Research Report

for Manga Tenshi

Creating brand awareness in Belgium and the Netherlands

By Suzanne Zuurman

Creating Brand Awareness

in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Research report.

International Communication

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Executive Summary.

Manga Tenshi is an online store that sells Japanese comic books, more commonly known as manga, and related merchandise. They sell through their webshop and at conventions where manga fans get together. However, as a start-up, Manga Tenshi is struggling getting its name out there. They are targeting anime and manga fans in the Netherlands and Belgium, and are also unsure whether or not differentiations should be made between the brand awareness strategies for Dutch and Belgian potential customers. This lack of knowing how to create brand awareness will be the focus point of this research project. As such, the research objective of this report is to give recommendations to Manga Tenshi on how they can create a brand awareness strategy for the Netherlands and Belgium.

In order to do this, three research areas have been derived. The first one is anime subculture and Dutch and Belgian cultural differences, the second is building brand awareness, and the last one is consumer behaviour. Using the outcomes of the desk research revolving these three areas, research questions were derived.

1. How do the anime subculture and the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Belgium influence their view on Manga Tenshi and the approach of creating awareness?

2. To what extent can the knowledge of the existing businesses and the potential customers give insights into how to create brand awareness?

3. To what extent can the knowledge of existing businesses and potential customers give insights into the behaviour and preferences of customers?

In order to answer these questions, interviews with existing successful businesses in the anime and manga niche were conducted, as well as surveys answered by potential Dutch and Belgian customers. The results provided valuable data which then was used to form a conclusion and recommendations. These led to a concise advice that will help Manga Tenshi create brand awareness.

The results showed that category need usually comes into play first when manga is bought, and that both transformational and informational motivations play a role in both countries. This led to a mixture of both transformational and informational strategies to be used when setting up a campaign. Considering this strategy and the findings, the following advice is given to manga Tenshi.

Manga Tenshi should visit two conventions, one in the Netherlands, and one in Belgium. The convention will be the best place to give a boost to the company's brand awareness, as it's a place where the target group comes together and is unavoidably brought into contact with Manga Tenshi. During this con, Manga Tenshi has to focus on bringing across its USP and show its brand image, as well as showing they have what their customers value in a manga selling business. In order to do this, there are several tools and methods to keep in mind.

First of all it is important to carefully select the volunteers working at the stand. They have to be knowledgeable and enthusiastic, as this is preferred by potential customers. Secondly, flyers should be created and distributed. This helps repeating the message, and gets across necessary information. Additions to the banner serve the same function. Though as the banner should be easy to understand, a differentiation between the Dutch and Belgian banner is preferred. This way the part that is most important to the Dutch and Belgian customer can be shown to them separately. It is then important to research the preferred titles of the customers before going to the convention, as the preferences between both countries are different. Lastly, preferences towards promotions and their relation with results concerning general differences between the Dutch and Belgian customers leads to a concise advice concerning how to handle promotions.

Aside from this, it is advisable to start the creation of a gift giving economy on social media where existing and potential customers of Manga Tenshi can form new relations with other fans and get to know the people behind the company. This is because the research shows the importance of community, relationship building and word of mouth. Social media should be focused on creating a community rather than sales. In order to create a gift giving economy, there are three points of importance. Firstly, it has to be focused on relationships instead of transactions. Secondly, it has to be focused on social currency, and lastly, status has to be earned, not bought. The relationship focus and community building can be done by starting up a discord communication server. The creation of social currency can be done through art contests. The combination of these will work towards earning status for Manga Tenshi. Changing the content posted on social media platforms such as Facebook to focus more on conversations and sharing instead of transactions and facts about the store will also contribute to this goal.

Because of the partnership between Manga Tenshi and Screen70, a screen printing company, and the fact it has volunteers for the convention stand, there are no expenses to be made aside from the given promotions and the convention dealer fee. This helps keeping everything within budget. Timewise, a strict planning will help bringing Manga Tenshi towards their goal. This is a 9 week planning for the conventions, and a 14 week start-up and ongoing planning for building the gift giving economy.

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Project context.

Before getting into the project, an introduction to Manga Tenshi, the small start-up founded by myself, and the niche it operates in is required. The company sells second-hand manga, which are pocket-sized Japanese comic books. Manga exist in numerous languages, with English being the company's focus language. This being said, the Manga part of the name makes sense. Tenshi is Japanese for Angel, and is added as a way to identify the brand. Tenshi is a well-known word in the anime (the animated version of manga) niche, as it is a focus point of many stories. It creates opportunities for branding and relates directly to the angel-like mascot. Manga Tenshi sells to the people in the niche who already know terms such as manga, anime and tenshi. Sales are done both through online platforms as well as during anime conventions, where manga fans come together.

Problem analysis

As a small start-up in a lively niche community, Manga Tenshi struggles with creating brand awareness. In the niche, many different fans and many different companies exist (Appendix 1.1). Although there are already some existing customers that express their satisfaction towards the price and service, these are but few. Due to the positive feedback, it is believed that increasing awareness will likely also bring sales. However, the best way to reach the target audience is still unknown.

Manga Tenshi wishes to target both Belgium and the Netherlands, considering fans from both countries often come together during conventions and the geographical distance is rather short. The company has sold their products to Belgium customers before, and found including Belgium would be a great way to increase their reach while minimizing issues such as shipping costs. However, it is not yet known whether it is necessary to differentiate methods to create awareness and reach potential customers in the Dutch and Belgium market, and how to.

The goal of this research project is to give recommendations to Manga Tenshi on how to create brand awareness for both the Dutch and Belgium market. This project uses practice oriented research, and is placed at the diagnostic stage of the intervention cycle. The first stage, the problem analysis, has already been completed as the problem is clear for the owner of Manga Tenshi. Considering it is a one man company without many stakeholders, not many people have to be made aware of the problems during this stage. In the second stage, the diagnostic stage, the problem's background is identified and a solution will be found through research. Considering it is not yet possible to design an exact plan of execution, as is expected in the design stage, the diagnostic stage is where the project will focus on.

Organizational context

Manga Tenshi is a small start-up based in the Netherlands. As the founder of Manga Tenshi, some information in this report such as the history of the company comes from my own experience and cannot be cited using secondary sources.

Aside from the sales of English translated manga, Manga Tenshi also occasionally sell pvc figures based on characters from the books, DVD's and other relevant merchandise. Their target group consists of manga fans in the anime and manga subculture. Manga Tenshi believes that due to the nature of this subculture, there can be no segmentations based on age or gender. Demographically they focus on The Netherlands and Belgium.

Manga Tenshi's mission is to create an environment where fans can buy affordable manga, and enable everyone that wishes so to create their own manga collection. Manga Tenshi believes that it should be made possible for people who earn less money, or those who do not want to spend large amounts of money, to still buy any book they want.

So far, communication with clients has been done both through Facebook and personal conversations. They have a small following on social media, though it is barely worth mentioning. The website was up and running for a while, but some issues arose and it had to go under construction. It got back up only a few weeks ago. The company was also present at the Dutch anime conventions Dynamiccon and Tomocon, where a lot of personal interaction with clients took place. Though they were small convention with relatively little visitors, the site and facebook page got many new views afterwards, and sales at the convention went very well. Though Manga Tenshi is run by one person, during conventions there are multiple people voluntarily helping out at the stand. These people occassionaly help Manga Tenshi with other activities as well, such as creating designs or updating the website. Aside from these volunteers, they also have a partner that supplies printed material. This partner, the screen printing company Screen70, has among other delivered Manga Tenshi's banners and business cards free of charge.

Currently Manga Tenshi does not have a brand awareness strategy, though there are plans of starting a blog in order to get people to their website. There is little internal communication between the owner and the voluntary helpers at conventions about changes, unless it concerns activities at conventions. Manga Tenshi is also active at facebook, where new updates concerning the webshop are frequently posted.

For more information about Manga Tenshi, see appendix 2.

Theoretical Framework.

Anime subculture and Dutch and Belgium cultural differences

Manga Tenshi's target group consists of the manga reading and collecting individuals from the anime and manga subculture. This subculture is very broad and consists of many disparate audiences. This is evident by the many specific genres anime is divided into, each of which targets a different genre and age range. As such, there can be no age or gender linked to the general term of 'anime and manga fans' (Orsini, 2017). A study by Orsini (2017) shows that the presence of females at anime conventions accounts for more or less 50% of the total participants, debunking the stereotype that this subculture consists of mostly males. There are of course similarities between people within the subculture, but these mainly concern lifestyle. There seems to be a massive overlap between anime fans and people who barely leave the house and spend a lot of time online (Orsini, 2017).

Research done by Rachael Lefler (2016) digs into why many people from within the autism spectrum seem to be interested in manga and anime. She notes that though not everyone in the anime community has autism, they are noticeably present. This is backed up by a video news article made by BBC news about the anime and manga shop TokyoToys in England (BBC news, Jun. 20th 2016). The owner there mentions the frequent visits by autistic people. Rachael Lefler (2016) mentions that there are many good reasons why this phenomenon may occur. One reason is that people with autism tend to look for a way to escape reality. Manga and anime offers this escapism to the readers and viewers through its exaggerated actions and stories. Other reasons include the fact that manga and anime stories often include friendship lessons, show fictional struggles they can relate with, or show school bullying. Another reason is the existence of the anime community, which is one of the most open and tolerating communities around. This creates a possible safe space. A final possible reason could be the fact that it satisfies an autist's need for obsession (Rachael Lefler, 22nd 2016).

Matsutani (May 2009) talks about the popularity of manga among Japanese adults. He notes that nowadays, adults are targeted by the creation of manga with adult themes including business, politics, history or gambling (Matsutani, 2009). With the existence of manga targeted specifically to adults, and the manga aimed to satisfy a younger audience, the age span of manga readers keeps increasing.

Dutch and Belgium cultural differences.

Considering the fact that Manga Tenshi aims to target both the Netherlands and Belgium, there is a need of understanding their main differences and how these could affect business. Hofstede shows some clear differences with the use of his cultural dimensions and country scores. The figure below shows Hofstede's dimensions and the scores the Netherlands and Belgium got for each dimension.
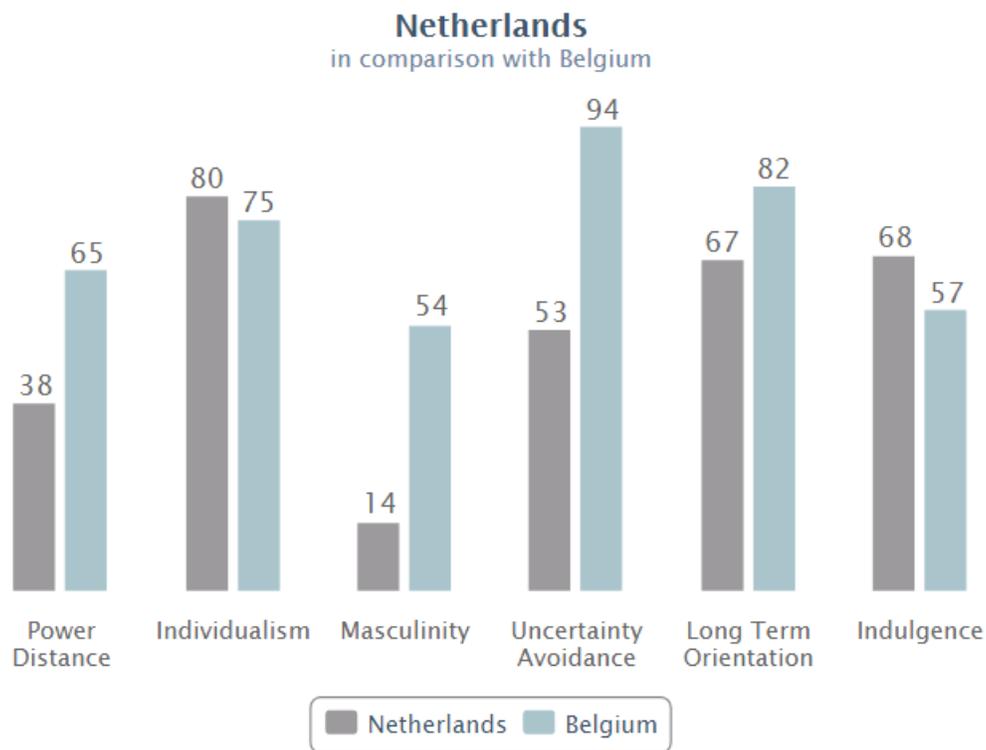
Figure 1. Hofstede dimensions Belgium and the Netherlands (Hofstede, N.D.).

The first shown dimension with great difference is power distance. There is a noticeable difference here, with Belgium scoring high and the Netherlands scoring low on power distance. This means that in the Netherlands, people are generally independent and stand for equal rights. Employees are to be consulted, and communication is direct and can be less formal. In Belgium however, there is more of a perceived hierarchy and inequalities are accepted. Superiors have privileges and can be hard to reach (Hofstede, N.D.). In the case of Manga Tenshi, this can relate to how 'superior' Manga Tenshi wishes to portray itself to Dutch and Belgium customers, and how closely related and informal they can get.

The second dimension worth looking at is masculinity. With a score of 14, the Netherlands score very low, meaning they are a feminine country. Belgium on the other hand, scores a lot higher on masculinity. Feminine countries value caring for others and quality of life, those are the keys to success. In a masculine country, people are more focused on achievements and competition. Belgium is somewhere in the middle between the two, whereas the Netherlands is clearly feminine (Hofstede, N.D.). This can relate to what values are important to show Dutch and Belgian customer.

The third dimension to look at is uncertainty avoidance. Though both countries score rather high, there still is a huge difference. The Netherlands scores just high enough to say they have a preference for uncertainty avoidance, but it gets nowhere near as strong as the Belgium feelings towards uncertainty avoidance. Though Dutch people might like a clear structure, rules and a good idea of what is going to happen, it is not always essential. Belgian people however, have one of the highest scores on uncertainty avoidance. Structure and clarity is a must, and without clear planning and rules stress may occur (Hofstede, N.D.). This is important for Manga Tenshi's approach because of the different amount of extra information and certainty Dutch and Belgian customers need.

The other three dimensions all have fairly equal scores for both countries. Though it is worth mentioning both the Netherlands and Belgium have high scores on individualism, meaning individuals usually take more care of themselves rather than of the community. They also score high on long term orientation, and have medium to high scores on indulgence. The higher score on indulgence means they are more willing to release their desires and impulses and enjoy their activities to the fullest (Hofstede, N.D.). Especially the higher scores on indulgence can be very important to Manga Tenshi, and could possibly be something to focus on.

Building brand awareness

Social media branding.

According to an interview done by Hart (2009), Ruth-Ann Thorn gave insights about social network as a marketing tool. She mentions that customers are interested in the culture and the image of a business. They have to be loyal and dedicated to what you are branding, so you have to think about what it is they are going to be loyal to. Social media can play a huge part when trying to bring across this image.

Building a following is of course the first step to take. You first have to know your target group. Outline who you want your followers to be, look at your business from their point of view, and start from there. Everything surrounding your business is important when building brand awareness: the logo, mission, values, looks, what you sell and who your partners are. Everything has to be related to the likes and preferences of the follower. Thorn also mentions a facebook page is not supposed to be focused on product sales. It is a long-term commitment where interacting with customers and having them become part of your business are the main factors. The goal is to create a place for clients to become more intimately involved with the business and see you as a human being rather than just a business (Hart, 2009).

Bonchek (2012) notes that social media is part of the gift giving economies. Because, as Hart (2009) also mentioned, people are on social media for relationships, not for purchases. Boncheck (2012) notes that gift economies differ greatly from market economies, and that understanding this provides insights into what does and does not work with social media and what can be done to be more successful. He mentions three main points of difference between market and gift economies. The first one is context. In a market economy, the focus lies on transactions, while in a gift economy, relationships get the focus. The second one is currency. In a market economy, exchanges are done purely with financial currency. However, in a gift economy, social currency is used. The difference is that social currency does not have a set value, but depends on the preferences of the receiver. The last point is status and whether it is earned or bought. Though a status can also be earned in a market economy, it cannot be bought in a gift economy. Boncheck (2012) mentions that brands that want to succeed and create awareness trough social media have to follow the principles of gift economies.

Bonchek (2012) also notes differences in levels for each of the three points, which show how well your brand is on the way. For the first point, building relationships, the base step is to give information in order to drive transactions. This can be improved by creating relationships with individuals, and will be best when helping and enable people to create relationships with each other. For the second point, creating social currencies, focussing on promotions and discounts is the base step. This can be improved by seeing your own product as a social currency, and will be best when new kinds of social currencies are created while keeping your brand in mind. For the last point, earning status, the base step is to celebrate the companies own accomplishments. This can be improved by celebrating others' accomplishments, and will be best when helping and enabling people to celebrate each other's accomplishments.

These principles can all be put into practice by asking yourself a specific set of questions, that, when answered in order, can provide new ideas about how to work with the principles. Of course, for these questions, you have to put yourself in the situation of the customer. The first question would be 'what traditions, activities or social conventions are carried out concerning your products?' Then ask 'what do people do, share, exchange or talk about during these activities?' Lastly wonder how the experience during these activities can be enhanced with something new or better (Bonchek 2012).

Putting these insights into practice will allow you to improve your social media strategy and increase brand awareness and increase the connection with customers.

The model of brand awareness and brand attitude advertising strategies.

Percy and Rossiter (1992) describe the model of brand awareness and brand attitude advertising strategies. The model is split into two parts, the first one being brand awareness. Brand awareness touches upon both brand recognition and brand recall. The second part is brand attitude, which addresses motivation and involvement.

BRAND AWARENESS	
Brand Recognition (at-point-of-purchase)	Brand Recall (prior to purchase)
BRAND ATTITUDE	
Low Involvement Informational	Low Involvement Transformational
High Involvement Informational	High Involvement Transformational

Figure 2. The model of brand awareness and brand attitude (Percy & Rossiter, 1992.)

As mentioned before, the brand awareness part of the model considers both brand recognition and brand recall. It is important to know the difference between these two types of brand awareness so one can conclude which type is most commonly used by their customers. The difference is dependent on the customer and what communication effect comes first: brand awareness or category need. Brand recognition is needed when brand awareness comes into play first. This happens when a person is presented with the brand first, and he then needs to consider whether or not they need or want the item. In this case, recognition of the brand reminds them of the category need. Brand recall on the other hand, is needed when category need comes first. This happens when a buyer makes a decision and the brand is not present. They experience category need, and then rely on memory to recall brands to generate options. Usually, as long as the recall is positive, the first brand that comes to mind will be the one the buyer will use.

Brand attitude portrays attitude "as referring to a buyer's overall evaluation of a brand with respect to its perceived ability to meet a currently relevant motivation" (Percy & Rossiter, 1992). They mention four characteristics that have to be understood about brand attitude. The first one is that brand attitude is dependent on the buyer's current relevant motivation. If this motivation changes, so may the evaluation of the brand. The second is that brand attitude consists of both a logical and emotional component. The logical component guides the buyer's behavior, and the emotional component energizes the behavior. The third one mentions that the logical component may include various specific benefit beliefs. These beliefs do not form the attitude, but are in fact the reason for the attitude. The last characteristic mentions that "brand attitude is a relative construct" (Percy & Rossiter, 1992.). When there is a category need, one brand will be picked. This brand is the brand that best meets the underlying motivation when being compared to other known brands.

As mentioned before, both involvement and motivation are important when it comes to brand attitude. Involvement is about the degree of involvement of a buyer when making a purchase decision. Low involvement usually means that little information or past experience is sufficient, whereas high involvement means that research is required before making a purchase. Motivation is also important, and there are eight possible motivations that can link to an advertised brand. These five negative and three positive motives that customers are seeking to fulfil can be seen in the table below.

Motivation	Motivating Process
Negative	
1. Problem removal	Seeking solution to a current problem
2. Problem avoidance	Seeking to avoid an anticipated problem
3. Incomplete satisfaction	Seeking a better product
4. Mixed approach avoidance	Seeking resolution to a conflict caused by both positive and negative attributes in the same product
5. Normal depletion	Seeking to maintain regular supply of product
Positive	
6. Sensory gratification	Seeking extra physiological enjoyment from the product
7. Intellectual stimulation	Seeking extra psychological stimulation from the product
8. Social approval	Seeking an opportunity for social reward from the product

Figure 3. The eight basic motives (Percy & Rossiter, 1992.).

Considering everything mentioned above, Percy & Rossiter (1992) came up with a 2x2 model of motivation and involvement, leading to a set of strategies. In these strategies, the negative motives are describes as informational, and the positive motives as transformational.

Type of Decision	INFORMATIONAL Negative drive reduction	TRANSFORMATIONAL Positive drive enhancement
LOW INVOLVEMENT (trial experience sufficient)	• aspirin • light beer • detergents • routine industrial products	• soda • regular beer • snacks and dessert • cosmetics
HIGH INVOLVEMENT (search and conviction required prior to purchase)	• housing • professional calculators • cars (print) • new industrial products	• vacations • fashion clothing • cars (television) • corporate image

Figure 4. Examples in the 2x2 model (Percy & Rossiter, 1992.).

Considering the fact that Manga Tenshi mainly sells rather cheap books, the involvement in this purchase is rather low. It can be, however, both informational as transformational. It can both solve a problem, such as thinking manga are too expensive and looking for a cheaper alternative, as well as give new enjoyment. As such, there are two strategies from Percy and Rossiter (1992) that matter. The strategies given are seen in the figure below.

Table 3. Specific Advertising Tactics for the Low Involvement/ Transformational Brand Attitude Strategies

Strategy	Tactic
Correct emotional portrayal of the motivation	• Emotional authenticity is the key element and is the single benefit • The execution of the emotion must be unique to the brand • The target audience must like the ad
Adequate logical support for perceived brand delivery	• Brand delivery is by association and is often implicit • Repetition serves as a build-up function and a reinforcement function

Table 2. Specific Advertising Tactics for the Low Involvement/Informational Brand Attitude Strategies

Strategy	Tactic
Correct emotional portrayal of the motivation	• Use a simple problem-solution format • It is not necessary for people to like the ad
Adequate logical support perceived brand delivery	• Include only one or two benefits or a single group of benefits • Benefit claims should be stated extremely • The benefits should easily be learned in one or two exposures

Figure 5. Brand attitude strategies for low involvement (Percy & Rossiter, 1992.).

Consumer behavior

Unique Selling Proposition.

Unique Selling proposition, or USP, is a term created by Rosser Reeves in 1960 which explains what is necessary to make a product or service wanted by consumers. Though this has everything to do with marketing a product, it also relates to consumer behaviour as consumers want something unique that sets the product apart. Reeves (1960) mentions that the term is often misused, leading to the inability to capture the audience's attention. Correctly using the USP can only be done when taking all three parts of the USP into consideration.

The first important part of the USP is that each advertisement must include a *proposition* made to the consumer. It must show a benefit the consumer can get by purchasing the product. The second part says that the proposition must be one that your competitors do not offer. It has to be something unique. The third part says that the proposition has to be so strong that it can move the audience and get them interested in your brand (Reeves, 1960). The proposition has to include something of interest to the audience, and as such, it is necessary to know what the audience values and might like as an USP.

Brand equity model.

Keller (2001) created the brand equity model, which illustrates the steps necessary to build strong brand equity. Brand equity being the term describing the value of having a well-known brand name that generates revenue just by brand recognition. The idea behind the model is quite simple. In order to have a strong brand, customers must have specific and positive beliefs and perceptions about it. When there is a strong equity, customers will buy more and be more loyal. They are more likely to recommend your company to others, and overall are more likely to increase sales. This model shows the thought process of the consumer and what steps they go through when getting to know a brand. Though it does focus on what the company can do during each of these steps, understanding that these come from the behaviour and wishes of the consumer is necessary. In the figure below, the four steps of the brand equity model are illustrated.
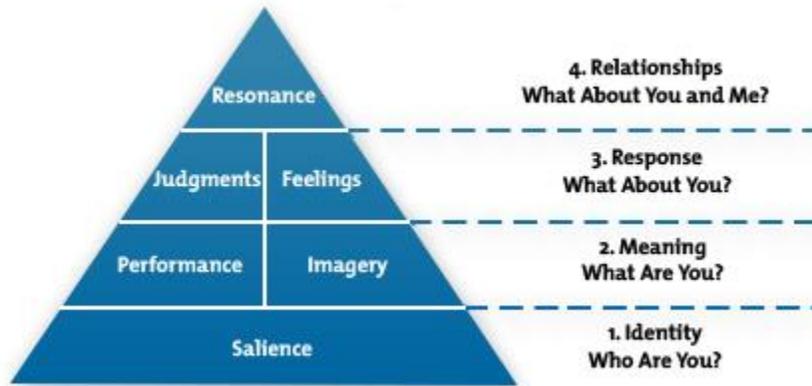
Figure 6. Brand Equity Model (Keller, 2001).

Each step in the brand equity model relates directly to questions or concerns a customer will have about a brand. The pyramid shape shows that resonance cannot be achieved without first going through all the other steps. The first step is the brand identity. Here, the customer might wonder who you are. The goal here is to create awareness, and making sure that brand perceptions are in line with what the company wishes customers to perceive. The second step is brand meaning. In this step, the goal is to communicate what your brand stands for. This section is split into two parts: performance and imagery. Performance is about how well your customer's needs are met when they buy your product. This includes product durability and reliability, but also service effectiveness, efficiency, design and price. Like performance, imagery is also about how well the product meets the customer's needs. However, these are the social and psychological needs. These are the steps that are relevant to this research. The following steps are needed to build towards brand resonance, however will not be focused on during this research due to its scope and the low amount of existing customers to give feedback.
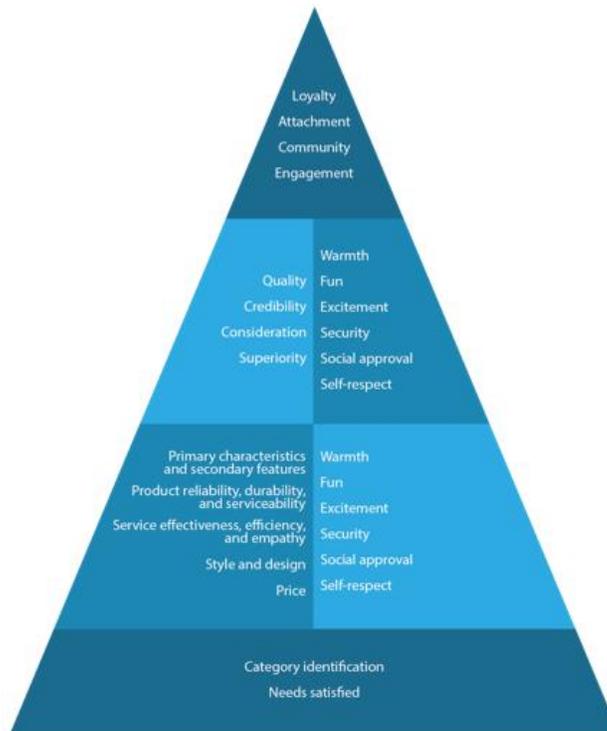
Figure 7. Brand Equity Model (Keller, 2001).

Research Design

Research Objective

The research objective of this report is to give recommendations to Manga Tenshi on how they can create a brand awareness strategy for the Netherlands and Belgium

by

providing insight into the preferences of potential customers, and the opinions and experience of existing anime-industry businesses about the anime subculture and Dutch and Belgian cultural differences, building brand awareness and consumer behaviour.

This A-part of the research objective tackles Manga Tenshi's problem and the cultural aspects they were unsure of. As mentioned before, Manga Tenshi both wants awareness as well as to differentiate where necessary considering cultures. An objective bringing these both points together is necessary, while still manageable.

The B-part of the research objective explains the process and steps that will be taken to reach the objective. Both potential customers as well as successful existing businesses in the anime and manga niche will be reached out to through surveys and interviews, which will provide the necessary information. The potential customers are the only group that can give clear insights into the opinions and preferences of the target group, while the successful existing businesses can help give insights into strategies that work for this target group. Together they can help give a clear view on what the target group wants, and what is actually feasible to work as a brand awareness strategy.

Research Framework
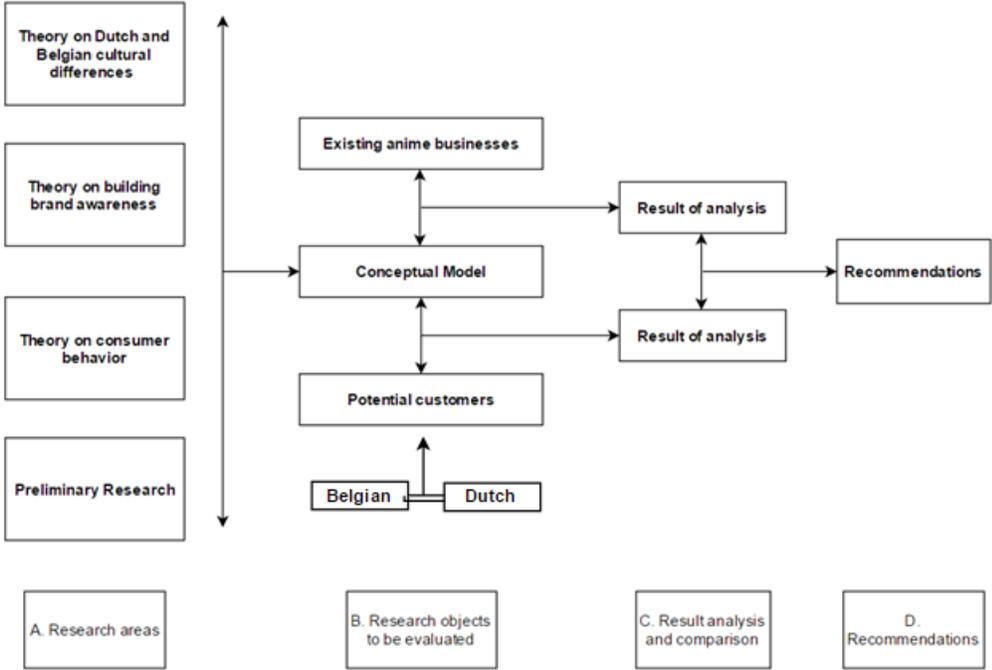
Figure 8. Research framework.

Figure 8 shows the research framework, including all the steps that will be carried out during this research project. The research areas and preliminary research create the conceptual model, which will be used to evaluate the research objects. These are Dutch and Belgian potential customers and existing anime businesses. The results will be analysed and compared, leading to a set of recommendations.

Conceptual model

As mentioned before, this research takes place in the diagnostic stage. The type of diagnostic research used will be the background analysis. Manga Tenshi does not have all the necessary information concerning brand awareness to set up a strategy, and therefore a background analysis is necessary (Verschuren & Doorewaard 2010). However, though background analysis will have the upper hand, it will be combined with opinion research. This is due to the fact that the anime and manga niche is very specific, and may have different views and standpoints than the general audience described in theory.
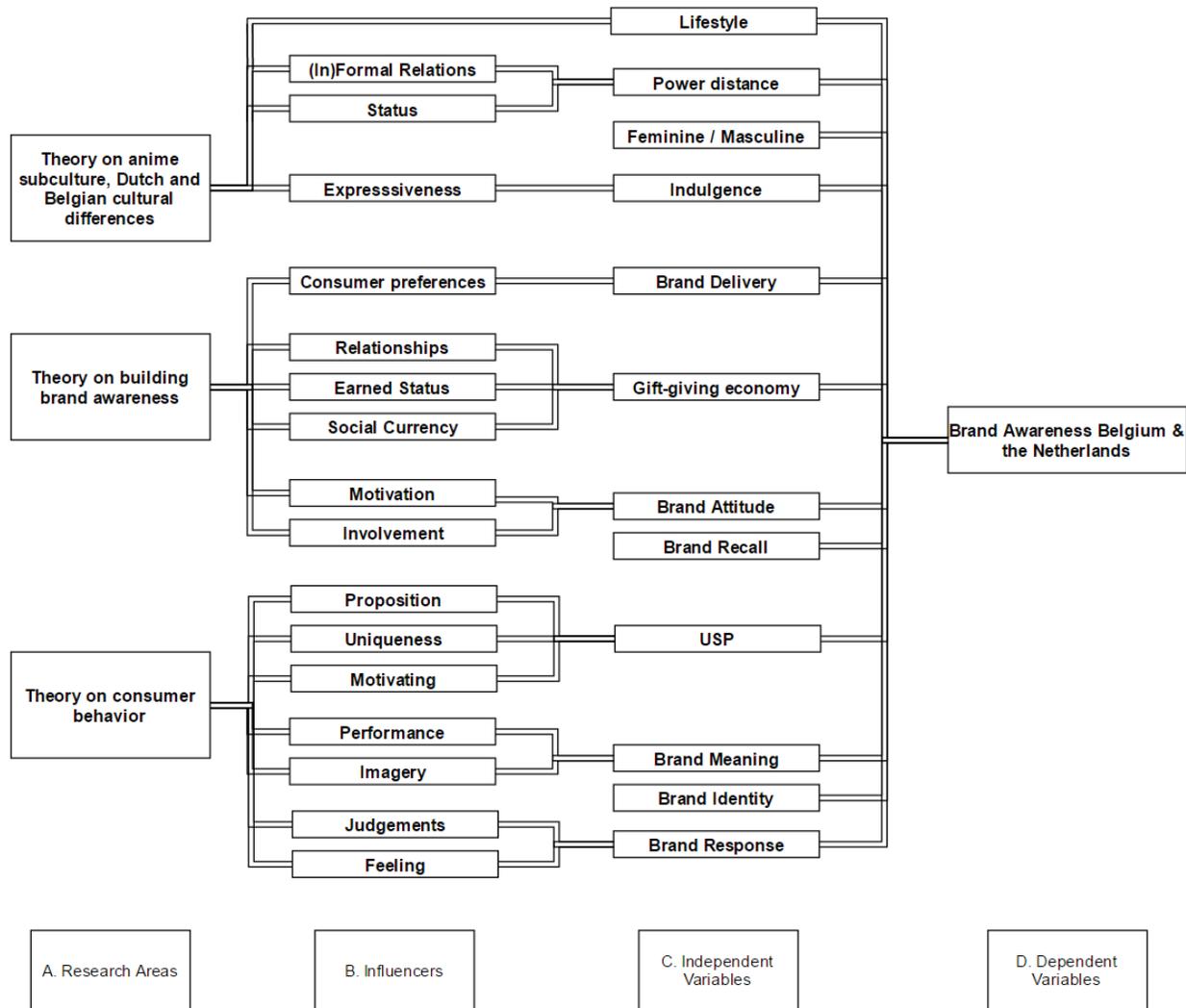
Figure 9. Conceptual model.

The figure above shows the conceptual model derived from the research areas. It shows the independent variables, which directly affect the desired outcome, and their related influencers. All key concepts present in this model are relevant to the research objective. However, the weight of each of these concepts can differ, and some are more important for reaching the goal than others. Even so, in order to give a complete view of the concepts, the smaller ones have also been included.

Research questions

Research questions area 1: Anime subculture and Dutch and Belgian cultural differences

Central question.

1. How do the anime subculture and the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Belgium influence their view on Manga Tenshi and the approach of creating awareness?

Sub questions.

1.1. How do Dutch and Belgian potential customers perceive the importance of status and formal relationships, and how different are they?

1.2. How expressive (indulgent) are potential Dutch and Belgian customers?

1.3. How does the feminine/masculine aspect of the Dutch and Belgian cultures affect their attitude towards new brands and how they are being delivered?

1.4. What are the differences between Dutch and Belgian people in the anime subculture?

Research questions area 2: Building brand awareness

Central question.

2. To what extent can the knowledge of the existing businesses and the potential customers give insights into how to create brand awareness?

Sub questions.

2.1. Do potential customers experience category need or brand awareness first when buying manga?

2.2. What do potential customers do when category need arises first? What channels do they use and what is important to consider?

2.3. To what extent can the potential customers give information about the involvement and motivation involved with the intent to purchase manga?

2.4. To what extent can the experience of existing businesses give insights into brand awareness strategies and brand delivery by giving examples and ideas?

Research questions area 3: Consumer behaviour

Central question.

3. To what extent can the knowledge of existing businesses and potential customers give insights into the behaviour and preferences of customers?

Sub questions.

3.1. What do potential customers value in manga businesses?

3.2. What is most important to potential customers concerning performance and imagery (brand meaning)?

3.3. How much do potential customers value USP's, and what could possibly be attractive to them?

3.4. What roles do brand identity and brand meaning have in getting to know, remembering and returning to a brand according to potential customers and existing businesses?

Research Strategy

The research strategy chosen for this report is the case study, which is meant to give insights into a specific field with intensive data collection and a selective sample (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). This relates to the objective considering one of the research objects includes businesses in the niche, which is a very specific group. This makes it a selective sample where qualitative data will be collected from through semi-structured interviews. The second object, the potential customers, are also part of that same niche market. Though the objective is still to collect specific data, this group creates the possibility to gather a larger number of research units through surveys. This will create a more complete view of the specific field this project focusses on. The research approach is deductive, meaning that the theoretical framework is used to gain insights into the research areas, which will then be tested and elaborated on through the interviews and surveys (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

Data collection techniques

For this research, the mixed methods approach to data collection will be used. This means that both qualitative and quantitative techniques will be used, but they are not combined. Though they can be done at the same time, both the qualitative and quantitative date will be analysed using their respective analysing methods. A mixture of semi-structured interviews and surveys will be used with this method.

This research project has three research areas, cultural differences between the Netherlands and Belgium, building brand awareness and consumer behaviour. For each of these research areas, qualitative and quantitative data will be used. The semi-structural interviews will provide insights into how existing businesses view the difference between Dutch and Belgian customers, brand awareness strategies and ideas, and the behaviour of their customers. The surveys will provide the view of the customer in each of these three areas, revealing their actual preferences. This will be done in combination with desk research going more in depth about the areas and the underlying theory.

Time Horizon

For this research project, a cross-sectional study will be done. This means that something will be researched at a certain time. In this case, that would be what possibly could be done in this current time to increase the brand awareness for Manga Tenshi. There is also a time limit on this research, which strengthens the need to use a cross-sectional study. The used data collection techniques with the use of surveys and interviews over a short period of time align well with the decision of using cross-sectional research (Saunders et al., 2009).

Credibility of research findings

Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent of which consistent findings will be yielded when using the same data collection techniques in different settings. There are three points that have to be ensured. These are unbiased measurements that yield the same results on other occasions, unbiased observers and transparency in the findings (Saunders et al., 2009). There are four threats to reliability directly related to the aforementioned points that will be attempted to control.

The first one is the subject or participant error. This relates to the possibility of getting different findings depending on the time and setting of the research (Saunders et al., 2009). In order to control this, the surveys will be conducted at neutral settings and times. A possible time creating participant error for potential customers would be just before, during or after an anime convention. Therefore these times will be avoided. The interviews with other businesses will all be conducted at a time convenient for the interviewee, to ensure they are not in a hurry or stressed.

The second error is the subject or participant bias. This relates to answers being changed due to the bias of interviewees when they believe giving certain answers may have certain consequences for them (Saunders et al., 2009). For the surveys, this bias will be minimized by making the survey completely anonymous. This way participants will not have to worry about judgements. Aside from this, details about the research project were left out, such as Manga Tenshi's name, in order to make sure no bias about Manga Tenshi or other manga shops would be included. For the interviews with businesses, the bias is a bit harder to control. Though the interviews will be conducted with companies that operate in the same niche, they will not be direct competitors. However, considering the fact these interviews will be done in person and most likely in a setting where they will know about Manga Tenshi, there may be some bias present.

The third one is the observer error. This error poses no issues in this report, considering all the interviews will be conducted by the same person. As such, all interview questions will be explained and interpreted the same way by the interviewer.

The last error is the observer bias (Saunders et al., 2009). This is the error most likely to be present in this research project, since the company this research is about is owned by myself. However, this error will be minimalized by creating accurate transcripts of all the interviews, and survey questions where there is little room for biased interpretations. Using multiple choice and rating questions, most of the results will yield clear results.

Validity

Validity concerns whether or not the findings are actually about what they seem to be about (Saunders et al., 2009). Is there a causal relationship between variables? There are several threats that may influence the validity of the research. Most of these however, do not highly threaten the results from the surveys, considering the low amount of information they receive about the project and the complete anonymity. The interviews with existing businesses however, may be influenced by two threats; history and testing. They may have a certain history which leads them to be biased towards manga shops or to Dutch or Belgian customers in specific. They may also believe sharing certain information may give themselves a disadvantage in the market, which will be attempted to be controlled by selecting businesses that will not view Manga Tenshi as direct competition. Though both threats are relatively hard to control, their effects will be minimized by asking clear, unambiguous questions.

External validity, or, generalizability, refers to the extent to which the research results are generalizable (Saunders et al., 2009). As the results of the survey will be used to portray the general public in the anime and manga niche from the Netherlands and Belgium, these results should be as generalizable as possible. This should be done by getting a relatively high sample. The interviews however, are done with a smaller amount of businesses and are focused on their separate stories and inputs, and will not be generalizable.

The aforementioned threat controlling methods are used to ensure that sufficient data will be yielded which leads to valid conclusions that answer the research questions, and can be used to create an advice that will meet the objective of the report.

Sampling

As there is no list of the population of people in the anime and manga niche, the data collection cannot be statistically defined and a sampling frame cannot be created. This means non-probability samples will be used (Saunders et al., 2009). The same goes for existing businesses. Though a list with known businesses can be drafted, there is a high chance of leaving out businesses as there is no pre-existing list.

For the surveys, self-selection sampling will be used. Though there is a possibility of reaching out to individuals that fit the population, this will most likely not include all types of individuals in the niche. Though they will be asked to fill in the survey as well, their numbers wouldn't suffice. Therefore, the survey will be shared on various different platforms in order to reach the largest and most diverse group of anime and manga fans. Locations of posting include anime and manga related Facebook groups, personal Facebook page of individuals with other fans as friends, and the Aniway forums, which is a forum directed towards the niche.

For the interviews, purposive sampling will be used. This means samples will be picked based on their suitability to help answer the research questions and provide helpful insights. The samples will be picked based on the size of their business and their specific market. It is important to pick samples that will actually provide information, and as such they should operate in the same niche, but not be direct competitors. This relates to the case study approach, as only a select few cases will be analysed in a small niche.

Limitations

The outcomes of this research are limited by a number of factors. Firstly, there is a set time frame of 15 weeks in which the research has to be completed. Secondly, the fact that I am the company's owner means there is a possible bias present when conducting research. This is because of the high amount of personal involvement. Nevertheless, everything that can be done to stay objective will be done, such as getting second opinions on interview questions. The intent to conduct interviews with existing businesses in the anime and manga niche could also be hindered by limitations due to the fact the niche is rather small and they may not reply. If absolutely necessary, it is an option to step outside of the niche and interview other successful businesses.

Research Methodology

In order to give recommendations on how Manga Tenshi can increase awareness while keeping the differences between Dutch and Belgian customers in mind, information has been gathered through desk research on Dutch and Belgian cultural differences, building brand awareness and consumer behavior. Preliminary research on competitors, shipping rates and the target group have also been included.

Furthermore, surveys consisting of multiple choice- and open questions have been given out to both Belgian and Dutch potential customers. These surveys provided quantitative data about the preferences of potential customers that can be used in creating brand awareness strategies, as well as the differences between the preferences of Dutch and Belgians participants.

In-depth interviews with businesses in the niche who already have achieved successful brand awareness also were conducted. This way data has been gathered which gives insights on how businesses achieve brand awareness, and the differences they perceive in Dutch and Belgian customers. Such open interviews focus on gathering qualitative data and leave room for follow-up questions when needed (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

Planning of the research

In the table below is the planning for this research project illustrated. This schedule includes the project phase, planned meetings, activities and deadlines per week. Due to the fact that the client company is in fact owned by myself, no client meetings were scheduled. Instead, there are meetings scheduled with value 050, an external group providing supervision for the business. The holiday break is not taken into account in this schedule, as work on this project continues during that week. The project has a time span of 11 weeks, which will be taken into consideration during the research. The different phases of this project include preparation, data collection, data analysis and strategy development and implementation.

Week	Project phase	Meetings	Activities	Deadlines
10	Finalizing proposals	First meeting value 050	Finalizing proposal	Deadline 06.03.17
11	Preparation research report	Meeting value 050		
12	Data collection	Coach meeting: Feedback proposal and research preparation.	Preparing surveys and interviews	
13/14	Data collection	Meeting value 050	Interview & survey	
15	Data collection and analysis	Meeting value 050 Coach meeting	Analysing collected data	
16	Data collection and analysis		Analysing collected data	
17	Writing research report	Meeting value 050	Report writing	
18	Finishing research report	Coach meeting	Report writing	
19	Starting advice report		Report writing	
20	Strategy development & Implementation	Meeting value 050	Report writing	
21	Strategy development & Implementation		Report writing	Draft 22.05.17
22	Finalizing advice report	Meeting value 050	Report writing	Deadline 01.06.17

Figure 10. Planning.

Research Findings.

As mentioned in the methodology, in addition to desk research, interviews and surveys have been conducted. Three business owners with companies operating within the anime and manga business have been interviewed. The first one being Dave Martens, owner of Red Dot Commerce. Red Dot sells anime related merchandise. The second interview was done with Eefke Smulders, owner of Custom Costumes, where fantasy and animal based costume parts such as horns and tails are for sale. The last interviewed business owner was Richard Den Besten, owner of Whoops, a store selling new manga. Though none of them are competitors of Manga Tenshi, they all target the same niche. The full interviews can be found in appendix 4.

Surveys were conducted with potential Dutch and Belgian customers using personal Facebook pages, anime/manga Facebook group pages, and anime/manga related forums to find participants. The survey was filled in by 102 participants, of which 59 Dutch and 43 Belgian. For more information about the survey set up and participants see appendix 3.

Research questions area 1: Cultural difference Belgium and the Netherlands

Central question: How do the anime subculture and the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Belgium influence their view on Manga Tenshi and the approach of creating awareness?

Results question 1.1: How do Dutch and Belgian potential customers perceive the importance of status and formal relationships, and how different are they?

Conducted desk research shows that Belgium has a power distance score of 65, while the Netherlands scores a lot lower with 38 (Hofstede, N.D.). This would mean that Belgian customers would show more power distance, with more formalities and differences in status between employer and employee, and perhaps customer and shop owner, than the Netherlands. Even though a score of 65 is still not very high, the difference between the two countries is very grand.

However, the conducted surveys show little difference between potential customers from the two countries. When asked if a relationship between seller and buyer should be more formal or informal, both countries showed replies leaning towards informal.
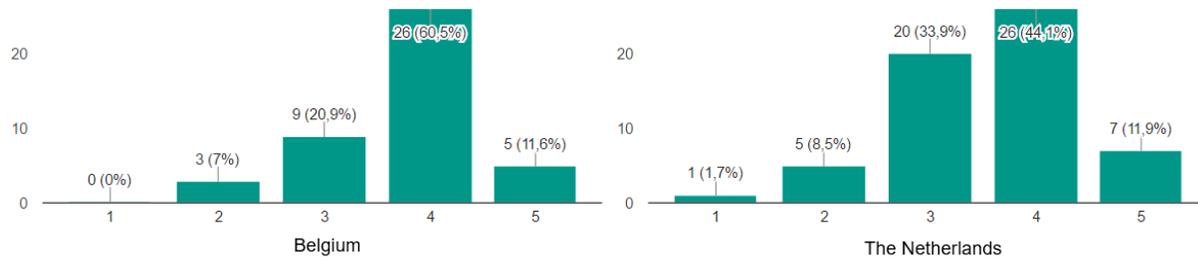
Fig. 11. Survey question 6. Very formal (1) or very informal (5).

This difference between the interview results and the desk research could possibly be explained with two factors. The first being the existence of the anime and manga subculture, which may be different and weigh heavier when undertaking actions related to the subculture. The second possible reason is that even though there may be more power distance in Belgium, this does not mean that this applies for all different functions in life. As such they may have greater power distance concerning family relations, teachers and employers, but not necessarily with shop owners.

Considering the research is about manga shops and the relation between a shop owner and a buyer, the findings from the interviews are likely to be more valid.

Results question 1.2: How expressive (indulgent) are potential Dutch and Belgian customers?

According to the conducted desk research, both the Netherlands as well as Belgium score relatively high on indulgence (Hofstede, n.d.). This would mean they are more likely to allow themselves to do what they want and realize impulses in regards to enjoyment and desires. This is backed up by Ms. Smulders in the interviews, who notes that impulse buys are very common during conventions. People see something they like, and buy it in impulse in order to satisfy their current desires (personal communication, April 9th, 2017).

The surveys filled out by potential Dutch and Belgian customers show that their expression of excitement varies a lot. There is, however, only a small amount of people that claimed to want to keep their excitement for themselves. Another question shows that the interviewees generally either like others to be excited, leading to them being more excited themselves, or to not mind. There are few people who dislike enthusiasm in others. The high amount of people claiming to always express their excitement could proof indulgence is high, but the high amount of people worried about standing out or getting too excited still have to be considered. The differences

between Dutch and Belgian interviewees is relatively small, backing up the desk research saying their level of indulgence is similar.
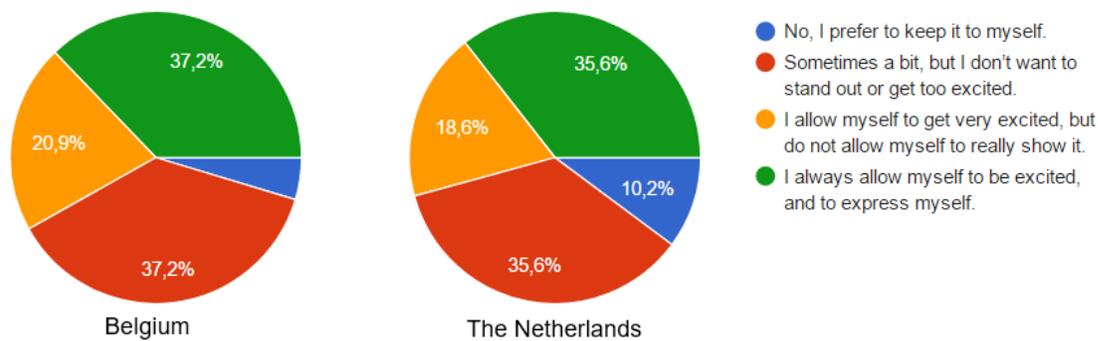

Figure 12. survey question 8. When buying manga online or at conventions, do you generally allow yourself to be excited and express and act upon this excitement?
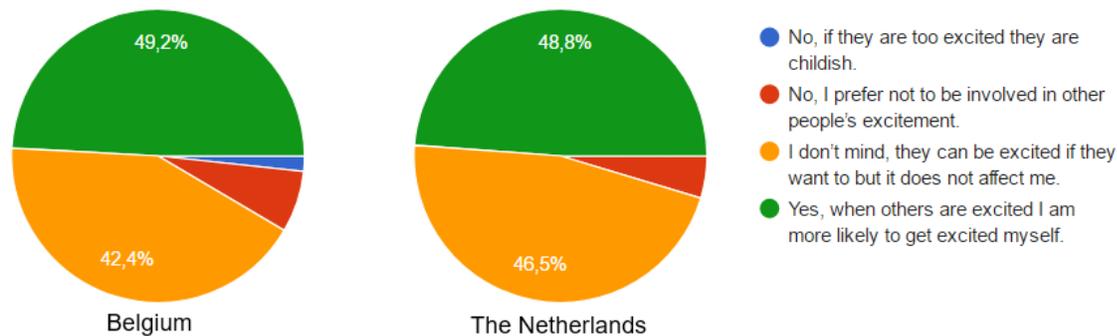

Figure 13. Survey question 9: Do you enjoy it when other people express their excitement?

Results question 1.3: How does the feminine/masculine aspect of the Dutch and Belgian cultures affect their attitude towards new brands and how they are being delivered?

The conducted desk research shows that Netherlands scores 14 on masculinity, and Belgium scores 54. For Belgium, being somewhere in the middle, this would mean that a confrontational win-lose negotiation style most likely would not work. Instead, they try to reach a compromise where winning does not matter as long as there is a mutual agreement. This is even more strongly present in the Netherlands, where the score is much lower. Cooperation, involvement and mutual consensus drives businesses (Hofstede, n.d.).

This is backed up by Ms. Smulders statement that, especially in the Netherlands, it is very important to be friendly with other businesses in the niche and the conventions (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). Cooperation, and friendly relationships are very important to grow in this niche.

When asked if they prefer competition or cooperation in businesses in the anime niche, it becomes clear that a large amount of participants lean towards cooperation. However, as participants are most likely not as involved in the relationship between businesses, these results show what kind of image they would like to see in businesses. Instead of competition, which could possibly bring prices down and increase discounts, participants prefer cooperation, where better communication and involvement is present. They are in favour of mutual consensus and discussing to get the most favourable outcome. Considering their possible bias as consumers, this could mean that they also want to be able to cooperate with businesses themselves and reach a mutual consensus through negotiations concerning products or services.
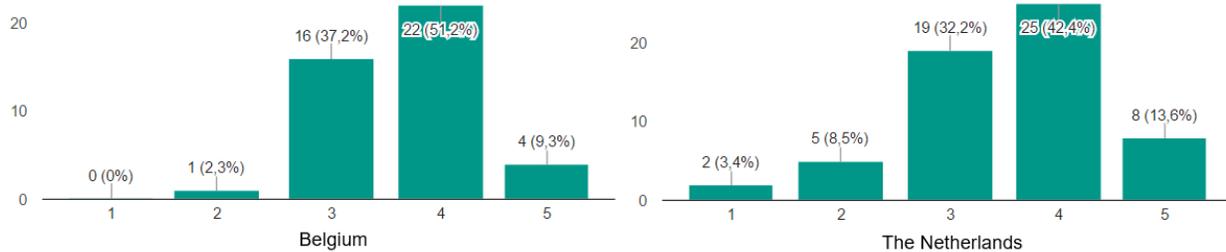

Figure 14. Survey question 7: Do you prefer businesses in the anime and manga niche to be focused on competition (1) or cooperation (5)?

Results question 1.4: What are the differences between Dutch and Belgian people in the anime subculture?

The survey showed that for both Belgian and Dutch participants, the largest age group was 21-25 years old, with 44% for the Belgian and 56% for the Dutch. Noticeable is the large group of 18-20 years old in Belgium (28%), with the second largest group being shared between 18-20 and 26-30 with 15% in the Netherlands. This does however not mean that the other age groups aren't present. All categories ranging from 14-31+ were represented in the survey. Though the age group of 0-13 was not represented in the survey, it does not mean there are no fans in that age range. However, these fans are unlikely to read English and be able to buy manga by themselves to looking for extra participants of that age group seems unnecessary (see appendix 3 for full servey results.). The clear range in ages matches the study by Orsini (2017) from the conducted desk research. This study shows that due to the varying genres, a general age range or gender ratio cannot be concluded, and instead, lifestyle choices define the people in the anime and manga niche.

The survey also showed that for both Dutch and Belgian customers, manga is generally purchased whenever they find a volume they need to complete a series, rather than buying a book once in a set time frame. A high number of Belgian participants also claims to buy manga only once a year, while this number is much lower for the Netherlands. Aside from this, the answers were quite equally divided over various time slots, so it can be said that in general people buy mainly whenever they find a book they want, instead of buying because they haven't bought in a while (see appendix 3 for full survey results.).

The survey also shows that both Dutch and Belgian customers are not very likely to buy titles they don't know yet, but might consider if the story or art looks good to them. A lower price does not seem to have a big impact on their choice to buy a title they haven't heard of before, though the lower price for books still seems to be more motivating for Belgium than Dutch participants (see appendix 3 for full survey results.).

In the interviews, the business owners were asked about the differences they notice between the Dutch and Belgian customers. Mr. Martens mentions that a difference he notices is that Belgian customers are more likely to haggle for a lower price than the Dutch. The Dutch people are usually more enthusiastic and outgoing when it comes to seeing products they like, and act more excited and expressionate in general. He also mentions that it might be worth noting that Dutch and Belgian customers like very different series (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). Mr. Den Besten agrees to this, and adds that as they like different series at different times, series that might be good to sell to the Dutch might not be sold at all to Belgian customers (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). Ms Smulders mentions that in Belgium, there are less ways to express love for anime and manga as there are fewer conventions (personal communication, April 9th, 2017).

Research questions area 2: Building brand awareness

Central question.

2. To what extent can the knowledge of the existing businesses and the potential customers give insights into how to create brand awareness?

Sub questions.

Results question 2.1: Do potential customers experience category need or brand awareness first when buying manga?

As mentioned in the theoretical frameworks, it is important to know whether category need or brand awareness is experienced first, as this has effect on the brand awareness strategy. This helps figure out if there has to be a focus on brand recall, or brand recognition (Percy & Rossiter, 1992).

In the interview, Ms. Smulders mentions that it differs depending on the medium. At the conventions, brand awareness comes into play first. People see the stand and then decide whether or not they want the item. However online, people will only look for your site if they have the desire to buy something specific (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). Mr. Martens adds that at conventions, both do happen. People may recognize his stand and start browsing, or come to him asking for a specific figure as they recalled he might have it. He also confirms that people often look for specific products on their website, but he also says people would browse his website just to see if there is something they like (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). Though this can still be considered category need, as they did specifically go to his website to look for anime related products. Mr. Den Besten confirms both statements by saying it differs greatly depending on the person and their intentions (personal communication, April 9th, 2017).

Due to the clearly different nature between sales at conventions and online, the survey made a distinction between sales at conventions and online in the questions. The results from the survey show various interesting facts. First off, when looking at online sales only, it becomes clear that looking for a specific title has the main focus for both the Netherlands and Belgium. The blue (I always look for a specific title when buying online and search for a shop that has it) and orange (I do both but mostly look for a specific title) make up the largest part of the chart, with the blue part still being overwhelming. This means that category need arises first, as they are looking for a specific title and search shops with that goal in mind. In this conclusion, the purple part (I don't buy manga online) can be ignored, as it is irrelevant to whether category need or brand awareness happens first.
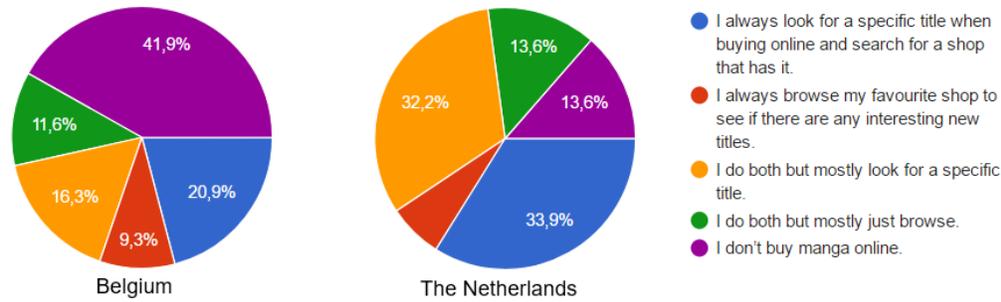
Figure 15. Question 10: When you buy manga online, do you first have a title you want, and then search for a shop that has it in stock, or do you often first see a shop, and then look for a title you want?

As for conventions, a difference becomes more noticeable. While the Dutch people still clearly prefer looking for a specific title, and therefore have category need happening first, the Belgium people now express a desire to browse any stand they happen to see, no matter if they are looking for anything specific. This means they experience brand awareness first. Though there is still a large portion that claims to do both but mainly look for specific titles, these people do also still browse. It can as such be said that Dutch people usually experience category need first at conventions, while for Belgians, brand awareness plays a much bigger role.
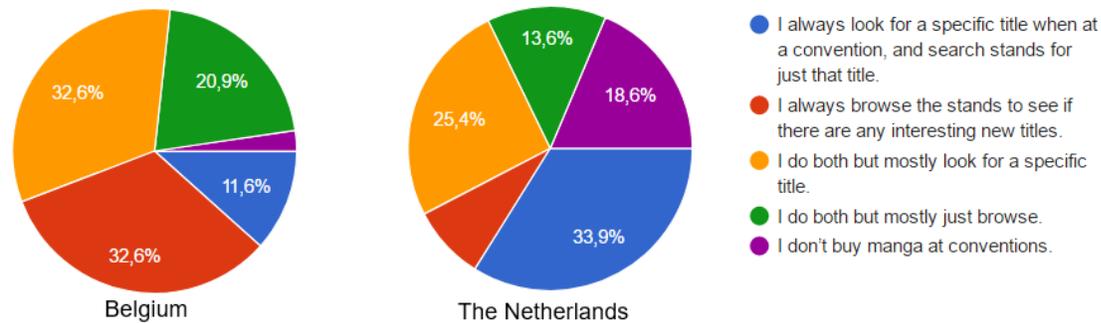

Figure 16. Question 10: When you buy manga at a convention, do you first have a title you want, and then search for a shop that has it in stock, or do you often first see a shop, and then look for a title you want?

Lastly, it can be said that for Dutch potential customers, there is not a large difference between buying manga online or at a convention. For Belgian participants however, the difference is striking. It is also worth noting that over 40% of the Belgian participants mentioned that they never buy manga online. That being said, it can be concluded that Belgian customers are less likely to buy online than Dutch customers, and when they do, they only do so with a specific goal in mind, while they are more likely to browse and perhaps even buy on impulse during conventions.

Results question 2.2: What do potential customers do when category need arises first? What channels do they use and what is important to consider?

When category need arises, a person will look for a store to buy their desired manga from. As mentioned before, Dutch participants show that category need generally happens first both during conventions and online. For Belgian customers, brand awareness is more prominent at conventions, but they still act upon category need as well. For this research question, potential customers were asked where they generally buy their manga. This reflects the channels they use when category need happens first quite accurately, though channels used when brand awareness happens first will also be included in the results. Since this does frequently happen, it is important to have them included in the preferred channel as they have to be kept in mind when deciding what channels potential customers prefer in general, no matter if brand awareness or category need happens first.
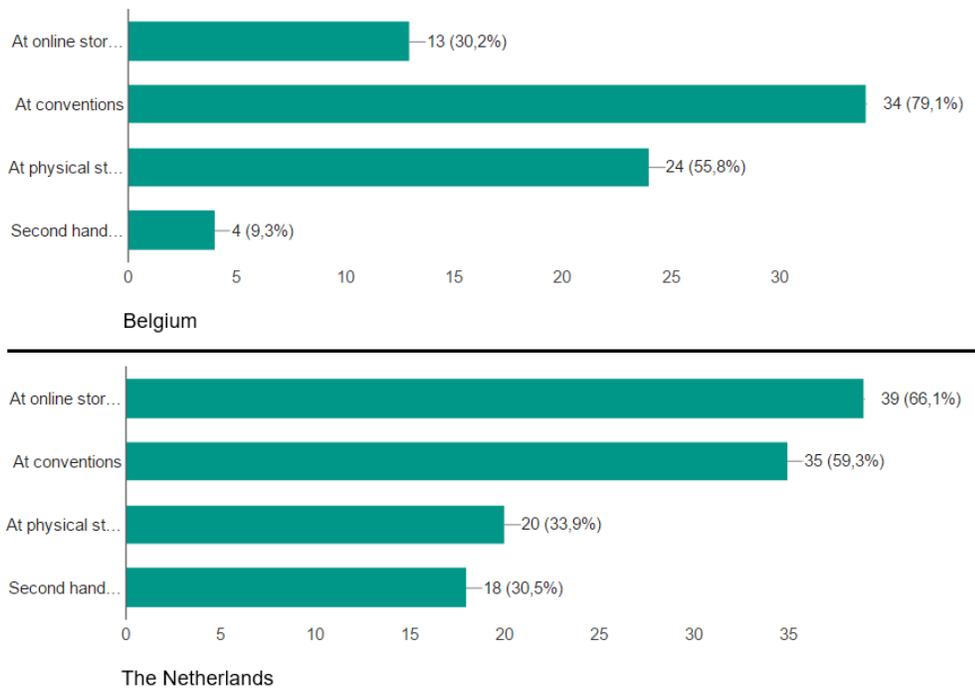

Figure 17. Question 4: Where do you usually buy manga?

The figure above confirms the conclusion drawn in the previous section, where it was said that Belgians prefer buying at conventions, and avoid buying online, while Dutch people buy most of their manga online. It becomes clear that a physical location is very important for Belgian customers, as 55% also claims to buy manga at physical stores, whereas second hand manga through social media and forums is even more avoided than general online stores. The differences between their offline and online buying behaviour is very grand, making their preferences very clear. The Dutch participants however, show very different results. They seem to prefer online stores, and are also more active on social media for second hand manga. The score for physical stores is also quite a bit lower than for the Belgians. They do however still have a relatively high percentage of manga bought at conventions. The difference is less grand, meaning though there is a difference and a preference can be seen, both online and offline channels are liked.

Results question 2.3: To what extent can the potential customers give information about the involvement and motivation involved with the intent to purchase manga?

For this question, the motivations listed by Percy and Rossiter (1992) were considered. The motivations possibly fitting the purchase of manga were shown to the participants of the survey, each with a short example of how it could apply to the situation.

Motivation	Motivating Process
Negative	
1. Problem removal	Seeking solution to a current problem
2. Problem avoidance	Seeking to avoid an anticipated problem
3. Incomplete satisfaction	Seeking a better product
4. Mixed approach avoidance	Seeking resolution to a conflict caused by both positive and negative attributes in the same product
5. Normal depletion	Seeking to maintain regular supply of product
Positive	
6. Sensory gratification	Seeking extra physiological enjoyment from the product
7. Intellectual stimulation	Seeking extra psychological stimulation from the product
8. Social approval	Seeking an opportunity for social reward from the product

Figure 18. The eight basic motives (Percy & Rossiter, 1992.).

The collection of answers the participants could choose from based on the possible motivations for buying manga were the following:

- Seeking a solution to a current problem. (For example: Prices too high elsewhere, or searching a rare title.)
- Seeking to avoid an anticipated problem. (Buying because it might be out of stock and hard to find later or might go up in price.)
- Seeking enjoyment from the product.
- Social status: wanting the product to get social reward. (For example: having something new no one has yet, or having something everyone has in order to not fall behind.)

The answers given by the Dutch and Belgian participants are very similar. Both groups put seeking enjoyment as the number one motivation. However, seeking a solution to a current problem, such as prices being too high or seeking specific titles they have troubles finding, also plays a large role. Participants were able to select multiple answers, and it shows that motivations may overlap. Seeking to avoid a problem and social status do not seem to have that much influence compared to the other two. As such it can be said that the main motivations driving participants to buy manga are to seek enjoyment and to get lower prices or missing titles.


Figure 19. Question 14: When buying a manga, which of the following statements can be true concerning the motivation for buying a manga?

That said, it becomes clear that both positive (transformational) and negative (Informational) brand attitude strategies for low involvement motivations could be useful. Low involvement considering the purchase of a low priced book generally requires little involvement and prior research, as opposed to purchases such as cars. As evident by the survey responses, the positive motivation is more prominent so if one strategy had to be picked, the low involvement/transformational strategy would fit best for potential customers of Manga Tenshi. However, as negative motivations are still largely present, the best option would be to combine both strategies, while keeping a focus on the transformational strategy.

Table 3. Specific Advertising Tactics for the Low Involvement/ Transformational Brand Attitude Strategies

Strategy	Tactic
Correct emotional portrayal of the motivation	• Emotional authenticity is the key element and is the single benefit • The execution of the emotion must be unique to the brand • The target audience must like the ad
Adequate logical support for perceived brand delivery	• Brand delivery is by association and is often implicit • Repetition serves as a build-up function and a reinforcement function

Table 2. Specific Advertising Tactics for the Low Involvement/Informational Brand Attitude Strategies

Strategy	Tactic
Correct emotional portrayal of the motivation	• Use a simple problem-solution format • It is not necessary for people to like the ad
Adequate logical support perceived brand delivery	• Include only one or two benefits or a single group of benefits • Benefit claims should be stated extremely • The benefits should easily be learned in one or two exposures

Figure 20. Brand attitude strategies for low involvement (Percy & Rossiter, 1992.).

Results question 2.4: To what extent can the experience of existing businesses give insights into brand awareness strategies and brand delivery by giving examples and ideas?

Mr. Martens mentions Red Dot started a long time ago, in a very different time and setting. They had little competition, which helped them grow (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). They started with the use of Marktplaats.nl and their website, and get their brand name out wherever they can. He says that little things like handing out flyers with every purchase or in general, with discount codes helps a lot. Mr den Besten also mentions flyers and banners as a great way to increase brand awareness (personal communication, April 9th, 2017).

Sponsoring helped Red Dot a lot too, it got their names visible in many places. Mr. Martens notes that visibility is not the only reason for the sponsoring, they also sponsored because they wanted to support the community. He does say that the most important way of creating brand awareness is through word of mouth. As the community is relatively small, everyone knows each other. As such, negative buzz has to be avoided. You shouldn't do things like selling bootleg or overpricing as it will create negative word of mouth. Instead, you can do small favours for your customers and keep them happy. Helping them out is always good. Aside from that, knowing the trends and having a good setup is very important. They also cosplayed their mascot in the beginning, which got the face of their mascot out there. People started drawing her and it was great buzz. But they stopped doing it due to age (personal communication, April 9th, 2017).

Social media is also a great way to increase brand awareness, as seen in the conducted desk research. Research done by Hart (2009) shows insights from Ruth-Ann Thorn, who mentions social media as a great marketing tool. However, social media shouldn't be focused on the product, but rather be a place where customers can really meet the business and see them as human beings. It is a long-term commitment where a relationship with the customers is created. Boncheck (2012) also mentions social media is part of a gift giving economy. The focus should lie on relationships, social currencies and earned status. He notes that the best you can do for each of these focus points is to help people get to know each other, creating own social currencies while keeping the brand in mind, and enabling people to celebrate each other's achievements. Ms Smulders also mentions the use of social media to grow, and the importance of having a good relationship with your customers.

Ms Smulders also mentions that she also hands out business cards, much like Red Dot's flyers. She also confirms the importance of word of mouth, and the visibility of the brand name. She notes that some brands barely show their brand name, which really hurts brand awareness. Instead, you should try to show it wherever you can so people are more likely to remember it (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). This importance of showing your name is also mentioned by Mr. den Besten (personal communication, April 9th, 2017).

Research questions area 3: Consumer behaviour

Central question.

3. To what extent can the knowledge of existing businesses and potential customers give insights into the behaviour and preferences of customers?

Sub questions.

Results question 3.1. What do potential customers value in manga businesses?

In the survey, participants were asked to rate a list of possible valued aspects in manga stores from not important at all to very important. The results can be seen in the figure 21.
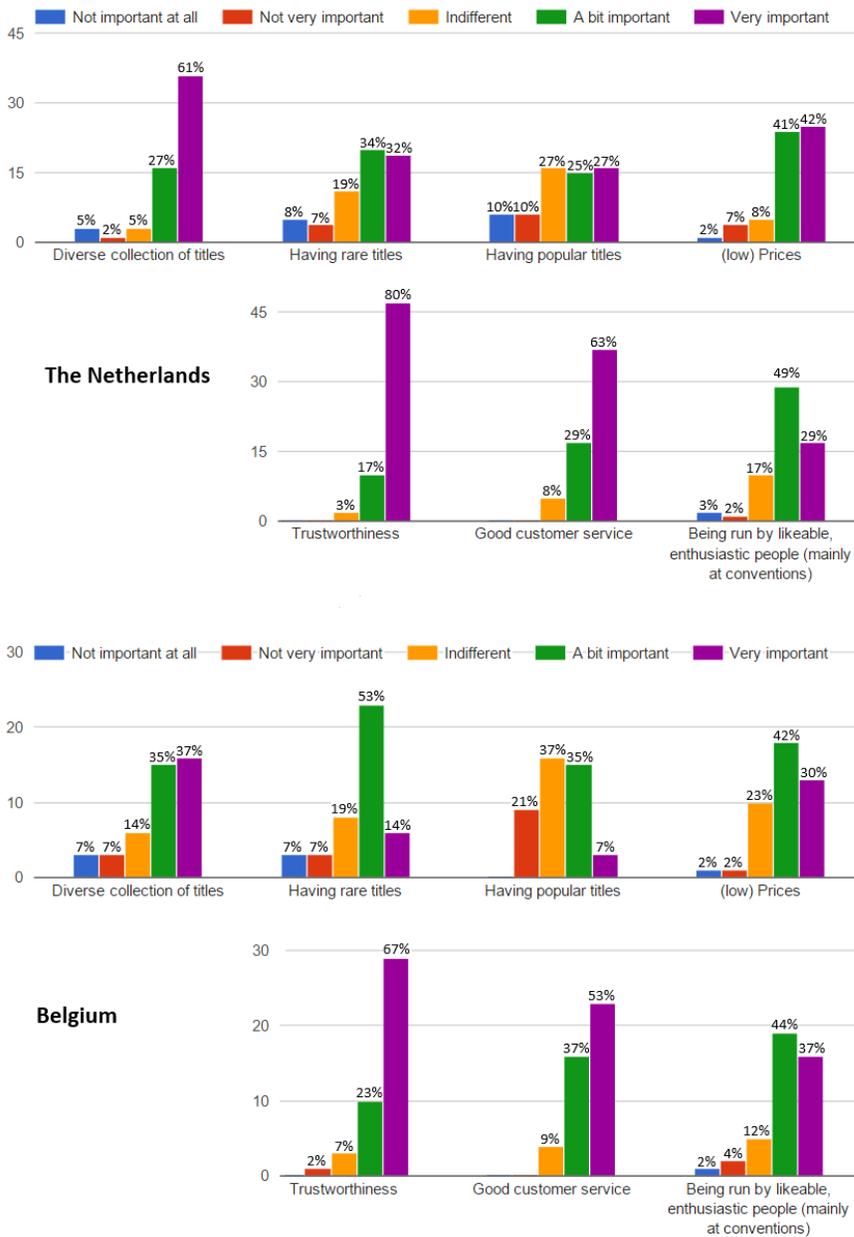
Figure 21. Results question 15. When buying manga from a shop online or at anime conventions, how important are the following points?

This overview makes clear that there are only a few differences between the Dutch and Belgian participants when it comes to what they value. The biggest differences all concern the collection. The Dutch value a diverse collection more than the Belgians, even though when looking at the Belgian numbers, over 70% still define it as important. Belgians also care less for the inclusion of rare titles, and the inclusion of popular titles.

Considering the survey results, it can be said that both countries value trustworthiness and good customer service the most, with having a diverse collection, low prices, and being run by likeable people following with slightly lower numbers. For this conclusion, the percentages showing 'very important' were considered first and foremost, but the 'a bit important' percentages were added with a little less weight as the customers still consider them to be important. Trustworthiness seems to be the most important value of all according to potential customers in both the Netherlands and Belgium, as such this value should be the focus point.

Aside from these listed values, participants were able to list other things they found important themselves. One value in specific kept coming back in the 'other' answers, which was being knowledgeable. They want the seller to be able to recommend titles and to know what they are talking about.

Mr. den Besten argues that his customers mostly value a complete collection (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). The prices do not matter as long as you have all the volumes they might want, so they can get their collection complete whenever they want. Even though Ms. Smulders does not sell manga, she also mentions the importance of having a large collection with many different items to choose from (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). Mr Martens agrees to this as well. He also adds that customers greatly value honesty, trustworthiness, fast service and delivery (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). This aligns well with the results from the survey. Martens mentions that people want to have a good feeling when shopping, and they want the staff to be knowledgeable and able to answer questions. As mentioned before, this was also one of the most common answers in the 'other' section of the survey. Ms. Smulders adds that professionality and good communication with customers is also valued. Being appreciated is important, and it will get good word of mouth advertisement going (personal communication, April 9th, 2017).

Aside from these general values, participants of the survey were asked about their preferences about promotions and other activities done by manga selling shops. The results show that the most wished for extra activity would be the sale of other anime related merchandise (81% – 93%). For other activities the amount of likes was lower, and they were more equally divided over the options. It becomes clear extra activities are liked, but not everyone likes every activity. This does not mean that they have to be avoided, as long as they do not scare away the customers that do not like these activities. One activity that scored very low was the newsletter (2% - 6%), so this would be better off left out. Frequent news updates on the site, cosplaying mascots, and blog posts are still options. For the full results on extra activities, see appendix 3.

As for promotions, it becomes clear that promotions are very liked in general. General discounts, getting free goodies with a purchase, and buy.. get .. free promotions all scored high for both countries. Getting a lottery ticket scored lower for the Dutch participants. Noticeable is that both countries have a score of around 35% on not caring for discounts as long as the price/quality is good. People may like promotions, but it is not always necessary if the price/quality is good. Even so, the highest scoring promotions could very well be used with a publicity stunt. These would be getting free goodies, and general discounts. For the full results on promotions, see appendix 3.

Results question 3.2. What is most important to potential customers concerning performance and imagery (brand meaning)?

Keller (2001) discussed brand meaning, where the goal is to communicate what your brand stands for. It consists of performance and imagery. Performance concerns how well a customer's needs are met when buying a product. This includes product durability and reliability, service effectiveness, efficiency, design and price. Imagery is about how well the product meets the customer's social and psychological needs. A large portion of this is already covered in the previous section, which shows that trustworthiness and customer service are highly valued when evaluating the performance of a shop.

However the design part of the performance of a brand still has to be considered. The survey participants were asked which of the following aspects they thought were important when considering the design and house style of a brand.

- A fun, relatable mascot
- A pretty website
- A well-functioning website
- A catchy brand name
- A good slogan
- A consistent house style (colours, etc.)
- A neatly organized convention stand

The results showed many similarities between the Netherlands and Belgium, with some small striking differences. Even though Belgian participants show that they generally do not often buy manga online, both Belgium (79%) and Dutch (90%) participants show that a well-functioning website is the most important of all things listed. For Belgians, a neatly organized convention stand is almost as important as the website, while there is a bigger gap between the two for Dutch customers. This could be due to the fact that the Dutch buy more manga online. Having a consistent house style is also important for both countries. Noticeable is that all aesthetic factors such as a pretty website, a mascot and a catchy brand name all are a lot less important. Functionality seems to be the focus over how it looks and sounds.
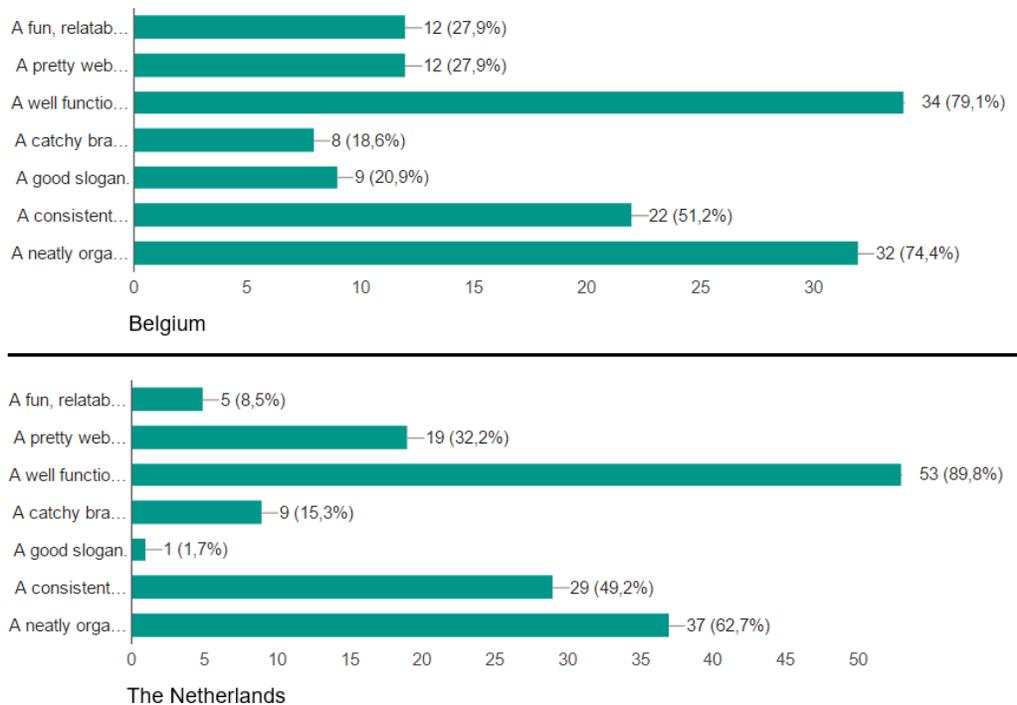

Figure 22. Question 16. What do you believe is important considering the design/house style of a brand?

Results question 3.3: How much do potential customers value USP's, and what could possibly be attractive to them?

All three interviewed businesses have clear USP's and greatly value theirs (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). Ms Smulders mentions that setting yourself apart is very important to get a head start and stand out. The USP for Custom Costumes is the great variety and collection, anything a person wishes can be made by her, and will be of high quality. For Whoops, Mr den Besten mentions their USP to be completion. Having all the volumes there are available, and for Red Dot, Mr Martens mentions established trust, legitimate products and a great variety as their USP (personal communication, April 9th, 2017).

From the surveys, it becomes clear that potential customers do greatly value trustworthiness and good customer service. Being able to set yourself apart is also mentioned as important in the 'other' answers.

As such it is important to have, and show, your USP. Desk research shows that, according to Reeves (1960), a USP has to have all three components for it to succeed. It has to have a proposition made to the consumer, it has to have a benefit. It also has to be something your competitors do not have, and lastly it must be so strong that it is able to move customers.

For Manga Tenshi, the following aspects would make up the USP: low prices, rare titles, trustworthiness and good customer service. These are all things valued by potential customers, and they all give a benefit to the customer. Though trustworthiness and customer service is valued most, this is not enough to be unique. The low prices and inclusion of rare titles sets Manga Tenshi apart from sellers of new manga, such as Whoops. According to Mr. den Besten however, sellers of new manga stores cannot be considered competitors since they sell different volumes and market towards different customers (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). However, they still both sell manga to people looking to buy manga, and share the same customers at conventions. As such it can be believed it is still important to show low prices and rare titles as a USP new sellers do not have. Good customer service is where Manga Tenshi will set itself apart from Special Edition, its only competitor. According to Mr. Martens, Special Edition has a badly set up stand, and the people at the stand seem very unfriendly (personal communication, April 9th, 2017).

Results question 3.4: What roles do brand identity and brand meaning have in getting to know, remembering and returning to a brand according to potential customers and existing businesses?

As mentioned before, the points potential customers believe to be most important concerning brand meaning are trustworthiness, customer service and a well-functioning website. However, this does not yet show what makes customers remember and come back to a specific store. This is something the survey responses can answer. When asked what generally makes them remember a manga selling brand positively, they could answer picking one of the options below.

- Good prices
- A catchy brand name
- Interesting house style/banner/mascot
- Good customer service
- Enthusiastic people
- Other:

The results show that there are once again relatively few differences between the Dutch and Belgian participants. The Belgians seem to care more for an Interesting house style and enthusiastic people than the Dutch. The preference for enthusiastic people can be explained by the fact that Belgians shop more at conventions and physical stores, leading to them caring more about the way the employees of said store act. Aside from these two differences, the results are almost the same. The main reason to remember a store positively is good prices, followed by good customer service. Though only around 40% of the participants in both countries mentioned low prices to be very important when asked about values, it is the most important value when it comes to remembering a brand. The 'other' answers shows that a large variety of titles is also something that will make customers remember you.

Belgium

Good prices.	32 (74,4%)
A catchy bra...	6 (14%)
Interesting ho...	18 (41,9%)
Good custom...	30 (69,8%)
Enthusiastic...	27 (62,8%)
Overig	4 (9,3%)

The Netherlands

|	
Good prices.	44 (74,6%)
A catchy bra...	8 (13,6%)
Interesting ho...	12 (20,3%)
Good custom...	43 (72,9%)
Enthusiastic...	29 (49,2%)
Overig	5 (8,5%)
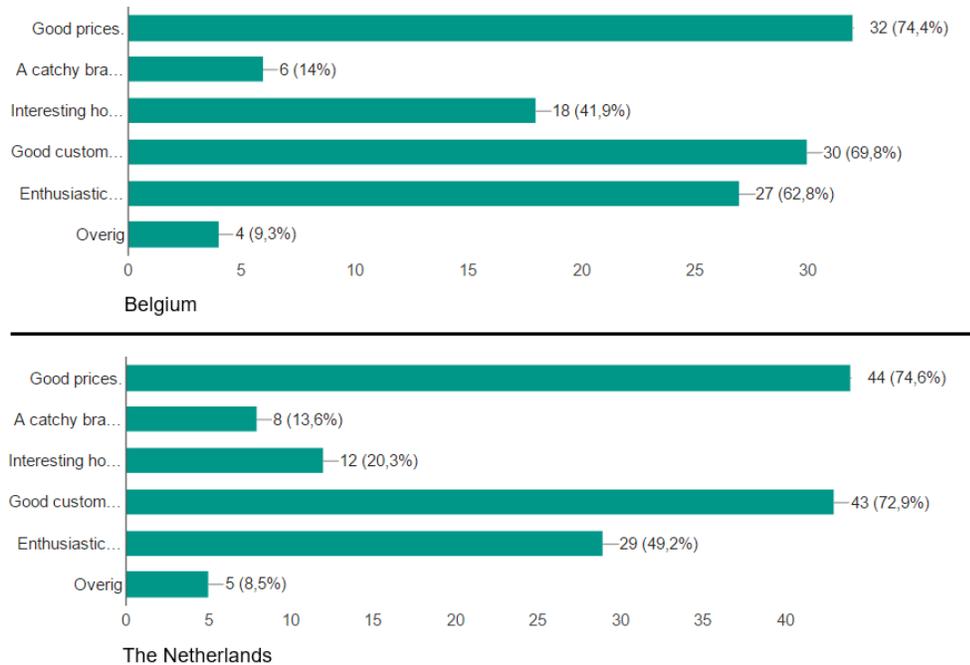
Figure 23. question 12: What generally makes you positively remember a specific store selling manga and their brand?

As remembering a brand is not the same as coming back to a brand, the following question asked participants what would make them come back to a brand. Considering the values and points previously listed as very important will also play a role in making a person come back, the answers of this question focused specifically on the experience they had with the store that would make them want to come back, rather than ask about the same values again. The options given can be seen below.

- Good previous customer service.
- Fast delivery (if online)
- Just the fact that you remember them
- Other:

The results show that good previous customer service clearly is the most important factor that makes people come back. This aligns well with what Mr. Martens mentioned about doing favors for your customers and making them happy and having general good customer service, as it will make them want to come back (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). Both fast delivery and brand recall (just the fact that you remember them) also play a role, though it pales in comparison with customer service. Even so, the other two can still be used as a large portion of the participants still thought they were important. Fast delivery is more important in the Netherlands, most likely due to the fact they order more online. The 'other' answers confirm my earlier statement that values mentioned in earlier questions were also important reasons to come back, as 'good prices' was present in most of the 'other' answers.
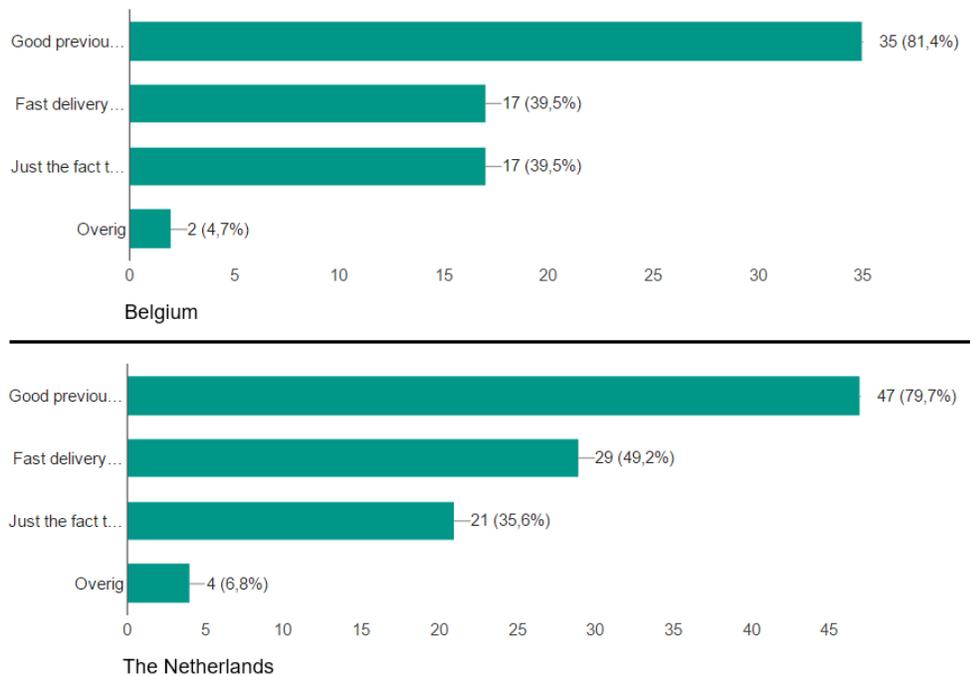

Figure 24. Question 13: What generally makes you want to come back to a brand?

Conclusion and recommendations

In the following section a conclusion will be drawn from the findings resulting from the research. In this conclusion the most important findings were used to set up recommendations for Manga Tenshi in order to create brand awareness in the Netherlands and Belgium. Success is to be measured by the amount of new visitors on the website and new likes on social media after the strategies are put into action, as well as the amount of visitors during conventions.

Dutch and Belgian differences

Research done by conducting interviews, surveys and desk research showed that even though on most topics there were similar responses, there still are some significant differences between Dutch and Belgian potential customers. The main difference being the fact that Belgian customers prefer buying at physical locations, while the Dutch customers also frequently buy online. This leads to the conclusion that even though most of the strategy will overlap due to their preferences being similar overall, there will be points where differentiating will proof to be fruitful.

Consumer preferences

One thing that became clear from the research is that it is important to cater towards the preferences of the consumer. There should be something that makes your brand unique and favourable, and positive word of mouth should be stimulated by giving the customer positive experiences to talk about. There should be a USP that is unique, motivates and includes aspects that are valued by the consumers. For Manga Tenshi, this will consist of trustworthiness, good customer service, selling rare titles and having good prices. These four points will be the main focus of the campaign and will have to come back in every aspect of the strategy. Aside from this, the preferences concerning extra activities and promotions will be used for a publicity campaign.

Building brand awareness

Knowing what the strategy should display, and what image should be brought across, the next step is to know how to do this. The conducted research shows that category need usually happens first, though brand awareness plays a slightly bigger role in Belgium. This means the focus should lie on increasing brand recall. Even if brand awareness happens first, brand recall will still be useful in that case. Motivation for buying manga can be both transformational and informational, with transformational having the upper hand. However, instead of focussing on one strategy and tackling one motivation, it would be more suitable to create a mixture of both strategies. This would lead to the following aspects creating the strategy:

- Emotional authenticity is a key element and the execution must be unique to the brand.

- The target audience must like the ad

- Repetition serves as a build-up function and a reinforcement function.

- Possibly include a problem-solution format

- Benefit claims should be stated clearly and be easily learned in one or two exposures.

This strategy includes showing the benefits that are important to an informational strategy, while keeping the overall idea of a transformational strategy.

Aside from this general strategy, a start towards building a gift giving economy on social media will be made. As mentioned in the desk research, this is a great way to get to know your audience, and create a long-lasting relationship (Bonchek 2012) With the survey results showing their preference towards an informal relationship, and the interviews stressing the importance of good relationships and word to mouth, building an online community with the use of the gift giving economy tactics would be a great way to get started. This will be done by hosting an art contest, changing the content of the posts on social media and setting up a channel on discord, a communication server using chat rooms and voice chats. This will be elaborated on in the advice below.

Brand awareness campaign

Aside from the general strategies mentioned above, starting a campaign in order to increase awareness would be a good idea. This is also where the strategy starts splitting into two different directions depending on the consumer's country of origin. The conducted research shows that both groups frequently buy manga at conventions. The Dutch also are very active online, but in order to get them to buy from Manga Tenshi's website, they first have to know Manga Tenshi. Conventions seem to be a great way to get people to know Manga Tenshi, as a large part of the community is present at conventions, and the part that isn't will be reached through the very important word of mouth.

For this purpose, Manga Tenshi will have to visit two conventions as a selling party. One in Belgium, and one in the Netherlands. These two conventions will make use of different promotions and focus points depending on the country. The main difference will be in the fact that the Dutch convention stand will focus on letting people know about the website and making them aware of the option to buy there, while the Belgian convention stand will focus on the convention stand itself instead of the online counterpart. The focus points for the convention campaigns will be the addition of flyers, the use of the banner and promotions, researching titles and knowing how to handle the volunteer situation. This will be elaborated on in the advice below.

Advice report

for Manga Tenshi

Creating brand awareness in Belgium and the Netherlands

Word count: 4999

Advice report

Manga Tenshi experiences difficulties creating awareness for its brand.

Based on the conducted research, an advice can be formulated in the form of a set of recommendations for a brand awareness strategy plan. This plan should give insights into the recommended strategy, the specific actions and their execution, the planning and the budget. This advice will be based on problems Manga Tenshi experiences and goals they wish to reach, using the outcomes of the research areas.

For the advice, there are several barriers that should be taken into consideration. The first one is that Manga Tenshi is run by a single person, limiting the amount of time and work that can be put into the execution of the advice. Manga Tenshi does occasionally enjoy the help of volunteers but their roles tend to lie completely in supporting the owner in physical sales at conventions. The second barrier is budget. As this is a start-up, the budget is limited. Expensive methods should as such be avoided, unless they could be executed by Manga Tenshi's partner, the screen printing company Screen70.

As mentioned in the conclusion, Manga Tenshi's USP will have to be a central point in the entire strategy. As such, trustworthiness, good customer service, sales of rare titles and good prices will be a focus point when trying to convey the company image.

The recommendations will be split into various sections. The first section will touch upon building the gift giving economy for social media. The second section will talk about the appropriate brand awareness strategy and the convention brand awareness campaign. This will be split into Dutch convention campaigns and Belgian convention campaigns, which will elaborate on how to differentiate between the countries and how to maximize effects for both. Both the first and second part will consider the implementation, communication and barriers. Internal communication concerning changed policies is not necessary considering it is a one man company, customers should know about changes that affect them, however, and volunteers for convention work should be properly informed about convention campaigns. After the recommended implementations, the activities advised against will also shortly be discussed. Then the planning will be presented, and lastly measuring the results will briefly be discussed.

Building the gift giving economy

As mentioned by Hart (2009) and Boncheck (2012), social media is all about building relationships, and less about sales. Sales will follow when you achieve a loyal following that likes you for who you are. The importance of personal relations is also mentioned by Ms. Smulders (personal communication, April 9th, 2017). As mentioned in the organizational context, Manga Tenshi is currently active on social media. However, they are merely posting updates concerning their store, and are not building a following. It is mentioned they have a following, but this following has to be expanded as it is very small, and it has to be more personalized and relationship focused. Altogether, it would line up well with the goal and the outcome of the research to start building a gift giving economy through social media. Bonchek (2012) mentions three factors contributing to a gift giving economy: relationship focus, social currency and earned status.

Enabling relationship building between customers using Discord

The relationship factor will be at its best when it makes people interact and get to know each other, rather than just the business. This creates a lively environment, and close relationship with customers. The question is, how does a manga store enable customers to interact with each other, keeping clear that it is being hosted by Manga Tenshi? The answer can be quite simple. Manga Tenshi needs to create a place for anime and manga fans to interact. This can be done with the creation of an anime and manga related discord server. Discord is a free, easily set up communication channel. Servers can be created and split up into many different chat and voice rooms, for different themes. You are both able to type and have voice calls with large or small groups, and individually chatting is also possible. Discord was mainly intended for gamers, what with the easy server creation and voice chat, but grew into a place where many communities come together and chat about what they love (Discord, n.d.). A Manga Tenshi Discord server with multiple chat rooms would work great to build a community.

There should be a channel for Manga Tenshi where store related questions can be asked if wished, but the focus should lie on the other rooms. These should include Manga, Anime, Cosplay, Conventions, and Games. Suggestions for new rooms can also be done in the Manga Tenshi server. This way people in the fandom can have a nice place where they can chat about their favourite series and get to know other fans.

This idea has been done successfully before by Aniway, an anime and manga related magazine in the Netherlands (Aniway, N.D.). They have created a forum where fans come together and discuss many different related topics. There is barely anything to find about Aniway aside from the title of the forum and a few links to their site, and it is immensely effective and popular. The Aniway forum is the largest anime and manga forum in the Netherlands. Manga Tenshi would not be able to compete with this. However, A discord server as described above does not yet exist. A direct chat with multiple rooms will make conversations more personal, and as such different from the Aniway forum, yet still able to meet its purpose.

When it comes to budget and workload, this is a very cost-effective method. Setting up a discord server is free, and it only takes a few clicks to set up. Aside from initial promotion to get the first few people in, word of mouth will also really help getting the sever going. The only thing that still has to be considered is the possible need of moderators, as moderating everything by one person can get overwhelming. A possible method of selecting moderators would be asking the most active and enthusiastic members to help out. If necessary, a compensation along the lines of a discount code or free items can be given.

Social Currencies using contests

Social currencies do not have a market value, and they are mainly used to express a relationship. A simple example of how this could be used is by doing a giveaway, where people 'pay' with Facebook likes in order to have a chance of winning something. Though this would succeed in bringing in likes, these people will have liked the page only because of the possibility of winning a prize, not because they want to have a good relationship with you. This is still, however, an option to quickly build a following, something that brings Manga Tenshi to the best step of social currencies is advised.

According to Bonchek (2012), this would be by creating your own social currencies while keeping your brand in mind. This new social currency has to be something that aligns with the general interests of people who enjoy anime and manga. Considering over 30% of the survey participants expressed their likings towards a fun, relatable mascot, this could be used. Even though 30% does not seem to be a very high number, it can still be very well used, especially if it is done well. This is because having a clear brand image and identity, and a clear mascot to go with it makes people remember you more easily. Mr. Martens also mentioned their mascot was often drawn and customers love it (personal communication, April 9th, 2017).

That brings up the point how this can be turned into a social currency. An open art contest could be held focussing on Manga Tenshi's mascot. As not everyone can draw well, it should be open to anything related to the mascot. Drawings, cosplay, crafted 3D works, anything could be entered. The entries would be shown on the website and on Facebook, where people would be able to vote for their favourite entries. Two winners will be chosen, one will be chosen by the owner of Manga Tenshi, and one will win a popularity vote. In return, the winners will win a price selection from the products Manga Tenshi has for sale, and their art will be displayed with full credits given. This will give people an incentive to start browsing the site and facebook page to look at art, and to start creating using Manga Tenshi's social currency: an art piece of their mascot. Aside from creating a social currency, online traffic and interaction between customers, it also creates awareness of the mascot and thus better establishes the brand image.

This is also something that can be set up fairly quickly, and takes little time and effort to uphold aside from the necessary initial sharing and promoting. It can also be as expensive as wished, as Manga Tenshi can decide the price. As such it will always stay within budget.

Earning status

Bonchek (2012) mentions that for earning status, you are improving when you celebrate the achievements of others, and are at your best when you enable others to celebrate each other's achievements. The discord server is a great place where people will be able to talk to each other and talk about their own achievements, and those of others. Especially in combination with the art contest, where the achievements of others are celebrated, there will be plenty of opportunities to share achievements. The submitted art and results can be shared and discussed through the discord, creating more conversation material for the people in the community. This is a great step Manga Tenshi could make towards earning status.

Changing content

As a gift giving economy focuses on relationship, and less about transaction, it is important to show that in the content on the page. As mentioned in the project context, Manga Tenshi currently only posts about changes in the store, such as new arrivals. This focuses completely on transactions, and thus should be changed. Though Facebook still can be used to let customers know about new arrivals and which conventions Manga Tenshi will attend, they should put the focus on other, non-sale related topics. The posts that are still store related, should always focus on bringing across Manga Tenshi's USP. This can be done by focusing on the arrivals of rare titles, or on the good times shared with customers during conventions.

The surveys showed that both Dutch and Belgian potential customers like frequent news updates about anime and manga in general. This should as such be added to the updates about the store. These updates however, should be personalized. As such, a post could be explaining about a new season of an anime coming out, and asking readers what their favourite character is. This both increases interactions and thus builds relationship, as well as takes the attention away from transactions. It does not cost any extra money, but it can take a lot of time depending on the intended type of content. If limited to news, however, daily checking's of anime related news sites and reposting it with slight edits will be enough. Special posts that take more time to prepare, such as reviews, can be added every now and then. Advisable is to aim to bring out a special post once a month. Even so, regular posting does not have to take up a lot of time and should be manageable by one person aside from regular duties.

Brand awareness strategy and convention campaign

Conventions would be a great way to create brand awareness. This is mainly due to the fact that the research shows that participants from both countries frequently buy manga at conventions. Even if they do not buy the books, every visitor at an anime convention likes anime and manga to some degree, and will most likely walk past the convention stand no matter if they intend to or not. Even if there is a good website and a well hosted social media page, people still have to find it and know about it. Considering that Manga Tenshi's target group has no choice but to come across their stand at conventions means that using the time and space available there in order to bring across the brand would be a great start.

In order to know exactly what to do, it is important to understand the best strategy to use. The conducted research shows that category need is most common among manga buyers, though brand awareness also plays a role in Belgium. This still does not take away the fact that the focus of the strategy should lie on brand recall. This is because when there is good brand recall, they will also recognize the brand in the case of brand awareness. The research also showed motivation for purchasing manga can be both transformational and informational. This leaves two possible strategies derived by Percy & Rossiter (1992) that could be used. Transformational is the most common form of motivation, but informational still plays a big role. As such, in this case, using both strategies to create a new one fitting for this specific situation would be best. This would lead to the following aspects creating the strategy:

- Emotional authenticity is a key element and the execution must be unique to the brand.

- The target audience must like the ad

- Repetition serves as a build-up function and a reinforcement function.

- Possibly include a problem-solution format

- Benefit claims should be stated clearly and be easily learned within one or two exposures.

So the campaign during the convention should consider these points and ensure each of their inclusion. This can be done using various methods at the same time, leading to an overall experience for customers that will make them aware of the existence of the brand.

The convention campaign is also the only point where differentiating strategies depending on the customer's country of origin seems favourable. Though the differences aren't great, there certainly are some noticeable differences that could make a slightly different approach very fruitful. As such the first thing that has to be mentioned is the fact that for the convention campaign, two different conventions will have to be visited. One will be in the Netherlands, and one will be in Belgium. These conventions will be Nishicon in the Netherlands, which will take place 23-25 February 2018, and Atsusacon in Belgium, which will take place 5-6 August in 2017.

There are many points that will overlap for both conventions. Below, each advice is listed separately. Each section will include the contents, implementation, barriers and differentiation between the Dutch and Belgian version of the convention.

Volunteers

Considering you can never leave a convention stand alone, it is necessary to have at least two people present. This to ensure breaks can be taken, and crowded times can be handled. As such, it is necessary to have an employee or volunteer working with you. As mentioned in the project context, Manga Tenshi does have volunteers that help out during conventions. However, volunteers should fit the image Manga Tenshi wants to bring across and should also help delivering a good experience to customers.

The conducted surveys show they find it very important that the sellers are knowledgeable, and able to recommend titles and talk about it. The surveys also showed that when someone else is enthusiastic, people are more likely to become enthusiastic themselves. As such, it has to be ensured that the people at the Manga Tenshi stand are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the products. Good customer service is the key factor here, and finding volunteers that can fulfil the above mentioned requirements will work towards bringing across this part of the USP. If a volunteer matching these requirements can't be found, it is advisable to keep searching for someone who will fit, even if that means having to pay them. However, considering the nature of Manga Tenshi's possible volunteers, it is likely that this will not have to cost a lot of money.

The people working at the stand are key to everything happening around the stand. As such, they should always be well informed about all promotions and issues. They should also be made aware of the image that Manga Tenshi is trying to get across, so they can contribute. There is not much difference concerning volunteers for the Dutch and Belgian convention. It would be useful if the helper at the Belgian convention spoke French, but it is not necessary as the convention takes place in the Flemish part of Belgium.

Research preferred titles

From the research it becomes clear that Dutch and Belgian customers prefer different titles. Before going to a convention, it would be smart to do research on their preferred titles, genres, and which titles are considered rare. Considering not all books are able to be transported to a convention stand, this will help picking out the perfect titles for each convention. Having the correct rare titles will help bring across an important point of Manga Tenshi's USP. There could be rare titles, but if they are unwanted rare titles, people will not notice. Having preferred titles will also help bringing people to the stand, which will lead them to viewing promotional materials for a longer period of time.

Flyers

As mentioned by Mr. Martins (personal communication, April 9th, 2017), adding flyers to a purchase is an effective way to make them remember your brand. Flyers are also a great way to incorporate some of the points from the brand awareness strategy. Most noticeably, flyers contribute to repetition of showing the brand name. The contents of the flyer should address the problem – solution format in short, and have it easily understood. It should also include emotional, original content, and it must be something the audience will like.

Considering the points mentioned above, the flyer should incorporate the following:

- The brand name, slogan, general house style, website, Facebook page and discord server. All of this contributes to repetition of the brand name, and awareness about the existence of the website, Facebook and discord server. People finding out about these platforms will also help building the online community.

- Something original with emotional value, which focuses of relationships and good feeling instead of sales. This could be done by using the company's mascot. She could be displayed smiling, welcoming customers. The original and cute appearance of the mascot together with a well thought out text should be able to reach this goal. The addition of the mascot should also make the ad more likeable, as the research shows that a mascot is generally liked. The more the ad and the mascot are liked, the more likely people are to remember the brand.

- A line that firmly states the problem and solution. This could even be combined with the use of the mascot in order to make it seem more personal and emotional rather than a sales technique. It could be displayed as if the mascot were talking, saying "Worry not about spending too much, I've got you covered!". This way, the problem solution format is used in a way that relates the reader to the mascot.

There is no need to differentiate between Dutch and Belgian customers. This is due to the fact that most of their preferences regarding the contents of the flyer are not very different. The biggest difference here is that the Dutch people are more likely to actually visit the website and buy online, while the Belgian people are more likely to like and relate to the mascot. This does however not mean that it should be left out for the other, as it is not something that pushes them away from the brand. Belgians may still want to visit the website even though they are less likely to, and the Dutch may still very much enjoy the addition of the mascot. Below, a small version of the example flyer can be found. A larger version can be seen in appendix 5.
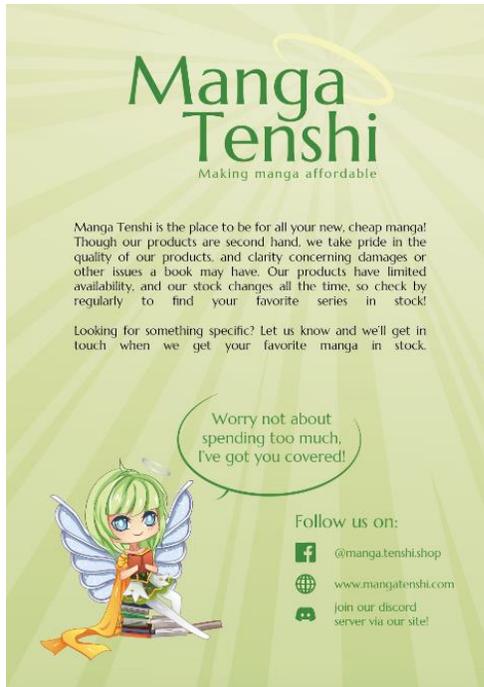
Figure 25. Example flyer.

The flyers can be printed without costs by making use of Manga Tenshi's partner Screen70, and in order to reduce work, the given example of the flyer could be used. If alterations are wished, this should be a one-time change and should not take too much time. As such it is a cost and time efficient method.

Banner

Showing the brand name clearly is something mentioned my Ms. Smulders as very important. If the brand name is not clearly shown at the convention stand, customers will not relate the stand to the brand. However, this is not the only purpose of a banner. It also contributes to repetition, and is a great tool to show the most important points of a business in a few seconds. Manga Tenshi's current banner only shows the brand name, slogan and mascot (see appendix 2.). Though this does get the most important parts of the message across, it can be improved to show the most important values of the customer. However, as a banner must be easy to read and understand in a few seconds, it cannot include too much text.

Considering the difference in nature of Dutch and Belgian customers concerning their purchases online or at physical locations, the focus point on the banner changes for both groups. For Dutch conventions, the banner should focus on the opportunity of online sales. As such, the banner should include a clearly visible line saying 'Visit us online at www.mangatenshi.com!'. For Belgian conventions however, the focus point should not be on the website. If they want to visit the website, they can take a business card or flyer, which displays the website. However, considering the low amount of people purchasing online, the valuable space on the banner should be used differently. The Belgian banner should focus on the convention itself, and bring across a good feeling. As evident by the research, for Belgian customers, enthusiastic employees and a good feeling at the convention is more important due to the fact this is their main place to buy. As such, the banner should include a line conveying feeling and the positive points of the stand.

As mentioned in the project context, banners can be delivered free of charge to Manga Tenshi by their partner Screen70. This means that production costs of the banners is no issue. Changing the banner to incorporate an extra line will costs a bit of time, but it is something that only has to be done once. Afterwards the amount of time it takes to set up a convention stand will not change. Overall, this means changing the banners is a great, cost and time efficient way to better bring across Manga Tenshi's image.

Promotions

Currently, Manga Tenshi is using the get free goodies promotion at the Dutch conventions they visit. The research shows that the Belgian customers would prefer this promotion over all possible promotions. This makes sense considering the fact the Belgian customers value the feeling and liking at a convention more, and getting free goodies feels like getting a present. This will make the Belgian customers remember and like the brand. This makes use of the strategy by creating something customers like, and has an authentic emotional value. Therefore it is advised to use this promotion at Belgian conventions as well.

The results from Dutch participants however, show that an overwhelming majority prefers general discounts. Having general discounts at a convention does not work, as there is no proof of the price actually going down. If, for example, the tag says 'from 8 euros: now 6 euros!', there is no proof it wasn't 6 euros all along. Though it may get people to impulsively buy or buy because they believe it was discounted, this goes against Manga Tenshi's value of trustworthiness. Considering the fact the Dutch often buy their manga online, the best way to practice a general discount is to add a coupon upon purchase to be used on the website after a purchase. Even though the free goodie promotion seemed to make customers happy, it is advisable to try out the discount promotion. It would be best to use both at the same time, but due to budget limitations, trying out only discounts fits best. After using this method based on the research outcomes, it is important to assess the changes and see which method works better in practice.

Don'ts

Aside from everything mentioned above that would help increase brand awareness, it is also worth mentioning some things that should be left alone for now. These are mainly things that were already considered by Manga Tenshi, but are shown to most likely not be worth the effort put into them by the results of the research.

The first one is the blog. As mentioned in the project context, Manga Tenshi was planning on keeping a blog in order to increase traffic on their site. However, only 15% of the Dutch participants said they would like a blog. The Belgium participants showed more interest, with 40% of them saying they would like it. However, as its goal would be to increase traffic on their site, the fact that Belgium people do not like to buy online or browse manga sites online means it will be less effective for the Belgium customers anyway. As writing a blog takes a lot of time, and almost everything concerning the webshop has to be done by a single person, it is advisable to drop the idea of the blog and focus on the other tasks necessary to uphold the shop.

The second on is using indulgence in the strategy. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, both Belgium and the Netherlands score high on indulgence (Hofstede, N.D.). As such, it was mentioned this show of desire could be used in the strategy. However, the survey results show very varying opinions on showing and acting upon excitement. As nearly 40% of all participants mentioned they do not like to show or act upon their desire, this should not be a focus point of the strategy. Even so, it is still best to be enthusiastic when behind the stand in order to avoid looking uninteresting.

Planning

The planning of when to implement which step is also important. While making the planning, it is crucial to keep the deadlines in mind, which are the dates of the conventions. It is advisable to set up the discord and start changing the social media content immediately. The art contest should be started a few weeks later, after an initial following has been built through discord. This way, more people will know about the art contest, and it will receive more attention and entries. The registration as dealer for both cons also has to be done as soon as possible in order to ensure a spot. When registering, it is also important to ensure there is an available volunteer at that date. The first week of the planning for the gift giving economy starts at June 5th. This starting date has been chosen because there has to be enough time to be able to sign up as dealer for the conventions. After signing up, there will be a gap in the planning. At July 3rd, or week 5, the planning will resume. This way there will be plenty of time left to implement all the steps, and it will start right when Manga Tenshi has time to start working on it. The planning ends with the start of the event at the 5th of August. The table of the planning below does not include the Dutch convention Nishicon. This is due to the fact that it takes place 23-25 February 2018, which is much later than Atsusacon. The planning for Nishicon will be the same as the planning for Atsusacon, except it will take place in the 9 weeks before Nishicon instead of the 9 weeks before Atsusacon.

	Week 5	Week 8	Week 9	Week 13	Week 14
Discord server	Set up discord server and advertise on Facebook and on the website.	Assess amount of people entering discord, and advertise again.	If more people are joining discord, look for a moderator.		
Art contest			Set up art contest, advertise on Facebook, website and discord.	Close entries for the art contest. 4 weeks should be enough to allow people to create something.	Reveal winner of the art contest.
Change content	Start posting weekly with anime news related content.	Start drafting up some unique posts such as reviews to post monthly.	Post the first special post. From now on keep this schedule going.		

Figure 26. Planning creating gift giving economy.

	Week 1	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7-8	Week 9
Register as dealer	Sent emails to register as dealer.	Sent information about helper, and ask for additional information.			Atsusacon takes place.
Volunteers	Look for volunteers available at the date of the convention.	Inform volunteers about promotions, changes, prices etc.		Inform volunteers about possible changes.	
Research preferred titles			Start research Belgium preferred titles.	Finish research	
Flyers			Create and finalize flyer design, and send it to Screen70.		
Banner				Create and finalize banner design, and send it to screen70.	
Promotion		Start making sure there are enough goodies to give away. If not, start restocking.		Create and finalize discount coupons.	

Figure 27. Planning conventions.

Measuring results

After implementing everything mentioned above, their success has to be measured. The goal of these implementations is to raise brand awareness, which is something that is not easily measured in numbers such as the amount of people attending a certain event. Instead, it can be measured by observing changes. In order to do this, it is important to keep track of the amount of Facebook likes, and the amount of traffic on the website starting from the day the implementations are made, up until after the event. Of course tracking changes in visitor numbers is useful at all times, in this period it is especially important to see the effects of the campaign. Are more people visiting the Facebook page? Are people joining the discord server? Is there more traffic on the website? How many extra 'visits' would be considered a successful campaign is hard to tell, as it may fluctuate. It may be that it takes a while for the discord server to have a noticeable effect, and it may be that an increase in traffic turns out to only be temporary, without entering the follower base. As such it is best to separate each of the results, both because of the differences in time and effect, as well as to see what works best.

Aside from this, measuring the brand awareness at the convention may be tough. This is due to the way a convention is set up, which leads people to walk by your stand no matter if they intend to or not. However, whether or not they stop and actually take a look around is something they have to choose. The popularity of the stand compared to the previous attended conventions may be a good way to judge the effect during the convention, but this may still be biased due to the differences in the amount of people present at each convention.

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Appendixes

1. Preliminary research

1.1. Existing competitors in the Netherlands and Belgium.

The anime and manga niche is rather large, with a large variety of different products being sold. Most of the big companies selling anime and manga related goods however, sell new products. Though big manga stores selling new books can be seen as a competitor considering potential customers might buy books there instead of at Manga Tenshi, the closest competitors are other second hand shops.

The main reason big stores such as Archonia and Henk Comics (Henk Comics en Manga, N.D.) are not main competitors is because they will be stocking the most recently released products (Archonia, feb. 13th 2017), which are harder to come by second hand. They also do not stock out of print books, which is something Manga Tenshi does regularly. There is also, of course, the difference in prices, but that would not eliminate these parties as competitors as they have a lot of customers.

The first of two identifiable competitors is a small online webshop called Mangawinkeltje (N.D). Much like Manga Tenshi, they only operate online. They have a facebook page with 150 likes, which was last active August 2016 (Manga Winkeltje, N.D.).They sell their manga at prices generally ranging from 5-6 euros, with some exceptions. This is close to identical to Manga Tenshi. However, Mangawinkeltje is not active at conventions, and their stock is very limited. =

The second, and biggest, competitor is Special Edition. This mainly second hand focused shop sells manga, some figures and clothing. They also sell some new manga aside from the second hand ones. They have an offline location where they sell their good, and are very active at conventions. Their prices vary greatly depending on the title of the book. One of the biggest differences Manga Tenshi notes is that during conventions, they only sell their manga in batches, leaving customers unable to buy single volumes. Red Dot Commerce noted that the sales and set-up approach of Special Edition was not working well, considering they stacked their books in bookshelves from the ground up, rather than having the books visible on a table. He mentioned that people are not willing to crouch to check out the batches of books at the bottom, so they are losing a lot of customers. They mentioned that the approach Henk and Manga Tenshi had for selling books was a lot better. Even so, Special Edition is the most prominent competitor for Manga Tenshi.

1.2. Foreign shipping.

Shipping costs can vary greatly depending on the delivery services used and the country of destination. Manga Tenshi mentioned that shipping costs was one of the main reasons they focus the Netherlands and Belgium, and no other countries yet. This is because people are more likely to buy products with low shipping costs, which usually translates to products within close surroundings.

For the following section, information has been found based on the assumption the products will be sent from the Netherlands, and that the size of one standard manga is 19x12.50 cm, and one book weighs around 200g.

Post NL ships packages anywhere on earth, but the prices skyrocket once delivery is outside of the Netherlands. The maximum size for a package that can be shipped abroad is 100x50x50 cm. The packages will be delivered at the address of the customer. The table below shows the prices given by Postnl (n.d.).

What?	100 - 250 g	250g - 2kg	2 – 5 kg	5 – 10 kg	10 – 20 kg	20 – 30 kg
To the Netherlands:						
Letter (Fits 1 or 2 books.)	€ 3,12	€ 3,95	-		-	-
Letter insured	€ 8,35	€ 8,35	-		-	-
Package	€ 6,95	€ 6,95	€ 6,95	€ 6,95	€ 13,25	€ 13,25
Package insured	€ 8,60	€ 8,60	€ 8,60	€ 8,60	€ 14,90	€ 14,90
To Belgium:						
Letter						
Letter insured						
Package	€ 13,-	€ 13,-	€ 19,50	€ 25,-	€ 34,-	€ 45,-
Package insured	€ 14,65	€ 14,65	€ 21,15	€ 26,65	€ 35,65	€ 46,65

Figure 28. PostNL shipping.

Kiala is a cheaper delivery option. However, Kiala does not deliver the package to the address of the customer. Instead, it ships to a so-called kiala-point, where the customer picks up the package. Kiala delivers in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France and Spain. Kiala has a set price for all packages up to 15 kilos, depending on the country it is shipped to. The

maximum size for a Kiala package is 70x70x70 cm, and the maximum weight is 15 kilos. A package sent to a kiala point in the Netherlands costs € 3,95 and a package sent to Belgium costs € 7,50 (Kiala, N.D.).

A third possible option is DHL. DHL mainly ships to DHL points, just like Kiala. However, for a small extra fee, they will deliver at home in the Netherlands as well (DHL, N.D.).

Package to DHL point in:	0 – 2 kg	2 – 5 kg	5 – 10 kg	10 – 20 kg
The Netherlands	€ 5,-	€ 5,-	€ 5,-	€ 8,-
Belgium	€ 10,-	€ 18,-	€ 22,-	€ 27,75

Figure 29. DHL shipping.

Extra costs can apply depending on the wishes of the sender and receiver.

- + € 0,75 for sending the package to the home address as long as it doesn't fit through the door.
- + € 1,- if the sending label has to be created at the point of delivery instead of making it at home.
- + € 1,50 when sending with 'Extra Zeker' which will provide additional insurance.

2. Additional organizational context.

Below, Manga Tenshi's business model canvas is shown. The canvas includes key partners, key activities, key resources, value propositions, customer relationships, customer segments, cost structure and revenue streams. Each of these sections together gives a clear and complete view about how the business operates.

Figure 30. Business model canvas.

As shown above, there are two kinds of main partners for Manga Tenshi. The first one includes the minor partnership with Screen70, a screen printing company located in the Netherlands. Considering family relations between both companies, Manga Tenshi was able to make a sponsorship deal. Screen70 provides professional banners, outstanding business cards and any printing they might need in return for promotion. The second kind is conventions, which includes any anime convention the company has, or will be selling products. The key activities of Manga Tenshi include the sale of their key resources: manga, dvd's, figures and merchandise. It also includes social media activities, activities during anime conventions and blog creation. The value propositions include the fact that the books are sold for half the new price and are as such very cheap, the fact that rare titles that cannot be found at new manga shops can be found at Manga Tenshi, and the fact that there is good customer service available. As for customer relations, the company wishes to create a strong personal bond with customers as well as

receive feedback from them. This will be done through social media contact and personal interactions. The channels used to reach the customers, which are made up of Dutch and Belgian geeks and manga fans, are social media, the website and personal contact at conventions. The main expenses of Manga Tenshi consists of the purchase of stock, the contracts with conventions to get a stand, and the maintenance of the website. The income consists of both online and offline purchases, through facebook, the website or at conventions.

My expertise in the field of anime and manga allows to stock the right products, and to know what to look at when deciding whether or not to buy a batch of manga. Three main focus points to consider are the title of the book, the language and whether or not the books come from the 'boekenfestijn'. The title of the book concerns the popularity of different series, and how well they sell. That knowledge allows you to always buy the selling titles, and ignore unwanted ones. However, that's not all there is to it. English manga generally sell way better than Dutch ones. This is partly because of preference, but also because there are a lot more titles translated into English than into Dutch. The last thing to consider is the 'boekenfestijn', which is a book market in the Netherlands where many books, including manga, are sold for very low prices. In order to stop re-selling, all these books are marked. These books cannot be sold at regular price, as people know they are actually very cheap. This mark drastically decreases the value of a book.

Manga Tenshi was founded early 2015, even though business only started late 2016. The first year was spend setting up the company mission, branding and stock. Early business was done purely through Facebook, as there were issues with the site. The site launched late 2016, and Manga Tenshi officially became a brand to the public.

In January 2017, the company first attempted to join the circle of well-known anime-related sales brands by participating as dealer during an anime convention named Dynamiccon. Here, first contacts were made with competitors such as Special Edition, and potential partners such as Archonia, Aniway and anime conventions other than Dynamiccon. Options for sharing knowledge and obtaining know-how were also present during the convention.

Currently, Manga Tenshi makes use of banners and business cards at conventions. The banner shows the brand name, slogan and mascot. The business card shows the brand name, slogan, mascot, website and Facebook. During the two visited conventions, the promotion of getting free goodies with a purchase was tried out, and seemed to have good results. People liked it a lot to get free goodies, but usually did not realize they would after they bought something. So though it increased liking, it did not necessarily increase sales.

3. Survey Results

The survey participants from the self-selection sampling method were able to find the survey at various locations. The first one was at my personal Facebook page, and the pages of several of my friends who are also active in the anime and manga niche. The survey was also accessible at several Facebook pages directed at anime and manga fans. Lastly, the survey could be found at aniway.nl, a forum for anime and manga fans in the Benelux, hosted by the anime magazine aniway. Participants were informed of two prerequisites before filling in the survey. The first being that the participants are either Dutch or Belgian, and that they have at least bought manga some time before filling in the survey. The survey was filled in by 102 participants, of which 59 Dutch and 43 Belgian.

The survey consisted of four parts guided by the research areas: general information, cultural, brand awareness and consumer behavior. The questions and answers can be seen below, with the answers displayed by different kinds of graphs. It is worth noting that when filling in the survey, the questions asking for answers on a scale ranging from one end to another, i.e. competition – cooperation or not important at all – very important, were sufficiently displayed in the questions with all options clearly visible and described. This was left out in the graphs showing the results.

3.1. General questions

1. Where are you from?
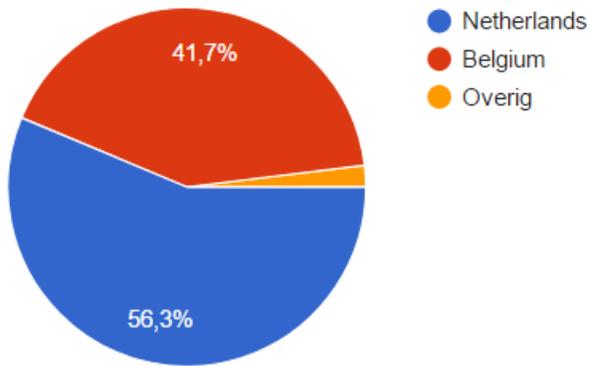
Figure 31. Results question 1.

Overig meaning other, these two participants from Poland and the UK were filtered out for the rest of the results.

2. What is your age?
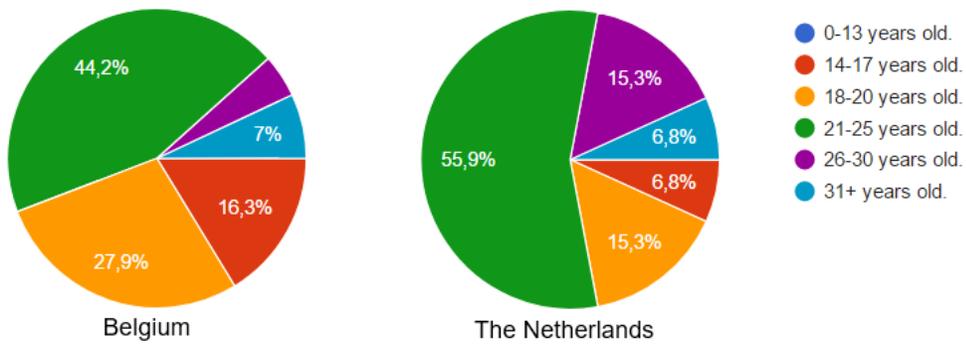
Figure 32. Results question 2.

3. How often/when do you buy manga? (Multiple answers possible)

Full answers in this order:

- Once a year or less often.

- Once every half year.

- Every few months

- Every month (This answer was an option but was never selected.)

- I buy manga whenever I find a volume of series I collect.

- I buy manga (almost) every time I visit an anime convention.

Belgium

The Netherlands
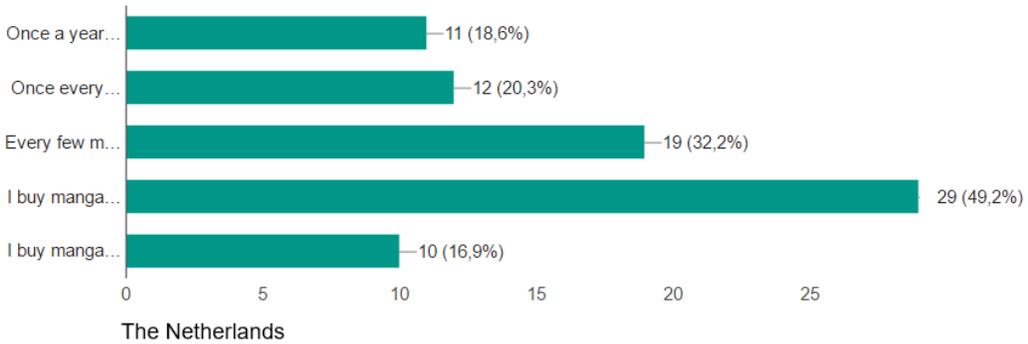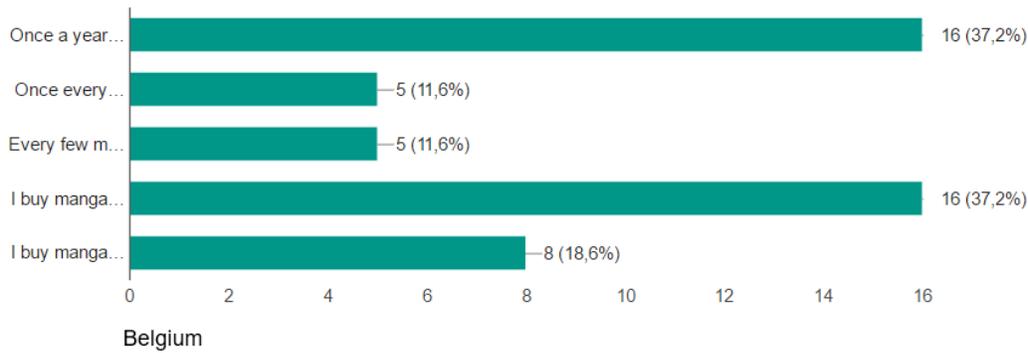
Figure 33. Results question 3.

4. Where do you usually buy manga?

Full answers in this order:
- Online
- At conventions
- At physical stores
- Second handed through other media (facebook, etc)

Belgium

The Netherlands
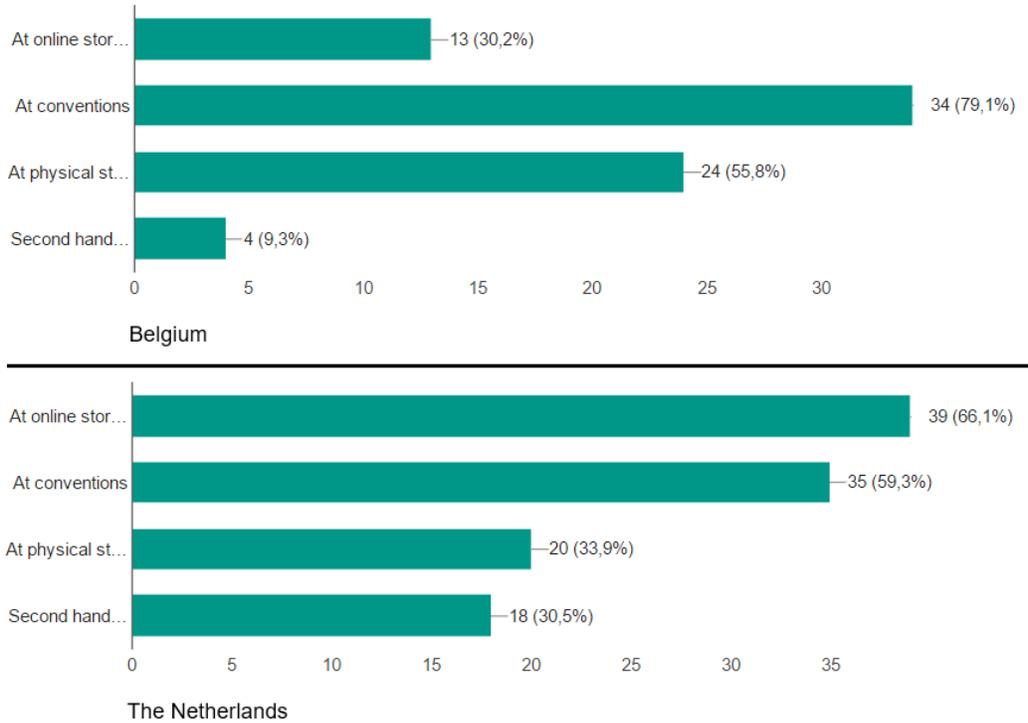
Figure 34. Results question 4.

5. How likely are you to buy titles you do not know yet?
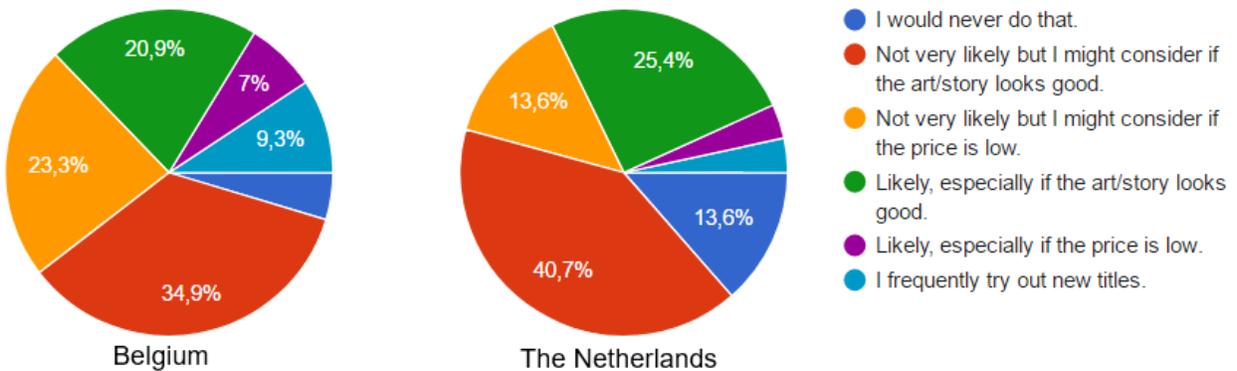
Figure 35. Results question 5.

3.2. Cultural questions.

6. Do you believe relationships with sellers of manga should be very formal or more informal? (do you prefer a professional relationship where it's about sales, getting things done and formalities, or do you prefer to have fun conversations where status matters less?)
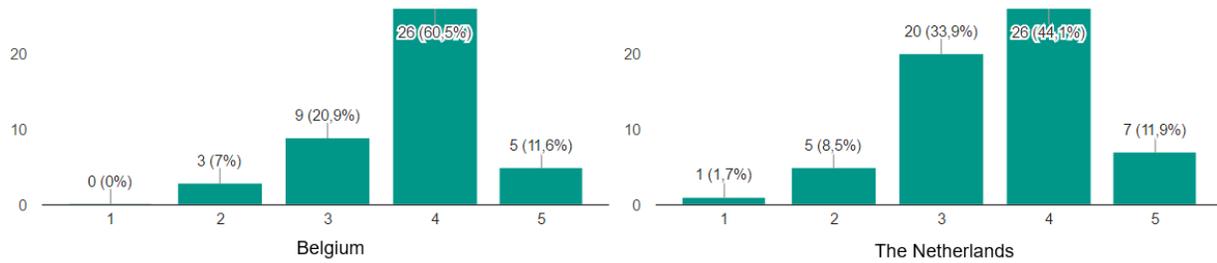
Figure 36. Results question 6.

In this question, 1 would be very formal, 3 would be indifferent, and 5 would be very informal.

7. Do you prefer businesses in the anime and manga niche to be focused on competition or cooperation?
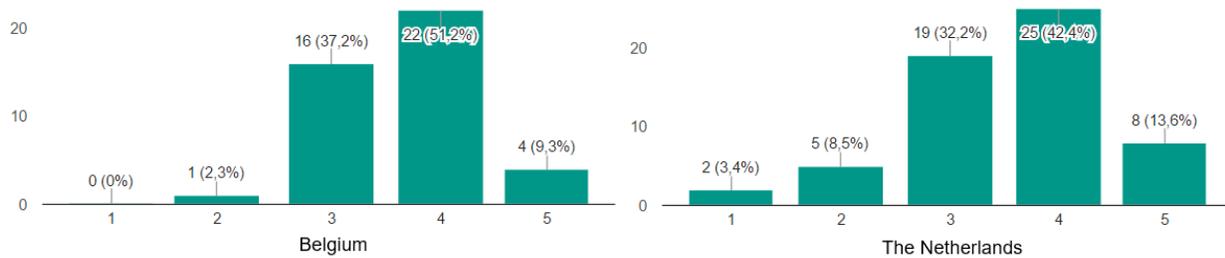
Figure 37. Results question 7.

In this question, 1 would be complete competition, 3 would be indifferent, and 5 would be complete cooperation.

8. When buying manga online or at conventions, do you generally allow yourself to be excited and express and act upon this excitement?
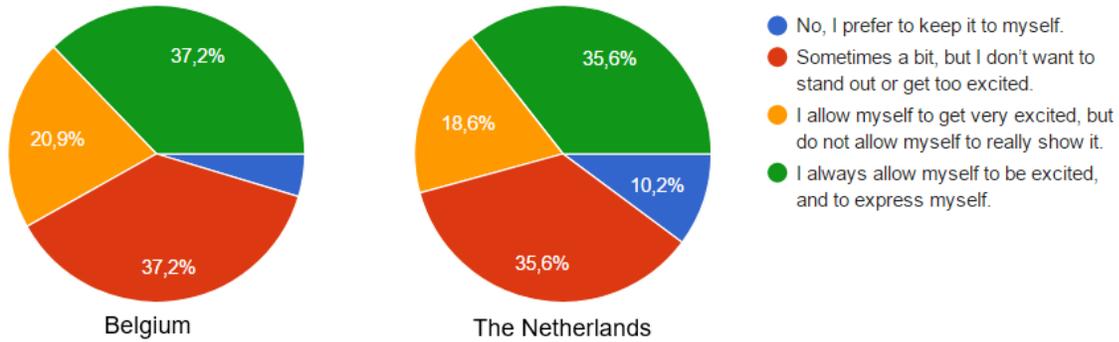

Figure 38. Results question 8.

**9. Do you enjoy it when other people express their excitement?**
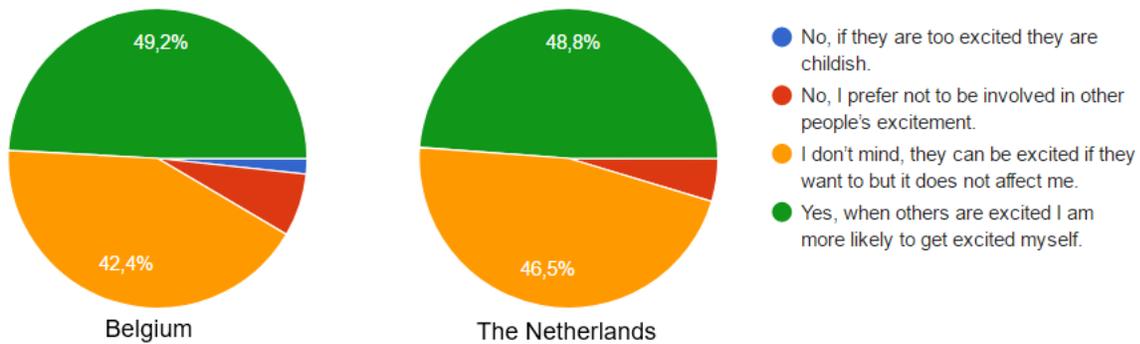
Figure 39. Results question 9.

3.3. Brand awareness questions.

10. When you buy manga online, do you first have a title you want, and then search for a shop that has it in stock, or do you often first see a shop, and then look for a title you want?
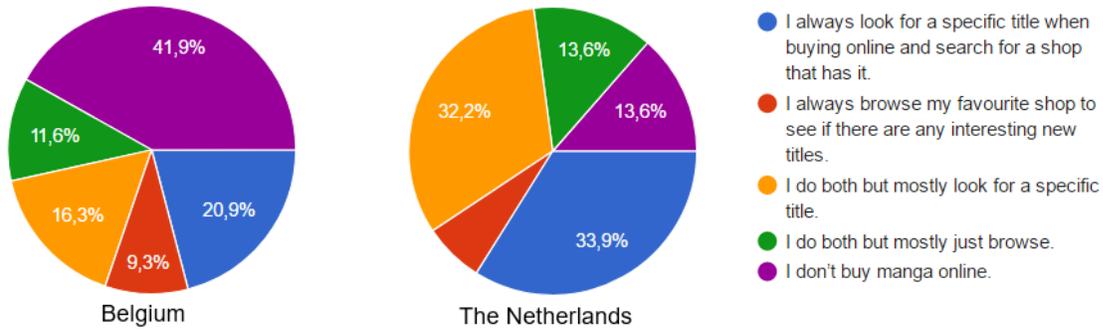

Figure 40. Results question 10.

11. When you buy manga at a convention, do you first have a title you want, and then search for a stand that has it for sale, or do you often first see a stand, and then look for a title you want?
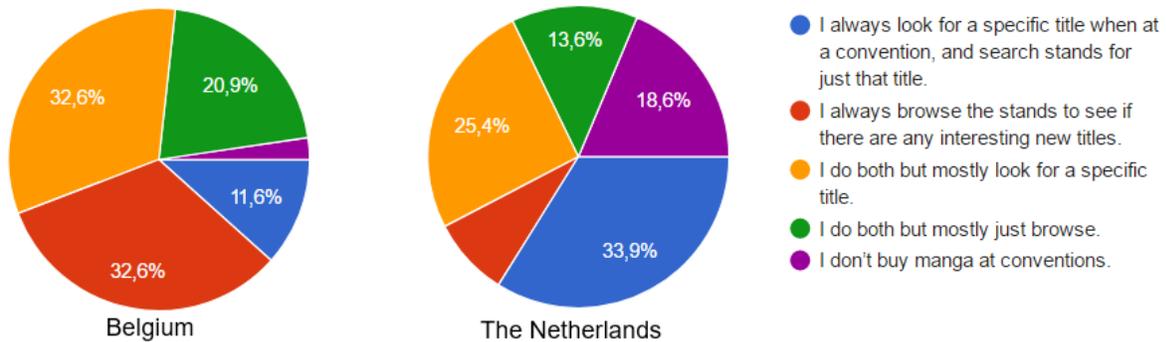

Figure 41. Results question 11.

12. What generally makes you positively remember a manga selling brand?

Full answers in this order:

- Good prices

- A catchy brand name

- Interesting house style/banner/mascot

- Good customer service

- Enthusiastic people
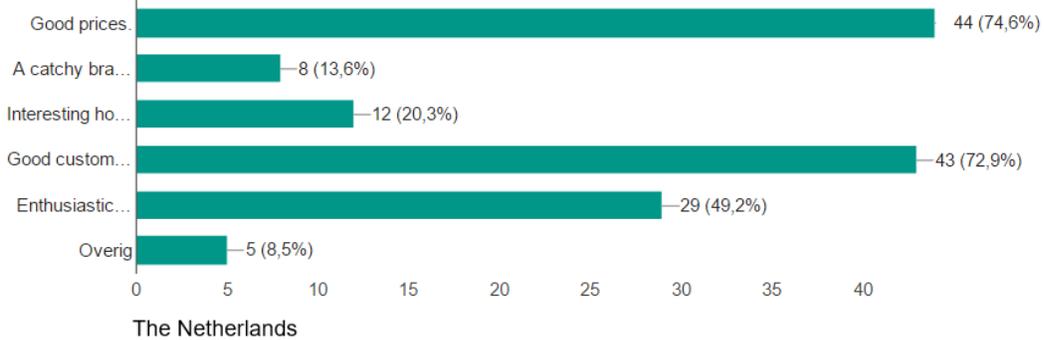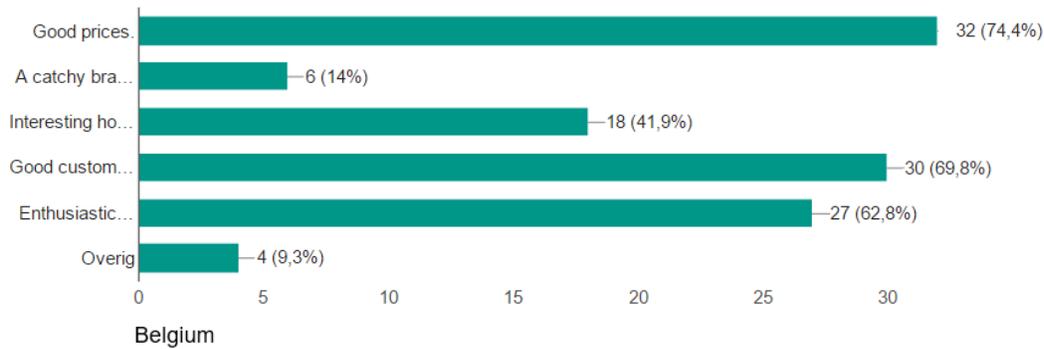
- Other:

Figure 42. Results question 12.

Other answers Belgian:

- General Atmosphere inside the store

- A wide variety of Manga, not just the most popular series

- Business card, maybe with their Facebook page and online shop

- Wide variety of titles

Other answers Dutch:

- Cheap shipping

- Large and diverse collection

- Selling manga that I cannot find anywhere else.

- A large collection

- Easy to navigate

13. What generally makes you want to come back to a brand?

Full answers in this order:

- Good previous customer service.

- Fast delivery (if online)

- Just the fact that you remember them

- Other:

Belgium

The Netherlands
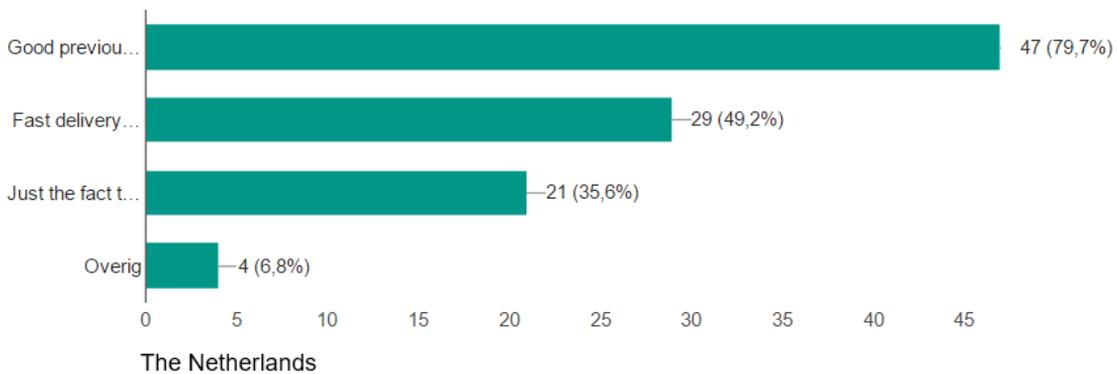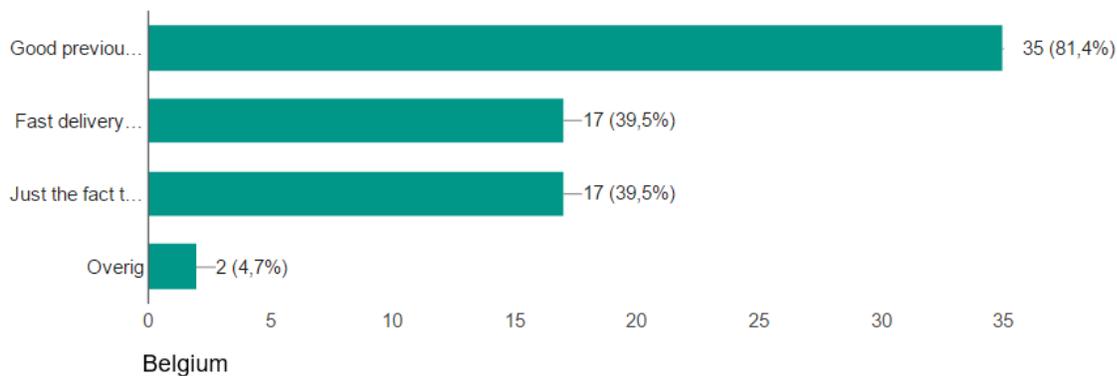
Figure 43. Results question 13.

Other answers Belgium:
- Good price/quality ratio
- Continuous periodical availability to new titles

Other answers Dutch:
- Pick up points
- Convenience
- Good prices
- Good prices

14. When buying a manga, which of the following statements can be true concerning the motivation for buying a manga?

Full answers in this order:
- Seeking a solution to a current problem. (i.e. Prices too high elsewhere, or searching rare titles)
- Seeking to avoid an anticipated problem. (Buying because it might be out of stock and hard to find later or might go up in price.)
- Seeking enjoyment from the product.
- Social status: wanting the product to get social reward. (For example: having something new no one has yet, or having something everyone has in order to not fall behind.)


Belgium

The Netherlands
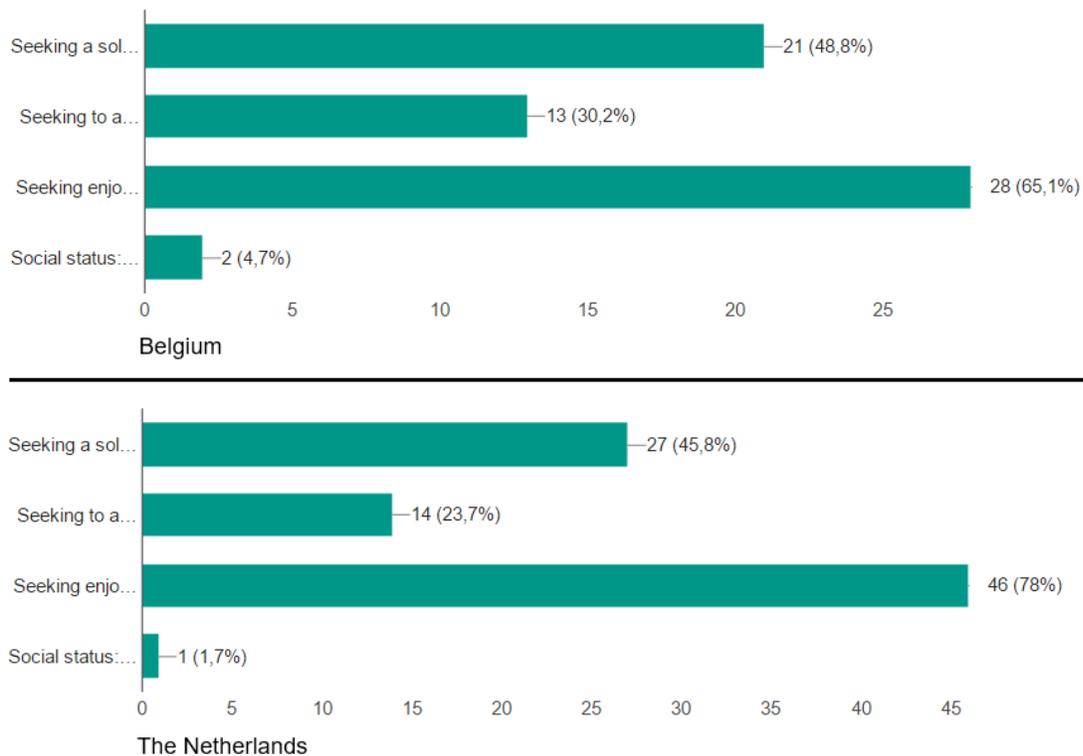
Figure 44. Results question 14.

3.4. Consumer behaviour questions.

**15. When buying manga from a shop online or at anime conventions, how important are the following points?**
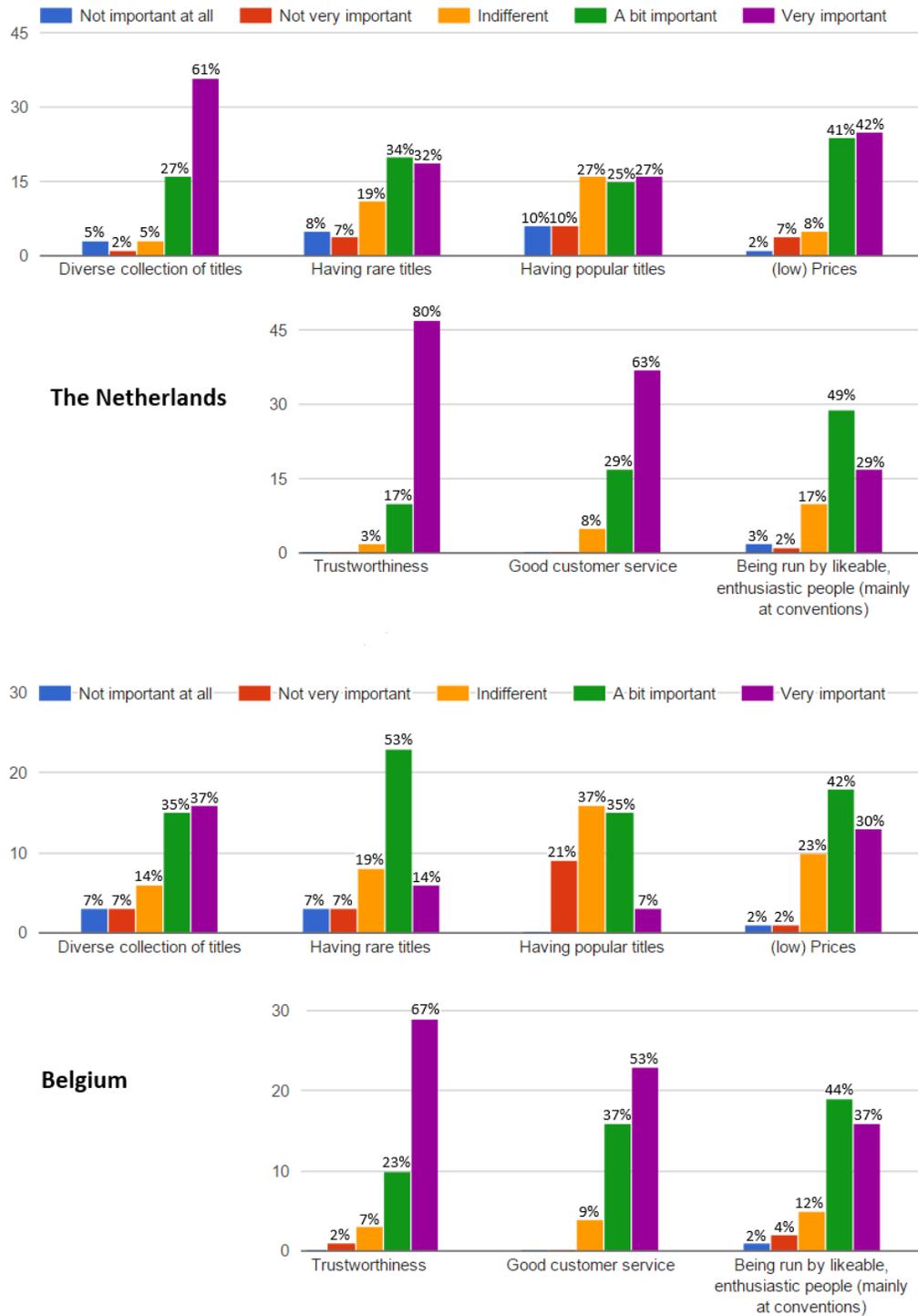
Figure 45. Results question 15.

15b. Are there any other points not mentioned above that you value greatly in manga shops?
Dutch answers:

Knowing about the current trends, being in the know

A good/logical layout (Both for online shops and Convention booth setups)

De bereikbaarheid, omdat ik van ver moet reizen. (roughly translated: Has to be easy to reach because of long travels.)

Actually being able to ship a manga on the displayed release date

Accessibility (easy registration for webshops and easy to browse at both shops and conventions)

Able to look in the manga itself before buying

Different Languages

A notification service where you can enter a list and be notified when that manga is in stock.

How central the placement of the store is. Is it next to a station or do you need to search for it

Knowledgeable staff. They know what they have in stock.

Having successive volumes (in the same language)

New books should look like new

I personally like old titles which are rarely available.

For shops online - cheap prices, for conventions - perhaps discount when buying many?

Having access to information, or knowing, about certain titles when someone asks for such (at conventions).

That they do the best they can to get a title they normally dont have in stock

That the books are sorted!! No boxes with a 100 different manga's pls.

Belgian answers:

Ik hou gewoon van de kleine zelfstandige, ik koop dus meestal geen manga's online en enkel titels die ik mankeer op conventies, het overgroot deel van mijn collectie komt van de WEC in Gent, waar ik ook een titel op 'vaste bestelling' kan zetten, wat betekend dat zunder opletten of er een nieuw volume uitkomt in een reeks die ik volg en ik daar zelf mijn tijd niet in moet steken, wat echt een gigantisch pluspunt is (plus hun prijs kwaliteit zit heel snor) (Rough translation: prefers small physical stores and doesn't buy online, the function of being able to put a title on 'permanent order' where whenever a new volume comes out they will be notified.)

Selling non-bootleg/translated manga

Having also genres like Yuri and Ecchi

Maybe theme songs from main animes? Playing while u browse the store.

If there wouldn't be any of the titles I seek I would hope they would help me find something new in the same style or advise me some other place where I could find it. I would do the same if I would work as such a stand and have the knowledge of it.

Some knowledge of what they sell

The manga being in English

The way you present your Manga and the knowledge of the seller.

English manga and the addition of Light Novels

16. What do you believe is important considering the design/house style of a brand?

Full answers in this order:
- A fun, relatable mascot
- A pretty website
- A well-functioning website
- A catchy brand name
- A good slogan
- A consistent house style (colors, etc.)
- A neatly organized convention stand
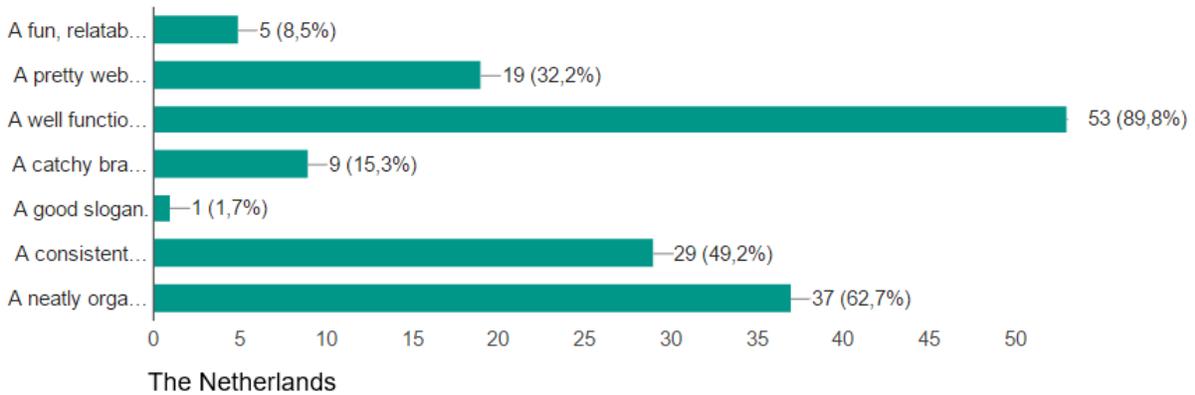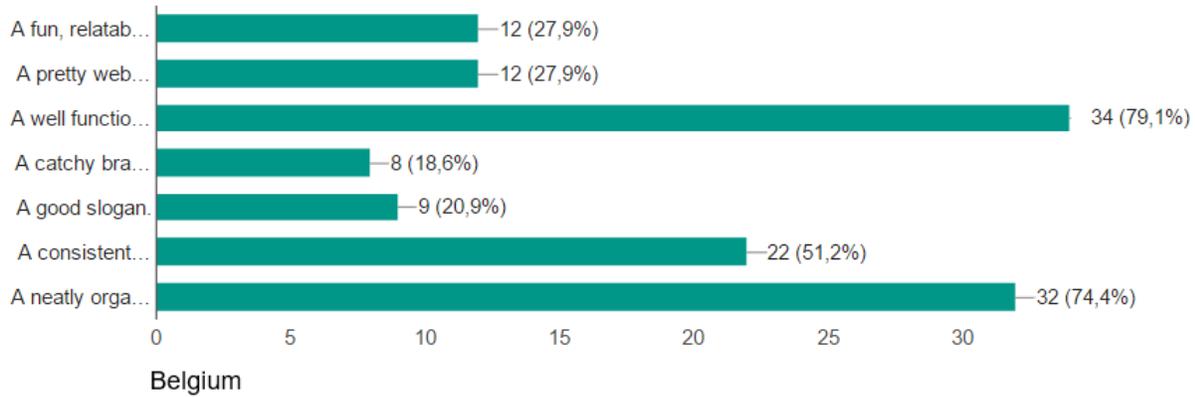
Figure 46. Results question 16.

17. What kind of extra activities do you like in manga shops?

Full answers in this order:
- Sale of other related items (figures, merchandise)
- Frequent news updates concerning the shop on the site and social media
- Frequent news updates concerning manga and anime in general
- Newsletters
- Interesting blog stories about manga, figures, and more
- Cosplaying mascots at the convention stand
- Other:

Belgium

The Netherlands
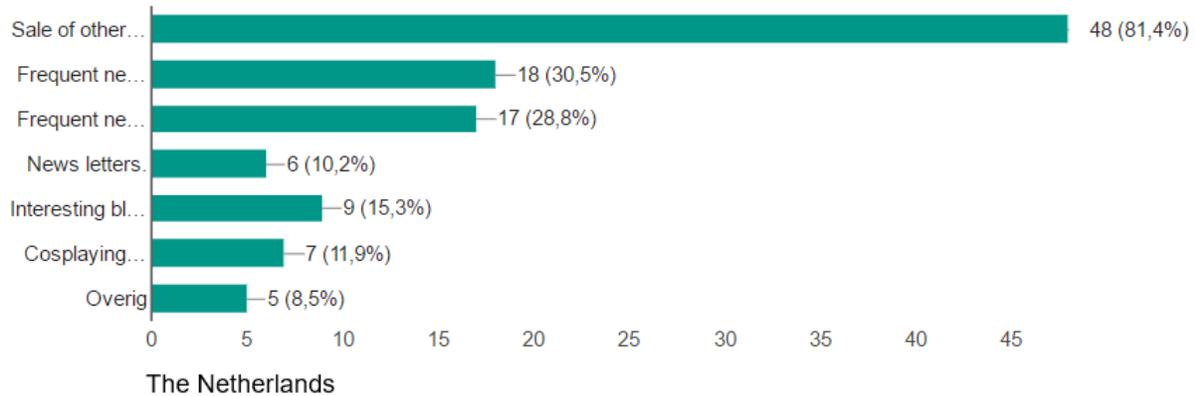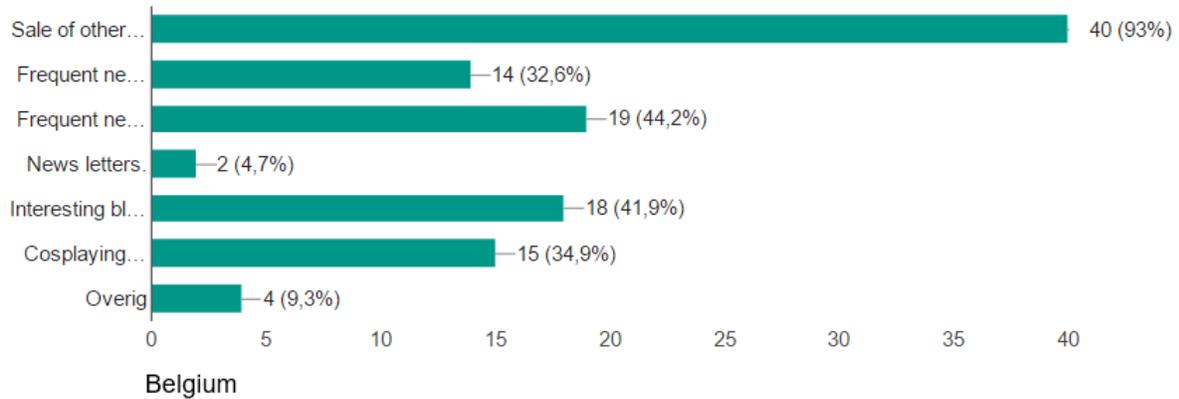
Figure 47. Results question 17.

18. What kind of promotions do you like?

Full answers in this order:
- Free goodies with a purchase.
- Buy .. get .. free
- General discounts
- Getting a free 'lottery ticket' with every purchase with the chance of winning prices.
- Other:
- I don't care for promotions as long as the price/quality is good.

Belgium

The Netherlands
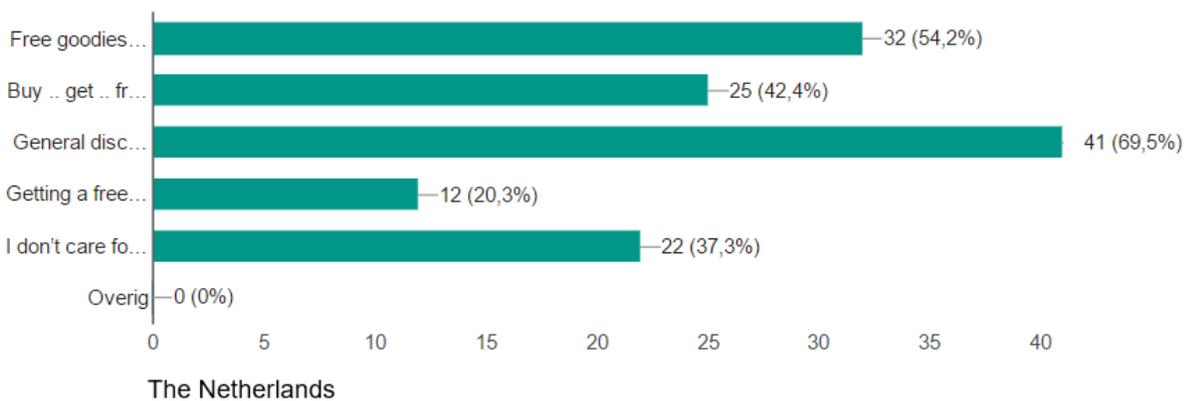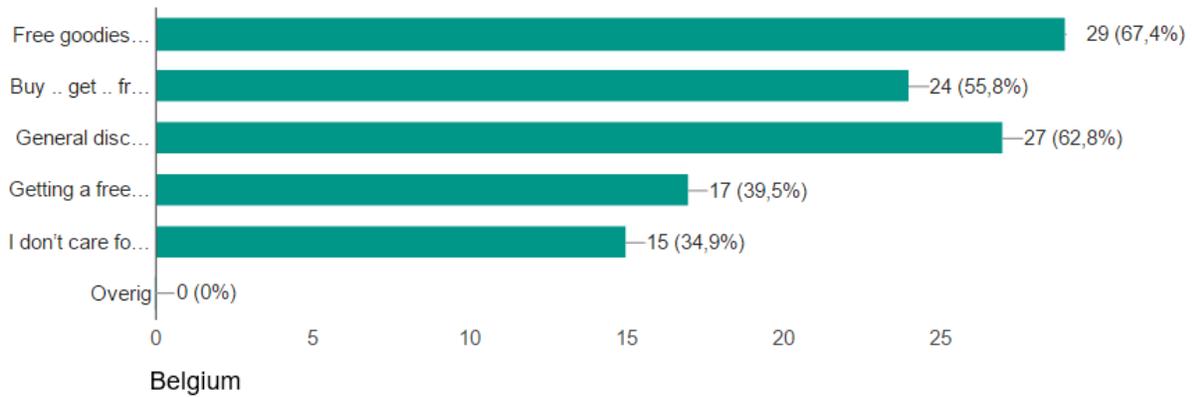
Figure 48. Results question 18.

19. Is there anything else you can say about creating brand awareness that hasn't been covered yet?

Dutch answers:

Too strong a brand can create the opposite effect by whiteknights. (E.a archonia and pharmacom) be aware of that when dealing with criticism or complaints both public and private, grounded/rude or not

I have personally experienced that there is too little competition/places to buy manga/merchandise from around Holland and Belgium. Apart from conventions there are little webshops that are well made and trustworthy. I bought much things from Archonia.com and I have terrible experiences with them, but apart from the second hand Facebook pages, I have no good alternative that are importing in my country/language.

Not necessarily related to brand awareness but: You formulate a lot of "can" So I answered accordingly, but because it is "can" Doesn't mean I will in any given situation. This especially applies to question 14. They are all valid motivations which I have experienced before, but not all of them will be working at the same time.

I usually order 1 specific manga every time a new volume is released. The 2 shops I pre-ordered the manga from where not able to ship the manga on the displayed release date. If you display a release date on your website and no shipping date, it's very misleading to me. I hope to find another shop that can give me an accurate shipping date and not a global release date where they ship it a week after that. That's very important to me.

Consistency in social media and a clean updated website, so you know they're not dead like most shops nowadays.

Shipping and in stock ;)

Mond op mond reclame, youtube promotiefilmpje, facebookpagina, advertentie in de krant (rough translation: word to mouth, youtube promotion videos, facebook page, advertisements in the newspaper)

Staff wearing Brand clothing like shirts for recognition

I'm not fond of the almost hyperactive otaku attitude. I'm an adult and like to shop like one.

Amount of social media activity? Shows the shop is still active (whether it be online or at a convention, doesn't matter in this case).

Belgian answers:

Have an active, recognizable Facebook page where you can contact the shop

Sending news mails and maybe artwork from that specific manga or anime.

the awareness that there are manga shops around and have goods for sale needs to have more attention, i searched for a shop near antwerp but couldn't find a single one. But I only got to find one by accident.

Convincing people to buy over reading online is important.

4. Interview nexuses.

4.2. Interview Summary Dave Martens

Interview file nº: 1	Date: April 9th
Place: Tomocon in Oss	Time: 10:30
Main Topic: Stores in the anime and manga niche and brand awareness.	
Name of interviewer: Suzanne Zuurman	
Name of interviewee: Dave Martens	
Role of interviewee: Owner Red Dot Commerce	
Sub-topics: Cultural differences, Brand awareness, Buyer behavior.	

General information.

1. Do you sell products to Dutch and Belgian customers? Where is your biggest customer base located?

Red Dot Commerce mainly sells in the Netherlands, with Belgian customers making up around 10% of all customers, and other countries accounting for 2-3%.

2. What products do you sell?

Red Dot Commerce specializes in anime figures, but also sells other merchandise including t-shirts, POP figures, cups, pillows, dvd's, lenses and costumes. They also occasionally get official Japanese lottery sets including the official prices and tickets. These are also have only anime related prices. All Red Dot's products are legitimate, they do not sell bootleg (fake) products.

Main topic 1 or primary research question 1: Cultural differences. How do the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Belgium influence their view on Manga Tenshi and the approach of creating awareness?

1.2. – if selling to both Dutch and Belgian customers, can you notice any differences in their buying behaviour?

According to Mr. Martens, Belgian customers are more likely to haggle for a lower price, and Dutch people are usually more enthusiastic and outgoing when it comes to seeing products they like, as well as in general.

Main topic 2 or primary research question 2: Building brand awareness. To what extent can the knowledge of the existing businesses and the potential customers give insights into how to create brand awareness?

2.1. Through what channels do you sell products? (cons, websites, etc)

Red Dot Commerce sells product through their website and at conventions. They do not have a physical store.

2.2. Does a buyer first experience category need (wishing to buy an item -> looking for brand) or brand awareness (seeing a brand -> decide if want item)?

- is that different for online sales or manga?

Mr. Martens says that for his store, brand awareness usually comes into play first. People go browse their site, and look for figures they may like. However he does say both happen frequently, with people looking for specific figures at their site as well. He usually can't really know whether or not people go to his site with a specific figure in mind if they didn't use that figure as the search term to get into his store. At conventions both happens, people come visit because they know the shop and want to see if there are any new products, and people might come to ask for a specific figure. It really depends on the person and the situation.

2.3. Do you think your brand is well known in the anime and manga niche?

Yes, Red Dot Commerce is the market leader in the Netherlands for figures and merchandise. When it comes to the Benelux, he mentions Archonia as the biggest brand. But in the Netherlands they are the biggest party.

2.4. How are you trying to portray your brand? (brand image)

Mr. Martens mentions that he mainly tries to show trustworthiness and give a pleasant feeling when shopping. There are many important values, but the main one is that people feel comfortable with you, so he tries to show his brand as trustworthy. One of the ways they do this is by making sure they only have legitimate products and sell no bootleg products at all.

2.5. Have you used specific strategies and ideas to increase brand awareness? If so, is there something you can share? Any examples?

When they started around ten years ago, there was only one competitor, and this competitor sold bootleg. This made it a lot easier to stand out, as they were the only one to sell legitimate products. However they still had to let people know they existed, for which they used 'marktplaats' (comparable to ebay) and their webshop. Anime conventions were almost non-existent at that time so they didn't use that in the beginning. When they started growing, their brand awareness strategies didn't stop. They give out flyers with every purchase. Mr. Martens mentioned that putting a flyer in a plastic bag is just as effective, but easier than printing logos on bags. These flyers always include a discount code for use on their website. Aside from this, they sponsor a lot of conventions and doujin circles (fan made manga stories). Mr. Martens said they want to both support the community, as well as get their name everywhere. These sponsor actions work to achieve both, as their name, banner, and links will be published, and the community will grow. At conventions, 9/10 times they sponsor products the convention can use as prizes for competitions instead of money. They were the main sponsor for tomocon, meaning their name was all over their website, convention leaflets and on banners at the convention. He also notices that the most important way of creating brand awareness is probably through word of mouth, as the community is very small and everyone knows everyone.

2.6. What is important to consider when trying to reach out and create brand awareness in this niche?

You have to know the trends, and have to give your customers a good feeling so they will come back and tell others about you. You also have to avoid doing things that will generate negative buzz such as selling bootlegs. Mr. Martens mentioned that he had seen the Manga Tenshi stand at Tomocon and Dynamiccon, and said the stand had a good setup and people seemed to like it a lot. He compared it to Special Edition, Manga Tenshi's competitor, and said they had some issues going on. For one, they used a badly thought-out setup, which forces

people to crawl in order to see all books. This is something no one wants to do. You have to be careful about that. They also are very unfriendly, and always seem to be mad at something. This brings a bad atmosphere.

Main topic 3 or primary research question 3: Consumer behavior. To what extent can the knowledge of existing businesses and potential customers give insights into the behaviour and preferences of customers?

3.0. Are there any trends you notice currently among anime/manga fans?

The most important trend is actually what kind of series are popular at the moment. At the moment that would be Re:Zero, Love Live and Konosuba. Cups are also popular. Another thing that is very popular at the moment is lotteries and goodiebags. Even though they are popular, an issue with goodiebags arose recently due to the fact you cannot look inside and you won't know beforehand whether or not the products inside are real or not, and if you get products worth your money. As such, doing goodiebags is heavily reliant on the trust customers have in you, and wrong use of them could crush that trust. The lotteries however, is another story. Red Dot Commerce only uses real lotteries with prices from Japan, which are always price lotteries. You know how many times each price can be pulled, what is already missing, and what exactly you can get. As such, this is a lot more trustworthy and exciting than the questionable goodiebags.

It may be important to mention that the popular series differ greatly per country, and the Netherlands and Belgium both have very different anime they like at each moment.

3.1. What do you believe customers value in anime/manga related businesses?
- how does this reflect in the customers?

Customers value honesty, trustworthiness, fast service and delivery. They want to have a good feeling when shopping with you, and want to feel comfortable asking questions and chatting with the people at the store. They also want the people at the store to be knowledgeable so they can actually help you and recommend items. A good feeling and appreciation is incredibly important, especially since that ties in well with the just as important word of mouth. It is also very important to be knowledgeable and to know the trends.

3.2. What is your USP, and how important is this to customers?

Red Dot's USP is the fact that they have a large variety of goods, and only sell legitimate products. They are already well-trusted and well-known in the anime community.

4. Is there anything else worth noting?

They used to cosplay as their mascot, which was very fun and got a lot of positive reactions. They however quit it as they grew older and didn't have time to prepare and put effort into it. Their well-known mascot was also randomly drawn by people, which was really cool.

It is important to give customers what they want and please them, and do them favours so they will like you. Like, they usually do not take returns but sometimes they make exceptions for people who accidentally spent all their money. But it is important to know when to say no. Buying stock can be very risky as you have to buy large quantities at once, and you never know what trends are coming up and what series sell best.

Conclusion:

Red Dot Commerce had a great boost in growing because they were a one of a kind shop with little to no competitors. They grew using mainly online media, and continue growing using sponsoring and discounts. They are knowledgeable and trustworthy.

4.2. Interview Summary Eefke Smulders

Interview file nº: 2	Date: April 9th
Place: Tomocon in Oss	Time: 12:40
Main Topic: Stores in the anime and manga niche and brand awareness.	
Name of interviewer: Suzanne Zuurman	
Name of interviewee: Eefke Smulders	
Role of interviewee: Owner Custom Costumes	
Sub-topics: Cultural differences, Brand awareness, Buyer behavior.	

General information.

1. Do you sell products to Dutch and Belgian customers? Where is your biggest customer base located?
Custom Costumes sells internationally. The Netherlands makes up about 40-50% of their customer base. They do also sell to Belgium but can't give a clear estimate on how large their customer base is there.

2. What products do you sell?
They create animalistic costume accessories and handmade fake fur costume parts. This includes but is not limited to antlers, dragon horns and other fantasy horns and animal tails and ears.

Main topic 1 or primary research question 1: Cultural differences. How do the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Belgium influence their view on Manga Tenshi and the approach of creating awareness?

1.2. – if selling to both Dutch and Belgian customers, can you notice any differences in their buying behaviour?
According to Ms. Smulders, the main difference between Dutch and Belgian people is that in Belgium, there is less awareness for the whole fantasy and anime genre. There are less conventions there, though there may be just as many fans, they have no way to show it.

Main topic 2 or primary research question 2: Building brand awareness. To what extent can the knowledge of the existing businesses and the potential customers give insights into how to create brand awareness?

2.1. Through what channels do you sell products? (cons, websites, etc)
Custom Costumes sells using their webshop and at conventions.

2.2. Does a buyer first experience category need (wishing to buy an item -> looking for brand) or brand awareness (seeing a brand -> decide if want item)?
- is that different for online sales or manga?
At cons, it's brand awareness. People see you and look for something they want.
At the website however, it is category need. People will only look for your website when they are searching for an item. Another thing that happens frequently at cons is impulse buys. People see something they never thought they needed, like it, and buy it in impulse.

2.3. Do you think your brand is well known in the anime and manga niche?
Not too much, but their brand awareness has been greatly improving. Word to mouth helps a lot, and online searches increases. Having a name for the brand really helps. There are stores without name, or without displaying it correctly. That really hurts their brand awareness.

2.3. How are you trying to portray your brand? (brand image)
As a professional business that focusses on good quality products and good communication.

2.4. Have you used specific strategies and ideas to increase brand awareness? If so, is there something you can share? Any examples?
Ms. Smulders was mainly active on facebook, in many related groups. Both advertising as well as reacting to people looking for products she could deliver. She also hands out business cards op convention and uses a lot of social media in general.

2.5. What is important to consider when trying to reach out and create brand awareness in this niche?

You have to be unique. There has to be something that makes you special, and makes people want to come to you. A clear and recognizable house style also helps a lot.

Main topic 3 or primary research question 3: Consumer behavior. To what extent can the knowledge of existing businesses and potential customers give insights into the behaviour and preferences of customers?

3.0. Are there any trends you notice currently among anime/manga fans?

People in the niche are entering at an increasingly younger age. They are raised with the idea of the subculture by parents who are already into it, and they are told it is okay to like it and that it's not weird.

3.1. What do you believe customers value in anime/manga related businesses?

- how does this reflect in the customers?

Professionality, good communication with customers and other businesses in the niche. It is very important to make friends with other businesses and the conventions, as they might be able to help you out a lot. Friendly relationships lead to cooperation, and they will help you out if you need assistance. The people running other stands are very friendly and willing to help, as long as you are friendly yourself. Do not look for competition and struggles, this will only lead to issues with more stands and the owners of the conventions. Having a good relationship with the organisation of conventions is also very important, they will be able to arrange anything for you if they like you. This all is especially important in the Netherlands.

3.2. What is your USP, and how important is this to customers?

Collection. Custom Costume has a large collection with many sorts of fur, material, and forms. She also takes commissions so she can offer anything you can think of. It is also all very high quality. It is very important to have an USP to make yourself stand out, so that people will remember you and come back to you.

Conclusion:
Custom Costumes grew due to its uniqueness. Having something that makes you unique as well as good communication with customers and other businesses is very important. Word to mouth is what can really grow your business.

4.3. Interview Summary Richard den Besten

Interview file n⁰: 3	**Date: April 9th**
Place: Tomocon in Oss	**Time: 15:00**
Main Topic: Stores in the anime and manga niche and brand awareness.	
Name of interviewer: Suzanne Zuurman	
Name of interviewee: Richard den Besten	
Role of interviewee: Owner Whoops	
Sub-topics: Cultural differences, Brand awareness, Buyer behavior.	

General information.

1. Do you sell products to Dutch and Belgian customers? Where is your biggest customer base located?
Whoops sells to both, but most of the customers are Dutch.

2. What products do you sell?
Manga, and some other merchandise related to the manga. But the focus lies on new manga. Sales of new manga are very different than sales of second hand manga. Because of the difference in prices and especially the difference in sold titles, sellers of new and second hand manga con hardly be seen as competitors.

Main topic 1 or primary research question 1: Cultural differences. How do the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Belgium influence their view on Manga Tenshi and the approach of creating awareness?

1.2. – if selling to both Dutch and Belgian customers, can you notice any differences in their buying behaviour?
They prefer different series.

Main topic 2 or primary research question 2: Building brand awareness. To what extent can the knowledge of the existing businesses and the potential customers give insights into how to create brand awareness?

2.1. Through what channels do you sell products? (cons, websites, etc)
Whoops sells using their website, physical store and conventions.

2.2. Does a buyer first experience category need (wishing to buy an item -> looking for brand) or brand awareness (seeing a brand -> decide if want item)?
- is that different for online sales or manga?
Both, it completely differs per person.

2.3. Do you think your brand is well known in the anime and manga niche?
Yes, it's one of the biggest manga stores in the Netherlands.

2.3. How are you trying to portray your brand? (brand image)
Trustworthy, in possession of a complete collection of manga.

2.4. Have you used specific strategies and ideas to increase brand awareness? If so, is there something you can share? Any examples?
Mr. den Besten mentions that he doesn't really remember it that well because he started in 1995. He does mention the use of flyers and banners at convention, and that it is very important to have your brand name visible at all times.

2.5. What is important to consider when trying to reach out and create brand awareness in this niche?
To have one point you excel at, not to try to do everything at once.

Main topic 3 or primary research question 3: Consumer behavior. To what extent can the knowledge of existing businesses and potential customers give insights into the behaviour and preferences of customers?

3.0. Are there any trends you notice currently among anime/manga fans?
Not really, all series still sell quite well. There are more popular series at times, but older ones also keep selling well. In the end it doesn't really matter much for manga.

3.1. What do you believe customers value in anime/manga related businesses?
- how does this reflect in the customers?
They want manga stores to have all volumes of a manga, and not missing some and having to look for it elsewhere. As such, the price doesn't even matter that much. Whoops never tried to have a low price, and people did keep coming back purely because they know that Whoops will definitely have the volume they are looking for. As long as you're complete, you can allow yourself to keep a higher price. For secondhand manga this works differently of course, since it enables you to stock manga that aren't being produced anymore. People still regularly ask Whoops for manga he can't get since they aren't published anymore, this is where second hand businesses shine. To be able to sell the books people can't find anywhere else, even if they are complete.

3.2. What is your USP, and how important is this to customers?
- How does it show?
Having the complete collection.

Conclusion:
Whoops prides itself in its completeness, and that alone makes people come back simply so that they don't have to look in other stores. Trustworthiness and showing your name around is also very important.

5. Flyer

Figure 49. Flyer example.