

COMPANY WEBSITES – THE EFFECTS OF VISUAL AND TEXT CUES ON PERCEIVED CORPORATE IMAGE

An empirical study

Bachelor's Thesis
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Abstract

The different ways of using the internet for business are getting more and more common and it is still a quickly growing platform for all kind of activities and this is a trend that seems to continue growing in the future. Companies concerned with their reputation and corporate image try to find a way to use their websites to its' fullest potential, however there are many ways to design a website. What kind of a website should a company strive towards is largely a guessing game.

As a communication channel, a website can have a varying amount of visual and text cues and this is the topic that is focused on in this study. The research aims to give companies a better idea and guidelines on how information-heavy or visual their website should be to optimize their corporate image according to their own goals.

Keywords Text cues, Visual cues, Website, Customer perception, Corporate image

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1. Introduction:

1.1 Problem definition

In this modern era of internet, online is the main marketplace for many companies. For example e-commerce has been in steady climb for the last few years and is estimated to reach 8,8% of the total retail purchases worldwide and 15,6% in UK and 10,8% in Finland during 2018 (Invesp, 2018). To succeed in this kind of market it is imperative to have good infrastructure to support this kind of way of doing business. One of the more important parts of this sort of infrastructure is the platform used to communicate and provide information to the potential customers and business partners.

To fulfill this purpose, many companies have their own websites. However, these websites are something that the companies feel obligated to have, but don't put much effort into, as all of us have surely seen our fair share of poorly constructed websites. This creates a communicational problem between the company and the customer as the website is not well tailored to fit the company's needs and desired corporate image. On top of this the website could as well be their only source of information about the company.

The perceived corporate image is the mental picture that the public has of the company and it can be affected by communicating the corporate identity consistently to the public (Gray & Balmer, 1998). As a communication channel, the website of a company has a great potential to affect the corporate image, but to be successful with it, the communication must be coherent with the identity of the company, as Gray & Balmer outline.

A couple of aspects of website design are that how visual (peripheral cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) such as imagery) or information-heavy (central cues (Petty & Cacioppo)) the website is (Cyr et. al., 2018). To generalize this point, these two are the main types of websites that this research is focusing on. These are two very different approaches to website design, and how they affect the corporate image has not really been researched. This leads to the situation, that companies don't have that good of a way to determine what kind of website design they should use to

achieve their desired perceived corporate image. This study aims to explore the relationships between the website design, especially the amount of visual and text cues, and the corporate image.

1.2 Research question and definition

Previous researches have been focusing on one or the other, either the corporate image or the website design, but for the reasons outlined above, this is an area that should be expanded on. Also, the relationships between the website design and online persuasion has been studied by Cyr et. al. (2018). The focus of this study is specifically how the information-heavy websites and their more visual counterparts affect the perception of the company. To expand the field of study to include corporate image, we need to answer the following question:

How does the ratio of visual and text cues on websites affect the customers' perceived corporate image?

To get a clearer understanding of what answering this question requires, we need to divide this question to sub-questions:

1. How do we define corporate image and how can it be affected?
2. What are these visual and text cues?
3. How can we establish a connection between these two aspects?

The aim for the study is to give a baseline on what sort of website design the company should be going for to achieve a certain type of corporate image. This would make designing corporate website into a more goal oriented process with more predictable outcomes.

1.3 Structure

This study is based on two theoretical frameworks, which are the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion, ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and the basic dimensions of corporate image (Spector, 1961). To be able to analyze the individual aspects of this problem, these two need to be defined more thoroughly, which will be discussed next. After going through the main findings of this field, the hypotheses for this study will be formulated.

After the hypotheses, the method of the study will be gone through. The exact arrangement of the test made to find out the answers to the research question are to be found here, including the test setup, the questionnaire and information on the sample gathered. The results and some of the key figures will be introduced after this.

During the next section the raw data and key figures presented previously will be put into context with the existing theories and studies by introducing implications the results have for the fields of study and practice. This will be divided to two sections: theoretical implications, and managerial implications.

Finally, to conclude, the most important findings will be recapped and then some of the limitations of the study will be brought up. From the limitations we can then go on to discuss the possible future research directions that can be ventured towards.

2. Main Body:

2.1 Defining the corporate image

The corporate image is a concept that lies outside the corporate identity, which could be defined as the reality of the corporation (Gray & Balmer, 1998), including things like culture and ways of

interacting and other distinct characteristics inside the company itself. Gray's & Balmer's definition of the corporate image is: "Corporate image is the mental picture of the company held by its audiences". The corporate image is the notion the public has of the company, thus making it harder to influence than the matters directly inside the company, like the identity. If the corporate image is the public's opinion on the company and how it handles things, how can it be measured?

The main theoretical background this research is basing the idea of corporate image on is the basic dimensions of corporate image introduced by Spector (1961). Spector suggests that even though the corporate image itself is a really complex concept and has tens of different aspects, it can be simplified to the basic dimensions of corporate image, which are:

1. **Dynamic:** Flexible, active, goal-oriented, innovative
2. **Co-operative:** Friendly, well-liked, maintains self-respect, eager to please
3. **Business-wise:** Shrewd, persuasive, well organized
4. **Character:** Ethical, reputable, respectful
5. **Successful:** Finances, self-confidence
6. **Withdrawn:** Aloof, secretive, cautious

With these dimensions it is possible to get a better understanding on how the corporate image is exactly perceived by the viewer. By finding out how the viewer thinks about these aspects, the corporate image profile can be generated and then it is possible to compare meaningfully the differences of different companies. According to Spector the weakest one of these different dimensions is withdrawn, which means that it has the least effect on the overall perceived corporate image.

This is an older theory on the corporate image, and there are also other ways of defining it, such as the corporate character scales (Davies et. al., 2004). This theory takes into account more of the interactive aspects and "humanized" personality aspects of the company, such as warmth and snobiness. This is also the reason the Spector's basic dimensions of corporate image was chosen to be the base of the corporate image aspects of this study, as the Davies' study relies heavily on the interactions between the employee and the customer, but this was not a focus

in this research, thus making the Spector's dimensions of corporate image more suitable for this particular study.

Now that the definition of corporate image has been established, we should go through how the corporate image can be affected by the company. Corporate image is created through consistent communication that is also consistent with the corporate identity as can be seen from the pragmatic operational model by Gray & Balmer (1998). What this means for the company and by extension the website design is that the communication has to be done in a way that is consistent with what the corporate identity is to be able to communicate it correctly and coherently to the public.

However, there is a problem with managing the corporate image. The consumer communities often defy companies' attempts to guide the corporate image directly (Fournier & Lee, 2009), thus making it difficult to control the perceived corporate image. In spite of this, companies can in fact affect the perception with their communications and actions (consistency being an important factor in all of this, as mentioned earlier (Gray & Balmer, 1998)), the website being one of the possible channels that can be used to help the community and guiding it discreetly to the desirable direction. On top of this, the people who are not a part of any community and have no knowledge of the company often get the first impression of the company through the website. This makes the website especially important when communicating with parties not already familiar with the company.

2.2 The elaboration likelihood model

The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (ELM), introduced by Petty & Cacioppo (1986) is the second theoretical framework used in this study to be able to connect the website's visual aspects and the effects it has on the perceived corporate image. The central idea behind ELM is that there are two possible ways of analyzing arguments presented in a persuasive situation. These two routes are called central route and peripheral route and according to Petty & Cacioppo affect issue involvement (motivations, interests etc.) which the further leads to attitude change.

The central route is mainly to be used when a person is both interested and capable of processing the arguments presented (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). According to Petty & Cacioppo, a person using the central route looks deeper into the arguments presented during the persuasion, which leads to a relatively durable attitude change. Cyr et. al. (2018) have also confirmed in their study, that these two routes can be used simultaneously to some extent.

Opposed to this is the peripheral route, which is often initiated when the viewer is not interested or capable of analyzing the topic presented (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). When using the peripheral route, the argument quality is not speculated that much, but the focus is put more towards the other peripheral stimuli. These peripheral stimuli on websites include things like (Cyr et. al., 2018):

1. Image appeal
2. Navigation design
3. Social presence
4. Connectedness

Cyr et. al. state that all of these aspects were meaningful when trying to predict the issue involvement of the viewer. When using the peripheral route, the argument quality is not that thoroughly analyzed. This means that the peripheral stimuli, or in the other words, the visual aspects and other more shallow components, affect the attitude change much more than the actual quality of information.

According to Petty & Cacioppo (1986), the different information analysis methods also create different type attitudes towards the topic of the persuasion. The central route makes the viewer really consider and analyze the topic on a deeper level, making the attitude longer lasting and making it harder to harder to convince them otherwise. However, the peripheral route also contributes to an attitude change, but the change is weaker and easier to discredit as the person hasn't really thought about the topic on a deeper level but only through the more shallow peripheral stimuli.

2.3 Hypotheses

The goal of the more visual focused website is that the visual information, or in this case images, serve to evoke emotions in the viewer (Borchers, 2012). These emotions would then lead to heavier investment, or greater motivation, into the subject of the website, thus increasing the issue involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This issue involvement would by extension make the participant view the company in a more positive light and rate the different dimensions of corporate image better.

H1: visual focused website has more positive corporate image

The motivation provided by the images would then also encourage more of the use of central route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) when analyzing the issue captured by the website. The opposite would happen on the other website due to the same reasoning.

H2: People process the visual website through the central route

H3: People process the text-heavy website through the peripheral route

3. Empirical Study

3.1 Method and Procedure

To carry out this research, an actual website for the tests had to be constructed. For this research a company Honpumet Oy allowed its' website's information to be used as a base for the test website. The website was a bit simplified to be suitable for this research as the amount of variables had to be minimized to get good results. The website can be found in the appendix (Appendix B) with one of the text tabs opened (the About us -text tab). There were two test

websites set up for this research. The websites were identical in all but one aspect: on the other website the text tabs were opened by default and on the other the text tabs were closed, so only the heading were visible when the website was opened. The goal for this arrangement was to encourage more of the central route of information analyzing with the other website and the peripheral route with the other.

These text tabs were set out to be visual representation of its' content (Appendix B) so that the image would be of something related to the topic, and also there would be the heading of the section found by clicking the image/heading. When opened, the text tab extended from the bottom of the image and heading in a way that the image and heading were also left visible, this allows the opening of the tab to only affect the amount of information presented.

Also one thing decided to be kept as a constant was that the text tabs in both of the websites were able to be both opened and closed. If the website that had the text tabs already opened had the tabs permanently opened without the possibility to close them, it would have caused the website to lose some of its' functionality, which would introduced some unnecessary variables to the website.

For the participant of the survey the user experience started from the landing page (Appendix A). The landing page had simple instructions for the user to follow so that they had an clear idea what to do and how to find the survey. Tha landing page also included a button to guide the user to the website. The button had to distribute the participants as evenly as possible to the two possible websites, this was done by randomizing where the button would lead each user. In theory, this would yield as even distribution as possible, and it ended up doing just that.

The sample for this study was gathered by spreading the website through different social media, such as Whatsapp and Facebook, as well as some of the Aalto university's channels such as MyCourses. The sample was split randomly for each of the websites and the sample size for the website A's survey ended up being 22 whereas the sample size for the website B was 20 people.

The user was told to look through the website, they could spend as much time on the website as they saw fit and get accustomed to the company in question. At the bottom of the page they

could find the button that would guide them to the survey specific to that website. The surveys themselves were identical for both of the websites but they were fully separate to be able to separate the data for the analysis.

3.2 Measures

The survey consists of eight sections of questions (Appendix 3) that capture both the image of the company and what the participant thinks about the different visual and text cues. Also some questions about the participant's demographic was included. First items were set up to discover how the participant viewed the corporate image with 1-7 likert scale from 'not like' to 'much like'. The items are derive from the Spector's (1961) basic dimensions of corporate image.

The next sets of items were adapted from studies conducted and validated previously by Maheswaren & Myers-Levy (1990) in issue involvement, by Maheswaren & Myers-Levy (2006) in prior knowledge and argument quality, by Cyr et. al. (2009) in image appeal, by Cyr (2008), Badre (2000) and Egger (2001) in navigation design, and by Cyr et. al. (2008) and Gefen & Straub (2003) in social presence. All of these items were valuated in 1-7 likert scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. From the four aspects that contribute to the websites peripheral cues outlined by Cyr et. al. (2018) only three were used: image appeal, navigation design and social presence. The reason that the connectedness was excluded from this test was that the website used for the test didn't make it possible as there was no online community attached to the website in any manner.

After these validated scales the survey also included an open question about what the participant thought about the website in general. On top of this, to be able to make some conclusions about how different demographics react to different websites, items were added for the sex, age and occupation of the participant.

3.3 Results

For the data analysis of this study, a couple of methods are used; firstly for the mean analysis and its' significance, the t-test by William Sealy Gosset (Student, 1908) is used to find out if there are significant differences in the corporate image of the company; and secondly to find out the possible causes of these results, basic correlation analysis is used to match the different factors and the corporate identity dimensions. This way both the result and the cause can be identified if there is significant differences. As Petty & Cacioppo (1986) suggest that the issue involvement is affected by the different peripheral and text cues, it was also decided that the correlation analysis would be applied for the other aspects' effects on it as well.

To be able to judge the different aspects of the websites the questions set up to capture, each aspect had to be simplified. To do this the questions were condensed by using the questions' mean score as the overall score for the aspect and use that as the value in all the analysis. In all of the figures, the website A refers to the website that had the text tabs open by default, thus being more information-heavy, including more initial text cues. The website B then refers to more visual website that had the tabs closed by default.

The results of the study show that in every aspect, or dimension of corporate image, the website A yields better results (Table 1). The effect of the different website designs is best seen in the Business-wise (difference of 1,40) and successful (difference of 1,13) dimensions of corporate image. The only dimension the higher score is not necessarily better is withdrawn, which is the weakest of the dimensions of the corporate image (Spector, 1961) but the website A has a higher score in that as well.

Means	Dynamic	Co-operative	Business-wise	Character	Successful	Withdrawn
Mean A	5,00	5,59	5,55	5,55	5,18	4,23
mean B	4,25	4,60	4,15	4,75	4,05	3,40
Difference	0,75	0,99	1,40	0,80	1,13	0,83

Table 1: Means of the different websites dimensions of corporate image

Of these results, all but the aspects withdrawn and dynamic are significant at least on the 0,05 level and business-wise reaching even 0,005 level (table 2). The t-tests were conducted for the different website's dimensions of corporate image so that the values were compared to the opposing website's values.

T-test	Dynamic	Co-operative	Business-wise	Character	Successful	Withdrawn
p-value	0,1215	0,0169	0,0024	0,0296	0,0204	0,0863

Table 2: The T-test

The correlation analysis revealed that the argument quality, representing the central route of information analysis, was actually one of the three best predicting factors of positive corporate image (Table 3). Two other factors achieving constantly medium to high correlation coefficients of more than 0,5 were the image appeal as a peripheral cue, and the issue involvement mapping the motivation of the viewer. For all of the dimensions the best predicting factors (highest correlation coefficient) can also be found among these three factors, this holds true also when analyzing the websites separately (Tables 4 and 5). One property which correlations could also be inspected would be the prior knowledge, but its' correlation coefficient was constantly only low positive (under 0,3), which made it the weakest predictor of corporate image.

The only dimension of corporate image that seems to not correlate well with any of the factors is withdrawn, neither to the positive, nor negative side (Table 3). Given that withdrawn is the weakest dimension of corporate image and it has no high correlation with any of the aspects present in the analysis, it was excluded from calculating the means of the different aspects' correlations (calculated from table 3). These means for the three big contributing factors: issue involvement, argument quality and image appeal, exceed the medium correlation of 0,5. This result as well holds true to the separate analysis of the websites as well (tables 4 and 5).

All

Correlation analysis	Dynamic	Co-operative	Business-wise	Character	Successful	Withdrawn
Issue involvement	0,70	0,55	0,62	0,65	0,52	0,40
Argument quality	0,68	0,59	0,70	0,63	0,61	0,32
Image appeal	0,68	0,54	0,55	0,68	0,57	0,32
Social presence	0,31	0,45	0,42	0,26	0,34	0,13
Navigation design	0,59	0,34	0,54	0,40	0,36	0,19

Table 3: The correlation analysis, Both websites combined

One of the largest differences that can be observed between the different websites' individual correlation analysis (Tables 4 and 5) is that the the argument quality actually has medium correlation of 0,5 with the dimension withdrawn on website A (the version with the text tabs open by default) , in contrast to the other website, which has virtually no correlation at all with the correlation coefficient of -0,03. However, overall there are no major differences in the correlations between different text and peripheral cues and the dimensions of corporate image.

A

Correlation analysis	Dynamic	Co-operative	Business-wise	Character	Successful	Withdrawn
Issue involvement	0,69	0,44	0,55	0,56	0,41	0,41
Argument quality	0,57	0,39	0,67	0,57	0,57	0,50
Image appeal	0,63	0,60	0,32	0,72	0,47	0,21
Social presence	0,15	0,40	0,23	0,07	0,13	0,28
Navigation design	0,57	0,48	0,56	0,34	0,30	0,16

Table 4: The correlation analysis, website A

B

Correlation analysis	Dynamic	Co-operative	Business-wise	Character	Successful	Withdrawn
Issue involvement	0,71	0,60	0,64	0,70	0,54	0,22
Argument quality	0,72	0,56	0,58	0,57	0,52	-0,03
Image appeal	0,67	0,40	0,59	0,56	0,55	0,32
Social presence	0,35	0,38	0,43	0,28	0,41	-0,21
Navigation design	0,58	0,18	0,49	0,39	0,33	0,14

Table 5: The correlation analysis, website B

The correlations between the the different text and peripheral cues, and the issue involvement also indicate that issue involvement is also most affected by the two other major factors, argument quality and image appeal (Table 6). The correlation coefficients for these factors and also navigation design from the overall sample was above the 0,5 threshold of medium

correlation and this is true also for the website B. However, for the website A, the results actually seem to be a bit mixed with the second highest correlation being with prior knowledge instead of argument quality, which has a low correlation coefficient of 0,47. This is a significant difference to the website B's figures that would suggest strong correlation of 0,72 with the issue involvement for argument quality.

	Correlation with issue		Navigation		
	involvement	Argument quality	Image appeal	Social presence	design Prior knowledge
All		0,62	0,69	0,41	0,52 0,48
A		0,47	0,64	0,35	0,46 0,53
B		0,72	0,68	0,37	0,55 0,42

Table 6: Correlations between issue involvement and the other factors

The demographic of a participant of the study had some effect on the viewed corporate image (Table 7), especially the age of the participant. The age provided constantly the highest difference, with people aged under 30 scoring the dimensions on average 4,37 and the people over 30 giving the average score of 5,33 (difference of 0,96). These numbers were calculated from the whole sample of participants but the same results can still be seen in the both of the different websites with the age of the participants being the biggest demographic factor to affect the perceived corporate image. However, the difference is significantly larger on the website B (more visual website) having a difference of 1,20 between the ages over and under 30, opposed to the 0,49 of the website A.

All

Means by demographic	Dynamic	Co-operative	Business-wise	Character	Successful	Withdrawn
Men	4,72	5,24	4,76	5,16	4,72	3,64
Women	4,53	4,94	5,06	5,18	4,53	4,12
20-29	4,15	4,81	4,44	4,89	4,19	3,74
Over 30	5,53	5,67	5,67	5,67	5,47	4,00
Students	4,32	5,14	4,55	5,05	4,50	3,59
Others	5,00	5,10	5,25	5,30	4,80	4,10

Table 7: The means by demographic

The open question actually seem to indicate that the participants paid somewhat more attention to the informational aspect of the website A with comments as:

"It's very informative in regards of what the company is actually doing but I'd love to mix it up with images that appeal more to a feeling."

"Interesting, I got a lot of information of Honpumet".

The main difference of the comments on the website B was that on they were more focused on the appearance while giving less credit to the informational value of the website. This can be seen in comments such as:

"Website was easy to use. Contacts were in good position at the end of the site and all necessary information was easy to find. Website was visual, clear and easy to read, thaks to the pictures and colours."

"Clearly optimized for mobile/tablets. Could provide more information, now the website just provides the very basic information."

4. Discussion/Implications:

4.1 Theoretical implications

As mentioned earlier, the website that has more initial text cues (website A) provided better figures in all the dimensions of corporate image. This is a direct contrast to the Hypothesis 1, which stated that the website B would improve the perception of the corporate image, and so it is rejected. This reveals that on the websites the amount of emotion caused by images (Borchers, 2012) are not that much helping the corporate image on the more visual website even though the images are more prevalent and more attention is paid to them.

This is interesting as the answers of the open questions would suggest just the opposite, but it doesn't seem to manifest that much into the actual perceived corporate image or the correlations between the different factors and the corporate image. Another factor that would

support this is that one of the big factors affecting the corporate image is the image appeal, however, it seems like the website itself didn't produce exactly the expected results. The three best predicting factors for the corporate image are the issue involvement, argument quality and image appeal, which strongly supports the Cyr et. al. (2018) result that both of the information analysis methods, central and peripheral, are used simultaneously.

As this holds true to both tested websites with no major differences between the two, it is a result that directly supports the hypotheses 2 and 3 that state that the more visual website B would have been analyzed more through the central route and vice versa for the website A. Another result standing for the hypotheses was that on the website A, the argument quality was actually the third best predictor of issue involvement with correlation coefficient of 0,47 while for the website B the same figure was 0,72. This would suggest that the website with less text cues would actually encourage more to use the central route and more text cues would encourage to the use of the peripheral route, this might be due to an information overload as well as the images motivating the user more. This would suggest that the use of central route doesn't necessarily mean that the perceived corporate image is better than when using the peripheral route. Actually, quite the opposite as the corporate image the website A yielded was significantly better. Thus the hypotheses 2 and 3 are confirmed, but the surprising thing seems to be that the use of central route doesn't necessarily end up giving a more positive corporate image.

The just mentioned result would suggest that a more visual focused website would benefit more if the company would next focus on the information provided on the website and the information-heavy website would benefit more if the image appeal would be focused on next. One thing this could suggest in a greater scheme of things is that there might be an optimal ratio of these peripheral cues where the benefits received from both types of cues would be pretty much equal. This might be a spot where the achievable issue involvement, one of the three big factors would reach its' apex, thus maybe helping to improve the perceived corporate image as well.

This study provided evidence that on top of withdrawn being the weakest of the dimensions of corporate image, it is also hardest one to be influenced, as it doesn't correlate that well with any of the different cues.

Overall the website B seems to have a bit of more correlation between the different cues and corporate image, but the differences are only marginal, so no concrete conclusions could be made. In other words the situation is such that with a more visual website you might have a slightly higher chance of affecting the corporate image, but the main differences will most likely come from different sources such as actual contents of the arguments and images themselves rather than how they are interpreted due to different page layouts.

Other affecting factors for the corporate image are the demographics of the participant and the people over 30 years old seem to have more positive perceived corporate image overall for website design. What this reveals is that the age would be the single largest contributor to the change of the corporate image when demographics are concerned. However, as mentioned previously, even though this effect can be noticed on both of the websites, it is noticeably larger on the more visual website B, making them more receptive to the visuals.

4.2 Managerial Implications

This study has indicated that the website with more initial text cues (website A) yielded a better result for the overall perceived corporate image and beat out the counterpart (website B) in pretty much every aspect. If a company would want to increase chances of having a better corporate image, it would be recommended to develop a website that has more visual text and gives the consumer the information right away. The customer base of the company doesn't seem to matter much at this point, as this result seems to be the case for all the kinds of tested demographics.

So overall in this sort of a website the text cues provide better corporate image. However, some peripheral cues are still clearly needed as the study also indicates that the image appeal (and to

some extent other peripheral cues) has high effect on the corporate image as well. What this means to a company is that there should be a good balance of both and not focus only on one of the type of cues. Also, if a company would want to influence the perceived corporate image, the test shows that the best way of doing this is to focus on the image appeal especially, because it consistently affects the corporate image and issue involvement positively. On top of this, the company should be considering their website's ratio of different cues and then focus their efforts accordingly:

For a heavily visual based websites the focus should be aimed more towards the argument quality even though the peripheral cues, especially image appeal are still important.

For a more information-heavy websites the focus should be aimed first towards the image appeal and second to the argument quality and then the other peripheral cues.

5. Conclusions

Overall, it seems that the better choice for the initial design for a company website is one with more text cues but including also visual aspects. This has the largest positive effect on how business-wise and successful the company is perceived, but it holds true for all aspects of the corporate image and also for all the demographics measured. In other words, the website with more initially visible information makes the company seem more professional for the potential customer.

The three biggest aspects to affect the corporate image directly are issue involvement, argument quality and image appeal. Of these three aspects only two can be influenced easily by the company itself as the images and arguments can be tried to make better, but issue involvement is a sum of many different things and cannot as simply be improved. Of these different things the most important are again the argument quality and the image appeal, but it seems that the more

visual websites actually benefit more on if the argument quality is developed further and the more information heavy websites would benefit more on the development of the visual aspects. This might suggest that there is a optimal ratio of these cues somewhere in the middle that could provide a better issue involvement and could improve the corporate image by extension.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The single most limiting factor for this study and its' results was that the sample size for both of the surveys was a bit on a smaller size, as it is generally preferable to have more than 30 samples for statistical analysis. However, despite this the study managed to get some significant results. Another thing is that the sample was not random sampled as it is mostly consisting of people I have some connections to, making the age and occupation ratios shifted more towards younger students, so the results cannot really be generalized except with great caution. In the future a similar larger scale study with random more random sampling could be conducted so that the results can be confirmed further and generalized.

These results are of course not also generalizable to all kinds of websites, as they might have different functions such as e-commerce websites or portfolios and such. The website tested was an introductory website for the company and it didn't have any complicated functionalities attached to it. A direction future studies could take is to expand this topic to different types of websites

The results suggest that there might be an optimal ratio of text and peripheral cues such as image appeal. For this study, it is impossible to make a better judgment on this concept or define the ratio further, however, this could be a valid research topic for the future so this could be confirmed and defined. This could be done by extending this sort of research to include more websites with different ratios of these aspects or use some more qualitative methods to find out more about the people's attitudes.

One aspect from the Spector's (2018) study's Research Model of Online Persuasion not gone through in this research is the community, connectedness, as the website used as a base for the study did not have that aspect implemented in any way. This is an aspect which should be covered by future research.

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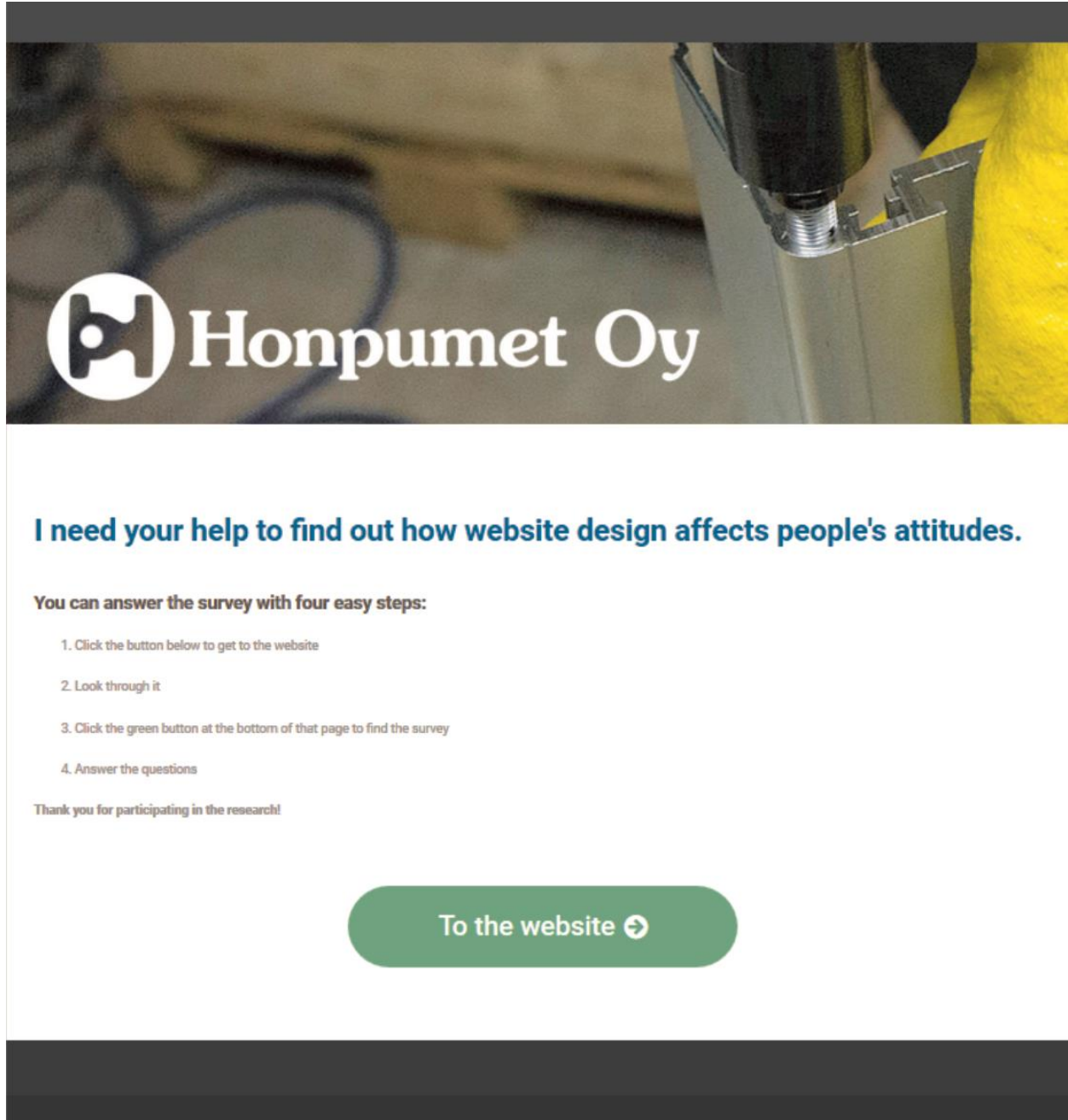
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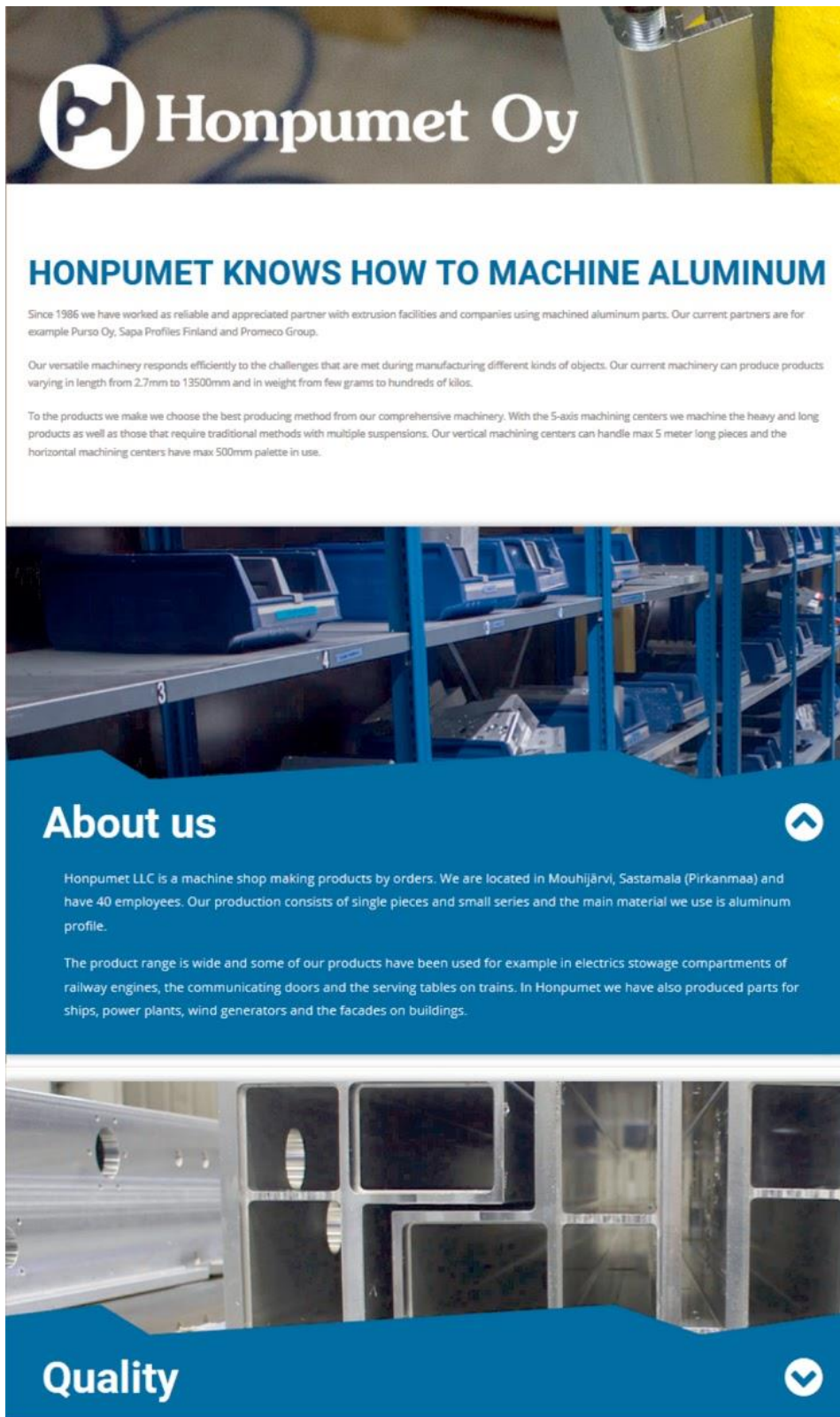
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8. Appendix


A: The landing page




B: The website (1/2)




B: The website (2/2)




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C: The survey

Rate these by how much they describe the company. not like....much like

Source: Spector (1961)

Dynamic

Co-operative

Business-wise

Character

Successful

Withdrawn

Issue Involvement

Source: Maheswaren & Myers-Levy (1990)

As a company, I find Honpumet Oy...

II-1: interesting.

II-2: involving.

II-3: personally relevant.

Argument Quality

Source: Bhattacharjee & Sanford (2006)

The information provided on the website was...

AQ-1: informative.

AQ-2: helpful.

AQ-3: valuable.

AQ-4: persuasive.

Image Appeal

Source: Cyr et. al. (2009)

The images used in the website...

IA-1: are appropriate.

IA-2: are satisfying.

IA-3: are exciting.

IA-4: are interesting.

IA-5: make the website content look appealing.

IA-6: appeal to me emotionally.

Navigation Design

Sources: Cyr (2008), Badre (2000), Egger (2001)

ND-1: I can easily navigate this website.

ND-2: I find this website easy to use.

ND-3: This site provides good navigation facilities to information content.

Social Presence

Sources: [Cyr et. al. (2008), Gefen & Straub (2003)

Pictures of people on the website provide a sense of...

SP-1: human contact in the website.

SP-2: personalness in the website.

SP-3: sociability in the website.

SP-4: human warmth in the website.

SP-5: human sensitivity in the website.

Prior Knowledge

Source: Bhattacharjee & Sanford (2006)

PK-1: How knowledgeable are you regarding the Keystone XL oil pipeline? novice....expert.

Open ended question:

What did you think about the website?

Questions concerning the demographic status

Sex. Man, woman

Age. Under 20, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, over 50

Occupation. Student, unemployed, employee, manager, entrepreneur, other