lyset af udviklingen fra et moderne til et postmoderne og hypermoderne samfund, samt en gennemgang af identitet set ud fra forskellige generationsperspektiver, ser dette speciale nærmere på hvordan identiteter kan ses konstrueret på organisationers traditionelle (læs: ikke sociale medier) hjemmesider. Specialet antager en socialkonstruktivistisk tilgang til verden hvormed identitet dermed ses skabt i krydsfeltet mellem *individ*, *kontekst* og *sociale relationer*. Med fokus på den kontekstuelle del af denne identitetsskabelse og ud fra en analyse af udvalgte hjemmesider fra de tre organisationer – Apple, Google og Microsoft – benyttes *framing* (Fairhurst 2010a), som metodologisk tilgang til diskurs og mentale modeller, til at forsøge at kaste lys over hvordan forbrugeridentiteter kan ses skabt online. Samtidig, da *framing* normalt anses som et værktøj (*skill*) til brug for det enkelte individ i forsøget på at skabe en mere effektiv kommunikation i dynamiske situationer, er dette speciale

også en uofficial lakmustest af *framing's* egnethed/potentiale som analyseværktøj (*tool of analysis*) til brug i undersøgelser af statiske analyseobjekter, hvor forskeren ikke har mulighed for at deltage i kommunikationen. Specialet tager dermed sit udgangspunkt i følgende problemformulering:

> *Hvordan konstruerer organisationerne Apple, Google og Microsoft forbruger- identiteter ved tilstedeværelsen af diskurser of frames på deres hjemmesider?*

Specialet identificerer i alt ni diskurser på de seks hjemmesider der en inkluderet i undersøgelse og 24 deraf følgende mentale modeller. På baggrund af disse præsenteres og uddybes tre forskellige *frames,* der hver især tjener til at konstruere forbrugeridentiteter på organisationerne respektive hjemmesider. Det konkluderes at generation X ser ud til at måtte vige pladsen sammen med de modernistiske idealer om objektiv sandhed, til fordel for et generelt fokus på både generation Y og Z samt de postmoderne og hypermoderne identiteter. Dog ses der en klar tendens til at generation Z og det hypermoderne individ tynger vægtskålen ned, og dermed er i centrum for den identitetskonstruktion der kan identificeres på organisationernes hjemmesider. Samtidig påvises det, at *framing* har en klar anvendelighed som analyseværktøj, omend der er behov for at afprøve teoriens brugbarhed i situationer hvor analyseobjektet undersøges over længere tidsperioder.

Content

I Introduction

In writing the final pages of this thesis, a radio show on the national Danish radio network channel P1 caught our attention. In this show[1], Associate professor at Copenhagen Business School Søren Schultz-Hansen and Associate professor at the IT University of Denmark, Anders Kolding Jørgensen, engaged in a debate on how the change of the communication technologies, during the last twenty years, had fostered two different generations: The one born before the Internet, and now commonly referred to as "digital immigrants", and the generations born after the emergence of the Internet, oftentimes mentioned as the "digital natives". What caught our attention, was not so much the discussion about the creation of the two generations, but more the debate on whether or not the identity of people were changing, as a (more or less) direct consequence of this development.

At its core, the foundation of this debate was that communication had previously required two basic dimensions. Namely, that the sender, in order to transmit a message, had to be somewhere within a reasonable (physical) distance of the receiver and that the sender also needed to be there at the same time as the receiver, in order for the communication to be complete. In the light of this, the rise of the Internet fundamentally changed these prerequisites by enabling people to communicate across boundaries of time and space.

We will take this discussion as our point of departure for introducing this thesis, as it deals with the very same issue of whether identities are becoming increasingly alike or more diverse due to the advancements in digital communication technologies. Though, this is not our precise research question it deals with some of the same issues, of identity and technology, culture and "reality".

On the one hand, Søren Schultz Hansen argued that the technological development has caused the individual to, increasingly orient itself towards others than him- or herself. And that this orientation was increasingly taking place online, making the identity of individuals *socially created* and often times enacted *online.* On the other hand, however, even though we may be using the Internet regardless of generational belonging, this does not entirely change our perception of reality, which demonstrates that some parts of our identity are not being affected by this

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[1] The show is available here (in Danish):
http://podcast.dr.dk/P1/P1formiddag/2011/P1formiddag_1107200907.mp3

development. We find the best way to illustrate this is by the power of an imaginary example:

> *A family is sitting at the dinner table. The parents are very irritated with their son, who is texting while they are eating, even though they have asked him to wait until they are finished. What the parents don't seem to realize, is that, for the son not to answer the text message, would equal a situation, where his parents were tapped on the shoulder by someone and they didn't care to turn around. Both situations would be considered impolite, from persons in their respective generations[2].*

What this example illustrates is that, while both generations may *understand* the use of communication technology, they certainly do not *interpret the use of this* in the same way. This is very much in line with our view on identity, that even tough certain parts of identity may become more similar, across generations and cultures, the rest of the components in our identity remains, very much, the same. We are distinctive in our distinct cultures (although, one may argue that culture is also becoming more similar in the age of globalization) with distinct languages and traditions. We differ in religion, gender, education, politics, social heritage and so on, which all sums up to the identity that represent who we are, today. While we are, perhaps, becoming more uniform in our ability to connect via digital communication technologies, much of our identity is still made up of our own individual pieces and experiences that fit into the identity puzzle of our lives.

Social interaction medias have been investigated, quite thoroughly, as being the new sphere for construction of identity. In this sense, it is obvious that social media play a significant role in creating possibilities for identification for the people using them and as they are dynamic medias, they are also open to a social construction. However, in our opinion, what has been neglected in this perspective is the study of how more traditional and static websites (i.e. the website of a commercial organization) create possibilities of identification and identity work, even though they do not classify as social media.

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[2] The example is shamelessly stolen from the mentioned radio show on P1.

In connection to this, we find 'identity' particularly interesting, as we believe that knowledge about identity, and how identities are constructed, can help organizations face some of the challenges that they will, predictable, meet as a consequence of our developing society. In example, many organizations are already faced with the challenge of targeting a vast consumer group, with a potential worldwide span, in their communication content on their websites. In a situation like this, we believe that traditional segmentation methods and demographic classifications fall short, and become less effective than they were, when they were used in a more limited and local context. We therefore turn to investigate how three specific organizations construct consumer identities, today, and relate them to the theory of consumer identity, to see if the identity theory can contribute with some interesting perspectives in this new context. In this thesis, we will therefore be looking at the possibilities for identification, on a selection of web pages from the organizations; Apple, Google and Microsoft.

A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH AND OTHER CHOICES

Precisely the view that identity is a social construct – something, which is created through social interaction – have brought us to take a particular social constructivist approach to exploring this subject. Identity in this perspective, is created in the cross field of *individual, context* and *social relations* (much more on this later on). We have chosen that this thesis will have its particular focus on the *context* of this identity construction, as we believe that the possibilities for identification is best uncovered in the context of a message. And, in connection to this, our particular point of departure will be to investigate how the presence of certain discourses, on the organization's web pages, act as fixing points, with which the consumers can identify with the organization.

A SECOND AGENDA

Our thesis also has a hidden agenda. Throughout our education, we have been introduced to the theory of *framing* as presented by Gail Fairhurst (2010a). While the theory will be explained in detail, in the pages to come, it serves to mention that we see a great – but relatively unexplored – potential in this theory.

Generally speaking, framing is concerned with how interpersonal communication actors, by understanding the discourses they are embedded in as well as other's discursive point of views, can strengthen certain mental models over others, in

order to give more effect to communication messages; to win hegemony over the meanings ascribed to a given situation. In a management perspective, this situation is desirable as delegating tasks and responsibilities and creating results, very much depend upon everybody's understanding and acceptance of, *what* the goals are and in effect *what* the results should be. Having an ability to hegemonize the interpretation of a given situation, allows the manager great power and legitimacy in deciding and delegating tasks to others, as well as inspiring others to move in the same direction as the manager of the company. In *The power of framing* Fairhurst (2010a) provides a brief introduction into discourse theory, as well as cognitive psychology to create an awareness of the contextual premises for all communication. The foundational premise is that all messages, sent to a receiver, will always be embedded into specific discursive understandings. As well as, the decoding of these messages, which will also, in turn, be influenced by the discourses that the receiver is participating in. In connection to this, Fairhurst (2010a) advocates for discursive cultivation and priming of certain mental models over others, in order to strengthen one's interpretation of reality and gain more power in one's communication of messages.

However, we believe that framing has an even more potential besides being an interpersonal communication skill. We believe that framing can also be used as an analytic tool, to uncover the discourses and mental models embedded in explicitly communicated messages, and thereby we take a more outside-in approach to framing than did Fairhurst.

Therefore, our thesis also sets out to act as an unofficial litmus test of the theory's usefulness as a tool of analysis - *framing analysis*. A section in the end of the thesis has, therefore, been devoted to assessing the use of *framing* as a tool for active analysis of a rather static text, rather than applying it on an a present, interpersonal and dynamic communication situation.

Without further due, this brings us to our Research Question.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do the organizations of Apple, Google and Microsoft construct consumer identities by the presence of discourses and frames on their web pages?

OUTLINE FOR THE THESIS

In the following pages, our focus will be on answering the question above. The thesis has been divided in chapters for the convenience of the reader. Continuing from here, chapter II will deal with reviewing identity in a social constructivist light, while chapter III will explain our method, methodology and the design of the thesis. Chapter IV contains review of modernism, postmodernism and hyper modernism and also a review of the identity characteristics of generation X, Y and Z. In chapter V, as reality in a social constructivist worldview is subjectively understood, we shortly describe the web pages included in the study, as we believe it important to demonstrate *in words* what caught our attention on the pages. Chapter VI contains a presentation and argumentation for our findings from the analysis in terms of discourses and mental models along with a discussion of the findings and a description of the frames. Chapter VII contains our analysis and chapter VIII the discussion. Chapter IX will contain a review of the usefulness of framing as a tool of analysis. Finally, in chapter X we provide a conclusion to the thesis and lay out directions for possible future research.

II Identity

Looking at identity, there are many different ways to approach the subject. Identity has been touched upon by many academic disciplines, all of them concerned with people in some way or another; like for example philosophy, social sciences, communication, leadership and marketing. Looking at identity is not something that can be done overnight. In a simple search conducted on the well-established article base Business Source Complete, on the 27th of June 2011, *identity* reveals 45.030 articles concerning the academic perspectives on this term, while a search on Google for this term brings forth some 548.000.000 hits. There is thus a massive body of literature concerning this particular area of research and many differing perspectives. And to begin a literature review of this massive body of literature would surely prove very difficult to oversee. This is why we have chosen to delineate our focus on identity in this review to the perspective of social constructivism. Hence, in the following we will introduce the concept of identity, as made up of elements of discourses and the social (co)construction. We find this approach interesting, as it recognizes and acknowledges the *fluid* and *dynamic* character of identity, as apposed to more traditional approaches to identity. In fact, *fluidity* and *dynamics* are ground premises for the character of identity, that is, as identity is constructed in an ongoing social process, the boundaries of identity become fluid and the development of one's identity becomes dynamic. We find this view interesting as it allows us, as researchers, to investigate consumer's identities from a more holistic point of view, than do more functionalistic approaches.

But what are the reasons for communication scholars engaging in identity theory? Which contributions do perceptions of *identity* bring to bear upon the field of communication? We find that changed conditions for communicating in society (especially, in regards to the technological development of digital communication technologies), has increased the access to information and communication technologies, which has become a basic premise. And taking an organizational theoretical approach to this, one can argue that in a time with increased access to information and communication technologies, consumers are being bombarded with messages from organizations, potentially from all over the world. This has led to an increased selectivity from the consumer's side, as a survival instinct, not to be overloaded by information (InsidePeople 2008). If an underlying distance and skepticism towards organizations communication and marketing is present, identification is perhaps what can lead consumers in the direction of one's

company. Thus, if several organizations in an industry offer the same products, consumers choose the brand with which they can identify (Pelsmacker 2010). This means that, as a point of departure, a ground premise for effective communication is that the consumers can identify with the organization and the messages – and in a social constructivist approach – consumers need to be able to identify with the social (co)construction of reality created by the organization.

Identity Defined

As identity has been approached from many angles and in different contexts, there has been multiple attempts to define 'identity' as a term and thereby many different versions of this definition. Defining a term, though, which basic premise lies on the basis of *fluidity* and being *dynamic*, is only likely to result in different dynamic definitions. In this thesis, we will base our definition of 'identity' on Alvesson et als. identity approach (Alvesson et al. 2008). Here, he refers to identity as:

> *"Subjective meanings and experience, to our ongoing efforts to address the twin questions, 'who am I?' and – by implication – 'how should I act?'"*

(Cerulo 1997 in Alvesson, et al. 2008: 6).

What characterizes the definition, besides the fluidity and dynamics of *"subjective meanings"* and *"experience",* is the space for ongoing identity-construction, which arises in the *"ongoing efforts to address the twin questions".* This effort, we argue, will be understood and influenced by the discourses that the consumer is embedded in, and the meaning making of "who am I" and "how should I act" will be produced and re-produced through the social interactions and constructions of reality. Thus, consumer's identities will be effected by social interactions and constructions, as well as the discourses embedded in the social practices taking place.

TWO OVERALL APPROACHES TO IDENTITY

The functionalist

For reasons of clarity and overview, we will not elaborate extensively on the functionalist approach to identity, as this will not be the perspective we adhere to

in this thesis. We do feel, however, that it is important to understand the underlying assumptions of this approach, in order to fully understand and appreciate the ontology behind the chosen approach to identity.

What were emphasized above in the definition of identity were its elements of fluidity, dynamics and social construction. This, however, is in contrast to previous time's more functionalistic approaches to consumer identity. In this approach, consumer's identities are considered as being rather fixed categorizations of consumer's needs and wants, and these are viewed as possible to decipher with methods such as demographics. Consumers are then segmented into different categories based on different aspects like; *age, gender, political and religious beliefs, educational background* and so forth. Taking a functionalistic approach is effective in a manner of creating order in the approach to a vast consumer group, such as the potentially world wide group of consumers that the three organizations, Apple, Google and Microsoft, are targeting in their communication content on their websites. This approach allows organizations to approach consumers with initiatives based on rather pre-expected and predictable outcomes. This means that even though one's consumer group is vast and diverging in multiple directions, the functionalist approach offers great clarity and overview and even some solutions. Therefore, we understand why organizations may choose this approach over others, as it appears more tangible and oriented towards results.

However, what this approach does not take measure of is the dynamic character of identity. From a functionalistic approach one might set up boxes that categorize the different characteristics and needs and wants, specific for the segments in one's consumer group. Typically, researchers and practitioners from this perspective would also point to the fact that some aspects of the consumers might overlap the different boxes or categories. But it is exactly this knowledge about the overlaps and diverging needs within an individual, which becomes interesting for organizations, in an attempt to continuously create point of identification for the consumer to relate to. The criticism of the functionalist approach has thus been that this perspective's view on identity, as something you have within you and that can be manipulated or controlled on the basis of segmentation and campaigns with predicted outcomes, is to simple in its understanding of identity as something that is not – or at least not very much – influenced by other parameters. This approach does not support our understanding of identity as something that emerges on the basis of personal experiences and the contexts, and as something that is potentially fragmented.

The social constructivist approach

In contrast to this, we approach identity from a social constructive perspective. In this perspective identity is viewed as socially constructed and what is interesting in this field of identity research, is the co-construction between the individual, the context and the interactions the individual is participating in.

Social constructivism's ontological position on "reality" is that "reality" draws it's meaning through construction – a subjectively influenced, fluid and dynamic construction. Taking this perspective means perceiving the "reality" as an on-going process of continuously (co-)construction of the world around us. Giddens explains how negotiating and constructing meaning

> "… creates a dynamic and ongoing basis for structures [discourses] that are both stable and yet open to change as interactions evolve over time"

> (Giddens 1979, in Fairhurst 2010b:174)

Reflecting this, social construction can be seen as both the ongoing interpretation of social worlds and phenomena (Pye 2005), relational meaning making (Hosking 2000), the constitution and reconstitution of realities and identities (Cunliffe 2008), and the centrality of discourse or language (Deets 1992: Caroll & Levy 2010). This description fits well with our understanding of 'identity' as constructed between the individual, the context and the interactions and in this thesis, we will be focusing especially on the constitution and re-constitution of realities and identities, as formed on the basis of the analyzed discourses from six elected websites from the three organizations included in the study. More specifically, we look at how discourses on the six elected websites create certain 'mental models' (Fairhust, 2010) that in turn create specific terms for identification with the company's brands. In this way, we are not limited to just looking at how messages are explicitly communicated, but have the opportunity to go deeper and look *behind* what is being *implicitly* communicated.

Understanding 'identity' as a socially constructed phenomenon offers an opportunity to understand social agents and research agents as both subjects – managers or authors of meaning – and as "an object to be manipulated/shaped" (Fairhurst 2007:76, *in* Caroll & Levy 2010). In this thesis, we will be looking at how identity discourses help shape the consumer, as we argue that consumers will

often tap into the identity discourse when identifying with a specific brand over another. In this way, identity discourses on an organizations website can influence what consumers value, and hence feel is a part of their identity. And thus, in consumption situations, identity can therefore described as:

> *Subjective meanings and experience, to our ongoing efforts to address the twin questions, 'who am I* [and what do I like]*?' and - by implication- 'how should I act?'"*

(Cerulo 1997 in Alvesson et al. 2008:6)

Furthermore, to the post-structural social constructivist approach belongs the notion that individual's identities can, and oftentimes will, be fragmented without this necessarily leading to any conflicts within the individual. This fragmentation emerges in the individual's participation in several discourses, or structures of meaning, at the same time and thereby develops an understanding of oneself through different discourses. Many times, an individual will emphasize certain aspects of his or her identity in one context, and others in other contexts. Thus, when taking this approach one emphasizes that individuals can *change* or *stay the same* from situation to situation, and still be true to or *identical* with oneself across different situations.

Taking this perspective means trying to understand (interpret) how a given social context affects the social construction of 'identity'. One can say that as opposed to the functionalistic approach to identity, there is an ontological shift from *being* an identity to *becoming* an identity. This gap that emerges when identity shifts from *being* to *becoming,* we believe, potentially opens up for great potential in organizations opportunities to relate to their consumers in ways that could prove to strengthen the relationship between the organizations and its consumers even further. In the light of this, an academically nuanced approach to the identity of consumers can prove to be very valuable to organizations wishing to understand consumers in order to relate to them.

Identity as resting upon discourses and communication

As we have seen in the sections above, the premise for social constructivism is that "reality" is discursively constructed and contested. Discourses, as used in this

thesis, will be defined as;

>*"... bodies of knowledge that 'systematically form the object of which they speak'*
>
> (Foucault 1979: 49; Hardy & Phillips 2004:301)

>*"Discourse lays down the 'conditions of possibility' that determine what can be said, by whom, and when."*
>
> (Hardy & Phillips 2004:301)

Thus, as presented by Hardy and Phillips (2004), who view discourse from a Foucauldian perspective, discourse forms reality and consumers as 'objects' and lays down the possibilities for what can be said and by whom. We will therefore be looking at how messages on the website is embedded in discourses which lays down the conditions of possibility for what can be said and by whom.

Fairhurst (2010b) operates with a notion of '*big-D discourse'* in her framing theory that we will be using as an analytic tool in this thesis. Big D discourse is understood as "*effectively rendering them* [the users] *as objects"* (Fairhurst 2010b; Fairhurst 2007 *in* Caroll & Levy 2010)*,* and as such, this would be the discursive approach to the frames identified on the selected websites. However, to underpin the discursive understanding, we will furthermore draw on Hardy & Phillips' definitions of the same. Discourses will be explained further in-depth in the method-chapter of this thesis, and therefore, for now, we will settle by introducing the term as a *structure of meaning that systematically form the objects of which they speak and who lays down the possibilities of what can be said and by whom.* Discourses thus, lays the grounds for social constructivism of "reality", and thereby also of 'identity'.

What facilitates the discourses and social construction, we argue, is communication. Communication is the physical manifestation of discourses as structures of meanings that forms the grounds for how we speak and perceive. As previously mentioned, perspectives on constructions of social reality focus on the cognitive (psychological) perception and how certain communicative frames or discourses are used to create a specific reality:

>*"Most social constructionists adhere to the belief that language does not mirror reality; rather it constitutes it [...] Seen in this light, communication becomes more than a simple transmission; it is a*

medium by which the negotiation and construction of meaning takes place"

(Fairhurst 2010b: 174)

And hence, as identity is resting upon the foundation of discourses, negotiation of reality and identities are facilitated by communication through the use of language and symbols.

Our approach to identity

Thus, as we have seen in the above, we will take a social constructivist approach to identity in this thesis. When looking at three organizations web pages to see how they construct the identity of the consumer, one can say that delineating the identities, as we have done in order to discuss them, actually shows tendencies toward the functionalist approach. However, it is important to note that the delineations made in this thesis are solely made on the behalf of being able to discuss them. We fully acknowledge the fluid and dynamic character of identity, which is evolving as social construction takes place. From the extreme of a social constructivist approach to identity, 'identity' is impossible to define in the *objective* terms to meet the standards of a rational science, as reality from this perspective is always subjective. Though, in an attempt to create common standpoints on the concept of consumer identities created on the websites, we will be using discursive analysis to create a structure of meaning on how these identities are portrayed. Identities, as discussed on the basis of discourses, allow us to create some sort of structure in the otherwise fluid and dynamic nature of a social constructed identity. Thus, while we recognize that we can never fully delineate the identity of the consumer, we will use discourses as a way of structuring the identities and meanings surrounding them. When we use theoretical categorizations of the consumers, such as the *postmodern* or *hypermodern* consumer and categories based on *generations*, we find it important to note that we use them as discourses on *how the consumers can be characterized* – and not as scientifically, objective, truths about a delineated consumer. We use them in an attempt to put *some form* to the identities in discussion and to fix the meanings surrounding them, to form the basis for a common discussion on our findings.

19

Identity is influenced

Organization

Frames becomes part of consumers value set

Frame / Message

Consumer identify: "This is meaningful to me"
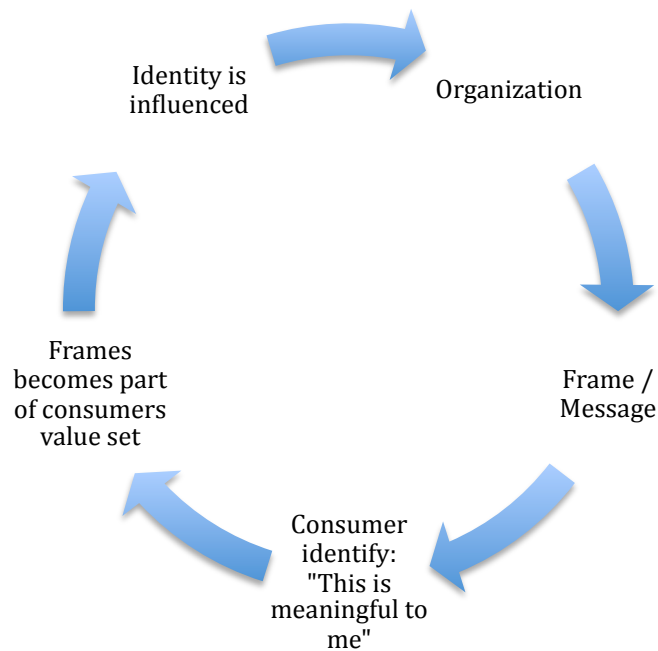
The distinction between the consumer versus customer

In connection to the distinction between the *consumer* and *customer*, we find it necessary to explicitly clarify how this distinction will be made throughout this thesis. In our view, there is an inherent understanding in the term '*customer'* that an economic transaction is taking place: The *customer* buys something and pays something, whatever he or she is buying. The '*consumer'*, on the other hand, associates to the person actually *using* the product or service. Whether or not there has been any economical transaction taking place before the *use* of the product is less interesting. What is in focus here is the fact that consumers *uses* the products or services that the organization provides. In connection to the companies and their consumers, it is interesting to note that for Apple and Microsoft, the *consumer* may very well be the *customer*, whereas for Google, the *consumer* of the services is not necessarily paying anything. In their case, customers are typically those paying for the placement of information about their products or services in Google's search results - or to retain knowledge about *consumers* searching habits.

As our thesis is about the people actually *using* the websites, soliciting information

and only *perhaps* buying something, we will use the term *consumer* consistently throughout this thesis. There might be situations where transactions are also involved, but our focus will be on the *consumers* of the content. The argument for choosing this focus, over the customers, is that we believe that oftentimes the *users* or the consumers of Apple's, Google's and Microsoft's websites, products and services are not always those who buy them. Therefore it is interesting to see how the companies appeal to consumers in their attempt to socially construct identification from consumers, so that customers (whoever they are) will buy products or services from their websites.

III Method, methodology and Design

– The theory of framing

We have now introduced the reader to the concept of 'identity' and presented the reader with the notion that as society has changed, consumers have changed along with it, and this has had an impact on the ground premises for how organizations can communicate to and with their consumers.

Identity, in this process, has become interesting as organizations are more often faced with the challenge of creating communication content on their websites that target a potentially worldwide consumer group that one can not simply divide the group into smaller target groups, as does traditional marketing and communication disciplines, and expect it to be accurate nor sufficiently effective. A reason for this view is that the postmodern social constructivist identity approach prescribes that identities are fragmented, and can therefore not be categorized as if they were fixed identities. What organizations can do, though, is to appeal to different aspects of identity and then hope to spark an identification from consumers. This is why identity matters, and why knowledge on this perspective can pay great contributions, both in theory and practice. But how do one analyze an 'identity'? For example, how do we analyze how Apple, Google and Microsoft aspire to identification? We will elaborate on our approach to this in the below sections.

Firstly, we will begin by shortly introducing the collected data, and our methods for collecting it. After that we will continue with a presentation on our methodology for analyzing the collected data. Finally, we will conclude the chapter with a short presentation on how the analysis is structured and which implications this has in terms of readability.

METHOD

As mentioned, the data for this thesis consists of six selected web pages from three organizations. These organizations are:

- Apple,

- Google, and
- Microsoft

The three have been selected as data material for this thesis for several reasons. First of all, they all practice in the same industry (the IT-industry) and in a scale that makes the consumer groups potentially worldwide. In this sense, there is great similarity between the companies which allows us to analyze the identification points, from this specific context, which potentially aspires to identification, and in that process, thus, co-create identity. The organizations are all large, multinational organizations, both in terms of employees, brand awareness, and revenue[3]. Apple is bigger in terms of employee-mass but earn less than Google, who is on the other hand smaller than Apple while Microsoft is the overall largest of the three on all parameters. All organizations are furthermore accessible by consumers in several languages and virtually all over the world[4].

However, there are also interesting differences among the three organizations. Though they all operate within the same industry, and in some areas compete for the same consumers, they are still selling different products. Apple is the only organization selling both hardware and software, as a complete solution, and as a part of their ordinary product portfolio. Microsoft, as the name implies, is mainly selling software. However, they do have some minor hardware products, but no computers to run their software. And Google is only organizations only providing[5] online software, if we disregard the lone *nexus* mobile phone, which is of no interest to our analysis.

Our focus in this thesis will be on *consumers* and identity, and in this regard, the organizations have been chosen, as they are all *commercial* organizations. Hence, organizations that needs a certain amount of contact to their consumers in order to reach their ultimate goal (profit). By choosing three commercial organizations, as

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[3] **Apple:** 46.400 employees, Income: 14.013 MUSD (2010 Annual Report: http://investor.apple.com/financials.cfm)
Google: 24.400 employees / Income 29.321 MUSD
(http://investor.google.com/financial/tables.html)
Microsoft: 89.403 employees / Income: 62.484 MUSD
(http://www.microsoft.com/investor/reports/ar10/index.html)
Global Brand awareness according to Interbrand.com
(http://www.interbrand.com/en/best-global-brands/best-global-brands-2008/best-global-brands-2010.aspx) Apple: 17 / Google: 4 / Microsoft: 3.
[4] Google are due to their core business of providing their consumers with unfiltered and uncensored information, not accessible in some parts of the world, including China.
[5] We chose the word *provide* over *sell* in this instance, as Google is not selling the products used by their main users.

opposed to mixing commercial organizations with i.e. non-profit organizations, we also hope to eliminate any inconsistencies in connection to differences in end-goals or target groups.

Collection and selection of data

The collected data consists of six web pages from the three companies presented, and there are two web pages from each company. They are all collected on the same date, which was Friday, July 1, 2011 between 11[am] and 11.30[am].

To ensure that the analysis is based on material available to the reader after the analysis, we stored the pages as pictures, which also takes into account that fact that the sites may have otherwise changed during our analysis. In some instances the web pages include visual effects, which are of course not visible on the pictures, and we will instead mention these effects explicitly in the analysis.

To begin our analysis, we have chosen the start page s of each company, which we refer to as the *start page s* as this is where the consumer first meets the organizations online. We have chosen to analyze these, as they most often function to serve as a first impression of the company, when a consumer visits these sites. On that note, we assume that they should therefore be able to reveal a great deal about how the organizations view themselves, their consumers, the context, and their consumers.

The following three pages are included because we, in some way, find that particular chosen page interesting for the organization in question. We have selected pages that are representative and, as mentioned, in some way special for the organization in comparison to the two other companies. For this, we have selected the following: From Apple, their web-shop, from Google, their "about Google" page and from Microsoft, also their web-shop page.

METHODOLOGY

Analyzing how the organizations take an active part in co-constructing identity on their websites, calls for a methodology that takes several factors into account.

First of all, we must encompass the view that discourse play a role in connection to identity and that multiple discourses could be present at the same time, both within the individual (fragmentation) and in society (the context). Second of all, since websites tend to be more static than interpersonal interaction – e.g. between customer service and the consumer – we must take an approach that is concerned with language, or the absence of language, and how this is influencing the perception of identity. And third of all, as we take a postmodern social constructivist view on identity, we must also make sure that our approach or methodology leaves room for the fact that identity is viewed as being dynamic and fluid and cannot be fully delineated or categorized by any theoretical framework so far.

We realize that several theories take this into account, and hence qualify for accomplishing the task of this thesis. But one approach in particular has, as mentioned in the introduction, caught our attention in looking for a lens to analyze the potential identity construction on the three company's web pages. In the next few pages, we will introduce the theory of *"framing".* We will elaborate a little bit on the concept, as well as present how we will use the theory as an analytical tool and as we go along provide the reader with an argument for why we have chosen this particular concept for our purpose. We will then continue with a short guide to how the analysis is designed and this will all lead to the practical analysis and discussion of our findings before rounding off the thesis with a conclusion.

FRAMING

Framing in a context

Before we introduce the concept of framing, we would like to situate it in a context that is relevant to the thesis. As we have presented previously, in this thesis, societal development and changes have created a change in consumer behavior, needs and wants. The postmodern society, which we argue is the present model of society, now reveals hypermodern currents. This indicates that postmodern consumers or generation Y, or at least some of them, will begin to change even further into what we, in theory, categorize as *the hypermodern consumer* or in other cases identify as the *generation Z* (Lipovetsky 2005b; Jensen 2011b; Cova 1999).

On this note, we ask the reader to be aware that according to our social constructivist approach, we use these categorizations to form the basis for a common understanding that will allow us to analyze and discuss upon this subject in a way that makes sense and is understandable to the reader. Hence, we do not believe that we, by using these categorizations or terms that indicate greater tendencies of change, are describing the entire identities of the consumer.

What was characteristic for the postmodern society was the ontology that 'reality' is the (re-) production of our version of reality. So whereas the ideals of the modern society prescribed rational argumentation and positivism, postmodernism allows for some uncertainty to exist, as a consequence of the world being subjectively experienced. Another important characteristic for the postmodern consumer (as well as the hypermodern) is that identity can be fragmented. Thus, postmodern consumers may emphasize certain parts of their identity in some situations and others in other situations, without this creating a conflict in the individual. This changes patterns in consumption, which is emphasized even further as consumption changes its function to become even closer related to identity work, which in turn also changes the conditions for communicating on websites to appeal to consumers. Furthermore, as seen previously, postmodernism places emphasis upon the construction of identity *through* consumption. Thus, where identity in previous times was primarily constructed through the work one performed, identity is now very much constructed through the things one buy. This means that companies, like Apple, Google and Microsoft are now communicating to consumers who, potentially, wish to *identify* with their brand and products, if they find what is being communicated to them appealing.

In this context, using *'framing'* as an analytical tool, encompasses several of the above-mentioned aspects and of the social constructivist approach to identity. In example, framing place great emphasis on discourses, which allow us to step *one step behind* an explicitly expressed message and investigate which "world views" or structures of meaning that lies behind these messages emerge from. In this way, *the context* for the communication content of the web pages becomes an object of analysis. Furthermore, we will also be able to interpret some of the values embedded in the consumers, who identify with these brands, as the frames and mental models that we find will indicate certain values or identification points offered to the visiting consumers. This means that when using framing as an analytic tool, we will both be able to take a view on the individual *but also* on his or her context. However, the *social interaction* that is the third leg of the social

constructivist approach is not as evident in this situation, as the web pages is rather static and does not allow for much interaction.

Thus, throughout the next pages we will build upon this argument, as we present and discuss our approach to '*framing*' as an analytic tool to analyze the web pages of the three organizations.

Framing defined

In simple terms, communication can be viewed as the act of transmitting a message to a receiver, which is generally referred to as the "Sender-Message-Receiver"-model. This may be a true model of how communications works, but it is also a gross simplification of communication, as this neglects the process of creating shared meaning in that process and hence, constituting the 'reality' of a particular situation (Mumby 2008). From a communication perspective, language is often seen as being able to shape the context, in which it is used, by choosing some words and meanings over others. And this means that reality is often contested (Fairhurst 2010b) and, thus, cannot be simplified to the "Sender-Message-Receiver" model as presented above. In this light, framing provides an extra dimension to communication.

In example, if we take the example of telling your friend that you have just bought a computer. You might tell him or her that; *"I have just bought a new computer today"*. Or you might also tell him or her that; *"Today, I have just bought a technical device that will make my everyday life a whole lot easier, it's a computer"*. The content in these two examples is in essence the same: You have bought a new computer. But the way you *frame* reality is very different and hence, leaves different possibilities for reacting open in the social relation. The first frame emphasises the product, as a computer, and perhaps its function as one can argue that most people would know what a computer does. The latter frame emphasizes that you have bought a technical device (a computer), which you will integrate into your everyday life to help make some things easier. This is an example of how language can be used to place reality in different perspectives with a different focus. And in the light of this, we argue that framing, becomes key to making sense of a given situation – both in regards to one's own perception of the situation and other's attempt to do the same. According to Fairhurst (2010a), this is something we do automatically and mostly without knowing it, but the theory of '*framing*' can

help us become aware of when it happens and how it affects the situation. And using '*framing'* as an analytical tool can thus help uncover the specific frames that create specific conditions of possibilities for identification, on the company's websites.

Moving toward a definition, '*framing*' is about emphasising *some* meanings over others and in that sense also about learning how to *manage* meaning (Fairhurst 2010a). We cannot take control or change every situation, but we can seek to control the context under which the situation is understood (Fairhurst 2010a).

> *"… at its most basic level, framing reality means defining "the situation here and now" in ways that connect with others."*

> (Fairhurst 2010a:3)

Fairhurst (2010a) argues that in situations where "reality" is uncertain or ambiguous, what becomes "real" is the hegemonized perception of reality. And this means that *framing* is when we actively shape reality by choosing some interpretations over others:

> *"Framing involves the ability to shape the meaning of a subject – usually the situation at hand – to judge its character and significance through the meanings we include and exclude…"*

> (Fairhurst 2010a;4)

To frame then, involves the ability to articulate and persuade, more or less on demand (Fairhurst 2010a:2). The articulation and persuasion should be strong enough to hegemonize one particular meaning over others and translate this into a *mental model* for the majority of the situation's actors. In this regard, framing becomes very much a theory concerned with *discourses*, and therefore we find it to be highly relevant to our thesis, as this encompasses the context for identity and identity construction.

As you may have noticed, our description of framing above introduced two concepts written in *italic*; *Mental models* and *discourses.* These concepts form the foundation of framing, and to better understand the inner workings of framing, we will elaborate on these in the following, beginning with discourse:

… Discourse

Several approaches to discourse have been proposed throughout time. We are not going to elaborate on the full nature of discourse as an independent theory, as this would lead to a massive amount of theory being presented and discussed. However, instead, we will present the approach to discourse that we find relevant and useful in connection to this specific thesis. In doing this, we will use Fairhurst's recent (2010a) approach to discourse and thereby primarily adhere to a Foucauldian perspective on discourse, defining discourses as:

> "…bodies of knowledge that 'systematically form the object
> of which they speak'."
>
> (Foucault 1979:49; Hardy & Phillips 2004:301)

Fairhurst (2010b) operates with two overall approaches to discourse, which she calls; "Big-D" discourse and "little-d" discourse. "Big-D" discourse is concerned with how discourse is producing or constituting its users, and effectively rendering them as objects (Fairhurst 2007 *in* Caroll & Levy 2010: Fairhurst 2010b). Whereas "little-d" discourse is concerned with how linguistics can be understood as a resource to skilfully craft messages in interpersonal communication and in different contexts (Fairhurst 2007 *in* Caroll & Levy 2010, Fairhurst 2010b). In this thesis, emphasis will be placed upon the "Big-D" discourse, as we investigate how frames on the three websites constitute consumer identities in the process of communicating, which means that we do not forefront the interpersonal communication or the social interaction between the organizations and their consumers. Although, this does not mean that we dismiss its potential presence.

We furthermore underpin our definition of discourse with the approach presented by Hardy and Philips (2004), that:

> "Discourse lays down the 'conditions of possibility' that determine
> what can be said, by whom, and when."
>
> (Hardy & Phillips 2004:301)

This means that discourses forms the context for the people involved in a given situation and prescribe different object- and subject positions to those involved, which conventionally prescribes who can say what (and when). In particular, we will be looking at how practices of *textual production and transmission* create specific discourses that lead to specific frames, that function as points of departure

for communication on the websites, create consumers as specific objects and put them into specific structures of subject positions. We will not use the specific terms of "object" or "subject positions" in the analysis, but rather describe which identities are being portrayed through the company's websites and discuss the different opportunities for action provided to the them there, as a result of the way they have been identified, or one can say "objectified", through the frames on the websites. In the light of this we argue that by tapping into the discourses and strengthening these by the use of language and graphic design, the respective organizations can then hegemonize certain understandings of identity over others, on their websites.

In conclusion, we find it sufficient to say that in order to analyze a frame, it is essential to access the very source to where the content of the communication comes from. In this sense, discourses are essentially the vehicles by which we transmit meaning among us. Thus, from a discursive perspective, creating meaning in a given situation is about tapping into specific discourses to frame and strengthen one's argument. The battle for hegemony is thus rooted in discourses. And having described how we approach discourses in our analysis, we will now turn to an explanation of the concept of *mental models*.

… Mental models

A *'mental model'* is a deeply held image of how the world works (Peter Senge in Fairhurst 2010a:17) and in that sense much like much like the term, '*cognitive schema'* that is used within the field of psychology. Fairhurst (2010a) presents the '*mental model'* as the *mental picture* we hold inside our heads:

> *"… a frame is that mental picture in our heads,*
> *and framing is the process of communicating that picture."*
>
> (Fairhurst 2010a:3-4)

> *"… Models that tell us how the world work, but also how it is likely to*
> *work in the future"*
>
> (Fairhurst 2010a: chapter 2:11)

Thus, these models are deeply held images of how the world works, they are manifested in mental pictures or understandings in our head about; people, events,

themes, situations, and ourselves that we use to make sense of the world around us. And this means that looking at mental models on the organizations websites could give an indication of how consumers are perceived, and thereby approached from Apple, Google and Microsoft's side.

Metaphorically speaking, mental models can also be described as general structures that can be seen as a library of past cases and experiences, from which specific mental models emerge when we communicate (Fairhurst 2010a). Neurologically, our brain draws upon these mental models when perceiving situations, as they function as predictions and expectations of how the world works. The very process of perceiving and using mental models in that process is of course grossly simplified in our association here, as there are numerous processes at play when perceiving and turning this perception into the action of actually communicating about it. However our description serves as a rather simple, yet substantial, explanation as to why mental models play a role in the way we communicate and understand communication.

In example, most of us instinctively assume that if we turn a doorknob, the door opens (unless off course it is locked, which then requires a different mental model). This is because we have experienced so many times before that, if we turned the doorknob a door opened, that we have come to establish this as a mental model for opening doors. If you were to explain someone what the trick was when it comes to opening doors, your explanation would depend upon your mental model for opening doors. And this is not only the case for opening doors, but for all experiences we face in our life. And hence, when we communicate from what we generally believe to be *ourselves,* we are in fact always communicating on the basis of past experiences and future predictions that we, in this perspective, call '*mental models'* (Fairhurst 2010a)*.*

In Fairhurst's (2010a) theory on *'framing'* another aspect is presented, which is concerned with the brain and mental models. This is called *'priming'*. Priming has to do with how one can nuance, or become better at drawing upon numerous aspects of one's mental models, or tap into other's mental models, in order to, for example, become better at spontaneous communication (Fairhurst 2010a). However, as we do not have access to internal knowledge about how the communication content was created, nor how it was intended, and as our focus is on the explicitly communicated messages, we will not explore this concept further in this thesis.

SUMMARY

If we take a look at what has been presented and discussed in this chapter, we have presented the reader with the following:

Framing is about communicating a certain understanding of a given situation. Framing is rooted in discourses and can be used, strategically, to strengthen certain discourses to win hegemony with certain meanings over others. In connection to this, it was concluded that, what lies behind every communicated message is a mental model that is based upon previous experiences and future predictions on how the world is likely to work. These models influence the way one chooses to frame a message, as does discourses that, either purposely or hidden form the obvious, effects *what* is being communicated and *how.* Whether mental models are constituting discourses or discourses are constituting mental models remains open for discussion – perhaps it is not the case of "*either or*" but rather a continuously circular engagement and development.

A final thought that relates to some criticism to the use of *'framing'* as an analytical tool is that it is important to note that we, who are conducting this analysis, will not able to objectively, or exhaustively, provide the exact meanings to the messages analyzed. Framing is an "interpretive tool" that relies on the interpretation of the analytics. And this allows us to interpret upon the frames set for identity construction on the websites, based on the analysis of which discourses are present on their websites. But it does not allow us to extract *all meanings*, with no uncertainty. In this regard, one can argue that what is lost in terms of rational, identifiable measurements, is gained in terms of ability to manoeuvre *behind* the actual stated messages and detect the discourses, or conditions of possibility, that lies behind messages that are seldom as simple as they come across.

DESIGN OF THE ANALYSIS

In the light of the above description, working with framing on an organizations website will be to look at how the company is describing the situation at hand (e.g. the context for the consumer) to provide a contribution (their product or service),

in a way that relates to identity of the consumer. One can say that the way an organization chooses to frame the consumer's context and the organizations contribution (solution) towards this, effects the identity aspects that consumers can read into. Therefore, we argue that, the way organizations frame themselves and their products, indirectly sets the frame for how the persons who buy products or find information from these sites can buy into this identity-universe.

We will conduct an analysis to investigate how the three organizations – Apple, Google and Microsoft – frame the context of the organizations and the consumer. Initially, we have conducted an analysis of all the six chosen web pages, to reveal all discourses present on each chosen page, and during this analysis we found a total of *nine* discourses being present. As the analysis itself was conducted one organization at the time, and one web page at the time, this gave us a large amount of raw data material from each organization. What was interesting was that, as the analysis progressed, we discovered that several discourses were present, not only on the web pages of *one* organization, but on the web pages of *all* organizations included in the study. Furthermore, we found some discourses that were only visible on one or two of the three organization's web pages. In some instances we found the discourses to be overlapping each other, from organization to organization.

In continuation of this analysis, we will now present an analysis of the discourses found and the mental models associated with these. Thus, instead of presenting an analysis of *each company's website* and which discourses were displayed, which would cause us to repeat many arguments, we chose to do it this way to avoid to much repetition and to provide the reader with an even more relevant and interesting analysis and discussion. We have chosen to analyse the discourses, as we see discourses as being a constituting element for mental models displayed on the web pages. We will begin with the discourses that were identified among all the organizations, and then continue with those that were only visible at two and finish with the one's that were only displayed at one of the organizations. Each of the discourse sections will contain information on how a discourse was identified and how they were displayed on each organization's web pages. If the given discourse was not displayed on a company's web page, it will not be mentioned under that specific discourse section.

In order to be transparent in our analysis and findings, each section will have a recognizable layout. To begin, we will present the discourse and then list which

organizations had this particular discourse displayed and how it was visible. After all discourses have been analyzed, we will proceed to an analysis of which mental models was associated with the above-mentioned discourses. Thus, should the reader be interested in a conclusive summary of each of the discourses, we suggest to read the introduction to each discourse. However, should the reader wish to have more in-depth information on how the discourses were identified, we suggest the reader to continue reading the analysis.

Following the analysis of discourses and mental models, we will continue to a discussion of our findings, as well as provide the reader with an overview on the particular identity-constructions (framed consumers) that were identified from the company's websites. After this, we will proceed with a discussion on framing being used as an analytical tool. But for now, please allow us to begin our analysis, by introducing the reader to our findings and thereafter present the practical analysis.

IV Society and its consumers

As we have mentioned in the above, we use theoretic terms and categorizations of the consumers to form a basis for the discussion of our findings from the analysis. To think that these terms or categorizations could be exhaustive in their description of the identity of consumers would appose our social constructivist approach. Rather, we use these terms and characterizations as a way to fix the meanings, surrounding the consumers, to be able to discuss them, and to clarify if there are any differences between the consumer identities described in theory and those indicated in practice.

Moreover, this allows us to discuss where the companies are heading, in terms of their context and their approach to consumers. Thus, we use these categorizations, not with functionalistic aims, however to describe some broader tendencies of consumers in relation to identity. The theory of the postmodern and the hypermodern consumer represent the broadest brushstrokes of identity characteristics. This is then further underpinned with the theory on generation X, Y and Z. Our goal is, thus, to present some theory that, to a broader scale, describe consumers in terms of what they identify with. And in relation to this, we will discuss the practical findings of identification points on Apple, Google and Microsoft's websites.

In order to understand what challenges organizations are facing in today's society, we now turn to an exploration of how the society has developed and how this in turn has affected the consumers. We mean to investigate how the individual as a person and a consumer has changed with the society. First of all, based upon a short introduction to modernism, we conduct a review of the main characteristics of the postmodern currents, and end this investigation with an exploration of the hypermodern trends. The focus will be especially on the development of the main ideas and implications and on approaching a definition of the postmodern and hypermodern consumer identity

A MODERN SOCIETY

In this section we will briefly introduce the reader to the characteristics of the traditional modern society. These characteristics are interesting as they form the basis for both change, into the postmodern society model, and because some of the

modern societies ideals are still present in today's society despite its further development towards a hypermodern societal model.

Modernity is best described as a social model, which originated in the middle of the 17th century and continued to develop throughout the 18th century, with its main ideas still stretching into today's society (Cova 1999:16). The most visible change from the traditional society – mainly dominated by agriculture and by people living together in small, local and self-sufficient production communities – to the modern was the development from a self-sufficient local community to a larger society based on increased production capabilities and a mechanization mass-production of commodities. This shift had great impact on socio-economic conditions of the community and turned the traditional agricultural economy into a new industrialized economy (Christensen 2007:28-29). In addition to this, the modern period is often characterized as a break away from the traditional society's irrationality, myths and religion (Brown 1993: 19-20) and as arising an increased orientation towards rationality, science and objectivity. This gave rise to the quest for the absolute truths and a freedom of the individual, who was no longer as dominated by religious beliefs and as by what was positivistic and could be objectively accounted for. This caused this particular social period to be characterized as the rule of reason and the establishment of rational order and also the emergence of the freed subject (Cova 1996). The revolution meant that people were now considered to be rational individuals who make choices based upon rationality. A presumption that is still visible in many areas of our society in the year of 2011. Lipovetsky points to an interesting tendency, that a greater focus on equality in society led to a democratic development, which among other things, helped legitimize the personal taste of each individual (Lipovetsky 2005:3). Thus, where the collective had previously been immensely important, the individual was now slowly being more emphasized, as the dependency on the local community changed. This tendency developed even further and led to a development in society, which gradually became more and more postmodern. This change, and the characteristics of the postmodern society, will be elaborated in section the below.

A POSTMODERN SOCIETY

The first postmodern currents emerged, as a counter reaction to the ever-prevailing rationality, which had been characterizing modern society and its

institutions. Claiming that modernity's ideals would never truly be realized (Cova 1996:16) postmodernism is characterized by an intense fragmentation of the individual and distrust in all universal or totalizing discourses (Cova 1996:16). Following this, the postmodern era has been described as:

> "…an era without a dominant ideology or utopia but with a plurality of current and styles"

> (Cova 1996:16)

In this societal model, the individual is seen as being entitled to have different opinions and values. In the light of this pluralism becomes the active rejection of structures and hierarchies that limit individuals and situate them in certain roles and identities (Andersen & Kaspersen 2001:463). However, despite the rejection of the modern ideals, a tendency to place the individual in the centre – which had begun in the modernity – has continuously developed under the postmodern era. This is seen in a much stronger focus on individual self-development and realization of personal goals (Smith 2008). Identity in this era is viewed as very closely linked to consumption and the buying experience (Firat 1993:235), and consumers want to realize- and express themselves through the lines of their consumption (Lipovetsky 2005:9).

The postmodern consumer

These changes in society have affected the competition in the markets - and companies are now increasingly selling design and exclusivity that signals a certain status in society. This means, in example, that companies are no longer solely competing with companies that produce the same products, but also with companies that sell other designs, that signal equal status (Mogensen et al. 2004:21; Smith 2008). The postmodern consumer is characterized by producing his or hers own image through consumption, in order to market oneself in the social market (Firat 1995:92). Consumption thereby becomes an essential tool for social integration (Firat 1995:18) and this has at least two implications for how we approach identity in the postmodern perspective;

> 1) The postmodern consumer deviates from the modern consumer in terms of identity work. The modern consumer identified himself through the work he performed, whereas the postmodern consumer defines him-

or herself through consumption, and the experiences that relates to this (Firat 1993:235). This means that there are potentially as many identities (or more) as there are consumers (Firat 1995:44).

2) A postmodern consumer is potentially fragmented, which gives rise to a need for new segmentation methods. This need arises, as consumers can no longer be classified on the basis of fixed categories as consumers are fragmented (Firat 1995:44: Fink 2007). And in line with this, we argue, that theory on identity can contribute to the understanding of how to relate to consumers, and communicate; in ways that meet consumer's needs and wants across a global scale. As it is no longer possible to, effectively, classify and predict people's buying behavior on the basis of their age, gender, religion and so forth, 'identity' theory can potentially provide, both researchers and practitioners, with a tool to meet the consumers, in a way that aspires to co-construct identity and enhance identification from the consumer.

The postmodern society has been characterized by keywords as hyperreality, fragmentation and decentralization of the subject (Firat 1993 & 1995). While most of these tendencies are self-explanatory, hyperrealism deserves some clarification. 'Hyperreality' refers to the fact that reality, as we know it, is only a (re)production or one version of the "real" reality. In contrast to modern time's trust in objectivity and faith in positivistic validity, postmodernism rejects such notion and considers the (re)production of 'reality' as the only real reality, (Nielsen 2006). This means that the hypermodern consumer finds it equally desirable to receive simulated experiences from consumption, as the "real" experience (defined by objective standards) does not exist.

Thus, as indicated above, postmodern communication is different from the modern. Where companies, in the modern society, could seek to dictate the needs of consumers through sender-oriented and strictly segmented communication, this is not a possibility for the postmodern communicator. The postmodern consumer is characterized as being a fragmented, pluralistic and co-creator of his image and this places the companies in front of new challenges that yield for communication to invites consumers to be engaged and to interact in the identification between the company and its consumer.

Much in line with these required changes to communication, we cannot presume

that society will continue to be postmodern, as societies are constantly developing. In the below, we would like to introduce the reader to the concept of hypermodernity which is identified by the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky (2005b), in theory, as being the next social model for society.

A HYPERMODERN CURRENT

In this section, we will elaborate on a hypermodern current seen, by the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky, in today's postmodern society. This line of thought has originated in France, and is basically a discussion of whether the postmodern society is developing into a hypermodern social model. Central to this debate is Lipovetsky and Charles[6], who give their account on the future society and their theory on the hypermodern[7] (Lipovetsky 2005b). Lipovetsky's work is based on studies and interpretations of societal development and should be seen as a critique of the simple perception of reality often seen in cultural and societal research (Lipovetsky 2005b:3). Today, trends of the hypermodern society can already be traced in western societies. Where consuming used to be the source of rivalry on high status in society, hyperconsumers are now consuming for their own pleasure (Lipovetsky 2005a).

Hypermodernity is described as a second modernity - we could call it modernity of consumption (Lipovetsky 2005b). It is argued that, *"[hypermodernity] has no opposite, and is absolutely modern, resting essentially on three axiomatic elements constitutive of modernity itself: the market, technocratic efficiency and the individual."*(Lipovetsky, 2005:31-32). The hypermodern society is described as globalized and constantly developing. In this sense, development should be understood as obligatory, if the citizens do not wish to be outpaced by technological development:

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[6] Lipovetsky is a french sociologist and professor. Sébastien Charles is as well a French Ph.D. in philosophy.
[7] Lipovetsky is very much inspired by the French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (18-05-1859), who was a political thinker and historian and among the first to describe the individual's strive for personal happiness and which consequences and limits this striving had (Lipovetsky, 2005:2).

"Hypermodernity is a liberal society characterized by movement, fluidity and flexibility, detached as never before from the great structuring principles of modernity, which have been forced to adapt to the rhythm of hypermodernity so as not to disappear."

(Sebastien Charles in Lipovetsky 2005b:11)

"In hypermodernity, there is no longer any choice or alternative other than that of constantly developing, accelerating the movement so as not to be overtaken by 'evolution': the cult of technocratic modernization has won out over the glorification of ends and ideals."

(Lipovetsky 2005b:34)

When referring to the detachment, Charles is talking about a decreasing influence from public institutions in favor of individual responsibility (Charles in Lipovetsky 2005b: 12). This development continues to carry on, as an increased access to new communication technologies has made it possible for people to break free from structural hierarchies, and to seek information for their own enlightenment. In a corporate perspective, this means that consumers now have the access to obtain information i.e. about products or the companies, and gain an ability to influence an organizations communication.

In studying the changes, Lipovetsky argues, that in line with the future becoming harder to predict, increased demands are made for people to be more mobile, flexible and constantly adaptable (Lipovetsky 2005b:34). This constant fluidity becomes quite clear by the abolition of barriers of time and space, primarily facilitated by the Internet and internet-trade. This has decreased many of the previous known obstacles and restrictions in consumption. The consumer is now able to move through several contexts instantly, by a few clicks. In example, the consumer is able to trade in other countries, in order to save money or to purchase some products at a time when local shops are closed. Furthermore, consumption is increasingly integrating itself in greater potions of social life (Lipovetsky 2005b:11). Thus, what characterizes hypermodernity is; increased access to communication technologies, consumption that takes up greater portions of social life, fluidity, flexibility and detachments from structures and mobility.

The hypermodern consumer

To compare the identity in what we may call modernity 1.0 versus modernity 2.0 (modernism vs. hypermodernism), we can say that where identity was found in relation to ideology and politics (modernism), hypermodern consumers develop their identity in relation to the mass media, economy, consumption, individual egocentrism and technological development (Lipovetsky 2005b: 32-33).

Interestingly, it was stated in the above that consumption, to the postmodern consumer, was about flaunting social status and consumption was hence, directed to external display. But this has changed with the hypermodern consumer. To this type of consumer, consumption is about satisfying the individual's intrinsic needs. And this means that communication to these consumers should aim to create content with which the consumer can identify, for his or her own pleasure, and not to fit in or flaunt a specific status or value toward society.

> *" The quest for private pleasures has taken over from the demand that one flaunts one's status and win social recognition: the contemporary period is witnessing the establishment of a luxury of an unprecendented kind - an emotional, experiential, pscychologized luxury, which replaces the theatricality of social display…"*

> *"Hyperconsumption is a consumption which absorbs and integrates greater and greater portions of social life […], and which is, rather, arranged in such a way as to meet individual ends and criteria, according to an emotional and hedonistic logic which makes everyone consume first and foremost for their own pleasure rather than out of rivalry with others."*

(Lipovetsky 2005b: 11)

Another important consequence is that hyper-consumers want to be able to find the information they need – in an instant. This consumer type "is increasingly concerned with the time they have available. They can't bear wasting time. They want products accessible at any time of day or night, and seek speed, if not instantaneousness, in each act of consumption" (Lipovetsky 2005a:210). This characterization speaks for the use of the Internet to increase, as this is the only place (so far) where information and trade options are available to the consumer

whenever he or she needs it. The content of websites such as Apple, Google and Microsoft thus becomes even more valuable, as this is where contact will increasingly begin (and end).

SUMMARY AND FINAL THOUGHTS

In conclusion, we can see that views on identity change along with the developing social models for society. While modernity saw the individual as rational, a postmodernist perspective seems to emphasize that the individual is rather irrational and fragmented between several discourses. In the postmodernist view, the reality of the individual is subjective which leads to a much greater emphasis places upon the individual and fragmented identity of people, rather than on their social status in society. A hypermodern view on identity contains elements from both the modern and postmodern era. However, an emphasis it put upon the personal pleasure of buying things and experiences. In particular, the hypermodern era is characterized by a rapid development within digital communication technologies, which integrates technology and consumption into greater portions of social life and demands constant development in order to be in control.

Modernism	Postmodernism	Hypermodernism
• Increased focus on the individual instead of the society	• Continuing increased focus on the individual - Self-development and realization of selv is mporatant	• Critique of simple approach to reality - Reality is complex.
• The rational individual making rational choices in a rational society	• True rationality is an utopia	• Individual empowerment through communication technologies, and demand to stay up to date on this development
• Search for objective and absolute truth	• Distrust of universality and totalising discourses	• The individual demands mobility, flexibility and constantly adaptability - and is demanded to be so as well
• Science increasingly important	• Self-determination produces an individual who is fragmented between different values and opinions	• Individual is concerned with time through speed, and availability
• Democracy legitimizes individuality and personal taste	• Identity linked to and defined through consumption	• Individual consumption is based on hedonistic and emotional needs
• Identity linked to social status and occupation	• A subjective reality	• Life is about meaningful experiences
• An absolute reality		• Less focus on solidarity and more focus on individual happines

GENERATIONS

To further underpin the importance of societal changes toward the identity of the consumer, we will now introduce the reader with the theory of generations. This theory is generally concerned with how people can be characterized despite cultural differences, and how there seem to be some values that people have in common (at least in Western countries with access to the digital communication technologies) and identify with. We argue that this is the case, because society (the context), from a macro-perspective, forms the ground premises for action and identification. By this we mean that some incidents or particular features of society influence the was consumers act, such as for example, when the Internet gained ground this led consumers to seek for information or buy products online. Thus, as seen above the society affects consumers values and conditions of possibility (and that includes action), and in this section, we will be investigating how one can talk about the differences in what consumers value and how they prefer to act, on the basis of when they grew up, that is; which generation they belong to. It is, however, important to note that there are some strong arguments against this theory, namely that as technology develops and several generations gradually now use the digital communication technologies, the strong gaps between one generation and the other slowly fades. As elder generations gain access to the same information, pictures and updates online as their younger generations (their children or grand children), the differences between them are gradually becoming less. However, we do believe that it is fair to say that there are still distinct features that characterize one generation from the other. And in this thesis, we will be using the theory of *generations* as a tool to discuss the tendencies we find on Apple, Google and Microsoft's websites. Hence, we do not think of *generations* as categories that exhaustively defines people's values and needs and wants, but as useful terms that direct the meanings and attention to certain aspects discussed in our thesis.

On this note, we mean to investigate how the developments in the society, from modern to postmodern with hypermodern trends, have affected the individual as a person and consumer, as can be seen in smaller groups of generations. In doing this, we assume that people tend to be influenced very much in the same way by the current political, economical and technological environment while they are young (Jensen 2008).

Generation X

BORN BETWEEN 1960 AND 1975

Generation X is a relatively small generation. This is partly due to the improvements in contraception methods[8], which caused birth rates to drop, and partly because this generation was the first generation to be affected by "parents getting a divorce" (Montana 2008). The introduction of the birth control pill in the US in 1960 is the event, which we identify as the beginning of this generation (Jensen 2008; Pelsmacker 2010; InsidePeople 2008).

From one perspective, this generation is characterized as a "generation of desired children", born because their parents really wanted them, and raised with care and personal attention (Jensen 2008). From another perspective, though, this generation has also been classified as the "forgotten generation", as they were the first to experience parents living separately, each having a job, which meant a loss of parental time and more day-care, but also an increased economic ability of the parents. However, when referring to them in this thesis, we will call them "generation X" as this come a cross as more neutral and leaves us to explain the consumerist distinctions of this generation.

The consumerist distinctions are of course affected by the above-mentioned conditions and as a response to this, several theorists argue, generation X is characterized as being self-centred and oriented towards achieving their own goals (Jensen 2008; InsidePeople 2008; Pelsmacker 2010; Montana 2008). This quest for personal success created a generation of workaholics (Jensen 2008) that are obsessed with material wealth (Montana 2008). Their quest for status and success causes them to buy products in which they can seek identification and signal who they are to gain social status, and generation X is therefore more concerned with buying brands that signal status as opposed to more generic products (Jensen 2008). This description, when comparing it to the broader brush strokes of societal and consumer tendencies, is very much in line with the postmodern characteristic of consumers. And thus, generation X classifies as a postmodern consumer type for whom social status is valued as important and identification very much takes place on the basis of social status. Thus, when communicating content on a global scale, one should consider the identification points that signal social status, in terms of work or material wealth, among other things, which will very like values that the

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[8] The Birth Control Pill was introduced in the US in 1960 and in Denmark in 1966 (Jensen & Levinsen ????) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Combined_oral_contraceptive_pill=).

postmodern, generation X -consumers will identify with.

Generation Y

BORN BETWEEN 1975 AND 1990

This generation was raised in a period of economic wealth and political stability and the event that, in particular, mark the beginning of this generation was the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. At that point, the world had been at arms, almost constantly, since the beginning of that century, and the world was now left with "only" two nations locked in a cold conflict. And this resulted in a period of rather stability in the world (Jensen 2008; InsidePeople 2008). This caused the values to change and develop once again, and where personal success and material wealth were considered to be values to admire in a time where the world had been in conflict, generation Y now embarked on a quest for self-realization instead. This caused the generation to pursue many individual purposes and, in example, often zapping from education to education, which left them with the nickname "the zapper-generation" (InsidePeople 2008).

Reizenwitz & Iyer (2009) identifies generation Y as more media savvy than generation X, as generation Y was the first generation to use e-mail, instant messaging and cell phones. For that reason, generation Y is described as more comfortable with new technology and that they posses an understanding of how to solve problems, or shorten a learning curve, by using interactive collaboration tools (Reizenwitz 2009). For this reason, generation Y is also referred to as "the digital natives" (InsidePeople 2008). What is especially characteristic for this generation is that their context for action, the tools with which they can interact, have developed and generation Y, thus, becomes the first generation, in which the use of the Internet exceeds television consumption (Barnikel 2005). This fact supports the claim from the post-and hypermodern consumer sections in that digital communication technologies change the ways in which consumers behave. It also changes the conditions and power of consumers, as they gradually evolve to be more engaged consumers. This furthermore, supports our previous claim that postmodern and hypermodern currents in society places great emphasis on the communication content of company's websites, as this increasingly becomes the source for identification.

Generation Z

BORN BETWEEN 1990 AND 2001

This generation was born into a period of change. The cold war had come to an end and in 1989 the Berlin Wall fell which established a new world. On one hand, these children were born into an optimistic period of time, as a great conflict had ended, but on the other hand, this new world order created new conflicts among other in Balkan. Also, signifying this period of time was the fact that the Internet was still increasing in its integration into more and more parts of social life (Jensen 2008) - one could trade on a world wide basis and public television broadcasts began to publicly display themselves online.

Generation Z has been characterized as a generation with a positive view on family and children. This may stem from the roots of generation X who have experienced the ruin of "the family" and who have therefore, typically, done their best to change these conditions for their children, generation Y and Z (Montana 2008). In this regard, generation Z have also been called the "project children" or "trophy children", as they were born to a position of being in the centre of family (Jensen 2008).
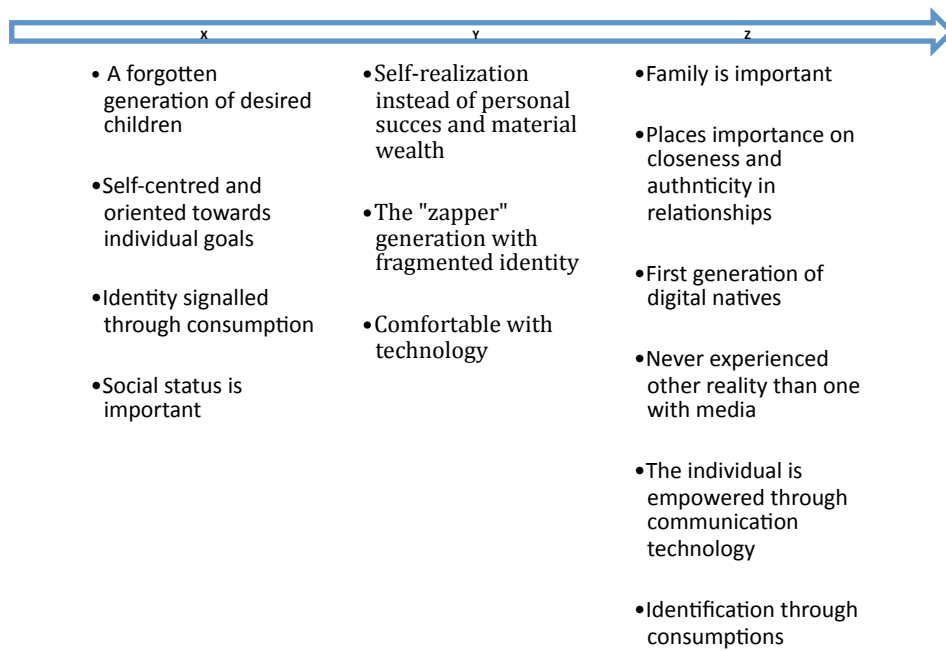
Generation Y was identified as setting the values of *working hard* and *achieving personal happiness* as key to gain prosperity and to become happy. However, generation Z, tend to place more value and emphasis on closeness and authenticity in their relationships, as what makes them happy. And in this regard, generation Z is defined by a willingness to maintain an almost constant stream of communication with their network, to maintain their relationships and interpersonal nearness and to continuously ensure the validity and existence of a relationship (Jensen 2011b+c). In that sense generation Z can also be characterized as "masters of networks", as most of them carry their network with them wherever they go, via smartphones or other devices, which they can easily use to gain information about, in example, brands or products, but also to pass on knowledge or opinions of the same. This can perhaps be seen as a result of generation Z, never having experienced a reality with no access to the Internet and its possibilities in terms of communication, shopping, online interactivities and social networking (InsidePeople 2008; Jensen 2008). This relates well with the notion of the hypermodern consumer, who thrives with digital communication technology and who want to have access to knowledge in an instant.

As the hypermodern consumer was also characterized as impatient in relation to obtaining information and as (hyper-) selective when it comes to information, this supports the argument well, that as identities are fragmented and one can no longer predict, precisely, which consumers will do what, creating identity points that appeal to hypermodern, generation Z -consumers may appeal to a broader group of people, despite cultural differences, as would traditional communication based on demographic segmentation. The claim is thus, that technology makes consumers more and more alike in some perspectives (we all use the internet, most of us would know how to buy a product, and many of us know facebook or other social networks). However, consumers are still distinct in many other perspectives, and the different emphasis placed upon values as described through the generations in this chapter, is just one example of this. Identity positions that would appeal to generation Z consumers, would most likely be those defined within an emphasis on *time* and *network, authenticity* and *nearness* (being connected)*.

SUMMARY AND FINAL THOUGHTS

Having explored three generations ranging in year of birth from 1960 to 2001 it is apparent that each generation has its own characteristics in terms of identity. While the identity of Generation X is based on consumption and a drive towards personal success and material wealth, this has transformed into a need for self-realization of personal ideals in Generation Y. Both perspectives correspond with a postmodernist social model although Generation X still displays remainings of a modernist mindset with an orientation towards social status. The "zapping" tendencies visible in generation Y, as part of the quest for self-realization, is in deed a postmodernist characteristic, with identity being fragmented between the ample opportunities and values. Generation Z contains hypermodern tendencies in their approach to identity, as the individual is seen as empowered through communication technologies and they display a keen orientation towards closeness and authenticity in personal relationships, while still being fragmented between being consumes on the one hand and social activists on the other. They are indeed concerned with the experience and a need to co-create the reality, places less importance on brands than did the previous generations.

The major characteristics of the various generations are illustrated below:

X

Y

Z

- A forgotten generation of desired children

- Self-centred and oriented towards individual goals

- Identity signalled through consumption

- Social status is important

- Self-realization instead of personal succes and material wealth

- The "zapper" generation with fragmented identity

- Comfortable with technology

- Family is important

- Places importance on closeness and authnticity in relationships

- First generation of digital natives

- Never experienced other reality than one with media

- The individual is empowered through communication technology

- Identification through consumptions

V Description of the pages analyzed

As described the data collected for this thesis is made up by six web pages, two from each organizations included in the study. As these pages are potentially changing over time, and most likely in rapid cycles, we have included screen dumps of the pages as appendixes. However, as these pages are essentially pictures with text, it may potentially be very subjective what is derived from looking at them. Parameters such as cultures, age, how familiar a person is with a particular webpage and with the organizations included in the study, all come together and influence how the pages are interpreted. Therefore, what we derive from looking at the pages may be different from what others observe. In order to ensure complete openness about what we have found particularly interesting and therefore have included in the analysis, we will now bring a textual description of the web pages, which should serve to clarify on what premises we have based our analysis. Many of our arguments for identifying the discourses will be based on our observations made in this section.

Surely, others would have found other discourses and mental models from looking at the pages, as they would perhaps pay attention to other things on the web pages than we have. We acknowledge this, and welcome any additions or observations made by those reading this thesis, and qua our social constructivist approach, we do by no means claim an absolute truth to be found nor demonstrated from our findings.

In the following we will describe the pages we have included in the study, one page at the time, and indicate where we found it. We will begin with the first pages – which we have termed *start page,* as it is the first page the visitors is likely to see – and continue with the secondary pages – called "store page" in the case of Apple and Microsoft, and "About page" in the case of Google.

APPLE

Start page – *apple.com*

The very first thing we observed on the start page of is an almost overwhelming simplicity. There is quite a lot of white space, that is, the space designers refer to as the amount of screen not used by text, pictures or anything like it. There are no sound effects beginning as you enter the site, which means that the only thing creating the visitors experience is the visual design. Likewise, there are no animated visuals that begin as you enter the site, with the exception of a news bar in the bottom of the visual screen area, which changes every three seconds.

The navigation bar is located at the top of the screen, with the characteristic image of a half-eaten apple at the upper left corner, and the search bar at the upper right corner. In between are the links to the five main products of the organization[9], a link to the *store*, and a link to *support*.

The page is clearly dominated by a very large field displaying information about the newest product, in this case Apple's iCloud. The whole field acts as a bottom, which is interesting as the logo of the cloud is also shaped as a bottom. Everything is in shades of silver and grey, except for three pictures of three persons displayed in full color and a text in blue; "*Watch the keynote*". Whichever section we scroll the mouse over, the area lights up to an even brighter white color, to indicate that we can click to go further on the page resulting in a sense of intuitive simplicity. When scrolling down, four new areas become visible, each displaying information that Apple deem relevant to the visitor in the form of news, updates to software, "how-to" guides in the form of videos and special offers, in this case for students.

The language is English, but there is an opportunity to change this at the bottom of the screen, located by an American flag and followed by text. The page demonstrated an equal amount of pictures in the form of bottoms and text. The text is never long, and wherever it is, we are able to click on it, except for the bottom of the page where the phone number and obligatory copyright sentence is displayed.

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[9] Mac, iPod, iPhone, iPad, and iTunes.

Apple store – store.apple.com/us

This page is characterized by having a lot less white space than the start page. There are quite a few more sections and no identifiable clear main area to focus on. Like the start page there are no audio effects, and in this case no animated effects either, which means that the main driver of attention and discourse are to be found in text or static pictures, or the absence of the same. The navigation bar is the same as the start page but a new menu bar is added below that to navigate, *within* the store: between the store, a personal *account* and a *shopping cart.*

While the start page was oriented about products, this is even truer for the store, which off course makes good sense. The page is primarily filled with products of various kinds, albeit not only the main five as presented in the menu bar, but also many small products, software and accessories and also products made by third party manufacturers. The centreline from the top to the bottom is reserved for products illustrated with both text and pictures, while each of the sides has various navigation sub-menus, with textual links as the main driver of attention.

The bottom of the page is reserved for links to specialized online stores, such as the *educational store,* the *business store* or the *government store.* And there are no links to *Job opportunities* or *corporate information* as on the start page . Instead, the links are used for *help* and *account* links, links referring to *sales and refunds*, links to information about *privacy* and *security.*

GOOGLE

Start page – *google.com*

If white space was a dominating thing for the start page of Apple, then Google has taken this to a whole new level. The first thing that meets us when opening this page, is a completely white page, with the colourful "Google" logo in the middle and a long search bar just below. The logo itself is written in colour in a pattern of cold and warm colours. Below the search bar are only two buttons, both rectangular one in shades of grey. One is for *Google Search* the other is called *I'm Feeling Lucky*. There are no sound effects beginning when the site is opened and no animated visual effects.

The only two navigation menus displayed on the site are a black bar located at the top of the screen, and going all the way from the left side to the right, and six links in blue text in the bottom of the screen. By default you enter the menu *Web* when visiting the start page , and you can then select other search pages and services such as *Images* and *Gmail* – Google's own online e-mail client. In the upper right corner is a *Sign In* function and a *Gear* signaling a possibility to adjust something on the site. The lower menu is divided in two. On the left one are links to *Advertising Programs*, *Business Solutions, About Google, Go to Google Denmark,* and *Privacy*. In the lower menu at the bottom is a link called *Change Background Image*.

One thing worth mentioning is that you as default are directed to the local-language page, regardless of which Google address you type into your browser. You then have the possibility to navigate to Google.com in English, which we have done in order to ensure that we analyze the pages from the different organizations in the same language.

About Google – google.com/intl/en/about/corporate/index/html

This page is remarkably different from the start page. White space is still very much present, but much less than on the start page, as more information is being displayed. The first thing that meets us when entering the site is Google's mission statement written in a large font, and five large boxes each containing corporate information about Google. These are displayed in both text and in a visual portrayal that brings connotation to the content. Like the start page, there are no sound effects and no animated visual effects.

Below the five boxes are three columns of text with a total of five sections about *Advertising Solutions, Business Solutions, Our Solutions for site owners, Fun Stuff* and *Our Products*. The main driver of attention here is text, except for a few, rather small, logos under the sections of advertising and fun stuff.

Located in a small, grey menu bar at the bottom of the screen are links to the same pages as in the five boxes, and below the bar links to information about *privacy* and *Terms of Service*. The Google logo is no longer placed in the centre of it all, but in the top, just a little to the left of the centre line. The black menu bar found on the top of the start page has disappeared and there are no longer any possibilities for signing in or customizing the site or your account.

MICROSOFT

Start page – microsoft.com

The first thing to notice is that the white space in this case is in shades of blue, creating an effect of looking towards the skies. In terms of the white space as a design feature, there is not much of it as various boxes with information use most of the screen.

The page contains several menu bars located in different positions around the page. In the upper right corner is where the visitor can change language, see other Microsoft sites, share information, shop or provide *feedback* to Microsoft. A little below this menu and located in the centre is a search field with the text *search microsoft.com* and the logo for *bing*, Microsoft's search engine. Located just below this, we find the second menu bar, containing standard commercial information about *products,* the two main products *Windows* and *Office*, as well as links to the *support, download, about* and other similar links. The third menu is located to the right of the animated commercial window under the headline *I want to*, and featuring three possibilities: *Get Office 2010, Get Windows 7* and *Update my computer.* The fourth menu bar is located in the box named *Top Products* and allows the visitor to navigate between certain selected products web pages. This menu has a *Most Popular* function where the visitor can shift between the most popular products by clicking back and forth on two arrows in the upper right corner of the box. The fifth menu is a vertical drop-down menu in the box named *Product support*, which is located below the *Top products* box, and next to two similar boxes named *Popular Downloads* and *Latest News*. Below this we find the sixth menu bar under the headline *Popular Searches,* featuring an expand and collapse menu with index categories such as *For home, For work, Fun, Security, Downloads and articles* and *Bing.* In the lower right corner we find the seventh and final menu bar with the standard corporate information about legal issues, privacy, but also a possibility to *Manage your profile* and *Contact us*.

By default you are taken to the *home* area of Microsoft, and the screen is divided vertically between *home* and *work*, where the *work* section is located in orange in a long vertical bar to the right.

Pictures, symbols and visual effects are used extensively and the amount of text is also large, compared to Apple and Google. There is a mix between single words, and whole sentences. There are no sound effects beginning when the site is opened but in contrast to both Apple and Google, there is an information box dominating the view, which contains several different product commercials, which shifts every five seconds.

Microsoft Store – microsoftstore.com/store/

The Microsoft "store page" is very different from the start page. Mostly, in terms of layout and design but also in terms of text. The white space in each side is now grey and there are a lot less information displayed than on the start page, though the amount is still considerably more than on the pages of Apple and Google. The main color is white and the boxes have been replaced and the borders between new sections or products are now displayed by vivid color from the pictures of the products or by a headline followed by a thin grey horizontal line. There are again no sound effects but there is still a visual animation in the form of four commercial banners located in the centre of the screen view, which are shifting every 5 seconds.

There are less navigation menus, and the most prevailing is the vertical main menu located at the left of the screen (in contrast to the start page, where all single menus were horizontal), and the main content is indexed into different product categories. As a sub-menu to this menu there are links to *small business, developers* and a *store picks* link, just as we found on the Apple store. There is also a navigation menu located under the section headlined *Top Sellers*, which is categorized under the groups of *Gaming, Music, Computers* and *Software*. In the bottom we find a third navigation menu on containing links to *All Microsoft sites* plus legal information. As a new feature, there is one menu located in the absolute bottom of the screen, which remains visible regardless of the visitor scrolling the page. This menu contains in the left side links to *Wish List, Store locations, Region: United States,* and *Account* and in the right side we find the image of a shopping cart and a green button with the text *checkout.*

In the lower part of the screen are three columns each with its own separate headline; *About, Orders* and *Help* and underneath each headline are links to different pages containing information relevant to the text in the headline.

There is also a search bar named *Top Search Terms,* which is indexed into four categories, in contrast to the search field locate in the upper right corner next to the phone number. An interesting visual difference from the start page is also that the Microsoft logo has changed and is now a colorful square quite similar to the windows logo as opposed to the bold, italic characteristic *Microsoft* logo at the start page.

VI Findings

During the analysis we have identified a total of nine prevailing discourses on the web pages of the organizations included in the study. Some of these discourses overlapped, however they were used differently from organization to organization, and this led us to identify; seven discourses visible at Apple, five discourses visible at Google and finally six discourses visible at Microsoft. We identified the discourses as the *Simplicity, Personalization, Cultural, Commercial, Popular, Technical, Information Importance, Business* and *Exclusivity* discourses.

After analyzing and presenting each discourse, one at the time, we turned to explore, which mental models could be derived from the specific combination of discourses. This led us to identify a total of 24 mental models, reflected on the six web pages studied. Seven models were found on Apple's web pages, seven at Google's and ten at Microsoft's.

In Apple's page we identified seven models, which were:

- Technology should be easy to use
  - o The *technical* discourse and
  - o The *simplicity* discourse
- Automation being desirable
  - o The *simplicity* discourse
- People are different from each other
  - o The *personalization* discourse
- English is universal
  - o The *cultural* discourse
- New is good and technology equals new development
  - o The *technical* discourse
- Apple is known
  - o The *exclusivity* discourse
- People are social actors (or beings)
  - o The *social* discourse

In Google's pages we also identified seven models, which were:
- Retrieving information should be easy and available to everybody

- o   The *simplicity* discourse
- People are seen as different from each other
    - o   The *personality* discourse
- People think locally, but search for or need global information
    - o   The *cultural* discourse
- At information is power or at least immensely important
    - o   *Information importance* discourse
- Information is money (orgs. can influence which info you get)
    - o   The *business* discourse
- People are primarily driven by individual needs. Secondly, social actors
    - o   The *social* discourse
- Information is in the eye of the beholde*r*
    - o   The *information importance* and the *business* discourse

And finally we identified ten mental models in Microsoft's pages, which were:
- People are fully capable of selecting relevant information
    - o   The *information importance* discourse
- Time is important to people (few clicks to get information)
    - o   The *information importance* discourse
- Difference between home users and professional users
    - o   The *commercial* discourse
- Sales are what Microsoft do
    - o   The *commercial* discourse
- Purchases should be made easy
    - o   The *commercial* discourse
- People have a need to share information with other people
    - o   The *social* discourse
- People seek input from other people
    - o   The *social* discourse
- English is seen as a universally understood language
    - o   The *cultural* discourse
- People are different
    - o   The *personality* discourse
- Simplicity depends on the task at hand
    - o   The *simplicity* discourse

After the mental models were identified and presented, we took these as a point of departure to identify how the three organizations seem to be framing their consumers.

We found that Apple frame their consumers as:

> *Being globally integrated, but individually unique while still having a need to be social in consumption situations. Technological integration and development are important to the consumer and this should be both simple and intuitive.*

Similarly, Google is framing their consumers as:

> *Being locally oriented but retrieving information from a both global and local scale. They are individually unique and have no particular need for social searching trends. What is important to consumers is just plain information and preferably fast.*

While Microsoft is framing their consumers as:

> *Being globally integrated, individually unique and social all at the same time. The consumer is interesting in buying and hence about products information. What is important to consumers is thus both information and that it is provided in a clear manner.*

Simplicity Discourse	Personalization Discourse	Cultural Discourse	Commercial Discourse	Social Discourse	Information Importance Discourse	Technology Discourse	Exclusivity Discourse	Business Discourse
Apple	Apple	Apple	Apple	Apple	Apple	Apple	Apple	Apple
Google	Google	Google	Google	Google	Google	Google	Google	Google
Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft

VII Analysis

ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSES

The Simplicity Discourse

This discourse we have labeled the *simplicity* discourse and it relates to how information is presented to the visitor on the webpage, in a way that appears both simple and straightforward. It relates both to the general layout of the pages, to the display of specific products, and to the overall purpose of this setup, which we interpret is to signal that products or services are both easy to buy and easy to use – and that the organization itself easy to deal with. It is displayed in the way the information on the web pages is arranged and presented to the visitor, and it portrays an understanding that information is important to the visitor, and hence, presented in a simple, understandable manner.

The *simplicity* discourse was identified in two ways. Firstly, by looking at how text was used in form of sentences and words, but secondly, also by looking at the overall layout of the page and their design. This discourse was identified in all three organization web pages, but it was displayed differently from organization to organization. Therefore we will present the reader with how the discourse was identified one organization at the time. The mental models, which we interpret on the basis of the discourses we find in the organization's web pages, will be described after all discourse has been presented.

The *simplicity* discourse was visible in the following organizations:
- Apple
- Google
- Microsoft

… *Apple*

On the start page of Apple the *simplicity* discourse was identified, as a number of words are being used to tap into this discourse, specifically. These words are especially visible in the main field of the screen, where words like *seamlessly,*

everything, and *automatically* brings forth connotations of the product being easy to use, despite its technical character. We get the feeling that we can expect this product to eliminate many routine chores due to its *automatic* nature. It is also interesting to note, how two discourses overlap, when using these words, and create a frame grounded in two understandings. This can be seen, as the words can either be read into a *technical* discourse or into the *simplicity* discourse, and hence as something that is very easy to use – or even, high-tech *and* easy to use.

The layout of the page is furthermore supporting the *simplicity* discourse, as the simple design – which we have also described in the description of the start page – creates an atmosphere of simplicity. The very simple navigation bar at the top of the screen, and the large amount of white space, plus the very few buttons, all complete this image of simplicity. What we note, in particular is that the absence of text, or the short nature of the text that *is* present, creates an impression that what is offered by this organization, is so simple that it need not be explained in words. Moreover, this is the case with the four areas at the bottom of the screen, where short sentences and simple telling pictures continue the impression of simplicity.

This discourse is also present on the "store page". And this seems to have been emphasized even further than on the start page. Although, much less white space is used, which often creates a simple universe, and instead Apple tap into the *simplicity* discourse by demonstrating their products with one single picture, with only the name of the product present and the price below. Textual explanation is offered to those interested, though, in three sections below the visual presentation of the products. In the pictures, simplicity is emphasized, as you do not see any of the primary operation buttons, which leaves a more simple impression and perhaps leaves the visitor with the impression of integrated automation. The text presented here is very short and with simple sentences, and with no commas. The words used, which tap into this discourse, is words like *thinner, lighter, faster, amazing,* and *available.*

Although, on the "store page", the *simplicity* discourse seems a bit compromised, as there is a lack of whitespace. But then again, perhaps it is gained as you only need to scroll in order to be able to see almost all of Apple's products and product categories, which again leaves the impression that Apple is simple, yet technologically very much forward thinking.

… Google

On Google's website the *simplicity* discourse was the first we identified on the start page*.* And as was the case with Apple, this discourse was visible both in text and visual layout, which complemented each other. In the textual aspects the *simplicity* discourse was identified in the wording on the page. Firstly, the word *"Google"*, which is also the brand of the company, is a simple word consisting of only four different types of letters. Secondly, on this page sentences are almost never used, except for the links in the bottom of the screen that says; *"Go to Google.Com in English"* and a link called *"Change Background Image"*. Furthermore, as previously seen with Apple, there are no commas and no periods either, but an even stronger emphasis on simplicity is created in this case as most of the words that are used is standing alone; such as *Web, Images, Gmail, More*, and many others. In this way, single words come to *signal* a message instead of explicitly giving the message. This allows for some meanings to be put into these words by the reader, as the message is not crafted on forehand.

Considering the layout and design of Google's start page, there are actually many possibilities for navigation, but the visitor is not presented with these at a first glance. Most of navigation possibilities are kept in a dropdown menu, which is again opened by clicking a single word. This limited view of possibilities limits the choices that have to be made to act on the web page and this contributed to the overall impression of simplicity. In fact, in our view, Google came across as being quite easy to use and simple to navigate in, despite of the complex mathematical algorithms that lies behind the search engine, and the fact that it often provides millions of hits from a single search term. In this section, we are analyzing the start page of Google, and we will therefore not enroll in an analysis of how the search results are presented in terms of simplicity. However, the design of this start page was rather unique, compared to the two other start pages analyzed. To begin with, there is a massive use of white space on this page, which makes everything on the page look small, but easy to find. In addition to this, there are not many things to consider for the visitor's eye, when figuring out how to navigate. And this, along with the very few navigation possibilities being visible, contributes to an overall impression of this page being very simple. This design comes across as very classic, where only the five central positions of a square are being used; each corner has its own area of function and the main function of this page is placed in the centre. This layout resonates well with the *simplicity* discourse as searching information on the Internet is made very easy and gives control to the visitor, while not bothering him or her with endless possibilities at first sight.

In the "*About"* page, the *simplicity* discourse is also present. However, on this page, we are presented with larger degree of information. The start page was only using only short sentences, with no commas or periods, however, the "About page" uses sentences with both. Yet, the words that are chosen are easy to understand, and most sentences are very short, making it simple to navigate in the text. The layout that counts three boxes below the mission statement and the three columns following, furthermore, gives the impression that information is easy to access, which again indicates that Google draws upon the simplicity discourse in their content on the web pages.

In line with this, we find the discourse of simplicity once again when analyzing the "stylished" logos that are used to portray the meaning of the text in each of the five boxes. In example, two blue envelopes are used to illustrate the box with the text *Contact us*. However, what was most interesting was the fact that Google seems to be very explicit about the purpose of Google.com on their web page, stating in large fonts; "*Google's mission: Organize the worlds information and make it universally accessible and useful"*. And thus, explicitly indicates that while Google's search algorithms are generally considered to bee very complicated – and not least, very secret – they still wish to make the retrieving of information as simple (useful) as possible.

… Microsoft

As the last organization to be presented, we also found the design and the use of words to draw upon the simplicity discourse on the "store page" of Microsoft. Due to a heavy emphasis on information, which we will elaborate on in the section of "The information importance discourse" (see page 76), we found this simplicity quite surprising. The tapping in on the *simplicity* discourse is visible here, in both text and layout, however, with the layout being the dominant driver for simplicity. In terms of text, the ample spacing between the lines is in contrast to the start page and creates a more easy reading experience, which is also being facilitated by a larger font size. This is again emphasized by very short sentences, and the use of single words such as *Here today, ready for tomorrow.*

Layout wise, all products here are clearly distinctive from other products, as they are marked by a sharp contrast of colors. The information here is less than on the start page and it leaves the impression that information about products and

Microsoft is easily obtainable. We find this interesting as the start page was filled with information of commercial character, indicating that there is a vast amount of products and information about products available, and that the organization has a product suited for every possible situation. When entering the store, the *simplicity* of the layout, and the very small amount of products being displayed, at first hand, gives quite the opposite impression – placing simplicity and overview over the amount of information. The vast amount of information is still obtainable, though, as placing the mouse cursor over the main menu opens up a menu, with quite a lot of product options to choose from.

The Personalization Discourse

This discourse we have called the *personalization* discourse. It relates to how content on the web pages can be arranged in a way that makes it possible for the visitor to personalize parts of the page, to meet his or hers specific needs. In some cases this discourse is displayed via the opportunity to create an account, or to save products in a wish list. But it is also visible through the way in which the information on a web page can be arranged, in a way so that one would be likely to find something of interest on the page. The ability to personalize also appears through possibilities to customize products, services or the entire webpage in a way that one finds suitable. This discourse was, especially, visible through the links and functions of the analyzed web pages, but also in the use of pictures and text.

The *personalization* discourse was identified at all three organizations, but was displayed very different, from organization to organization. We will therefore continue to introduce the reader to how the discourses were identified one organization at the time.

The *personalization* discourse was visible in the following organizations:
- Apple
- Google
- Microsoft

… *Apple*

This discourse was mainly visible in the text on Apple's "store page" and complemented by a few pictures. The discourse was present only on the "store

page", and not on the start page. On the "store page" there is the possibility to enter a personal *account,* in the upper right corner, and also in the lower right corner. Without analyzing what actually happens when and if you enter this link, we assume that this is where you are directed to a site, where your – perhaps previous – orders are visible, and you can enter personal information and receive information on your personal email.

Also, what indicates that Apple is tapping into this discourse is the word *From* before each price of a product. Along with several products being portrayed in different versions, this gives the impression that there are not just *one* type of each product, but several to choose from. In this way, you are given the opportunity to customize your product, or perhaps just choose the version that you find most suitable to your personal needs. The ample list of accessories advances the impression of personalization as the consumer is now enabled to put together a combination of products suitable to his or hers personal wishes. Should the consumer be representing a special background – e.g. another organization, a government or official institutions or be a student – then there are separate stores available to meet these direct demands. And in this way, the *personalization* discourse is backed up, in the recognition that not all consumers have the same background or needs, and that some may require special attention.

What we found particularly interesting in this connection was that there seemed to be a mixing between the *simplicity* discourse and the *personalization* discourse. The *simplicity* discourse was present in the; *Why buy at the Apple store* section in the lower middle part of the page. Here it was illustrated, both how simple it is to interact with the organizations; by offering *free shipping,* having a *Just ask* sections where support can be contacted instantly and a possibility to sign up to *news* and a function to *check your order*. But also, it was demonstrated that you can personalize and customize your products as you wish, by phrases such as; *Build your perfect Mac* and *Free iPod engraving*, which denotes this and is further being emphasized by words such as; *personal, customize,* and *exact specifications.*

… Google

At Google, the visitor is presented with an opportunity to customize the page, which leads us to identify a strong *personalization* discourse. This is visible mostly in text, but also from the placement of the personalization options in right side of the page, on the top as well as in the bottom.

In the top, the words *Sign In* signal that you, as a visitor, can create an account, and then have the content of the page personalized and customized to your needs. As we both have previous experience with Google, we know that this includes personal email, calendar but also a complete personalization of the start page itself, with all the information you might wish to have, besides the obvious search bar in the centre of the page. This knowledge would of course not be available to someone who had never used Google before, but as the function says *sign in* this indicates that you do have some possibilities to personalize your interaction.

Overlapping with the *simplicity* discourse, the visitor has a possibility to change some of the settings concerning the main purpose of the page itself; the search. By clicking the gear in the upper right corner, the visitor can change both the setting affecting the *search* itself, but also conduct an advanced search, should he or she not find what he or she was looking for in the standard search. This setup is overlapping with the simplicity discourse in the sense that if one does not need the advanced search in the first place, one does not need to make the active choice of not using it. This makes the search simple. However, if one needs a more advanced search, this function is kept hidden in a drop down menu. The *gear* menu, moreover, contains language tools for translation and for navigating to the Google start page, in another language, as well as *iGoogle*, the mobile platform version of the online start page. These are furthermore indicators of personalizing functions, along with the possibility to exchange the white background color to a full screen picture, which requires an account.

The centre search bar on the start page completes the tapping into a *personalization* discourse. We argue this, as the main purpose of the page seems to be to help *the visitor* find what *he* or *she* is looking for. In that way, this page is merely facilitating the wishes of the visitor, and thereby acknowledging that different people may have different needs and wants.

In this light, it is interesting that the *"About"* page does not seem to continue this possibility (to personalize). Here, every possibility for signing in has been removed, and hence leaves no opportunity for the consumer to select which information *about* Google he or she is looking for. This setup is in contrast to the *personalization* discourse dominating the start page, and we will elaborate further on this aspect in the section on "the business discourse" (see page 83).

… Microsoft

At Microsoft, the discourse of *personalization* is mainly visible through the layout of the page. In terms of text, the bottom menu offers a possibility to *Manage your profile,* where it seems clear that visitors are expected to, potentially, be distinct from other visitors. However, the main presence of this discourse is seen in the many different information boxes and the menus that provide different information. As an overall impression it seems that the approach is to provide such ampleness of information, that it is more likely that every visitor will find something of interest.

On the "store page" the *personality* discourse is also present and this is mostly visible through the use of text. However, what is interesting is that where the layout on the start page was the main driver of the discourse, the "store page" is displaying a remarkable similar range of products suggested to the visitor. This indicates a view that visitors are viewed as being quite similar. This layout, thus, contrasts the *personalization* discourse from the start page. However, the text does reflect some assumptions that visitors are different, as the fixed menu bar in the bottom of the screen, where they link to *Account*, offers a possibility to adjust some personal settings concerning the store.

Furthermore, we find in interesting to note that this discourse seem to be in contradiction to the *Social* discourse, that we will elaborate on in the section "The *social* discourse" (see page 73). Here the visitor is assumed to take interest in what other visitors have bought, searched for or downloaded before. However, the *personalization* discourse, as it is manifested in the web pages of Microsoft, indicates that people are too different to just providing them all with the same possibilities when visiting their websites. However, on the other hand, when tapping into the social discourse, which Microsoft is also doing, they indicate that even though people can not be compared and be provided with the same opportunities, they do have a wish to be affected by the meanings and buying of others.

Cultural Discourse

The *cultural* discourse relates to how cultural markers, such as language, text and combination of words and pictures anchor the present web page in a certain cultural view. This discourse was present in all three organizations, which we also

expected since organizations, working across several nations, must take into account that they are not communicating to people who have the same cultural background.

Culture is a parameter, which can never be escaped, and every aspect of a webpage, will, willingly or unwillingly, reveal a certain cultural understanding of the world. We acknowledge that all the discourses we have found are, to some extent, bound to culture and the revealing of them will also be bound to our cultural background. By no means do we intend to signal that some discourses are more or less cultural than this one. What we do intend to do though, is to describe indicators of the organization's view on culture and its potentially importance to the consumers visiting the respective web pages.

The *cultural* discourse was primarily discovered in the possibilities of selecting different languages, in pictures and in the way text was used. And as has been the case with the two previous discourses, this discourse was present on all three organization's websites, however displayed differently. In the following we will therefore present how we identified the *cultural* discourse, one organization at the time.

The *cultural* discourse was visible in the following organizations:
- Apple
- Google
- Microsoft

… *Apple*

On the "Start" page of Apple, the cultural discourse was primarily visible in text, but also in visual effects. This part of the analysis is, however, difficult to assess, as we, inevitably, will be influenced by our own western culture, which may cause us to be unaware of some cultural distinctiveness on this site.

The discourse is mainly visible in text and at the bottom of the screen where there is information about how to reach the organization, physically. Here what seems to be a phone number is displayed in the form of *"1-800-MY-APPLE"*. In this situation, it is clear that you need to understand the American approach to phone numbers, where the letters in the phone number represent the numbers on a touch keypad. *M* should represent the number *6* and *Y* the number *9*, as these are the numeric

buttons of a phone, where you would find the letter. In Denmark, for example, this would not be understood immediately, although it is a clever way to make people remember a phone number otherwise difficult to remember: "1-800-69-27752". Furthermore, you receive a clue that a specific cultural approach is being used, by the presence of the American flag in the lower right corner. This means that Apple is American in their point of departure, and would like to display this to consumers. However, in this same section, you can choose your nationality or region to *personalize* the settings. Another remarkable thing, from our cultural point of view, is that simplicity and sparse information on the start page, is not usually what we associate with an American web site, which most often seems to be filled with as much information as possible.

However, although the cultural discourse is visible in this way on the start page, it is not used extensively throughout the entire pages, and therefore Apple also seem to understand that people have different backgrounds than the American with which they would relate and identify.

On the "store page", this discourse is yet again visible. Although, there seems to be no pictures revealing that you are on the American page. Instead text and languages becomes the key drivers of tapping into this discourse. And the American point of departure, in stead, becomes visible when the prices are shown in US Dollars and by the American phone number, this time located in very large fonts at the top of the page, and smaller fonts again at the bottom of the page. Apple seems to display the notion that English is an universally understood language, which becomes even more apparent than the first impression, should you choose to navigate to a local online store by using the almost anonymous link in the bottom of the page. Here you will be redirected to a link revealing that you are, for example, on the Danish store, but the only difference, seems to be that prices are now displayed in *Danish Kroner* (DKK) instead of US Dollars. The language remains English, however, some of the products demonstrated has been shifted. In this sense, it is clear that Apple approaches the identities of the consumers as someone who understand and speak English, perhaps because of their global "integratedness" facilitated by integrating technology. We will get back to this point in the discussion.

… *Google*

On the "start" page of Google, we also analyzed a cultural discourse. This time, however, not as explicitly visible as was the case with Apple. The discourse was mainly visible in text, but also in the absence of text, and in pictures and *very much* a localizing redirecting feature of the web page.

The localizing redirecting feature of Google's web pages is a feature that directs the visitor to a local site – in our case Google Denmark – where the language is changed into the local language, regardless of which browser you type into. We typed both google.com and google.es (for the Spanish version) but were in all cases redirected to the local language site. This reveals a *cultural* discourse where locality is important even though the service provided is very much a global one. We interpret this as being an expression of the cultural view that consumers may want to search for information on a global scale, and in that sense become globally integrated, however, as a point of departure Google sees these consumers as very much locally rooted.

What furthermore underpins this *locally rooted point of view* is the fact that there is no contact information to Google.com provided on this page. However, there is also no link that redirects you to a local "branch" of Google online, and no flags or other symbols to indicate that you can change the language or region, which means that the consumers are basically left to be just exactly the way Google intends them to be, namely local consumers that (in our case) would prefer to enter a Danish version of Google. There is, though, as possibility to switch to the English dot.com page, but to change the language you will have to use the gear menu and select language tools. And this does provide for some flexibility in the cultural understanding – however, by first impression, Google is very strong in their cultural understanding of consumers.

Choosing a new language is not possible once you have entered the "*About*" page, neither by text nor flags or other visuals. Here everything is displayed in English, which thus indicates an understanding that English is universally understandable. You are not redirected to the local pendant to the site, as is the case with the start page, and everything seems to be directed to a global audience, and not automatically to the local audience as was the case before. In this light, the cultural discourses are conflicting on the two pages; one tapping into a discursive understanding of consumers as being locally rooted, but with a need for finding information on a global scale, and the other where consumers are seen from a

global perspective, and hence, only provided with a global entry to this information.

… *Microsoft*

With Microsoft, as was the case on both Apple's and Google's two pages, there is also a *cultural* understanding being displayed, this time, especially, on "start" page. However, where Google took the approach to consumers that they are, primarily, locally rooted, Microsoft taps into the same cultural discourse as Apple, namely that consumers are globally integrated more than they are locally rooted. Thereby not saying that the two companies do not acknowledge the fact that consumers can be locally rooted, they just put emphasis on the other approach.

This approach is mainly demonstrated by the link provided in the top menu, where the location of the page, and the language used, is indicated by the text *United Stated (English)*. Clicking this link brings forth a very comprehensive list of countries and languages in which the page content is available. Every item on the list is displayed in the corresponding local language but no flags are displayed to indicate nationality. It is clear that English is, once again, considered to be a universally understood language, and this is the main language of the international dot.com page. What emphasizes this approach even further is that there are no visual effects, such as flags, to indicate that this is where you change language, should you be unable to understand English.

The products displayed seem to be internationally available products, and it is therefore not possible to decipher anything from the pictures of the products. Except from the orange *work* area, in which a picture of a female in a suit is dominating. This signals an understanding where females are, first of all, common in a professional working environment, but also that they have jobs which require a certain dress code. Hence females are not employed as housemaids, for instance, which would have been common quite some years ago in a Western culture. This visual indicates that Microsoft is aware of feminist tendencies in today's working environment. However, this is only the case of recognition of feminist tendencies. In the "store page", the only item displaying the cultural discourse is the phone number in the upper right corner that tells the consumers that they are located on an US bases online store, an information which is also displayed in the fixed menu bar indicated by the text *Region: United States.* Thus, cultural integration is emphasized as a point of departure on the web pages, over cultural distinctiveness.

Commercial Discourse

The *commercial* discourse relates to how specific commercial content is being displayed on the web pages, to indicate that the main purpose of the page is to sell products; be it physical products or services. Textually, it is heavily indicated by the use of certain words, but it is also underpinned, visually, by the presence of product pictures and the extent to which the actual purchase is being facilitated on the page. This discourse was only visible on the web pages of two of the three organizations we have studied, and in the following we will present how the discourse was identified at both organizations.

The *commercial* discourse was visible in the following organizations:
- Apple
- Microsoft

… Apple

The *commercial* discourse was found both on the "*start*" page and also, as could be expected, on the "store page" of Apple. Beginning with the "*start*" page, the discourse was visible in both text and in the overall design. As an overall impression, everything seems to be oriented towards products that can (of course) be purchased. Looking at the layout, the main menu bar in the top of the screen, is dedicated to specific pages for each of the five core products for Apple, plus a link to the *store* and a link to *support*. This illustrates, that the main reason consumers should visit this page is to seek product information, either *before or after sales* as indicated by the link *store* (before) and *support* (after), and eventually to purchase the products.

In the bottom of the start page, four information boxes confirm this approach, as each of these boxes contain information about new products, special offers plus the possibility of (re-)viewing a television commercial. In two of the boxes (to the far right) we find commercial content about new product updates coming soon. It does not actually say that these can be purchased, only that they are very new and the use of words like *most extensive, most advanced, new features, coming* and *even further,* which reveal that this discourse is very much intertwined with both the *technical* discourse and the *exclusivity* discourse, which will both be explained later in this chapter (see page 79 and 81).

In the right corner of the screen, an information-box displays a special offer, where a cash voucher can be redeemed for further products in the store, if a particular product is purchased for studies. Again, words such as *buy, get* and *spend* indicate the existence of the commercial discourse. What is interesting, though, is an observation that this is the only explicit use of words related directly to a transaction. All other words indicate a more implicit use of commercial words such as, for example the word *store* or, visually, by the links that direct you to product pages. Other commercial content is directed towards an assumed desire to acquire the products, and lead the visitor to explore the products even further, and eventually to buy it.

Complementing this discourse even further, are the links provided to the visitor, in the bottom right corner of the screen, where no less than four sales channels are suggested. First there is the link to the *Apple online store,* followed by the direct number to purchase from this store by phone. This is followed by a link to physical *Apple retail stores* and, finally, by a link to online and physical authorized *resellers* of Apple products.

On Apple's "store page", the *commercial* discourse is very dominating, which could only be expected, as the main purpose of the page is to facilitate product purchases and transactions. It is mainly textual features that imply the presence of this discourse, although pictures of the products also add to the *commercial* discourse. First of all, while the menu bar in the top is still present in its usual location, a new menu bar is located just below this, offering possibilities of creating an *account* (necessary for purchasing), and a link to the online shopping *cart*, characteristic for a store web page.

On the "store page", it is furthermore very clear that this page is centered on displaying Microsoft's products, now complete with prices and links below them. Several possibilities exists for finding the products that are not displayed up front, indicated by the many information boxes, in each side of the page, indexing products after different criteria, such as *new to the store*, *top sellers,* and *popular accessories.* Moreover, there even exists an indexation possibility (*personalization* discourse*)* where consumers can divide themselves into a specific category, based on the intended use of the product, which is demonstrated with links to the *Education store, Business store, Government store* and *International store.* Clicking these, presumably leads the visitor to a page where products suited for this particular purpose are displayed.

… Microsoft

On Microsoft's start page, we also identified this discourse. This was, again, visible in text but also presented by the use of pictures. Many of the sentences that were used, were oriented towards a commercial agenda, illustrated by words such as *Choose, Find, Buy, Get windows, try the new Arc mouse, Buy now, Free trial*, and many more. In most of these cases, the textual commercial content was accompanied by a visual effect in form of a picture, illustrating the product, either by photo or by its logo.

The discourse is further identified in the boxes that provide information about *after sales support* such as; the *Product support* box and the links, in the top menu, below the *bing* search bar to; *support, downloads, products* and much more. Lastly, what further emphasizes the existence of the *commercial* discourse is the horizontal box, at the bottom of the screen, which is a compilation of pictures of products, that function as one big link to the Microsoft "store page".

As could be expected, the *commercial* discourse was dominating the "store page". But far less products were being marketed here than on the start page. There are four commercial banners at the top, four product suggestions below this banner animation and additional four products being suggested under the *top sellers* section. Each product is clearly marked by a picture, as large as the text used to describe it, and many of the products suggested are repeats from previous suggestions. This is the case for *Windows 7, Office, Xbox* and a *Windows 7 PC.* This is very much in contrast to what we saw in the Apple store, where lots of products were being displayed all at once. On this page, the visitor will have to either conduct a search to find a specific product or to choose a product category in the main menu. Compared to Microsoft's start page, this design stands out, as the start page was characterized by an abundance of products and solutions displayed in various places, and this page seem more categorized.

Social Discourse

The *social* discourse, in its most basic form, relates to the understanding on whether consumers are socially oriented – or wish to be socially affected on their website. This discourse was identified on the basis of how the respective web pages facilitated information sharing about products, services or the organization

(and thereby anticipated whether consumers would be interested in this or not). The discourse can therefore be characterized as having an *outreaching* perspective, where consumers desire to connect with other consumers, and an *inbound* perspective, which is made up of consumer's curiosity, as to what other consumers found interesting. Social interaction facilitates this notion, and hence, the name *social* discourse.

In particular, this discourse was identified through the use of text, which we had also expected, since we have previously argued that language is a key driver for social interaction (and communication). What is interesting, though, is that we found that very few of the web pages used animation to signal interaction between the company and its consumers or consumers in between. This is otherwise a generally familiar visual trick, used to signal an interaction.

The *social* discourse was visible in the following organizations:
- Apple
- Microsoft

… *Apple*

During the analysis of Apple's "store page", we identified a discourse that we were not able to identify on the start page. This *social* discourse, which we identified, was visible in text, and no pictures (i.e. pictures of groups, or people together) seemed to tap into the *social* discourse, such as we had anticipated that much traditional marketing would do.

In text, on the left side of the screen, a *Popular Accessories* section denotes a social aspect of the web page, as previous purchases from other consumers in general are being displayed, to show which accessories have been popular in the past. This adds a *social dimension* to the store experience. And although, it is not possible to directly interact with previous consumers, you are presented with what the majority have chosen, which then in turn, perhaps, works as a sort of quality assurance that you might perhaps also like these products. Another feature much like this one is displayed on the right side of the screen, where we find the *Top Sellers* section, which brings forth the same connotations. This section is very much the same as the section in the left side however, where focus was on accessories in the previous example, focus is now on the main products.

Interestingly, the *social* discourse is being mixed with a *technical* discourse (see page 79) on their web page. This is manifested by a section of *Staff Picks*, which denotes, not only the social element of other people finding something interesting, but also that these products are so good, that even a highly demanding staff would choose to use some products over others. Furthermore, the social aspect is presents in the possibility to buy *Gift cards*, which underpins a social dimension as you purchase *Gift cards* to someone else.

… Microsoft

Furthermore, the *social* discourse was prevailing on the start page of Microsoft. This was rather unique for Microsoft and in direct contrast to what we identified on both Apple's and Google's start pages, and this was visible in several ways.

The first function, which drew attention to this discourse, is located in the top menu bar, where several possibilities for social interaction are available. First of all, the visitor can provide *feedback* to Microsoft, presumably about products, services and the web page. This menu also contains a possibility to *share*, with the visitor's network[10]. What should be shared is not clear to us, but we assume that it is links to Microsoft or information from Microsoft in one way or another.

The next indicator of this we found that displays social aspects as important, is in the headline named *Top products.* The words used here, clearly illustrates how someone, other than the visitor, has chosen these specific products before, and that they are rated as being in the top. On which parameters the ratings are based, is not clear to the consumer, but this is also not the intention. The intention seem to be to demonstrate that others have found these products interesting, and therefore the visitor may also find them interesting. Yet, another place where the social discourse is visible is in the box headlined *Popular downloads*. The use of the word *popular* is again a signal that other people have found these downloads worthwhile, and by that contributing to a social dimension to the page. The word *popular* is furthermore used in the search box below the headline *Popular searches*, where the visitor is again presented with a categorization of the topics that most visitors have searched for.

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[10] It is not actually made explicit that sharing is with the users network, but this becomes clear if the link is clicked.

On the "store page", this discourse what not as visible as it was on the start page. The possibility of sharing was not, intuitively, present, which surprised us as we expected this content to be shared due to the *commercial* awareness that we had identified previously. The *social* discourse was, however, present which was demonstrated by the words used to indicate that other visitors have found something interesting; *Top Sellers, Store Picks,* and *Top Search terms.* Also, a new *social* feature was added in the menu fixed to the bottom of the screen; the *Wish list.* And this is where the sharing feature was present anyway, although it did not come across as the intuitive way to share information about Microsoft's products. By using the *wish list*, the visitor can save certain products of interest in the *Wish list*, and save them for later purchase or share it with others in the visitors' social network.

Information Importance Discourse

This discourse we named the *information importance* discourse. As the name suggests, this particular discourse relates to how the concept of information is seen as particularly important, or if information is merely regarded as a driver of a message. In this light, most web pages would surely display an *information importance* discourse, but our focus, and what we wish to reflect with the word "*importance"* is whether information (be it about the company, its products or its services) is viewed as a central purpose of the webpage. In contrast to, for example, selling a product being the main purpose of the website. This discourse was mainly identified through the company's use of text, although design and layout also contributed to its existence.

As was the case with the social discourse, this discourse, was only visible on two of the organization's web pages that we studied, and it was yet again expressed very differently from organization to organization. In the following we will therefore present how we identified the discourse in both organizations, taking one organization at the time.

The *information importance* discourse was visible in the following organizations:
- Google
- Microsoft

… Google

On Google's the "*start*" page, the *information importance* discourse was visible in both text and layout. First of all, the entire site is created with the goal of facilitating information retrieving. The only thing demonstrating that there might also be another purpose with the page is the lower left menu, which is primarily directed to businesses, where they can buy search solutions. That is, pay to be displayed when people search for certain words or other services alike. Thus, to Google information is attributed tremendous importance on their start page.

Secondly, the menu bar, in the upper left part of the screen, reveals that there are *different kinds of* information, which important enough to be grouped together. Here, words like *Shopping, News* and *Maps*, reveal a discourse where important information is organized so that the visitor can browse it easier (*simplicity discourse*).

Interesting in this regard, is also the *I'm Feeling Lucky* button, located under the search bar to the right, which, unlike the main search button *Search Google,* does not provide the visitor with the characteristic list of web pages to choose from, but navigates directly do a certain web page of Google's choice. This means that Google selects what is to be the most relevant information surrounding the term searched for, and not the visitor. This is interesting, as the *personalization* discourse had allowed the visitor to customize almost everything about the use of the page and the search, and this feature takes it all away, if chosen. In one way, Google then positions themselves as the rulers of information, as they portray themselves as knowing what is most interesting concerning a given topic. In another way, this option further emphasizes the *simplicity* discourse, which has been analyzed previously in this chapter, as the consumer is then presented with almost no choices concerning their search.

Interestingly, where the *information importance* discourse seems to be combined with a *simplicity* discourse on the start page, much more text is used on the "*About"* page, which makes it less simple to navigate in, quickly. On the other hand, much more information is available, here, without having to click or search for it. In fact, the search functions are not even present on the "*About"* page.
Firstly, the information is grouped into five categories presented in boxes, and then in an additional five other categories, written in text and organized in three columns below the boxes. As we will return to, when describing the *Business* discourse (See page 83), much information available here is directed towards

businesses with Google. In this situation, we get the impression that Google is deciding which information is to be displayed, where the start page has another purpose, namely, to present the visitor with a call to search for information.

… *Microsoft*

During the analysis, we have identified the *information importance* discourse to be present at Microsoft's website too. This was visible in both text and layout on the "*start*" page and also on the "store page". In contrast to the web pages of Apple and Google, the discourse, here, was much oriented towards providing remarkably more information at first hand, than the others.

First of all, there is an abundance of pictures and symbols on the site, indicating the existence of this discourse. There are many pictures of products, serving to illustrate how a certain product looks like, and by that inform the visitor even further about the products, than what can be explained in text. This approach is used throughout both sites and is complemented by symbols, indicating that you will get more, or new, information if you click them.

Second, the discourse was also identified in plain text. Throughout the pages, sentences were used to describe products, such as *"Share photos while you chat, video chat in HD, and connect your social network",* which illustrates how sentences are used to explain the main features of a product. All boxes on the pages have headlines that explain the content, and thereby not leaving it up to intuition, pictures or symbols to let the visitor decipher what to expect from that particular site. Further supporting this, the navigation menus makes it clear that a wide selection of possibilities in navigation is possible, due to a large amount of information available to the visitor. The information provided concerns everything from *products* to *supports* to *about* the organization.

Moreover, the *information importance* discourse is also presented via a box labeled; *Latest News*, where the visitor can easily gain information about the latest Microsoft-relevant news. Even further establishing this discourse, as one of the prevailing discourses of Microsoft's web pages, are the ample opportunities for information search on the entire microsoft.com site. These are provided, both by the "*bing*" search in the top of the page, and also by the *Popular searches* field, in the bottom of the screen. Here the information is categorized so that the consumer

would not actually have to type anything, but just click a category for a selection menu to appear.

On the "store page" this discourse was representing it self, as each product presented was followed by a textual description of the main features of the product, and also by the extensive amount of information provided in links, about various aspects of both the shopping, the organization, support, career opportunities and many other topics. This contrasts to the start page, where most of the information was of a commercial nature.

What we find particularly interesting, though, is that the information on the "store page" of Microsoft seem to be so important to that the organization of the information was made much more simple than on the start page.

Technical Discourse

This discourse relates to how technology is used as a separate parameter to create a sense of "newness" around both products and services, and hence around the organization itself. We investigate the emphasis placed upon technology and technological development as being important. The *technology* discourse was visible in both text and pictures. The discourse was only identified on Apple's web pages. The two other organizations surely make use of very sophisticated technology themselves, but we could not find any evident traces of this discourse being displayed on their websites. Therefore we will in the following present how the discourse was identified at the web pages of Apple.

The *technical* discourse was visible in the following organizations:

- Apple

… Apple

As we have already presented, there is an obvious *technical* discourse being displayed on the web pages of Apple. This is visible in two ways: in text and in visual design. Beginning with how the text taps into a technical discourse, this is highly visible in the sparse five lines of a commercial text for their product; iCloud. Words like *content*, *wirelessly, pushes, devices, integrates,* and *apps* clearly draw upon a technical language, which a visitor would have to understand, in order to make sense of the dominating area on the page. Other words could easily have

been used in stead, as, we assume, the understandings that lie behind the word *content* is pictures, files and contacts and whatever else consumers have on their products/devices.

The product in question is also not explained, but referred to in plural as a *device*, bearing connotations of something with a specific and technical purpose, which you use for something important, and which might require that you understand the product in order to use it. This is interesting, as Apples products are notoriously known for being easy to use. It is presumed that the visitor knows what is meant by *wireless push* and understands why this is desirable and also why it is important that the *apps* are *integrated* into all of this. Furthermore, this use of words with a technical resonance is continued in the four information boxes below, where words like *new, features, most extensive, update, ever, world's most advanced, operating system* are all drawing upon the technical discourse, where new and groundbreaking inventions are important.

However, in this section it is interesting to note that the pictures are not supporting the technological text, as was the case in the main field of the screen. Here, a number on a background of raindrops and a lion (widely recognized as the most majestic animal alive) use a more *naturally* oriented discourse, than a *technical* one.

The large button, displaying a cloud, which seems as if it is carved in to one solid piece of metal, where you can see the circular rings from the polishing machine all over the button, further backs this up. This taps into a technical discourse, as only skilled professional with a thorough technique, would be able to carve such a piece.

The navigation bar at the top of the screen is an example of how text and visuals are used together to enhance the *technical* discourse. This has a remarkable resemblance to a dashboard on a physical device. We intuitively sense that one can use this to navigate the page as one may wish, which gives a feeling of being in *control*, and you almost get the feeling that you can physically touch the buttons. The technical discourse is further being supported by the three pictures in color of three males, which are not described further. But with the text *"Watch the keynote"* at its side, these three seem to take a place as technical inventors, ready to explain to the consumers what this is all about, should you have the need to know.

The *technical* discourse visible on the start page is, yet again, visible in the "store page", however, not nearly as prevailing. On this page, it seems, focus is more on showing the products in pictures, and less about describing the product, albeit

more text is actually used on the page, compared to the start page. The technical words used now, are mostly kept to industry standard specification such as *LED* or *HDMI*. The pictures are also smaller, in order to give space to more of them, which means that fever details can be seen, compared to the start page. In this sense, the *technical* discourse is still present, but has been tamed quite a bit, and prior technological knowledge is not nearly as necessary to navigate through the site, as was the case with the start page.

Exclusivity Discourse

The *exclusivity* discourse relates to how an organization tries to build a special aura around itself, its products and services on the basis of exclusivity. In essence, it is a way of standing out from the competitors, in the mind of the consumer, and positioning the brand in a certain manner. *Exclusivity* is used to make all products appear particularly exclusive and interesting in the eyes of the consumer, by using a combination of text, pictures and layout. This discourse was only found in one of the organization's websites, which surprised us at first, as we would have expected this to be a viable strategy for the other organizations as well. However, we found that the two remaining organizations use a combination of different discourses to create the same differentiation in the mind of the consumer, but not one of *exclusivity* per se. In the following we will explain how the discourse was identified on the web pages of Apple.

The *exclusivity* discourse was visible in the following organizations:
- Apple

… Apple

The exclusivity discourse is perhaps the most dominating discourse, being used on the *"start"* page of Apple. This is, visible in both text, absence of text and visual design. Beginning from the top, it is remarkable, compared to the other analyzed web pages, that there is no menu-button where you can get a product overview. The entire start page is created as product site, and the menu bar illustrates this very clearly. Here, you have the *store*, and the various five main products offered by Apple, recognized only by their name. There is no explanation and no pictures to reveal if *Mac* is a computer or just an Australian person who is relevant to the organization. In this way, Apple, in some sense, *excludes* consumers, who are not

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informed well enough about the organization, its history and products, by leaving no explanation. This, we argue, creates the impression of a well-informed audience and hence, indicates that the products are exclusive – since, we assume that not many consumers would spend their time looking for information about the company if their products were not something special. Hence, it is expected that you understand and know what a *Mac* is and what an *iPod* and an *iPad* is, while the *iPhone* gives itself away by having the word *phone* in the name. The logo – picturing the characteristic half-eaten apple – has the semiotic feature, bringing forth connotations of the organization's name.

In the same way, *iCloud* is not explained either, only portrayed as something very important that you are expected to know what is. The three pictures in color are not explained either, and the exclusivity of knowing who they are, are once again being requiring. However, what you do understand is that both *ICloud* and the three men must be important, in some way or the other, as they stand out in color on a white and gray page. Adding to all of this is the text in blue: "*Watch the keynote*" and here it becomes clear that it is not just *any* keynote, but *the* keynote, which might someone to find our what it is about.

Continuously, the four areas, on the bottom of the screen, include words such as *iOS 5* and *OS X Lion*, again using a combination of discourses to frame the content. On the one hand, this is clearly technical terms, but on the other hand, you belong to an *exclusive* club, if you understand what they mean. Some explanation is provided here, though, but only in the sense that the words are terms of *software*. And not explanations on how, or in what ways, these products are better than the previous versions, or what the previous version were in the first place.

On the "store page" an *exclusivity* discourse was also present, although with some pictures to illustrate what is behind the catchy product names, and some of the exclusiveness (or at least, what excludes some people) fades away. The text is, however, really underpinning the use of the *exclusivity* discourse (see below), again with very few sentences and no commas at all. Single words seems to be more in use here, which leaves the impression that you should know the meaning of the name or word beforehand. Another feature that makes the *exclusivity* discourse fade as bit, is the display of prices. In displaying the prices the exclusivity is very much compromised, as the products have now become obtainable and available to the masses. This is, furthermore, illustrated by the *Popular Accessories* section and the *Top Sellers* section, in each side of the page and even further in the

Special Deals sections. This is even further being compromised as some of the products display the word *just* before the price, bearing connotations of being cheap, which is not the general perception of exclusivity.

While all this may compromise the exclusivity, it does emphasize the *simplicity* discourse, by making the products *easily available* and often with *free shipping* and opportunities for *financing* the purchase.

Business Discourse

As our main focus of this thesis is to investigate how *consumer* identities are constructed on the web pages of three large organizations, it may seem odd that we have included a business discourse in our analysis. However, the reason for doing this is that it stands out in sharp contrast to the other discourses found on Google's web pages and this might be interesting in terms of how this contribute to identity – if it does – compared to the other organization's web pages. The previous discourses found on Google's web pages gives a sense that Google is offering its free services, in order to fulfill their goal of making information accessible and useful. However, this discourse reveals how Google is following a commercial agenda, which is, presumable, what makes them survive as a company, since no company's can survive upon idealistic ideals alone. This discourse, on Google's web page, is targeted to a different segment of B2B clients. The discourse relates to how importance is placed upon attracting commercial clients to a service, which very much appears free to everybody. It is very visible in the text used on the "*about Google*" web page, and stands out as it shifts focus, from Google as being a provider of free information to the masses, to a commercial organization, benefitting from people using its free services.

As mentioned in the above, this discourse was only visible in Google's web pages, and it stands out, as an almost hidden discourse, compared to the commercial nature of the two other organizations.

The *business* discourse was visible in the following organizations:
- Google

… Google

The business discourse was only present on the "*About*" page on Google's web pages, and not on the start page. This discourse is highly interesting, as it seems to be in conflict with some of the previous discourses found on their start page. The "*About*" page is very much tapping into a *Business* discourse, as all information available on this page is being directed towards other organizations, business and paying customers. And this is very visible in the text and words used here.

First of all, while the start page did not have many textual clues revealing the intended user of the site, this page certainly does. The start page uses words such as the anonymous *I'm Feeling Lucky,* denoting that everybody – and in particular the person physically using the page – is the target group*.* In contrast, the words used on the "*About*" page are clearly demonstrating that the intended visitor is not the individual person looking for information, but business looking for information about how to purchase a business solution from Google. Words such as *your business, site owners, grow your audience, submit(ting) your URL* and *our business solutions*, clearly demonstrates that the intended visitor is completely different from the one visiting the start page. In addition to this, the *Our products* section refers to those using the free services, provided by Google, not as "*you*" but as "*people*", as demonstrated by the sentence: "*… make it more simple for people to share information…*". This is interesting, as this statement seem to be in contrast to the stated mission of "*organizing the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful*". The purpose of this page rather seems to be to describe how organizations and businesses can pay to have influence on how this information is brought to the users of the free searches.

We find that this portrays the distinction between consumers and customers in the case of Google. The people *using* or *consuming* its services are not actually its *customers*. On the "About page", everything seems to be guided by this *Business* discourse and even the other discourses seems to be subordinate to this. Here contact information is easily available, displayed both in boxes and in the links below, and interaction with Google thus seems to be more desired by the organization between these users and the ones using the start page.

Summary of Discourses found

During the analysis we have identified a total of nine prevailing discourse on the web pages of the three organizations, and we believe a short summary of those is in place.

In conclusion of the web pages at Apple we found a total of seven discourses being used with two of those only being present on the "store page". These discourses were the *Simplicity, personalized, cultural, commercial, popular, technical,* and *exclusivity* discourses. At Google, we found a total of five discourses being used with one of those only being present on the "About page". These discourses were the *simplicity, personalized, cultural, information importance,* and *business* discourses. Finally, we found six discourses at Microsoft with only one being present at the "store page" only. These discourses were the *simplicity, personalized, cultural, commercial, popular,* and *information importance* discourses.

The *simplicity* discourse was demonstrated primarily by simple layout and the use of single words or short sentences, and for Google also by the mission statement on the "About page". The *personalized* discourse was demonstrated by the possibility of creating personal account on the web pages, possibility for customization of products, and was far stronger at Google, than on the web pages of the other two organizations, providing ample opportunity to sign in to an account and to customize the entire site as whished. The *cultural* discourse was, as we expected, visible in different ways on the organizations' web pages and mainly found through the use of language, but at Google this discourse was especially visible, which was demonstrated by the automatic redirecting to a local site. The *commercial* discourse was demonstrated by clear facilitation of purchase actions, created by words and pictures and was dominated on the web pages of Apple, while also being present at Microsoft. The *social* discourse was demonstrated by both an outreaching dimension in form of a desire to connect with other people and an inbound dimension based on curiosity about what other people find interesting. The *information importance* discourse was demonstrated by the amount of information provided to the visitor, and at Google, also by the explicit mission statement of the organization. The *technical* discourse was illustrating only at the web pages of Apple and dealt with a demonstration of, and differentiation by, technologically sophisticated and complex products. The *exclusivity* discourse was also only visible at Apple and surrounded both the brand and the products and was characterised equally by the use of text and visuals.

Finally, the *business* discourse, which was only found at Google, and which dominates the "About page". This was demonstrated by the words used to communicate to the visitor as a business client and not an ordinary user, and clearly marked a difference from the start page.

Having explained the nine discourses we found, we now turn to an identification of the *mental models,* which became visible from the discourse. This will be touched upon in the next section, albeit in a much shorter fashion, as many of the arguments and explanations have already been provided in the above section on discourses, and because discourses are the foundation of mental models according to Fairhurst (2010).

Analysis of mental models

In the previous chapter, we explored nine discourses on the web pages of the organizations included in the study. This was the first step in identifying how identities are constructed, based on an analysis using framing as the analytical tool. The second step in the methodology is now to describe which mental models can be interpreted from these discourses, and this will be the purpose of this section. In this thesis, our focus is not to study the included organizations per se, but rather to identify how specific frames, on the organization's websites, about the consumers and their contexts, (co)construct identities. Until now, we have been focussing on the nine discourses that were identified, however, as we turn to look at the mental models that can be interpreted from this, we are forced to redirect the attention to the specific organizations, one at the time.

As we have argued, previously, discourses lay the foundation for mental models and therefore it cannot be separated from its discourse. Some mental models occur solely on the basis of a single discourse, and others are very much a product of a combination of discourses and their specific use in a certain context

We found a total of 24 mental models on the six web pages included in the study. Seven models were found on Apple's web pages, seven on Google's and ten on Microsoft's web pages. In the following, we will describe the models as well as discuss which discourses we believe they are rooted in.

Apple

Drawing upon the *technical* discourse, it is visible that *new* is seen as a good thing. Technology and technological advancements are seen as being the driver of the future. There is a clear mental model of constant development in this field, and that it is something, which can be used to market Apples products; New is good. Therefore there is nothing based upon an understanding of traditions being important, perhaps with the single exception of the *exclusivity* discourse surrounding the organizations, which requires that you have previous knowledge about the organizations to fully understand the web site and their products. In the light of this, a mental model is also being displayed, which draws upon exactly the *exclusivity* discourse, that Apple is *known.* This mental model is displayed in the sense that there is no "*about us*" section on the page and furthermore, as their products are displayed in a way that seems to assume that consumers are familiar with their products, all ready.

Returning to the mental model of *new being good,* which we stated, draws upon the *technical* discourse, this is actually combined with the *simplicity* discourse. This combination is revealed as the emphasis on simplicity on their web pages seem to state that, even though technology is the future, it should still be easy to use, pleasant to look at and therefore both sophisticated on the inside and on the outside. Much in line with this, automatic integration (as seen in the pictures) also seems to be the future. Although, this would mean that the consumer will have to give away the some degree of control to the product itself, which will then think for you. In this light, we interpret a mental model of *automation being desirable*, which then, would be drawing upon an understand of consumers, as wanting to give away control, perhaps to gain more time or resources to do other – more important – things.

The fourth mental model we have discovered, is visible from the cultural discourse on their web site. Here *English language is seen as being universally understood* and there are no other languages to guide the consumer to something he or she might understand, if the consumer does not speak English. Furthermore, there is no start page asking the consumer, in several languages, to choose the preferred local site or language, as some organizations have. Therefore, the mental model that *English is a universally understood language* is visible here. At least, they expect, that people can recognise the American flag (which also represents a cultural awareness) and by that understand that here is a function that allows you to choose another language.

Following this mental model that is corncerned with the specific characteristics of consumers, we have also identified a model of *people as social actors or beings*, which we identified, primarily, from the *social* discourse. When visiting the pages, consumers are expected to find it relevant to be informed about what other consumers have found interesting. This would, however, not make any sense unless people were *social beings*, paying attention to other beings around them.

The final model that we have discovered was a model of *people being different from each other, qua having different personal needs*. This model was clearly rooted in the *personalization* discourse, where choices are provided to the consumers, to customize products and to choose between different models of the same product.

Google

Seven mental models were found in total. And one of the dominant models is *information is power or at least immensely important*. This is demonstrated by the main purpose of Google.com and is rooted in the *information importance* discourse. Everything on the start page is centred on retrieving information, and Google positions itself as a sort of gatekeeper of power in this regard.

In connection to this, we found a mental model displayed from the discourses drawed upon by the "*About*" page. This mental model, or this understanding, illustrates that, as information is so important and a key to power, someone – businesses and other organizations – are willing to pay for consumers to find them. In this light, Google displays a mental model that organizations can influence informational power by paying to be placed in the desirable places, in connection with certain searches. We call this mental model the *information is money* model.

Furthermore, we identified a mental model, tapping into the discourse of *simplicity*. This can be seen Google displays an understanding that, although the amount of information is breathtaking, *retrieving it should be easy and available to everybody,* regardless of nationality, money and social status. This is underpinned in practice, as all Google services are free - except off course for the ones that are provided to the businesses. The *cultural* discourse revealed in the analysis of Google's pages also displays an understanding that English is *not* seen as a universal language. Rather we revealed the mental model that *people think locally,*

but search for, or need, global information. This is visible as the start page redirects the visitor to a local page, but still provides information on a global level.

The fifth mental model we identified is a model tapping into the *personalization* discourse. From this discourse it is visible that *people are seen as different from each other* and thus have different needs and wishes. This is identical to the mental model found on Apple's pages, however on Google's pages, this model was visible from the many customization possibilities one had, from entering personal search criteria to changing the *entire* look of the functional start page. The next mental model we identified is concerned with the social nature of Google's consumers, and actually, this is identified from the lack of social discourses being used on the start page of Google. This model portrays that *people primarily are driven by individual needs and are, only secondly, seen as social actors.* We found this to be the case, as there is no indication of interaction with other users, or possibilities to see what others have searched for or found interesting. Should social interaction take place, it is not, however, directly visible to the consumers of Google. Though, the results that are being displayed from a search are said to[11] be based upon how many people have referred to a specific site on their own webpage, as well as other secret indicators. Either, we believe, the lack of social interaction possibilities is based upon an understanding of people as being so different that it would be impossible to administer the display of what other consumers have searched for. Or, it could be based upon an understanding that Google's consumers would not be interested in this. This model is further backed up, as organizations are not able to see which other organizations have paid Google, to be placed in desirable places in connection to the words that are searched for.

The last mental model we have identified on Google's web pages, are the *information is in the eye of the beholder* model. In this understanding, information is grouped into two overall categories. The first category is that information is provided to people at their request, and this could be about whatever they might find interesting. In the second category, we find that information is mainly concerned with facilitating knowledge about *which information is provided* and *to whom.*

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[11] This formulation is chosen over "is" as it is not publicly known how google searches really works.

Microsoft

We indentified no less than ten mental models from the analysis performed on the two web pages of Microsoft. In the following, we will present each one of them and argument their existence.

Firstly, when we identified the *information* discourse, we identified two mental models that seemed to be rooted in this. The first models deal with how the visitor reacts to information and the second with what the underlying driver of this behaviour is. The first mental model was that *people are fully capable of selecting relevant information,* even though there is a rich abundance of this present. This is demonstrated by the way the start page is organized with the many different categories of information, which is presented to the visitor. It seems to us, that Microsoft is basing their content on the web page on a world-view that, if they just provide ample information, the visitor will be able to chose from it to get the information they wish for. The second mental model we identified, in continuation of the first, reveals a view that *time is important to people*, and therefore there should be as few clicks to get information as possible. One can imaging that Microsoft puts as much information as possible into the start page of their website, from the hypothesis that the more you have to search for relevant information, the more time you spend.

The three mental models, to be presented next, we have identified from the *commercial* discourse. The first mental model is that there is a *difference between home users and professional users*, which is clear from the division of the start page in a home-area and a work area. As the *home* area is the default when entering the page, it is also clear that the home user is more in focus here. The second mental model presents an understanding of Microsoft as; *sales are what we do.* The commercial discourse is described further in depth in the section labeled "commercial discourse" (See page 71), which is why we will not go deeper into why we interpret the understanding that *sales are what Microsoft do*. However, we would like to note that the impression is that people, primarily, enter Microsoft.com to get information about *products*, their specification and price, possibly to see which products to buy. Only as a secondary purpose would the visitors be able to find information surrounding the products, which is in contrast to, in example, Apple's start page. The third mental model is rooted in both the *commercial* and the *simplicity* discourse, and that is, that *purchases should be made easy*, which is clearly shows from the simplicity of the "store page".

Based on the *social* discourse, we identified two mental models. Overall this is very much like the social mental models found at Apple, but in the Microsoft's case we detect two lines of this model. The first model portrays that *people have a need to share information with other people*, which is visible from the provided possibility to share content from Microsoft.com. The second mental model portrays that *people seek input from other people*, which is demonstrated by the many boxes and headlines where information about other's purchases or interests are displayed.

Based on the *cultural* discourse, we have further identified two models. Much in line with what we found at Apple, *English is seen as a universally understood language*, which is demonstrated by the fact that Microsoft.com is per default entered in English, and by the fact that the possibility to change the language sees to be very anonymous. The second mental model sees *people as international* consumers. International in the sense that people, internationally, seem to have some needs and wants that correspond in a way that allows Microsoft to have their products available in an international scale. Thus, they are not offered one specific computer in the United States and another computer in Europe. All products are internationally available, and whether people choose differently is another matter in this regard.

From the *personality* discourse we have identified only one mental model. And this was also found on both Apple and Google's web pages. This model displays an understanding that *people are different*. This is demonstrated by the different categories of information presented to the visitor, and also by the possibility of logging in to an account in order to customize the content of the page. We find this particular model very interesting on Microsoft's start page, as we find it to contradict the "store page" where only few product categories are presented, giving the impression that people are so similar that they buy the same products.

However, we believe that the reason for such a contradiction should be found in a mental model rooted in the *simplicity* discourse. This model prescribes that *simplicity depends on the task at hand*. Therefore, on the start page, simplicity is created by an attempt to avoid that the visitor should have to click too many times to get relevant information, and on the "store page", simplicity is provided by a very simple layout, which underpins the experience of buying to be as simple as possible.

VIII Discussion

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND FRAMES

Thus, in the previous chapter we have identified nine discourses based on a *framing analysis* of six web pages from Apple, Google and Microsoft. Following this, we identified a total of 24 mental models, which were rooted in the discourses uncovered. In this chapter, we would like to discuss how the above-mentioned organizations seem to be constructing consumer identities through the presence of prevailing discourses and frames, visible on their websites. We find this discussion very interesting, as society has evolved, over the last decades, from being (traditionally modern, but now) postmodern to now being postmodern with hypermodern trends and currents. In this development, the perception of identify has changed, along with many other things, and have caused 'identity' to be viewed as fragmented, different from other individual identities and to be more related to consumption than it has been in previous times.

In the light of this, it becomes very interesting to investigate, how three large organizations seem to address the identities of their consumers, now being fragmented and different, *and* being spread all over the world in multiple constellations of culture, age, political assumptions, religious beliefs, etc. How do the companies target the various identities that are assumed to exist among consumers - and how do they, in the process (co) construct (frame) consumer's identities? To discuss this, we will start by connecting all the dots from our previous analysis, and provide the reader with an overall view on how the identities are being *framed* on the web pages, based on the discourses and mental models revealed. After this, we will discuss how these frames relate to theory on consumer identity, and thereafter we will finish of the discussion with an assessment of *framing analysis*, that is, how useful was *framing* as a tool for communication analysis?

Frames

In the following we will present the reader with the frames that are created for consumers and their perceived identity on the web pages of Apple, Google and

Microsoft. After that, we will discuss how our findings relate to theory of the consumer identity, as represented by the theory of the postmodern- and hypermodern consumer as well as Generation X, Z and Y.

… *Apple's frame*

As revealed in the analysis, Apple tapped into seven discourses and seven mental models, which function as general structures of experience, from which communication emerges (Fairhurst 2010a). The models and discourses are listed below and for further explanation, please see the previous section (Page 92).

The mental models were:

- Technology should be easy to use
    - o The *technical* discourse and
    - o The *simplicity* discourse
- Automation being desirable
    - o The *simplicity* discourse
- People are different from each other
    - o The *personalization* discourse
- English is universal
    - o The *cultural* discourse
- New is good and technology equals new development
    - o The *technical* discourse
- Apple is known
    - o The *exclusivity* discourse
- People are social actors (or beings)
    - o The *social* discourse

The top four mental models stem from the specific discourses of *simplicity*, *personalization* and *culture*. And these were the discourses that all three companies had in common, on their websites. Based on the above stated models, which reflect their view on consumers, we will now discuss how this *frames* the identity of the consumer.

From the combination of discourses and mental models, we see Apple as framing their consumers as:

> *Being globally integrated, but individually unique, while still having a need*
> *to be social in consumption situations. Apple's consumers are well-informed*
> *individuals. And technological integration and development are important*
> *to the consumers, and this should be both simple and intuitive.*

In the below, we will now provide the reader with our argumentation for we see Apple, as framing their consumers in this specific way.

Cultural dimension

As Apple signals an understanding – a mental model – that the English language is universally understood, Apple in this way frame their consumers as being globally integrated individuals, rather than exclusively locally rooted. However, be leaving the possibility, to consumers, to choose another country or region and thereby language on the web page, this also suggests that although Apple presumes that the consumer might also be rooted in a more local understanding of the world, and hence prefer a specific regional page over others, when information is to be retrieved. This mental model emphasizes that the consumers are in some way more or less globally integrated, or at least aware globally aware. Otherwise, there would be no point in selecting a standard language for the opening page, and Apple could have chosen to present the consumer with a web page that, in several languages, kindly asks the consumer to choose a region to continue, as have been done on other global organization's websites (in example, see; www.rudyproject.com).

Personality Dimension

Apple frames the consumers as having a need to *personalize,* and are therefore being presented with possibilities of personalization on their webpage. This is displayed as possibilities to personalize an account or even a customization of the products. At first glance, this seems to be in contrast to the *cultural* frame, where the consumers are viewed as rather homogenous (all globally integrated) and are therefore, presented with specific language preferences. But although consumers are globally integrated, this does not necessary mean that people are *the same,* and hence, an option to personalize seem optimal. Taking this one step further, the framing of consumer's need to personalize is not limited to choosing the language settings (regional, cultural personalization), however, the consumer is presented

with an opportunity to *build your perfect MAC* or *engrave* your iPod, which personalizes consumer's device even further on an individual scale. Thus, while people are globally integrated, they are also unique individuals with unique personal needs and wants.

As we will argue later on, this also addresses the potentially fragmented and different aspect of identities, brought about by the theory on postmodern- and hypermodern society and consumers.

Social actors

In addition to this, Apple is framing the consumer as a social being, placing specific emphasis on the aspect of the postmodern consumer, that he or she would like to have the possibility of being informed about what other people have preferred, searched for or perhaps even bought, before they entered the situation. The social dimension was found in the analysis of Apple's "store page" where words like "*Popular Accessories", "Top Sellers"* and *"Staff Picks"* indicated popularity among products, based on other groups of people. Apple therefore seems to follow an understanding that popularity of a product is socially accepted, as a sign for quality of the products.

> Furthermore, deriving from the *exclusivity* discourse, Apple's consumers are supposed to or expected to know Apple as a brand, which frames consumers as being *well-informed individuals*. Prescribing this certain *exclusivity* to consumers, implicitly connect Apple's users in their passion for Apple products, which frame the consumers as being *socially connected*.

Technology is good

As a dominant and unique feature for Apple's way of framing consumers, Apple is framing consumers as interested in technological development. The use of specific words that associates to technology illustrates this rather well. First of all, words like *content*, *wirelessly, pushes, devices, integrates,* and *apps* clearly draw upon a technical language, which assumes that the consumer understands terms like this or else he or she might not have been able to make sense of this page. Secondly, the word "*device"* brings connotations of a technical purpose, which requires that the consumer understands the product technology in order to use it. The use of words continue throughout the page, and it is clear that development in this field is a positive thing, as nothing draws upon markers of tradition, such as history or the like. This leaves us with the impression that the consumer is assumed to, naturally,

see the benefits from technological development and integration. This perspective, on Apple's web page, furthermore, frames the consumers as being potentially fragmented, as the technical integration allow them to combine identities via the use of technology. In example, a consumer would be able to choose a product, say a computer that would contain the elements needed for professional purposes and for private purposes. Furthermore, they would be able to buy an iPad, which they could synchronize to their computer and then leave the computer at home for private purposes and bring the iPad for professional purposes. They could have their work-phone to synchronize with their home computer and the personal mobile. They could bring their work e-mail with them on their personal phone, along with their personal e-mail. And the possibilities of combining different aspects of one's identity seem endless with this focus on technology. In another example, this could allow consumers to be globally oriented while still remaining local, as everything consumers have on their home computers can be brought, or retrieved, from wherever they are situated in the world, by using Apple's technology.

Simplicity is good

In connection to *simplicity*, which has been mentioned quite some times throughout this thesis, Apple frame their consumers as not only seeing technological development as desirable, but also as *demanding* that the technology should be easy to use and pleasurable. As we have presented previously, the *simplicity* discourse prescribed how information should presented to the visitor, on the webpage, in a way that appeared as both simple and straightforward. Words such as *seamlessly, everything,* and *automatically* brought forth connotations of Apple's product being easy to use, despite of its technical character. This means, however, that consumers are assumed to be interested in giving away some degree of control to the product itself, which will then in turn do some of the thinking for the consumer. We also found this to be the mental model, or their approach, to technology, that *automation was desirable,* which framed time (amongst other things) to be important to consumers, which suits well with the notion of time being a new social status aspect for hypermodern consumer types. The hypermodern individual is described as creating one's identity *through* consumption (hence, the massive combinations of technologies and the presence of the *commercial* discourse) and as concerned with solving problems of time.

Maibrith Kempka Jensen   Sebbastian Naerbout

… Google's frame

In the analysis of Google's web pages we revealed five discourses and seven mental models that function as general structures of experience, from which communication emerges (Fairhurst 2010:A). The models and discourses are listed below and for further explanation, please see the previous section (Page 97).

- Retrieving information should be easy and available to everybody
    - The *simplicity* discourse
- People are seen as different from each other
    - The *personality* discourse
- People think locally, but search for or need global information
    - The *cultural* discourse
- At information is power or at least immensely important
    - *Information importance* discourse
- Information is money (orgs. can influence which info you get)
    - The *business* discourse
- People are primarily driven by individual needs. Secondly, social actors
    - The *social* discourse
- Information is in the eye of the beholde*r*
    - The *information importance* and the *business* discourse

From a combination of the discourses and mental models, we see Google as framing their consumers as:

> *Individuals who are locally rooted, but who retrieve information in both a global and local scale. They are individually unique and have no particular need for social interaction to conduct their search for information. What is important is just sheer information and preferably fast.*

Cultural Dimension

In contrast to the previous cultural framing that we saw with Apple, Google frames their consumers as being individuals who are primarily locally rooted. But yet, they have the need to retrieve information from a global scale. This frame, especially, arises in the localizing redirecting-feature, where visitors are directed to a local page, in a local language, when they want to retrieve information.

As we have discussed in the analysis and in the discussion chapter, it is interesting that even if consumers deliberately try to type into Google.es, to get to the Spanish version of Google, they will always be directed back to the local version of Google (with local adds). This strongly suggests a frame that consumers are *local* individuals with no attempt to apply a global mindset when they search for information. However, we find a contradiction to this frame on Google's *"About"* page, where people seem to be seen in a global perspective, and hence, only provided with a global entry to this information. We have chosen, though, to focus on the "*start*" page when extracting the frames about consumer's identities, as the *"About"* page was directed towards business clients.

The Personalization Dimension

Much in line with Apple, Google is also framing the identity of their consumers as being *individually different* and having *different needs*. This is displayed from the many customization possibilities provided to the consumer. In example consumers are provided with the option to exchange the *entire* whitespaced background to a personal full screen photo. However, when we look at the personalization discourse in the light of the cultural discourse, we find it remarkable to note that, even if Google recognizes that consumers hold individual customization needs, they still seem to insist on deciding, on behalf of the consumer, in which local branch of Google one would like to conduct his or her search. This means that Google decides which local adds one are presented to, and (perhaps) inspired by. Once again, this emphasizes the frame that consumes are *locally rooted individuals.*

Lack of Social Dimension

In contrast to the two other organizations analyzed, Google did not display an explicit *social* discourse. However, in our view, the absence of this dimension indicates a frame for consumer's identity as *not* being in need of social interaction when conducting information search.

In contrast to Apple and Microsoft, Google *not* framing consumers as social actors, and this becomes visible, as there is no indication of what other people have searched for previously or found interesting. In this sense, it is clear that the absence the social discourse creates a frame that consumers are *not* interested in neither *sharing* information about products, services or the organization, with other individuals, nor does the consumer find it interesting to *know what other individuals* have found interesting before them. The consumer desires information,

regardless of the social context, and hence, is not seen as having an *outreaching* desire to connect with others, nor, as having an *inbound* curiosity of what other people have found to be interesting.

The Information Dimension

The dominating frame on Google's web pages was that consumers view *information as important and powerful.* In the mental models we extracted from the web pages, we found that nearly every model was preoccupied with information in one way or another.

Another, very clear indicator that Google find information important, on behalf of their consumers, was that the entire start page was created to facilitate the goal of retrieving information. In Google's case, the *information importance* discourse was supported by the *simplicity* discourse, which could be seen from the overall simplicity of their design on the website. As we argued in our findings chapter, the only thing potentially demonstrating that there might also be other purposes with this page is the lower left menu, which, primarily, is directed towards business. Here, organizations can buy search solutions in different forms. That is, they can pay to be displayed when people search for certain words, or other services alike. Thus, by tapping into the *information importance* discourse and the *simplicity* discourse, Google frames their consumers as merely interested in (raw) information - no social interaction, no products to buy, just information needed in that specific moment of conducting the search. Furthermore, we view Google as framing the individual as occupied with time, on the basis that consumers are provided with a number on how many result were found and how long time it took to retrieve them. Thus, the a part of the consumer's identity is occupied with time, which is much in line with the theory of the hypermodern consumer.

… Microsoft's frame

In the analysis of Google's web pages we revealed six discourses and no less than ten mental models that function as general structures of experience, from which communication emerges (Fairhurst 2010:A). The models and discourses are listed below and for further explanation, please see the previous section (Page 99).

- People are fully capable of selecting relevant information
  - The *information importance* discourse
- Time is important to people (few clicks to get information)

- o   The *information importance* discourse
- Difference between home users and professional users
    - o   The *commercial* discourse
- Sales are what Microsoft do
    - o   The *commercial* discourse
- Purchases should be made easy
    - o   The *commercial* discourse
- People have a need to share information with other people
    - o   The *social* discourse
- People seek input from other people
    - o   The *social* discourse
- English is seen as a universally understood language
    - o   The *cultural* discourse
- People are different
    - o   The *personality* discourse
- Simplicity depends on the task at hand
    - o   The *simplicity* discourse

From the combination of discourses and mental models, we see Microsoft framing their consumers as:

> *Being globally integrated, individually unique and social all at the same time. The individual consumer seeks to be well-informed, and is therefore interested in clear and simple information about the products.*

Cultural Dimension

In the cultural dimension of Microsoft's frame on consumer identities, individual consumers are being framed as globally integrated. This frame is displayed when English is, once again, seen as the default language on their web pages. And although, a possibility of changing the language does exist, this is not advertised for and also not displayed by the use of a flag as symbol for this, and hence, this option is not view as particularly interesting to consumers. Actually, there is a Microsoft.dk page available (which was not included in the study), but you would have to look very closely to observe this. And one can say that the existence of this Microsoft.dk does frame the consumer as, potentially, locally rooted. However, as this was not emphasized in any of the pages in our study, we would not conclude this as the prevailing frame for the cultural identity of the consumers.

The Personalization Dimension

In this dimension of Microsoft's frame for consumer's identity, Microsoft frames the individual consumers as being individually unique, which is expressed in the acknowledgement that consumers have different needs and wants. This was identified, as the company present several categories of information, as well as a search function to retrieve information from these, to the consumers on their web page.

Interestingly, this seem to be in contrast to the very sparse amount of information provided on their "store page", which frames the individual consumers as being quite similar (the selection of products was very sparse and not very diverse). However, this, we believe, could be an expression of the individual consumers focus on time and in that sense also simplicity. If consumers are framed as being occupied with time, simplicity could be an attempt to provide the consumers with an easy access to information. To continue this line of argumentation, we see simplicity being displayed in two ways. On the start page, information is provided and categorized so that visitors do not have to click to many times to find what is relevant information to them. On the "store page", simplicity is provided in a very simple layout, which, presumably, causes the buying experience to seem more simple.

Social actors

Much in line with what we have seen previously, Microsoft frames the consumer as *having a need to be social,* while still being individually unique. However, in comparison to Apple's frame, Microsoft emphasizes the social aspect even more explicit. We see this on the start page, where Microsoft has incorporated the possibilities to provide *feedback* and to *share* [information] *with your network*, which indicates and understanding of people as having an *outreaching* desire to connect with other people/consumers. The perception that the individual consumers possess and *inbound* curiosity on what other people have found interesting is also emphasized, in the headlines such as; *Top products, Popular downloads* and *Popular searches.*

Information is important

Information wise, we see Microsoft framing their consumers as being well informed individuals. We see this from the vast information load provided on their

start page, where Microsoft seem to emphasize that information is important to consumer's identification with its brand. An interesting point in this connection is that Microsoft seems to take a *different* approach to information than does the two other companies. Apple and Google provided information in very sparse bites or through the use of pictures that one could click to gain more information. Microsoft, however, provides remarkably more information on their start page. This could be interpreted as a frame of consumers, as *being fully capable of selecting relevant information, according to their personal needs.* Selecting the information from the website then, would form an implicit personalization of the usage of their website, which correspond to their view that consumers are individually unique and value time and information.

On the other side, this could also be interpreted as an understanding that *time is important to people and hence there should be as few clicks as possible to get information*. In this interpretation, Microsoft creates a frame for consumers as, primarily, valuing easy and simple access to information, which would also correspond to the presence of the *simplicity* discourse on their website. However, a third interpretation could be that the consumers are simply framed as placing more value on *information* than they do on *time*, which would correspond to the presence of the *information importance* discourse on their website.

As we do not have access to internal insight, we will leave this open for further discussion. It is interesting, though, to note that information on Microsoft's web pages can be interpreted in, at least, three different ways, which actually corresponds rather well with the theory of the post- and hypermodern consumer who is fragmented and who wishes to actively take part in the creation of meaning.

Players of commercialization

Having stated that a characteristic of the individual consumer is that they like to be wellinformed, there is also another aspect that Microsoft, uniquely, emphasizes. This is the frame that consumers are, themselves, *players of commercialization.* This frame is created from the understandings that *sales are what Microsoft do, home users and professional users are different* and that *purchases should be made easy*. In this, there is a frame created that consumers know that sales are what Microsoft do, and they accept it - they even play along as subject positions of those who buy the products. We find that the clarity around this premise, is quite uniquely displayed on Microsoft's web pages. Not that Apple and Google are not selling products, and Apple is also taps into a *commercial* discourse, but the way they do it is very implicit. Microsoft is very explicit in their relation to sales. In

example Microsoft uses more words that are strongly connotative to sales, such as; *Choose, Find, Buy, Get Windows, try the new Arc mouse, Buy now* and *Free trial.*

This leaves us in a position where we can interpret how Apple and Microsoft, in particular, are diverse in their frame on what consumers identify with. Both companies are selling products, however, Microsoft seems to perceive the consumers as being well aware that the organization is interested in selling their products and that consumers prefer an openness about this so they can "play along", as they wish. Apple on the other hand, seem to frame consumers as being more ready to identify with sales "disguised" as relevant information than with an upfront commercial information technique.

SUMMARY

In the previous sections we have identified three ways of framing the identity of the individual consumers. It is important to note, that we are not referring to the complete identity of consumers in this interpretation. However, we are describing how the organizations studied seem to view the identity of their consumers, which in turn impact on how consumers can identify with the brands and how they cannot identify. Below we have listed the three ways of framing consumers, and after that we have provided the reader with a short conclusion to connect the lines from this thesis, so far.

We found that Apple frames their consumers as:

Being globally integrated, but individually unique, while still having a need to be social in consumption situations. Apple's consumers are well informed individuals. And technological integration and development are important to the consumers, and this should be both simple and intuitive.

Similarly, Google frame their consumers as:

Individuals who are locally rooted, but who retrieve information in both a global and local scale. They are individually unique and have no particular need for social interaction to conduct their search for information. What is important is just sheer information and preferably fast

While Microsoft frame their consumers as:

> *Being globally integrated, individually unique and social all at the same time. The individual consumer seeks to be well-informed, and is therefore interested in clear and simple information about the products.*

In conclusion, we note that all organizations rather explicit in their approach on whether the individual consumers are *globally integrated* or *locally rooted*. Apple and Microsoft both frame the individual consumers as being globally integrated, and settle for providing language options, as the local treat to those who are still a bit locally rooted. Whereas, Google is quite explicit in their view on consumers as being, culturally, locally rooted. Furthermore, all organizations frame consumers, as being *individually unique,* but only Apple and Microsoft seem to be emphasizing a *social* frame, where social interaction possibilities are provided to the consumers. Apple and Microsoft are similar in their frame of the consumers as purchasing individuals, where Microsoft is more explicit in this approach, which allow consumers to, explicitly, enter into the subject position of being those who buy. Google and Microsoft frame that an important aspect of the consumers, is to be well-informed, and what they identify with is simple and easy accessible information. Though, Apple does provide information to consumer, on both the products and on their company, what they emphasize *even more* is that consumers value technological advancements with simple and intuitive user interfaces.

All in all, we have both found remarkably similar frames for consumers, even though the prevailing discourses was perceived differently and led to different mental models.

Apple	Google	Microsoft
• Globally integrated (locally rooted) • Individually unique • Need for simplicity • Socially oriented • Technologically oriented	• Locally rooted (globally integrated) • Individually unique • Need for simplicity • No social orientation • Need for information	• Globally integrated (locally rooted) • Individually unique • Need for simplicity • Social orientation • Need for information

How frames relate to the construction of identity

Based on our analysis, of the discourses and mental models, we have now discussed how the companies are framing some of the identity characteristics of their perceived consumers. As a part of the purpose in this thesis, we will now discuss how consumer identities are constructed through the revealed frames, in relation to the theory of consumer identity, which we described in the beginning of this thesis.

However, as we have seen in the literature review, there is a problem related to the analysis and interpretation of identity from a social constructivist point of view. Inherent in this approach is the fact that identity is a social, dynamic and fluid concept, which makes it difficult to analyze. 'Identity' refers to one's subjective experiences and values, and from a theoretical point of view, these experiences and values, are influenced by the discourses we are embedded in, and the reproduction of the discourses. In that sense, theory emphasizes the point that even though we identify specific frames for consumers, as they are being produced by the three companies, and even though these are based upon an *analysis* of existing discourses, this does *not* necessarily reflect the *actual structure* for consumers, as they might be embedded in several other discourses than the one's provided to them on the websites. It is an important point to make, then, that it is not necessarily the case that *all* of Apple's consumers value technological development, or that *all* Microsoft's consumers value heavy information. In fact, it is almost certain that consumers are embedded in several other discourses than the ones provided to them here. Furthermore, the postmodern social constructivist approach emphasizes that co-construction is a constant, on-going process and a social phenomenon. And in the light of this, it seems reasonable to argue that the identity construction on the organization's web pages does not necessarily reflect the true identity of consumers, though we may presume that if consumers identify with the pages, the frames provided to them can influence identification and thereby the identity of the consumer.

In practice, as well as in theory, this represents a challenge, as the fluidity and dynamic character of identity makes it hard, and maybe even impossible, to categorize consumers after their needs and wants. The dynamic character makes it very likely that needs and wants will change over time, and according to the different situations that consumers are in.

In our analysis, we therefore chose to look at how three companies were creating an overall frame for the identification of consumers, diverse in multiple ways. In this way, we were not forced to look at strictly delineated identity characteristics, as *a frame* leaves room for fluidity. In example, we identified the cultural discourse in all three organizations, but the particular mental models and frame that this discourse created was different in the organization's display of this. A frame, so to say, "fixes" meanings around a certain discourse but it does not strictly delineate or define what exactly is meant. In the same way, we have chosen to use theory on consumer identity, which allowed us to discuss some overall tendencies and trends of the consumers, rather than define their precise character. We will now turn to a discussion on how the identified frames relate to the chosen theory.

Cultural integration and theory on consumer identity

Previously in this thesis, we have described a development in the perception of identity as evolved over the past generations. In connection to this, we also described what characterizes the specific Generations of X, Y and Z. In this, it was emphasized that while generation X was, generally, not comfortable with the use of online technology, generation Y have become quite comfortable with its use, and the even younger generation (generation Z) is being characterized as being "*the digital natives",* having never experienced a reality without the integrated technology.

In terms of culture, and being globally integrated or not, one can argue that the use of technology, in some ways, make consumers culturally more (alike or) connected. Consumers, across generations, now know how to *use* technology and are presented with more aspects of each other's lives, as they enter into the same world of cyberspace to enact some parts of their lives. In connection to Apple and Microsoft's explicit focus on consumers as globally integrated (and Google more implicitly), one can argue that related to the theory of generations, this makes sense as several generations now seem to be embracing technology and in their existence into cyberspace consumers are, inevitably, presented with a more global orientation to the world (the most apparent signifier for this being the "*www*" *(world wide web)* indicators before a web address). In example, consumers retrieve worldwide information from Google. They can watch global television channels; they can shop for products online, on websites that are internationally based because it is cheaper, or simply because they have the merchandize that is not

locally available. Danish consumers can order a computer from Apple on a Danish website, but have it sent from Holland.

However, from a theoretical perspective, there are still generations that Apple and Microsoft do not capture in their global approach to consumer identities. In this case, we are referring to the Generation X, who has not grown up with the Internet and who might have difficulties navigating in the global context. In theory, consumers from this generation are described as oriented towards material wealth and potentially, qua their age, posses a large buying power. This generation may be able to use the Internet, but is not accustomed to the global context for purchasing a product. In this sense, Google stand out as the considerate part towards this generation's, assumed quest for, or tradition of, locality before global integration.

 In the post- and hypermodern perspective, one can also make sense of the possibilities of customizing languages and other features that all organizations offer on almost all of their pages. Generally, we see a tendency that the organizations construct identity frames that corresponds to the *postmodern* individual, who is a co-creator of his or her reality, and thereby also of identity. Two characteristics that the organizations, typically, meet, is that the individual is fragmented and thus, identify with diverse aspects of the communication content in relation to the contexts they are in, in that specific moment (if they identify with the brand). Moreover, they seem to acknowledge that the consumer co-create identity, in part through consumption (hypermodern currents put even further emphasis on this aspect) and therefore, they communicate in ways that integrate the company's products into the lives (or the contexts) of the consumers.

Unique individuality and theory on consumer identity

Continuing down the line of the post-and hypermodern consumer, we especially find that the organizations are directing their communication content towards the hypermodern consumer, in their focus on consumers as *unique* individuals. This focus can be seen through the many customization possibilities provided to the consumers, both in terms of information search, account log in, customization of the *entire* layout of a page or in customization of products.

As presented in the theory on consumers, society has undergone a development from a traditional, modern societal model, to a postmodern model, now with hypermodern currents. These shifts, it is argued, creates a much stronger focus on

the individual, at the expense of the collective and solidarity. In connection to this, we note when analyzing the results of our analysis, that meaningful experiences and individual happiness seems to be emphasized over solidarity. This is, in particular, detected in the possibility to personalize content, and products, which can also be viewed as providing the consumer with a possibility to *personalize the experience* or a current situation. This, furthermore, corresponds with the hypermodern individuals' emphasis on constant adaptability. And in line with this, Apple is, to a large extent, drawing upon hedonistic features of their products and the quest for saving valuable time. They do this by means of the very simple design on their web pages, and also by communicating largely about the features of their products that meet, just exactly, these quests.

As an element that is included in both the postmodern and the hypermodern characteristics, we find that the mental models based upon a mixture of the identified discourses, can be taken as a sign that the organizations recognize the fragmented aspect of consumer identities. The fact that several models are being communicated through the content available on the pages, indicates an understanding that consumers, independent of modern, postmodern or hypermodern characteristics, will pick up and choose content from the discourses and models that speak to the specific parts of the identity that they wish to satisfy.

Social needs and theory on consumer identity

In terms of how the organizations seem to relate to the questions of whether people are social beings or not, when it comes to their website, Apple and Microsoft clearly construct identities towards a social consumer while Google is doing the opposite by offering no possibilities for social interaction. In Apple's and Microsoft's case, this means that while every consumer is seen as individual and unique they are *also* identified with a need to socialize in their consumption. This is very much in accordance with the social constructivist view on identity, as being socially co-constructed. In this regard, we see Apple and Microsoft as constructing identity frames that are much in accordance with the thoughts of theory of Generation Z, and their need to maintaining relationships through (digital) social interaction. In this sense, we see them focus less on Generation Y and X, but one can perhaps argue that if Generation Y and X do not have a particular need for (digital) social interaction, then they can simple choose not to use it.

When it comes to the emphasis on social interaction in consumption situations from Apple and Microsoft's side, this also relates well to the theory of the postmodern- and hypermodern consumers. Here the theory identifies a need for social interaction, as the consumers wants to be more engaged, than did the previous time's modern consumers. Hypermodern consumers are portrayed as even more dependent on social interaction, as their consumption *is* what creates their identity and the display of this manifests one's consumption (identity). In addition to this, the hypermodern and Generation Z consumers have previously been described as "masters of networks" and much information about consumption will, predictably, be spread in these networks, which makes the need for these to be present (for these consumers) even more necessary.

Interestingly, Google does not seem construct a *social* identity. There is no function where consumers can tap into which searches others have found interesting, and no indicators present of popular search terms (i.e. in relation to the current search conducted) in the pages we have analyzed. Naturally, there is a difference in Google's service, as they are not selling physical products and software solutions like Apple And Microsoft, rather Google is facilitating information. However, we do not see any reason why Google should not emphasize the social aspects of their consumers. The lack of the socialization aspect on their website, does support the identification of the consumer as individually unique, if we relate it to the theory of (especially) the hypermodern consumer, as this consumer type might use this socialization, both to get information and also to manifest his or her identity. Moreover, it does not do, in its approach to information that the consumer might be, technologically, very much ahead. And some consumers (i.e. the postmodern, but in particular, the hypermodern and Generation Z consumers) may want to take information-communication to another level. Namely, to share information with their network rather than, solely, basing the information interaction on a relationship between the company and the consumer.

Commercial orientation and theory on consumer identity

Microsoft is unique in framing their consumers as being commercially oriented. Naturally, Apple and Google are also commercial, as it lies within the realm of an organization to be commercial and gain profits which ensure their survival, but our findings indicate that Apple and Google emphasize the wish to *inform* consumers about, either their products, or just for the sake of facilitating information to consumers. This unique way of framing consumers, as being *commercially aware*,

can be interpreted in two ways. First of all, theory suggest that postmodern and hypermodern consumers are very well informed and trying to "hide" the fact that Microsoft has a commercial purpose with the website, would perhaps seem unauthentic. As the theory of Generation Z, also suggest that these consumers place great value on authentic relationships, displaying an unauthentic promotion of their products may decrease trust in the identification with their brand. However, another interpretation suggest that Microsoft is simply "behind" Apple and Google, who have realized that *information over commercialization* aspires to identification. As we have seen previously, both the postmodern- and hypermodern consumers place great importance on the ability to retrieve information about a product or service, as they wish to *engage* in the identification with a brand or a product. And perhaps experiences have shown that providing *information* lead to more *commercialization* than does an explicit commercialized discourse on the website. Choosing information over commercialization, one can argue, perhaps assigns the consumer with more power to decide for him- or herself whether he or she would like to buy the product or not.

Informational orientation and theory on consumer identity

In the analysis we revealed that Google and Microsoft seem to be oriented towards providing information (as identified in the *information importance* discourse, page 76). From a theoretical point of view, this indicates that the organizations are constructing identities based upon the line of thought, from the hypermodern perspective with a special emphasis on time.

What characterizes the hypermodern society and its consumers, is that time is of uttermost importance. In line with this, the individuals, therefore, have come to demand constant flexibility, adaptability, but also mobility, availability and speed. In the analysis, several things indicated that both Google and Microsoft seek to provide just this to their consumers. Google; by making the retrieval of information as simple as possible, and by indicating *how fast* the vast amount of information was found. Microsoft; by placing all "relevant" information on the start page. In the first case, the consumer can search for information instantly, in the second case, the visitor is presented with the information before even searching for it.

However, the placing of much information on the start page, could also bee seen as conflicting with the postmodern consumer identity, as these rejects totalizing discourses, and in some way, one could say that Microsoft is, actually, dictating what kind of information the consumer would find interesting and relevant.

However, on the other side, one can argue that this will inevitable be the case for all organizations with a website, as one has to choose which information to put there. Though, Apple approaches this from another angle, only placing little information on the start page, calling upon the consumer to determine what he or she finds relevant, by navigating the menus provided to the visitor.

Technological orientation and theory on consumer identity

An interesting finding was that Apple frame identities as being influenced by the technological development, and hence, this is important to consumers and their identity. We find this interesting, as this particular frame was not present in a predominant way, in any of the other websites. Connecting the frame to the theory of consumer identity, this constellation is quite interesting. In fact, as a unique characteristic of Apple's framing, we see Apple tapping into a basic premise of the hypermodern currents in society, and with Generation Z, namely, that 'identity' is "played out" and identification is taking place *through* the use of technology.

As mentioned in the theory section (see page 79), technological development and technological efficiency is, predictably, competences that will become key to future consumers. In fact, theory prescribes that if consumers are not developing along with the technological development, the technological development will outpace consumers and leave them behind in development. From this finding, we conclude that Apple seems to focus their content towards the younger consumers - those that may become hypermodern, and who is in fact all ready, generation Z.

Simplicity and theory on consumer identity

The uncovered discourse of simplicity becomes interesting in relation to the theory of consumers. First of all, the discourse was revealed on all of the organization's websites. And secondly, in theory, there is generally an emphasis on elements such as; *time, speed, availability, mobility, flexibility, adaptability* and information loads have become massive, in consumers everyday life, concurrently with an increased access to the information. As a consequence of this, product selections are more and more based upon *identification* than on rational choices (Jensen 2011b). In the light of this, it is not surprising that all organizations included in the study, place great emphasis on the simplicity in their design and information, which, if successful, will provide the consumer with a more *simple experience* of the interaction.

SUMMARY

In this section, it was concluded that even though the organizations, included in this study, work within the same industry, seem to be competing for the same consumers, and are all global organizations, the discourses and mental models that followed from it, seemed to create different frames for the construction of identity on the web pages.

The frames have all been introduced, in a separate chapter (see page 92), and following this, we looked at how these frames relate to the current theory on consumer identities, as represented by the theory of post- and hypermodern consumers and Generation X, Y and Z.

Generally, there is not much attention paid to the Generation X or the modernistic ideals of the modern consumer. If we relate this to the use of Internet, the non-present focus on these generations on the web pages makes sense, as this generation characterized as *not* being comfortable in using the Internet, as well as there being a contradiction in terms of the modernistic view on identity compare to the present (on the Internet, at least) postmodern social constructivist view, where identity is a dynamic, fluid, co-constructive phenomenon.

Much focus is, however, placed on communication content that appeals to the post- and hypermodern consumer, or to Generation Y and Z. This is seen as the organizations all place great emphasis on the consumer as being *individually unique*, concerned with self-realization and development, both reflected in multiple customization possibilities and in the opportunities, generally provided, to enact social interaction in the consumption situation (despite the different approach from Google).

We have illustrated how each frame contributes to construct consumer identities, in the model below:

Generation Y

- Global vs Local
  - Comfortable w/ tecnology
- Unique individuality
  - Self-Realization + development
- Commercial identity
  - Identity created through consumption

Generation Z

- Global vs local
  - Digital natives
- Unique individuality
  - Self-realization + development
- Social beings
  - Need for social interaction
- Commercial identity
- Technological development
  - Identity created through consumption

Postmodern

- Global vs Local
  - Choosing own reality
- Unique individuality
  - Self-realization + development & fragmented identity
- Social beings
  - Identity creation is social
- Commercial indentity
  - Identity created through consumption

Hyprmodern

- Unique individuality
  - Constructing meaningful experiences
- Commercial identity
  - Identity created through consumption
- Fast Information
  - Time & Speed
- Technological developemtn
  - Time & Speed

IX The usefulness of framing

In this chapter we would like to discuss the advantages and disadvantages we have come across, in our use of framing in a somewhat different manner than what the theory itself suggests.

In this thesis, we have used framing to look at how three organizations frame the context of a communication situation, namely that which is displayed through their web pages. Originally, framing, as described by Fairhurst in *The Art of Framing (1996)* and later in *The power of framing* (2010) it was presented as a communication tool for i.e. managers to nuance and enhance the quality and effects of their communication messages. Therefore, framing in itself has very much been used as a management tool or communication skill set, and not as an analytical tool. When we say *analytical,* we do not mean analytical in the sense that one can analyze the present, and oftentimes interpersonal, communication situation that one is part of. Rather, we are referring to *analytical* in the sense of

using framing to make sense of a broader communication act (such as the one on the websites) and to look at what lies *beneath* the messages prompted.

As we have described in the introduction to this thesis, we hold the opinion that framing has the potential to be used for more, than a skill set adopted by managers or a way to becoming better at communicating in a certain situation. However useful we find the theory, we believe that the theory has been framed in a rather self-limiting manner – in the ballpark of what we call "airport management literature". That is, the kind of (sometimes) very good literature about management that you can buy in an airport and which should not take you much longer than 4-5 hours to read. This kind of literature is often very much in touch with reality, and gives the reader a good introduction to a field, but it is often lacking the academic ambitions in terms of what it can do in more complex situations. Therefore, by this discussion we hope to reveal that framing is much more than airport literature and that it is, despite of its (sometimes) deceptively simple appearance, very capable of being used for conducting even complex communication analysis.

FRAMING INSIDE OUT — OUTSIDE-IN

As briefly touched upon in the above, framing has been very much oriented towards the situation at hand, and hence, seek to describe how to deal with a dynamic interaction in the best way. In this sense, we are talking about an inside-and-out approach to framing. By this we mean that in the overall approach, framing is about how interpersonal communication actors, by tapping into discourses, can strengthen certain mental models over others, in order to give more effect to their messages – to win hegemony over the meanings ascribed to a given situation, so to speak. In a management perspective, this situation is desirable, as delegating tasks and responsibilities and creating results very much depend upon everybody's understanding and acceptance of, *what* the goals are and in effect *what* the results should be. Having an ability to hegemonize the interpretation of a given situation, therefore allows the manager great power and legitimacy in deciding and delegating tasks to others, as well as inspiring others to move toward the same direction as the manager of the organization. In this light, framing is, metaphorically speaking, seen as a tool, which can be taken out of the toolbox and used by managers and communicators to address the communication

aspects of a given situation. In this sense, it is very much an inside-out phenomenon focusing on how to *co-create* the situation at hand.

In *The power of framing*, Fairhurst (2010) provides a brief introduction into discourse theory, as well as cognitive psychology to create an awareness of the contextual premises for all communication. The premise is that all messages sent to a receiver will always be embedded into specific discursive understandings and that the specific decoding of these messages will, in return, be influenced by the discourses that the receiver is participating in. In connection to this, she advocates for a discursive cultivation and the ability to prime certain mental models over others, in order to strengthen one's interpretation of reality and gain more power in one's communication of messages.

From our perspective, we approach framing as an analytical tool and thus, takes a different approach to Framing than did Fairhurst. By analyzing the web pages of the organizations, we have thereby not only selected an object of study which is much more static than the interpersonal communication situation – which off course allows for an analysis in the first place – but we have also taken a *outside-in* perspective. By *outside-in* perspective we mean that we are using framing as a tool to analyze a communication situation over which we have no control, a situation, which have been created before our interaction with it, to see what this can tell us about the organizations perception of the context. Websites are often seen as dynamic in nature, but rarely they change their content while the visitor is watching and they do not adapt its content, instantly, based upon the visitor's immediate reaction to it. In this sense, websites become more static than the situation at hand.

HOW IT WENT

Our approach to the analysis emphasizes framing as an analytical tool. The aim of the analysis was to analyze the discourses and mental models, that are embedded in messages sent to the receiver through the website content.

Traditionally, many communication analyses have been conducted with a focus to the sender-message-receiver aspects or semiotics. However, as social constructivist approaches to communication analysis are increasing, we see *framing analysis* as an effective way of uncovering some of the *patterns* and

contexts, which both the sender, the receiver and the messages are embedded in. This approach allows us to unravel discourses and mental models that affect the way in which the messages are crafted and sent. This view is interesting, as discourses that the messages on the websites was also embedded into, enables us to say something about how the sender perceives the identities of the intended receivers. Thus, doing the *frame analysis* and interpreting its results, allows us to investigate the (identity) assumptions that lie behind the organization's messages.

On this note, the advantages of using *framing* as an analytical tool was, among other things, that it allowed us to consider *the text*, *the context for the text* and to explore some of the *underlying structures of meaning* that were present in the messages on the websites. This approach enabled us to read something into the messages provided on a rather static page, in a quite thorough way. Thus, even though this theory seemed rather simple at first glance, it still enabled us to be quite thorough in our approach to Apple's, Google's and Microsoft's identity construction on their websites. This approach allowed us to discuss the mental models and discourses that Apple, Google and Microsoft wrote themselves into and how this could impact on the identity construction of consumers in the in the identification with their brands.

On how 'frames' are related to identity construction, one can say that frames create meaning, and certain frames create certain meanings. Thus, when Google emphasizes information in *everything* they do, they implicitly indicate that consumers identify with information - to them information is important. In turn, when consumers identify with this, it becomes a part of their value sat (identity) that information is important to them.

Oftentimes, communication scholars have approached communication issues from the point of view of what is being explicitly communicated. Often they proceed to give advise on how, what is being said, could be said more effectively. Either in terms of using different communication channels or simply in terms of rephrasing messages so that they appeal more to the chosen segment. However, choosing the *framing approach* one looks, not only at what is explicitly communicated, but also for what is *implicitly* being communicated and how this emerged. The problem one could encounter in solely taking the first approach is that, as focus is on the explicit message, advice on how to change the message might not be realistic or even effective in the long run, as there is still the risk that this could conflict with a respective company's dominating discourses and mental models. In general,

consensus on the ineffectiveness of messages that conflict with the actual life inside an organization, is in favor of not communicating something that does not correspond to the discourses in one's organization. Therefore, a consideration of the context, as well as the discourses and mental models in connection to messages being communicated can prove to be very useful, both in practice and for this thesis, in conducting the analyses of the company's websites.

What was less optimal in the conducted analysis, though, was that our analysis was directed towards one situation. We choose the three websites, and looked at them separately which means *not* in a wider context. This, in its extreme, conflicts with the social constructivist approach we have chosen to this thesis, but as we were not able to conduct an extensive analysis of *all* of the web pages related to (and thereby creating the overall context of) each company, we had to choose some sites that were interesting in connection to the identity construction on each company's sites. This also means that we were analyzing from a rather specific, pre-determined, communication situation (because the sites were static), which did not allow for interaction and co-construction to take place. It would have been very interesting to investigate how discourses and mental models were negotiated in the pages where participation and co-construction was possible. But this was not an option on the sites we have analyzed and to investigate this properly, this would require an access to the company's counterpart, namely the consumers, and their thoughts.

In conclusion, we found great advantage in using 'framing' to analyze an actual and present context of the web pages, which allowed us to analyze the conditions for identity construction in connection to identification with Apple, Google and Microsoft's brands. However, it was still somewhat static and did not take into account the possible disturbance of the system that could have been caused by consumers and other parts when took action in the co-construction. Compared to a regular analysis that would focus on semiotics and explicit messages, we have come much further into depth with the message communicated. Though, in connection to the social constructivist approach this could potentially have been explored even further into depth, if the situation had allowed for it. While *framing* can be used as a practical communication tool to enhance the quality and results of one's messages, *framing* can also be used as an *analytical* communication tool, to explore i.e. assumptions about consumers from an external perspective.

An analysis of this sort can prove interesting for both organizations and communication scholars interested in the identity, as some organizations gain so

much attention that they are actually in a state to co-generate trends and currents among young consumers, who identify themselves *through* consumption. *Framing analysis* can be used to bridge the gap between an understanding of discourses and relating these to target audiences. And *framing* thus, becomes even more than a skill set possessed by managers (and others). We view *framing analysis* as a useful tool for analyzing how reality is understood, subjectively, and how this effects communication. Both in present situations, to strengthen one's argumentation and communication towards others, but also as a tool for making sense of more complex and static communication situations, after they have evolved.

FRAMING AS A TOOL FOR MASS TARGETING

In this section, we will discuss a communication issue that relates to all of the three organizations we have analyzed. And that is, how do you frame messages in a way so that a vast consumer group (potentially worldwide), with professionals as well as technological new beginners, can relate to (identify) with the content of one's website? In an attempt to answer this question, we will take an inside-and-out approach to framing. Though this question has not been our primary focus throughout this thesis, we find it relevant to investigate, as *framing* potentially hold a possibility to view communication situations differently, in a way that would actually allow us to work with such vast consumer groups, from an overall, rather holistic, and communicative plausible way.

As we have seen previously, consumer theory, in its very concrete form, suggest that consumers can be divided into generations instead of segments based on demographics. This is the first step up the latter, if you work with communication in this scale, to describe that society, as it has developed today, prescribes a model where a larger number of people are grouped together and described in terms of *what is their general characteristics and which trends do they relate to*. Connecting consumer theory with the theory of framing would enable the organizations to communicate with the intention of reaching, potentially, broader group of consumers. In example, communicating to receivers/consumers that are defined from generational terms allow companies to appeal to *characteristics* that certain generations value. Thus, instead of relying on "*what do this particular demographic segment value because they have the same religious belief?*" type of questions, organizations get to ask, "*what do the different demographic segments, potentially,*

have in common because they are all members of the same generation?". By appealing to this, we believe that Apple, Google and Microsoft are potentially broadening the identification possibilities of people, characterized by a number of different things, and actually opening up for identification in a worldwide scale.

Taking the next step up the latter, consumers were described, not as segmented demographically or generation-wise, but in stead through their habits of consumption. This approach seems suitable as organization meet a new premise; that organizations are generating communication content to websites that are global in their span. This new premise means that organizations may be communicating messages to consumers that differ in multiple ways such as *cultural, generational, professional* and *private identities,* and so forth.

Consumer theory (at least, the theory we have chosen) is taking the divisions between consumers, and what characterizes one from the other, to a whole new level, and are here made on the basis of their consumption habits; either as postmodern or hypermodern consumers. What characterizes the post- and hypermodern consumer has been explained in the theoretical introduction. However, we would like to note that dividing consumers on behalf of their consumption habits, which is closely connected with their societal development, *and* adding this even further knowledge about specific characteristics of people from a generational perspective could provide organizations with a new perspective on how to communicate to identities rather than to consumer groups as defined by demographics. Framing is about *how a message can be crafted to shape the meaning of a context in a certain way that allow certain interpretations and actions over others.* Connecting this understanding to the knowledge of post- and hypermodern consumer trends, provides organization an opportunity to work with communication from an angle of *how could we communicate (frame) to speak in a way that relates to identities, in stead of narrow segmented consumer groups that can be difficult to foresee and trust.* The notion is that if organizations know how to *frame* the situation at hand in a way that related to the postmodern or hypermodern currents, the consumer will most likely be a affected by either the postmodern or hypermodern consumer trends (both because of their generational traits but also as a consequence of society's development) and thereby identification (and identity work) increases.

X Conclusion

During the analysis we have identified a total of nine prevailing discourses on the web pages of the organizations included in the study. Some of these discourses overlapped, however they were used differently from organization to organization, and this led us to identify; seven discourses visible at Apple, five discourses visible at Google and finally six discourses visible at Microsoft. We identified the discourses as the *Simplicity, Personalization, Cultural, Commercial, Popular, Technical, Information Importance, Business* and *Exclusivity* discourses.

After analyzing and presenting each discourse, one at the time, we turned to explore, which mental models could be derived from the specific combination of discourses. This led us to identify a total of 24 mental models, reflected on the six web pages studied. Seven models were found on Apple's web pages, seven at Google's and ten at Microsoft's.

In Apple's page we identified seven models, which were:

- Technology should be easy to use
  - o The *technical* discourse and
  - o The *simplicity* discourse
- Automation being desirable
  - o The *simplicity* discourse
- People are different from each other
  - o The *personalization* discourse
- English is universal
  - o The *cultural* discourse
- New is good and technology equals new development
  - o The *technical* discourse
- Apple is known
  - o The *exclusivity* discourse
- People are social actors (or beings)
  - o The *social* discourse

In Google's pages we also identified seven models, which were:
- Retrieving information should be easy and available to everybody

- o   The *simplicity* discourse
- People are seen as different from each other
  - o   The *personality* discourse
- People think locally, but search for or need global information
  - o   The *cultural* discourse
- At information is power or at least immensely important
  - o   *Information importance* discourse
- Information is money (orgs. can influence which info you get)
  - o   The *business* discourse
- People are primarily driven by individual needs. Secondly, social actors
  - o   The *social* discourse
- Information is in the eye of the beholde*r*
  - o   The *information importance* and the *business* discourse

And finally we identified ten mental models in Microsoft's pages, which were:
- People are fully capable of selecting relevant information
  - o   The *information importance* discourse
- Time is important to people (few clicks to get information)
  - o   The *information importance* discourse
- Difference between home users and professional users
  - o   The *commercial* discourse
- Sales are what Microsoft do
  - o   The *commercial* discourse
- Purchases should be made easy
  - o   The *commercial* discourse
- People have a need to share information with other people
  - o   The *social* discourse
- People seek input from other people
  - o   The *social* discourse
- English is seen as a universally understood language
  - o   The *cultural* discourse
- People are different
  - o   The *personality* discourse
- Simplicity depends on the task at hand
  - o   The *simplicity* discourse

After the mental models were identified and presented, we took these as a point of departure to identify how the three organizations seem to be framing their consumers.

We found that Apple frame their consumers as:

> *Being globally integrated, but individually unique while still having a need to be social in consumption situations. Technological integration and development are important to the consumer and this should be both simple and intuitive.*

Similarly, Google is framing their consumers as:

> *Being locally oriented but retrieving information from a both global and local scale. They are individually unique and have no particular need for social searching trends. What is important to consumers is just plain information and preferably fast.*

While Microsoft is framing their consumers as:

> *Being globally integrated, individually unique and social all at the same time. The consumer is interesting in buying and hence about products information. What is important to consumers is thus both information and that it is provided in a clear manner.*

From a theoretical perspective, we have noted that in terms of (co)constructing consumer identities, generation X seems to be forgotten as well as the modernistic ideals of objective truth. From a business perspective, we understand this: As Generation X has is characterized as not being used to using the Internet. From a societal perspective, we also understand that the modernistic ideals are very difficult to combine with the post structural postmodern and hypermodern currents, as these have very much emerges as a protest to the very nature modernism.

In terms of the organization's focus on the Generation Y and Z and postmodern or hypermodern individuals, in their communication, the organizations seem to be target a mixture of these quite well.

In general, Generation Y is being addressed via the web pages by means of the possibility of self-realization and individual development through customization.

They are also addressed, as they are comfortable with technology, and consumers here, are provided with the opportunity to purchase something (which was traditionally something you did in physical stores). The identity co-construction is offered to these consumers, as they tend to create their identity through *consumption* and this is what the organizations offer. Generation Z is targeted even more than Generation Y, in the content we have analyzed. This is, also, visible by the means of with customization possibilities, which allows for individual empowerment. Generation Z's identity is based, even more, on consumption than was Generation Y's and therefore this medium for buying and identifying may also suit members of this generation very well. However, were we see that they are being targeted even further is in the fact that their wish to socialize through digital social interaction is, generally, being met.

In terms of social models, the postmodernist consumer is being targeted via its need to choose a subjective reality (possibility to personalize) and the need for individual development (new products and information). Furthermore, they are being met in their approach to identity construction, as they are, mostly, provided with an opportunity to socialize in some way or another.

In terms of the hypermodern consumer, in theory, strong emphasis is placed on the need for constructing meaningful experiences and creating identity *through* consumption, but also on their concern with saving time and, hence need for speed. This is also being met in practice, as we identified the discourses of personalization, socialization and simplicity, which all type into the priorities of the hypermodern consumer.

In conclusion, it seems that the weight is tipping towards a focus on constructing Generation Z and hypermodern consumer identities online, which is particularly revealed by the presence of *unique individuality*, the *commercial* and the *technological* frames. While there are still many aspects of Generation Y and the postmodern consumer identity being portrayed by the organization's web pages, many of the elements are also consistent with Generation Z and the hypermodern consumer. This means, that even though there seem to be an emphasis on Generation Z and the hypermodern consumer types, there is still room for Generation Y and the postmodern consumer to identify and co-construct identities in the interaction. An example of several trends being present at the same time is seen in the providing of purchases online, and as the creation of identity is based upon consumption, to a lesser or greater extent, this relation to both Generation Y,

Z, the postmodern and hypermodern consumer types. The need for social interaction is met; Generation Z and the postmodern- and hyper consumer types.

In conclusion, we can this note that all three organizations are framing their consumers, culturally, as having a *global orientation* of some kind. While local orientation is emphasised at Google, Apple and Microsoft settle by providing language options as the local treat for consumers. Interestingly, all organizations see consumers as being *individually unique,* however only Apple and Microsoft seem to emphasize that their consumer's identities also possessed a need of being social, as seen from the *social* framing of the consumers. Google does provide some aspects of socialization, but this is not explicit and visible to the consumers.

Apple and Microsoft are similar in their framing of the consumer as a purchasing individual. Google and Microsoft both frame the consumer as keen on getting information, and preferably fast and easily accessible, while Apple frames the consumers as placing more importance on technological advancements with a simple and intuitive user interface. In general, we have found remarkable similar framings of the consumers, across the three organizations, despite of the different interpretations of the prevailing discourses and differences in mental models. They all had strong emphasis on Generation Y, Z and the post- and hypermodern consumer, while they differentiated themselves in the focus of the context these consumers were in.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As touched upon in chapter VII, we have deliberately taken a different perspective on the nature of framing. By analyzing the web pages of three organizations, we have selected, not only an object of study that is rather static compared to an interpersonal communication situation, and furthermore, we have taken an *outside-in* approach to the communication situation rather than the *inside-out* approach. When doing *framing analysis* on a specific communication situation, which has been created before we as communication scholars interact with it, this means that the content that is analyzed is rather static.

However useful the theory has proved to be in terms of uncovering the context for communicated material and emphasizing that reality is subjectively understood, we find that a gap needs to be investigated by future communication scholars.

Our approach looks at selected web pages, in a static setting, and therefore only represents a snapshot of reality. What this thesis does not take into account is that discourses and mental models may change, or disappear, over time. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate the discourses and mental models in a tracking study, where the web pages or organizations are studied over a longer period of time, in order to see if frames developed over time, and how, and whether any frames would perhaps disappear.

Moreover, our study has been focusing on the *construction of identity* through frames on the web pages. And this leaves room for an investigation on whether *framing* could be used, more actively, by the organization. Not as a managerial skill, but as a tool for online mass communication. We believe that our study indicates that great potential lies in experimenting with the usefulness of *framing.*

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XII Enclosures

ENCLOSURE 1: APPLE START PAGE

ENCLOSURE 2: APPLE STORE

ENCLOSURE 3: GOOGLE START PAGE

ENCLOSURE 4: GOOGLE ABOUT PAGE
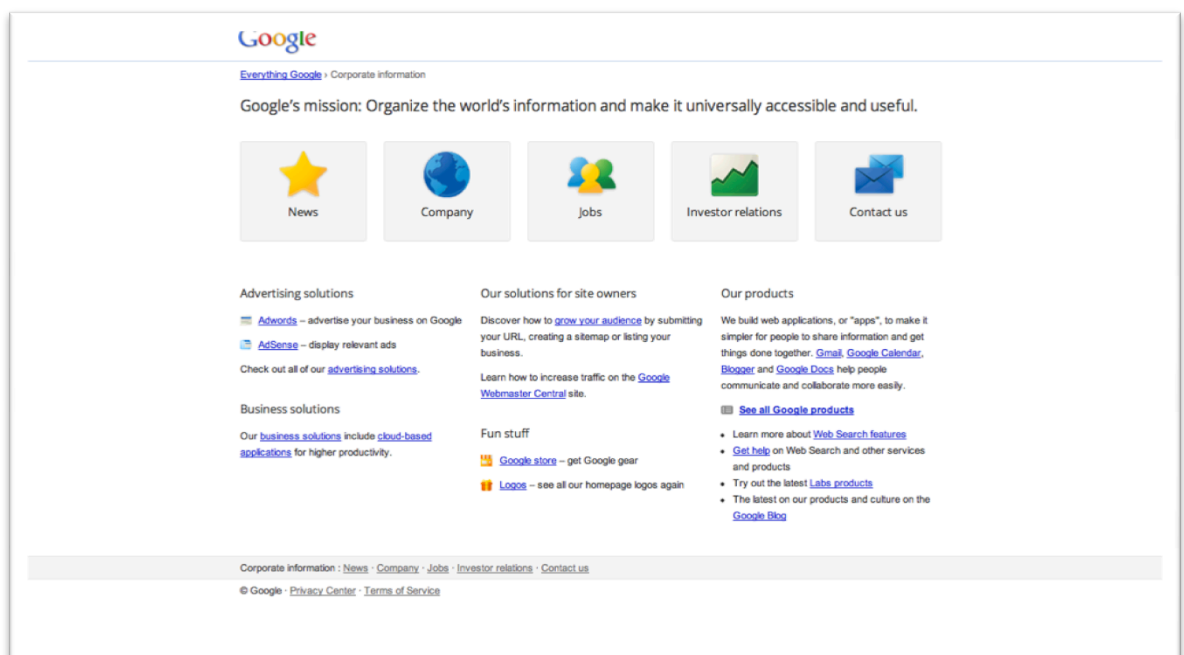
ENCLOSURE 5: MICROSOFT START PAGE

ENCLOSURE 6: MICROSOFT STORE

Enclosure 7: Lipovetsky 2005

11.1 APPENDIX A: Esomar Congress 2005

ESOMAR CONGRESS 2005
THE TIME OF THE HYPER-CONSUMER

Gilles Lipovetsky
Philosopher

We all agree that we are living in a consumer society. But today, it has actually become a hyper-consumer society and the consumer is now a hyper-consumer.

To define consumption, theoreticians using classic differentiation models have focused on its relationship to other people. This is increasingly less relevant to our understanding of what is at play in hyper-consumerism, which has more to do with the self and time than with others. The question of individualism and time has become fundamental, and all the predominating interpretive paradigms of consumption must be reconsidered.

Emotional consumption

To explain the dynamics of consumption we have long favoured Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, according to which we do not consume things for themselves but to win social esteem. But this loses relevancy when products are trivialised and found at all levels of society. Today, goods are purchased less with a view toward social distinction and more with a view towards personal sensations and satisfaction. Individualistic consumption now takes precedence over consumption commanded by what others think. Thus the hyper-consumer society coincides with the triumph of a consumerism that is driven more by emotion than by popular opinion, and is more about amusement than prestige.

But this does not happen without the question of time becoming a central factor. Hyper-consumerism functions like a journey: it means putting the imagination and the idea of time in motion. The key thing is to have something new in our daily lives. In our societies, consumption functions like existential stimulation. It is a commonplace experience, yet one that allows for basking in the daily routine and intensifying the present.

Today, we have to interpret the passion for consumption as a relatively successful way of combating or exorcising the fossilisation of the everyday and of the self. Through objects and new leisure activities, the consumer expresses his or her refusal to become a commodity and his or her desire to intensify the present. What underlies this passion is the hope of spicing up a lull in life, "changing" something, even if only a little. Rejuvenating one's experience of time, revitalising it with novelties that are semblances of adventure, means thinking of hyper-consumption as an emotional "youth cure" that keeps us coming back for more.

The temporal paradoxes of hyper-consumerism

The age of hyper-consumerism has led some sociologists to diagnose the arrival of a new and sensualist "Dionysian" culture centred on immediacy. These sociologists defend the idea that the modern age was Promethean, commanded by the austere cult of work and building for the future, contrary to the contemporary age which is Dionysian, based on carpe diem, the ethics of immediacy and the cult of instant pleasure.

To me, this diagnosis is not accurate. Ours is indeed a hedonistic and psychological culture, but it is not Dionysian and will no doubt become increasingly less so. It is a culture that is both narcissistic and Promethean, sensualist and health conscious, hedonistic and anxious, individualistic and humanitarian. The age of hyperconsumerism is definitely centred on the present, but also, in a new way, oriented towards the future and the past.

1. We universally exalt the pleasures of the body and the five senses. But more than ever before, these desires for the joy of existence are coupled with severe limitations relating to the body (diets, physical exercise). Of course, they try to sell things in terms of pleasure. But that fact remains that contemporary sensuality is accompanied by anxiety, guilt, restrictions and effort. Caring about tomorrow is more and more present. The hyper-modern consumer is not only a sensualist, but also an activist (diets) and Promethean (cosmetic surgery), since it is a question of refusing to allow things and time to take their natural course, of taking charge of one's body, and not just living with it or taking momentary pleasure in it.

2. When we talk about neo-individualism, we tend to think of hedonism, leisure time, sexual freedom, etc. This is true provided that we don't ignore the other side of individualisation: the cult of health and longevity which is becoming increasingly successful in competing with hedonistic values. Health-related spending and doctors' visits are growing exponentially. The focus everywhere is on identifying risk factors. More and more products are sold as well-being and health hybrids. The medicalisation of consumption and lifestyles has become a major factor, and this is probably just the start. The more we prize instant pleasures, the more the culture of anxiety, health and prevention is affirmed. The more the present dimension is affirmed, the more the personal future dimension becomes central.

3. At the height of the reign of immediacy, we are witnessing the revival of the past through the awakening of spirituality, as well as through a heritage and commemorative frenzy. Today, everything is a pretext for holding onto things and confining even the most recent items to museums. Authentic and nostalgic products (retro-marketing) are prospering. But while we are seeing a rehabilitation of the past, our daily lives are regulated by the standards of the present more than ever before. In other words, there is nothing traditionalist about our valorisation of the past. It is, above all, a new instrument in the search for well-being that is no longer associated with the quantity, but rather the quality of life, with respect to landscapes, legacies and aesthetic pleasures.

4. The obsession with change and endless renewal has in no way vanquished the passion for timelessness, as the luxury sector shows. At the heart of our passion for the most beautiful things is a permanent quest for permanence, a desire to see that not everything is surrendered to relativity and the evanescence of things. Hypermodern societies in which the fever for renewal and the accelerated obsolescence of things rages, give rise, like a counterweight, to a new demand for longevity or timelessness sought through products that escape the "throw-away" society. In certain behaviour patterns surrounding the hypermodern luxury sector, we can see a kind of hymn to suspended time, a need for remembrance, a quest serving a desire for eternity.

5. The temporal organisation of the hyper-consumerist society is marked by contradictory processes. On one hand, hyper-consumers are increasingly concerned with the time they have available. They can't bear wasting time. They want products accessible at any time of day or night, and seek speed, if not instantaneousness, in each act of consumption. They want everything right now in real time, leading to new efforts on the part of the retail sector to save consumers' time.
On the other hand, we are seeing the arrival of a new age of well-being that values the quality of time offered by different sensations: saunas and massages, meditation, yoga, Zen Buddhism, Callanetics, glide sports, walks, and home improvements. The hyper-consumer cycle coincides with a focus on all-encompassing, multi-sensory well-being, underpinned by a slowing of time.
Accelerated time versus slow time: the out-of-sync, incongruous and multirhythmical consumptiveness that characterises the age in which we live.

6. The hyper-consumption spiral has often been likened to a decline in altruistic values and morals that have given way to egoism. That is partly true, but we also buy ethical products and value humanitarian actions. Fair trade and solidarity products are beginning to gain a foothold. We are seeing the rise of a category of committed consumers who care about the environment and the future of the planet. At the same time, the emotional hyper-consumer supports charity rock events and stars who manifest their solidarity with causes.
The alter-consumer is only one of the figures of introspective and distanced hyperconsumer individualism. We are witnessing a new synthesis between hedonism and austerity, individualism and altruism, entertainment and commitment, living for the present and concern for the future.