REFEREE'S REVIEW

Program:	Master in International Business
Student:	Olga A. Kuznetsova
Title of thesis:	B2B BRAND PERCEPTION BY SELLER AND BUYER: CASE OF "INOA" BRAND

1.	**Justification of the topic choice. Accuracy in defining the aim and objectives of the thesis.** Justification of the topic choice; accuracy in defining the aim and tasks of the thesis; originality of the topic and the extent to which it was covered; alignment of the thesis' topic, aim and objectives.	**5**	4	3	2
2.	**Structure and logic of the text flow.** Logic of research; full scope of the thesis; alignment of thesis' structural parts, i.e. theoretical and empirical parts.	5	4	**3**	2
3.	**Quality of analytical approach and quality of offered solution to the research objectives.** Adequacy of objectives coverage; ability to formulate and convey the research problem; ability to offer options for its solution; application of the latest trends in relevant research are for the set objectives.	5	4	3	**2**
4.	**Quality of data gathering and description.** Quality of selecting research tools and methods; data validity adequacy; adequacy of used data for chosen research tools and methods; completeness and relevance of the list of references.	5	**4**	3	2
5.	**Scientific aspect of the thesis.** Independent scientific thinking in solving the set problem/objectives; the extent to which the student contributed to selecting and justifying the research model (conceptual and/or quantitative), developing methodology/approach to set objectives.	5	4	3	**2**
6.	**Practical/applied nature of research.** Extent to which the theoretical background is related to the international or Russian managerial practice; development of applied recommendations; justification and interpretation of the empirical/applied results.	5	4	**3**	2
7.	**Quality of thesis layout.** Layout fulfils the requirements of the Regulations for master thesis preparation and defense, correct layout of tables, figures, references.	5	**4**	3	2

Each item above is evaluated on the following scale, as applicable: 5 = excellent, 4 = good, 3 = satisfactory, 2 = poor.

By item comments:

1.   There's no doubt that the topic chosen belongs to the subject set of MIB Program. Any foreign (global) brand perception is of great attention for foreign producers/suppliers as well as for Russian resellers/users. INOA brand displays a distinct technology innovation in the hair coloring world. Therefore, the said topic gives a good opportunity to show an innovative marketing strategy permitting to skim temporarily the market.

2.   **The structure and logic of the text flow** are rather well defined and done. However, defining the subject of the study as "*the B2B brand (INOA by L'Oreal Professional)*" (p. 6) as well as the object of the study as "*the perception of B2B brand by different groups of stakeholders*" (p. 6) the author, in our opinion, makes the serious methodological error. First of all, why B2B brand *only*?. When surfing Internet it's easy to see very attractive INOA items offers of typically B2C nature. Therefore, the most interesting guideline could be studying an interrelationship of B2B and B2C market segments and trying to find the cannibalization as well as synergy effects.

3.   **The quality of analytical approach** is satisfactory. When they are talking about B2B market, – and this market is the stage for any B2B brand performance, – relationship marketing concepts and models are are the very right if not the only theoretical instruments acceptable for any analysis. The reference to the brand mapping model and 4D model is right but not sufficient to simulate the market story of the INOA brand. The reviewer see one more sophisticated model could be better applied to the case under consideration. However, the last line of the said thesis (p. 45) sounds as "*The*

methods suggested may be applied in further research aimed at investigating both B2B and B2C brands.". Typical case of Freud – the author, subconsciously sees the need to build a new B2B/B2C model. But "*in further research*". The **quality of offered solution** is difficult to assess due to a set of misunderstandings; *e.g.*, let's see Conclusion: there's (p. 44) the statement "*The main results of the research discovered through the comparative analysis of the two brand-maps revealed major discrepancies between the perception of the brand by its **owner and consumers**.* BTW, there are two Tables under number 3 (3). Table 3 at p. 39 (*Sources of information about brands of professional hair colorants*) presents INOVA awareness by information sources (no word concerning *owner and consumers !*). But, we read in Conclusion: *Table 3 illustrates all major differences between perceptions.*"; when turning to the Table 3, - AFTER THE SAID CONCLUSION, - (p. 52) we read: "*Table 3. Brand image of INOA among TV commercial **recognizers and non-recognizers**.*". The formal logic gives: **owner = recognizers,** and **consumers = non-recognizers.** At last, they could reveal at p. 41. Next, third Table 3 "*Comparison of producer and consumer's perceptions*". However, the reviewer is not sure the first column is about "*perceptions*"; the items of this column are rather about *messages*. To reviewer's mind, it could sound, as minimum, strange.

However, out of all critics, special explications could be delivered by the author during this thesis presenting upcoming.

4. **Quality of data gathering and description.** Quality of selecting research tools and methods is acceptable as well as their application made by the author; data sampling scale and size are sufficient to provide an adequate validity; adequacy of data used for chosen research tools and methods; completeness and relevance of the list of references are proved by the number of items and their features

5. **Scientific aspect of the thesis** is questionable due to considerations above. The methodological error in the very beginning of the work devaluates considerably the final outputs.

6. **Practical/applied nature of research.** Theoretical background could be partly applied to the international/Russian managerial practice in relevant marketing studies and actions; the same could be said concerning the development of applied recommendations, justification, and interpretation of the empirical/applied results. Methodology is the first!

7. **The quality of layout** is rather good. However, the author didn't pay any attention to numbering tables and didn't follow the convenient norms or standards for presenting tables. The ample considerations above (see point 3) are in sufficient degree inspired by this fact.

If the author is able to explain the logic his analytical framework and recommendations during defense procedure, then the master thesis, – B2B BRAND PERCEPTION BY SELLER AND BUYER: CASE OF "INOA" BRAND, – by Olga A. Kuznetsova may be recognized as meeting the main requirements of Master of International Business (MIB) program, and deserving a "**satisfactory**" grade, thus the author can be given the desired degree.

Date: June 16, 2011

Referee: *Vitally Cherenkov,*
Full Professor,
Marketing Department,
GSOM SPbSU