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The Power Online

Researching Online Branding Constructs Within the Energy Industry

Ragna Þorsteinsdóttir

Leiðbeinandi: Dr. Friðrik Rafn Larsen, lektor

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Júní 2016

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Abstract

An increase in liberalised energy markets creates unique challenges to energy companies as consumers gain power to choose among competing providers. This means that energy companies need to seek ways to capture the attention of the consumer, which could include online branding. There is still much to be learned when it comes to the branding of electricity and how this sector uses the branding tools that are available to them online.

The primary goal of this research was to study the current state of online branding in the energy sector, and if older and more experienced energy companies or those belonging to older markets were better at branding online than those that have less experience. By creating a reliable tool of measurement that can assess how well a company is utilising online branding constructs to facilitate its brand on the internet, it could be possible to both measure companies against each other and to measure the branding development as time passes. A branding rubric was created for the purpose of this research.

The results of this research showed that neither the experience of energy companies nor the experience of the markets they belonged to had any influence on how well the companies included in this study scored according to the branding rubric. However, the rubric proved to be a reliable tool of measurement, which means that it could be used for further research on this topic, or simply as a tool for brand managers to measure and improve their brand online.

Útdráttur

Aukið frelsi á raforkumörkuðum hefur haft í för með sér einstakar áskoranir fyrir orkufyrirtæki, þar sem neytendur hafa aukin tækifæri til þess að velja sér hvaðan þeir kaupa rafmagn. Þetta þýðir að orkufyrirtæki þurfa að keppast við að ná athygli neytenda, m.a. með notkun vörumerkjastjórnunar á netinu. Enn er lítið vitað um áhrif og notkun vörumerkjastjórnunar þegar það kemur að raforku og hvernig þessi iðnaður nýtir sér þau tækifæri sem eru í boði á netinu.

Helsta markmið þessarar rannsóknar var að kanna ástand vörumerkjastjórnunar á netinu, þá sérstaklega hvort að eldri og reynslumeiri orkufyrirtæki eða markaðir væru að standa sig betur en nýrri fyrirtæki eða markaðir. Með því að þróa áreiðanlegt mælitæki sem getur mælt hversu vel fyrirtæki eru að nýta sér eiginleika vörumerkjastjórnunar á netinu þá væri hægt að kanna bæði hvernig fyrirtæki standa gagnvart keppinautum og hvernig vörumerkjastjórnun á netinu þróast með tímanum. Sérstakt skema var hannað með þetta í huga til að nota í rannsókninni.

Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar sýndu að hvorki eldri orkufyrirtæki né fyrirtæki á eldri mörkuðum eru að standa sig betur þegar það kemur að vörumerkjastjórnun á netinu, samkvæmt mælingum. Hins vegar kom í ljós að vörumerkjaskemað virkaði sem áreiðanlegt mælitæki, sem þýðir að hægt er að nota það í frekari rannsóknir á þessu efni, eða einfaldlega sem mælitæki fyrir vörumerkjastjóra til að mæla og bæta þeirra vörumerki á netinu.

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1 Introduction

More and more countries are liberalising the local energy markets, which presents a unique challenge to both CEOs and marketing executives of energy companies as they are required to differentiate their products in order to gain an advantage on the competition. Consumers have more freedom to choose electricity providers, which creates direct competition between companies. However, research has shown that consumers can detect little to no distinction between providers, and some do not even realise that the option to choose is available (Larsen, 2014).

As the world on the internet keeps growing, the importance of understanding online branding grows with it (Siamagka, Christodoulides and Michaelidou, 2015). This space is no longer treated as the information dump it used to be only a decade or two ago. Communities are created online and ease of access can make all the difference when it comes to consumers looking for information. It is therefore up to the marketing department and/or brand managers to create an atmosphere online for discussions and customer relationships, in order to build the connection between the consumer and the brand (Christodoulides, 2009).

The literature and research surrounding the energy sector in liberalised markets is still relatively young and unexplored, and the scope of research of its online presence is even more limited. There is still much more to be learned when it comes to the branding of electricity and how this sector uses the branding tools that are available to them online. By exploring the online presence of energy companies in Australia, Europe and North America it may be possible to create a map that shows the development in the industry based on how long the markets have been liberalised. This may prove to be invaluable information for developing markets, as they will be able to look at the road ahead and avoid pitfalls that may be in their paths.

There is still little known about branding and its effects in the industrial environment, and even less when it comes to branding electricity and energy. It is therefore clear that a measurement tool would be useful in order to map this development in the newly

liberalised energy markets, and to measure the online branding practices of energy companies.

1.1 Research Goals and Questions

The primary goal of this research is to study the current state of online branding in the energy sector. By creating a reliable tool of measurement that can assess how well a company is utilising online branding constructs to facilitate its brand on the internet, it could be possible to both measure companies against each other and to measure the branding development as time passes.

In an attempt to find a developmental pattern of branding in the energy industry, the years of experience of energy companies will be calculated and measured against a total online branding score, and so will the years of experience of the energy markets.

This study will seek to answer three main research questions:

1. **Are older and more experienced energy companies more likely to display good online branding practices?**

2. **Are older and more experienced energy markets more likely to include companies that display good online branding practices?**

3. **Is it possible to create a reliable tool of measurement, to measure good online branding practices within the energy sector?**

To answer these questions, the data will be tested for correlation between the ages of the companies included in this research and how well they score according to a branding rubric that has been developed specifically for this purpose. The rubric in question will then also be tested to show its validity and reliability as a tool of measurement when it comes to online branding practices. In addition to being able to measure how well energy companies are branding themselves online, this kind of measurement tool will also open up the doors for future studies that could further assist in mapping the development of energy brands online.

Larsen's branding elements will also be explored to see how energy companies are differentiating themselves and where there is a gap in the market.

This thesis is divided into six main chapters. Following this introduction is chapter two, which will cover the literary context of branding, the definition of the concept and how it pertains to the energy sector. Also included in chapter two is an overview of Larsen's branding elements. As online branding is the main theme of this thesis, the entire third chapter will be devoted to an overview of the online branding literature. Chapter four explains the scope of this research, how it was executed and its limitations. It also includes the development of the online branding rubric and how it was used to evaluate each website used for this research. Chapter five details the main results of this research, as it relates to the research questions, and other notable results. Chapter six discusses the implications of those results in the context of the literature and suggests further research on this topic.

2 The Branding Literature

Over the last several decades, the electricity markets have been liberalised one by one in most western countries. This means that western consumers have more freedom to choose electricity providers and are able to shop around for the best possible provider and/or services. This creates a more competitive market and energy companies need to differentiate themselves to stand out in the eye of the consumer.

As electricity is considered one of the most basic products needed by and available to humans, it is commonly defined as a commodity. A commodity has been defined as a product that has few or no distinctive features, so fundamental that consumers find it difficult to point out any differences between products (Keller, Apéria, and Georgson, 2012). As is the case with electricity, where the end product is the same, no matter whether it is made by nuclear, solar or wind power. Electricity is a product that rarely gets noticed or thought about by the consumer, except perhaps when it is absent (Larsen, 2014). However, while some commodities have been successfully differentiated and branded, electricity simply has no features that can be highlighted to set the product itself apart. This chapter will focus on defining the concept of branding and what is known about branding in the energy industry.

2.1 Branding

A brand, according to the American Marketing Association, is "a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. [...] A brand may identify one item, a family of items or all items of that seller" (AMA). However, some argue for a broader definition to include relationships, the process of services, and experiences (Fournier, 1998; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Stern, 2006; Grönroos, 2007). Most definitions include some form of differentiation (AMA; Doyle, 1990; Kotler, 1991), while Ambler and Styles (1996) define a brand as "the promise of the bundle of attributes that someone buys [...]. The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible." This concurs with later definitions, where the focus is on the image of brands rather than more tangible things such as name, type or logo (e.g. de Chernatony and McDonald, 1998; Duncan, 2002; Riezebos, 2003). As Larsen (2014) puts it: "A brand is something that resides in the mind of the consumer, and branding is endowing products and services

with the power of a brand." As the definition develops, it focuses more on the relationship consumers have with brands, and their loyalties to brands (Haigh and Knowles, 2004).

Branding is one of the tools used to influence the decisions made by consumers to choose one product over another (Kotler and Keller, 2005). It is a way to create a distinction between similar products from different production companies (Interbrand, 1992). Several subcategories belong to branding, such as service, consumer, product, corporate, industrial and commodity branding. By choosing a branding strategy, managers commit to a certain way of managing their companies (Larsen, 2014). As mentioned by Webster and Keller (2004), "branding is a strategy problem, not a naming problem." It sets the tone of the company and how they present themselves to consumers, and how information is communicated (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001).

By branding a product, a certain image is being created that is specifically for certain types of people, of certain gender, of certain age, with certain interests, etc. Furthermore, this process includes teaching the consumers about this product and the image, and why this image should appeal to them (Kotler and Keller, 2005). The brand itself, if done properly, is created to appeal to a specific type of consumer, as it should further define this consumer image in the eyes of others (Kay, 1995; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998; Simoes and Dibb, 2001). Branding also involves brand positioning, which includes making conscious decisions regarding the preferred associations made with the brand in the minds of consumers and which aspects to emphasize to depict the competitive superiority (Keller, Sternthal and Tybout, 2002). Not only does that involve promoting tangible attributes, such as speed or strength, but also intangible ones, such as image (Keller and Lehmann, 2006).

There are several benefits to creating a successful brand. It creates added value to a product in the minds of consumers (Keller, 2008), makes choosing easier to consumers (Nelson, 1970), and minimizes the risk of purchase (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Branding can also make companies stronger and increase their value (Kohli and Thakor, 1997; Doyle, 2001). A brand offers certain safety and value in the minds of consumers, by differentiating themselves from competing products. A brand can also help increase or maintain the revenue of companies (Lane and Jacobson, 1995), and become a company's

most valuable asset (Klink and Smith, 2001). As Keller and Lehmann (2006) put it: “For customers, brands can simplify choice, promise, a particular quality level, reduce risk and/or engender trust.”

A brand has an impact on three levels, which together compose the value of brand equity: customer market, product market, and financial market (Keller and Lehmann, 2006). The brand equity itself has been defined as four categories that make up its assets: brand name awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations (Salzer-Morling and Strannegard, 2004). This combination creates value for both the company and the consumer. However, the impact branding has had on the energy sector is still largely unexplored.

2.2 Branding Electricity

As it is relatively new in most markets to have to differentiate and brand electricity, the lack of experience and options of differentiation leads most electricity companies to focus on price. The change into a competitive environment has led consumers to be able to choose their electric supplier, so a variation in the way electricity companies differentiate themselves becomes increasingly important (Larsen, 2014). In later years, more companies have started to emphasise customer service (Hartmann and Ibáñez, 2007; Paladino and Pandit, 2012), or even green energy (Bird, Wüstenhagen and Aabakken, 2002; Hartmann and Ibáñez, 2006; Salmela and Varho, 2006). While some may think that branding has little to do with industrial markets, such as the electricity industry, it has been shown to be beneficial, as it can lower risks and boost the efficiency of information (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2007). Brands have also been proven to outperform those products that have been treated as commodities (Tokarczyk and Hansen, 2006).

When it comes to industrial branding, there need to be different emphases than in consumer branding. Research has shown that industrial markets can benefit from having good branding strategies (Blombäck and Axelsson, 2007; Hutton and James, 1997; Mudambi, 2002). They need to focus more on a promise of value that can be experienced through a product or the organisation that sells it (Ward, Light and Goldstine, 1999). Industrial brands call for an increasing emphasis on the support structure, such as corporate image, customer service and logistics (Håkansson and Waluszewski, 2005;

Larsen, 2014). This is especially apparent in the energy sector as it is selling an intangible product.

By focusing on price when trying to differentiate themselves on the market, electricity companies end up competing on the most basic characteristic available to commodities (Pesce, 2002). It is also an ineffective tool as the competition can easily replicate this strategy (Pesce, 2002; Kotler and Keller, 2005) However, by using other branding tools, these companies have an opportunity to create a space in the mind of the consumer, by emphasising intangible ideas, feelings, experiences, etc. (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Keller, 2008). It could also help companies stay away from the pressure of low prices, which has become the case as more and more markets have become liberalised (Wiedmann, 2004).

Another common branding strategy when it comes to electricity is emphasising the quality of service. Electricity has several factors in common with service, such as its intangible nature and how it needs to be consumed immediately (Larsen, 2014). Research has shown that consumers' perception of the quality of service of electricity companies can influence customer satisfaction and trust towards them (Hartmann and Ibáñez, 2007). Being accessible and providing personal services has been shown to be important to consumers (Larsen, 2014), but electricity companies have few opportunities to prove those qualities, as most consumers seem to only consider those factors during power failures (Paladino and Pandit, 2012; Larsen, 2014). According to Hoopes, Madsen and Walker (2003), it is not advisable to differentiate on service quality alone, but rather use it in a mix of other qualities, such as innovativeness and customer centricity.

When it comes to branding electricity, a few studies have been done in the field of green electricity (e.g., Roe, Teisl, Levy and Russel, 2001; Bird, Wüstenhagen and Aabakken, 2002; Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibanez 2012; Paladino and Pundit, 2012). Green electricity, also known as renewable energy, is one that is more environmentally friendly, as it is created with techniques that are not harmful to the environment in the way of toxic emissions (Truffer, Markard and Wüstenhagen, 2001; Paladino and Pandit, 2012). However, not much has been studied in terms of understanding the perception consumers have of green energy and how it would influence their purchasing intentions (Larsen, 2014). Larsen (2014) discovered that consumers do not agree on what constitutes as green energy, and some renewable energy sources, such as windmills,

were considered less green due to them being eyesores that pollute the aesthetics of the environment. Participants in his research also did not think much of the green image, and that companies that advertised their renewable energy production were making themselves seem better than they actually were.

While there is some variety in the way electricity companies differentiate themselves, not much is known about what aspects the consumers actually care about. During his research, Larsen (2014) identified four constructs and thirteen elements that seem to be important to consumers (see Figure 1). It is not enough to know what can be used to create a successful energy brand from the managerial perspective; knowing what elements the consumers think is important is key to creating a successful brand (Larsen, 2014).

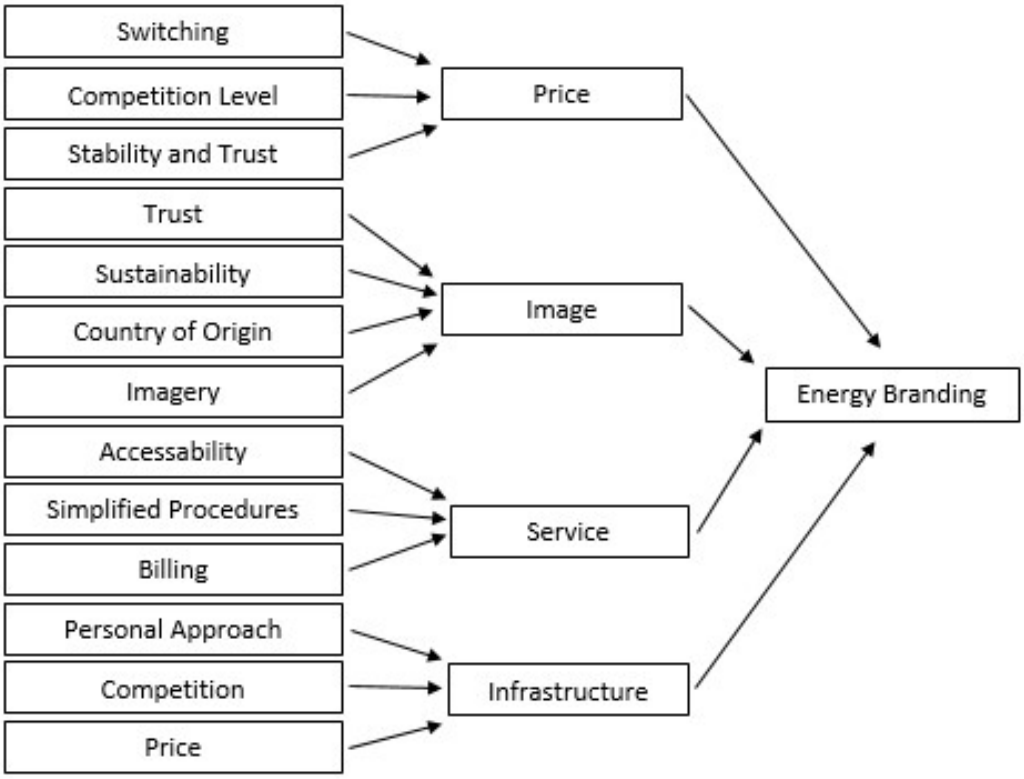

Figure 1. Energy branding elements and constructs identified by Larsen (2014).

3 Online Branding

As the digital world keeps developing, so does the world of online marketing and branding. The internet has a variety of applications that can be adopted for marketing purposes, such as websites, emails, analytics, and communities (Rowley, 2004; Jensen, 2008). As companies started using the internet for branding purposes, questions were raised as to whether there was a difference between brands online or offline (de Chernatony and Christodoulides, 2004), and how brand equity could be created via the internet (Simmons, Thomas and Truong, 2010). As the web keeps developing into what has been referred to as "Web 3.0", increased emphasis has been put on real-time service that is accessible anywhere, anytime and on whichever device the consumer has on hand (Roberts and Zahay, 2013).

According to Christodoulides (2010), online branding can be even more important than traditional branding. Online brands help consumers make choices when it comes to choosing products. The brands act as the condensed version of the information about the company or the product, and people who are less secure at navigating the internet are more likely to choose the product of the more well-known brand than of those that are more obscure. Choosing a brand online seems to be more of a gamble in the minds of consumers than when choosing physical products; consumers are far less likely to purchase products online if they are neither familiar with the retailer nor the brand (Christodoulides, 2010).

Two models were developed for internet branding that have become a guide for marketing managers when creating brands online (de Chernatony and Christodoulides, 2004; Simmons, 2007). Each model offers very important theories to be used in internet branding, but very few practical aspects. This field of online branding is still very young and so it could be beneficial for scholars and managers to have developed guidelines to support the execution of brand value (Keller, 2009; Simmons, Thomas and Truong, 2010).

3.1 Two Online Branding Models

Simmons (2007) collected several papers on brand building and divided them into three themes: Understanding customers, interactivity, and marketing communications. He also realised the fourth important theme when it comes to internet branding: content.

Together, these themes form “The Four Pillars of i-Branding” (see Figure 3). These pillars are not specifically a model for marketing managers to build brands around, but rather a guide to help managers identify the aspects that need to be considered when choosing a marketing strategy. As can be seen, these four pillars all connect to each other and according to Simmons (2007), they can be used to create brand equity. While Simmons’ pillars can help marketing managers to create brand equity, de Chernatony and Christodoulides’ Value Pyramid offers more of a framework for creating branding strategies.

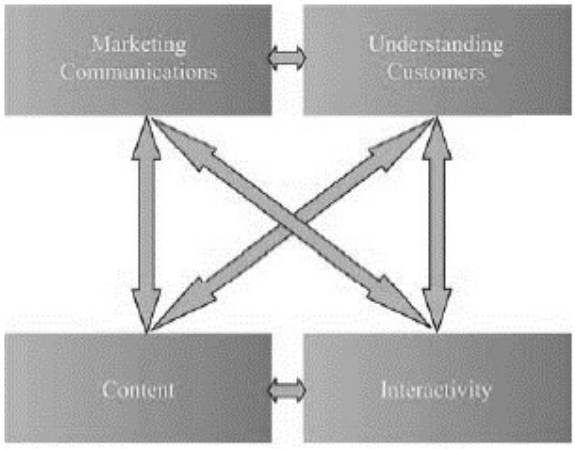

Figure 2. Simmons' four pillars of i-branding (2007).

De Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004) argue that brands are independent of their environments and that the digital difference lies in the execution of its promise. As brands started moving online, their online databases developed from information-overload to a customer-centric hub, and it was realised that brands could build an even better connection with consumers by using the internet to create even more value, and to build communities (de Chernatony and Christodoulides, 2004). Whereas companies could previously control the information that was given to the outside world, the move online meant that anyone could impart information and create content, so it has become harder to control the discussion (Hennig-Thurau *et al.,* 2010; Jones, Temperley and Lima*,* 2009; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The atmosphere online should be directed more into pathways of customer relationships and creating the discussion rather than focusing on the marketing directive (Christodoulides, 2009).

The online development has gone from emphasising rational values, to emotional values, to a promised experience. This is put forth by de Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004) as a hierarchy, in order of the added consumer value each step brings (see Figure 3). The rational values represent the core values that the brand stands for, while the emotional values represent the emotions that the rational values indicate that the brand has. Together, these values express the promised experience of a brand. However, this level is also dependent on the knowledge consumers have about the company in question. The consumers who participate and interact with the brand online are effectively co-creators to the online experience. Brands online often need consumers to enact their brand promises to fulfil the promised experience. "The brand experience is not just assessed on the content of a site, but rather through an amalgam of the elements [...]," (de Chernatony and Christodoulides, 2004).

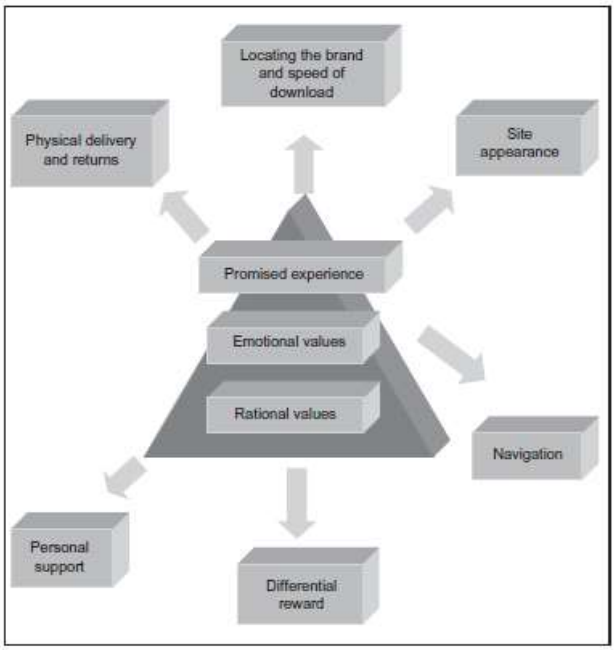

Figure 3. De Chernatony and Christodoulides' hierarchy of added consumer value and enacting the brand promise online (2004).

The model developed by de Chernatony and Christodoulides helps brand managers to stay on top of their brands when it comes to their businesses online. All these elements play a vital role in creating a successful brand online. A single case study by Lipiäinen and Karjaluoto (2015) showed how important it is that the company message is clear, especially in the digital environment. By moving the branding process online, companies

need to be inviting the consumers to partake in the creation of the brand (Christodoulides, 2010). The brand manager is not only managing the brand but also monitoring the online experience.

To add on what is known about online branding and branding in the energy industry, De Chernatony and Christodoulides' (2004) model can be used to focus the aspects that need to be considered when creating a brand online. By researching what energy companies are doing online, it is possible to see what is being done well and what can be done better.

4 Research Methods

The objective of this research was to examine the online branding decisions of energy companies. To do this, it was decided to look at individual websites of energy companies to see what they are putting online and how their brands are being represented on the internet. A rubric was developed, based on the online brand model devised by de Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004). This was done so that it was possible to rate each company based on how it meets online branding guidelines.

As the main objective of this research was to examine the correlation between good online brand presence and the experience of the liberalised energy markets across Europe, North America and Australia, and the experience of energy companies, this research is inherently quantitative.

In order to observe online practices and development of branding energy, a list of 317 websites from the energy industry was compiled, for companies from Australia, Europe and North America. To rate each website, a spreadsheet was filled out where each company was rated according to a predetermined spectrum from 1 to 5, where each number was to represent certain aspects, or lack thereof, for each category. The control questions were Age of company, Age of market and Type of company (Retail or Other) to see if there was a correlation between those factors and how well the websites were scoring according the branding rubric.

This study follows the cross-sectional, descriptive research design as it attempts to see patterns within a certain market and to see relationships between two or more variables at a certain point in time (Shukla, 2010).

4.1 Research Sample

The research sample for this study was a convenience sample of 317 websites for companies that deal with energy in one way or another, in Australia, Europe and North America. The list of websites was composed of a sample gathered for a project in March 2015, along with other websites gathered by extensive searching on Google.com, Wikipedia.org and LinkedIn.com in November 2015 and January 2016. Some websites had

to be excluded for various reasons, such as the website not working at the time of the research, the company having been merged with another company, or several companies had been reviewed already from that particular country, so it was put to the side. In the end, a total of 266 websites were added into the database. The list of websites has been included in Appendix 1.

It is hard to determine how big a sample is needed to accurately portray the population, as it is difficult to find accurate numbers for websites within any sector of the energy industry. To start with, a list of 100 companies was compiled, but during the data gathering, some websites had to be removed as they did not work during the research. As the first attempts at analysing the data resulted in no conclusive findings, it was decided to expand the list of websites considerably, to make sure that the lack of data did not influence the results. This rather slowed down the research process but eventually resulted in 266 websites.

4.2 Research Tools

The main research tool for this thesis was a branding rubric devised to measure online brands. Alongside the rubric, the websites were also observed to assess if energy companies are emphasising any of the elements identified by Larsen (2014) that consumers find important when it comes to choosing electricity companies (see Figure 1). By looking at the presence or absence of these elements, it is possible to judge how far the energy market has come in creating differentiating factors and if energy companies are trying to create a variety of options or if they are all grouping themselves into the same section of the market.

The rubric used to measure the online brand performance was developed based on the model by de Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004) on enacting brand promises online. Their model addresses how a brand's promise can be developed online and offers suggestions on how to be successful. Some of the sections discussed offline behaviour, which were excluded from the rubric as the scope of this research pertains only to online branding practices. Some sections were also excluded due to them having to do with product development.

4.2.1 The Online Branding Rubric

The rubric was divided into eight categories, each representing a part of de Chernatony and Christodoulides' branding pyramid. The categories were then divided into five sections to represent how well this category was being portrayed online. Each section was given a numerical value from 1 – 5, where 1 indicated a poor performance and 5 indicated an excellent performance in this category.

The first category represented the three values inside the pyramid: rational values, emotional values, and promised experience (see Table 1). In order to get at least an Acceptable rating, the website had to list some sort of values, often included with the name and/or logo of the website. An Excellent rating would be given if the look and feel of the website indicated clear values, along with practical ways of backing up their values, like calculators for companies competing on price or a unique way for costumers to communicate with the company.

Table 1. Branding rubric: Brand promise.

	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Brand promise: • *rational values* • *emotional values* • *promised values*	No visible values.	Some values presented but those are not reflected in the look, feel and function of the website.	Some values presented that are reflected in the look and feel of the website but no practical function.	Clear values are visible and reflected in the tone, look and feel of the website but it offers few or no practical functions to back it up.	Rational, emotional and promised values are clearly visible and enacted in unique ways, e.g. a calculator in a company that promises cheap energy and good service.

The second category looked at search results on Google.com when attempting to search for an energy company in the country and language of the company that was being researched (see Table 2). Google Translate was used to help translate the search string into the appropriate language, along with the help of a couple of native speakers of those languages. To get a more accurate translation, the wording had to be changed to "Energy firm [insert country]", as the word "company" was often recognised as a social situation instead of a business structure. Subsequently, great care was taken in making sure that the word "firm" was also translated properly, so it would not be given the meaning of

Table 2. Branding rubric: Searchability.

	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good	Excellent
***Searchability**: (Search: "energy company [insert country]" + the same in the native language)*	No visible signs on the first page on Google.com.	Only visible below the halfway mark on the first page on Google.com.	Visible in the first 4 results on Google.com.	Paid AdWords on Google.com.	Several related links on the first page on Google.com.

stiffness. This test was also done by using the incognito version of the Google Chrome browser, to prevent cookies and browser history from influencing the search results.

If the company could not be found on the first page of the search results, it got a Poor rating in this category. If paid AdWords could be found, the company got a Very Good rating, and an Excellent rating could be achieved by having several links on the first page of the search results. The reason paid AdWords only get a Very Good rating is because natural search results are more valuable, as it doesn't have to be paid for and means that the website is using search engine optimisation (SEO) for their content.

The third category tested the simplicity/speed of the website and mostly measured how long it took for the website to load (see Table 3). This section had to be adjusted during the research, as the first 20 of the companies tested all scored an Excellent rating. It was therefore decided to shorten the loading time for each section, taking 5 – 10 seconds off each time. All 20 companies were then tested for speed again and ranked according to the new definition.

All sites were loaded five times, once in a Google Chrome browser, once in a Mozilla Firefox browser, once in a Microsoft Edge browser, once in an Internet Explorer browser, and once in a Mozilla Firefox browser on a different computer. The loading times were then added together and divided by five to get a definitive loading time. The download speed was tested regularly throughout the process to make sure all websites were on equal ground, and the average download speed was 21.36 Mbps.

Table 3. Branding rubric: Simplicity/Speed.

	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Simplicity/speed: • *movement* • *programs* • *images* • *loading time*	Heavy images, videos or other programs, requires visitors to download specific programs to view the website, takes more than 30 seconds to load.	Heavy images, videos or other programs, takes 20-30 seconds to load.	A few moving images take time to load, takes more than 15-20 seconds to load OR option to load a less heavy website.	Some images take time to load, otherwise free of heavy programs, takes 10-15 seconds to load OR option to load a less heavy website.	No heavy programs or few images, loads within 10 seconds.

Websites only got an Excellent rating if they did not run heavy programs, such as Java or Flash, or if they were able to load within 10 seconds of pressing enter in the address bar. If the websites had an option to run a less heavy website, it could not get an Excellent rating as they are stronger if they only offer the one version. A single version makes the brand stronger and the message more consistent.

The fourth category measured consistency of the brand on various platforms (see Table 4). In this case, it was difficult to get a Poor rating, as most website platforms offer a unified look and feel throughout the domain it occupies. In this case, it was also very

Table 4. Branding rubric: Consistency.

	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Consistency: • *colour* • *logo* • *social media* • *regional vs. global*	No apparent colour scheme, inconsistent logo usage, inconsistent social media sites, regional and global pages are completely different.	Inconsistency in colour schemes throughout the site, inconsistent logo usage, social media sites do not match, regional and global pages are completely different.	Inconsistency in colour schemes throughout the site, inconsistent logo usage, social media sites do not match, some difference between regional and global pages.	Similar colours are used throughout the site, consistent logo usage, social media sites do not match home page, some difference between regional and global pages.	Similar colours are used throughout the site, consistent logo usage, social media sites match home page, regional and global pages match.

common for a company to get an Excellent rating, as some had few opportunities to show inconsistency due to them not using social media or having sister sites for other regions. The brands that reached outside of their single website to reach consumers were in more danger to get a less than Excellent rating.

The fifth category looked at the flow of the website and how easy it was to find basic information such as Services, Products, Contact Us, or other relevant information (see Table 5). This was most of the time one of the first things assessed during the research, as an attempt was made to determine the rating as quickly as possible. The exact timing of how long it took to find the information that was being looked for was not measured.

Table 5. Branding rubric: Flow.

	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Flow: • *info re: company* • *navigation* • *basic information*	Information about the company is unclear, complicated to find basic information such as Billings, Contact Us and Products, if any are available.	Start page is listed, navigation is somewhat complicated, complicated to find basic information such as Billings, Contact Us and Products.	Start page is clearly listed, some clutter restricts visibility of basic information such as Billings, Contact Us and Products.	Start page is clearly listed, information about the company is clear, some basic information such as Billings, Contact Us and Products visible right away.	Start page is clearly listed, information about the company is clear, access to basic information such as Billings, Contact Us and Products clearly visible right away.

The sixth category measured how accessible the websites were on mobile devices (see Table 7Table 6). All websites were tested both on a Samsung Galaxy S6 and an Apple iPad 2. To get an Excellent rating, the company website had to work well on mobile devices and there had to be an option of a mobile app. However, the app had to be mentioned on the website to be counted, as no searches were made in the app stores.

Table 6. Branding rubric: Mobile devices.

	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Mobile devices: • *mobile version* • *responsive* • *app* • *android vs. iOS*	A mobile version is not available and website does not work on mobile devices.	A mobile version is not available but website works somewhat on mobile devices.	A mobile version is available but does not work on some mobile devices.	A mobile version is available, works well on mobile devices.	A mobile version and an app are available and work well on mobile devices.

The seventh category explored the contact options available to customers (see Table 7). An Excellent rating in this category included being reachable via several contact methods and being available during all hours of the day. Emergency numbers were not included in this aspect, as they were specifically for reporting outages or related issues. The criteria included being available for consumer related questions at all time. To determine the rating for this category, the explicit service times were looked at and, where applicable, the responsiveness rating on Facebook.

Table 7. Branding rubric: Contact options.

	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Contact options*:* • *hours* • *methods*	No visible way of contacting the company.	Company can be contacted during business hours via one of the following: landline, email or online live chat support.	Company can be contacted during business hours via two to three of the following: landline, email, online live chat support or social media.	Company can be contacted via landline, email, online live chat support or social media and is available during business hours.	Company can be contacted via landline, email, online live chat support or social media and is available in one form or another 24/7.

The eighth and final category measured relationship building and the options available to current and prospective customers (see Table 8). While the Contact options category explored the methods available to contact the company, the Relationship building category focuses on if and how the company builds a community with its customers. By providing customer areas with information adjusted to each customer's needs, the company manages to build a relationship with the consumer. To score an Excellent rating,

Table 8. Branding rubric: Relationship building.

	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Relationship building	Customers have little to no access to the company online.	Customers have limited access to the company via Contact Us methods. No visible areas to ask questions or create discussions online.	Customers have access to Frequently Asked Questions and can ask their own questions OR discussion forums online.	Customers have access to their own area but information about what is accessible within is not available.	Customers have access to their own area where they can see billing information, customer history and provide feedback about their experiences. Visitors have access to information about this area.

prospective customers need to be able to see what is available to them once they join the company, to be able to make an informed decision.

Each of the ratings within the categories represent a numerical value that adds up to the total score of the companies included in this research. When all had been rated, a company could score anywhere between 8 and 40 points, 8 being Poor online branding and 40 being Excellent online branding.

4.3 Data Collection and Processing

The 266 websites that were included in the data were for companies from 20 different countries. Almost 40% of those were from English speaking countries (see Table 9). As mentioned before, each rating within each category represented a numerical value, which was used in SPSS to process the data and calculate frequencies, averages and possible correlations.

In order to test the function of the rubric, it was tested using two Icelandic companies, two American companies and two British companies, in order to streamline the rubric and eliminate country influences. These countries where also chosen so that language difficulties would not influence the testing. Some adjustments were made to the rubric, both after testing and during data collection, as mentioned before.

Table 9. Nationalities of companies included in this research.

Country	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Australia	30	11.3	11.3
Austria	1	0.4	11.7
Belgium	17	6.4	18.1
Czech Republic	3	1.1	19.2
Denmark	8	3.0	22.2
Finland	7	2.6	24.8
France	11	4.1	28.9
Germany	17	6.4	35.3
Greece	7	2.6	37.9
Iceland	7	2.6	40.5
Italy	8	3.0	43.5
Netherlands	7	2.6	46.1
Norway	33	12.4	58.5
Poland	3	1.1	59.6
Portugal	3	1.1	60.7
Spain	8	3.0	63.7
Sweden	5	1.9	65.6
Swiss	15	5.6	71.2
UK	32	12.0	83.2
USA	44	16.5	100.0
Total	266	100.0	

All companies were also categorised into energy retail companies and other energy companies. The latter group included companies such as gas suppliers or those that produce products that can generate energy. Essentially, all the websites included in this study offered energy in one form of another, whether it be supplying the energy, selling it or producing it. This was done in order to build a sizable database to generate reliable results. It was expected that energy providers or business-to-business (B2B) companies would offer fewer contact options or less relationship building, as those companies are generally more geared toward businesses than consumers. However, as some of those companies proved to provide just as many contact options and just as much relationship building as energy retailers, it was clear that it was not necessary to exclude those companies from the research.

4.4 Limitations

As an inherently western observer, the researcher could only rely on personal intuition when looking through company websites and it is inevitable that some bias may occur. Furthermore, language barriers proved somewhat limiting, even though the Google Translate tool was used frequently, along with online and physical dictionaries, knowledge from previous education and help from native speakers for certain websites.

The scope of this research was also limiting, as it meant only viewing the content of websites and how companies are using those websites to build their brands. To get a more holistic view of each company, other material would need to be viewed, such as press releases, advertisements, social media behaviour, and online behaviour in general.

Another limitation was being a single researcher, trying to assess the absence or presence of certain aspects that could be very subjective. For instance, the subject of "Flow": while one may find it hard to find certain aspects of the website, such as "About Us" or "Contact Us", others may find it easier. It is therefore suggested that a similar research done with focus groups could provide more accurate ratings.

5 Results

A total of 266 companies were observed over the period of four months. Around 40% of those companies were from English speaking countries – USA, UK and Australia – and the rest were from various European countries where electricity markets have already been liberalised. No particular care was taken in order to keep the country categories even, as this research did not focus on individual countries and/or how they perform, but rather to see if companies do better in an experienced market or when they themselves have more experience. These companies were grouped together into convenient groups, either based on the age of each company or the age of the market they belong to. The results can therefore be described in two ways: age of company or age of market, where age represent the experience of the company or the market.

Aside from researching the influence of age and experience on online branding within the energy industry, the goal was also to find a measurement tool to assess branding practices and how well energy companies are doing when it comes to online branding. This is why the rubric itself as a measurement tool will also be tested and discussed later in this chapter. Other parts of this chapter also include the presence of Larsen's branding elements in the energy market, and other notable results.

5.1 Age of Company

Each company was dated with the year it was founded, which was then used to calculate the age of the company as of 2016. This variable was then recoded into groups spanning 25 years each. The reason for this was to simplify the coding, as a span of 200 years is quite extensive.

About 60% of the companies that were researched, or 150 companies, were founded within the last 25 years (see Table 10). Almost 16% were older than 100 years. Not all of the companies provided information about when they were founded, while others traced their histories back hundreds of years, even though they had gone through several radical changes since being founded. In those instances, the earliest date was chosen, as this is the age the respective companies are using to represent themselves and the experience they claim to have. They should therefore be measured accordingly.

Table 10. The age distribution for the companies recorded.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 – 25 years	150	56.4	60.2	60.2
26 – 50 years	26	9.8	10.4	70.7
51 – 75 years	19	7.7	7.6	78.3
76 – 100 years	15	5.6	6.0	84.3
101 – 125 years	24	9.0	9.6	94.0
126 – 150 years	9	3.4	3.6	97.6
151 – 175 years	3	1.1	1.2	98.8
176 – 200 years	3	1.1	1.2	100.0
Missing	17	6.4		
Total	266	100.0	100.0	

To answer the question whether older and more experienced energy companies are more likely to display good online branding practices as defined by the branding rubric, it was decided to test for correlation between the Age of Company variable and the Total Score variable. Pearson Correlation was used (see Table 11). To see if there is a statistically significant correlation between those two variables, Sig. (2-tailed) is looked at, which shows a value of 0.888. A statistically significant correlation is a value of less than 0.05, which means that in this case there is not a statistically significant correlation. The age of the company does not influence the total score, so it does not affect their decision to use branding strategies online.

Table 11. Test for correlation between the Age of Company and Total Score variables.

		Total Score
Age of Company	Pearson Correlation	.009
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.888
	N	249

To further test if there are differences between younger and older companies, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) method was used. In this case, the Age of Company data was divided into two groups: Young (25 years or younger) and Old (older than 25). The

reason the divide was placed there was simply because 60% of the sample was 25 years or younger, so this divided the data into two groups that were as even as they could be.

The first step was to look at the Test of Homogeneity of Variances (see Table 12), to see if the distribution of the two variables on the Total Score spectrum is similar. The significance for this test is 0.822, which means that the variation within those variables is similar and the premise for ANOVA has been fulfilled.

Table 12. Test of Homogeneity of Variances, Young and Old, and Total Score.

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.051	1	247	.822

The next step is to look at the ANOVA test itself, to see if there is a significant variation between the two groups (see Table 13). For the variation to be significant, it would need to have a value of less than 0.05. In this case, the value is 0.248, which means that there is not a statistically significant variation between those two groups.

Table 13. Analysis of Variance test between the Total Score variable and Young and Old variable.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	18.233	1	18.233	1.340	.248
Within Groups	3361.365	247	13.609		
Total	3379.598	248			

As neither of those tests showed any significant link between the Age of Company variable and the Total Score variable, an assumption can be made that the age or experience of energy companies has no particular influence on online branding decisions. The answer to the first research question is therefore a resounding “no”, older and more experienced energy companies are not more likely to display good online branding practices.

5.2 Age of Market

The distribution when it came to the age of the energy markets were relatively even (see Table 14). The biggest group is in the 26-30 years bracket, with almost a quarter of the total companies used in this research.

Table 14. The age of markets tested.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
10 years or less	25	9.4	9.4	9.4
11 - 15 years	46	17.3	17.3	26.7
16 - 20 years	38	14.3	14.3	41.0
21 - 25 years	48	18.0	18.0	59.0
26 - 30 years	65	24.4	24.4	83.5
31 - 35 years	44	16.5	16.5	100.0
Total	266	100.0	100.0	

The same methods as before were used to answer the second research question of whether older and more experienced energy markets are more likely to include companies that display good online branding practices as they are defined by the branding rubric. Testing the Pearson Correlation was again the first step (see Table 15). To see if there is a significant correlation between these two variables, Sig. (2-tailed) is viewed and in this case it is 0.581, which again means that there is no significant correlation between the Age of Market and the Total Score variables. Therefore, the age of market does not influence the total score, so it does not indicate that older companies are more or less likely to apply branding to their online marketing strategies.

Table 15. Test for correlation between Age of Market and Total Score.

		Total Score
Age of Market	Pearson Correlation	.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.581
	N	266

This was also followed up with an ANOVA test to see if there was any difference in total scores among Age of Market groups. The first step was to look at the Test of

Homogeneity of Variances, which had a significance score of 0.619 (see Table 16). This means that the distribution is similar among those six groups and therefore the premise for the ANOVA test has been fulfilled.

Table 16. Test of Homogeneity of Variances, Age of Market, and Total Score.

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.707	5	260	.619

The next step was to look at the ANOVA test itself to see if the difference in variance is significant (see Table 17). In this case, the significance was 0.328, which means that there is not a statistically significant variation among those groups.

Table 17. Analysis of Variance test between the Total Score variable and Age of Market variable.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	78.501	5	15.700	1.163	.328
Within Groups	3510.405	260	13.502		
Total	3588.906	265			

Again, neither test showed any significant link between the Age of Market variable and the Total Score variable. It can therefore be assumed that the age of liberalised energy markets has no particular influence on online branding decisions. Doing the same tests but with a modified data sample, measuring only retail energy companies, did not render statistically significant results either. The answer to the second research question is therefore also a firm “no”, older and more experienced energy markets are not more likely to include companies that display good online branding practices.

5.3 The Rubric as a Tool of Measurement

A good measurement tool will have individual sections that should all influence the outcome of the measurement. While it seems obvious that all individual scores should influence the outcome, as they are all added together to form a total score, this is not always the case. To test the validity of the rubric as a tool of measurement, the Pearson Correlation test was used on the data.

All sections of the rubric were tested against the Total Score variable (see Table 18). By looking at the results, it can be seen that all variables have a statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.01$) to the Total Score variable, except Simplicity/Speed. This means that all variables but one have a positive influence on the total scoring, though in varying degrees. The fact that one variable does not have a statistically significant correlation to the Total Score is indicative of this variable not being a reliable measurement.

Table 18. Test for correlation between all sections of the rubric and Total Score

		Total Score*
Searchability	Pearson Correlation	.411**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Brand Promise	Pearson Correlation	.587**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Simplicity/Speed	Pearson Correlation	.035
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.568
Consistency	Pearson Correlation	.180**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003
Flow	Pearson Correlation	.328**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Mobile Devices	Pearson Correlation	.651**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Contact Options	Pearson Correlation	.558**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Relationship Building	Pearson Correlation	.702**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

* N is 266 in all instances.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Simplicity/Speed variable, and the frequency of each score within that variable, shows that 73% of the websites got the highest score for this variable (see Table 19). This may not be surprising, given that after the first round of testing, the times were adjusted to reflect a shorter period. This outcome suggests that this category needs to be adjusted further.

Table 19. Frequency of ratings within the Simplicity/Speed variable.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0
3	10	3.8	3.8	3.8
4	62	23.3	23.3	27.1
5	194	72.9	72.9	100.0
Total	266	100.0	100.0	

Furthermore, to test for reliability of this tool, Cronbach's Alpha was tested. All variables were measured in this test, including Total Score. Ideally, the Cronbach's Alpha value should be less than 0.7. In this case, the score is 0.686 (see Table 20). As this is below 0.7, the total statistics need to be checked to see if this number would get higher if any of the variables would be deleted (see Table 21). If the Simplicity/Speed variable would be removed, the Cronbach's Alpha score would rise above 0.7 and this measurement tool would be considered reliable.

It can therefore be said that the rubric does function as a reliable tool of measurement, even though it does need some tweaking to provide even more reliable results. The answer to the third research question is therefore "yes", it is possible to create a reliable

Table 20. Reliability statistics for the rubric as a whole.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
.686	9

Table 21. Item-Total Statistics for Rubric Variables.

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Searchability	.674
Brand Promise	.645
Simplicity/Speed	.703
Consistency	.693
Flow	.683
Mobile Devices	.632
Contact Options	.658
Relationship Building	.615
Total Score	.501

tool of measurement, to measure good online branding practices within the energy sector.

5.4 Larsen‘s Constructs and Elements

When looking at Larsen‘s elements in relation to the Total Score variable, there are a few interesting results that may be useful to branding managers when it comes to branding online. These constructs have been identified to be important to consumers, so it is interesting to see if they are being used by energy companies and if perhaps this has any kind of relationship to the outcome when measured against the branding rubric when it comes to the online branding elements.

Table 22 provides an overivew of the overall statistics for the appearance of Larsen‘s branding constructs identified by electricity consumers. Distinction is made between the four groups, as these elements fall into four categories: Price, Image, Service, and Infrastructure. What is interesting is the overwhelming presence of Sustainability among energy companies, as almost 50% of all the companies that were looked at during this research emphasized sustainability in some shape or form. Not far behind is Accessibility, with 38% of companies using this construct to differentiate themselves.

Table 22. Frequency of appearance of Larsen's elements.

	Yes		No	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Switching	55	20.7	211	79.3
Competition Level	79	29.7	187	70.3
Stability	39	14.7	227	85.3
Trust	58	21.8	208	78.2
Sustainability	130	48.9	136	51.1
Country of Origin	28	10.5	238	89.5
Imagery	45	16.9	221	83.1
Accessibility	100	37.6	166	62.4
Simplified Procedure	68	25.6	198	74.4
Billing	83	31.2	183	68.8
Personal Approach	27	10.2	239	89.8
Competition	91	34.2	175	65.8
Price	86	32.3	180	67.7

What is also notable are the areas that very few companies are using to differentiate themselves. Those are Country of Origin and Personal Approach, with Stability and Imagery following closely behind.

To see if any of the constructs correlates with the Total Score variable, Pearson Correlation was used. Table 23 shows how the constructs correlate to the Total Score variable, but to keep it fairly brief, only those constructs that showed a significant connection between the construct and the Total Score variable ($p < 0.05$). This shows that that out of the 13 elements, only eight correlate to the Total Score. This could indicate that these eight elements are a part of good branding practices, i.e., they fall into one of the rubric categories.

The fact that the Accessibility element shows the highest prediction factor of the Total Score variable ($r(264) = 0.52$; $p < 0.01$) is not surprising. This prediction factor suggests that if a company emphasises its accessibility, it is more likely to score higher on the

Table 23. Statistically significant correlations between Larsen's elements and Total Score.

		Total Score
Switching	Pearson Correlation	.334**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Country of Origin	Pearson Correlation	-.142*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021
Accessability	Pearson Correlation	.522**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Simplified Procedure	Pearson Correlation	.446**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Billing	Pearson Correlation	.368**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Personal Approach	Pearson Correlation	.242**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Competition	Pearson Correlation	.137*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025
Price	Pearson Correlation	.367**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

branding rubric. This should not be surprising, as two of the rubric categories deal with accessibility: Contact Options, where companies score higher for having more options and availability for customers to access them; and Relationship Building, where companies score higher when they have special areas for customers to access their accounts and seek help.

It is interesting to see that the Country of Origin construct has a negative correlation on the total score ($r(264) = -0.14$; $p < 0.05$), because it suggests that if this construct is emphasised, the company is less likely to be using online branding practices and therefore scoring lower on the rubric. This could mean that those companies are too focused on themselves to focus on the needs of the consumer.

6 Discussion

While the main goal for this research was to find out if the experience of companies or markets had an effect on online branding decisions, there were several other interesting findings when it came down to analysing the data. For instance, by documenting branding elements used online by each of the companies included in this research, it was possible to see which aspects included in the rubric are being ignored and where opportunities lie.

A few additional findings could be seen by looking at the data. The most notable result when looking at the distribution of each category within the branding rubric was the lack of search engine optimisation (SEO) (see Table 24). A significant majority of companies did not score above 1 when it came to Searchability, or 83%. This means that there is a huge opportunity for energy companies to use this to their advantage and emphasise this aspect in their marketing strategies. Another interesting finding concerning the Searchability variable, is that when it was broken down and cross-tabulated with Age of Company, it showed that the age group that did best in this category was the youngest group.

Table 24. Descriptive statistics for the Searchability variable.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Poor	221	83.1	83.1	83.1
Acceptable	12	4.5	4.5	87.6
Good	21	7.9	7.9	95.5
Very Good	6	2.3	2.3	97.7
Excellent	6	2.3	2.3	100.0
Total	266	100.0	100.0	

It is interesting to see that so few energy companies utilise SEO to be more visible on the web. While there may be a chance that the reason for most companies getting a poor rating would be that a language barrier is in place, i.e., that the search words were wrong in their native languages, it is still unlikely. First of all, almost 40% of the websites that were tested were from English speaking countries, and second of all, several search attempts were made for the other countries and the search attempt that scored the

highest was always used. It could be possible that most energy companies choose to use more traditional media to advertise their services and companies, such as television or radio commercials, or advertisements in local newspapers. Most of the time when the search string “Energy firm [insert country]” was typed into Google.com, the results were lists of energy companies within that country or continent listed on Wikipedia.org. While that was an immense help in gathering energy companies to view in this research, there is something to be said of the lack of actual businesses showing up in natural searches or paid advertisements on search engines.

Consistency is another category where most companies scored the highest rating, or 227 out of 266 companies. This is hardly surprising given that companies that had no links to social media or external sites had no opportunity to break their consistency. A more thorough analysis of each company online could provide different results for this category, but the scope of this research did not allow for more than a quick look to linked sites, if there were such links available. The highest rating does therefore not necessarily reflect what would be considered a good website.

Another interesting category was Flow, but it showed that only 52% of the companies got top scores when it came to the flow of their websites. This means that the other 48% of companies had some kind of clutter or aesthetical problems that made it difficult to see the most basic options, such as About Us, Contact Us, and Services (or a variation thereof).

It is difficult to know if the Simplicity/Speed category truly reflects what it is supposed to measure, as internet connections vary and these numbers may not reflect the experiences among general consumers. To get a truer value in this category, this needs to be tested among consumers and maybe adjusted to reflect a more subjective identification, as some websites simply appear slow even though they load the same as others.

6.1 Research Implications

Following the liberalisation of the energy markets, the need for differentiation among energy companies becomes more and more important, as consumers are able to choose from where they get their electricity. While consumers seem to be mostly unaware of

this option (Larsen, 2014), there will come a time where the competition will increase and the energy companies will have to be ready.

The main goal for this research was to study the current state of online branding in the energy markets. While the focus started on creating a map to see the development in the energy industry, it became increasingly clear that the real result of this research was the creation of the measurement tool that can be used to evaluate companies online when it comes to good branding practices. Two of the research questions, those relating to the correlation between experience and good online branding practices, showed that the correlation was not significant between those variables. However, the rubric proved to be a reliable measurement tool to measure good online branding practices, which can prove to be invaluable.

There are several possibilities in the way this tool can be used:

- It could be used to evaluate companies up for nomination for an award related to branding and/or online presence.
- It could be a tool for branding managers to measure their development when building a brand, and to regularly check that they are tending to all aspects of online branding.
- It could be used to replicate this research in a few years' time to map the development of the energy markets.

While this research could not manage to map the development of the energy markets, it could definitely be possible to do so by using the rubric and these research methods again in a few years, to find out if energy companies are increasing their online branding efforts, if they are stagnant, or if they are decreasing the emphasis on online branding.

Looking into the presence and absence of Larsen's branding elements may not seem to be important at first, but when looking at the data, it is possible to identify marketing niches and possible paths to differentiation for energy companies that are trying to build their brands. Several of these elements show a correlation between them and rubric measurements, which indicates that they have something to do with good branding practices, whether it is connected to customer relations or accessibility. It would be interesting to see if some of these elements would appear more frequently in a replicated

research or if energy companies will continue to pile themselves into the same two niches: sustainability and accessibility.

This research adds to two areas in the literature that are relatively new and unexplored: branding electricity and online branding. While Larsen (2014) has identified those elements that electricity consumers find important, this research highlights the fact that there is not much variety when it comes to energy companies differentiating themselves. Many of those elements identified by Larsen lie mostly untouched. It shows that there are many opportunities for energy companies to find new ways to stand out in the eyes of the consumer.

The branding rubric developed for this research enforces the literature of the online brand experience. A low score on the branding rubric indicates little connection with the consumer, while a high one indicates that the consumer has the opportunity to be the co-creator an online brand needs him to be. With further development, the rubric has the opportunity to become incredibly beneficial for brand managers and researchers, as it could help identify problem areas for individual brands when it comes to the online brand experience.

6.2 Suggested Amendments and Future Research

Even at the very beginning, it was clear that the Speed section of the rubric had to be adjusted, as it was clear that 15 seconds is a long time to wait for a website to load. Most web pages load within this time so in an effort to differentiate a bit more between sections this time was adjusted to 10 seconds, while a Very Good score was 10-20 seconds. To make sure all websites were tested along the same standard, all previously studied websites were tested again for speed. As a slight variation appeared during this retest, these were accepted as the new definitions for this section.

As it is very difficult for a single person to remain objective when judging websites like these, it is suggested that this research should be repeated, but instead of a single researcher evaluating each website, a group of 10 – 15 people from each country – focus groups – would view and rate each website attributed to their country and the definitive rating should be an average for these people. Only then a truer usability rating can be determined, as those are the users and consumers of those websites. Best would be if

the researcher had the opportunity to be at hand while each group tests these websites, to assist, answer questions and make sure there is coordination between countries.

Some aspects of the rubric can easily be tested by a single researcher, and is perhaps best to be done by the researcher, such as the availability on mobile devices. The speed test should either be conducted by the researcher but at several different locations and times of day, as the differences of locations and times of day can affect the loading time of websites, or by a team of people to test the connection in their own homes. The researcher also needs to pay special attention to the searchability test, and preferably get assistance from local consumers, to make sure that the search string is correct and that no search result is overlooked due to language barriers.

Another reason for conducting a similar research where consumers rate each company/website according to this rubric is the fact that a layman might be more qualified in judging whether the brand promise is being fulfilled or not; they might be satisfied with simple information or might be confused about what the company is actually offering. A single person viewing several websites within the same industry is at risk at comparing websites to each other and not judging each website by its own merits. Another risk is that a single researcher only gives his or herself limited time to view each website before making a judgement, as is the case for this research.

These results and any subsequent research made on this topic provide an invaluable insight into online branding of energy companies and it is hoped that this provides practical tools for the branding industry and the electricity sector.

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Appendix 1 – List of Energy Companies

Australia

Company	Website	Country	Year founded	Market Liberalised
ACTEWAGL	www.actewagl.com.au	Australia	2000	1991
AGL ENERGY	www.agl.com.au	Australia	1837	1991
ALINTA ENERGY	www.alintaenergy.com.au	Australia	2011	1991
AUSTRALIAN GAS NETWORKS	www.australiangasnetworks.com.au	Australia	1861	1991
CARBON ENERGY	www.carbonenergy.com.au	Australia	2006	1991
CLICK ENERGY	www.clickenergy.com.au	Australia	2006	1991
CS ENERGY	www.csenergy.com.au	Australia	1997	1991
DELTA ELECTRICITY	www.de.com.au	Australia	1996	1991
EASY BEING GREEN	www.easybeinggreen.com.au	Australia	2004	1991
ENERGYAUSTRALIA	www.energyaustralia.com.au	Australia	1995	1991
ENVIROMISSION	www.enviromisson.com.au	Australia	2000	1991
ERM POWER	www.ermpower.com.au	Australia	1998	1991
HORIZON POWER	www.horizonpower.com.au	Australia	2006	1991
JEMENA	www.jemena.com.au	Australia	1995	1991
LINC ENERGY	www.lincenergy.com	Australia	1996	1991
LUMO ENERGY	www.lumoenergy.com.au	Australia	2010	1991
MACQUARIE GENERATION	www.macgen.com.au	Australia	1996	1991
MULTINET GAS	www.uemg.com.au	Australia		1991
NEW HOPE COAL	www.newhopecoal.com.au	Australia	1904	1991

ORIGIN ENERGY	www.originenergy.com.au	Australia	2000	1991
PACIFIC HYDRO	www.pacifichydro.com	Australia	1992	1991
POWER AND WATER CORPORATION	www.powerwater.com.au	Australia	2002	1991
POWERSHOP	www.powershop.com.au	Australia	2007	1991
RAYA GROUP	www.rayagroup.com.au	Australia		1991
RED ENERGY	www.redenergy.com.au	Australia	2004	1991
SIMPLY ENERGY	www.simplyenergy.com.au	Australia	2005	1991
SNOWY HYDRO	www.snowyhydro.com.au	Australia	1949	1991
STANWELL CORPORATION	www.stanwell.com	Australia		1991
SYNERGY	www.synergy.net.au	Australia	2006	1991
WESTERN POWER	www.westernpower.com.au	Australia	2006	1991

Europe

Company	Website	Country	Year founded	Market Liberalized
VERBUND	www.verbund.com	Austria	1947	1999
ASPIRAVI	www.aspiravi.be	Belgium	2002	2003
BEE	www.bee.eu	Belgium		2003
BELPOWER	www.belpower.be	Belgium	1985	2003
ECOPOWER	www.ecopower.be	Belgium	1991	2003
ELECTRABEL	www.electrabel.com	Belgium	1905	2003
ELEXYS	www.elexys.be	Belgium		2003
ELIA SYSTEM OPERATOR	www.elia.be	Belgium	2001	2003
ENECO	www.eneco.be	Belgium		2003
ENERGIE2030	www.energie2030.be	Belgium		2003
ENOVOS	www.enovos.be	Belgium		2003
LAMPIRIS	www.lampiris.be	Belgium	2003	2003
MEGA	www.mega.be	Belgium		2003
OCTA+	www.octaplus.be	Belgium	1881	2003
POWEO	www.poweo.com	Belgium	2002	2003
TOTAL	www.gas-power.total.be	Belgium	1920	2003
TRACTEBEL ENGINEERING	www.tractebel-engineering-gdfsuez.com	Belgium	1986	2003
TREVION	www.trevion.be	Belgium	1992	2003
CEZ GROUP	www.cez.cz	Czech Republic	1992	2002
EPH	www.epholding.cz	Czech Republic	2009	2002
VEMEX	www.vemex.cz	Czech Republic	2001	2002
DONG ENERGY	www.dongenergy.com	Denmark	2006	2003
ENERGIMIDT	www.energimidt.dk	Denmark	2002	2003
ENERGINET.DK	www.energinet.dk	Denmark	2005	2003
MOLLER-MAERSK GROUP	www.maersk.com	Denmark	1904	2003
NATUR-ENERGI	www.natur-energi.dk	Denmark	2007	2003
NRGI	www.nrgi.dk	Denmark	2000	2003
SE	www.se.dk	Denmark	2006	2003
SEAS-NVE	www.seas-nve.dk	Denmark	2000	2003

FENNOVOIMA	www.fennovoima.com	Finland	2007	1995
FINGRID	www.fingrid.fi	Finland	1996	1995
FORTUM	www.fortum.com	Finland	1998	1995
GASUM OY	www.gasum.com	Finland	1994	1995
HELEN OY	www.helen.fi	Finland	1909	1995
POHJOLON VOIMA	www.pohjolanvoima.fi	Finland	1943	1995
TEOLLISUUDEN VOIMA	www.tvo.fi	Finland	1969	1995
COMPAGNIE NATIONALE DU RHONE	www.cnr.tm.fr	France	1933	2003
DALKIA	www.dalkia.fr	France	1998	2003
DIRECT ÉNERGIE	www.direct-energie.com	France	2003	2003
EDF	www.edf.com	France	1946	2003
ENERCOOP	www.enercoop.fr	France	2005	2003
ENGIE	www.engie.com	France	2008	2003
GRTGAZ	www.grtgaz.com	France	2005	2003
RESEAU GDS	www.reseau-gds.fr	France	1914	2003
SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC	www.schneider-electric.com	France	1836	2003
UNIPER	www.uniper-energy.fr	France		2003
SOLAIREDIRECT	www.solairedirect.com	France	2006	2003
50HERTZ	www.50hertz.com	Germany	2002	1998
AMPRION	www.amprion.net	Germany	2003	1998
E.ON	www.eon.com	Germany	2000	1998
ENBW	www.enbw.com	Germany	1997	1998
ENERCON	www.enercon.de	Germany	1984	1998
ENERGIEKONTOR	www.energiekontor.de	Germany	1990	1998
GASAG	www.gasag.de	Germany		1998
GREENPEACE ENERGY	www.greenpeace-energy.de	Germany	1998	1998
MAINOVA AG	www.mainova.de	Germany	1998	1998
MVV ENERGIE	www.mvv-energie.de	Germany	1999	1998
N-ERGIE	www.n-ergie.de	Germany	2000	1998
NORDEX	www.nordex-online.com	Germany	1985	1998
PNE WIND	www.pnewind.com	Germany	1995	1998
RWE	www.rwe.com	Germany	1898	1998
STADTWERKE KÖLN	www.stadtwerkekoeln.de	Germany	1960	1998

VNG	www.vng.de	Germany	1990	1998
VOLKSWIND	www.volkswind.com	Germany	1993	1998
ADMIE	www.admie.gr	Greece		2007
DEPA	www.depa.gr	Greece	1988	2007
HELLENIC PETROLEUM	www.helpe.gr	Greece	1998	2007
HERON S.A.	www.heron.gr	Greece	2000	2007
PROTERGIA	www.protergia.gr	Greece	2001	2007
PUBLIC POWER	www.dei.gr	Greece	1950	2007
RF ENERGY S.A.	www.rfenergy.gr	Greece	2006	2007
HS ORKA	www.hsorka.is	Iceland	1974	2005
LANDSVIRKJUN	www.landsvirkjun.is	Iceland	1965	2005
NORÐURORKA	www.no.is	Iceland	2000	2005
ORKA NÁTTÚRUNNAR	www.on.is	Iceland	2014	2005
ORKUBÚ VESTFJARÐAR	www.ov.is	Iceland	1978	2005
ORKUSALAN	www.orkusalan.is	Iceland	2006	2005
RARIK	www.rarik.is	Iceland	2006	2005
A2A	www.a2a.eu	Italy	2008	1995
EDISON	www.edisoncasa.it	Italy	1884	1995
ENEL	www.enel.com	Italy	1962	1995
ENEL GREEN POWER S.P.A.	www.enelgreenpower.com	Italy	2008	1995
ENI	www.eni.com	Italy	1953	1995
ERG S.P.A.	www.erg.it	Italy	1938	1995
HERA	www.gruppohera.it	Italy	2002	1995
TERNA GROUP	www.terna.it	Italy	1999	1995
ENECO HOLDING	www.eneco.com	Netherlands	1995	1996
ESSENT	www.essent.nl	Netherlands	1999	1996
GAS TERRA B.V.	www.gasterra.com	Netherlands	2005	1996
LIANDER	www.liander.nl	Netherlands	2008	1996
NUON ENERGY	www.nuon.com	Netherlands	1995	1996
OXXIO	www.oxxio.nl	Netherlands	2000	1996
TENNET	www.tennet.org	Netherlands	1998	1996
AGDER ENERGI	www.agderenergi.no	Norway	2000	1990
AGUA IMARA AS	www.aguaimara.com	Norway	2009	1990
AKERSHUS ENERGI	www.akershusenergi.no	Norway	1922	1990

ARENDALS FOSSEKOMPANI	www.arendalsfoss.no	Norway	1896	1990
ASKOY ENERGI	www.askoy-energy.no	Norway	1995	1990
BKK	www.bkk.no	Norway	1920	1990
BODO ENERGI	www.bodoenergi.no	Norway	1909	1990
EB KRAFTPRODUKSJON	www.eb.no	Norway	1999	1990
E-CO ENERGI	www.e-co.no	Norway	1892	1990
EIDSIVA	www.eidsivaenergi.no	Norway	2000	1990
ENEAS ENERGY	www.eneasenergy.com	Norway	1995	1990
FJORDKRAFT	www.fjordkraft.no	Norway	2001	1990
FREDRIKSTAD ENERGI	www.feas.no	Norway	1895	1990
HAFSLUND	www.hafslund.no	Norway	1898	1990
HELGELANDSKRAFT	www.helgkraft.no	Norway	1964	1990
HYDRO	www.hydro.com	Norway	1905	1990
INDUSTRIKRAFT MIDT-NORGE	www.industrikraft.no	Norway	1998	1990
ISTAD	www.istad.no	Norway	1918	1990
LOFOTKRAFT	www.lofotkraft.no	Norway	1998	1990
LOS AS	www.los.no	Norway	2001	1990
LYSE ENERGI	www.lysekonsern.no	Norway	1999	1990
NATURKRAFT	www.naturkraft.no	Norway	1994	1990
NORDEMORE ENERGIVERK	www.neas.mr.no	Norway	1991	1990
NTE	www.nte.no	Norway	1923	1990
SALTEN KRAFTSAMBAND	www.sks.no	Norway	1956	1990
SKAGERAK ENERGI	www.skagerakenergi.no	Norway	2001	1990
SN POWER AS	www.snpower.com	Norway	2002	1990
SOGN OG FJORDANE ENERGI	www.sfe.no	Norway	2003	1990
SOGNEKRAFT AS	www.sognekraft.no	Norway	1947	1990
STATKRAFT	www.statkraft.com	Norway	1986	1990
SVORKA	www.svorka.no	Norway		1990
TROMS KRAFT	www.tromskraft.no	Norway	1898	1990
TRONDERENERGI	www.tronderenergi.no	Norway	1950	1990

POLSKA GRUPA ENERGETYCZNA	www.pgesa.pl	Poland	1990	2007
TAURON	www.tauron-pe.pl	Poland	2006	2007
TAURON WYTWARZANIE	www.pke.pl	Poland	2000	2007
EDP - ENERGIAS DE PORTUGAL	www.edp.pt	Portugal	1976	1995
GALP ENERGIA	www.galpenergia.com	Portugal	1999	1995
REDES ENERGÉTICAS NACIONAIS	www.ren.pt	Portugal	1994	1995
ACCIONA ENERGY	www.acciona-energia.com	Spain	1989	1997
EDP RENOVÁVEIS	www.edpr.com	Spain	2007	1997
ENAGAS	www.enagas.com	Spain	1972	1997
ENDESA	www.endesa.com	Spain	1944	1997
FERSA ENERGIAS RENOVABLES	www.fersa.es	Spain	2003	1997
GAS NATURAL FENOSA	www.gasnaturalfenosa.com	Spain	1991	1997
IBERDROLA	www.iberdrola.com	Spain	1992	1997
TORRESOL ENERGY	www.torresolenergy.com	Spain	2008	1997
E.ON SVERIGE	www.eon.se	Sweden	1906	1996
MÄLERENERGI	www.malarenergi.se	Sweden	1861	1996
SKELLEFTEÅ KRAFT	www.skekraft.se	Sweden	1906	1996
UMEÅ ENERGI	www.umeaenergi.se	Sweden	1887	1996
VATTENFALL	www.vattenfall.com	Sweden	1909	1996
ABB	www.abb.com/	Swiss	1988	2009
ALPIQ	www.alpiq.com	Swiss	2009	2009
AXPO HOLDING AG	www.axpo.com	Swiss	2001	2009
AZIENDA ELETTRICA TICINESE	www.aet.ch	Swiss	1958	2009
BKW ENERGIE AG	www.bkw.ch	Swiss	1898	2009
ETRION CORPORATION	www.etrion.com	Swiss	2008	2009
GLENCORE PLC	www.glencore.com	Swiss	1974	2009
GUNVOR GROUP LTD	www.gunvorgroup.com	Swiss	2000	2009

INTERACTIVE ENERGY AG	www.inte-energy.com	Swiss	2015	2009
KRAFTWERKE OBERHASLI AG	www.grimselstrom.ch	Swiss	1925	2009
LANDIS+GYR	www.landisgyr.com	Swiss	1896	2009
MERCURIA ENERGY GROUP	www.mercuria.com	Swiss	2004	2009
REPOWER	www.repower.com	Swiss	1904	2009
TRAFIGURA	www.trafigura.com	Swiss	1993	2009
VITOL	www.vitol.com	Swiss	1966	2009
AGGREKO	www.aggreko.com	UK	1962	1989
BAYWIND ENERGY CO-OPERATIVE	www.baywind.coop	UK	1996	1989
BES UTILITIES	www.besutilities.co.uk	UK	2002	1989
BRIGHTON ENERGY CO-OPERATIVE	www.brightonenergy.org.uk	UK	2010	1989
BRITISH GAS	www.britishgas.co.uk	UK	1997	1989
CENTRICA	www.centrica.com	UK	1997	1989
DRAX	www.drax.com	UK	2005	1989
E.ON UK	www.eonenergy.com	UK	1989	1989
ECOTRICITY	www.ecotricity.co.uk	UK	1996	1989
EDF ENERGY	www.edfenergy.com	UK	2002	1989
ENERGY4ALL	www.energy4all.coop	UK	2002	1989
ENTERGY	www.entergy.com	UK	1913	1989
FIRMUS ENERGY	www.firmusenergy.co.uk	UK		1989
FIRST: UTILITY	www.first-utility.com	UK	2008	1989
FLOW ENERGY	www.flowenergy.uk.com	UK	1998	1989
GOOD ENERGY	www.goodenergy.co.uk	UK	2002	1989
GREEN ENERGY	www.greenenergyuk.com	UK	2001	1989
GREEN STAR ENERGY	www.mygreenstarenergy.com	UK	2013	1989
HORIZON NUCLEAR POWER	www.horizonnuclearpower.com	UK	2009	1989
INTELLIGENT ENERGY	www.intelligent-energy.com	UK	2001	1989
ISUPPLYENERGY	www.isupplyenergy.co.uk	UK	2012	1989

LOCO2 ENERGY	www.loco2energy.com	UK	2009	1989
NATIONAL GRID	www.nationalgrid.com	UK	1990	1989
NPOWER	www.npower.com	UK	2002	1989
OVO ENERGY	www.ovoenergy.com/	UK	2009	1989
SCOTTISHPOWER	www.scottishpower.com	UK	1990	1989
SPARK ENERGY	www.sparkenergy.co.uk	UK	2007	1989
SSE	www.sse.com	UK	1998	1989
UTILITA	www.utilita.co.uk	UK	2003	1989
VIRIDIAN	www.viridiangroup.co.uk	UK	1998	1989
UTILITY WAREHOUSE (NPOWER)	www.uwdc.co.uk	UK	2002	1989
THE MIDCOUNTIES CO-OPERATIVE	www.midcounties.coop	UK	2005	1989

United States of America

Company	Website	Country	Year founded	Market Liberalized
3DEGREES	www.3degreesinc.com	USA	2007	1982
AES CORPORATION	www.aes.com	USA	1981	1982
AGL RESOURCES	www.aglenergyservices.com	USA		1982
ALAMEDA MUNICIPAL POWER	www.alamedamp.com	USA	1887	1982
ALLIANT ENERGY	www.alliantenergy.com	USA	1917	1982
ALPENA POWER COMPANY	www.alpenapower.com	USA	1881	1982
AMBIT ENERGY	ww2.ambitenergy.com	USA	2006	1982
AMEREN	www.ameren.com	USA	1997	1982
AMERICAN STATES WATER	www.aswater.com	USA	1929	1982
AMIGO ENERGY	www.amigoenergy.com	USA	2003	1982
ATLANTIC POWER CORPORATION	www.atlanticpower.com	USA	2004	1982
AVISTA UTILITIES	www.avistautilities.com	USA	1889	1982
BALTIMORE GAS ELECTRIC COMPANY	www.bge.com	USA	1816	1982
BEACON POWER	www.beaconpower.com	USA	1997	1982
BEAR VALLEY ELECTRIC	www.bves.com	USA	1929	1982
BLACK HILLS CORPORATION	www.blackhillscorp.com	USA	1941	1982
CHAMPION ENERGY	www.championenergyservices.com	USA	2005	1982
CHOPTANK ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE	www.choptankelectric.coop	USA	1938	1982
CMS ENERGY	www.cmsenergy.com	USA	1886	1982
COMED	www.comed.com	USA	1907	1982
CONSOL ENERGY	www.consolenergy.com	USA	1864	1982

CONSOLIDATED POWER SUPPLY	www.consolidatedpower.com	USA	1986	1982
CPS ENERGY	www.cpsenergy.com	USA	1942	1982
CUPERTINO ELECTRIC	www.cei.com	USA	1954	1982
DIRECT ENERGY	www.directenergy.com	USA	1986	1982
DTE ENERGY	www.dteenergy.com	USA	1995	1982
DYNEGY	www.dynegy.com	USA	1984	1982
ELEMENT MARKETS	www.elementmarkets.com	USA	2005	1982
EXELON	www.exeloncorp.com	USA	2000	1982
FIRSTENERGY	www.firstenergycorp.com	USA	1997	1982
FLORIDA POWER & LIGHT	www.fpl.com	USA	1925	1982
GDF SUEZ ENERGY RESOURCES NA	www.gdfsuezenergyresources.com	USA		1982
GENIE ENERGY	www.genie.com	USA		1982
IDT ENERGY	www.idtenergy.com/	USA	2004	1982
IGS ENERGY	www.igsenergy.com	USA	1989	1982
INVENERGY	www.invenergyllc.com	USA	2001	1982
IPL	www.iplpower.com	USA	1926	1982
ISLAND PACIFIC ENERGY	www.islandpacificenergy.com	USA	2007	1982
KENTUCKY UTILITIES	www.lge-ku.com	USA	1912	1982
LUMINANT	www.luminant.com	USA	1882	1982
NEXTERA ENERGY	www.nexteraenergy.com	USA	1925	1982
PGE	www.pge.com	USA	1902	1982
PSEG	www.pseg.com	USA	1903	1982
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON	www.sce.com	USA	1886	1982

Appendix 2 – Online Branding Rubric

	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Brand promise: • *rational values* • *emotional values* • *promised values*	No visible values.	Some values presented but those are not reflected in the look, feel and function of the website.	Some values presented that are reflected in the look and feel of the website but no practical function.	Clear values are visible and reflected in the tone, look and feel of the website but it offers few or no practical functions to back it up.	Rational, emotional and promised values are clearly visible and enacted in unique ways, e.g. a calculator in a company that promises cheap energy and good service.
Searchability*: (Search: "energy company [insert country]" + the same in the native language)*	No visible signs on the first page on Google.com.	Only visible below the halfway mark on the first page on Google.com.	Visible in the first 4 results on Google.com.	Paid AdWords on Google.com.	Several related links on the first page on Google.com.
Simplicity/speed: • *movement* • *programs* • *images* • *loading time*	Heavy images, videos or other programs, requires visitors to download specific programs to view the website, takes more than 30 seconds to load.	Heavy images, videos or other programs, takes 20-30 seconds to load.	A few moving images take time to load, takes more than 15-20 seconds to load OR option to load a less heavy website.	Some images take time to load, otherwise free of heavy programs, takes 10-15 seconds to load OR option to load a less heavy website.	No heavy programs or few images, loads within 10 seconds.
Consistency*:* • *colour* • *logo* • *social media* • *regional vs. global*	No apparent colour scheme, inconsistent logo usage, inconsistent social media sites, regional and global pages are completely different.	Inconsistency in colour schemes throughout the site, inconsistent logo usage, social media sites do not match, regional and global pages are completely different.	Inconsistency in colour schemes throughout the site, inconsistent logo usage, social media sites do not match, some difference between regional and global pages.	Similar colours are used throughout the site, consistent logo usage, social media sites do not match home page, some difference between regional and global pages.	Similar colours are used throughout the site, consistent logo usage, social media sites match home page, regional and global pages match.

Flow: • *info re: company* • *navigation* • *basic information*	Information about the company is unclear, complicated to find basic information such as Billings, Contact Us and Products, if any are available.	Start page is listed, navigation is somewhat complicated, complicated to find basic information such as Billings, Contact Us and Products.	Start page is clearly listed, some clutter restricts visibility of basic information such as Billings, Contact Us and Products.	Start page is clearly listed, information about the company is clear, some basic information such as Billings, Contact Us and Products visible right away.	Start page is clearly listed, information about the company is clear, access to basic information such as Billings, Contact Us and Products clearly visible right away.
Mobile devices: • *mobile version* • *responsive* • *app* • *android vs. iOS*	A mobile version is not available and website does not work on mobile devices.	A mobile version is not available but website works somewhat on mobile devices.	A mobile version is available but does not work on some mobile devices.	A mobile version is available, works well on mobile devices.	A mobile version and an app are available and work well on mobile devices.
Contact options*:* • *hours* • *methods*	No visible way of contacting the company.	Company can be contacted during business hours via one of the following: landline, email or online live chat support.	Company can be contacted during business hours via two to three of the following: landline, email, online live chat support or social media.	Company can be contacted via landline, email, online live chat support or social media and is available during business hours.	Company can be contacted via landline, email, online live chat support or social media and is available in one form or another 24/7.
Relationship building	Customers have little to no access to the company online.	Customers have limited access to the company via Contact Us methods. No visible areas to ask questions or create discussions online.	Customers have access to Frequently Asked Questions and can ask their own questions OR discussion forums online.	Customers have access to their own area but information about what is accessible within is not available.	Customers have access to their own area where they can see billing information, customer history and provide feedback about their experiences. Visitors have access to information about this area.