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Ageeva, Elena, Melewar, T. C., Foroudi, Pantea ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4000-7023>  
and Dennis, Charles ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8793-4823> (2019) Evaluating the  
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**EVALUATING THE FACTORS OF CORPORATE WEBSITE FAVORABILITY: A  
Case of UK and Russia**

**Elena Ageeva**, Middlesex University, UK  
E.Ageeva@mdx.ac.uk

**TC Melewar**, Middlesex University, UK  
T.C.Melewar@mdx.ac.uk

**Pantea Foroudi**, Middlesex University, UK  
P.Foroudi@mdx.ac.uk\* corresponding author

**Charles Dennis**, Middlesex University, UK  
C.Dennis@mdx.ac.uk

# EVALUATING THE FACTORS OF CORPORATE WEBSITE FAVORABILITY: A

## Case of UK and Russia

### **Abstract**

**Purpose** - This research evaluates the significance of the corporate website favorability notion and examines its factors in developing competitive advantage in the context of retail and service settings in UK and Russia.

**Design/methodology/approach** - Based on the attribution, social identity, and signaling theories, this research adopted the qualitative exploratory approach by conducting 14 interviews with retail experts and 8 focus groups with retail users in UK and Russia, combined with experts in website design, communication, and marketing.

**Findings** - The research findings indicated that it is crucial to build and maintain a favorable corporate website that reveals the corporate identity as part of the overall company strategy. The study suggests that navigation, visual, information, usability, customization, security, availability, website credibility, customer service, perceived corporate social responsibility, and perceived corporate culture are the factors of corporate website favorability that contribute to the company's competitive advantage. The findings show that consumers from Russia, as well as from UK found the significance of a favorable corporate website (i.e. corporate website favorability), as well as the factors affecting corporate website favorability. However, consumers in UK are more critical and demanding in the level of expectation of the website overall and put more weight than consumers from Russia on the perceived corporate social responsibility, perceived corporate culture, customer service, and website credibility

**Practical implications** - Corporate website favorability should be adopted by the companies, as part of the overall corporate identity management. Furthermore, it is advised to take into consideration the variations in the level of importance of the factors of corporate website favorability in different countries. The findings of this research suggest that this investigation will make a considerable managerial contribution to the understanding of a company's decision-makers, communication professionals and website specialists about the building of a favorable corporate website in line with corporate identity strategy of the company.

**Originality/value** - There has been little systematic study of the effect of corporate websites on consumer evaluations of the websites, also there is a lack of research in regard to the factors that contribute to the development of a favorable corporate website (i.e. corporate website favorability). This is the first research of its kind to find the effect of corporate website favorability in Russia, representing a non-western country, and the UK, representing a western country. Therefore, it contributes to the corporate visual identity literature by presenting the corporate website favorability construct and demonstrating the factors that influence corporate website favorability.

**Keywords:** Corporate website favorability, retail, navigation, visual, information, usability, customization, security, availability, website credibility, customer service, perceived corporate social responsibility, perceived corporate culture

## **Introduction**

The current environment is predominantly online and visually focused (Foroudi et al., 2014). With the rapid advances in internet and other technologies (e.g. mobile phones, tablets etc.), website use (via multiple channels) became second nature for all parts of society and is widely adopted in retail and service environments. Huang et al. (2016) stated that “we found that despite the cannibalization effect of the new mobile channel on the preexisting web channel, multichannel consumers purchased more frequently and spent more money after mobile channel adoption because of the synergy effect” (p. 266). Literature (Chae and Kim, 2004; Ghose et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2016) suggests that mobile device access has a usability limitation, for example “small screens that reduce the richness of information presented and limited display capabilities that require consumers to remember the content of a web page and then find more information by clicking or scrolling... thus, the consumers may rely on computers to buy products that need heavy information search efforts (Huang et al., 2016, p. 266).

The global corporate website is the way for companies to communicate their corporate identity across countries (Halliburton and Ziegfeld, 2009) and a vital strategy for company success in the marketplace (Foroudi et al., 2017a; Kim et al., 2001; Palmer, 2002; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008), which helps to build relationships with the stakeholders (Booth and Matic, 2011; Pollach, 2005; Kent et al., 2003). A corporate website, by providing cues about the nature of the company, can impact on the user perception of the company (Braddy et al., 2008) and build a positive impression (Gatewood et al., 1993). Corporate websites need to be integrated into an existing consistent branding strategy (Argyriou et al., 2006; Halliburton and Ziegfeld, 2009; Merrilees and Fry, 2002; Singh and Pereira, 2005).

The development of appropriate terminology is required to study the phenomenon and examine the theory (Churchill, 1979). Various authors (Alhudaithy and Kitchen, 2009; Beatty et al., 2001; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008) adopted various terminology such as ‘site’, ‘web site’, ‘website’, ‘web pages’, ‘corporate website’, ‘brand website’ interchangeably when their definitions have overlapped. However, this study established the terms ‘corporate website’ and ‘corporate website favorability’ and their applications as the root of this research.

By engaging in corporate visual identity activities, organizations communicate more favorably to internal and external stakeholders regarding important characteristics of the

company's corporate identity” (Foroudi et al., 2014, p. 2276). Therefore, companies can use their corporate website (as part of the corporate visual identity) to create a positive impression in the consumers’ minds that will give a competitive advantage to the companies. Organizational communications present organizational images, and employ the company’s website to enhance the uniqueness of those images for external and internal audiences. Consequently, when consumers have positive attitudes towards corporate website favorability, they have a more favorable image about the company.

The above notion and the concept of corporate website favorability are built on the attribution, social identity, and signaling theories: 1) The attributional theory relates to how an individual’s success or failure can be attributed to another individual’s intentional behavior (Kelley and Michela, 1980). Furthermore, Markwick and Fill (1997) pointed out that corporate identity is portrayed to stakeholders by using a number of cues, which can be arranged so that intentionally planned messages are presented to certain target audiences to reach particular objectives and characterize how the organization would like to be perceived. Marketers frequently use attributional (Foroudi et al., 2014, 2017a) theories in corporate identity and corporate visual identity studies. Thus, consumers rely on the company’s intentional communication (i.e. corporate website) to form their perceptions about the company. Based on the attributional theory, it is stated that consumers’ positive attributions of the company’s website and its elements increases the likelihood of achieving a favorable impression about the company in the consumers’ minds; 2) “Signaling theory focuses primarily on the deliberate communication of positive information in an effort to convey positive organizational attributes” (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 44).

According to Gregory et al. (2013), who used signaling theory in their study, website design and website context will positively affect the attitude towards the website and organization. Therefore, based on signaling theory, it is proposed that corporate website favorability elements will positively affect the attitude towards the corporate website favorability and the company; 3) The social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) examines the relationships among groups, within groups and the social self. The social identity theory was widely studied by scholars (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Karaosmanoglu et al., 2011) to study identity of the company. In order to gain meaningful relationships with consumers, companies should fulfil consumers’ needs in regard to their social identity. Therefore, companies should communicate images relevant to the consumer. Therefore,

companies can use corporate website (as part of the corporate visual identity) to create a positive impression of the company in the consumers' minds in order to assist cross-functional managers to improve visibility among the stakeholders of an organization.

The importance of the corporate website favorability phenomenon was highlighted in Ageeva et al. (2018) and described as the extent to which a company projects its identity through a website as a primary vehicle of corporate visual identity to promote the positive attitudes of consumers. It does so by transmitting consistent images and messages about the nature of the organization to its audience, which enables a company to build a positive image in the minds of consumers. Additionally, some scholars (Foroudi et al., 2017a; Melewar et al., 2017) signify the importance of favorable corporate website and its positive impact on the company.

Based on the above, the importance of corporate website favorability was identified, however, there is still a limited literature on the true meaning of the concept (Ageeva et al., 2018; Foroudi et al., 2017a; Melewar et al., 2017). Furthermore, Ageeva et al. (2018) stated that there is lack of research in relation to corporate website favorability dimensions, antecedents and consequences. According to Ageeva et al (2018) "there is a lack of research on corporate website favorability, and managers need to carefully organize the factors that impact corporate website favorability" (p. 288).

Moreover, only a few studies have focused on website dimensions in non-Western countries (e.g. Alsajjan and Dennis, 2010; Cyr et al., 2008; Fan et al., 2013) and the majority of research focuses on consumers in Western countries (Alsajjan and Dennis, 2010). Moon and Kim (2001) advised that there should be more research in non-Western countries in this area. The majority of the online technology research focuses on the industrialized countries, such as the UK and the US, however, the perceptions of consumers in less industrialized countries remain uncertain, such as in Russia, one of the biggest countries in the world. Therefore, this study also focuses on the broader understanding about the phenomenon of the compound effect of websites from the consumers' perspective in the context of UK and Russia.

Hereafter, the purpose of this study is to investigate the notion of corporate website favorability due to the considerable increase of interest from academics and practitioners in services in today's global economy. The other aim is to examine the antecedents and

consequences of the under-researched construct of corporate website favorability with particular attention paid to corporate image, corporate reputation, loyalty, and consumer-company identification. In other words, the main aims of this paper are to address the question - what are the factors of corporate website favorability?

The subsequent part of the paper is structured as follows: it begins with the domain specification of corporate website favorability, followed by representation of the research methodology, then discussion of the research findings, and, finally, study implications, conclusion and future research avenues are outlined.

### **Defining corporate website favorability**

A corporate website is a primary vehicle for corporate visual identity (CVI) and plays an important role in the way that an organization portrays itself to internal and external stakeholders (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Van den Bosch et al., 2006). Alhudaithy and Kitchen (2009) pointed out that “websites offer the opportunity for marketers to utilize a wide assortment of cues such as colors, images and sounds to attract consumers’ attention and generate favorable attitudes” (p. 59). The concept of the unfavorable or favorable notion of brand associations, and the impact of its strength and cohesion on the quality of the brand image was theorized by Keller (1993). According to Suh and Amine (2007), favorability denotes a “positive attitude towards a company and is frequently measured as a holistic construct” (p. 207). Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) emphasized that the favorability is linked to the audience’s taste that consumers hold in regard to the company and product. Some scholars (Keller, 2003; Park and MacInnis, 2006) claimed that an equivalent term for ‘favorability’ is ‘emotional attachment’, which is defined as “a relationship-based construct that reflects the emotional bond connecting an individual with an entity” (Park and MacInnis, 2006, p. 17). Suh and Amine (2007) argued that ‘favorability’ includes both attitudes towards the company and emotional attachment.

The creation and maintenance of a favorable website is an essential strategy for company success in the marketplace (Foroudi et al., 2017a; Kim et al., 2001; Palmer, 2002). There has been an increased interest in the corporate website since the 1990s and various academics and practitioners have voiced their support for more attention regarding the importance of the corporate website (Cho and Park, 2001; Cyr, 2008; Doolin et al., 2002; Liang and Lai, 2002). The management of the corporate website requires an understanding of the corporate identity

(in terms of the corporate website as a primary vehicle of corporate visual identity). Therefore, corporate website favorability is the extent to which a company projects their corporate identity through the corporate website, as a primary vehicle of corporate visual identity, to gain positive attitudes from the consumers, by transmitting consistent images and messages about the nature of the organization to a company's audience that enables a company to build a positive image of itself in the consumer's mind (Abdullah et al., 2013; Chen and Wells, 1999; Foroudi et al., 2017a; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Pollach, 2005, 2010).

### **Research methods**

The literature review of the favorable corporate website domain produced rather few results. This study is based on the limited literature that examines corporate website factors. The qualitative research was used due to the present lack of understanding of the phenomenon of corporate website favorability. Qualitative research comprises "a judgement sample of persons who can offer ideas and insights into the phenomenon" (Churchill 1979, p. 66). A qualitative research approach is adopted through the exploratory study approach (Foroudi et al., 2017b). Churchill (1979) described the exploratory study as an experience survey that contains "a judgment sample of persons who can offer ideas and insights into the phenomenon" (p. 66). According to researchers, it is beneficial to combine focus groups with retail users and in-depth interviews with the retail experts (Foroudi et al., 2014, 2017a; Palmer, 2011). Focus groups examine the phenomenon in-depth by stimulating discussion between members (Foroudi et al., 2014, 2017, 2018) to investigate new ideas during the process of gathering data. In-depth interviews assist to gain deeper grasp of the phenomenon, and gather attitudinal and behavioural data (Foroudi et al., 2014, 2017a, 2018). The results obtained from the focus groups and interviews assisted in obtaining the additional data that were not established from the literature review. By using the exploratory study approach, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the corporate website favorability domain and its factors.

A review of the literature on the concept of the favorable corporate website showed that little systematic research has examined the effect of the components of corporate websites on consumer evaluations of these websites (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). Furthermore, too little study has been made of the relationship between the favorable corporate website and its antecedents and consequences (Cox and Emmott, 2007; Hendricks, 2007; Lombard and Hite,

2007; Taylor et al., 2002). Furthermore, there is lack of understanding not only of the website dimensions overall, but also in non–Western countries (e.g. Alsajjan and Dennis, 2010; Cyr et al., 2008; Fan et al., 2013). Therefore, a significant research gap exists (Alsajjan and Dennis, 2010), where the understanding about consumers’ perceptions in less industrialized countries remains uncertain, such as in Russia, one of the biggest countries in the world.

Therefore, the discussion above indicates that the study of favorable corporate websites is overdue in Western and non–Western settings, for those who need a fuller understanding of facets of the favorable corporate website (i.e. corporate website favorability). This study, therefore, seeks to shed light on the antecedents and consequences of corporate websites in Western and non–Western settings and specifically focuses on the elements constituting a favorable corporate website. Since conducting research in any Western or non–Western settings can be a challenge, the UK, as one of the top 5 largest advanced economies by nominal GDP in 2014 (IMF, 2014), was chosen to represent Western countries and Russia, as one of the top 5 developing economies according to GDP in 2014 (IMF, 2014), was selected to represent non–Western countries. Although the characteristics of non–Western countries are relatively different, Russia is obviously different from Western countries. However, there are similarities between Russia and other non–Western countries. Therefore, Russia could in fact represent emerging markets in a non–Western context and the UK represents developed markets in a Western context.

Based on the topic of study, an interview guide was developed that broadly outlined the corporate website as a subject of interest to encourage discussion. Additionally, as suggested by Foroudi et al. (2017b), the qualitative investigation throughout the interviews and focus groups included general unstructured open-ended questions such as, “what are the factors that influence corporate website favorability?” The researcher performed in–depth interviews with global company managers and decision makers that are experts in retailing, which helped to gain a better grasp of the phenomenon and gather attitudinal and behavioral data (Foroudi et al., 2014; Kolb, 2008; Palmer and Gallagher, 2007). Furthermore, the focus groups with the retailing users were conducted with open–ended and unstructured questions with academics. Both interviews and focus groups were conducted to examine the beliefs, feelings and attitude in relation to the field of the study (Foroudi et al., 2014). Neuman (2014) suggested conducting 4 to 6 separate focus groups with 6 to 12 participants, in order to “facilitate free, open discussion by all group members” (p. 471). The size of the focus groups

was 6-7 participants.

In order to address the aim of this research, 7 interviews and 4 focus groups were conducted in the UK and 7 interviews and 4 focus groups were conducted in Russia (in the Russian language) (Appendix 1 and 2). Originally the background of research was developed in the UK in English followed by the translation of the concepts into Russian for Russia. This research adopted the Harpaz et al. (2002) recommendation for translation of the questions and translation of the transcriptions. Harpaz et al. (2002) suggested using the translation–back–translation, not in a “mechanical back translation procedure of first having one person translate from English to the native language, then another from the native language back to English”, but “rather the procedure used was to discuss each question and the alternatives in a small group of persons fluent in both languages” and “discussion occurred until agreement was reached as to the linguistic equivalence of the questions in both languages” (p. 236). Following the recommendations of Harpaz et al. (2002), the translation–back–translation procedure was applied in a non–mechanical way, in which three bilingual individuals proficient in English and Russian discussed each question and the alternatives.

The qualitative research was conducted in the similar way in the UK and Russia. Following the recommendations of Craig and Douglas (2005) for research that is conducted in different countries: 1) the interviews were conducted locally in Russia and in the UK; 2) the researcher understands the culture of both countries, in particular, the background of the researcher is Russian and she has been living in the UK for 8 years; 3) the interviews were conducted in the local language, in Russia using Russian and in the UK using English; and 4) at the end of the investigation, the interviews were transcribed and then translated into a common language – English. The interviews were recorded (Kumar, 2014) using two recorders. They were reordered and transcribed verbatim. The names of the respondents were replaced with a code for the purpose of confidentiality. The transcriptions were cross–checked by a second recorder.

The participants’ understanding of what constitutes favorable corporate website (i.e. corporate website favorability) and what factors influence the corporate website favorability. Additionally, the general factors of the corporate website favorability that were established based on the literature were discussed (i.e. navigation, information, visual, usability, customization, security, availability, and perceived corporate culture). The focus groups and

interviews lasted for around 1 hour and 20 minutes. Foroudi et al. (2017b) state “the process of the data analysis/synthesis was iterative and corroborative in nature. It followed the general protocol of qualitative research, recorded, collection, recorded, accordingly transcribed, analysis, and interpretation of data took place simultaneously” (p. 163).

According to Smyth (2006), “to enhance the research process, computerized software such as NVivo can be used to manage large amounts of unstructured data, so that meaning might be derived more easily, understandings can be communicated clearly, and to demonstrate thoroughness of data analysis” (pp. 136–137). Therefore, NVivo software was used to group the collected data based on the relevant codes. NVivo helps in the analysis of qualitative data by managing ideas, organizing data, interrogating data, data reporting; it also permits the researcher to add rigor to qualitative research by interrogating the data at a particular level and can enhance validity (Welsh, 2002) and reliability of the research. The data coding in NVivo consists of creating nodes, each of which is a combination of references about a particular topic, place, person or another area of interest. The software combines a variety of helpful tools in a simple and accurate structure. NVivo software for qualitative research makes the analysis more transparent, accurate and reliable (Gibbs, 2002). NVivo is beneficial for viewing the entire text, which allows one to see the interrelationships between the codes (Welsh, 2002). The researcher used both manual and electronic tools in qualitative data analysis and management (Welsh, 2002). Moreover, as advised by Foroudi et al. (2017b), “the researchers tried to locate the phenomenon within the data, and markers of where the phenomenon began and ended based on a prior research-driven code development approach” (p. 63).

### **Findings and discussions**

A significant goal in conducting this qualitative study is to gain a deeper understanding about the factors of corporate website favorability. All respondents emphasized the significance of a favorable corporate website, in line with the previous literature reviewed. The importance of the role of the global corporate website, as the way for companies to communicate their corporate identity across countries was highlighted by participants. Additionally, practitioners and consumers emphasized that in the current competitive environment it is crucial to stay true to the brand and create a unified corporate identity that is revealed through the building and maintenance of the favorable corporate website. Furthermore, the factors that were found to affect corporate website favorability during the initial stage of literature review

(navigation, information, visual, usability, customization, security, availability, and perceived corporate culture) were enhanced by the qualitative study findings by adding website credibility, customer service, perceived corporate social responsibility to the research framework as the factors of corporate website favorability (supported by the literature). Therefore, navigation, information, visual, usability, customization, security, availability, website credibility, customer service, perceived corporate social responsibility and perceived corporate culture are recognized by the literature as antecedents of corporate website favorability.

### ***Corporate website favorability***

There are numerous dimensions of website that can characterize the consumers' perceptions towards corporate website favorability. However, the range of investigation is limited to those dimensions that are mentioned in related literature and referred to by the respondents from the qualitative study (focus groups and interviews). The qualitative study findings support the previous dimensions generated from previous study findings which are discussed below. The results of the qualitative research show that a website is the important element of the corporate identity that is linked to the consumers' evaluations. Additionally, the interviewees reveal that attention is on website as a part of the company's communication that needs to be supported internally by the organization. The statements above are derived from the following comments by managers from the UK and Russia:

*“The website is an element of identity of the company, that creates a link between the customer and the company. It can help the creation of the company's identity. The website, as a part of the identity of the company, needs to be supported internally by all the employees. It is very important for the website to be rational and have the feeling of a high quality website”.* (UK.KH)

*“I believe the corporate websites are starting to be one of the major parts of what an organization is about, the identity of the company. Before the technological advances, the visible elements of what the company represents was mainly on printed materials. For about two decades the world started to think about the importance of the website and apply it, as part of the company strategy. In Russia, branding and corporate identity became fashionable quite recently and are only starting to become professionally done. Still there is a massive lack of understanding about what*

*corporate identity and branding actually is among the consumers, and even among some managers of the companies. To my mind, the website is communicating with consumers about the company, shows it is unique, it is fresh and relevant to the company's consumers". (RUS.KS)*

These remarks are consistent with corporate branding and corporate identity authors (Bravo et al., 2012; Cornelissen et al., 2007; Perry and Bodkin, 2000; Pollach, 2005; Topalian, 2003), who suggest that websites are a component of communication of corporate identity and its elements. They asserted that management is responsible to convey the same message to the internal and external audience. Moreover, a consultant participant stated that:

*"...creation of the company soul has many facets and the website is one of them. The soul, the uniqueness of the company, what the company does and what it believes in, should be felt and seen through the corporate visual identity elements". (UK.DZ)*

*"Corporate websites can communicate everything about the company. It has become the second face of the company, sometimes even the true face. When people look at the website, they are thinking 'are you relevant for me and are you trustworthy'. It's like with any human being. Consumers mainly learn about the company through the website and perceive what the company is about through the website". (UK.OS)*

The findings are consistent with research (Chen and Wells, 1999; Van den Bosch et al., 2006). In addition, in the previous example, the corporate website is used as a reliable means of supporting an organization in communicating in the market (Abdullah et al., 2013; Chun and Davies, 2001; Ingenhoff and Fuhrer, 2010). The following quotes from the communication consultant reflect this idea: "For example, *John Lewis* based on its historical presence in the UK, they deliver a quality service. I feel that their identity is present on the website and they deliver the promise to consumers whether they are in the shop or shopping online. Everything is simplified and they suggest not only products but also delivery options. You log in and your communication is very secure, and you can pick up what you like. They deliver the identity and the customer promise for items bought online and offline. From all the visual elements, aesthetics and navigation you can tell that they deliver high quality products" (UK.DS).

The notion of identity should be treated with care, which was highlighted by one of the managers who stated: “website, as a part of our corporate identity management is treated with caution, this is because if a company changes its website, the company and its brand can be misunderstood” (UK.AI). This is explained in more detail by the next comment of a brand manager: “Websites, as a big part of the corporate visual identity strategy of the global companies, should be maintained as relevant and of high quality. It is a very tricky task for the whole management team to not only project the identity of the company through the website, but also to enhance the image of the company. When a company wants to update or change the website, all the details need to be carefully decided by the management team before involving the advertisement agencies. The website can enhance the brand, but, in the same way, it can diminish the brand” (UK.PC).

It is widely acknowledged that the corporate website is a part of communication and it seems that expectations of the company are higher when the quality of the corporate website is high. This is also supported by Braddy et al. (2008), who stated that perceptions of the website quality can change the impression about the company. In addition, from the comments of the communication consultant it can be seen that, to be considered rational, unique, relevant and high quality requires the involvement of top management, and their interest in the corporate website is important:

*“The important decisions about the website are made by the top management group where a chairman has the last word, and we have an IT team to manage day-to-day activities for the website. From my perception the overall function of the website and the feeling of high quality is very important for me”.* (UK.AI)

*“By looking at the website I judge the company, if the company is efficient, well organized and modern or is outdated and without clear goals. For example, if the website is a mess, I am never going to trust the company”.* (RUS.KS)

*“In order to be in step with the times, it is vital to be the source of the most engaging and current information, that makes consumers think that the website is relevant, because people judge the company by the website these days. Personally, I think when I am engaged with the content of the website and the visual appeal, the website is relevant for me”.* (RUS.EA)

Researchers (Abdullah et al., 2013; Ingenhoff and Fuhrer, 2010; Topalian, 2003) have pointed out the importance of the corporate website management, as a part of the communication strategy. This is supported by the findings of the interviews, which show that organizations are aware of the importance of building and maintaining a favorable corporate website, as a part of the corporate identity management strategy. This can be seen from the company managers' statements:

*“The website is of vital importance for the company. When looking at the site each element from the text to the design needs to be planned and help to reach clear business goals, such as sales, constructing email list, sign up for newsletter or a free trial. When I plan the website I imagine when someone visits your website, you have to push them to take action and think about the next step you want them to take. I would call it the rationale of the website”.* (UK.PC)

*“From my 10 years' experience in the industry, the website is one of the most crucial parts of the visual identity of the company, one of the main points for a good and favorable website is a clear rationale behind the whole website, meaning that everything on a website follows a precise logic and is made for a reason that was planned beforehand. The rationale should be felt from every aspect of the website”.* (UK.AN)

This notion is also supported by the communication consultancy specialist:

*“As I usually tell my clients, the website is about realizing what the company wants to be known for, what are the goals of the organization, what the organization is about and what you want your clients to feel about it.”.* (RUS.DP)

Thus, the website can represent the company to the consumers. Companies are encouraged to strengthen their brands by focusing on their websites. A website helps the company to creating a feeling about the company's product and brand to the company's audience. Consequently, the significance of the website and its importance for a brand to sustain a competitive advantage in competitive international market has been recognized by previous scholars (Argyriou et al., 2006; Berthon et al., 1996; Halliburton and Ziegfeld, 2009; Robbins

and Stylianou, 2002), as earlier described in the literature review. The qualitative data illustrate that the corporate website can display a product and brand, and by designing a favorable website, the company can improve the consumers' perception towards the brand and company. This concept is emphasized by the communication consultant as below,

*“Websites are a beautiful way to show what your brand represents by creating unique information. Information on the website is communication. Your language really shows your brand message and so people are going to construct and fill in the gaps of what you say and what you don't say. You might as well say something powerful. I use the words 'you want to be a meaningful specific, rather than a wondering generality'. A lot of people with their copywriting (information on the website) are trying to be all things to all people. The more you can speak specifically to your customers, the deeper you attract or repel them. The role of the brand and the message to people, that you want to polarize people. You want to strongly attract people that you want and strongly repel people that you don't want. But a lot of brands try to catch everybody, and it can be a real weakening of the brand and potential loss of loyalty. The worst is to be bland and boring. A unique brand personality statement in the form of the mission and vision statement on the website can be a powerful tool to be unique”.* (RUS.EA)

Similarly, the importance of the website in relation to the brand is mentioned by the managers as follows:

*“A well thought, professional looking website that is functional and fulfilling helps to please consumers, deliver the information across and build the brand of the company”.* (UK.KH)

*“The website is the face of the company. The website and all other visual elements of the company create freedom and spread the content that indicates the company brand”.* (UK.AN)

*“The website is important for the company, because the users who have an enjoyable experience on the website will help the company to build the company's brand and transform from user to a customer or from just a customer to a loyal customer”.* (RUS.PC)

Additionally, in line with the ‘anytime and anywhere’ notion (Pantano and Priporas, 2016), the practitioners highlighted that in the current competitive environment it is crucial to stay true to the brand and create a unified corporate identity that is revealed through the building and maintenance of the favorable corporate website that can be accessed anytime, anywhere and from any device. For instance, the managers stated that “the website should be responsive, meaning that it is fluidly changing and responds to fit any screen or device size”. (UK. OS). However, it is crucial not to create additional work in order to maintain all channels. In order to reach this, a responsive favorable corporate website that can be effectively maintained should be designed to be accessible from all devices.

### ***Constituents of Corporate Website Favorability***

The literature lists various factors of website; however, few were supported by the qualitative study. The preliminary factors’ selection included in this research are as follows: 1) navigation (Cyr, 2008; Cyr and Head, 2013; Kumar Roy et al., 2014; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2005, 2008), 2) visual (Cyr, 2008; Cyr and Head, 2013), 3) information (Cyr, 2008; Cyr and Head, 2013; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008), 4) usability (Casalo et al., 2008; Flavian et al., 2006; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008), 5) customization (Fan et al., 2013; Kabadayi and Gupta, 2011; Srinivasan et al., 2002; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008), 6) security (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008; Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003), 7) availability (Alwi and Azwan Ismail, 2013; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). Additionally, perceived corporate culture was employed by the study based on authors’ (Braddy et al., 2006; Overbeeke and Snizek, 2005) suggestion that corporate culture that is communicated through the company’s website affects viewers’ perceptions.

The outcomes from the interviews and focus groups highlighted the three additional factors that influence corporate website favorability: website credibility, customer service, perceived corporate social responsibility; these are in addition to the recognized factors that were emphasized in the literature prior to the research. The relevant literature in relation to the three constructs was examined. The literature examination showed that customer service was mentioned as a factor of corporate website (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003), however website credibility and perceived corporate social responsibility commonly were discussed in the literature as separate notions. Website credibility (Flanagin and Metzger, 2008; Gillmor, 2008; Rains and Karmikel, 2009) and perceived corporate social responsibility (Basil and

Erlandson, 2008 Chapple and Moon, 2005) were discussed as the significant attributes to affect audience perceptions about the company through the website.

Therefore, this study recognized eleven factors that contribute to generating a favorable corporate website; they were recognized as cues to predict the impression of corporate website favorability: navigation, visual, information, usability, customization, security, availability, website credibility, customer service, perceived corporate social responsibility, perceived corporate culture (Figure 1). The following sections will discuss these factors in detail.

### ***Navigation --> Corporate Website Favorability***

Navigation is central because it can significantly affect people's assessment of a website (Song and Zinkhan, 2008). Therefore, navigation is an important characteristic of the website that can help businesses to gain website success (Palmer, 2002) and result in consumer satisfaction (Cyr, 2008; Yoon, 2002). A number of studies (Agarwal and Venkatesh, 2002; Kumar Roy et al., 2014; Palmer, 2002) conducted the research from various approaches regarding the association between navigation and corporate website. With regard to navigation having a positive impact on online customer experience and behavior (Bauer et al., 2002; Fiore and Jin, 2003), good navigation on the website positively affects the user perception of the website (Sundar et al., 2003) and is positively related to the general impression of the company (Braddy et al., 2003, 2008). This is supported by the participants' comments as a contributing factor towards the corporate image. The focus group participants (representing consumers) supported this argument with the comments below:

*“A website that is difficult to navigate, creates a feeling and picture in the mind about the company website in general and forms a negative impression about the company. I assume that if the navigation is bad and not clear, that it is not a good website, and it is an indication for me of how the practices and policies at the company are implemented”.* (UK.FG1)

In a similar manner the importance of the navigation structure to the overall website favorability is emphasized by the communication consultant (as an expert judge) below:

*“I think for a website to be effective, navigation should be clear and guide the user step by step. When I am talking about good navigation I mean recognizable hyperlinks that are labelled appropriately. When a website is too crowded and has too many links, consumers have too many choices, which leads to disorientation. Ideally, navigation throughout the website should be consistent, with common placement of many buttons and bars”.* (UK.OS)

*“When creating the websites, the most important issue is navigation. It can make the difference between the website where the users can immediately find what they were looking for and the website where the users are lost. The whole point of website design is to simplify the access to what the users are looking for. This is the same as the navigation of the ship into the sea, it affects whether the sailors will survive or perish. The site that is difficult to navigate not only ruins the whole website, but also destroys the whole business. Unlike the content of the website that should be unique, navigation should be predictable. Customers are more satisfied if they receive the expected result, and a positive response from their action.”* (RUS. DP)

### **Visual --> Corporate Website Favorability**

The results of this study describe that visual is an important element that deals with the emotional appeal of the website and contributes to the construction of a favorable website (Tarasewich et al., 2003). Participants of the focus group provided numerous comments on the effective use of the right visual elements on the website and its influence on consumers' perceptions:

*“The visual graphics on the website say that the website is a real website. I mean if these things are not there, it means it's not a real website. If the logo is there that tells me that it is the real website”.* (UK.FG2)

*“I think that the website should have the balance of the written information and visual elements. I found that visual elements help me to remember what was presented on the website and leaves a strong impression. I remember reading somewhere in the article that 94% of the first impression is related to the visual design of the website, meaning that the visual elements create the look and feel of the whole website”.* (RUS.FG1)

The significance of the navigation concept on the website is also mentioned by the communication consultants below:

*“I would like to emphasize the importance of the visual aspects on the website, in particular, visual weight concept. Visual weight is the force with which the element attracts the eye of the observer. The visual direction is the direction of the forces acting on the elements, or the impact of the forces exerted by the elements. They guide the direction to what the user looks at. Many of the internal characteristics of the objects can be changed, making the elements "heavier" or "lighter". Some features also allow you to change the direction of the visual elements and the whole composition. When applied strategically, the concept of visual weight can help to guide the viewer's attention to the places we want them to visit.” (UK.DS)*

*“Each separate element of any composition, including a website, has certain degree of visual appeal. The higher the level of the visual elements' appeal on the website, the more attention will be attracted to the website. The visual elements on the website are so powerful, that it can have an impact on how users perceived other elements on the website and the website as a whole.” (RUS.KS)*

### ***Information--> Corporate Website Favorability***

Mithas et al. (2006) empirically proved that information content generates loyalty with online customers if the information is accurate, relevant and current, which is also espoused by managers. Similarly, Cyr (2008) has found empirically that the information on the website has a strong positive effect on trust. The information on the website about the company itself, its products and services positively affects customer satisfaction (Kim and Eom, 2002), and increases the likelihood of achieving a positive image in the marketplace. The importance of the information on the website is mentioned by the communication consultant below:

*“The full appropriate information needs to be on the website. With the true description of products and services that the company provides. It needs to be updated and consistent”. (RUS.RA)*

*“Information needs to be precise and to the point. Directly relevant to the services and products of the company and to the company itself”. (UK.OS)*

*“By examining the information on the website, search engines look for keywords to make a ranking of the website. It is important to attract search engines with the right content, key words and descriptions”. (RUS.DP)*

### ***Usability--> Corporate Website Favorability***

Usability can serve as a crucial part of supporting the corporate website, in the sense that it is the most significant factor by which consumers judge the website (Donnelly, 2001). The website usability or ‘ease of use’ is of paramount importance in creating a favorable website. Past research gave usability central importance in attaining user satisfaction (Kim and Eom, 2002). This is supported by the managers’ comments: “first impression is the last impression. The usability makes a very strong impression about the company” (UK.AI). The participants of the focus groups gave an explanation of how they defined usability on the website:

*“It is when a website is very simple to use and you can find what you need very easily. The usability on the website can make or break the success of the website. Bad usability can make me switch to a competitor or go to the store rather than shop online. For example, Air bnb I will use because it is easy to use, the usability is simple and efficient, rather than booking.com where the usability is poor”. (UK.FG3)*

*“Usability is the center around which the website should be built. Companies need to make it simple to consumers to get what they need and it can create real anger if the they don’t. I think if the usability is bad I would be very upset, the bigger the company the better the usability the website needs to have; it is very important”. (RUS.FG4)*

### ***Customization--> Corporate Website Favorability***

Arora et al. (2008) emphasized the significance of customization as the point of differentiation and a strategic advantage to the company, that helps to achieve greater customer satisfaction. Similarly, researchers pointed out that customization helps to effectively get what consumers want (Grewal et al., 2003; Srinivasan et al., 2002). This is supported by the focus groups participants’ remarks:

*“It is vital and crucial. I want to see on the website the things that I am interested in. I want to see which products or services I looked at, what I bought or what I was looking at. Also what other people bought that bought similar things like me. Customizing is very important, it just makes your life as a consumer easier”.* (UK.FG6)

*“Customization filters on the websites are important, useful and save us time. It shows that the company is customer oriented and that they value customer time. A company whose website provides customization is more customer oriented. Customization makes me feel that they are confident that they have what I am looking for”.* (RUS.FG2)

However, one of the managers commented: “customization can make consumers confused, because it makes the customers’ task more complicated and can be expensive for companies to implement” (UK.KH). This is supported by Arora et al. (2008) who found that customization makes consumers’ choice more difficult and costly for the company to adopt.

#### ***Security--> Corporate Website Favorability***

Previous researchers emphasized security as an important driver of customer satisfaction (Montoya–Weiss et al., 2003; Szymanski and Hise, 2000). Tarafdar and Zhang (2008) mentioned that security is what influences consumers’ opinion about the website, and, therefore, the confidence in the company as well. This is especially important in regard to online financial transactions, as whether consumers perceive the website as ‘safe’ affects their opinion about the company (Harris and Goode, 2010). In regard to the security on the website, managers commented as follows:

*“Security is one of the most import topics and it is an issue nowadays, as lots of companies and corporations are getting hacked. Also there is personal security of transactions, bank cards and viruses coming to your computers. I think a lot of people are very concerned with that issue from a local point of view. From a global point of view, a lot of people are nervous about hacking and viruses from the website”.*  
(RUS.LA)

Similarly, the focus group members emphasize the importance of security on the website:

*“The money, the data and privacy are very important regarding the security of the website. It needs to be clearly presented not in the small fonts. It shows the reputation of the company. I would rather buy from a secure and well known company website and pay more, than from a poorly secure website, even if the price is cheaper”.* (UK.FG2)

#### **Availability--> Corporate Website Favorability**

Availability is important for continued and sustained use of the website. Also, the importance of the availability of the website was highlighted by scholars (Ariely, 2000; Parasuraman et al., 2005) because it can be one of the determinants of loyalty (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). The notion of availability is also highlighted by the managers:

*“There is no website if it is not available. Something that is very simple, but still some companies neglect to pay attention to it” ... “the heavy videos and pictures, the wrong formats of the visual elements, all of these things can make the website slow to download on the screen. If the website is not available, then probably you are going to end up doing business with a competitor”.* (RUS.KS)

*“No global company can afford to have an issue with their website. Straight away it gives a negative impression and affects the image, reputation and loyalty of the website. If the website crashes, you will say that the company is a third class company”.* (RUS.LA)

*“In my mind availability is the free access to the website from any device: mobile, table, pc, mac. Soon it will include watches. Availability nowadays has become something more than just the website being up and running. It’s about how can I get the same experience across all my devices. Also being in any location and being able to use the website on all the devices brings flexibility and efficiency”.* (UK. AN)

*“If the website has issues with availability it will make the customer switch to competitors, and, also, customers can lose trust if the availability is bad. For example, Sony had this problem”.* (UK.PC)

#### **Website Credibility --> Corporate Website Favorability**

The findings of the current study show that website credibility is one of the crucial characteristics that lead to a favorable website. Researchers mentioned that with the rise of social media and user-generated content, the notion of website credibility has become significantly important (Flanagin and Metzger, 2008; Gillmor, 2008; Rains and Karmikel, 2009). The credibility of the website can influence consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Dutta-Bergman, 2003; Eysenbach, 2008; Hong, 2006; Rains, 2007; Rains and Karmikel, 2009). The importance of this notion was brought up by the focus group members' comments:

*“The credibility of the website is important for me, as well as the credibility of the company. For example, if I can see the partners of the company on the website that are well known, then I can see from the website that the company is an expert in the field”.*  
(UK.FG6)

*“When I am looking at the website, I am thinking are you relevant to me and do I trust you, it's like with any human being. When I am arriving on the website I am looking for relevance number 1, then do you have any case studies or stories. Generally, the kind of people that are arriving on the website, either a potential customer, employee or a potential partner. So yes there is going to be a career page, the about page, there will be your list of services or products. When people are on the website – they ask themselves a question – Do I trust you? How people build the trust is by social proof, which is a trust transfer mechanism, so is there anyone on your site that I already know and trust. If you have partners, for example, HSBC, I already know that I trust them and I am transferring that trust to you, even if I don't know you (talking about the website). Another one is testimonials that is a credibility indicator, for if I want to work with you (website). You have got to have the links to authority sources, such as published books, articles, talks, that can be put on the website and build credibility. The two things I look at on the website: are you relevant and can I trust you”.* (UK.FG2)

*“In my view, positive testimonials / customers' reviews from the people 'like them' is one of the most important features to develop a positive image of the company, that can lead to higher reputation. It is important for the customer review / testimonial to have the picture of the real person with the name and some details about them, such as job and the country they live in. Also it can be called website credibility, which includes*

*customer testimonials, reviews, case studies, intellectual property of the company (published papers, books...), established brands as partners of the company. It is crucial to demonstrate an impressive track record of success as well as of the clients. This part of the website should answer - what is it for me? – on the user question and - according to whom? The website is a reflection of you and your business. The website should be powerful and simple”. (RUS.FG2)*

Furthermore, the communication consultant pointed out the importance of credibility for creating a positive image about the company:

*“I think one of the important elements that can build a positive image and reputation of the site is ‘social proof’, or, in other words, ‘credibility’. That means that on the website I can see case studies, press about the company (pdfs from magazine, newspaper), how many subscribers or customers the company has, happy testimonials, well known partners of the company (their logo), as well as testimonials (reviews) of the customers, especially the ones that you are targeting (they don’t have to be famous). This gives the visitor the feeling of comfort to take the next step”. (UK.DZ)*

### ***Customer Service--> Corporate Website Favorability***

The findings of this study illustrate that consumers demand high customer service from the website and make their opinion about the company based on the customer service on the website and everything that is associated with it. Parasuraman et al. (2005) stated that managers of companies should pay attention to the online customer service and how consumers evaluate it. According to researchers, consumers can evaluate their experience with a company based on the degree of how efficient, helpful and willing is the service provided to the consumers on the website (Ding et al., 2011; Kaynama and Black, 2000; Parasuraman et al., 1991; Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003). The focus group members pointed out the significance of the customer service on the website to construct a favorable website:

*“For me the online chat is very important, I joined the Sky company only because of online chat. They were so good that I joined only for that particular reason. To call the customer service is so time consuming, but online chat I found it really useful, I believe many companies have started to use it – British gas, 02, etc. It’s customer service*

*element on the website. Customer services is one of the important elements to build a positive impression about the company”.* (UK.FG4)

*“I think, for me personally, customer service is a central thing on the website. Like online chat, where I can see a reply straight away from real people. How quickly the company can solve my problem and provide me the necessary information. It is a great reputational builder, because even if I faced some issue, but the company answered promptly and effectively, I will think highly about that company”.* (RUS.FG1)

### ***Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility--> Corporate Website Favorability***

The corporate social responsibility (CSR) construct was emphasized by the focus group members and managers. Researchers have emphasized the importance of companies presenting themselves online, as socially responsible corporate citizens (Pollach, 2003), and the transparency of the companies on the website, such as disclosure of financial information (Marston, 2003). Similarly, companies employ websites to communicate their CSR behavior. Companies use websites to communicate what the company is actually doing in terms of CSR, and what the company wants the public to perceive it is doing in terms of CSR (Basil and Erlandson, 2008). The company managers and focus group members highlighted the notion of the importance of CSR for favorable website building:

*“As a company manager, I can see that consumers’ perception about CSR affects the company’s image and reputation. One of the most convenient ways to project the CSR is by using the website, and clearly listing what we do and why we do it, in terms of CSR. Also it’s very important for all our employees to support the CSR activities of the company and to be a part of it. Internally the feeling of ‘doing good’ for the society increases the loyalty to the company”.* (UK. PC).

*“Nowadays it is paramount to employ corporate social responsibility activities, but it is even more important what consumers think the company does for society and the environment. This is where the corporate website is ‘the’ way to do it by providing the separate section of ‘corporate social responsibility’ with a detailed explanation of what the company does towards it. For instance, our company is supporting a number of charities, our employees are involved in marathons and social campaigns. Also, as a*

*company, we are training to be transparent and open with what we do in our day to day business, as we employ high ethical standards.” (RUS. PC)*

*“For me, one of the most important aspects on the website is the company’s social responsibility, such as ethical standards, and how the company helps the community and environment...For example, MacDonal’d’s – what comes to my mind is the brand colors, marketing offers, entertainment, any initiatives and social responsibility”. (UK. FG1)*

### ***Perceived Corporate Culture--> Corporate Website Favorability***

The findings of the current study show that the way consumers perceive the corporate culture is very important for forming their opinion about the company. Researchers emphasize the importance of the corporate culture on the website (Braddy et al., 2006; Overbeeke and Snizek, 2005), as it affects the impression of the company gained by the viewers. The culture of the company is represented as the mission and vision statements, as well as the ‘brand story’ in the corporate website. Balmer (1995) and Melewar (2003) stated that corporate culture refers to the business values and mission advocated by the founder of the company and the management board. The company managers commented on the importance of the corporate culture as follows:

*“Corporate culture – is how the company operates internally, how they treat the employees and the environment in the company. All this is important on the internal level. Social and ethical involvement is very important. History of the company is very important, such as founding date, for example Oxford, Selfridges, which even made a movie about the company. The more a company communicates the history the more consumers feel trust and improves the reputation of the company... Company culture on the website is represented by different things – If I talk about MacDonal’d’s, looking on the website home page: I see some entertainment activities and initiatives, it gives me an impression that they are up to date and they understand the customer, and that the culture is open. How open the organization is towards new ideas and to what customers want and need”. (UK. AN)*

*“The culture of the company is super important; it is two sides of the same coin. The brand is publicly expressed and that’s the way for people to meet the company, and the culture is internal to the company, but the boundaries are blurring more and more nowadays. The culture is ‘values in action’, its organizational structure, processes, models, what are the rituals, your employees, what do you do for corporate retreats, how do you conduct the meetings. All of this is important for a future client, partner or investor. The philosophy of co-creation is important and treating people in an equal manner is an important part of the culture. The history of the company is also important, an original story can make the company stand out; the first step in any relationship is establishing trust and rapport. If I can understand the origin of the business and if it can establish some common ground, I am looking for alignment with the company, based on that I judge - do I want to work with that company or not”.*  
(UK.AI)

The focus group members mentioned the significance of the corporate culture in regard to the website:

*“The company has to clearly show the culture of the company on the website. Also, the founder of the company is important, which country the company was founded in, and the goals of the company, as well as how they treat their employees. On the website they have sections on corporate culture. Powerful CEOs are a big part of the corporate culture. Positive and realistic values are also very important. If I use the same example – MacDonald’s – Globalization comes to my mind by looking on their website. I can see that they are established in many countries all over the world, and the number of branches around the world”.* (UK.FG3)

*“Company culture is very important, for me, it is represented by the history, values and beliefs of the company, how the company treats its employees, working environment and the top management of the company – chairman, as well as the founder. In addition, the number of branches. For example, Coca Cola, they are promoting happiness, now they are incorporating it in their website – they are trying to tell us that happiness is part of its culture”.* (UK.FG1)

*“I’m really interested in where the company comes from, in terms of quality of service products. For me corporate culture represents the history of the company and objectives of the company, also the ethical issues are really important. It connects to what the company stands for. I believe the company culture is very important when I’m forming my opinion about the company”. (RUS. FG1)*

## **Theoretical Implication**

The findings of the study are consistent with the attributional, signaling and social identity theories outlining the relationship between the construct of corporate website favorability and its factors (antecedents). The study provides a contribution to the knowledge in the areas of marketing, corporate identity and corporate visual identity through investigating the factors that affect corporate website favorability, as well as offering novel theoretical discoveries.

The outcome of this study supports the dialogue in regard to the main factors of corporate website favorability in the UK and Russia from the retail managers’, graphic designers’ and communication managers’ perspective. The factors that were found to affect corporate website favorability during the initial stage of literature review (navigation, information, visual, usability, customization, security, availability, and perceived corporate culture) were enhanced by the qualitative study findings by adding website credibility, customer service, perceived corporate social responsibility to the research framework as the factors of corporate website favorability. The development of research antecedents of corporate website favorability for evaluating and assessing corporate website favorability is a novel aspect of the current research.

Furthermore, findings of this study suggest that two markets representing the developed and emerging markets show that the level of understanding and the expectations in the developed market (i.e. UK) are considerably higher than in the emerging market (i.e. Russia). The outcome supports the fact that overall, consumers in Russia are less developed in regard to online technologies as compared to the Western consumers (awaragroup.com, 2013).

Russia, representing the emerging markets, adopted the terminology from English language,

therefore the phenomenon in each country is considered in a similar way in relation to terminology.

### **Practical Implication**

The theoretical implications portrayed above hold a number of practical implications for decision-makers. The results of this study propose contributions for decision-makers (company managers, consultants, website builders, policy makers) who wish to develop favorable corporate website and understand how to impact a positive image of the company. Firstly, this research results state that, to gain a competitive advantage, decision-makers should have a clear grasp of what comprises a favorable corporate website. The research framework presents that a favorable corporate website influenced by eleven factors (navigation, visual, information, usability, customization, security, availability, website credibility, customer service, perceived corporate social responsibility, and perceived corporate culture).

The decision makers can adopt the explanation of the phenomenon of corporate website favorability and its main antecedents, as guidelines in order to reach its goals and objectives by using the website more effectively and improving the image of its organization. For instance, this is significant because the company managers face challenges to build a website that addresses consumers' needs: "companies need to do more to engage readers in a dialogue with the company, e.g. by asking them to register with the site or letting them customize their views of the company's web site according to their needs and interests. Companies could then design their sites accordingly and would be able to deliver more useful information to their multiple audiences" (Pollach, 2005, p. 298). Therefore, in particular, this research is paramount for general managers that are in charge of shaping company website strategies, as they can use the recommendations (factors that shapes corporate website favorability) described in this study to improve their company's websites. In addition, public policy makers can benefit greatly from this research by adopting this study's recommendation and utilize their official website to get a clear message across to the public.

Furthermore, by investigating the corporate website favorability phenomenon in the UK and Russia this study can assist in the understanding of the various consumers; this can be used to

build a better company's website to get a clear message to consumers in western and non-western countries. The global corporate website is the way for companies to communicate their corporate identity across countries (Halliburton and Ziegfeld, 2009). In the current competitive environment, it is crucial to stay true to the brand and create a unified corporate identity that is revealed through the building and maintenance of the favorable corporate website. Nguyen et al. (2016) stated that "websites can have a powerful effect on stakeholders' perceptions of the organization" and "nowadays, the websites tell much about what we do as a company, how we strive to change the world" (p. 15). Findings of this research highlight that the corporate website favorability phenomenon is understood similarly in the UK and Russia and that they are affected by the same factors. However, consumers in UK are more critical and demanding in the level of expectation of the website overall and emphasize more perceived corporate social responsibility, perceived corporate culture, customer service and website credibility, rather than consumers from Russia.

Consequently, this investigation provides significant implications for decision-makers (i.e. general managers, website builders, and policy makers) in respect of the corporate website favorability phenomenon and its antecedents, since they need to carefully organize the factors that impact on a favorable corporate website. Additionally, this research assists consultants and managers in evaluating whether the corporate website achieves the goals and objectives of the company, portrays the company's identity and builds the right image in the minds of consumers. Moreover, the explanation of the corporate website favorability phenomenon can assist cross-functional managers and designers to develop corporate websites that can enhance the image and reputation of the company.

In addition, based on the arguments mentioned above, a corporate website is not merely a combination of hyperlinks and pages, but rather the primary vehicle of corporate visual identity. Thus, corporate website favorability is the extent to which a company projects its corporate identity through the corporate website, as a primary vehicle of corporate visual identity (Abdullah et al., 2013; Booth and Matic, 2011; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Pollach, 2005, 2010; Topalian, 2003; Foroudi et al., 2017a; Ageeva et al., 2018; Melewar et al., 2017). A company aims to gain a positive attitude from the consumers, by transmitting consistent images and messages about the nature of the organization to the company's audience that enables it to build a positive image of itself in the consumer's mind (Alhudaithy and Kitchen, 2009; Braddy et al., 2008; Connolly-Ahern and Broadway, 2007; Pollach,

2005, 2010; Winter et al., 2003; Ageeva et al., 2018; Foroudi et al., 2017a; Melewar et al., 2017).

It can be concluded that management and creation of a website should be a critical part of the strategic management of the corporate identity of the company as a whole, and one where the managers at different levels should acquire a comprehensive knowledge about it in order to reach the company's goals and objectives.

### **Future research**

This study focuses on the notion of corporate website favorability and its antecedents (i.e. navigation, visual, information, usability, customization, security, availability, website credibility, customer service, perceived corporate social responsibility, and perceived corporate culture), which can be developed further in order to advance the knowledge concerning favorable corporate website, corporate visual identity and corporate identity. This research is one of the first attempts to clarify the meaning of corporate website favorability phenomenon and its antecedents by using a qualitative approach, thus future studies should be implemented in order to enhance the understanding of the corporate website favorability concept and its factors.

In respect of the research setting, this study was conducted in the UK (developed market) and Russia (emerging market). Therefore, scholars who are interested in further investigating the phenomenon of corporate website favorability could examine the views of consumers from other countries representing the developed and emerging markets. However, as the research was conducted in the UK and Russia, when applied in other countries the results might vary, thus, future studies can be undertaken in different countries to further develop the knowledge about the concepts.

Additionally, future research should contain the validation of the results of this study, especially in other cultural settings. It is recommended to conduct a replicated research in order to obtain a greater generalizability and validity for the relationships. Moreover, the research framework should be explored in future study by adopting other research approaches and confirmatory statistical techniques.

### **Research limitations**

The limited amount of research in this area imposed a need to perform a qualitative study to construct the conceptual relationships with a view of theory development. This study has acknowledged that these findings cannot be generalized for other contexts. However, this research can assist other scholars to develop an appropriate instrument suited to construct empirical investigations in a cross-country context. This investigation has examined the internal stakeholders' (interviews from communication consultants, managers and designers) and the consumers' perspectives (focus groups from academia) of construction of a favorable corporate website at the planning and design stage.

This study employed semi-structured interviews with retail, design, communication and marketing managers, and focus groups with academia representing consumers, to examine the participants' understanding, experiences and feelings in relation to the topic of this research.

Moreover, the qualitative questions were aligned to the study and have probably limited the opportunities to generalize the results, further study here is also recommended. Additionally, the research design can be another limitation of this study, and further research can be conducted by employing a broader sample. Therefore, the research outcome should be interpreted with care.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, this study is one of the first attempts to collect empirical qualitative evidence that seeks to show the factors that positively affect corporate website favorability, as well as to evaluate the effect of the compound website on consumer evaluations of website in the context of the UK and Russia, representing developed (UK) and emerging markets (Russia) respectively. The current study is applicable to the retail and service setting that clarifies the factors of the corporate website favorability as part of the global corporate identity management (Halliburton and Ziegfeld, 2009). Moreover, the outcome of this research is in line with prior authors (Ageeva et al., 2018; Foroudi et al., 2017a; Melewar et al., 2017), who stated that favorable corporate website is a part of the corporate identity of the company that can bring a competitive advantage and affect the consumers' impression about the company in a positive way.



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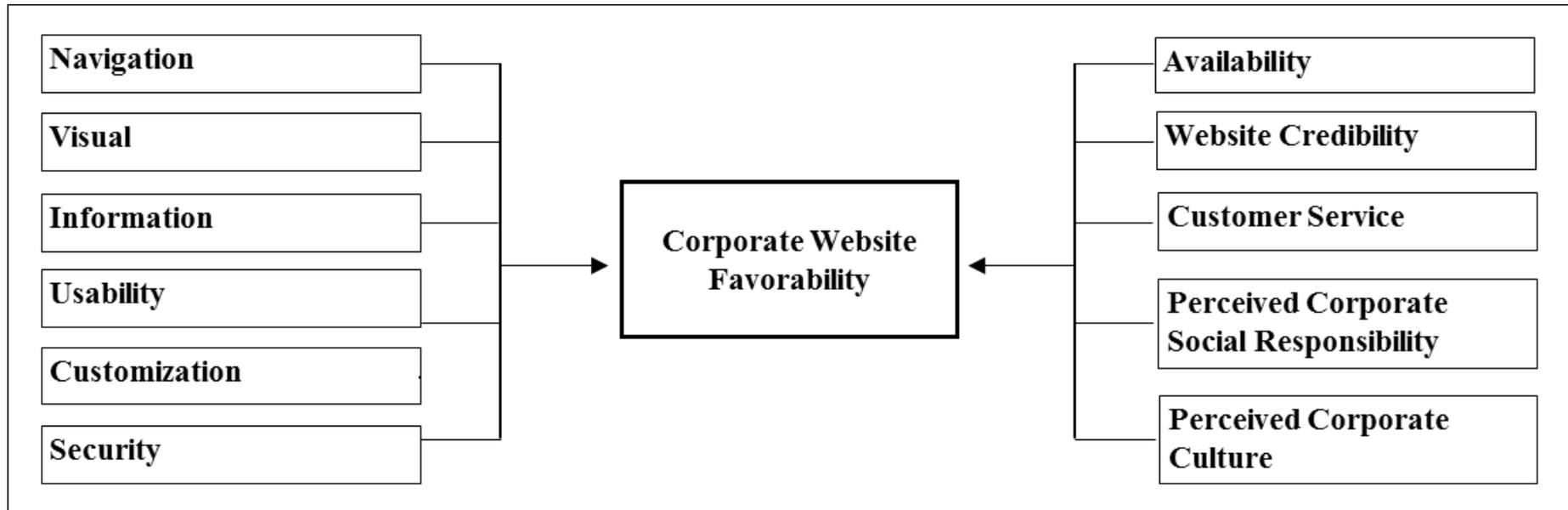
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**Figure 1: Factors of the corporate website favorability**



**Appendix 1: The details of in-depth interviews with consultants and managers**

<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Interview position</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Interview approx. duration</b>
02. 06.2015	Communication Manager		UK	60 min.
08.06. 2015	Marketing Consultant		UK	90 min.
10.06. 2015	Communication Manager		UK	30 min.
12.06.2015	Ex Communication Consultant		UK	60 min.
16.06.2015	Marketing Lecturer and Design Consultant		UK	82 min.
21.06.2015	Managing Director		UK	90 min.
26.06.2015	Co-owner and Managing Director		UK	65 min.
01. 08. 2015	Chairman		Russia	60 min.
01. 08. 2015	Managing Director		Russia	30 min.
03.08.2015	Communication Manager and Design Consultant		Russia	62 min
05.08.2015	Managing Director		Russia	85 min.
07.08.2015	Communication Manager		Russia	90 min
07.08.2015	Creative Manager		Russia	32 min
09.08.2015	Brand Strategist		Russia	60 min
	<b>Topics discussed</b>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The understanding of corporate website and corporate website favorability.</li> <li>-The factors that influence corporate website favorability.</li> <li>-Their experience of what they understand about corporate website favorability and its influences on corporate image, corporate reputation, identification and loyalty.</li> <li>-Discussion of elements of corporate website and whether they influence corporate website favorability.</li> <li>-The main perceived impacts of corporate website favorability.</li> </ul>			

Source: The researchers

## Appendix 2: Details of the participants in the focus groups

Interview date	Number of participants	Interviewee occupation	Location	Age range	Interview approx. length
26.05.2015	6	Employees of Middlesex University London and Doctoral researchers	UK	25-42	90 min.
27.05.2015	6	Employees of Middlesex University London and Doctoral researchers	UK	30-37	85 min
29.05.2015	6	Employees of Middlesex University London and Doctoral researchers	UK	25-29	60 min
30.05.2015	6	Employees of Middlesex University London and Doctoral researchers	UK	25-37	63 min
28.07.2015	6	Employees of Kazan Federal University and Candidacy students (equivalent to PhD in the UK)	Russia	23-25	65 min
29.07.2015	6	Employees of Kazan Federal University and Candidacy students (equivalent to PhD in the UK)	Russia	23-29	90 min
02.08.2015	7	Employees of Kazan Federal University and Candidacy students (equivalent to PhD in the UK)	Russia	23-27	86 min
02.08.2015	6	Staff of Kazan Federal University, Candidacy students (equivalent to PhD in the UK)	Russia	23-26	60 min
<p>Topics discussed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Their understanding of corporate website and corporate website favorability</li> <li>-General information about different global websites</li> <li>-Impression of what they understand about corporate website favorability and their relationship to a company's image, company's reputation, identification and loyalty.</li> <li>-The impact of corporate websites on the minds of consumers</li> <li>-The influences of corporate website favorability on company products or services</li> <li>-The main perceived impacts of corporate website favorability</li> </ul>					

Source: The researchers

