Colour as a determinant of Service Expectation

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Abstract:

What colour is quality? While this question has been answered partly in different product contexts, research regarding colour in services is few and far beyond. For services, quality is judged based on service expectation. When a consumer has high expectations, the execution has to match the expectations or the experience can be negative. The role of colour in consumers’ expectation building process is unstudied and hence unclear.

This thesis aims to find out what role colour plays when consumers construct their interpretation of a company’s values and subsequently form a service expectation. The study conducted in this thesis focuses consumer’s perception of colour in commercial bus companies.

Due to the research area being largely unstudied, this study is exploratory and qualitative in nature. The study utilizes a repertory grid analysis to reveal consumers’ constructs within the context of the research object and subsequently to gain insight into what colours tell consumers about a company.

The interviews and the repertory grid gave hints towards colour associations. Through the use of rankings within the repertory grid analysis, some colours were deemed better than others. However, the explanations and associations varied heavily between respondents.

Through analysis, a pattern as to how consumers use colour as a signifier of a company’s values was found. Consumers are heavily influenced by their experiences and hence try to find learned colour associations before resorting to inherent meanings. This process has been illustrated in Figure 6.

As conclusions for this study, it can be said that while colours certainly have inherent meaning, this meaning is far too vague for consumers to rely on when constructing a service expectation. However, colour can have a strong effect in creating remembrance and brand recognition and should hence not be underestimated.

Keywords:
Service Expectation, Service quality, Colour meaning, Colour association, Visual communication, Visual image, Repertory grid
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1 INTRODUCTION

What colour is quality?

While there is significant research as to what colours mean and what consumers associate colours with, as Kiehelä (2014) alludes, the scope of these associations has not been explored in many different product categories outside that of her own thesis.

It is, however, clear that colours play a role in the minds of consumers. As there is paucity in terms of research to the perceived value of products, the same applies to the effect of colour on expected quality of services. As such, it would be interesting and important for companies in different service industries to see how different colours represent values and value propositions through associations and syntactic messages in services.

“Services are performances rather than objects; purchasing services means no shoes to try on, no fruit to inspect, no chairs to compare.” (Berry, Wall & Carbone 2006)

Services as opposed to products are less tangible; it would hence make sense that a colour would serve as less of a functional attribute to the service but more as a medium for first impressions through associations and meanings. Ergo, when choosing a service, a consumer would subconsciously create a preconceived notion regarding the values of the services based on the colours associated with the service providers.

To cope with the lack of a tangible product, consumers tend to build an expectation towards the service provider. This expectation is a built through on multiple smaller and larger aspects that the consumer processes. These aspects can be called clues, as the customer uses these clues to build their perception of the brand and the company providing the service, sort of as a detective would. (Berry, Wall & Carbone 2006)

The preconceived notion of a company affects the expectation of the service. The importance of the expectation has been discussed by Zeithaml et al. (1993) and Parasuraman et al. (1991) since the introduction of the SERVQUAL model in 1986. The weight of the expectations is imperative, as the customer will compare the service delivery to his or her expectations to form the impression of service quality.

There are three types of clues that constitute and construct the impressions that consumers have of an organization. Functional, Mechanic and Humanic. Functional clues are those that indicate technical quality, for instance a functioning toilet in a hotel. Humanic clues are given by the service providers; their behavior and appearance; body
language etc. Mechanic clues refer to clues that have to do with objects or environments: how something looks, feels, smells, sounds or tastes. (Berry, Wall & Carbone 2006)

One type of mechanic clue central to this paper is **colour**.

Colour in itself can be somewhat tricky, as it can be viewed as highly subjective. There is research into consumers’ colour preference (Hanari, Takahashi 2005, 2008, 2013), although they do not provide any significant insight into how colour as a mechanical clue affects the perception and expectation of a service. The same authors have, however, written articles that can possibly be applied into the marketing of services. Namely, a connection between certain colours and emotions called “pleasantness” and “comfortness” (Takahashi, Hanari 2015, Takahashi, Hanari & Miyake 2016). Further, Bellizzi and Hite (1992) have identified a significant difference between customer behavior depending on the colour of the retail space. Schwarz (2000) discusses how different emotional states affect decision-making and cognition and finds that individuals that are in a positive mood tend to make optimistic predictions whereas individuals that are in a negative mood make pessimistic predictions. Similarly, a positive environment can allow an individual to function “normally”, giving a sense of ease and comfort; and vice versa (ibid.). These aspects combined with Singh’s (2006) literature review that states that although colours affect people in different ways, they affect them significantly.

I find that the logical deduction of these studies is that colour affects consumers in a significant way and influences their decision-making, service expectations and image building process in regards to services. Compared to product colour, service colour does not have a specific function for the customer other than to instil an image of the company and its service, making it an important tool of communication instead of an attribute of the service itself.

The problem is that there is no research as to how important the colour that a company is identified with has when making the purchase decision and how the colour affects expectations towards the values of the company and its services in a first impression.

“Colours are controversial.” (Singh 2006)
1.1. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to gain insight into how colours factor in and affect the expectation creating process of a consumer. In practice, this study aims to find out what kind of associations and values consumers have towards colours within a specific context and use this to understand what role a colour has in building an expectation and understanding of a company in a service industry.

To accomplish this, this study is focusing its empirical component on a specific field and will through the use of a repertory grid analysis strive to expose what constructs consumers have regarding the industry and how different colours evoke those constructs. This will expose if and how consumers use colour as a visual language that signifies other things than itself within a context. For the empirical component, the study focuses on consumers’ perception on colour within the Finnish commercial bus industry. The motivations for choosing this specific industry are presented in detail in chapter 3.3.

Figure 1  Elements of colour perception (Aslam 2006)

Figure 1 illustrates the different dimensions and elements of colour perception. This study focuses mainly on the psychological elements of colour perception, meanings and associations. While physical elements are touched upon within the theoretical framework, this study is not designed to reveal any insights within this aspect. Further,
as the research is conducted solely within the Finnish market, any cultural elements cannot be extracted from this study.

Figure 2  Service Level Expectations – Finding the zone of tolerance (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1991)

Further, in order to gain insight into the role of colour in service evaluation and expectation, the intention is to conduct a thorough literature review on which the intention is to develop a model that functions as a theoretical framework for the purpose of supporting the empirical process and for possible future research. As Service Level Expectation, or Service Expectation, is central to this study, so is Figure 2. In a way, the aim of this study is to find how the process that lies between Figure 1 and Figure 2 looks.
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to present existing research and theory regarding services and colour. Initially, relevant theory regarding services and service marketing will be reviewed following by general theory regarding perception and colour associations as well as theory specifically regarding colour in marketing and corresponding fields.

2.1 Building Service Expectations

The aim of this first subchapter in the literature review is to establish the importance of the service expectation in regards to the perceived service quality and the role colour as a dimension might play in the formation of the service expectation.

Perceived service quality is the result of a customer’s expectations compared to the delivered service experienced by the customer. In other words, as the expectations of the customer grow, so must the execution of the service. If not, the perceived service quality will suffer. (Berry, Parasuraman & Zeithaml 1988)

\[-(Service \text{ \ Expectation}) + Service \text{ \ Performance} = Perceived \text{ \ Service \ Quality}\]

This formula is my attempt to encapsulate the function of the expectations in relation to how the service is performed, based on various studies (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985, Berry, Parasuraman & Zeithaml 1988, Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1988, Berry, Carbone & Haeckel 2002). In essence, the bar is set by the expectations and the result depends on the performance. Further, if the performance exceeds the expectation the perceived quality will be positive, and vice versa.

Building the service expectation is therefore vital for having a successful business. Letting customers understand the values of the company can give them clues as to what kind of service to expect based on what kind of preliminary “basic expectations” there are for a service in a particular niche (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1991).

“An organization’s first step toward managing the total customer experience is recognizing the clues it is sending to customers.” (Berry, Carbone & Haeckel 2002)

2.1.1 The Soul of the Service

The title of this section is borrowed from a book by Leonard Berry (1999). It mostly discusses different success stories and recipes for success in service companies. However,
therein lies a deeper lesson; the soul of the service. As stated earlier, services are generally intangible. Service might or may have tangible parts to them, but in the grand scheme of things services are in essence intangible experiences and/or goods. Hence, it would make sense that a soul of a service serves as a conceptual blueprint of the value proposition. In essence, the soul functions as basis on which the processes of the service are built, in a way acting as the “what” that precedes the “how”.

Berry (1999) presents values as the core for a service enterprise. While the tactics of a company vary from day to day and strategies change and develop over longer periods of time, the value base of the company, its soul, stays intact as they guide the company. Now, there may be different core values, some vague, some more precise. Shared values between the organization and its parts (in the case of a company, these parts could be seen as employees and teams thereof) benefit the organization by allowing for independent and interdependent actions by actors. (ibid.)

As mentioned earlier, customers of service companies construct their view of a company based on sets of clues, functional, mechanic and humanic (Berry, Wall & Carbone 2006). As services are generally intangible, customers are forced to build their understanding of a company based on secondary aspects of the service, for instance physical environment or the contact personnel (Nguyen, Leblanc 2002, Lin 2004).

These clues convey the company’s values, the soul of the service, for the customer. In the next chapter we will look at an integral part of mechanic clues; the visual identity.

### 2.1.2. Visual Identity and Mechanical Clues

The visual identity of a company can be said to encompass everything visual that is connected to the company. The function of the visual identity is to create awareness as well as it is to help customers recognize the company and remember it. In other words, the visual identity is the “visual manifestation of the organization’s desired image”. (Dowling 1994)

It can therefore be said that the mechanic clues (Berry, Wall & Carbone 2006) are equal to the company’s visual identity (Dowling 1994). Logically it can be argued that the visual identity or mechanic clues convey the company’s core values, its soul.

Dowling (1994) writes that colour is often an afterthought. Companies choose their colour schemes either without further thought even though a prevalent colour
association is present in some of the world’s strongest brands (McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, etc.) and despite the fact that colour has been found to have predictable effects both on an emotional and physiological plane (ibid.). Further emphasizing this importance, a study conducted by Bottomley & Doyle (2006) finds that a product with a colour that has a congruent connotation with the type of product/brand it represents is more positively met. For instance, a product packaging that is of a colour with a “functional” connotation will seem more appropriate to customers if the product is also viewed as “functional”, as opposed to an “emotional” product and vice versa (ibid.).

Mechanical clues serve as the physical representation of an intangible service and should therefore be designed according to the intended service delivery level (Berry, Wall & Carbone 2006). In other words, the mechanical clues should give the customer a service expectation, which is in line with the service delivery (ibid.). The importance lies in the perceived quality of the customer; the perceived quality of the service (which in essence translates to satisfaction) relies heavily on the expectation of the service (Berry, Parasuraman & Zeithaml 1988).

Another aspect of a visual identity is the physical environment. For a service company, the physical environment can be seen as the “packaging” of the service. The ambient aspects of the physical environment, such as colour, light, temperature, noise, etc., might induce reactions in a customer that are cognitive, physiological or emotional. While the emotional and physiological reactions mainly affect the customer’s attitude towards the company through, for instance, discomfort which encourages the customer to interrupt the service, or vice versa, the cognitive reactions function as a mechanical clue and give the customer a sense of the service, e.g. of its nature and price, through non-verbal cues. (Nguyen, Leblanc 2002)

Summarizing the chapter of “the soul of the service”, it is imperative that the core values of the company providing the service is congruent with its visual communication, as these mechanical clues are instrumental in building an image of the company and its service. These clues have to be in line with the quality of the service and represent what the customer is going to be delivered in order for there not to be a gap between expectation and delivery, potentially leading to negatively perceived value.
2.2. Colour

“Colour performs a highly informative function; without it we would be practically unable to move in the world safely, as happens to the blind.” (Caivano 1998)

As established earlier and poetically emphasized by the quote above, colour has a plethora of functions in the visual world. This chapter will initially discuss semiotics and properties of colour as a sign based on writings of Caivano (1998) and then move on to reviewing literature regarding colour preference, meanings and the affect and use of colour in different business-related contexts ranging from retail space and physical and virtual servicescapes. These aspects will be divided into upstream and downstream effects of colour.). Upstream effects are universal effects that companies cannot change or affect, while downstream effects are directly related to a product or company and are bound to the context (Kiehelä 2014).

Figure 3 Consumer perceived holistic value of product colour (Kiehelä 2014)

Figure 3 summarizes the dimensions of perceived value in regards to product colour according to Kiehelä (2014). Product value differs from service value in some aspects, e.g. tangibility, and the weight of colour can arguably be regarded differently in terms of value creation. I find this model to be of adequate use in mapping out the central elements and provide an ample basis for the literature review and will be used as a basis for creating a model of the service expectation building process.
2.2.1. Colour as a sign

In order to discuss colour as a visual representation of something, i.e. a sign, we first have to define the concept sign – what constitutes a sign?

Caivano cites the work of Peirce (1931-1935, 1966) as basis for his definition of a sign, which is that a sign is a substitute for something, which is not present, to someone/something that can interpret that substitute. In other words, for a sign to exist there has to be three parts present. Peirce has named these parts the representamen, the object and the interpretant (ibid.). The representamen is that which has substituted something and represents it in its absence. The object is the thing that is substituted and the interpretant is what is conveyed about the object by the representamen. (Caivano 1998)

Figure 4 Concepts of message, sign, and meaning (Kauppinen 2005)

In Figure 4, we see a representation of how a sign can be utilized in practice. While it originally illustrates how communication between 2 people functions using signs, I argue it applies very well to the aspect of mechanical clues discussed in the previous chapter and hence encapsulates the process between the use of colour in a service and a customer.

The ways colour itself functions as a sign are threefold. First, colour has a tendency to imprint strongly into the memories of individuals, leading to people often referring to generally homogenous items by their colour. For instance, a stereotypical initial description of a car is of the colour, even though cars in general have many defining and distinguishing features. Clothing is another good example. Secondly, colour can be a sign of an attribute, the colour of a fruit can for instance reflect its edibility. Third, although
colours have different associations in different cultures and contexts the prevalence and distinction within these associations further prove the efficiency and potency of colours as signs. (Caivano 1998)

2.2.2. The upstream effects of colour

Upstream effects can be defined as initial effects; in the case of colour, they can have direct or indirect effect on the perception of value. Direct effects directly affect the perceived value while indirect effects mainly trigger downstream effects. The upstream effects are in this study defined as per Kiehelä, i.e. Colour preferences, meaning of colour and physiological effects. (Kiehelä 2014)

2.2.2.1. Colour preferences

The colour preference aspect refers to the favourite colour of an individual. According to the literature review conducted by Grossman & Wisenblit (1999) colour preference depends heavily on context. In other words, people prefer different colour for their car than they do for their carpet (ibid.). It is further stated that cultural context plays a significant role in determining what colour is considered favourable or appropriate for what product category (ibid.).

A study conducted by Hanari & Takahashi (2013) found evidence that shows existence of different types of colour preference styles. In this study, they found one group to be less picky about colour, while another one was pickier regarding favourite colour. Further, an earlier study found that the degree to which an individual was colour-sensitive had a connection to certain colour, but not to colour preference style (Hanari, Takahashi 2005). Another study conducted by the same people (Hanari, Takahashi 2008) found a correlation between liking grey and black and having a self-image described as “self-concealment”.

The implications of these studies on the field of marketing are slim. As mentioned, colours seem to hold different value in different contexts and it is further supported by Hanari & Takahashi (2013), who state the results of these studies do not reveal any connection between colour preference style and cognitive factors. This would be in line with Grossman & Wisenblit (1999), who argue that it is unnecessary to regard customers’ favourite colour, as the colour preferred for a certain product depends heavily on cultural context and product category.
However, recent research has found a link between colour preference and preference of specific positive feelings. A study conducted by Takahashi & Hanari (2015) explored how an affinity for a specific good feeling over another correlated with colour preference. The feelings in question were “pleasantness” – active good feelings characterized by change/surprise (e.g. feeling cool when walking from the heat into an air-conditioned room) and “comfortableness” – good passive feelings characterized by stability (e.g. there not being anything wrong during a health examination, or just staying in a room with unnoticeable temperature). While no colour correlated with both good emotions, individuals who preferred pleasantness are prone to like black and purple, while individuals who preferred comfortableness preferred orange, green and yellow-green (Takahashi, Hanari 2015). A more recent study found correlations between seeking pleasantness and liking pink, red, purple and, with a weaker correlation, brown, while there was also a weak correlation between seeking comfortableness and liking orange (Takahashi, Hanari & Miyake 2016). These studies have not shed light on any cognitive processes that might result in these correlations and this may also be culture-based.

The colour preference dimension seems to be somewhat unnecessary in regards to services. This point is further emphasized by the fact that colour preference tends to be very fickle. People tend to change their colour preference over time and different trends affect this additionally (Singh 2006). Even though colours are found to have a bigger effect on choice of high-involvement product compared to low-involvement products (Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999), I would argue that this does not translate to services either, even though services can be low or high-involvement. The colour for a product that is high-involvement (e.g. car, phone, television) can be seen as an attribute or even functionality of the product itself (Kiehelä 2014). This can hardly be seen to apply to services, as the service performance is intangible and can therefore not be of any colour.

2.2.2.2. Meaning of colour

Returning to the literature review of Grossman & Wisenblit (1999); colour have many meanings in many categories. While it can be argued that colour meaning and association depends on the context, in a vacuum the colours also have specific associations, where blue, yellow and orange can be called “happy colours” while red, black and brown are “sad colours” (Singh 2006).
Much of the literature regarding meaning of colour, as it was with colour preference, is regarding colour meaning for products. However, many of these findings are much more applicable to services than the ones regarding colour preference.

Similar to colour preference, colour meaning varies heavily on context and culture. While there are general associations for certain colours (e.g. red is associated with danger or passion), others are different across the board (Caivano 1998, Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999).

Colour meaning is also different whether it is on its own, i.e. separate from an object, and the colour of something. For instance, red, as mentioned, meaning “stop” or “danger” while it is also associated with Coca-Cola and other soft drinks (Caivano 1998, Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999).

Based on their past experiences within the same category, consumers also associate colours with certain product features or attributes. Blue has e.g. generally been associated with cleanliness within the laundry detergent market (Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999). This association seems to carry over to services, by a quick overview of cleaning service companies’ web pages; all visited pages have incorporated shades of blue into their colour scheme (Freska Finland Oy 2016, Mopp.com 2016, Moppi.com 2016).

It is also possible that many of these associations are actually learned by consumers from the market and past experiences. In this sense, marketers are actually the ones who have created the colour associations for specific product categories. Due to this, colour schemes within a certain sector/segment are naturally similar (see the above example of the cleaning companies), as it is deemed suitable for evoking the emotions and connotations that are desired. (Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999)

Colours also evoke brands. This is in line with the statement that colours imprint strong memories on individuals (Caivano 1998). Hence, strong brands often have a specific colour or colour scheme that they are known for (Singh 2006). Some brands actually have such a strong colour association that private labels copy them in order to seem more similar to the “name brand”, e.g. Freeway Cola, First Choice Cola and Rainbow Cola, the private label colas of Lidl, Pirkka and S-Group, all share the red colour scheme of Coca-Cola.

Interestingly, the blue colour of Pepsi Cola has not gained a similar status as a suitable colour for cola drinks, at least not in Finland. This allows for a perfect segue into product
differentiation. While it is as established so, that certain product segments have colours associated with them and, as supported by the earlier chapter, individuals prefer different colour for different segments. In order to not blend in too much and be indistinguishable, choosing an opposing, or just different colour for your product can be an effective way of standing out (Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999).

As with chapter 2.2.2.1, much of this research is heavily focused on colour associations in regards to products. However, I would like to argue that colour meaning plays a larger role in services than colour preference. As mentioned, many of the colour meanings in products stem from consumers' habits and what they are used to seeing and can hence be argued to be built by marketers initially. Notwithstanding, as these meanings differ heavily between different product categories, it would seem that different colours evoke different emotions in different context (not to mention different countries). Hence, it would also make sense that colours have to some degree inherent emotional meanings and associations in different contexts. In services, then, it could be argued that colour can heavily signal something about the feeling and “soul” of the service and serve as an effective mechanical clue for the customer.

2.2.2.3. Physiological effects

According to multiple studies, colours affect not only our thoughts, but our bodily functions and moods as well. Küller et al. (2006) found that, used in conjunction with adequate lighting, a good colour design could positively impact the mood of people working indoors. The general consensus regarding the effect of colour seems to be that colours in the blue end of the spectrum have a calming effect whereas colours shifting towards red induce arousal (Singh 2006, Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999).

Direct concrete effect attributed to colours are present in new-age medicine. In this field, it is believed that “that red energizes the liver, scarlet increases blood pressure, purple lowers blood pressure, orange strengthens lungs and increases calcium metabolism, green activates sympathetic nervous system, and, yellow energizes the alimentary tract.” Similarly, red is believed to stimulate metabolism, leading red to be a dominant colour in fast-food restaurants’ colour schemes. An example of this is McDonald’s which supplements its red colour with yellow to grab the attention of its customers. Contrastingly, finer dining restaurants typically deploy blue to offer a calming environment. (Singh 2006)
Interestingly, time is found to feel like it is moving slower under red lighting. (ibid.)

However, Kido’s study “Bio-psychological effects of colour” (Singh 2006) found that, contrary to this, blue stimulates the sympathetic nervous system, which controls heartbeat and blood pressure, effects typically attributed to colours in the red end of the spectrum.

Much of the physiological effects regarding colour are more or less related to atmospherics, discussed in the downstream effects of colour.

### 2.2.3. The downstream effects of colour

The implication of the previous chapter is that, set aside the physiological effects, the upstream effects offer little direct clarification to how colour is interpreted and how it functions as a mechanical clue due to the fact that most colour associations and preferences tend to be heavily bound by context and culture. The implications are therefore rather slim, as companies/marketers cannot change the fundamental and cultural implications, associations and preferences of colours short term.

The downstream effects of colours are something that can be controlled and utilized by companies, as they are free to express and brand their business and products according to their own liking. Research on downstream effects of colour are according to Kiehelä (2014) rather inconclusive for the unsurprising reason that the results they have generally found results that do not apply from one context to another.

In this chapter, the downstream effects of colour will be presented as listed in Figure 3.

#### 2.2.3.1. Colour in the retail environment

While research regarding colour in retail environments, it is relevant for this thesis to expand this section of the theory to include theory regarding colours and visual stimulus within servicescapes as well as basic atmospherics.

A servicescape is defined as “the environment in which the service is assembled and in which the seller and customer interact, combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service” (Booms, Bitner 1981:36) and is hence parallel to a retail space. It should also be noted that the role of the internet and internet shopping have been invented since the creation of the servicescape-concept. The
internet presence of the service company is considered as a part of the servicescape in regards to this study.

Donovan and Rossiter (1982) have found that arousal in a retail setting enhances emotions as pleasantness in both a positive and negative situation. The implication here is that it depends on the pleasantness of the retail location if it is viable to try to induce arousal. In essence, if your store is unpleasant it pays off to tone down the arousing stimuli and vice versa (ibid.).

The effects of red and blue mentioned in the previous chapter, red being arousing and blue calming, are somewhat contested by the findings of Bellizzi and Hite (1992), who found that although red and blue have different suitability for a retail atmosphere, the arousal levels are the same. However, they found that blue retail atmospheres resulted in more purchases and more expensive purchases. The study in question did not find any significant results explaining these results and as it might once again be the case that the blue association was just an association that suited the product used in the experiment. (ibid.)

Although there was no significant reason for purchasing amount in the study mentioned above, Babin et al. (RW.ERROR - Unable to find reference:123) similarly found that customers have greater purchase and shopping intentions in blue retail atmospheres compared to orange ones. Crowley (1993) found similar results once again; reactions moved fairly linearly towards positive when the wavelength of the colour in the retail space moved towards blue from the red.

None of these studies have found any actual cognitive reasoning behind the general liking of the blue retail environments. Interestingly, these studies refer to the environments as “cool” environments and while blue is generally viewed as a cool and calming colour, it is not universally viewed as such across cultures (Aslam 2006). Aslam (ibid.) states that blue as a colour is experienced as being a passive colour (as opposed to red being active). This might have an effect on how customers experience the retail setting, as a blue and passive setting would invite to focus on the products and give space for thought, while a red one might bring about a sense of urgency.

Bitner (1992) states that a positive retail environment can have the effect of enhancing the value of the products in the customers’ eyes. Further, while the physical location is important for all business, it is even more important for service companies, as the
customer often experience the location as a significant part of the service, as opposed to retail, where the usage of the product often occurs mainly outside of the retail environment (Bitner 1992).

Regarding servicescapes located online, Koernig (2003) states that the “E-Scape” (sic) has an important function of elevating the tangibility of the service in the eyes of the consumer and strengthening the brand. This also serves to diminish the perception of risk in the eyes of the consumer, as a vague description in an intangible location (i.e. the web) can seem suspicious (ibid.).

In a study about the intangible qualities of service brands (Vilnai-Yavetz, Tifferet 2013), it was found while comparing universities web pages that “Excellent” universities were more likely to utilize more cold and warm colour schemes compared to “Good” universities, which in turn were more likely to be more neutral (ibid.). The websites of “Excellent” universities were also likely to have a darker colour scheme (ibid.).

It would seem that colour in servicescapes/retail environments has a significant impact on customers. Colour in the physical servicescape has a significant effect on the customers’ service experience and the “E-Scape” serves as an important brand-builder and can consequently imprint strong connotations about the company’s values in the consumer’s mind.

2.2.3.2. Colour in advertising

Advertising services is different from advertising products. Similar to the web based servicescapes, services advertising has the task of making the service feel more tangible in the eye of the consumer. (Berry 2000, Cutler, Javalgi 1993)

Colour in advertising has been studied extensively, and it has been concluded that colour is the most important aspect of an advertisement, as colours are more easily preserved in memory than words or symbols (Kiehelä 2014).

Colour also has the property to elicit emotions in viewers, as Percy & Rossiter (1983) found there to be a significant difference between affect towards coloured advertisements compared to advertisement in black and white.

Schiller’s (1935) study tested different colour combinations and found that certain colour combinations were more suited for certain categories etc. This of course echoes nearly
everything discussed in this literature review so far, but there are some interesting aspects in the findings. First, the colour combination “Silver and Black” ranks as the most suitable for the categories “Luxury”, “Dignity” and “Automobiles” (Schiller 1935), which personally think is in line with contemporary colour usage (save for perhaps the ever-changing trend on preference of car colours, see Kiehelä (2014)), which hints at there being inherent associations with certain colours. Second, the combination “Yellow and Green” ranks as the most suitable for the categories “Cleanliness”, “Economy” and “Breakfast Food” (Schiller 1935). While there can probably be a whole other discussion about why there is a category called “Breakfast Food”, it is noteworthy that this result is in conflict with findings from the 1950s (Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999), where it is found that blue is associated with cleanliness in the context of a cleaning detergent brand and yellow was deemed “not clean”.

Another noteworthy aspect of Schiller’s (1935) findings is that although no colours were found to be suitable across the board, there were certain colour combinations that seemed to be always perceived as bad. Hence, it would seem that while there are no right answers to what colours to use, there are wrong answers.

In addition, I find it hard to imagine that the colour combination yellow and green would be deemed suitable in modern times, although this might be an issue of personal preference. Nonetheless, this contradiction serves as a clue; perhaps a colour association can differ based on the degree of tangibility. In this case, the concept, word, ‘cleanliness’ finds an association within yellow and green, whereas the tangible product fits best together with blue. Of course, this might also be a matter of trend, as mentioned by Singh (2006).

To sum up, the function of colour in advertising is to elicit an emotional response from the viewer as well as to strengthen the brand through recognition. For services, the weight of this can be seen as substantial, as the intangibility of services leads to the consumer resorting to secondary attributes (Lin 2004) for something to hold on to and hence places more emphasis on these aspects.

2.2.3.3. Colour in branding

The colour of a brand is often one of the first aspects an individual noticed about a brand’s visuals. As part of a brand, colour serves the function of helping customers recognize corporate brand and brand identity. The colour a brand is associated with gives
the customer a visual aid to sense the values of the brand. Choosing an adequate colour to represent your company’s identity, values and value proposition has the effect of aiding customer’s evaluations of a company’s identity while simultaneously increasing recognition and purchase intention. (Chang, Lin 2010)

According to Bottomley & Doyle (2006), utilizing a colour that matches your corporate identity facilitates the processing of the colour-brand combination for the consumers and subsequently leads to a more positive attitude towards the brand.

Despite the fact that colour associations do not translate directly between cultures (Aslam 2006), the corporate brand colour seems to retain its effect when crossing cultural borders. Grimes & Doole (1998) studied colour associations to brands between two cultures and found that standardising your brand across cultures, despite there being different colour associations between these cultures, is viable. A colour effectively strengthens the international brand (ibid.). However, it should be noted that colour alone does not make much of an impact as colour merely enhances and strengthens the brand, it does not create it (ibid.).

As corporate identity is a means of communicating with the customers non-verbally, colour has the effect of not only enhancing recognition but also appropriate colours used in corporate branding positively affects customers’ favourable impressions as well as attracting the right customers. In a way, colour functions as part of the vetting process of the customer. (Chang, Lin 2010)

The results found by Chang & Lin (ibid.) support the notion that a colour gives the customer clues about the nature of the service therefore affecting the service expectation. Further supported by Bottomley & Doyle (2006); a colour that is in congruency with what it is representing positively affects customers’ perception. In this case, having a colour that has the same values as the brand, product or service it represents, it increases not only brand recognition but affects the suitability of the brand (ibid.).

Interestingly, the study by Grimes & Doole (1998) found that both of the cultures studied associated Pepsi with red, despite the main colour of the company being blue. Is this because the product group (cola) is so heavily associated with red that it affects the brand itself. It could hint towards the fact that there exist so strong product-colour associations that it can “leak” onto a brand. In a similar vein, Kauppinen-Räisänen & Luomala (2010)
found that customers associate colours of leading brands, the “authentic brands”, as being the expected colours of a certain product group.

2.2.3.4. Colour and product perception

While this topic is somewhat irrelevant to the purpose of this thesis, it is recognized as an important aspect of colour theory and will hence be glanced upon.

As established earlier, Bottomley and Doyle (2006) have found that a colour has the possibility of “fitting in” with the product category, enhancing customers’ processing of the product. Hence, the logical deduction from this is that colour, within context, contains some inherent values in itself. A colour-product combination that is congruent (e.g. functional-functional) will be more positively received than one that is not (e.g. sensory-functional) (2006). In essence, this would mean that a colour can, in fact “be” functional in itself. Supporting this, Heath (Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999) found that for a cleaning detergent, the blue colour was perceived as most suitable when compared with red and yellow. The study was conducted by introducing specks of blue, red and yellow into the laundry detergent and revealed that consumers actually found that the product with blue was effective in attaining cleanliness, while the yellow was perceived as leaving clothes unclean and the red was said to damage clothing (ibid.). Thus, a colour can even have a negative effect on product perception instead of just being able to enhance the perception in case of congruency.

In line with what has been stated, colours result in different perception depending on the context in which it is presented. Kiehelä (2014) finds that even though the colour blue can have multiple meanings, the customer is unlikely to process all of them when viewing a product, rather they instantly jump to the meaning that is relevant for that specific product category.

2.2.3.5. Colour and purchase intention

Similar to the preceding chapter, this topic does, albeit being important, not directly relate to the aim of the study and while purchase intention for services differs from products due to intangibility, the research presented but its contents are recognized as important for the subject of colour research related to this topic.
Generally speaking, colour has a strong effect on consumers. Studies have found that the colour of the retail environment has a significant effect on the purchase intentions and actualized purchasing (Bellizzi, Hite 1992). Environments with a “cool” colour scheme influence the customers’ purchasing intention positively compared to environments with a “warm” colour scheme (ibid.).

Kauppinen-Räisänen & Luomala (2010), on the other hand found that the colour of the product packaging has an opposing effect; warm colours enhance the customers’ ability to notice the product and therefore stimulate purchasing.

Customers evaluate products differently when making the purchase decision than when they are actually experiencing the product (Kiehelä 2014), and concerning services, this is noteworthy, as a customer mainly evaluates the experience and result when considering a service, while a product has more specific attributes. Then, it could be argued that a service consideration is more about building an expectation than it is about evaluating the service quality (as opposed to products).

2.3. Summary of the theoretical framework

In this chapter, as a summary, Figure 3 will be revisited and modified to represent the domain of services based on this literature review. Further in order to illustrate how colour functions as a determinant of service expectation, this modified model will be used together with Parasuraman et al.’s (1991) Service Level Expectation model (Figure 2) to compose a relevant model.

Services are intangible and are hence difficult to evaluate and compare prior to the purchase and delivery of the service. Due to this, customers are forced to resort to using secondary aspects of the service provider to build an expectation and sense of the company and its service. These aspects, or clues, are threefold. There are functional, mechanical and humanic clues. Colours fall into the domain of mechanic clues, which in general are the physical representation of the service company (e.g. location), but can be argued to include immaterial locations, such as web pages as well. In other words, the servicescape. (Berry, Wall & Carbone 2006, Nguyen, Leblanc 2002)

Research on colour preference and meaning are somewhat inconclusive when it comes to marketing implications. Most associations and preferences are heavily bound by context and even general colour preference (i.e. an individual’s favourite colour) does not
necessarily change or affect how they evaluate the functions and values of a product or service. Associations also change depending on context and are heavily influenced by past experiences and brands. There seems to be support for both the fact that colours have inherent meanings and that the meanings are connected to the existing “spectrum” in specific categories. Colour also affects consumers on the physiological plane, from triggering appetites or slowing down the sense of time to causing anxiety and calming effects. (Hanari, Takahashi 2013, Singh 2006, Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999)

The takeaway from research regarding the downstream effects of colour are somewhat unanimously that colour serves an important function of allowing the customer to notice and remember a brand easier. Colour in a physical servicescape has mainly the effect of making the customer feel comfortable and to facilitate approaching the company, while colours in the immaterial servicescape, such as the web, has a similar function to advertising and branding, i.e. making the customer remember and building a strong brand through remembrance, conveying values through combinations of colour. Colour in ads evokes emotions significantly more than ads that are without colour. In general, colour in advertising and branding help service companies to convey the value of their service proposal while simultaneously imprinting the brand and allowing it to become a part of their consideration set. (Percy, Rossiter 1983, Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999, Singh 2006, Chang, Lin 2010, Kiehelä 2014)

### 2.3.1. Conceptual model

The model illustrated in Figure 5 has been built based on considerations on the theory reviewed in chapter 2. The process of building was as follows: “Colour in retail environment” changed to “Colour in servicescape” due to this being more adequate for services and because the servicescape as a concept is more adequate to the aim of this study. “Colour in product perception” removed due to not being relevant, and “Colour and purchase intent” was also deemed irrelevant due to the different nature of the purchase-decision making for services as compared to products. In essence, these aspects are present in “Colour in branding” and “Colour in advertising”.

An explanation the model is that the upstream effects of colour mainly trigger the downstream effects and their direct effect on the service expectation is secondary, albeit possible. The downstream effects of colour then move on to illustrate the value proposition and “soul” of the service through branding, advertising and mechanical clues in servicescape to form the customer’s expectations. Parasuraman’s (1991) model for
service expectation is illustrated at the bottom of this model for the following two reasons: (1) To illustrate its presence and strong connection to the effects and it being the result of the streams of effects and (2) illustrating it at the bottom serves as a visual metaphor of the process; like a river running into an ocean at an estuary.

Figure 5  Conceptual model on the effects of colour on Service Expectation, adapted from Parasuraman (1991) and Kiehelä (2014)
3 METHOD

The empirical segment of this thesis was carried out through a series of interviews based on confirmation gained through an initial pilot study. Due to the nature and depth of the research question, a qualitative approach was chosen in order to gain an initial insight into the associations and constructs that the respondents possess in regards to colour in a specific service context.

In this chapter, the foundation on which the reasoning for choice of method will be presented. Initially, the philosophy of science which has functioned as a foundation for the research will be presented. After that, the chapter will present the empirical study and the motivations behind the choices regarding its components, from technique utilized to choice of industry. Finally, the pilot study and the sample will be presented, followed by discussion regarding the quality of the study.

3.1. Research philosophy

The importance of establishing the research philosophy of the researcher lies in giving the reader insight into how the research has been constructed. Further; as with the theoretical framework, it establishes the logic behind which the methods of the research have been based and in essence captures the fundamental values of what the research is trying to conclude. (Silverman 2006, Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009)

In this sense it is important to focus on epistemological aspects of the philosophy here; as it addresses what is acceptable knowledge for this particular research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). While generally considering myself to be a pragmatist (ibid.), partly due to a fear of commitment to a specific creed, mostly because I believe there to be importance in choosing an adequate method for your goal and as some methods are inherently more suitable for certain perspectives, disregarding any philosophy for the sake of principle runs the risk of crippling scientific diversity.

As to what constitutes acceptable knowledge for the research question in this study, based on the established theoretical framework and earlier research it is notable that interpretations based on colour are influenced by subjective opinions, individual experiences and colour preferences. In this sense, I do not deem it plausible that there are universal truths regarding what colour means what. Rather, based on this theory it would be more acceptable that what colour means varies depending on the individual
and functions as a representation of their experience of the context and their preferences and values. I also opine that even though there are culturally and contextually significant “norms” and “trends” within certain industries, these have little to do with any inherent meanings, instead just functioning as reference points and as experiences for the individual.

With this in regard, I consider valid knowledge for this research question to be of an interpretivist and constructivist nature. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, Patton 2002)

“How have the people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, “truths”, explanations, beliefs and world-view? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviours and for those with whom they interact?” (Patton 2002)

These two terms are used somewhat interchangeably throughout literature, so far that I will henceforth refer to them both as constructivism, as I find that the word more closely resembles the workings of the interpretations of colour; the individual would theoretically interpret the colours based on the constructs in their mind and these different value constructs would be based on each other and have semi rigid meanings.

Generally, the constructivist view can be summarized as reality staring to exist when an individual is introduced. In this sense, the reality within the mind of the individual is what is real and exists, and without that, there is nothing. Social construction in the same sense regards that the things individuals experience and see, and how, are a result of social contexts and cues, things that exist in their mind. (Patton 2002, Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009)

This supports quite accurately my view on the subject matter of this study. In a vacuum, colour representations of service do not mean anything. Meaning appears when there is an observer. This meaning is based on the constructed reality of the observer. In a similar vein this functions as a language does; you cannot say anything until there is a listener, and your words are interpreted by this person.

3.2. Repertory grid technique

Associations linked to colour are arguably connected to the constructs and the constructed reality of individuals. It is hence imperative to gain insight into the constructs themselves in order to be able to find links to colours. For this purpose,
repetory grid technique (also known as repertory grid analysis, RGT/RGA) was utilized as a part of the empirical procedure in this study.

Repertory grid technique is a semi-structured interviewing technique that allows the respondent to describe their personal constructs without bias or interference from the interviewer. The technique will hypothetically reveal the specific constructs that are related to the subject at hand and aims through a lack of rating scale and predetermined attributes to elicit the related constructs built through the individual’s experience and interpretation. (Caldwell, Coshall 2002, Tan, Hunter 2002)

Introduced in 1955 by Kelly (Marsden, Littler 2000, Tan, Hunter 2002, Caldwell, Coshall 2002) in conjunction with the Theory of Personal Constructs, the repertory grid technique is based on the individuals interpretation and assessment of the environment they are interacting with and function to give the individual a possibility to interpret the current situation as well as to predict future scenarios. This makes the technique ideal for the research question at hand, as it is possible to see how colours evoke constructs, hence giving insight into how the colours can affect the individual's expectations, associations and perceptions. Kelly (Caldwell, Coshall 2002) further argued that the individual’s expectations are hints towards their constructs.

The repertory grid technique process is mainly divided into three stages, generally followed by analysis. These stages are:

- Element Selection
- Construct Elicitation
- Linking Elements to Constructs

3.2.1. **Element Selection**

Selecting the elements used for the repertory grid is an important fundamental step of the design process. In selecting the elements, the important aspects of the field studied are brought up for comparison. The elements represent the areas of interest and the environment that the constructs of the individual occur and exist (Marsden, Littler 2000). Elements can be selected by either the interviewer or the interviewee, and while it is generally preferable to let the interviewee to bring up and select the relevant elements (ibid.), in consumer research and marketing related studies it has been found
to be advantageous to have pre-selected elements, as this allows the researcher to learn about a given set of elements between respondents and compare the constructs (Tan, Hunter 2002). Having predetermined elements also allows the researcher to let pre-existing theory guide the element selection (Tan, Hunter 2002).

When letting the respondent define the elements it is advised to allow for some guidelines and directives, allowing the respondent to start thinking in the direction that will lead them to relevant elements by, for instance, asking them to name three co-workers when making a repertory grid analysis on organizational culture. Similarly, it is also possible to evoke a situation or role for the respondent to gain a sense of direction. (Tan, Hunter 2002)

When the researcher themselves select the elements there are likewise aspects to consider. Firstly, the researcher has to be discrete and precise in their selection. In essence, the elements should not represent directly the topic that is being researched but at the same time, they have to be able to evoke the relevant constructs. Second, the elements have to be homogenous in their type (Marsden, Littler 2000). One should not mix, for instance, elements containing people and events in the same study as these, while possible connected, run the risk of convoluting the results by evoking different kinds of constructs. (Tan, Hunter 2002)

“...evaluative words such as motivation, leadership, knowledge, and communication can be often mistakenly used in order to elicit the qualities of successful managers. Instead, perhaps names of different managers should be used.” (Tan, Hunter 2002)

As the previous quote explains the third aspect to be considered while selecting the elements, i.e. that elements should not be evaluative, it is also connected to the aspect of discretion. In other words, using these evaluative elements “run too close to home” to be effective. Finally, the researcher has to take into consideration both the subject matter and the respondents knowledge. While the elements need to be representative of the area that is being looked into, it is likewise imperative to be sure that the respondents can relate to the elements. Essentially, the respondents must have enough knowledge to be able to elicit constructs from these elements. When predetermining and selecting elements, it is imperative to take this into consideration. (Tan, Hunter 2002, Marsden, Littler 2000)
3.2.2. **Construct Elicitation**

In order to call forth the constructs of the respondents, there are multiple methods and techniques that can be utilized.

The construct elicitation is conducted through interviews in which different techniques can be deployed to gain different types and depths of constructs. Respondents are generally interviewed separately but the repertory grid can also be completed through group construct elicitation. In a group construct elicitation, the researcher strives to reach consensus between respondents to gain insight into the group’s general constructs as opposed to individual constructs. (Tan, Hunter 2002)

The most common practical methods utilized in repertory grid technique are called triading, laddering and pyramiding. (Marsden, Littler 2000)

In triading, or triadic sort method, the respondent is shown three elements (a triad) and is asked to identify which of the three is different from the other two. In essence, simultaneously the respondent also expresses which to elements of the three are most similar. The degree to which these similarities are pressed is up to the researcher, the respondent can be asked to assign a “label” to the groups or the difference can be left open. This “triad”-process is repeated until all the elements have been contrasted or when the respondent has more or less addressed most differences and has outlined his or her constructs. Triading is considered the most classic method utilized in repertory grid analysis. (Tan, Hunter 2002, Marsden, Littler 2000)

Laddering is a technique in which the elements are pressed on and probed heavily by the researcher in order to gain insight into the deepest underlying values that affect the constructs and function as their fundamental basis. By continually asking “why” some aspect is important or unimportant, the researcher can “climb past” the most superficial reasonings and closest constructs to reach the overarching constructs that affect a more widespread construct building process than just for the specific elements in question. (Marsden, Littler 2000, Tan, Hunter 2002)

Pyramiding is similar to laddering in its aim, but differs in that instead of “why”, the respondent is asked “what” defines the two poles of the construct. It has been found that by asking “what” instead of “why”, respondents describe far more tangible and concrete than “why”, which tends to result in highly intangible constructs. (Marsden, Littler 2000)
3.2.3. *Linking Elements to Constructs*

There are generally three methods utilized for linking elements to constructs; dichotomizing, ranking and rating. (Tan, Hunter 2002)

These methods are all similar in that they serve to place the elements within the constructs, albeit with different praxis. Dichotomizing can be summarized as a rating scale with only two points; in essence the respondent chooses which “end” of the construct the element is more close to. In ranking, the respondent is asked to place the elements in order between the poles of the construct, while in rating the respondents give the elements points on a point scale. Out of these methods, rating is the most common. (Tan, Hunter 2002)

Linking the elements to constructs is not a necessary step of the repertory grid technique. For instance, in cases where the focus of the interest is principally in the constructs and the labels attributed to them, linking the elements serves no real purpose. (ibid.)

3.2.4. *Designing the repertory grid*

With the aim of this study being to study how colours affect the service expectation and hence indirectly how colour influences perceived value in services, it can be considered irrelevant to find out about the constructs of the individual respondents, as they do not answer the research question. The normal result of the repertory grid technique and analysis is not what is of interest, however. What is of interest is the ability of the chosen elements to evoke, to elicit the constructs that exist.

Subsequently, the aim of this repertory grid was to test the chosen elements and see how clearly the respondents find a place for them in their constructs, based merely on difference in colour.

The specific methods utilized within the repertory grid analysis of this study is as follows.

Element selection was predetermined. As the fundamental aim was to test colours as elements, this is the natural choice. In practice, the elements consisted of six different representations of service (discussed in detail in chapter 3.3.), which were identical except for colour. The colours chosen were somewhat arbitrarily; chosen primarily due to them being sufficiently different from each other and as opposed to any expected result. The colours chosen as elements were: Red, green, blue, purple, black and silver.
Red, green and blue were chosen due to them being basic colours (per the additive RGB colour model). Black and silver were chosen as elements mainly because they were found to be associated with luxury in the study by Schiller (1935), and because they were considered to represent a more traditional and muted end of the colour spectrum. The inclusion of purple can be attributed to the desire to include a colour that felt “abnormal” compared to the other and based on the findings of Hanari, Takahashi & Miyake (2015, 2016), purple could be seen as such.

For construct elicitation, triading was chosen due mainly to the fact that the depth and detail attributed to laddering and pyramiding was considered to be irrelevant to the focus of the study. In practice, the respondents were given three representations of service randomly and asked to select which one stood out. After the initial triad, elements were switched out either systematically or depending on the situation, with the goal of making the respondent have a couple of difficult choices during the process. In all interviews the constructs were already somewhat clear and the respondents’ answers were mostly depleted after the sixth triad.

Linking the elements to the constructs was not viewed as relevant to this study, and was hence not conducted in a structured manner. Rather, a segment of the “interview” that was reminiscent of ranking was conducted. After the triading, respondents were asked to rank the elements according to a combination of their constructs and attributes considered to be generally applicable to the industry. The aim of this, however, was not to find out how these elements pertain to the constructs, but rather to see how strongly the respondent evoke the constructs based on the difference in colour and further how clear the differences were within each construct/attribute.

### 3.3. Choice of Industry

The choice of industry for the empirical part of this study is heavily linked to the element selection process. As the research question is not to study the effect of colour in a specific segment, it is important to make a distinction between the empirical study and the research question. However, due to the nature of the repertory grid technique, it is important to find elements that are suitable for the type of study in question.

Commercial buses (also known as long-distance buses) were chosen as the visual representation of service for the empirical study. This was done for four reasons.
First, a commercial bus company provides a service that is easy to represent physically. Compared to a car service, a bus is less likely to be considered for the physical product itself, but can be expected to be connected to the company and its service rather than its performance as a bus. The bus is also a tangible object, which makes it easy to show to the respondent. For instance, visually/physically illustrating another type of service, a massage for instance, might be easy, but it can be difficult to attribute a colour to it. A red bus is easy to show someone, but how do you show someone a red massage? What is a red massage?

Secondly, buses are somewhat generic in appearance and it is unlikely that a common consumer will be able to distinguish between different models of buses. Further, this makes it easier to compare buses while allowing the respondent to focus on just the colour without being influenced by other aspects, such as technical details attributed to a specific model of bus.

The third reason is connected to a fundamental aspect of element selection mentioned by Tan & Hunter (2002). Namely, the respondents must be able to relate to the elements and understand the context to be able to evaluate the elements (ibid.) In other words; the respondent has to have some sort of constructs in the context in question (ibid.). For this aspect, it is highly likely that a consumer will have a sufficient knowledge and understanding of a commercial bus service and its basic value proposition to be able to assess different attributes between elements, even without being a frequent user of such services.

Finally, as the study was conducted in Finland, the market for commercial bus lines has to be taken into consideration. In this regard, the commercial bus lines market in Finland is adequate to be used as industry in this study. There are few major players on the market, which allows the respondents to be heavily influenced by previous associations.

These four aspects served as the reasoning behind choice of industry. The next chapter will present the pilot study, in which the design of the repertory grid as well as the choice of industry as an empirical method was tested in practice.

3.4. Pilot study

In order to assure that the repertory grid would be adequate and the empirical study successful, a pilot study was conducted to test the proposed composition of the repertory
grid and to find out how it could be improved, as well as to see what kind of results it
would possibly yield. Initially, due to the lack of previous research, it was uncertain if it
would be a daunting task for respondents to make associations and attribute qualities to
the possibly too vague elements. It was also uncertain what degree of results to expect,
vague or specific. In the case of insufficient results, the repertory grid would have had to
be changed and developed in order to better address the research question.

Two pilot interviews were conducted on November 2nd, 2016 in the afternoon. These
interviews confirmed the adequacy of the repertory grid. The constructs were clearly
evoked in both interviews despite an initial difficulty to extend the mind beyond the
colours. Because of this, respondents in subsequent interviews were given some context
to the elements to aid the elicitation. The addition of “general attributes in the industry”
in the ranking-segment was based on one of the pilot study interviews, as it was used to
aid the respondent to find more tangible aspects to relate the elements to and further
elicit associations and constructs.

Due to the success of the pilot study, the repertory grid was used in the proposed form
for the following interviews. For the same reason the pilot interviews were also included
as part of the overall empirical data and regarded as equal to the remainder of the
empirical data.

3.5. Sample

Owing to restrictions in time, budget and access, it is often impossible to study the whole
population, all cases and members of a group. It is, then, advisable to utilize a sample, as
it allows for similar results within much more reasonable amounts of time, money and
access. Sampling can be divided into two types; probability sampling and non-
probability sampling. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009:210-243)

Probability sampling utilizes a somewhat random sample, so that the probability of
selecting each case from the population is equal. In other words, there is no bias in
selecting specific cases for the sample. Non-probability sampling is, as its name would
suggest, opposite of this. In a non-probability sample, the probability for each in case
being selected from the population is unknown. A non-probability sample can hence not
be generalized on statistical grounds like a probability sample, but it is possible to
generalize from a non-probability sample. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009:210-243)
Patton (2002) approaches the non-probability sample for its positive aspects and refers to it as purposeful sampling. Namely, the purposeful sample has its strength in allowing for selecting information-rich cases and building a sample that answers the research question adequately and yields information that is highly relevant to the question at hand. (Patton 2002)

For the sake of this study, non-probability sampling was utilized. More specifically the sample was a convenience sample (Patton 2002:241-242, Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009:241), albeit a purposeful one. A convenience sample is, in essence, a sample where a case was chosen mainly due to the ease of access and inexpensiveness (ibid.).

Although Patton describes convenience sampling as “neither purposeful nor strategic” (Patton 2002:242), there were motivations and consideration behind selecting the sample.

First, as the repertory grid requires informants who have knowledge of the context, it is important to choose cases that fill this requirement. Second, the issue of access plays a part as well. Choosing samples that were likely to have a casual relation with the researcher to allow for an honest process, without an agenda. Lastly, there are few arguments against a convenience sample for this study. There is no earlier research that would establish restrictions. The study does not study any demographic in particular either. These aspects considered together with the explorative nature of this study resulted in choosing convenience sample with some diversity between cases.

The sample consisted of 10 respondents. While choosing, aspects in the respondents’ background regarding education, socioeconomic status, location of residence and knowledge of the research context were considered in order to gather a sample that would not only be diverse and hence yield rich data, but also be able to represent more than a single specific demographic. Of the respondents, three were students at different stages of their studies. Three had been graduated or working for over 2 years, while three were recent graduates. Most respondents were in their mid-twenties.

Table 1 (below) summarizes the sample and illustrates the data collection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Interview date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>02.11.2016</td>
<td>25:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>02.11.2016</td>
<td>17:06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.11.2016</td>
<td>21:06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24.11.2016</td>
<td>23:09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24.11.2016</td>
<td>33:51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26.11.2016</td>
<td>17:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26.11.2016</td>
<td>16:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>01.12.2016</td>
<td>29:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>02.12.2016</td>
<td>19:57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Overview of respondents and interviews

3.6. Summary: the interview process in practice

The repertory grid technique was performed as part of an interview. First, the respondent was subjected to 6 triads, one at a time. They were asked to single out one, or to combine two elements (pictures of different coloured buses, found in appendix 1), effectively creating two groups. After this, their answers were probed in order to allow for explanations and to further evoke associations. After the triads, the respondents were asked to rank the elements according to values that were mentioned by the respondents themselves, as well as values often mentioned (price, comfort) were added in some cases in order to better allow for comparison. Similar to the triad-section, after each ranking the respondents were proved for further associations and tried to get them to “tell a story” about the companies that the buses were imagined to represent.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. This was done to be able to go back to the data and find patterns and nuances that might have gone unnoticed in the process (Patton 2002). During the techniques, notes were taken to better record the triads and rankings. An example of notes can be found in appendix 2. In addition, the rating scales
were compiled into tables (Appendix 3) to gain an overview of the ratings and to further aid in interpreting the interviews.

3.7. Analyzing qualitative data

Qualitative data, as opposed to quantitative data is a data on meanings derived from words. Whereas quantitative finds patterns and meaning through the analysis of numbers, quantitative data can be challenging to analyse, as meanings have to be found in a complex system of language and words. In other words, the analyst has to, in a way, boil down all the complicated signals transmitted by the respondent into proverbial “numbers”. Therefore, it is important to follow and utilize concrete methods to treat all the data equally and be able to gain an overarching and meaningful understanding of the data.

Saunders et al. (2009:480-516) describe three methods of analytical processes for qualitative data: summarizing, categorization and structuring. Spiggle (1994) expands the processes by further introducing abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, iteration and refutation.

These methods and processes will be presented in this chapter.

Summarizing aims to condense larger chunks of words into smaller statements. Making a summary of key points of transcripts can allow for identifying trends, as many summaries might contain similar key points not noticeable in the raw data, hence finding similarities. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009:480-516)

Categorization strives to identify trends through the usage of categories. In practice, first, categories are derived, developed and labelled. All of the data is consequently put into these categories and under labels that represent them. The categories can be either based in theory or inductive, emergent from the data. The categorization process continues throughout the analysis and can contain all of the data, but it is also imperative to know that not all data needs to be categorized if it does not have a significance or it is irrelevant. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009:480-516, Spiggle 1994)

Structuring happens through a narrative. Basically, the respondent is encouraged to give in-depth answers that form a narrative. The benefit in this is that the data gathered through a structured narrative will inherently be temporally structured and be affected by social constructs and contexts that are important to the context at hand. To put
simply, by encouraging a narrative answer from a case or informant, one can gain insight into bigger pictures and identify important aspects that affect associations and opinions. Structuring through narrative is a highly inductive approach. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009:480-516)

Abstraction, as expressed by Spiggle (1994), is based on categorization. Going beyond categorization, abstraction groups the data into higher constructs and abstractions and its significance stems from the relationship between the overarching constructs and abstracts.

Comparison functions as a continuation of categorization and abstraction. The data, whether in categories or abstracts, is compared in order to identify similarities and differences. The comparison process continues throughout the whole research process and can also form data collection. (Spiggle 1994)

Dimensionalization finds properties within constructs and categories identified in the qualitative data allowing the analyst to find dimensions within the data. Dimensionalization aids in theory formation by enhancing conceptual meaning and as it identifies properties within the aforementioned categories, allows for further defining and viewing relationships between constructs (Spiggle 1994). Similar to this, integration is a process in which theory is based on the collected data, flipping the deductive approach to strive for finding theory in analysis. (Spiggle 1994)

As the aforementioned methods are more fundamental in nature, iteration and refutation are more operational.

Iteration functions as a freeform method of going through analysis as one sees fit, going back and forth between initial and final analyses to find an overarching theme. Refutation is a process in which the analyses, the data and the empirical study is put under harsh scrutiny in order to allow the researcher to see if the research represents reality in a sufficient way. (Spiggle 1994)

3.8. Quality of research

In order for the study to be ‘of quality’, there has to be some sort of credibility. According to Silverman (2006:271-303), the credibility and hence quality can be evaluated in two attributes; validity and reliability.
Reliability is a measure of how dependent the study is of accidents and of circumstances within its design or the implementation of it. In order to ensure reliability, the study must follow established and standardized methods to make notes of the empirical component of the study. Further, by being transparent about both the methods and the scientific point of view of the research allow for more credibility towards the study and its conductor. (Silverman 2006:271-303)

Validity on the other hand refers to how accurately the study represents the reality that it studies. As such, the story told by a valid study is representative of reality. In practice, assuring validity in a qualitative study relies on conducting analyses and handling data consistently and with as little bias as possible. (ibid.)

In addition to credibility, Spiggle (1994) discusses usefulness, innovation, integration, resonance and adequacy as dimensions of quality in research.

Usefulness refers to the degree of which the study contributes to the world. Does it further the field, does it facilitate understanding of the world? This question can be answered by considering two aspects. First, does the researcher connect the study with central elements of the field and second, if the findings of the study are transferrable to other facets of the field. (Spiggle 1994)

Innovation simply looks at how new the findings are and how they affect and change the notions that exist in the field. (ibid.)

Integration looks at the findings holistically and asks if the findings are just a collection of different inferences or if there exists a holistic framework that exceeds the common themes found in the data. (ibid.)

Resonance is a measure of how the results and findings enrich our knowledge and understanding of similar and even dissimilar phenomena. (ibid.)

Lastly, adequacy looks at how well the data represents the findings. It is noteworthy that even though there obviously exist different interpretations of data, some conclusions have a stronger connection to the evidence than others do. (ibid.)

“Unless you can convince your audience(s) that the procedures you used did ensure that your methods were reliable and that your conclusions were valid, there is little point in aiming to conclude a research study” (Silverman 2006:310)

The aspects of quality regarding this particular study will be discussed in chapter 6.
4 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

In this chapter, the empirical results will be presented, loosely following the structure of the interviews and repertory grid technique.

The results of the empirical results emerging from the repertory grid technique and the coinciding interview are divided into three parts. First, the results of the triading phase of the technique will be went through, focusing on the basic motivations of the respondents in lieu of fixating on which colours most often stand out and which are connected. The second section will concern the general results of the rating scales, while the final section will aim to summarize the more tangible stories, descriptions and associations expressed by the respondents.

I have, for the sake of readability, translated any and all quotes from interviews to English. The quotes can be found in their original form in Appendix 4.

4.1. Triading

In the initial stage of the interview, the respondents were subjected to six triads of three elements. In other words, they were shown three of the buses shown in appendix 1 and asked to single out one, or choosing two that are similar. In essence, these two are the same, but respondents sometimes found it easier to group two than to single out one, which is why both were presented as a task by the interviewer.

The nature of results in this phase varies heavily between respondents. In general, the nature of the variance between the respondents ranges from having initial difficulties finding anything to differentiate between the buses.

"Similar how? In how they look? It's the same bus!" (Respondent 1)

These difficulties mainly persisted for the first couple of triads, after which even those respondents were able to find differences and similarities between the buses based on colour.

Most of the respondents decided the triads based on their perception of the staples of the industry or directly on the regularity of the colour itself.

"I noticed that these colours are darker. This one catches my eye more and these are plainer.” (Respondent 2)
“It’s a different colour, it’s a mixed colour and it’s darker.” (Respondent 4)

Many of the respondents also directly deemed some colours either different from the norm or downright unfit for a bus. Here, there was not really a consensus on what would be a quintessential colour for the industry in question, but the respondents’ perception of it was somewhat decisive for these triads.

“These ones are neutral while this one sticks out. It’s not a car that is normal on cars or vehicles in general.” (Respondent 3)

“I think this blue one [is different]. It’s somehow different. It’s not a common bus-colour. The others remind me of traffic… I’ve been in buses like these.” (Respondent 8)

It is worth mentioning that in all of the triads within all of the interviews, the colours to stand out the least times were Black and Silver, which were deemed “different” in 24% and 20% of the triads they were included in. The one that stood out the most was Purple, standing out in 58% of the triads in which it was included. The remaining colours were described as different in 32% (green), 35% (red) and 37% (blue) of triads. It should be noted that the least “different” colours were often described as “neutral” colours when compared to others, even when they were different.

“It doesn’t feel like it has a colour.” (Respondent 3)

Similarly, the colours that were “in the middle”, red, green and blue, were also mentioned to be basic as colours.

While the triading-phase shed some light on what affects how respondents group different colours within the specific context, the explanations regarding the specific colours within the triads and colour-contexts are what is most interesting regarding the results. These aspects will be further expanded on in chapter 4.2 and 4.3.

### 4.2. A look at the rankings

After the triading-phase of the interview, the respondents were subjected to the ranking-phase, in which they were asked to rank the buses according to attributes that were implied within the triading-phase. One attribute, price, was included in every ranking-phase, even though it did not come up naturally within all triading-phases.

It is important to keep in mind that the numbers presented in this review are not statistically significant and are not supposed to mean anything in themselves, but rather serve to illustrate the position of the colour in relation to the other colours and to bring out any themes that might exist. Further, the numbers are ordered so that a lower
number illustrates the “most” or “highest” of something and vice versa. Tables illustrating these numbers and rankings in full can be found in appendix 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Blue</th>
<th>Green</th>
<th>Purple</th>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Silver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>R3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>R5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVG</td>
<td><strong>2,0</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,6</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,2</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,9</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,0</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  Respondents rankings according to “Price”

In Table 2 we can see how respondents ranked the buses according to price. As said, a lower value denotes a higher position; in this case “1” would be the “highest price” while 6 is the “lowest price”. AVG denotes the average value of the colour in question and Var shows the variance. In this chapter, the rankings will be presented according to colour, i.e. every colour and their rankings within the attributes will be discussed separately.

### 4.2.1. Black

Out of the colours used in the repertory grid technique, black had the lowest average across all attributes. This means that it was considered the “best” or “highest” in general. Although it could be understood that this means that it was considered to be the least expensive as it can be assumed that a low price is “best”, it is noteworthy that black was considered to be the most expensive by most respondents. The respondents whose answers separated from the others in this aspect, R2 and R6, rated black differently. While the majority of respondents ranked black as most expensive, reliable, easy and comfortable, the two outliers had a different view on the company with the black bus.

"...the black bus I can imagine to be the same as it was 20 years [ago]"  "Well at least I don’t expect to be surprised by their service. They don’t have any extra services, like Wi-Fi or something. No online booking. I am certain they succeed in their mission but nothing extra.” (Respondent 6)

“A company that has been in the transport business for a really long time, so they know how they can set their price, where to cut costs and so-on.” (Respondent 2)
In other words, Respondents 2 and 6 saw the black bus to represent a company with strong routines and traditional values and services.

### 4.2.2. Blue

The blue bus ranks in the middle of the bunch, with somewhat varying rankings depending on what the respondents associations. In other words, blue did not have a strong presence in any attribute compared to, for instance, the black bus. While the different ratings between the black bus can be seen to be caused by similar associations, the associations to the blue bus varied heavily. Blue also had the highest variance between averages of all colours.

"It feels like I could go on a longer journey on the blue one."

"It feels like the blue one would give me the most value, just based on colour." (Respondent 3)

Respondent 3 makes these statements about the blue bus. While it is not clear what exactly evokes these thoughts, they are not universal.

"The seats are harder, more people."

"I still have the old association of the blue buses in the city, that they make a lot of noise and exhaust fumes." (Respondent 4)

Aside from these remarks and respondents associations, blue falls in between and does not stick out or signal anything in particular. It is hardly mentioned by other respondents in their explanations of the rankings. One noteworthy point is that some respondents mention HSL, the regional transport authority in Helsinki, which uses mainly blue buses.

### 4.2.3. Green

Similar to the blue bus, the green bus is somewhat “all over the place”. However, where the associations for the blue one vary heavily, the green one differs in that it either has a clear association or not. In price, green ranks second highest overall. Interestingly, all three respondents who ranked the green bus to be high (1-2), described the green bus as possibly being an ecological bus, meaning it has some ecological aspect to it. This aspect was also present with some other respondent, but was not present across the board. The respondents who rated it to be the least expensive did not mention ecological issues at all during the whole interview. In other aspects the trend continues, the green bus is somewhat all over the place but the associations here are dictating the ranking.
Respondent 2, who ranked the green bus on the lower side of reliability provided some insight into his reasoning.

"I feel like, as they use some ecological fuel or something like that, that it can [break down] because the bus can blow up during the trip. Or, then they have to go refuel and [finding a place to fuel this special fuel can be difficult]." (Respondent 3)

As such, the rating stems from the association, not from the colour itself. While the ecological association of the green bus heavily guided those respondents who made that association, those who did not were not especially keen on the green.

"It does not look neat; they probably got the paint for cheap from some green paint surplus-sale.” (Respondent 7)

“This green one also looks to be “not up-to-date.” (Respondent 1)

In summary, those who made the ecological associations based their rankings of the green bus on this aspect, whatever the ecological aspect may mean to them. There were no other explicit associations, the ones who did not associate green with “eco” seemed to be somewhat nonplussed by the choice to paint a bus green.

4.2.4. **Purple**

If the black bus can be said to be the “best one”, purple is definitely the “worst one”. Just as the black one scores high in most rankings, purples scores low even more unanimously. Purple is the only one to not be ranked highest a single time. It also averages out at the bottom 2 for each attribute and has the least variance in most categories. In other words, while it can be argued that seeing purple as a “not expensive” is not bad, it is quite unambiguous that the purple bus is not viewed as an option with inherent quality.

Three respondents described the purple bus as a party bus.

"I imagine a cheesy club transporting its clubbers in a way they consider to be cool.” (Respondent 5)

"Doesn’t seem all that respectable. Evokes entertainment somehow. A “party bus”. (Respondent 8)

Respondent 3, who ranked the purple bus to be third in price, described it as follows:

"That purple one could maybe be some sort of party bus, some form of party thing, which is why I wouldn’t place it in the lowest class. But maybe it’s more of an experience. Therefore, I prefer to rank it in the higher half but still in the middle. Not everyone would want to ride in it.” - Respondent
Reliability was perhaps the most unfavourable category for the purple bus. It ranked by far the lowest of all the colours. Respondent 1, for instance, describes the purple bus to belong to a new company that is trying to be different, and has therefore not figured out their business completely yet. Respondent 2 similarly imagines that the purple bus is a new company that wishes to stand out and has priced its service low in order to attract customers.

Respondent 9 thinks both the purple bus and black bus are “young” companies, but the black one is a trendy kind of young, while the purple is young in a more childish way. Respondent 9 further describes the purple one as “unnatural”.

Compared to the other options, the purple bus proved difficult task to connect to some specific attribute. As such, it is interesting to see how the lack of any real world connection results in such a harsh ranking.

4.2.5. Red

Even though the red bus did not stand out significantly in the triading phase, it does have a somewhat noteworthy “presence” in the rankings. The red bus ranked quite unanimously low in price, with an average of 4.0 and the lowest variance of all colours in that category. Red had the second highest variance between averages overall, although it was far behind the blue bus in variance. In general, the red is described to stand out and want to tell the respondents something.

“I consider that there is some idea behind [the colour].” (Respondent 3)

The red colour on the bus is described as “aggressive” by respondent 5 and “garish” by respondent 9.

“The red one will always stand out when they’re next to each other. The others are a little more low-key.” (Respondent 6)

There is also an interesting bisection between the associations; respondents 4 and 7 directly associate the red bus with OnniBus, a Finnish low-cost bus company. Their associations are mostly in line with the values and attributes described to be close to those of OnniBus. Respondents 2 and 4, however, describe red as a nice colour, and one that they associate with luxury.
"It catches my eye and it’s a cool colour...maybe it (sic) has guts to choose a flagrant colour like that. [That bus] is probably difficult to service, you probably have to wash it quite a lot. Maybe [the people at the company] care about looks and being extrovert...It looks well-kept to me, kind of like when someone prefers red cars, it’s a little bit of a posh bus.” (Respondent 2)

Respondent 6, who did not describe the red one as particularly lavish or fine, still rates the rate one as high in price as did respondent 4, who thought it to be luxurious. Respondent 6 motivates this by saying that the red colour is, in this case, meant to draw attention to them and let the customer notice their out-of-the-ordinary or new approach to the service.

In general, the reaction to red is mixed. It is described as a flashy colour, but how this is interpreted is largely dependent on the individual respondents.

4.2.6. Silver

Finally, the silver bus. Ranking wise, it placed second highest overall but still very close to the colours in the middle (red, blue, green). It fared best in reliability and worst in comfort, although being close to the middle within both categories. In all categories, the silver bus’s average rounds to the middle two. It should be noted that although the bus is referred to as silver and was coloured with the hex-code #C0C0C0, respondents sometimes referred to it as “grey” or “white”.

Compared to the other colours that ranked in the clear middle four, the silver bus has a much clearer role and place in the mind of the respondents. In general, respondents tended to describe the silver bus as a scaled down service with nothing out of the ordinary. How this was seen depended on the responded, but the consensus seems to be that the silver bus represents a “basic” company that does not necessarily do anything special.

“They’ve been at it for so long that they know what they’re doing.” (Respondent 1)

Respondent 3 regards the silver bus to be representative of “nothing”, due to its nondescript colour. While respondent 5 described the silver bus as “boring” and “just a means of transport, nothing more”, respondent 7 liked the bus.

"It looks [stylish]. More high-quality. It probably has, based on the colour, a nice interior” (Respondent 7)
As said, the attitude towards the silver bus depends heavily on the respondent. Respondent 1 favored it and felt that it was dependable and nice. Others thought it to be basic and it was uncommon for respondents to put much emphasis on it.

As a summary of the silver bus, it could be stated that it is viewed as somewhat of a baseline model. Some think it to be modern, some old-fashioned. It, as said, ranks somewhat high on both ease and reliability. This is likely due to many respondents describing it to not have any features that can go wrong.

### 4.3. Summary of the results

This subchapter will aim to further expand and solidify the results through summary and by collecting data from the whole interview process.

As apparent from the previous subchapters, aside from a few exceptions, there are few very concrete attributes associated with any of the elements and the associations are not always in unison between respondents. Under scrutiny there are, however, emergent themes and “feelings” that exist within the confines of each element, each colour. In general, red green and blue are often described as “basic colours”, corresponding with the additive RGB colour model. These colours all stand out in about a third of the triads in which they are included. Silver and black are in turn described as neutral colours.

What came across about the black bus is some sort of connection to security and reliability. Some respondents connected it to tradition, while others saw it as a sign of luxury. While these aspects are not necessarily mutually exclusive, it is noteworthy that they were seldom strongly connected to each other. As such, it could be said that the black bus evoked emotions of credibility and trustworthiness. Further, as the respondents did not express any doubt over what their individual associations, I would argue that there black coloured bus has a strong presence and position within each individual. It is also viewed as a somewhat neutral colour, as it does not stand out within triads that often.

The blue bus is as a whole a different case. It is seen somewhat as a basic colour, together with red and green. The associations regarding the blue bus are mixed in meaning and strength. Some respondents have a clear and tangible association to, for instance, regional traffic, while some feel that it is just a fresh bus with a cool colour. Some respondents have a difficulty interpreting its message and find difficulty in expressing a
story about it. In essence, blue could be summarized to have unclear and mixed associations and a weak inherent positioning.

Green is a more specific version of the blue one. While it is similar in how it is perceived as a colour, the associations connected to it are different in nature. The associations connected to green are somewhat polarized. While the blue one had mixed associations, i.e. they were a lot different, the green one have associations that are “one or the other”. In practice, the green was either seen as ecological or not. If it was seen as ecological, the respondents rated it according to their view on ecological values and services. If the respondent did not think about the ecological aspect regarding bus-services, they did not associate the green colour with the ecological aspect. Those who made the eco-association did so either instantly or tentatively.

“These others are more normal colours for buses, this one is more like an eco-bus, perhaps.” (Respondent 4)

The quote from respondent 4 show an interesting feature regarding these colours. The quote is lifted from the triading-phase, from a triad in which the respondent compared red, green and blue. Initially, the respondent chose the blue bus to stand out, motivated by considering red and green to be a “pair”, as they are used on boats. When asked how they are different as companies, the respondent changed his mind and chose the green bus to be different. As such, the green bus has a polarized positioning with either strong or weak associations.

Moving on to the least favourite, purple. As a colour, purple stood out most, by a somewhat large margin. It was also the only colour not to be described to have a category (compared to neutral/basic). Association-wise, it did not fare all that well. Many respondents had a difficult time taking it seriously. The “flagrant” colour resulted in many respondents finding it to not be a viable option, or even a viable company. The “loud” attribute of the colour resulted in respondents associating it with what they viewed to be negative aspects. These negative aspects were not objective, however, and there was no theme as to “how” it was bad, it was more a general associations. Consequently, it could be described to have a strong position and unclear or mixed associations.

The red bus was similar to blue and green, with some differences. The results regarding the red bus shares many qualities with those of the blue and green buses. The difference is that many described the red one to be noticeable and the colour was considered to be designed to awaken interest in the company. These associations were in some instances
strongly connected to OnniBus, whereas there were instances where it was seen as such inherently. The actual meaning and values communicated with the red colour was unclear to many respondents, it was however expressed by many that it probably has some very specific meaning to it. In summary, the red bus had unclear and strong associations, and a mixed position.

Last but not least, the silver bus. Just as its partner in the neutral-colours, the black one, the silver one did not stand out often. In fact, the silver bus stands out in least of all triads. The associations were somewhat similar to those of the black one, but they were much weaker. As such, the black one dominates the silver one in most instances. Many respondents describe the silver one to be bland and basic. In other words, it could be inferred that the silver one stands for similar values but on a more “basic” level. Assessing the type of position and associations of the silver bus is difficult, as it depended much on the respondents’ individual values. Some see the silver bus as a blank canvas of sorts, while others see it as a very rudimentary bus-service. In essence, the silver bus had a specific and weak association and mixed position.

This chapter has recounted the results and discussed what the interviews and repertory grid techniques revealed. The specific associations, positions and meanings behind the buses will be analysed in the next chapter.
5 ANALYSIS

This chapter will analyse the data collected through the interviews that utilized the repertory grid technique. The data will be analysed through categorization as described by Spiggle (1994) while contrasting and comparing to the theoretical framework. From this, the data will be abstracted in order to present emergent themes and conclusions that answer the research question. These conclusions will then be used to develop the conceptual model presented in chapter 2 (Fig. 5), so that it will represent the findings of this study. Further, the analysis has been subjected to refutation in order to avoid blatant assumptions and inconsistencies based on possible bias. This process will be reviewed in chapter 5.3.

5.1 Categorization of data

The categorization process was tentatively initiated in chapter 4.3. Continuing from that, the purpose of this chapter is to further develop the categories and discuss these aspects in relation to the theoretical framework established in chapter 2.

As a foundation, based on the results, the colours could be divided into two categories; neutral and basic. The neutral category would include the black and the silver, while the basic colours would essentially include red, green and blue. The purple colour would be left out from both categories and be an outsider in this case. The next chapters will go beyond these fundamental categories and to find more specific themes and associations within the colours.

5.1.1 Upstream effects

In this chapter, the results will be presented in relation to the upstream effects of colour as presented in the theoretical framework established in chapter 2. The upstream effects of colour are divided into colour preference, colour meaning and physiological effects.

The fact that purple would stand out and even further that it is negatively perceived somewhat unanimously correlates with the studies conducted by Takahashi & Hanari (2015) and Takahashi, Hanari & Miyake (2016), in which purple was the only colour to have a strong correlation in both studies. It is hence interesting that the same colour would stand out so strongly in this study. The latter study (ibid.) speculates that the association of purple is that of artificialness, surprise and extraordinarity. While only
speculation, this speculation could be said to be supported by this study as well. The purple colour is said to have a somewhat lavish and unreliable appearance and it does not fit well with the other colours. As such, this aspect is more likely to be a consequence of colour association than colour preference.

There were few if any references to colour preference having an effect on the choice and associations across the board. The respondents did not generally express any favouritism for an option that is of their favourite colour. Rather, all of the respondents chose to motivate choices and descriptions based on association. This does not mean that the respondents did not have preferences between the buses. These preferences seem to be based rather on the associations and values of the imagined company and its values and the perception of it than merely its colour. This in turn supports the study conducted by Grossman and Wisenblit (1999), which states that consumers' colour preference varies heavily between contexts. As such, it could be said that their preference of colour does not affect associations, but rather the other way around.

It can be debated whether the physiological effects can be studied through the methods utilized in this study. Personally, I do not think they can. However, there are some results are in line with theories in this field. Most noticeably many of the respondents described blue and red to be more or less similar in their inherent value and position on the market but mentioned that while blue did not necessarily signal anything special, the red was described to have “something” that it was trying to say. Similarly, the red was said to catch the eye. Whereas the actual value of this attribute varied, the noticeability and activity of the red bus was apparent. As said, the connection between this aspect and the physiological effects of colour can be debated, but it is in line with the findings of Singh (2006) as well as Grossman and Wisenblit (1999), that blue is a colour that has a calming effect, while red induces arousal. I do not find this to be viable “proof” of physiological effects per se, but it does in its own right support the assumption that colours have inherent positions in the eye of the beholder. In other words, while there are some associations for colours based on experience, there are inherent attributes in colours that clue consumers in on the values that the company might represent.

While constructing the theoretical framework, I argued that colour meaning would logically have more relevance for services than for products. While there is some support for this theory, some results are against that. In essence, it is not as simple as I theorized. This aspect will be discussed further in the abstractions and when discussing downstream effects.
In general, the results pertaining to the meaning of colour are somewhat polarized. Barring the more general feelings and associations of the colours, there were few tangible meanings connected to any of the colours. As Caivano (1998) states, colour meanings vary heavily between contexts and cultures. The results of this study did not reveal any inherent meanings inside this specific context, aside from a few examples. First, a few respondents associated the red coloured bus with OnniBus, a company that operates a commercial bus service at low prices. This complements both Caivano (1998) and Singh (2006), who state that colours can evoke brands and even further, brands can be known specifically for their colour. Other companies were not associated with their colour. This can be either because OnniBus is a strong brand in its context, similar to what was discussed in the aforementioned article by Singh (2006), or it can also be because OnniBus’s colour scheme makes it stand out from the others and is an instrument of differentiation, as discussed by Grossman & Wisenblit (1999). The respondents’ description of the red bus as standing out and trying to signal something further connects to this study.

The other specific meaning-association found in the results is that the green bus was in some cases associated with being ecological. Interestingly, this association was not directly connected to any existing company. According to Grossman & Wisenblit (1999), it is common for consumers to base their associations on their past experiences in that category. However, it seems that this specific association spans many contexts and is not restricted to a specific category of products or services.

In the next chapter, the results will be categorized and compared to the downstream effects.

5.1.2. Downstream effects

The downstream effects of colour are the effects that a company can control and utilize through their visual communication. In essence, these effects are the effects of more tangible representations of the company and are hence more context bound than the upstream effects.

First, we look at the results regarding the servicescape. In this study, the bus itself serves as the servicescape, as it is where the service itself takes place. The bus terminal and ticket office could also be counted into the servicescape, but for this study, the elements
chosen serve as an ample representation of the servicescape and will hence be compared to the relevant theories established in the framework.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, red and blue are seen as arousing and calming respectively when it comes to issues regarding the physiological effects. Pertaining to the servicescape, this does not seem to be as unambiguous. Bellizzi and Hite (1992) found that consumers experienced similar arousal levels in retail environments of both colours. Even so, blue environments tend to create more purchases compared to the red. In this study, it was found that even though red and blue were equal in value, they had different views on the companies behind the colours. Aslam (2006) finds that blue is often seen as a passive colour, whereas red is seen as an active colour. This is somewhat in line with what this study has found; blue just being and having “some” values, whereas the red has explicit values and they are actively trying to tell the customer something.

The response to the darker colours, namely the black bus used in this study can be found to be in line with the study by Vilnai-Yavetz and Tifferet (2013), which found that universities that were considered “Excellent” were more likely to utilize dark colour schemes on their web pages. While there were different opinions on the values represented by the black bus, most of the respondents seemed to have the view the black bus represented luxury and reliability and was inherently of good quality.

This inclination in the results is further echoed by the results of the study of Schiller (1935). The results of the aforementioned study find that “Silver and Black” is a combination of colours that is most suited for the categories “Luxury”, “Dignity” and “Automobiles”. This would stand behind the assumption that colours have some sort of inherent meaning behind them and that consumers find that the value of some colours exists even without complementary communication. It is worth pointing out that while “automobiles” is not a category that directly relates to this study, some of the respondents mentioned there being suitable and ordinary colours for vehicles in general. The fact that the respondents who did not associate the green bus with an ecological value were somewhat perplexed by the colour choice serves as confirmation for the hypothesis that suitability is an issue that affects how consumers perceives the colour within a context. The response for the purple bus is further addressed by this study, where it is found that while there were no colours that applied for every category, there were colours that were deemed unsuitable across the board. The purple bus being more or less unanimously negatively perceived is a clue towards the fact that there are no right answers, but there
are wrong ones. However, it is of interest to find out if there indeed exist contexts where purple would enjoy the same success that the black bus did in this study, but I digress.

Lastly, as Chang & Lin (2010) and Bottomley & Doyle (2006) find, having a distinct colour can help communicate to consumers your company’s values and through this lead to a more positive attitude towards the brand. In this case, it is interesting that few colours have a distinct meaning in themselves, but rather some feelings and themes that the respondents expressed. Consequently, there does not seem to be directly any specific thing you can express solely using colour. However, having a colour that corresponds to the feeling, theme and value proposition can guide consumers towards your business and enhances their perception and liking of the company in question. Bottomley and Coyle (2006) found similarly that a colour that is in line with the type of value you are offering has the possibility of increasing liking towards your company.

5.1.3. Summary of categorization

In this chapter so far, the results have been categorized based on the theoretical framework between effects that are either upstream or downstream effects of colour. In practice, this means that upstream effects are effects that are more inherent and associations connected to colour, whereas downstream effects are essentially learned effects and associations. Ordinarily, the downstream effects would be that of a specific context and be a part of a much larger effort of communication from the company’s side. In other words, colour is seldom the only signal sent by the company. This study was, however, explicitly designed to exclude as many other signals as possible. Consequently, it means that the downstream effects illustrated by the respondents of this study were recalled from experience and are not purely downstream effects, but rather learned associations and effects.

Based on this, Table 3 summarizes the categorization between inherent (upstream) and learned (downstream) effects of colours.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Upstream (Inherent)</th>
<th>Downstream (Learned)</th>
<th>Comments on group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Strong and reliable</td>
<td>Traditional and successful</td>
<td>The colours mentioned to be neutral were in general associated with basic and ordinary bus-services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>Nondescript and unambitious</td>
<td>Fundamental, bare essentials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Noticeable, stands out. Has something to say.</td>
<td>Emphasis on something special, new or out of the ordinary</td>
<td>The colours in this group were mainly called &quot;basic&quot; colours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Polarized views.</td>
<td>Ecological.</td>
<td>While the associations differed, they all had something that set them apart from each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Calm, unassuming. Ordinary.</td>
<td>Varying associations, city buses to long-distance comfort.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3  Categorisation summarized**

Table 3 summarized the thematic results regarding each colour with a comment on the group in general. In this summary, the inherent associations with the colour green are listed as “Polarized”. This is due to the divided results. In those cases where the respondent connected the colour to the ecological value, green did in fact mean “ecological”, while if not, there was no specific association to the colour.

Further, it should be noted that while this table has grouped these colours together due to them having thematically similar associations, the values within each group are not mutually exclusive. For instance, the fact that the black seems to have a stronger presence in general does not mean that the silver option is incapable of having an association of success for an individual, and vice versa.

In addition, these qualities should also be looked at without assuming any inherent value. As an example, even though the black bus was thought to represent reliable and traditional company, some respondents had a negative view on traditional companies, which heavily influenced their view in this case as well. In line with earlier research, this means that while there are obviously colour associations and values that are inherently better than others, there are no associations or values that are universally good.
This chapter has utilized categorization as described by Spiggle (1994). The categorization was based on the theoretical framework proposed by Kiehelä (2014). The following chapter will take the next step in order to place the conceptual model (Figure 5) under scrutiny and aim to develop it further to represent the findings of this study.

5.2. Abstraction of data

Building on the previous chapter, this chapter will utilize abstraction as described by Spiggle (1994) in order to identify higher constructs from the categories. These abstractions will be used to compare the findings to the conceptual model with the intent to develop it so that it will represent the results of this study.

The main takeaway from the previous chapter is that there seems to be some discrepancy between the learned and inherent meanings of colour. As it stands, it would seem that some colours possess inherent values that are reflected in what the learned associations of the respondents are. In this way, for instance, the red colour is a colour that is easily noticed and its learned association is that the company that the colour represents is trying to tell the individual something special. On the contrary, the blue bus has a more passive inherent association while its learned associations differ heavily depending on the respondent. The concept of “fit” also seems to be of relevance for consumers when evaluating and associating based solely on colour. The more tangible the association is, the stronger it affects the values it represents. In other words, respondents who make a direct association to an existing company based on colour are least likely to associate values that are outside of how they view the values of the company in question. On the other hand, the respondents with the vaguest associations also have a varying and ambiguous view on the values of the company that the colour represents.

From this we can abstract that compared to the conceptual model, the downstream effects of colour, the learned associations, are actually where the consumer searches for associations first. How they evaluate the company after their learned association is based on their own values and how they evaluate the values represented by the company they are thinking of when seeing the colour. If there is no direct association, they look for learned associations that are similar. It is not until if they have no experiences that relate that the upstream, or inherent, associations come up. In this part of the evaluation, the inherent meanings behind colours and how they are perceived are in a big role. However, the final association and “image” built by the consumer is heavily influenced on their own values regarding the industry or context. In other words, while colours can have a
universally recognized inherent meaning, or rather feeling, associated with them, what this means within a context depends on what the individual consumer feels to be important within that context. Perhaps the most tangible example of this is the colour green, where those who thought of ecological values associated it with ecological values while those who did not think of ecological values did not. The less experiences or “explanation” for a colour that the consumer finds, the less tangible the association will be. Dead last is the colour preference; in a case where the consumer has no other “point of reference” than their liking of a colour. This is, as said, a last resort.

To summarize; as opposed to the conceptual model, the inherent values come into play when the consumer is searching for an association to the colour only after exhausting his or her alternatives that are learned from experience. While the colours can be said to mean something, this meaning is often very vague and is interpreted by the consumer based on their own values regarding the context in which they association exists.

5.3. Refutation

Spiggle (1994) describes refutation as a process that subjects the emerging theories and inferences to empirical scrutiny. Due to the framework giving space plethora of interpretations and the somewhat multitudinous results, the categorization was subject to refutation in the form of negative case analysis. As not all the elements had corresponding findings for each category, this was placed under scrutiny and the reason was looked for in the data. As such, this process can be described as a negative case analysis.

Namely, the categorization of the black bus to have a strong presence and reliable nature was contrasted by a couple of negative cases. In other words, two respondents evaluated the black bus negatively. This can be interpreted to be a result of their differing views regarding the industry in general. Further, this aspect has been taken into account when considering the abstractions.

Another aspect that came up is the interpretation regarding the purple bus and its values. Although the interpretation of it and the company it represents is similar across the board, there is a real-life example in the industry which refutes the results and analysis of this study. While the purple bus was seen to be unfit for its context and have negative associations, there is the case of Pohjolan Liikenne. Pohjolan Liikenne utilizes the colour purple heavily in its visual communication and its buses are painted mostly purple, albeit
not completely (Pohjolan Liikenne 2016a). Taking into consideration the findings of this study, the company would not enjoy popularity. However, the revenue of Pohjolan Liikenne for 2014 was 91 million euro (Pohjolan Liikenne 2016b). Compared to OnniBus, which was named a couple of times in the empirical section of this study, this is over 4 times more (Pohjolan Liikenne 2016c). This considered, there are other aspects than colour that affect the association and expectation that consumers have towards a company. Alternatively, it is possible that this is an effect of what Meyvis, Goldsmith & Dhar (2012) describe in their study; a product is consider more viable and fit when it is viewed in a store compared to a hypothetical situation. Nonetheless, it is unknown if Pohjolan Liikenne is held back by their colour scheme and if they could communicate their values more effectively through a colour that corresponds to their values as described by Bottomley and Doyle (2006).

5.4. The conceptual model revisited

This chapter will revisit the conceptual model presented in chapter 2.3.1. In essence, the composition and meaning will be compared to the findings of this study as presented in chapter 5 so far.

First, the conceptual model illustrates that the upstream effects of colour function as a starting point for the process of generating a service expectation for the consumer. The upstream effects in this model consist of colour meaning, colour preference and physiological effects.

Second, the process goes on unto the downstream effects of colour. These include colour in servicescape, colour in advertising and colour in branding. From this, the process goes on to compare the interpretation with the zone of tolerance on the service expectations scale. The model also illustrates that the upstream effects can take a shortcut and bypass the downstream effects.

The findings of this study show a different image. While the downstream effects can be debated to include other things, it seems that this is where the process starts for consumers. When looking for a service expectation based on colour, the consumer looks into their experiences and memories, i.e. the learned associations to find a point of reference to build the interpretation on. If none is found, they rely on the upstream effects and try to utilize the inherent associations of the colour and make sense of what it could mean in practice.
While I argued in chapter 2.2.2.1 that the colour preference does not play a significant role in forming the service expectation for a consumer, the results of this study find this hypothesis to be debatable. In principle, the direct preference a consumer has in a vacuum (e.g. liking the colour red out of all colours, as an example) does not play a significant role. However, in practice the consumer can have a colour they favour within a context, reflecting the values they prefer and value the most for the service type in question. In other words, a person who likes the colour red in general can like the colour green for buses due to what they consider important for a bus service. Depending on the definition for colour preference it can hence be argued if it should be included in this type of effects or not. Seeing as it is somewhat close to the colour meaning-aspect, these could be combined to illustrate that a consumer sees an inherent meaning within a colour and consequently interprets this based on context-specific criteria. As a result, consumers will prefer different colours mainly based on their individual evaluations regarding the type of service and context they are approaching.

As the earlier experiences play a vital role in formation of an expectation, the shortcut illustrated in Figure 5 is also inaccurate. It would rather seem that as the inherent meanings function as a sort of last resort, the learned associations have the power to circumvent the inherent meanings somewhat easily. This phenomenon would also serve to explain the example of Pohjolan Liikenne described in the previous chapter.

In regards to the service expectation scale and zone of tolerance illustrated at the bottom of the model, it is noteworthy that the descriptions of the services by the respondents mostly fell within the zone of tolerance. Only the purple was deemed downright unfit in some cases and even then, it was described to fit more or less adequately into some other specific situation. This could be a by-product of the method used, as the buses were illustrated in a way to allow for the respondents to be able to view them as more tangible. As such, the fact that most respondents viewed most buses to be within the zone of tolerance could be another result of the phenomenon described by Meyvis, Goldsmith & Dhar (2012), in this case meaning that more tangible representations of service are seen as more viable in the eye of the consumer. This aspect also emphasizes the importance of the E-scape as a creator of tangibility as described by Koernig (2003).

The aspects and issues described in this chapter will be put into effect as a revised model in the next chapter.
5.5. The conceptual model revised

This chapter presents the revised model that represents how a consumer’s expectations of a service are affected by colour. Modified from the conceptual model presented in chapter 2.3.1, it has been changed to take into account the findings of the study. The model and the changes to it are described below.

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**Figure 6  The effect of colour on service expectation**

First, the initial point of the process is the consumer’s knowledge of context. In practice, the consumer starts to build an expectation based on what they know about the context and what they find to be possible, probable or “normal”.

When interpreting a colour, the consumer looks through their experiences to find a point of reference. If they find an experience that is a match with what is being interpreted, this has a strong effect on the association. For instance, a learned effect of the colour green is that it represents ecological values. If this has been learned by the consumer, they are prone to associate the green colour with the value and extend their further
interpretations beyond inherent meanings and associate other tangible aspects that are connected to the value, despite them not being inherent to the colour itself.

In a situation where the consumer does not have a strong learned association or experience, the vague associations can be supplemented by inherent associations and meanings of a colour. In this case, from a potentially broad selection of colour associations, the ones that match the vague learned association are selected. As such, inherent associations of colour are not specific and crave other aspects to function effectively as a tool of communication. Emphasizing this is a situation where there is no learned association to a colour; the consumer has a hard time pinning down a specific value of it and is forced to go by a feeling and hunch that is left open for further clues. As an example, the colour red can have a learned association of being cheap or innovative, but if left to purely inherent association, it is liable to be only associated with trying to actively convey something. As such, in this example the colour red invites to consumer to look for something out of the ordinary.

Figure 6 illustrates the expectation building process of a consumer when it comes to colour. As it stands, the consumer strives to find as tangible clues as possible, moving through learned associations to inherent associations to build an expectation based on their knowledge and standards regarding the context of the service in question.

5.6. Conclusions

This thesis commences with a simple question; “what colour is quality?”

Kiehelä (2014) provided some answers to this question in regards to a specific product context. The aim of this study is to find out what role colour plays when it comes to services. In essence, as the quality of service is in large part determined by the expectations of the consumer, it is imperative to find out what role colour plays in building said expectations.

This thesis finds two conclusions to be characteristic for the construction of a consumer’s service expectation and the role of colour in this process.

First, in line with earlier research, interpretations and associations of colour are heavily bound by context. As such, there are colours that are more usual than others in a specific field. When it comes to services, consumer’s try to find clues that give them information about the nature and quality of a service. Consequently, a colour that is divergent from
colours normally used within a specific industry will be at a disadvantage when compared to others, because a colour in itself can mean many things, whereas an association made to a specific value is easier to understand and feels more viable in its tangibility. However, colour has a simultaneous ability to communicate an inherent feeling. This means that a company can use an out of the ordinary colour to communicate, for instance, an innovation or something different about its value proposition. An unusual colour is not automatically a bad thing, but without proper supplementary communication of value, it can result in a negative interpretation.

Second, even though colours are prone to signal somewhat specific feelings, themes and meanings, the interpretation of this is based on consumers’ individual knowledge and preference affects how they interpret and experience a colour. As an example, even if the black colour could be said to absolutely stand for tradition (which it does not), this aspect is evaluated by the consumer based on their own individual views and values on the industry in question. In other words, as colours communicate vague and nonspecific, the themes communicated serve as more of an indicator of direction for what they represent, which is subsequently interpreted through the individual’s subjective view on the state of the industry. As such, a colour can be said to convey a theme more than a meaning.

All in all, while it can be boiled down to be situational, colours do serve a purpose in a company’s communication. Whether it is an afterthought or a conscious choice, colours do tell a consumer what a company is about.
6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings of the study will discussed. First, the theoretical (6.1.) and managerial (6.2.) implications will be reflected upon. Second, the study will be subjected to evaluation (6.3.) in order to present and question the validity and reliability of the study. The last chapter (6.4.) will present suggestions for future research.

6.1. Theoretical implications

As mentioned on multiple occasions in this thesis, the associations of colour vary heavily depending on context (Caivano 1998, Priluck Grossman, Wisenblit 1999, Kiehelä 2014). While this theory cannot specifically be confirmed by this study, the fact that there seems to be concrete connections between meanings found in this study and those in the theoretical framework. However, while the meanings are not consistent, colours appear to have somewhat consistent themes that in turn are interpreted within the context by the consumers.

Regarding the issue of research question, the lack of previous research complicates finding similarities and differences. However, as this study is partially based on the study of Kiehelä (2014), comparisons to this research can be made.

Through the analysis of chapter 5, it was found that while the upstream and downstream effects of colour function in a similar way to how Kiehelä (2014) finds, the process of constructing a service expectation does not run in the same “direction” as presented. Rather, it would seem that due to the intangibility of services, consumers rely heavily on the clues, as is described by Berry, Wall & Carbone (2006) to construct their expectation. In effect, this means that while colour does give the consumer signals and messages, these can be rendered obsolete by a consumer’s experience. As an example, even though the colour green could mean anything, an experience of it meaning “ecological” will dominate over any inherent meanings.

As a summary, the inherent versus the learned associations of colour have a heavy effect on the process where consumer builds their service expectations. As mentioned by Bottomley & Doyle (2006), colours can serve to enhance the feeling of a product. This can be applied to services as well. Even though this study finds that pre-existing knowledge of the industry is what is the “first impression” regarding a colour, colours have inherent associations as well. This, as mentioned by Chang & Lin (2010), can be
used to enhance the recognition towards a brand and to strengthen the identity of the brand (Bottomley & Doyle 2006).

As such, the results of this study do not differ significantly in content from previous research, but rather suggest an alternative framework as to how consumers use colour in their understanding.

6.2. Managerial implications

The managerial implications of this study are focused around the marketing communication of a company. The strength of colours is that they are able to convey a vague feeling and function to set a point of reference for the consumer to digest further signals. As such, colour functions as an abstract language. Consequently, this would imply that colour could be used to amplify the verbal communication of a company. In other words, colour is an aspect that can convey values intangibly to the consumer. In essence, the use of a colour can provide a context within a context for the customer and signify what direction and position a company is taking within the industry.

There is, however, a minor issue regarding the focus on the usage of colour in communication. Choosing a colour to represent the company presents a twofold problem. As the meaning and implication of colour can be moderately overwritten by other, more tangible signals, how does one then choose a colour? Do you choose a colour that is unusual for the market in order to gain recognition and risk being deemed “unfit”, or do you choose an established and recognized colour and risk being associated with something that you do not represent? Depending on the industry you are in, the first impression might stick for a long time and consumers might base heavy emphasis on what they feel. Consequently, a colour can stand for a large part of what they consumer “learns” about a company.

Perhaps the most significant and tangible takeaway from this thesis is that colour does indeed matter. It plays a role and takes a place in the identity of a company. Seeing as colour does have inherent meanings or rather inherently evoke feelings, there exists an advantage to use a colour to emphasize and strengthen the uniform communication of the company. While it obviously is not sufficient to function on its own, its role as a complement and supplement is clear.
6.3. Evaluating the research

This chapter will address the validity and reliability of the study and its results. Further, the usefulness and innovation of the study are discussed.

6.3.1. Reliability

The reliability of a study expresses how the study is independent of the circumstances of the study and that the design and implementation of the study is not impaired by these. In this sense, the sample that is studied also has to be unbiased. Following established methods diligently allows for avoiding any flaws in the design of the study, and further allows comparison and functions to give a point of reference. Further, expressing the methods and the scientific orientation of the researcher is important to allow for inspection. (Silverman 2006:271-303)

First, it is important to note that this study is constructed from the point of view that colour does have some effect. In practice, this means that the respondents is introduced and led onto look for clues within the colours. Despite this, it can be assumed that the sample is unbiased for all intents and purposes of this study. The methodology of this study follows the established and standardized guidelines of the repertory grid method and even though the usual aim of the method is not in focus in this study, it can be argued that this method does not dilute the findings in and of itself. Further, even though the specific answers and musings of the respondents can be somewhat depend on the design of the study, the overarching themes and findings are expected to be echoed by similar studies conducted in a similar manner.

Second, using refutation as a part of the analysis was chosen because there was a concern that the elements would not evoke any coherent constructs. Refutation was then used to scrutinize both the results and the method.

Lastly, while Silverman (ibid.) discusses the importance of analysing naturally occurring speech to find out honest answers that are not affected by the circumstances of the study. While this would be ideal, it is important to note that the choice to use the repertory grid method was to be able to follow an established method and still provoke a response that is usable for the aim of the study. Additionally, when conducting the study, the respondents were not forced to answer anything, but merely encouraged initially. Consequently, it can be argued that the findings of the are not created by the method but in fact evoked.
6.3.2. **Validity**

Validity refers to how well the study represents the reality that it is describing. In other words, while reliability expresses how independent the study is from the circumstances in which it is conducted, validity describes how well the study describes reality. (Silverman 2006:271-303)

Ensuring validity can be done by following the methodology rigidly and analysing and interpreting the data consistently and without bias. (ibid.)

When it comes to the validity of this study, there are a few aspects to be discussed and presented. First, as the sample is a convenience sample, is there a bias that restricts the study to only represent a narrow reality? To answer this, as explained in chapter 3.5, the choice of sample is adequate in its representation of a broader population because there is no reason to believe that these ordinary respondents have any bias towards the industry in question or that their knowledge differs from that of an average consumer.

Second, as the method already functions as an evoker of constructs, the analysis can be more consistent and unbiased. Specifically, as the method adequately brings forth any constructs, effects and association of colour, this allows for an analysis of both situations; where there are clear associations and where there are not, giving access to a broader scope of findings.

In addition, as the results consists of similar findings of that of earlier research, it is sound that the findings of this study are valid as well.

6.3.3. **Usefulness and innovation**

Spiggle (1994) presents the two aspects of usefulness and innovation as important parts of the quality of a study. Usefulness, which can also be partly described as transferability, refers to how the study can be applied outside itself and innovation simply alludes to how the research adds to or changes the notions of the field it describes. (Spiggle 1994)

In terms of usefulness, it can be argued that the broad and somewhat unspecific results and conclusions of this study allow them to be applied to a wide selection of industries and situation and it therefore not limited to the studied industry. Hence, it can be said that this study is useful in any situation where a company can utilize visual cues to supplement their communication.
As for innovation, colour and service expectation as well as service clues have all been studied separately. These aspects have not been studied in a scope similar to this thesis before, together. This study confirms and strengthens many of these studies and also provides a framework for looking at the effect of intangibles on a service expectation.

### 6.4. Suggestions for future research

The effect of colour on a consumer’s perception of a service has not been studied before. Although the results of this thesis are somewhat general and broad, a study that is similarly constructed in a different field would likely yield the most expansive contributions. Namely because this study bases its empirical component on a service industry that has a certain degree of tangibility in it. A study conducted in a service field that has a higher or lower tangibility associated with could develop the theory regarding the construction of a service expectation. Moreover, it is interesting to see how strongly the previous experiences would factor in a different scenario.

As established multiple times during the course of this thesis and its theoretical framework, colour associations vary heavily between social, cultural and situational contexts. It would hence be futile to focus research on colour meanings per se. Rather, there seems to be a lot to discover in the constructs consumers have and how these are built. Consequently, a study that looks into the different service clues and the weight of them between different industries and contexts.

Finally, there exists a sort of “chicken or egg”-situation within the study of colour associations. Do we associate a colour with this inherently or have we learned everything from some experience? So, which came first, the colour associations or the usage of the colours in advertising?

As a conclusion, future research that sheds light on how colours factor into consumers’ construction of expectations and associations is of importance. Utilizing the most important factor of an advertisement (Kiehelä 2014) in a world where attention spans are shrinking and the service economy is growing is something no brand can disregard.

So, what colour is quality?
SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

INLEDNING


Då det kommer till hur färg påverkar konsumentens uppfattning om kvalitet, har Hanna Kiehelä (2014) studerat hur konsumenter uppfattar färg som en skapare av kvalitet i vissa specifika produktgrupper (smarttelefoner och bilar). Utöver dessa kategorier finns det dock glesst med forskning då det kommer till hur färg påverkar konsumenters uppfattning om kvalitet. Det samma gäller då det kommer till färgers påverkan på uppfattningen beträffande tjänster.


Syftet med denna studie är att ta reda på hur färger påverkar processen där konsumenter upprättar sin förväntning gällande en tjänst. I praktiken kommer jag i min studie att se på hurudana associationer och värderingar konsumenter har gentemot färger i en viss kontext och använda denna information för att förstå hurudana roll färger har i hur en konsument bygger sin uppfattning om ett företag och en förväntning till dess tjänster.


TEORI

Det finns bristfälligt med forskning gällande färger inom tjänstesektorn. Därmed är denna studies teoretiska referensram en sammanställning av generell teori gällande tjänster och tjänsteförväntning samt en genomgång av teori gällande färgers effekt baserat på Kieheläs (2014) teoretiska referensram.


Kiehelä delar in de effekter färger har i två delar; uppströmseffekter och nedströmseffekter (eng. upstream and downstream effects, egen översättning). Uppströmseffekter innefattar fysiologiska effekter, färgpreferenser samt färgers mening och karakteriseras som effekter som ett företag inte direkt kan påverka. Nedströmseffekter är sådana effekter som ett företag har kontroll över; färg i butiksomgivning, färg i reklam, färg i skapandet av varumärken samt effekter inom produktuppfattning och avsikt för uppköp.


För att sammanfatta den teoretiska referensramen har en konceptuell modell upprättats. I grund och botten är tjänster så pass immateriella att konsumenter använder sig av sekundära attribut, ledträdar, för att skapa en uppfattning om hurudan nivå på tjänsten
de kan förvänta sig. Eftersom konsumentens upplevelse jämförs med förväntningarna
då upplevelsen bedöms är det viktigt för ett företag att bygga upp en förväntning som
motsvarar utförandet. Företag kan använda sig av färger för att förstärka och betona sin
kommunikation visuellt.

Kiehelä (2014) delar upp färgers effekter i två grupper; uppströms- och
nedströmseffekter. Figur 1 illustrerar, baserat på tidigare forskning, ett förslag på hur
färger kan påverka processen där en konsument bygger upp sin tjänsteförväntning och
får en uppfattning om ett företag.

Figur 1 Färgers inverkan på konsumentens förväntningar

Figuren illustrerar hur konsumentens tolkning av färg går från uppströms- till
nedströmseffekterna för att bilda en förväntning, som i sin tur placerar sig på
tjänsteförväntningsskalan.
METODIK


För att analysera de empiriska resultaten utnyttjas kategorisering och abstraktion (Spiggle 1994). Resultaten kategoriseras enligt den teoretiska referensramen. Ur kategoriseringen grupperas resultaten i större abstrakt som ger insikt till hurudan roll färger har inom respondenternas konstruktioner. Till sist görs en utvärdering av avhandlingen.

**EMPIRISKA RESULTAT**

Resultaten av RGT-metoden har delats i tre delar, först enligt två centrala delar i intervjunprocessen och sedan en sammanfattnande del.

I början av intervjun fick respondenterna se tre olika bilder åt gången och skulle sedan välja vilken som inte passar in med de andra. Alternativt kunde de också uttrycka vilka som passade ihop. Resultaten i denna fas varierar kraftigt mellan respondenterna. En del av respondenterna fokuserade starkt på färgen och dess vanlighet både inom industri och som färg i allmänhet. Färgerna röd, grön och blå nämndes ofta som att vara ”vanliga” färger, medan svart och silver beskrevs som ”neutrala”. De neutrala färgerna stod ut mest sällan, medan den lila bussen stod ut i 58 % av alla situationer där den var med, nästan dubbelt så ofta som de ”vanliga” färgerna.

Respondenterna ombads sedan rangordna bussarna. Som kategorier för rangordning användes ofta attribut som respondenten själv hade valt för att försäkrat att attributet var relevant för respondenten. Utöver dessa användes attributet ”pris” i alla intervjuer även om respondenten inte nämnde priset som en faktor själv. Detta gjordes för att ha en referenspunkt och möjliggöra jämförelser. I rangordningsfasen stod två färger ut. Den svarta bussen platsade högst i så gott som alla kategorier och hade i allmänhet en väldigt stark position. Även de få respondenter som placerade den svarta bussen låg i pris beskrev detta som en följd av en stark tradition samt ändamålsenlig och medveten


**ANALYS, DISKUSSION OCH FORTSATT FORSKNING**

För att kunna dra slutsatser från forskningens resultat bör dessa också analyseras. Denna studie utnyttjar analysmetoderna kategorisering och abstraktion som de är beskrivna av Spiggle (1994).

Kategoriseringen baserar sig på den teoretiska referensramen och strävar därmed efter att gruppera resultaten till antingen uppströms- eller nedströmsgift. I vanliga fall kommer ett företag att skicka en uppsjö av andra signaler än endast en färg. Därmed har de nedströmsgift som syns i resultaten kommit från respondenternas minne och bör hellre kallas inlärda associeringer eller effekter. Som motpol bör i sin tur uppströmsgifterna kallas medfödda associeringer eller effekter. I regel är de medfödda
effekterna svagare och vagare. De inlärda kan vara väldigt starka och innebär ofta specifika och konkreta attribut som baserar sig på konsumentens erfarenhet om den typ av tjänst som bedöms. Trots det att konsumenters färgpreferenser inte vara relevanta i hur de upplever ett företag och dess tjänster kan man påstå att konsumenter har preferens över andra färger inom en viss bransch. Denna preferens baserar sig på deras erfarenhet och hurudana värderingar de uppskattar. Med andra ord kan man säga att konsumenter faktiskt har favoritfärger, men att de baserar sig främst på de värderingar de uppskattar mest än endast estetiska aspekter.

Det finns situationer där de medfödda och de inlärda associationerna inte går ihop. I en sådan situation litar konsumenten på den inlärda, eftersom den har en mer konkret association som det är lättare att relatera till i en beslutssituation. Ur detta kan det abstraheras att till skillnad från förslaget i den teoretiska referensramen är det i själva verket de inlärda associationerna och effekterna som kommer in i processen först och har en förkörtsätt i processen där konsumenten skapar en förväntning och uppfattning.

Figur 2 Uppdaterad modell – Hur färger påverkar konsumentens förväntningar
Figur 2 illustrerar studiens avgörande slutsatser; då en konsument bygger upp sin uppfattning börjar processen från förhandskunskap. En färg tolkas först på basis av tidigare erfarenheter. Ifall det finns bristfälligt med relevanta erfarenheter, kan de medfödda associationerna ge en vag bild åt konsumenten. I det här fallet kan en individs subjektiva tolkning leda till att han eller hon föredrar vissa färger över andra.

På teoretiskt plan bidrar denna forskning till området med att ytterligare bekräfta tidigare forskning och med att föreslå en modell på konsumenters tolkningar som skiljer sig i struktur, men inte i innehåll, från modellen som Kiehelä (2014) presenterat. Denna studie kan anses ge företag insikt till hur konsumenter tolkar deras företag på basis av färg och hur de kan använda färg för att förstärka deras visuella kommunikation.

För fortsatt forskning föreslår jag liknande studier i olika branscher. Som konstaterat varierar färgers mening kraftigt bland olika kontext, därmed vore det nödvändigt att se ifall effekterna av färg har olika styrka i olika branscher. För mindre påtagliga tjänster kan färger t.ex. ha mera eller mindre vikt för konsumenter.
REFERENCES


Patton, M. 2002, Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, 3rd edn, Sage Publications, USA.


APPENDIX 1 ELEMENTS USED IN THE RGT
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Luoto Anija
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Helpless
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APPENDIX 4 QUOTES FROM CHAPTER 4 IN THEIR ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Quote 1: "Hu på sätt liknande? Av utseende? De e ju samma buss!"

Quote 2: "Mul tuli mieleen se et täs on on tummat värit. Tää iskee enemmän silmään ja näää on enemmän pleinei"

Quote 3: "De e en annan färg, de e en blandfärg, o den e mörkare."

Quote 4: "Dom hä e neutrala, den hä sticker ut, de e int en färg som e normal på bilar, eller fordon över huvutaget"

Quote 5: "Mun mielest tää sininen. Se on jotenki erilainen. Ei oo tavanomainen bussinväri. Muista tulee mielikuvit tommosiin liikenne...tai mä oon ollu näitten värissä busseissa"

Quote 6: ". . .mustaan bussiin ni siel voi aatella et se on samanlaine ku kakskyt vuotta... Ei siin ainakaan odota et palvelu niissä ainakaan yllätä. No siel ei oo mitään lisäpalveluita, niinku vaikka jotain WiFiä tai jotain. Eikä nettivarausjärjestelmää. Ihan varmaan ajaa tehtäväänsä mut ei mitään lisäpalveluita."

Quote 7: "firma joka on ollu kuljetusalal tosi kaua et ne tietää miten voi hinnottelu js mist voi säästää ja niin pois päin"

Quote 8: "De känns att ja ska kunna åka en längre resa med den blåa. ". "de känns som att blåa ska ge mig mest värde, såhär bara baserat på färgen."

Quote 9: "De e hårdare bänkar, mera folk"

" Jag har nog den gamla inbilden av dihär blåa bussana i stan att de för meteli o avgaser"

Quote 10: , must tuntuu et ku näää käyttää jotai ekologiskt bensaa tai jotai tommest ni ni se vo kusta sen takii et se vo poksahd na matkan aikana se bussi tai sit ne joutu käydä tankkaa

Quote 11: Se ei näytä siistiltä, todennäköesti varmaan vihreen värin ylijäämävarastosta halvalla saatu.

Quote 12: Ja fick en sån där cheesy klubb transporterar sina clubber ti va dom tror att ett coolt sätt


Quote 14: R: Den då lila ska kanske kunna vara nån slags party-buss, nån form av festgrej, därmed ska ja int placera den ti lägsta klassen, men den e kanske mera än upplevelse. Så ja sättar hellre den i dyrare ändan men i mitten. Vem som helst ska int villa åka me den.

I: Menar du att de finns en specifik grupp me mänskor som ska åka me den?

R: Just, exakt så. Eller kanske int specifik grupp men beroende på situationen.
Quote 15: Ja ser nog att me den finns det också någon idé bakom

Quote 16: ku noi on vierekkäin ni kyl se punanen aina erottuu. Noi toiset on vähän hillitympiä.

Quote 17: Se iskee silmään ja se on magee väri... ehkä sil on vähän pokkää lähtee tollasella räikeellä. Tota on varmaan aika vaikea huoltoa, et sitä pitää varmaan pestä aika paljon. Ehkä niille on ulkonäkö ja se uospäinsuuntautuminen on ehkä tärkeä. Ne näyttää mun silmään hyvin huolletuilla, vähän niinku joku tykkää punasist autoist, et se on vähän semmonen hienostobussi.

Quote 18: dom hä hålli på så länge så dom vet nog hu de går

Quote 19: Se näyttää tyylikkäimmältä kuin muut. Laadukkaammalta.

Siel on varmaan, johtuu tosta valkosesta väristä et siel on varmaan aika siisti sisätit.

Quote 20: Ja tycker att dom hä andra e mera vanliga för bussar, dehär e mera sådär ekobuss, kanske.