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Leadership and Brand Alignment

By:

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Abstract

The purpose of this journal is to describe and analyse both the corporate leader's and the brand's visibility in order to understand the different types of alignment between corporate leaders and brands. The research has a qualitative and inductive approach and is conducted through a multiple-case study where four leaders and their respective brands were described and analysed. The four cases in this research are Elon Musk & Tesla, Kurt Hellström & Ericsson, Bert Karlsson & Jokarjo and Åke Bengtsson & Haldex. To illustrate the findings of the different alignments between leaders and brands, a matrix has been developed. The main finding of this journal is the different alignments between leaders and brands, which can be seen as a result of the degree of leadership- and brand visibility. The matrix presented can function both as a managerial tool in order to categorise the alignment between a leader and a brand, but also as a theoretical tool in order to address the research gap concerning visibility among these two research areas.

Key Words: Visibility, Brand Identity, Leadership Theory, Brand Orientation, Brand-Oriented Leadership

Introduction

The interest of leadership in relation to brands has increased over the last decades as it has become apparent that leadership roles impact the brand as a whole (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000). Researchers offer different definitions of leadership. One definition of leadership is expressed as "a process of social influence, which maximises the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal" (Kruse, 2013). This indicates that the link between leaders and brands can have a dynamic dimension and a social aspect to it which makes the link interesting to investigate further. An alternative explanation of what leadership is can be stated as follows: "Leaders hold a position of power or authority, but those who lead inspire us. Whether they're individuals or organisations, we follow those who lead, not because we have to, but because we want to." (Simon Sinek, 2009).

However, through these explanations leadership is still quite an ambiguous area.

In order to investigate the relationship between leaders and brands, one needs to take into account both leadership theory and brand theory. There are several ways of explaining brands, however, in relation to leadership, research has found human elements of brand identity (Urde, 2013) that can be linked to personal leadership. Kapferer (2012) explains brand identity as an initial step towards establishing the brand's "self" and its differentiation towards others, which eventually can lead to the independence of a brand as it acts as a DNA agent. Brand identity is also a way for a company to define "who we are, what our name is and what distinguishable features we have that can be instantly recognized" (Kapferer, 2012, p.149), which in addition is questions that leaders also can ask themselves.

With regards to the above stated, research has been conducted on leadership and brand identity separately, however, the relatively new area of brand-oriented leadership has touched upon this combination (Mats Urde, personal conversation, 20 September 2019). This raises the problematisation of whether there are more structured ways of explaining the relationship between leaders and brands and if there are ways of categorising leaders in relation to their brands. Therefore, this journal's purpose is to describe and analyse both the corporate leader's and the brand's visibility in order to understand the different types of alignment between corporate leaders and brands.

Literature review

Brand Identity

According to Kapferer (2012), one of the critical aspects of managing a brand is to manage brand identity. Brand identity offers a conceptualisation for overall brand coherence and aids organisations in believing in the actual existence of the brand and its uniqueness (Kapferer, 2012). Moreover, he states that brand identity facilitates organisations to differentiate itself from others and emphasises that the identity concept can eventually lead to brand independence instead of being solely product names, as it acts as a DNA agent (Kapferer, 2012).

The Brand Identity Prism presented by Kapferer (2012) shows six different facets that together demonstrate and explain the identity of a brand. The model implies that brand identity depends on these interrelated elements Kapferer (2012). As brands derive from the fundamental conceptualisation that they have the ability to communicate, every element of the prism represents an important component for achieving this (Kapferer, 2012). The *picture of the sender* consists of two facets: *Physique and Personality* and this perspective of the prism relates to the fact that all

communication derives from a sender and serves as the sender's reflection (Kapferer, 2012). Furthermore, Kapferer (2012, p. 159) explains that: "The easiest way of creating instant personality is to give the brand a spokesperson or figurehead, whether real or symbolic." which exemplifies that the sender's communication can mediate a certain identity which then becomes applicable on the brand itself.

On the opposite side, the model present *picture of recipient* (Kapferer, 2012). This part of brand identity is based on the conception that the communication addresses a particular person or audience (Kapferer, 2012). The recipient is thus a part of the formation of the brand identity, (Kapferer, 2012) but will not be of major focus in this journal.

In between the *picture of the sender* and *picture of the recipient*, there is a bridge consisting of *Culture* and *Relationship*. The externalisation aspect of the model (Relationship) refers to the prism's social dimension. The element contributes to giving the brand an outward expression. Meanwhile, the internationalisation aspect (Culture) is, on the contrary, explained as the inward identity attributes of the brand (Kapferer, 2012). However, the prism is limited in terms of providing a deeper understanding of the total sum of identity which includes the organisation behind the brand, eg. CEO, managers and employees (Urde, 2013).

The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Figure 1) functions as a complementary framework to the prism, in order to gain a profound understanding of brand identity and the organisation behind the brand (Urde, 2013). A recent study made by Urde and Greyser (2019) states that many companies have difficulties in defining their brands and suggest that a clear corporate brand identity would help in doing so, thus reaching a competitive edge.

A corporate brand could be defined by nine interrelated components, three internal ones, three external ones and three combined internal and external ones (Urde & Greysner, 2019).

The internal section of the matrix consists of three components and these three focus exclusively on the internal part of the brand identity and constitute the very foundation of the corporate brand identity (Urde &

Greysner, 2019). The middle row represents elements that are simultaneously applicable to brand identity from an internal perspective and an external perspective. In addition to the lower level of the matrix, the multidimensional level provides the *personality* element which can be interpreted as a way of understanding the human characteristics of the organisation (Urde & Greysner, 2019).

EXTERNAL	<p>VALUE PROPOSITION</p> <p><i>What are our key offerings, and how do we want them to appeal to customers and other stakeholders?</i></p>	<p>RELATIONSHIPS</p> <p><i>What should be the nature of our relationships with key customers and other stakeholders?</i></p>	<p>POSITION</p> <p><i>What is our intended position in the market and in the hearts and minds of key customers and other stakeholders?</i></p>
EXTERNAL/ INTERNAL	<p>EXPRESSION</p> <p><i>What is distinctive about the way we communicate and express ourselves and makes it possible to recognize us at a distance?</i></p>	<p>BRAND CORE</p> <p><i>What do we promise, and what are the core values that sum up what our brand stands for?</i></p>	<p>PERSONALITY</p> <p><i>What combination of human characteristics or qualities forms our corporate character?</i></p>
INTERNAL	<p>MISSION AND VISION</p> <p><i>What engages us (mission)? What is our direction and inspiration (vision)?</i></p>	<p>CULTURE</p> <p><i>What are our attitudes, and how do we work and behave?</i></p>	<p>COMPETENCES</p> <p><i>What are we particularly good at, and what makes us better than the competition?</i></p>

Figure 1: The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde & Greysner, 2019)

Brand and market orientation

Although market orientation has been dominating early strategic brand management research, brand orientation has since its entrance in the 1990's been acknowledged and played a bigger role in research because of its more balanced and less market reactive perspective (Urde, Baumgarth & Merrilees, 2013; Gromark & Melin, 2011; Tarnovskaya et al, 2008).

Market-oriented firms try to understand the market in a systematic way and develop solutions based on existing customer needs and knowledge, therefore taking an outside-in perspective and stressing the importance of brand image (Tarnovskaya et al., 2008; Urde, Baumgarth & Merrilees, 2013). Brand orientation, on the other hand, is described as taking an inside-out perspective where brand identity is said to

be key for branding and marketing (Urde, Baumgarth, Merrilees, 2013). Furthermore, Urde, Baumgarth and Merrilees (2013) suggest that there is no ideal orientation and that orientation is dynamic whereas a company can be a hybrid of the two. Urde (1999) also claims that to be able to manage a brand-oriented company, a specific skill set of managing the brand is required.

According to Gromark and Melin (2011), one of the important dimensions of a company's brand orientation is top management's participation, which is relevant for this journal. This element means actively being a part of strategic work and actively representing the brand (Gromark & Melin, 2011), which is critical as Greyser (2009) expresses that the CEO serves the purpose as the main guardian of the brand. Gromark and Melin (2011) stress that there is a clear connection between brand-orientation and financial performance, however, this journal does not aim to explain the financial effects. Brand orientation will instead only serve as a basis for understanding the underlying environment of a company and its brand.

Leadership theory

In order to understand the meaning and implications of being a leader and leading a brand to be successful, it is according to Simon Sinek (2019) of importance to understand how leaders and organisations think, act and communicate. Leadership is defined by Banai and Reisel (2007) as a process in which a person is showing direction and influencing followers towards a specific goal. Cameron (2008) emphasises that leadership can not only originate from the CEO but from other people within a company, however, the CEO are most commonly referred to in research.

Sinek (2009) presents the "golden circle" as the principle of every brand's and leader's success. By asking your organisation or yourself as a leader *why* you do what you

do, you can express the organisation's purpose and gain trust among others, which is an important success factor for leadership (Sinek, 2009). Urde (2019) elaborates on Sinek's theory, saying that by adding a *by whom* you can provide the brand and organisation with a purpose and a full understanding of the organisation behind the brand.

Sterling Marketing Group (2016) states that the role of a CEO in today's environment has become "the chief brand ambassador" since almost 50 % of the company's reputation can be tracked down to the CEO. Additionally, Sterling Marketing Group (2016) presents the CEO branding matrix as a way of showing branding activities for leaders and suggests there are activities that must be undertaken to be a successful leader in today's business landscape. They describe that creating a strong CEO brand includes activities that not necessarily fall in line with the branding of the business, rather go beyond and adds on to the business as a whole (Sterling Marketing Group, 2016). Among other activities, a leading CEO must have an online presence, but also offline with the ability to be active in social networks and able to communicate externally and internally through media exposure and public speaking (Sterling Marketing Group, 2016). Davis (2018) adds on to this by saying that CEO branding means using thoughtful leadership through social media, public relations and speaking engagements. By strategically adding and showing the human element to the leadership, the leader can add value not only to themselves but also to the brand they represent (Davis, 2018).

Several researchers have reflected upon different approaches that leaders can adopt and O'Toole (2008) and Dean (2008) presents values-based leadership as a way of practising leadership. O'Toole (2008) states that values-based leaders do and that values-based leaders role, task, and responsibility is to help their followers

realise and implement things they hold dear, but which requires help from others. Dean (2008) specifies the possible result of values-based leadership as reaching success in strategy work and successfully building relationships with business partners. One distinguished aspect is that a values-based leader is not driven by a desire for personal wealth or power, as the objective of values-based leadership is to aid others (O'Toole, 2008). It is further elaborated that when a business is faced with problems, leaders who are focusing on core values are an enabler for success, not those leaders merely showcasing problem-solving skills (Cameron, 2008). Goleman (2000) suggests that leadership is a strategic choice, not a function of personality and that leaders can adopt different styles regarding the situation and organisational climate. Finally, Goleman (2000) explains that these leadership styles can function by themselves but he emphasises that a strategic combination would be most beneficial, thus also indicates on financial performance.

Brand-oriented leadership

Balmer et al (2006) state that many brand managers encounter difficulties when trying to understand the essential representation of a brand. Further, Urde (personal conversation, 20 September 2019) adds on to this by explaining the importance of having a corporate leader with a clear direction for and dedication to the brand. It is important for managers to know both the internal parts of the brand and the parts connected to the external environment (Urde, 2013). With this knowledge, it is possible for them to use a brand-oriented approach, an inside-out view when addressing the internal parts of the matrix (Urde, 2013). A recent concept has touched upon the combination of leadership and brand identity, called brand-oriented leadership (Mats Urde, personal conversation, 20 September 2019). The territory of brand-oriented leadership consists of three layers: identity,

communication & positioning and reputation (Urde, 2019). Through this territory model, one can distinguish drivers for how leaders should or can be and act in relation to their brand. The identity layer involves defining the brand and once that has been done, one should start communicating and position the brand (Mats Urde, personal conversation, 20 September 2019). The result will be your reputation which will be the foundation of how your opportunity is to actually do business in your market (Mats Urde, personal conversation, 20 September 2019)

Lastly, the research around *Brand-Oriented Leadership* is at an early stage, hence not published, and can therefore not be seen as final. This journal paper does not aim to develop this concept any further, instead, the idea behind brand-oriented leadership is relevant for a discussion concerning the alignment between leadership and brands.

Methodology

This journal paper is based on qualitative research as the authors aim to seek a deeper understanding of a practical phenomenon, best suited through a systematic empirical investigation of specific real-life examples (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The journal is fulfilling its purpose by taking an inductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015), through observation of relevant cases, thereafter by developing a matrix on the basis of case characteristics as a visual contribution. In order to support the chosen axes of the matrix, a review of existing literature on the topic was done. Relevant literary books and articles were studied and extractions of these serve as the basis for the background and the problematisation, which ultimately results in the matrix. According to Bryman & Bell (2015), this enables the authors to present patterns in real life, in order to contribute with new insights to existing theory (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

This journal paper uses a case study approach, which is both useful when investigating phenomena within real-life contexts and relevant for the journal (Yin, 2015). The research is done through studying four leaders and their respective corporate brands: Elon Musk-Tesla, Kurt Hellström-Ericsson, Bert Karlsson-Jokarjo and Åke Bengtsson-Haldex. Yin (2015) recommends a multiple case study design when it is important for the reader to understand differences in terms of using different strategies, which is applicable to this journal. These cases were carefully and purposely chosen in order to highlight representative typologies. A list of 40 cases (the leaders and their respective brands) was compiled to broaden the authors' perspectives, which then enabled careful screening of the range and finally a decision on the four most explanatory and easily understood cases, as suggested by Yin (2015). Moreover, these cases are presented in order for the reader to easier understand the categories in the matrix.

To broaden the understanding of the cases, detailed document analysis was chosen as the method (Bryman & Bell, 2015). By combining numerous sources, both digital ones and former case studies, company websites and news articles, an overall but deep and updated understanding of the four cases were established.

Developing the matrix

The matrix was developed from the observation of the cases. Brand-orientation theory is not incorporated in the matrix, thus only function as a background for understanding the environment of the matrix. The journal's focus is instead on leaders and brand identity. The matrix is created upon empirical findings of visibility as distinctive characteristics of leaders, as well as the brand visibility. This contrasts existing research that has yet not emphasised the leader's visibility nor the brand's visibility. However, brand identity and leadership theory were found to be

valuable factors and suitable when trying to explain the two axes in this journal paper. In conclusion, this creates an opportunity to contribute to the research area, and the two visibility axes will thus persist. It is important to highlight that visibility is often related to outside observers and the brand image such as recognisability and presence. However, since this journal has interpreted visibility as identity, not image, there is limited bias.

Generally, it was essential to incorporate elements in the matrix that made the framework easily comprehensible for both the authors and readers of the journal paper. The matrix essentially elaborates on the, as earlier stated, relatively un-researched area and can, therefore, be seen as useful for further understanding. The matrix can provide important insights to companies and managers when reviewing the alignment between current leaders and their corporate brands. This also initiates the option for alternative usage of the matrix, namely to analyse both historical and future situations when choosing a leader. Furthermore, the matrix should be used as a framework for applying cases in order to answer other similar research purposes. Although the ultimate goal is creating a general model that is fully applicable to all cases. The authors are aware that some distinctive aspects of both leaders and brands may affect the level of generalisability.

Elements of the matrix

Two axes, x, and y were developed as a result of the observation of cases. The aspect of visibility is key as the matrix is solely based upon visibility in both axes. This journal paper presents two different types of visibility, the brands' and the leaders'. The previous literature review, together with the observation of the cases, enables explanations of each axis, as stated below.

The x-axis illustrates the level of visibility of the leader which means to which extent the leader is a front figure to the brand. The x-axis ranges from low to high, emphasising if the leader tends to focus more inside the organisation or both inside and outside the organisation. This aspect is derived from the fact that to maintain a leadership position, leaders are expected to be dedicated to their company, but that some leaders strive to show leadership on an external level too.

The y-axis illustrates the level of visibility of the brand, which regards to what extent the identity traits of the brand appear and is shown to the public. This axis also ranges

from low to high, meaning the level that the brand is portraying a clear and prominent identity outwards and what the brand does to be visible. This aspect is derived from the fact that brands can exist without fully utilising it, or it can provide an identity to enhance business operations.

Overall, the matrix should be studied vertically and horizontally simultaneously, as the aim of the journal paper is to specifically study the alignment between leaders and brands. Furthermore, the matrix takes an objective neutral perspective. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that the matrix allows categorisation, rather than ranking by preference.

Leader-Brand Alignment Matrix

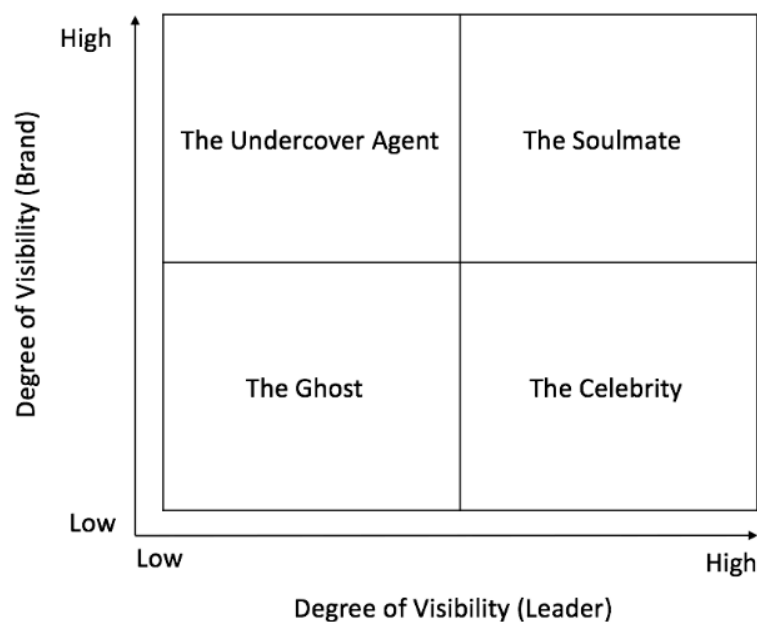


Figure 2: The alignment between leaders and brands.

Typologies of the matrix

'The ghost'

The first alignment between the leader and the brand is called 'Ghost'. This category is characterised by having a leader with low visibility simultaneously as the brand has low visibility. It relates to the phenomena of

ghosts that possess a mythological presence.

'The undercover agent'

The upper left square presents the category called 'Undercover agent'. It is characterised by a low degree of leadership visibility on the x-axis and a high degree of

brand visibility on the y-axis. An undercover agent metaphorically represents a person that acts under the radar while dedicated to their agency.

'The celebrity'

The third typology in the matrix is categorised as 'Celebrity'. Distinctive for this typology is a high degree of leadership visibility and a low degree of brand visibility. Metaphorically, it shares a resemblance to celebrities as they constantly appear in the spotlight, but do not necessarily need to connect to a specific source.

'The soulmate'

The final typology in the constructed matrix is defined as 'Soulmate'. It represents a close alignment between the leader and the brand, scoring a high degree on both axes. The term soulmate can metaphorically show close similarities a highly developed symbiosis between the two parties.

Matrix applied to the cases

Drawing upon the matrix presented above, the matrix has been applied to four cases in order to showcase in-depth the four different alignments between leaders and brands.

Case 1: Elon Musk & Tesla

Tesla, the international electric car manufacturer, was founded in 2003 by engineers who wanted to challenge the car industry (Tesla, 2019). The company does not only develop and sell electric cars but also offers electronic battery solutions and work towards a better future without having to compromise on car power (Tesla, 2019). Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla, is involved in several big projects such as SpaceX, a company within space craft (Forbes, 2019).

Musk is described as widely visionary and is highly associated with Tesla (Yauney, 2018). He is seen as an inspirational leader

by his employees partly because every time he demands something from them, he also demand more from himself (Yauney, 2018). Inspiring leaders set the example for employees and as Musk is known for working extremely hard and long hours, he sets the bar for the entire organisation and proves to have a high degree of commitment to his work (Yauney, 2018). Furthermore, Musk is known to be a true optimist that would never abandon his vision under any circumstances (Yauney, 2018). The fact that Musk is very transparent in his way of leadership has lead to him frequently appearing in the media, both online and offline (Forbes, 2019). Further, Blazek (2016) states that Musk has become memorable as a leader due to the fact that he goes his own way, not stopping for any obstacles.

The aim of being the premier global provider of accurate energy industry forecasting solutions, hence the vision and mission of the brand, is something Tesla incorporates in everything they do. Moreover, Tesla's internal values such as always doing your best, respect and encourage people and respecting the environment, are constantly appearing in their corporate documents (Tesla Forecast, 2018). In a study regarding electrical vehicles, Tesla profoundly exceeded other companies regarding brand awareness scoring approximately 81% (Garsten, 2019). A customer said, "So even though I had no idea what Model 3 would look like when I ordered it, I had trust in the technological and design capabilities of the car" (Chen, 2016). The low expenditure on the marketing of the brand and its products can thus be supported by the long waiting lists that Tesla experience due to new releases of car models (Schultz, 2017).

Tesla and Musk both have high visibility, separately and individually, which is demonstrated by their constant active presence. One aspect that is important to emphasise is that strong brand awareness

implies that Tesla has a valuable and distinctive identity that is hard for competitors to imitate. The introduction of the Model 3 can indicate great trust and knowledge about the brand. The unique characteristics of Musk, visionary, inspirational and extremely hard-working, can all be applied to the brand as well. Tesla is commonly seen as a visionary brand, developing solutions to solve both current and future expected problems. Adopting this futuristic approach and aspirational leadership style, makes both Musk and Tesla seem to strive for similar goals. Through applying the journal's matrix on Elon Musk and Tesla, their alignment could be seen as *'The Soulmate'*.

Case 2: Kurt Hellström & Ericsson

Ericsson, one of the world-leading companies within Information and Communication Technology, is striving for a fully connected world (Ericsson, 2019a). In order to do this, Ericsson enables valuable connectivity by developing services and technology that can be scalable and adapted for each customer (Ericsson, 2019a). Kurt Hellström, CEO of Ericsson between 1999 - 2003, is one of many that have been running the company during the last years (Augustsson, 2003). Hellström was in charge of the mobile sector during his early years which made him a good candidate in 1999 when the company was to assign a new CEO (Augustsson, 2003).

Hellström is described as a media-shy and low key person which is not often seen in an executive position at companies in Ericsson's size (Augustsson, 2003). This is further described by his colleagues: "Kurt Hellström did not seem to enjoy media, even though he was described internally as a social talent and a very good boss, there was something wrong with him when he met media" (Augustsson, 2003). Hellström did not want to attend the media events even though he did and it was sometimes described as a disaster (Augustsson, 2003). Hellström's time managing Ericsson as

CEO was hard, the company faced difficult challenges both financially and managerially (Augustsson, 2003). After Hellström resigned he expressed he felt relieved to step down from the position (Augustsson, 2003).

Ericsson's international brand approach is widely stressed and can be exemplified by "For more than a century, they [employees] have travelled all over the world to build networks and solve problems in extremely uncomfortable surroundings..." (Ericsson Success, 2019). Ericsson has overtime worked hard with portraying the same brand profile internationally, to create coherence (Ericsson, 2019b). Ericsson had a big market share during the 2000s and due to the acceleration of new customers within the wireless market, Ericsson's gained more attention (Ericsson, 2000). Further, Ericsson (2000) stated during that time that they were not simply delivering products and services, they were creating an opportunity for communication and creating the mobile internet revolution (Ericsson, 2000).

This information indicates that Hellström shows low visibility as a leader and that Ericsson shows high visibility as a brand. While many big actors around the world were familiar with and used Ericsson's products, Hellström was not very visible. Hellström's reputation among business partners was also described as dedicated internally but less dedicated externally because of his bad media presence and low visibility. While Ericsson's employees travelled all around the world, and the brand was shown coherent internationally, Hellström attended media events to a bare minimum. In regards to the above presented, Kurt Hellström and Ericsson are together categorised as the alignment *'The Undercover Agent'*.

Case 3: Bert Karlsson & Jokerjo

The company Jokerjo is described as one of the largest private providers of

accommodations for refugee-classified or asylum-seeking adults in Sweden (Crouch, 2015). During the immigration crisis in Sweden, beginning in 2015, the company increased its revenue and profitability (Alla bolag, 2019) and only one year later the profit was at record high level (Höiseth, 2016). The CEO of the company, Bert Karlsson, is a businessman in Sweden and former pop music mogul, who has been appearing on various occasions and contexts (Braw, 2016).

Karlsson is a well-cited man in both Swedish and international media and has been fronting news articles quite frequently. David Crouch (2013) writes that Karlsson is an entrepreneur that has simultaneously taken on different business roles, where he throughout all of them has made his name recognisable. He co-founded a political party and took on the role of leading the party for some time (Nordenstam, 2015). Karlsson also appeared as a host on the Swedish television show fame factory for several years (Nordenstam, 2015). These actions imply that Karlsson has made active choices of becoming a public figure on a regular basis. Moreover, Karlsson has stated that he saw a profitable business opportunity during the refugee crisis, without necessarily caring about the people around the business (Crouch, 2013). Karlsson has been described as being compassionate even though he is mainly seen as having a commercial focus (Crouch, 2013).

Jokarjo was founded to fulfil the market need of housing for refugees (Crouch, 2015). The company's glory days were during the refugee crisis and according to Skovde Nyheter (2019) in recent years have been unprofitable. Today, Jokarjo has no registered website that offers official information about the company, however annual reports can be bought for those who are interested (Alla Bolag, 2019). This makes it hard for different stakeholders to

understand what the company and therefore the brand, does and what it stands for.

The information illustrates that Karlsson has high visibility as a leader, while simultaneously the visibility of the brand is low. When Karlsson appears in the media, the emphasis has constantly been put on him. Being as opinionated as he is, he proves to be very dedicated to all his endeavours which makes him, and his characteristics, memorable among the public. His public statements also seem to be thought through, which could be seen as the branding of Karlsson as a leader. In contrast, Jokarjo is visible in some articles but not nearly as much as Karlsson and the company's lack of a website and published brand guidelines further confirms the brand's low visibility. Since it is hard to identify and analyse the brand, it is easy for stakeholders to create own assumptions of the brand, which can create confusion. To conclude, the case presented above indicates that Bert Karlsson and Jokarjo could be seen as *'The Celebrity'*.

Case 4: Åke Bengtsson & Haldex

Haldex, originated from Sweden, is a global business-to-business company that works as a subcontractor in the commercial vehicle industry (Haldex, 2016). The company supplies innovative solutions through technology development, both for traditional cars and for electrical and autonomous ones, with the aim of increased safety in vehicles (Haldex, 2016). Åke Bengtsson was appointed as the CEO of Haldex from 2017 to the middle of 2019 (The Break Report, 2019). Prior to this, Bengtsson had the role as the CFO between 2015 and 2017 (Höök, 2017).

Bengtsson has a strong academic and business-related background, which was seen as a good competence to have when assigning a new CEO to the company (Haldex, 2017). In his former position at Haldex, he is described as a strong operative and business executive with a

long and reliable track record (Haldex, 2017). When Bengtsson resigned, the board expressed that he was great at leading the company internally through turbulent times (Haldex, 2019). Bengtsson has appeared in some press statements on the company website (Haldex, 2019), however, he is not frequently featured in other media contexts.

The Haldex brand is portrayed towards their customers through their website, but not to the end customer as they are subcontractors in a B2B environment (Haldex, 2016). The brand's focus is not on promoting themselves but rather to spend money on research and development so that their products stay attractive for big car manufacturers. When looking for a new CEO, Haldex (2019) expressed that the company was in need of becoming the top-of-mind partner and gain more credibility. However, press statements mainly focus on the company's future business operations, rather than the vision and mission (Haldex, 2019).

Evidently, Haldex and Bengtsson are both relevant within their field of business. However, neither of them are highly visible in relation to the other examples. Looking into the case of Bengtsson as a leader, he has mainly been acting in the background even though he was operating as CEO. Further, Bengtsson is sometimes mentioned in regard to his business and operative successes, but there is no information about his leadership success. The information that does exist does most often not include Bengtsson's own reflections, but solely information about him. This can indicate his low visibility as a leader. Further, since Haldex is a subcontractor to famous car manufacturers, the brand is often not promoted. This can indicate Haldex as a low visibility brand. The alignment between Haldex and Åke Bengtsson can be viewed, in regard to the above mentioned, as the *'The Ghost'*.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has examined how leaders and brands could be aligned with each other in different ways by looking at their respective levels of visibility. It is highlighted that certain models support the importance of leadership visibility. Among others, Simon Sinek's (2009) golden circle can for example work as a tool for leaders in decision-making situations, which can ultimately affect the success of leadership and finally support the journal's meaning of leadership visibility. Moreover, the journal also establishes different degrees to which leaders perform activities and their possession of specific characteristics. This is essential for performing great leadership, something that both the CEO branding theory and the values-based leadership theory supports. Goleman's (2000) emphasises that leadership is situational and a combination of different leadership styles is strategically most beneficial. This will be further explained when addressing implications of change for both the leader and the brand.

In regards to brand visibility, the journal paper defines this as the degree of how brands signal their brand identity traits. It has been highlighted that visibility does not only refers to media exposure which one might instinctively expect but rather means that identity traits are conveyed both within the organisation and externally. Kapferer's (2012) brand identity prism and the corporate brand identity matrix by Urde & Greyser (2019), represents accumulated identity theory which lies as the foundation of brand visibility. By focusing on internal elements in these models, brand visibility becomes characterised by more social and human traits. This creates an appropriate link to the leadership theory that supports the axis for leadership visibility.

By looking at the cases, it is clear that there is no decided way of being a leader and relating to the corporate brand. Previous

theory often relates characteristics and identity to performance in relation to success. However, it is important to emphasise that the alignments are rather of a dynamic than static nature. There is not a preferred alignment between leadership and brands, nor is there a simple answer on what type of leader that a specific type of brand. This derives from the fact that there are success stories within all types of alignments.

Different degrees of leadership visibility is illustrated through the case studies and one interesting point of view is that business operations could be independent of the degree of leadership visibility. In line with the presented CEO branding theory (Davis, 2018; Sterling Marketing Group, 2016) and values-based leadership theory (O'Toole, 2008), certain activities are emphasised as of considerable importance to strengthen leadership. Among those vital activities is the need for online and offline presence as well as activities that are not driven by personal wealth but rather connected to the organisational values. Looking at the cases, both Hellström and Bengtsson proves to have a very limited online presence, as Hellström preferred to avoid all media and Bengtsson is not actively present if not needed. This could be interpreted as a contribution to why Hellström and Bengtsson as leaders have low visibility. Opposite to this, Musk and Karlsson have high visibility leadership, which can partly be explained by CEO branding since both participate in both online and offline activities.

Further, this journal discovered that there is a pattern in the matrix whether a company is brand-oriented and market-oriented. Looking at the Haldex and Jokarjo, both of them have a low visibility brand and both of them are seen as more market-oriented. This can be derived from the fact that they are offering solutions to market needs which do not necessarily require a solid brand identity. On the opposite side,

looking at Tesla and Ericsson which both are categorised as high visibility brands, they could be seen as more brand-oriented. This is due to the fact that the brand identity is very clear which results in a clear direction for internal stakeholders as well as external. Altogether, low visibility of brand can indicate on market-orientation and vice versa. However, this journal paper cannot ensure this pattern. The matrix, therefore, invites to the categorisation of brands where the outcome might be different from what was found in this journal.

Since businesses environments are under constant change it is interesting to look deeper into the change of categories, for example when a leader resigns. Since Kapferer (2012) emphasise the importance of having a spokes-figure in order to create an instant personality and Davis (2018) emphasise that CEO branding adds value to the brand, the analysis is that Tesla might face problems if Musk would resign. This is due to the fact that he is closely related to the Tesla brand since he is the founder. It is also important to take into consideration that the change of category might be both positive and negative since the matrix is developed as an objective tool. In opposite to this, it is furthermore interesting to discuss if a change of leader can be expected to be less problematic in a company where the previous leader had low visibility. One might wonder, according to the above stated, whether a low visibility leader such as Hellström can be more easily exchangeable than high visibility leaders, such as Musk. If this exchange would be implemented, a categorisation change will occur, thus moving Ericsson from '*The Undercover Agent*' to '*The Soulmate*' in the matrix. Lastly, in situations like these, it can be viewed as beneficial to have the capability of adopting multiple leadership styles as Goleman suggests (2000).

In the literature review, the relatively new phenomenon brand-oriented leadership was brought up to highlight the importance of

brand strategy and being aware of how a leader relates to the brand, in order to be able to practise brand-oriented leadership (Urde, personal conversation, 20 September 2019). If research in this area stresses the importance of being able to define the identity of a brand to reach success, low visibility brands may struggle to excel in brand-oriented leadership. However, those who are not brand-oriented but wish to excel in brand-oriented leadership could be helped by realising its own alignment through looking at the different alignments stated in the matrix. Lastly, 'The Soulmate' category indicates in regards to existing brand-oriented leadership theory, to be the category with the most potential in being brand-oriented leaders. This is solely based upon that the theory emphasises the importance of interconnection between leaders and brands to be successful.

To conclude, through this journal paper it can be argued that visibility has not yet been truly highlighted in previous research as a factor that explains leaders, brands and their alignment. By defining visibility further as both leader traits and brand identity traits it was possible to reflect upon the various categories of existing relationships. The developed matrix provides a structured tool for converting this new theory into practice.

Theoretical and managerial implications

By introducing the aspect of visibility to the existing theory, researchers can gain further insights into leader and brand alignment. This journal wishes to contribute to the research on brand identity and leadership theory by adding visibility as a dimension that explains both leaders' and brands' identity, thus show their alignment. The matrix developed in this journal represents a first attempt on the leader-brand-alignment type of categorisation. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the matrix is not constructed in a way to show preferable

leadership and brand alignment, but rather to create an opportunity to categorise them.

This journal provides managers, board members and other leaders, such as the CEO of the company, with a new theoretical approach to analyse the brand in relation to the leader. The matrix is a tool that can make managers reflect upon their brand and their leaders in different ways to increase awareness of their situation. The matrix can also be of importance when in times of change, by addressing what level of visibility leader is applicable for your brand and vice versa. With the knowledge of what alignment, the leader and the brand have managers can decide whether this is important in their strategic decisions. Lastly, it is equally important for the managers as for the researchers to know that this matrix takes a neutral objective.

Limitations and future research

This research is limited to four purposely selected cases. To be able to support the generalisation of the findings even further, this type of study should be conducted multiple times. To gain additional insights, interviews can be held with the leaders and insiders at the organisations. Although, it is not viewed as highly feasible because of the geographical distance and popularity of some brands and leaders. The authors have also taken into account the limitations of choosing two internationally known cases and two less well-known, at least for readers outside of Sweden. To add on to this, it was easier to find information about Tesla and Ericsson, which could affect the case descriptions slightly. However, this journal paper aims to provide all relevant knowledge needed to understand all four cases, thus for any reader to understand the findings.

Moreover, this journal focuses solely on an inside view on alignment when analysing visibility. The authors have recognised the possibility of also studying leader and brand alignment through other dimensions,

such as an outside perspective. Researchers may, therefore, look into leader image and brand image to find out if a similar alignment pattern occurs. One further aspect that has not been brought up in this journal is the fact that leadership can derive from other persons than the CEO. Hence, it would be interesting to conduct research on alternative leaders and their relation to the brand identity. Lastly, aspects such as success and performance were frequently brought up in the existing theory, however not addressed in this journal since the aim was not to find one ultimate preferred alignment. These aspects could be ways of researching further into this area.

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