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Levels of corporate branding

A multiple case study to identify and define levels of corporate branding

Authors: Sofia Lilliehorn & Johanna Schönberg

Supervisor: Mats Urde

Examiner: Veronika Tarnovskaya

Abstract

Title:	Levels of Corporate Branding
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Authors:	Sofia Lilliehorn & Johanna Schönberg
Advisors:	Mats Urde
Keywords:	Corporate Branding, Levels of Corporate Branding, Corporate Branding Spectrum, Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix
Thesis purpose:	To identify and define levels of corporate branding by exploring what sets corporate branding apart internally and externally.
Methodology:	A qualitative multiple case study with an abductive approach. Philosophical assumptions of relativism and constructivism.
Theoretical perspective:	The theoretical framework is based upon literature within internal corporate branding, external corporate branding, and corporate communication to determine essential elements of corporate branding.
Empirical data:	Qualitative empirical data was collected through four semi-structured interviews with case corporations: Pantamera, Haglöfs, Gunnarshögs Gård, and Thule. Secondary data was collected through peer-reviewed articles, archival sources and publicly available information such as websites and social media.
Conclusion:	Theoretical contributions include distinguishing one level of corporate branding from another, what degree of internal and external corporate branding is associated with different levels, and why it is important to identify and define levels of corporate branding. Managerial implications include measuring corporate branding, understanding the current level of corporate branding, and how to become a higher level of corporate branding.

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Families and Friends

For supporting us with positive energy in the most stressful times.

Lund, Sweden

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Sofia Lilliehorn



Johanna Schönberg

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1 Introduction

The first chapter introduces the research area of corporate branding and its increasing significance in today's business context. Further, corporate branding is problematized by illuminating the existing literature's inadequacy to capture the complexity that resides in reality, leading to the purpose of the research and research questions. Finally, this chapter provides an overview of the thesis.

1.1 Background

In today's business context, corporations are no longer remembered or distinguished based on their product or service offerings; they all need to leverage their particular brand to stand out in the crowd. However, this has not always been the case; back in the days, when the competition for the consumer's wallet was smaller and instant knowledge about corporations was not available in an instant, the product was king. Therefore, the ruling paradigm for decades on how to manage a brand was through product branding, a single positioning for each product and product line (Kapferer, 2012). Nonetheless, in the modern business context, where corporations needed to communicate in new ways, sharpen their product portfolios, and create stronger superior brands, a new way of branding was born - the era of corporate branding.

Corporate branding has fostered a new way of thinking, the brand is viewed as a strategic asset that requires the involvement of the whole organization as well as a new way of communicating, stretching beyond the functional nature of product branding (e.g., Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Greyser & Urde, 2019). Through corporate branding, corporations can show who they are and what they stand for, to reach beyond, and not be contained and defined by their products or services (e.g., de Chernatony, 1999; Urde, 1999; Urde, 2013). Corporate branding enables corporations to connect on a deeper level with all stakeholders, not only the consumers, to create stronger relationships (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

Corporate branding has become quite compelling to an increasing number of corporations as firms seek to create efficiency and effectiveness through streamlining their branding strategies (Aaker & Moorman, 2017), creating an ongoing trend since the early 2000s to transition towards corporate branding (e.g., Balmer, 1995; 2001; de Chernatony, 1999; Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Keller, 2000; Urde, 2013). However, with great power comes great responsibility, corporate branding is way more complex as it involves a broader scope of stakeholders and the involvement of the whole organization, and it is thus more exposed to criticism (Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Gray, 2003).

We have now viewed different ways to manage a brand, either through product branding or corporate branding. The distinction between the two ruling paradigms in branding is well explored and defined in the literature. However, are the two ways of branding all there is? Do all corporations practice corporate branding to the same extent?

1.2 Problematization

When defining corporate branding, article after article raises the question: how does corporate branding differ from product branding? (e.g., Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2003). However, no one concerns themselves with raising the question if all corporate branding is the same? Rather, the current literature lumps all corporate branding together, resulting in a single level that reflects all. We argue that this lack of nuance in the corporate branding literature, that either you practice corporate branding, or you do not, demotes the complexity that resides in reality. What about all the corporations that do not qualify to be included in the single level? How come only the ideal corporate branding is reflected when almost certainly only a fraction of all corporate branding, in reality, reaches the level?

Bearing in mind the single level of corporate branding, the current literature is not able to answer questions such as: How to distinguish between corporate branding? How to identify current corporate branding? How to become more corporate branding? Evidently, these unanswered questions illustrate the gap currently found in the literature due to the lack of nuances in the single level of corporate branding. Additionally, managers today who seek to evaluate their current

corporate branding or wish to become more corporate branding are left in the dark, creating several managerial headaches.

First of all, corporate branding is complex. If not, even the literature can capture the complexity, how could managerial understand their corporate branding? Most companies might be aware that they are a corporate brand, but what does it imply? How do they manage their corporate brand? The current literature focuses on providing several general tools and guidelines for corporate branding (e.g., *The Corporate Branding Toolkit* (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; 2003), *Corporate Brand Identity Matrix* (Urde, 2013)). However, no attempt has been made to create a tool that has the starting point in the corporation's current corporate branding.

Second, corporations today cannot evaluate their current corporate branding as the existing literature does not provide the possibility to measure corporate branding. Thus, leaving the managerial to question whether the corporate branding actions taken are relevant and if they are satisfied with their current corporate branding.

Lastly, as corporations today cannot identify their current level of corporate branding, they lack the understanding of how it can be improved. Therefore, another managerial headache is the lack of knowledge on how to become more corporate branding. Additionally, the existing tools and guidance fall rather short, as it is taken out of context if it is not based on the current corporate branding. This again highlights the need to be able to distinguish different levels of corporate branding.

To conclude, the current literature cannot answer how to distinguish between corporate branding, how to measure the current corporate branding, or how to become more corporate branding, as there are no nuances of corporate branding. Evidently, there is a gap in the literature that needs to be filled in order to better understand corporate branding and reflect the complexity that resides in reality. Hence, the need for more than one level of corporate branding. Therefore, this research starts from the preliminary idea that corporate branding might be a matter of levels.

1.3 Purpose

To identify and define levels of corporate branding by exploring what sets corporate branding apart internally and externally.

1.3.1 Research questions

- **How** to distinguish one level of corporate branding from another?
- **What** degree of internal and external corporate branding is associated with different levels?
- **Why** is it important to identify and define levels of corporate branding?

The main theoretical objective is to better understand and reflect the complexity of corporate branding in reality by nuancing the single level of corporate branding in theory. Applied in practice, the outcome aims to offer managers an understanding of their current corporate branding and how to become more corporate branding.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is divided into the following six chapters:

- Chapter 1:** Provides an introduction to the research topic and field of corporate branding through a background, problematization, purpose of the research, and connected research questions.
- Chapter 2:** Discusses the philosophical assumptions and methodological design, and choices that affect and influence the whole research process.
- Chapter 3:** Presents our theoretical framework covering the theoretical areas of internal corporate branding, external corporate branding, and corporate communication. Lastly, the essential elements of corporate branding is summarized.
- Chapter 4:** The result and analysis present a preliminary framework towards levels of corporate branding. Further, the Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix evaluates the four case corporations: Pantamera, Haglöfs, Gunnarshögs Gård, and Thule. Lastly, the Levels of Corporate Branding Framework is presented.
- Chapter 5:** Abstractly discusses, reflects, and elaborates on the findings of our research and relate to previous theory.
- Chapter 6:** Concludes the thesis by revisiting the purpose and presents the theoretical contributions and managerial implications in relation to our findings and research questions. The final part concerns the research limitations and suggestions for future research of interest.

2 Methodology

The second chapter describes our philosophical assumptions of relativism and constructionism as well as explains the methodological choices taken throughout the research process. Consciously, we have moved away from the traditional thesis structure with the theoretical framework chapter before the methodology chapter. For our particular thesis, an understanding of our methodological choices before presenting the theoretical framework is necessary.

2.1 Research Philosophy

First and foremost, it is of utmost importance for us to address the paradigm, the philosophical standpoint or ground beliefs, as it guides and impacts the whole research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Only after the determined paradigm has been revealed, the question regarding quantitative or qualitative methods is relevant. The fundamental belief system can be determined by viewing three essential assumptions, namely the ontological, epistemological, and methodological.

First, we aim to answer the ontological question, “*what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?*” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.108) and the epistemological questions: “*what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?*” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.108). Our ontological position is relativism and the epistemological approach of constructivism. Meaning that we believe that the nature of reality does not exist independently, and that the social world is constructed and given meaning by people. We find relativism and constructivism most suitable for understanding our complex research phenomenon of corporate branding as there are several ways of interpreting the social reality since corporate branding does not exist by itself but rather is socially constructed by people (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Furthermore, our ontological position and epistemological approach are often used by researchers within the field of social science, as these types of research tend to generate theory rather than confirm or disconfirm truths. This argument supports that our ontological and epistemological position can fulfill the research purpose of our study, to identify and define levels of corporate branding.

Third, the methodological question we ask ourselves is: “*how can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known*” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.108). The methodological assumption goes beyond only the methods used as a strategy, such as quantitative or qualitative. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the suitable methodology concerning our already determined assumptions regarding how we acquire knowledge and how we interpret nature is hermeneutical and dialectical. These methodological assumptions imply that constructions “can be elicited and redefined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; p.111). Therefore, we focused on comparing and contrasting during the research process.

Additionally, it is important to uncover the relationship between us as researchers and the object of study, i.e., corporate branding. In this study, we applied an engaged style, which is the most suitable, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2015), when studying complex systems like organizations. An Engaged style means that we were close to the things that were studied, which follows the constructionism paradigm that the observer is part of what is being observed (Ibid).

To conclude our philosophical assumptions, we followed an engaged constructionism, which affected the research process throughout. The implications of the philosophical assumptions will further be illustrated in each section of this method chapter.

2.2 Research Strategy & Approach

2.2.1 Qualitative research strategy

To identify and define levels of corporate branding, we needed to explore corporate branding in-depth. Therefore, in our view, a suitable way to find out what needed to be known for our research was to conduct qualitative research that enabled the collection of complex data about an unknown territory, the levels of corporate branding. In contrast, quantitative research focuses on measuring existing factors and statistical correlations, which would not have allowed the proper data to be acquired (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, a purely quantitative research strategy is better suited when questions like how many instead of the questions we sought to answer such as, how, what, and why. Additionally, a quantitative research strategy is typically more suitable to accept and test theory rather than the building of a new theory. Therefore, the quantitative research was not in line

with our philosophical assumptions or suitable to fulfill our research purpose, to identify and define levels of corporate branding, as we aimed to generate new theory. Hence, the choice of a qualitative research strategy.

2.2.2 Abductive approach

We have an abductive approach that made it possible for us to go back and forth between the literature and empirical data (Bell et al. 2019). However, our approach leaned more toward an inductive rather than deductive approach as we started with a qualified perception - that corporate branding might be a matter of levels. This unexplored area could be viewed as a research puzzle that we aimed to solve to create both a theoretical and practical contribution, something our abductive approach created the conditions for. Furthermore, our abductive approach enabled us to generate theory from the empirical data while not neglecting previous theory. This was crucial as the interplay between previous theory and the empirical data was necessary to generate new theory (Ibid).

2.3 Research Design

The research emerged by asking questions such as; Do all corporate brands practice corporate branding to the same extent? Can the current single level of corporate branding capture the complexity that resides in reality? To have the starting point in asking questions goes in accordance with the constructivism paradigm. In turn, these questions culminated in a preliminary idea that there might be levels of corporate branding.

That is to say, early in the process, it became evident that to identify and define levels of corporate branding, we needed to understand the intersection between internal corporate branding, external corporate branding, and corporate communication. Hence, the thought of a case study emerged, which is one of the suitable research designs in the constructionist paradigm according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021). Through the research design, a multiple case study, we could investigate real corporate brands and how these were managed. The use of a multiple case study, in comparison to a single case study, provided the opportunity to compare and contrast cross-case to find both similarities and differences, which deepened the analysis. Additionally, another benefit of multiple cases is the possibility that the findings can be applicable to other cases (Yin, 2018). However, the

comparison between cases also possesses a risk to lose the holistic view. Nonetheless, a multiple case study enabled us to answer our research questions of how, what, and why. In order to ensure that similar results could be ascertained from all case companies, the cases have been selected with the utmost care.

2.4 Sampling

2.4.1 Selection of case corporations and respondents

Following the constructionism paradigm, the suitable sampling, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2015), is “a small number of cases chosen for a specific reason” (p. 53).

The sample choice was therefore done according to non-probability purposive sampling. Meaning that a certain set of criteria was determined when choosing the participants (Bell et al., 2019). In addition, the choice of purposive sampling is aligned with our constructionist approach as we are a part of what was being observed since we judged if corporations fulfilled the criteria or not (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021).¹ The criteria determined was that the case corporations should actively manage their corporate brand, be Swedish and SME:s. The reason for the determined criteria was foremost to have a big audience to choose from, however, as 99% of Swedish corporations are SMEs, we needed to narrow it down further (OECD, 2020).

We had previously been in contact, during different periods of time, with four Swedish corporations that met the criteria, namely Pantamera, Haglöfs, Gunnarshögs Gård, and Thule. As we already were familiar with these four corporations, we decided to include them in the sample. To further strengthen the argument that these four corporations were suitable cases, we had a preliminary idea that these corporations practiced corporate branding to a different extent and focus. In some sense, therefore, the sampling could also be viewed to be a form of convenient sample. Furthermore, since we already had collected some primary data from the four case corporations beforehand, we knew that the sample contained a large portion of relevant information beneficial to fulfilling the purpose of this study. Therefore, following the rule of information power, to let the sample size be determined through the amount of relevant

¹ Pilot study

information the samples hold, a lower number of cases were needed (Bell et al. 2019). The size of the sample is further argued to be appropriate as the respondents in each case corporation were picked on the basis to have been in the organization for some time and had a high positioning in the marketing department. Reasonings behind this choice of respondents was that although corporate branding should permeate the entire organization, those who can offer a more detailed description of how they manage the corporate brand, both at an internal and external level, are those within roles of marketing and branding.² The chosen case corporations and the respondents' professional titles are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of case sample

	Corporation	Respondents professional title
1	Pantamera	Marketing Communications Project Manager
2	Haglöfs	Global Marketing Director
3	Gunnarshögs Gård	Head of Marketing & Events
4	Thule	Global Brand Communications Director

2.5 Data Collection

The first step when collecting data, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), is to decide on the most appropriate technique. In order for us to have an open mind to our collected data, the choice was made to combine several techniques (Bell et al. 2019). The use of multiple techniques to gather data was suitable for us as we needed large portions of both primary and secondary. Furthermore, collecting data with several methods and techniques enabled us to gain multiple perspectives. When gathering qualitative data, the most common methods include interviews, observations, and archival sources (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). To gather relevant information in order to identify and define levels of corporate branding, we collected primary data through qualitative interviews

² Pilot study

and secondary data from peer-reviewed articles, academic literature, archival sources, and other publicly available information.

2.5.1 Qualitative interviews as primary data

Interviews as a technique for collecting data involve a communication method of asking questions, listening carefully, and explaining the meaning to participants to collect valid and relevant data. Interviews can either be in a structured, semi-structured, or unstructured form (Saunders et al. 2019).

For our study, we decided that the suitable interview technique was semi-structured, as this structure allows the respondent to speak freely enough regarding the subject but with some guidelines set by the predetermined topic (Bell et al. 2019). Further, semi-structured interviews created freedom for us to systematically explore themes and create an interaction with the responses depending on the direction the interviews went. Unstructured or structured research interviews would not have given the same opportunity to facilitate the underlying realities desired to be discovered as those methods do not capture the facts likewise (Bell et al. 2019)³. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the four corporations, Pantamera, Haglöfs, Gunnarshögs Gård, and Thule.

The initial semi-structured interviews with the case corporations were not gathered for this specific research purpose, however, the collected data is judged to be of high relevance as the data was collected through open questions regarding the corporate brand management. Regardless, the collected data was reviewed carefully in regard to this reservation. In addition, continuous contact and additional follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with the case companies, specifically for this study. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were necessary to reach saturation. During the follow-up interviews, the focus revolved around companies describing in more detail how they work internally and externally with corporate branding in terms of different elements if we felt that we had insufficient information in a particular area. And similarly, how they work with corporate communication is linked to their corporate brand management. After the

³ Pilot study

follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted, no more gathering of primary data was needed as we then reached saturation, meaning that more data would not provide any new insights or information (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015).

In practice, the initial semi-structured interviews, with the four case companies, lasted between 30-60 minutes, while the follow-up semi-structured interviews lasted around 20 minutes each. All interviews were conducted by both of us and were conducted in Swedish to reduce the possibility of important content being lost in translation. The initial interviews were conducted via Zoom with a clearer interview setting, while additional follow-up interviews were conducted via telephone calls as this created more flexibility and less time expenditure for the respondents (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021; Saunders et al. 2019). Furthermore, the interviews were all recorded and transcribed directly after the interview. The choice to transcribe the interviews was based on the benefit of creating the possibility to thoroughly reflect, interpret, and review the collected material from the semi-structured interviews (Bell et al. 2019). What permeated all interviews was the aim to create a dialogue between us and the respondent where the focus from our side was to enable the respondents to speak as freely and as much as possible about the relevant topics.

2.5.2 Secondary data

In contrast to primary data, secondary data is produced by someone other than us and is particularly evident in case studies (e.g., Bell et al. 2019; Easterby-Smith et al. 2021; Saunders et al. 2019). In our multiple case study, secondary data has been crucial in creating a comprehensive understanding of the case corporations' corporate branding in practice as well as saving us time. However, as the secondary data, as previously mentioned, was not produced with our research purpose in mind, we were not in control of the quality of the collected data, which made us even keener to study the material with a critical eye (Saunders et al. 2019). More in detail, a critical eye was applied through constantly referring to our main areas; internal corporate branding, external corporate branding, and corporate communication, and asking ourselves, is this information relevant for our purpose, to identify and define levels of corporate branding?

Predominantly, we collected secondary data in the form of scientific peer-reviewed articles foremost written by leading researchers within the field of corporate branding as well as academic

literature in the form of articles and books. In addition, archival sources, public corporate documents, such as annual reports, code of conduct reports, and sustainability reports (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021), have been collected to understand the corporations' way of practicing corporate branding. Furthermore, to extend our knowledge of how the case corporation communicates its corporate brand, secondary data was collected from the corporations' websites, social media, and newsletters.

2.6 Data Analysis

As we had quite extensive knowledge within the field of subject, we started the analysis off with a predetermined angle, that corporate branding might be a matter of levels. However, the collected empirical data was not limited or steered in any direction during the analysis as we aimed to interpret the data independently, as recommended by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018). Regardless, the risk of interpreting too much into the empirical material during the analysis was pretty high. Since it was not possible to ignore the knowledge we had, the most important was to be aware of the risk. Therefore, our ability to distance ourselves from the research, reflexivity, was essential (Ibid). Though, the risk could be limited as we were familiar with the concept of confirmation bias, the tendency to focus on the evidence that was in line with predetermined expectations.

As with most qualitative research, our study did not follow a linear path through the construction of theory, data collection, and analysis, rather it overlapped. The overlapping path is in line with the constructivist paradigm of creating findings along the way (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015).

2.6.1 Approach to determining the essential elements of corporate branding

To identify and define levels of corporate branding, we needed to figure out an appropriate way to distinguish one level of corporate branding from another. We knew that we wanted to form some sort of standardized way of estimating the level of corporate branding in order to be as unbiased as possible. Furthermore, the determined elements needed to be illustrated in the literature to be of importance for corporate branding as well as exist in the case corporations in order to be relevant. On this basis, our analysis of the empirical data started simultaneously as the previous literature was reviewed in order to determine relevant elements for estimating the levels of corporate

branding. In contrast, if the analysis of the empirical data would not have proceeded at the same time as the determination of the elements, elements that were not evident in any of our case corporations could have been determined and thus been irrelevant in the evaluation.

More in practice, the relevant elements of corporate branding, further presented in the theoretical framework chapter, were determined by comparing and compiling, also known as thematic analysis, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021). The thematic analysis for abductive approaches includes both the creation of themes derived from theory as well as modifying and adding as one explores the data (Saunders et al. 2019). Thus, we both created themes by compiling and comparing literature within the intersection of the theoretical areas; internal corporate branding, external corporate branding, and corporate communication, and applied them to the empirical material in accordance with the deductive approach. However, we did not impose a predetermined framework on the empirical data as we added and modified the elements, based on the repetition, similarities, and differences from the empirical data, as suggested in accordance with the inductive approach (Ibid). Through thematic analysis, we deepened the understanding of corporate branding by creating these elements or as we call them, the essential elements of corporate branding.

2.7 Quality of research

In business research, the quality of research is often assessed on the basis of replicability, validity, and reliability (Bell et al. 2019). However, there are certain difficulties with applying these criteria to qualitative studies as these are developed for quantitative research that focuses on measurability. Instead, Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that qualitative studies' quality should be evaluated on the basis of trustworthiness and authenticity (Bell et al. 2019; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, we have chosen to motivate the quality of our study, in accordance with Guba and Lincoln (1994)'s criteria.

The criteria authenticity refers to the way we have a responsibility “*to fairly represent different viewpoints within a social setting*” (Bryman & Bell, 2015; p. 365). However, it is important that the quality of the study is evaluated in consideration of the philosophical assumptions. Therefore, in our research, as we followed the constructivist approach, we did not put a larger emphasis on

including different viewpoints but rather only interviewing senior management as these had the most relevant information regarding the corporation's corporate branding.

The criteria trustworthiness can be further divided into four sub-criteria: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* (Bell et al. 2019). First, *credibility* refers to the likelihood that our study will be seen as reliable by others, and that we have reflected the respondents' social reality fairly (Ibid). We believe that there are several ways of interpreting social reality, and that the respondents' social reality is only one of many, which is in line with our epistemological approach of constructivist (Ibid). Therefore, continuous confirmation with respondents has been of utmost importance to ensure that we captured their social reality. For instance, during the interviews, we repeated back some of the respondents' answers to ensure that we had understood them correctly. Additionally, we had continuous correspondence with the respondent to resolve any possible misinterpretations along the way. Hence, the study's credibility can be seen as sufficient.

Second, *transferability* refers to whether the research can be applied to other contexts, however, bear in mind that qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalization (Bell et al. 2019). The transferability of our study is perceived as sufficient as the research design was a multiple case study which often implies that the findings can be applied to other cases. To strengthen the transferability additionally, as our aim was to contribute to the existing literature with levels of corporate branding, the case corporations have throughout the research been viewed to reflect corporations in general rather than in their individual context.

Third, *dependability* is the equivalent to reliability in quantitative research (Bell et al. 2019). The dependability of our study can be strengthened through our continuous effort of transparency, which is of high importance in the constructivist approach. Our study's dependability increases through the transparency of describing the research process step by step, such as the choice of participants, data collection method, and data analysis approach (Ibid). Furthermore, if peers wish to access the collected material, it has been stored on multiple devices and protected in an accessible manner that guarantee availability.

Fourth, *confirmability* refers to the degree of objectivity we had as researchers (Bell et al. 2019). The objectivity in our study was threatened as we had extensive previous knowledge within the field of corporate branding which could have led to confirmation bias, which implies to focus on the findings that were in line with our predetermined expectations (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). However, thanks to our consciousness regarding the risk together with the constant strive to let the empirical material drive the direction, the risk could be decreased. Furthermore, we tried reducing the bias further by focusing on reflexivity, the ability to distance us from the research. Moreover, the objectivity was increased, as we evaluated the case corporations on equal terms. The described efforts taken illustrate the length we went to avoid letting personal values or theoretical implications steer our research (Bell et al. 2019). However, in accordance with the constructivist approach, it is not desirable, or possible, to fully reduce the human impact as we are an important part of what is being observed (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). In addition, we had no links to either the respondents or the companies that was interviewed for the study. As argued for in the paragraph, we have acted with good faith and therefore not steered the research in a certain direction, thus the comfortability in our study is considered sufficient.

3 Theoretical Framework

The third chapter presents the theoretical framework that lays the foundation for this study within internal corporate branding, external corporate branding, and corporate communication. First, previous theory within corporate branding in general is presented to provide an overview of the research field. Then, as presented in the methodological chapter, the essential elements of corporate branding that was determined through the thematic analysis is presented in a way that illuminates the essentiality. Lastly, the essential elements of corporate branding will be summarized.

3.1 Corporate branding

3.1.1 Overview

To identify and define levels of corporate branding, we must first agree on what we refer to when speaking of corporate branding. Corporate branding concerns the management of a corporate brand. Corporate branding goes beyond managing what the corporation does as an equal emphasis is put on who the corporation is (Keller & Richey, 2006). This type of branding strives to take a foothold in the corporation's core values (Balmer & Gray, 2003). A corporation's core values can be equated to a human's fundamental beliefs and values that remain the same throughout long periods of time. In corporate branding, it is desirable to let the core values be reflected in the corporate brand's identity (Balmer, 2013; Urde, 2013; 2021). The corporate brand identity is the foundation of the corporate brand and “what it is”. It can be understood as a mix of organizational characteristics and elements that creates the identity of the brand. With the aim to have an inside-out approach, corporate branding emphasizes a long-term mindset focusing on the brand to satisfy the customers within the limits of the brand identity (Urde 1999; Urde et al. 2011; Urde, 2013). Thus, the corporate brand is defined by its corporate core values and brand identity (Ind, 1997; Kapferer, 2012; Urde, 2013; 2021).

Furthermore, the main challenge in corporate branding is to ensure that the core values are reflected in the brand identity, as the brand identity represents how corporations want the world to see it (Urde, 2013). The ultimate goal is that all internal and external stakeholders shall have the same perception of the corporate brand and brand image.

3.1.2 Complexity

The complexity of corporate branding does not only lie in the broader audience; there are also several more elements to consider and manage as corporate branding involves the whole corporation and several stakeholders (e.g., Ind, 1997; King, 1991; Knox & Bickerton, 2003; Urde, 2013).

First, as corporate branding goes beyond the consumers and the product to involve several stakeholders, it becomes more complex to provide a compelling brand identity that attracts all stakeholders (Ind, 2001; King, 1991). Second, conducting effective corporate communication that aligns with the top management's vision and the perception of internal and external stakeholders (brand identity and brand image) is quite complex (Balmer & Greyser, 2002; Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Urde, 2003). Third, the complexity of creating core values that are not hollow and reside with both internal and external stakeholders is challenging (Kapferer, 2012). Fourth, internally institutionalizing the corporate brand can also be very challenging. The complexity lies in ensuring that the employees live the brand and buy into the values, beliefs, and culture (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005; Ind, 2001).

In line with permeating the whole organization, corporate branding is, in contrast to product branding, viewed as a strategic element that can, if managed successfully, provide several benefits (e.g., Balmer, 1995; 2001; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Knox & Bickerton, 2003).

3.1.3 Benefits

According to Aaker (2004), corporate branding can credibly differentiate the brand. This is essential as it has become harder and harder to maintain credible brand differentiation (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). However, Balmer & Gray (2003) specify that corporate branding only creates credibility when continuously managed and reinvested. Fully integrated corporate branding creates

credibility as the communication has substance through the corporate brand identity that takes ground in the core values and is thus not hollow (Aaker, 2004; Kapferer, 2012; Urde, 2013). If managed and communicated successfully, corporate branding influences stakeholders' perception, the brand image, to align with the corporate brand identity (Urde, 2013).

Some authors take it a step further than Aaker (2004) and argue that corporate branding is the only way to create a sustainable relationship with several stakeholders, which is how one creates a long-term advantage (Roper & Davies, 2007; Urde & Greysner, 2016). As Ind (1997) puts it: "A product can be copied by a competitor; a brand is unique" (p.3). This standpoint is shared by Balmer and Gray (2003), who discusses how corporate brands cannot easily be copied since a corporate brand is "intangible and consequently difficult to replicate" (p. 989) and often patented by corporations.

Furthermore, corporate branding allows for streamlining branding strategies as the corporate brand functions as an umbrella which creates a halo effect for the corporation's products, e.g., creating trust and respect for one offering spills over to other offerings provided by the corporate brand (de Chernatony, 1999). Corporate branding also allows going beyond the brand and engaging in social problems, also known as corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Vallaster et al. 2012). Therefore, the CSR efforts can be directly linked to the corporate brand and create a favorable brand image (Ibid). Additionally, instead of managing several product brands, all efforts and money can create a strong corporate brand that creates efficiency and effectiveness due to economies of scale (Aaker, 2004; Balmer et al. 2006; Kapferer, 2012). Lastly, the cost of introducing a new product is lower for a corporate brand as the brand already has brand awareness and recognition in addition to economies of scale.

As illustrated, there are several benefits connected with corporate branding. However, as earlier mentioned, to reap the benefits of corporate branding, the corporate brand must be managed both internally and externally as well as communicated.

3.2 Internal corporate branding

To view what sets corporate branding apart internally and how to manage the internal corporate branding, we start with defining internal corporate branding. Internal corporate branding concerns the management of the internal elements of the corporate brand identity.

The intention with internal corporate branding is to assure that all internal stakeholders, foremost employees, share the same perception of the brand and thus live the corporate brand, its core values (e.g., Aaker, 2004, de Chernatony, 2009; Urde, 2013; von Wallpach & Woodside, 2009). Therefore, the core values need to be consistent and deeply rooted in the internal brand identity as it creates the precondition for a corporation to deliver the brand promise with commitment and passion, which in turn brings the brand to life (de Chernatony, 2002, Gyrd-Jones et al. 2013). Internal corporate branding is successful when the core values permeate the entire organization, all internal brand identity elements, which several authors stress the importance of (Urde, 2013; von Wallpach & Woodside, 2009).

3.2.1 Internal brand identity elements

Throughout the corporate branding literature, the corporate brand identity has been described as consisting of a set of elements. In this research, the following internal elements: mission and vision, culture, and competence, as compiled and defined by various researchers (e.g., Aaker, 2004; de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 2002; Urde, 2013; Urde & Greyser, 2016), make up the internal corporate brand identity. Hence, these internal elements are seen as the essential internal elements of corporate branding.

Mission & Vision

The core of corporate identity management has a clear foundation in the mission and vision statements (Balmer and Soenen, 1999; Melewar et al. 2005). First, the mission statement is a vital element in the corporate brand identity (Collins and Porras, 1998; Ind, 1997) as it states what motivates and engages the corporation besides monetary values (Collins and Porras, 1998; Urde & Greyser, 2016). Moreover, it shall convey the corporation's purpose, values, and goals, which illustrates the corporation's uniqueness (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997; Melewar et al. 2005; Yamauchi, 2001). As the mission statement expresses the corporation's reason for existence and

purpose, the brand's core values aim to be reflected. However, this is easier said than done; challenges may arise with expressing the goals and failing to involve the stakeholder perspective (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010).

Second, the vision statement extends the mission by viewing the futuristic perspective, where the corporations want to head onwards (de Chernatony, 2010; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Urde & Greyser, 2016). The future desired status helps create a sense of direction; hence, a corporation's vision is a crucial element in the corporate brand identity (de Chernatony, 2010). However, it can be rather complex and difficult to formulate the top management vision into words, which may result in an incomprehensible or unobtainable vision (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010). Therefore, it is vital to have a well-defined vision statement that reflects the corporation's core values, as the vision constitutes a strategic process for building integrated corporate brands.

In regards to the internal brand identity, the mission and vision statements can be argued to be essential elements. However, it cannot be evaluated in terms of good or bad; rather, the statements can be evaluated on the degree of the incorporation of the core values and the evoking of engagement and inspiration in stakeholders.

Culture

Corporate culture can be defined as the shared values, beliefs, and behavior of a group (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Urde & Greyser, 2016). Researchers within the corporate branding field all stress the role and importance of culture as a building stone in the corporate brand identity (e.g., Balmer, 2013; de Chernatony, 1999; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Ind; 1997; Urde, 2013; Urde & Greyser, 2016). According to Kapferer (2012), corporate culture is even the most important internal element in a corporate brand's identity as it captures the essence of a corporation and is the key to setting brands apart. Balmer (2013) conveys, in corporate branding, the corporate culture should be based on the core values of the corporation to a greater extent than any other type of branding. It thus is a key element in the corporate brand's identity.

There are several different corporate cultures that all are unique. Though some are more common than others, the following eight styles of culture, compiled in Table 2 are the most common ones:

Table 2. Eight culture styles. Source: Compiled from Groysberg et al. (2018)

Eight styles of culture	Culture Style
Caring	Warm, sincere, relational
Purpose	Purpose-driven, idealistic, tolerant
Learning	Open, inventive, exploring
Enjoyment	Playful, instinctive, fun-loving
Results	Achievement, driven, goal-focused
Authority	Bold, decisive, dominant
Safety	Realistic, careful, prepared
Order	Rule abiding, respectful, cooperative

Practitioners of corporate branding are often somewhat naive as they believe that the current corporate culture is the same as the desired corporate culture according to Hatch & Schultz (2003). However, usually several subcultures in different departments in the organization exist, and these deviate from the desired corporate culture as they have their own values and beliefs (de Chernatony, 1999; Ind, 1997; Urde, 2003). The risk of subcultures includes stakeholders perceiving the corporate brand differently as they come across different parts of the organization and its employees with various values, creating so-called doppelgänger images (Thompson et al. 2006; von Wallpach & Woodside, 2009). Therefore, it is vital to sustaining a unified corporate culture in the whole organization, which is derived from the core values to sustain the corporate brand credibility and authenticity (Ind, 1997; von Wallpach & Woodside, 2009).

As argued, corporate culture is an essential internal element in the brand identity. The degree of core values embraced by the employees determines the shared corporate culture and is important in determining a corporate brand’s success.

Competence

A large part of the corporate brand identity is to view what sets the corporation apart and what makes them unique. Accordingly, the brand personality influence on the brand identity has long been established (e.g., Shee & Abratt, 1989; de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 2002). Furthermore, a brand's personality can be described as "the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands" (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, p. 151). Often, a brand's personality strives to be perceived as competent; however, this does not set a company apart from other corporate brands if the competence is not distinct or unique for the own corporate brand (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010). Thus, the need to specify the corporation's unique competence. Urde (2013) was the first to identify competencies as an important internal element in the brand identity by viewing what makes a corporation superior and asking questions like what competency the corporate brand possesses that makes them unique? In order for the corporation to be competitive, all organizational core values must be reflected in the competence (Urde, 2013).

3.3 External corporate branding

To view what sets corporate branding apart externally and how to manage the corporate brand externally we start with defining external corporate branding. External corporate branding concerns how the external elements of the corporate brand identity are strategically managed and expressed (Abratt & Kleyn, 2011; Urde, 2016; Witt & Rode, 2005). The intention with external corporate branding is to assure that all external stakeholders share the same perception of the brand; the brand image should be coherent with the brand identity (Witt & Rode, 2005) Even though corporations cannot directly impact the brand image held by the stakeholder, the external brand identity elements can be managed and expressed to indirectly affect the brand image as the stakeholders base their perception of the communicated external brand identity and other interactions with the corporation. The external brand identity elements are expressed through different methods and techniques within corporate communication. Therefore, we first view the external brand identity elements and then different techniques for communicating these.

3.3.1 External brand identity elements

The external brand identity element is evaluated on the degree of incorporated core values. External corporate branding is successful when the core values permeate the external brand identity elements, thus appealing to relevant customers and non-customer stakeholders. In this research, the following external elements: value proposition, relationship, and positioning, make up the external brand identity as compiled and defined by various authors (e.g., Knox, 2004; Urde, 2013). Hence, these external elements are seen as the essential external elements of corporate branding.

Value proposition

Value proposition, the corporation's key offerings, and its appeal (Urde & Greyser, 2016) are fundamental to brand identity as they provide context and reason to the brand identity (Aaker, 1996; Urde, 2013). To communicate the value proposition, the functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits are vital in order to provide credible arguments to persuade consumers in their purchasing decisions (Aaker, 1996). First, the functional benefits refer to the practical advantages, the product attributes, of the product or service. Second, the emotional benefits instead are the feelings connected to the purchasing or usage of the brand. Lastly, the self-expressive benefits are the possibilities to express your desired self through the usage of the product as symbols to communicate the self-image. In corporate branding, the focus on the emotional and self-expressive benefits is crucial as functional benefits can easily be copied (Ibid).

When managing and communicating the value proposition, it is therefore crucial to build the brand's offering on core values as the degree of appeal and meaningfulness of the offering depends on the relevance (Knox et al. 2000; Urde & Greyser, 2016). Urde (2013) concurs that incorporating the brand's core values is of utmost importance as it lays the foundation for various brand identity elements, including the value proposition. However, the creation of specific value propositions that achieve consistency with the core values is quite a managerial challenge.

Additionally, Aaker (1996) states that through active communication of the value proposition, corporations are able to have an advantage over competitors as an effective value proposition creates the foundation for a corporation to build a favorable relationship between the brand and its

customers (Aaker, 1996, 2004). Leading us to the importance of the corporate brand relationship with its stakeholders.

Relationship

A corporation's relationship, the emotional attachment, with its stakeholders is a significant part of the brand identity as the building of relationships over time "reflect and define a corporate brand identity" (Urde, 2013; p. 753). The relationship affects the value proposition as well; through the interaction with external stakeholders, the brand's core values are reinforced, leveraged, and maintained, which creates a competitive value proposition (de Chernatony & Harris, 2000; Urde, 2013). Again, which strengthens the importance and contribution of the element relationship to the brand identity.

The question - What kind of relationship do we want to have with our stakeholders?, steers the direction for managing the relationship (Urde, 2013). For a corporate brand, the relationship extends beyond including only the relation between consumer and product, hence it is rather complex (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Roper & Davies, 2007). Arising questions such as: should the corporate brand have the same relationship with all its stakeholders? Balmer (2008) argues that the corporate brand's relationship is a matter of degree with different importance and dependency depending on the stakeholders' impact on the brand identity. However, the intention should always be to have a relationship with all stakeholders that are built on core values to create trust (de Chernatony, 1999; Light & Kiddon, 2015). A strong relationship is desirable as it makes consumers identify with the brand, creating trust that fosters loyal consumers with a higher potential for word of mouth (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

Intended position

To determine the corporate brand's intended positioning is another important element in the management of the brand identity as it differentiates the corporate brand identity from its competitors (e.g., Aaker, 1996; Brexendorf & Kernstock, 2007; Kapferer, 2012). This external brand identity element refers to the "*...intended position in the market, and in the hearts and minds of key customers and non-customer stakeholders*" (Urde, 2013; p. 754).

Furthermore, the corporate brand's intended position provides the stakeholders with an insight into what the corporate brand can provide them with (Aaker, 1996). Urde (2003) stresses the importance of taking support in the organization's core values when formulating the intended position. A positioning that takes a foothold in the core values will be perceived as more distinct and genuine, which, in contrast to a positioning without a foothold in core values, is long-term oriented (e.g., de Chernatony & Harris, 2000; Ries & Trout, 1986; Urde, 2003; Urde & Greyser, 2016).

3.3.2 Communication elements

Corporate communication has many functions, the most important being the linkage between the brand identity and stakeholders (Urde, 2016). In corporate branding, managing the corporate communication is crucial in order to communicate the external brand identity effectively and efficiently to influence the brand image (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

There are several methods and techniques to express the external brand identity, though, the following techniques are somewhat more significant in corporate branding: Expression to strengthen the intended position, Brand Ambassadors to strengthen the relationship, and Storytelling to strengthen the emotional and identification benefits of the value proposition.

Expression

In corporate branding, a consistent unified corporate message and consistent visual expression are crucial (e.g., Balmer & Gray, 2003; Greyser & Urde, 2019; Olins, 1989).

First, Greyser & Urde (2019) stresses the importance of having a consistent unified message, communicating with one corporate voice, to effectively and efficiently communicate the brand identity. A unified strategic message reduces the risk that stakeholders will interpret the message differently (Kapferer, 2012). In comparison, communicating several messages increases the risk that stakeholders will perceive the corporate brand differently, thus, the brand identity and brand image will be shattered.

Second, the unified visual expression is important as it makes it easier for the stakeholders to understand the corporate brand by making it more tangible with attributes, the brand's "physical specificities and qualities" (Kapferer, 2012; p. 158). More in detail, a visual expression consists of the corporate name, symbol, typography, color, and tone of voice (e.g., Abratt & Kleyn, 2011; Melewar & Saunders, 1998). In turn, a distinctive, unified, and well-communicated visual expression enables stakeholders to anchor with the corporate brand to build a coherent perception which contributes to strengthening the corporate brand's positioning (Abratt & Kleyn, 2011).

Together, the unified strategic message and visual expression increase the odds that the stakeholders will interpret the communication the same way, hence, the brand image will be more coherent and reflect the brand identity. Through this consistency, the corporate brand can easily be distinguished and recognized through corporate communication (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

To conclude, a unified strategic message and visual expression enable the communication to be recognized, which in turn creates a more distinct positioning by adding tangible attributes.

Brand Ambassadors

The use of brand ambassadors as a way of communicating today is a very common method to bring life and attention to the corporate brand through the use of an authorized representative. The brand ambassador is primarily used for marketing purposes and is presented to the public with their appearance in order to strengthen the relationship through building trust in the brand by creating a bond through corporate identification (Cohen, 2014). Corporate brand identification occurs when stakeholders' self-identity corresponds to the corporate brand's identity. Consumers more easily connect to the brand when brand ambassadors are used to portraying the corporate brand identity (e.g., Balmer, 2012; Brannan et al. 2015; Cornilissen et al., 2007; Podnar & Golob, 2015; Smidts et al. 2001). Moreover, brand ambassadors are closely linked to corporate branding as the ambassadors are expected to live, communicate, and project the brand (e.g., Al-Shuaibi et al. 2016; Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Hemsley, 1998). Corporate branding can make use of internal or/and external brand ambassadors.

Several corporations make use of external brand ambassadors as it has a great impact on attracting consumers to the brand. However, external ambassadors must be chosen with much care to reflect the organization's core values in order to impact the customer's perception of the brand to be in accordance with the brand identity (Al-Shuaibi et al. 2016; Vel et al. 2011).

Lately, it has become more common to use the corporation's employees as brand ambassadors, so-called internal brand ambassadors. Employees as brand ambassadors have a strong impact on customer perception of the brand as they can act as the interface between the internal and external aspects of the brand. Moreover, the use of internal brand ambassadors can also make the brand be perceived as more genuine than external brand ambassadors as it comes within the corporation (e.g., Balmer & Wilkinson, 1991; Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Hemsley, 1998; Schneider & Bowen, 1985).

The use of both external and internal brand ambassadors together contributes to building stronger relationships with stakeholders as it is a technique to express the brand identity in a way that consumers easier can identify with (e.g., Balmer & Soenen, 1999; de Chernatony, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Harris & de Chernatony, 2001).

To conclude, the use of internal and external brand ambassadors enables the corporation's values and personality to come to life, and be more tangible, through certain chosen people, which instills trust and makes it easier for stakeholders to identify and create a bond, which in turn strengthens the relationship to the corporate brand.

Storytelling

Another essential technique in corporate branding is the ability to tell entailing and emotionally appealing stories to communicate, also known as storytelling (Urde, 2016). Storytelling is the most commonly used technique to engage stakeholders through awakening emotions (Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

Through storytelling, the corporate brand can convey who and what they are, the brand identity, by creating a feeling of the brand rather than focusing on the functionality of the products or service which creates a more distinct, genuine, and appealing value proposition (Balmer, 1995; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Keller, 2000). The use of storytelling in corporate communication creates a “we” rather than “it” in terms of referring to the corporate brand (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). The significance of “we” is further reinforced by Urde (2016), he argues that evoking emotions in stakeholders, also known as making use of pathos, is an effective way to communicate with stakeholders as they can more easily identify with the corporate brand. Aaker (1996) emphasizes that the strongest brand identities focus on communicating the emotional benefits as it stirs positive feelings in stakeholders.

To conclude, a high degree of storytelling allows the corporations to stir emotions in stakeholders which strengthens the emotional and identification benefits of the value proposition, in turn making it more appealing.

3.4 Summary of the essential elements of corporate branding

Thus far, we have provided an overview of the field within corporate branding and illustrated the importance of the essential elements within internal corporate branding and external corporate branding that was determined through a thematic analysis. The essential elements of corporate branding is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Essential elements of corporate branding

Internal corporate branding elements	
Internal brand identity elements	Mission & Vision
	Culture
	Competence
External corporate branding elements	
External brand identity elements	Value Proposition
	Relationship
	Position
Communication elements	Expression
	Brand Ambassadors
	Storytelling

4 Empirical findings and analysis

The fourth chapter presents and analyzes the empirical findings. First, we will present the first step towards levels of corporate branding. Second, the case corporations will be presented to allow an overview of the corporations and then assessed on their degree of corporate branding. Lastly, with the help of our findings we will return to present the levels of corporate branding.

4.1 Towards levels of corporate branding

We turned the list of the essential elements of corporate branding into something more graspable and measurable to evaluate the case corporations' level of corporate branding. More in detail, we made each essential element more measurable by converting it into a qualitative scale, the Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix (Appendix A). By converting the essential elements of evaluating corporate branding into a qualitative scale, the following assessment of the case corporations became more objective and enabled us to be less biased. The Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix evaluates corporations based on the degree of internal and external corporate branding. The next step towards identifying and defining levels of corporate branding is to bring forth a primary framework, Preliminary Levels of Corporate Branding Framework (Figure 1), that illustrate the degree of corporate branding provided by the Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix.

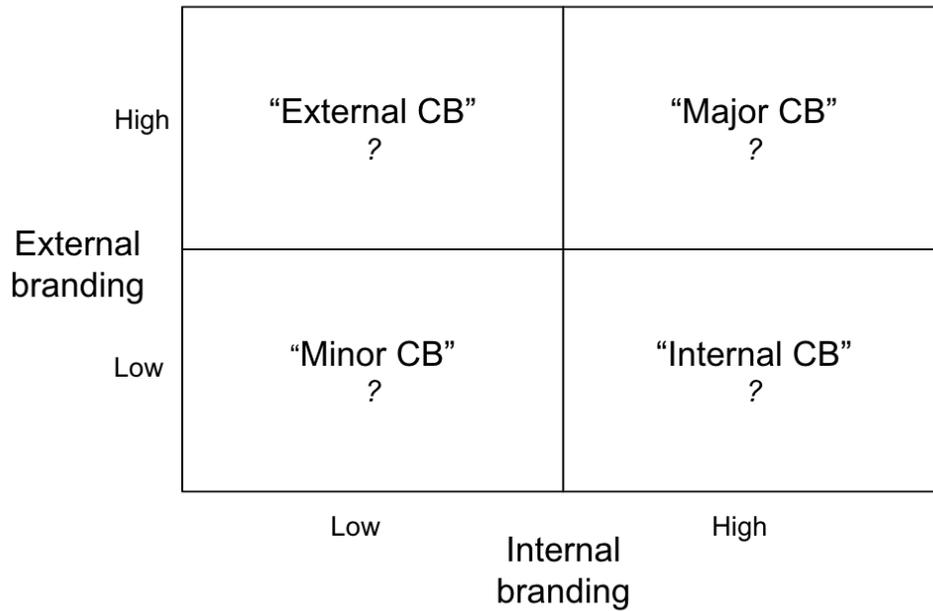


Figure 1. Preliminary Levels of Corporate Branding Framework

Moreover, as previous literature foremost has stressed the importance of internal corporate branding, it is reasonable to assume that focus on the internal corporate branding, is considered a higher degree of corporate branding than focus on the external dimension. Therefore, in complement to the two-dimensional framework, we also present the preliminary corporate branding spectrum (Figure 2).

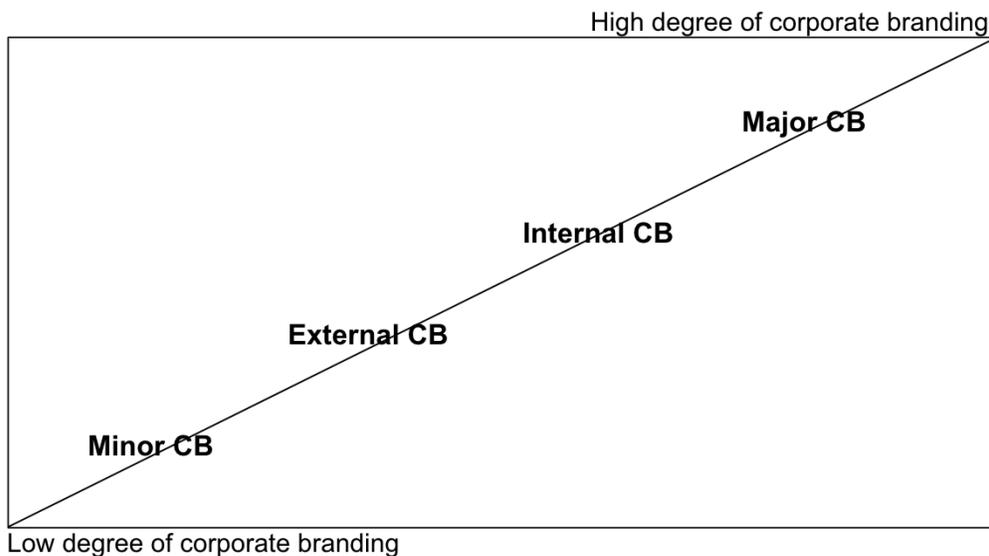


Figure 2. Preliminary Corporate Branding Spectrum

4.2 The assessment of case corporations' corporate branding

We will now, briefly present the case profiles, and then assess each of the case corporations' corporate branding through the Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix (Appendix A). Initially, looking at the internal corporate branding followed by the external corporate branding.

4.3 Case profiles

4.3.1 Pantamera

Pantamera (Returpack AB) provides Sweden with its only deposit system and behind the corporation are several Swedish trade associations. The corporation was founded in 1984 with the aim to contribute to a sustainable society through its deposit return schemes for the recycling of beverage containers (Pantamera, 2022a). Pantamera reason to has a strong foundation for spreading the message to all stakeholders to increase their awareness and understanding of the environmental importance of recycling returnable packaging. Therefore, Pantamera consistently works to increase the bottle recycling rate in Sweden through different marketing activities (Ibid).

4.3.2 Haglöfs

The Swedish corporation Haglöfs is in the outdoor segment and was founded in 1914. Haglöfs aims to allow everyone to explore outdoor life by providing craft goods, equipment, and clothing, that will withstand all weather conditions. The corporation is influenced by nature and wants the outdoors to be still there for future generations to explore, whether it is through hiking, outdoor activities, skiing, or snowboarding (Haglöfs, 2022a; c).⁴

4.3.3 Gunnarshögs Gård

The Swedish corporation Gunnarshögs Gård is family-owned and established its rapeseed production in 1996. The business has evolved from traditional agriculture into a corporation that focuses and values innovation and educates the world on sustainable and good quality food. Their product portfolio mainly contains rapeseed oil, both natural and flavored. Other products include skincare, other food products with rapeseed, to name a few. In addition, the corporation runs a

⁴ Pilot study

farm shop, cafe, and hosts different events and guided tours for consumers (Gunnarshögs Gård, 2022a).⁵

4.3.4 Thule

Thule is a Swedish corporation, founded in 1942, that provides people all over the world with products that make it easier to live an active outdoor life (Thule, 2022b). Thule aims to create the opportunity for its customers to devote time to their passions rather than focusing on how you can bring everything you need to pursue your passion. The product range includes roof boxes, roof racks, bicycle racks for vehicles, and strollers among other products (Thule, 2022b).

4.4 Internal Corporate Branding

The essential elements of corporate branding internally are the internal brand identity elements; mission & vision, culture, and competence. The internal brand identity elements are evaluated on the degree of incorporated core values, as seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Essential elements of internal corporate branding

Degree of internal corporate branding		Low		High	
Internal brand identity elements	<i>Mission & Vision</i>	The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders
	<i>Culture</i>	A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity
	<i>Competence</i>	The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive

⁵ Pilot study

If a minority of core values are incorporated, the degree of incorporated core values in the specific element is considered low (the first quadrant). If the majority of core values are incorporated, the degree is also considered low (the second quadrant). If all core values are incorporated to some extent in the internal brand identity element, the degree is considered high (the third quadrant). Lastly, if all core values are fully incorporated into the element, the degree is also considered high (the fourth quadrant). The degree for each element is then summarized to compile the degree of internal corporate branding as either high or low, the majority rule applies.

4.4.1 Pantamera

To determine the degree of incorporated core values in the internal brand identity elements for Pantamera, we first must view the corporation's core values. Pantamera's core values are the following: Accountability, Innovation, and Collaboration.

Mission & Vision

Pantamera's mission is "*Running a return system with a deposit for the recycling of plastic and metal beverage packaging in Sweden*" (Pantamera, 2022b). The mission statement is hardly built upon the core values of accountability, innovation, and collaboration. Rather, the mission statement describes how the corporation functionally operates than what motivates and engages them.

Pantamera's vision is to "*contribute to a sustainable society through the world's best deposit system, where we collect all deposit packaging sold*" (Pantamera, 2022b). The vision statement derives from the core value of accountability as Pantamera takes responsibility for contributing to a sustainable society. However, the vision statement does not derive from the core values of innovation and collaboration as the statement does not emphasize continuous collaborations and innovation.

Concluding the Pantamera's statements, the mission statement does not derive from any of the core values. Additionally, the desired future status stated in the vision statement does only derive from the core value of accountability, excluding innovation, and collaboration. Hence, the statements are derived from a minority of core values. Therefore, we estimate the internal brand

identity element, mission and vision statements, to have a low degree of incorporated core values.

Table 5. Pantamera’s degree of incorporated core values in mission & vision statements

Low		High	
The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders

Culture

Pantamera’s current and desired corporate culture indicates to be in the purpose style as they describe their corporate culture as permissive, as illustrated in the following quote:

Pantamera: *“We work a lot with innovation and a kind of innovative working environment, there is a permissive culture here which means that you're very often ready to test things and there's no one who's going to like interfere or track you down if something you're testing doesn't fly like that.”*

The tolerant atmosphere illustrated in the quote is characteristic of a purpose style culture and Pantamera’s behavior, of testing new things, illustrates that the core value of innovation is embraced. Furthermore, a purpose-driven culture style also includes being purpose-driven which certainly is the case for Pantamera as they are driven to be sustainable through recycling cans and bottles. Sustainability as the purpose of the corporation illustrates that Pantamera’s core value of accountability is embraced.

Additionally, a subculture with an enjoyment culture style exists at Pantamera as some employees rather want to follow values such as fun and playful:

Pantamera: *“some people who work for us would prefer that we just talk Pantamera [colorful and humorous] all the time”*

The existence of a subculture illustrates that the core values are not embraced within the whole organization.

Concluding the estimation of Pantamera’s culture, their current corporate culture is in purpose style which indicates that the core values of innovation and accountability are embraced, but not the core value of collaboration. Additionally, a subculture with an enjoyment culture style with different values than the core values exists. Therefore, we estimate the internal brand identity element, culture, to have a low degree of incorporated core values.

Table 6. Pantamera’s degree of incorporated core values in culture

Low		High	
A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity

Competence

Pantamera’s unique competences reside in having superior knowledge within the deposit system that enables them to recycle bottles and cans sustainably, as illustrated in the quote:

Pantamera: *“Our competence also depends on the original part, in terms of the purpose of our business, the competence lies in the mission we have to collect all the returnable packaging in Sweden and to take care of that material and make sure that it becomes new packaging ... in our case, it’s about the deposit in Sweden and taking care of the material.”*

First, this competence reflects Pantamera’s core value of collaboration as they cooperate with partners in the whole supply chain, for instance, producers and importers, and merchants. Second, the core value of accountability is reflected since Pantamera takes responsibility for all Swedish deposits and making sure that the material is recycled in the most sustainable way. Lastly, Pantamera’s core value of innovation refers to thinking in a new way, thus, being the sole operator on the market broadcasts the innovation to some extent. Even though the innovation can be seen in the past, when they first started, it is not as present today.

Concluding Pantamera’s competence, the superior knowledge within deposit systems, and handling of the material in a sustainable way, reflect the core values of accountability and collaboration, whereas the core value of innovation is reflected, to some extent. Therefore, Pantamera’s competence reflects all core values to some extent. Hence, we estimate the internal brand identity element, competence, to have a high degree of incorporated core values.

Table 7. Pantamera’s degree of incorporated core values in competence

Low		High	
The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive

Summary

Table 8. Pantamera’s degree of internal corporate branding

Degree of internal corporate branding		Low		High	
Internal Brand identity elements	<i>Mission & Vision</i>	The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders
	<i>Culture</i>	A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity
	<i>Competence</i>	The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive
⇒Low degree of internal corporate branding					

4.4.2 Haglöfs

To determine the degree of incorporated core values in the internal brand identity elements for Haglöfs, we first must view the corporation's core values. Haglöfs' core values are the following: Curious, Reliable, and Proud.

Mission & Vision

Haglöfs' mission is *"To inspire people to get out there"* (Haglöfs, 2022c). The mission statement is hardly built upon the core values of being curious, reliable, and proud. Perhaps, inspiring people could be derived from the core value of being curious. However, when Haglöfs refers to curiosity it is rather in the terms of breaking boundaries and being innovative than inspiring curiosity (Haglöfs, 2022b). Therefore, Haglöfs' mission statement does not derive from curiosity or the other two core values.

Haglöfs vision is to be the *"#1 responsible outdoor performance brand"*. The vision statement derives from the core value to be proud as Haglöfs description of the core value includes being proud of the responsibility taken, as they are respectful towards both the world and the people in it (Haglöfs, 2022b).

Furthermore, the vision statement is also derived from the core value to be reliable. Haglöfs describes that according to them, to be reliable is to create products that last in tough weather conditions and perform over time, which demonstrates the focus of being responsible. Therefore, the desired future state, to be the number one responsible outdoor performance brand, derives from the core value reliable (Haglöfs, 2022b).

Concluding Haglöfs' statements, the mission statement does not derive from any core values. Additionally, the vision derives from the core values to be proud and reliable. Hence, the statements are derived from a minority of core values. Therefore, we estimate the internal brand identity element, mission and vision statements, to have a low degree of incorporated core values.

Table 9. Haglöfs' degree of incorporated core values in mission & vision statements

Low		High	
The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders

Culture

Haglöfs desired corporate culture is learning style which is characterized of an open and exploring atmosphere which the corporation themselves describe as experimental and innovative:

Haglöfs: *“I think what exists internally, that has always existed, is some kind of experimentation and like this, trying and making art with products and things that are a bit outside of the box and then maybe we have to take them back after a few years because they didn't sell anything. But we have never been so afraid of that. There's lots of weird stuff in our archive.”*

However, the desired corporate culture, learning style, seems to be mostly limited to the marketing department. To illustrate, when the Global Marketing Director was asked how well their concept “Outsiders by Nature” was implemented and widespread in the organization, this was what he answered:

Haglöfs: *“It hasn't had that much internal impact so, more than, more than, we're maybe better at, we use internally and call ourselves outsiders and stuff like that, it's in my signature too. But it hasn't had a huge effect internally, I don't think. In our department, yes, but not in general.”*

As the quote above touches upon, Haglöfs' desired corporate culture is not the same as their current corporate culture as the values are not shared and behaved according to the whole organization but rather limited to a single department. This implies that at least one other, or perhaps several subcultures, exist within the corporation which indicates that Haglöfs' core values are not embraced.

Concluding the estimation of Haglöfs culture, their desired learning culture is limited to the marketing department. Thus, the current corporate culture is, as of today, not the same as the desired which implies that only a minority of the core values are embraced. Therefore, we estimate Haglöfs’ degree of incorporated core values in the culture to be low.

Table 10. Haglöfs’ degree of incorporated core values in culture

Low		High	
A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity

Competence

Haglöfs’ unique competence lies in the manufacturing of superior quality goods that are specifically produced for high-performance outdoor activities:

Haglöfs: *“We take pride in making high-quality, high-performance products that keep up with our consumers’ adventures.”* (Haglöfs, 2022c)

First, the core value of being proud is very well reflected in their competence as they take pride over their products which is illustrated in the quote. Second, the core value of being reliable is well reflected in the competence, to illustrate, Haglöfs products, in comparison to competitors, can withdrawal tough weather conditions:

Haglöfs: *“We are somehow okay with not buying Haglöfs the first time you go hiking, it's like no problem, then you can buy Everest or McKinley or something. And then it rains on them and then it doesn't go so well and their tent was kind of not a good deal and so on, and then you go and buy Haglöfs the next time.”*

As the quote touches upon, Haglöfs' superior manufacturing provides reliable outdoor goods. Lastly, the core value of being curious is somewhat reflected in the competence as superior

manufacturing requires thinking outside the box and being innovative to produce new exciting goods and high-quality materials.

Concluding Haglöfs’ competence, in manufacturing superior quality goods for high-performance outdoor activities, reflects the core values of being proud and reliable, whereas the core value of curious is reflected to some extent. Therefore, Haglöfs’ competence reflects all core values to some extent. Hence, we estimate the internal brand identity element, competence, to have a high degree of incorporated core values.

Table 11. Haglöfs’ degree of incorporated core values in competence

Low		High	
The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive

Summary

Table 12. Haglöfs’ degree of internal corporate branding

Degree of internal corporate branding		Low		High	
Internal Brand identity elements	Mission & Vision	The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders
	Culture	A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity
	Competence	The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive
⇒ Low degree of internal corporate branding					

4.4.3 Gunnarshögs Gård

To determine the degree of incorporated core values in the internal brand identity elements for Gunnarshögs Gård, we first must view the corporation's core values. Gunnarshögs Gård's core values are the following: Generosity, Going beyond, and Durability.

Mission & Vision

Gunnarshögs Gård's mission is *"We are passionate about teaching others about the importance of good food and where good food comes from"* (Gunnarshögs Gård, 2022b). The mission statement evidently reflects the core values of generosity, going beyond, and durability. First of all, the mission derives from the core value of going beyond since Gunnarshögs Gård goes beyond offering its products by putting a huge focus on emphasizing its purpose of being, to teach others the importance of good food. This also illustrates the core value of generosity as well as durability through volunteering to take on the role to promote sustainable food, broadcasting what engages and motivates them.

Gunnarshögs Gård's vision extends the mission by aiming to provide the *"rapeseed oil of the future"* (Gunnarshögs Gård, 2022b). When Gunnarshögs Gård refers to the rapeseed oil of the future, they explain that it includes being sustainable, educational, and innovative:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *"... All with a sustainable, educational, and innovative mindset behind what we do, both for us and our guests, now and in the future."*

On this basis, the vision derives from the core values of generosity and going beyond as it can be equated to education and innovation. Additionally, to be sustainable derives from the core value of durability, as previously discussed.

Concluding Gunnarshögs Gård's statements, the mission and vision statements are fully derived from all core values of generosity, going beyond, and durability, thus, the statements engage and inspire stakeholders. Therefore, we estimate the internal brand identity element, mission and vision statements, to have a high degree of incorporated core values.

Table 13. Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of incorporated core values in mission & vision statements

Low		High	
The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders

Culture

Gunnarshögs Gård’s current and desired corporate culture has a caring style which is warm, sincere, and relational. To illustrate, Gunnarshögs Gård’s main focus is their employees’ well-being:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“So I’ve said to my colleagues that I want the number one thing to be that we are well and feeling good and so on, and then a lot of other things will be solved automatically...”*

The caring style of corporate culture evidently broadcasts that all core values of generosity, going beyond, and durability is fully embraced. The collaborative and welcoming workplace is a sign of generosity, to go beyond a corporation’s primary purpose and making the employees the number one priority is a durable mindset.

Furthermore, Gunnarshögs Gård emphasizes the importance to hire employees that share their values, beliefs, and motivation:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“...Not everyone is the right employee...not everyone may be right for us and it’s not the fault of us or employees for that matter, we may just have different motivations.”*

To express that not everyone is the right employee illuminates that Gunnarshögs Gård values that the core values are the foundation of the corporate culture and embraced by all in the organization. This further stresses that Gunnarshögs Gård’s caring style culture is a collective based on the same motivational factor.

Concluding the estimation of Gunnarshögs Gård’s culture, their cultural style is caring which implies that their core values are fully embraced within the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity. Therefore, we estimate Gunnarshögs Gård's degree of incorporated core values to be high.

Table 14. Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of incorporated core values in culture

Low		High	
A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity

Competence

Gunnarshögs Gård’s unique competence resides in their authentic mindset that can be viewed in their desire to produce natural products and be transparent in the production process in order to educate. When Gunnarshögs Gård speaks of their production in comparison to imported olive oil, they emphasize their different standpoint of authenticity:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“There's a fair amount of cheating around olive oil as it is, you don't even know if you're buying something that has olives in it. But we insist very much on authenticity and that you can basically see everything from seed to bottle here. It would also be a stupid idea to put anything other than rapeseed in our product”*

As pointed out in the quote, Gunnarshögs Gård stresses the importance of authenticity and the transparency of displaying the production from seed to bottle which also is educational. Their competence of authentic mindset is additionally uncommon in the industry which reflects the core value of both generosity and going beyond.

Furthermore, not following industry standards but standing out and being authentic also reflect the core value of durability. Gunnarshögs Gård puts an emphasis on this aspect as stated in the quote:

Gunnarshögs Gård: “*You also have to think a bit like this: but what works for us and what will work for us in the next 10-15 years? You don't have to do it like everyone else either.*”

The quote exemplifies the importance for Gunnarshögs Gård to think long-term and durability even if it means not being like everyone else.

Concluding Gunnarshögs Gård’s competence, their authentic mindset, fully reflects all core values of generosity, going beyond, and durability, thus, the competence is competitive. Hence, we estimate the internal brand identity element, competence, to have a high degree of incorporated core values.

Table 15. Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of incorporated core values in competence

Low		High	
The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive

Summary

Table 16. Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of internal corporate branding

Degree of internal corporate branding		Low		High	
Internal Brand identity elements	<i>Mission & Vision</i>	The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders
	<i>Culture</i>	A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity

	<i>Competence</i>	The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive
⇒ High degree of internal corporate branding					

4.4.4 Thule

To determine the degree of incorporated core values in the internal brand identity elements for Thule, we first must view the corporation’s core values. Thule’s core values are the following: Passion, Smart Solutions, and Enable active life.

Mission & Vision

Thule’s mission is to “*make it easy to live an active life*” (Thule, 2022b). The mission clearly conveys Thule’s purpose of being and what motivates them which illustrates the core value of passion. Furthermore, the vision derives from the core values of smart solutions and enables active life, as these are crucial building blocks to make it easy.

Thule’s vision is to be “*One of the leading Sports and Outdoor Goods companies in the world*” (Thule Group, 2022a). The vision statement could be argued to be derived from the core value of enabling active life since becoming a leading Sports and Outdoor Goods company implies providing goods for sports and other outdoor activities. However, even though the vision statement clearly expresses Thule’s desired future state, there are no traces of derivations from the core values of passion and smart solutions. Therefore, this statement could belong to any outdoor company, this is not unique to Thule.

Concluding Thule’s statements, the mission statement is fully derived from all core values, thus, the statement engages and inspires stakeholders. However, the vision statement only derives from the core value of enabling active life. Hence, the statements are derived from the majority of core values. Therefore, we estimate the internal brand identity element, mission and vision statements, to have a low degree of incorporated core values.

Table 17. Thule’s degree of incorporated core values in mission & vision statements

Low		High	
The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders

Culture

Thule’s desired and current corporate culture is in the style order as their focus lies on following the rules, structure, and shared norms. The following quote highlights Thule’s focus on a certain set of ways to work and what they stand for, illustrating that the employees must follow these rules and the importance of structure:

Thule: *"... holding on to the fact that this is where we are, this is what we stand for [...] But I think we've had very strong support from the CEO and the board, that this is how we work."*

Furthermore, the way Thule describes itself, on their website under the section “what we are”, the importance of shared norms shines through:

Thule: *“To keep our brands at the highest standards, we need to have all employees passionately devoted to the brands and have them understand the fundamentals of what our brands stand for and what kind of company we are.”* (Thule Group, 2022c)

Shared norms are not limited to the behavior at work but stretch outside, to be passionate about the outdoors and the employees living an active life in their leisure time which can be illustrated in that Thule uses their own employees in photos and videos:

Thule: *“Our photos and our films are either our ambassadors or our own employees”*

The use of Thule’s employees shows that the core values of passion and enable active life are embraced in the organization. Further, the core value of smart solutions is not explicitly illustrated to be embraced by the organization, however, it is assumed, to some extent, to be embraced as it is such a large portion of delivering the brand's business concept, as stated in their annual report:

Thule: *“to offer high-quality products with smart features and a sustainable design that make it easy for people across the globe to live an active life.”* (Thule Group, 2022b)

Concluding the estimation of Thule’s culture, their cultural style is order which implies that the core values of passion, enable active life, and smart solutions are embraced to some extent. Therefore, we estimate Thule’s degree of incorporated core values to be high.

Table 18. Thule’s degree of incorporated core values in culture

Low		High	
A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity

Competence

Thule’s unique competence is a superior product development and product design which results in easy to use high-quality innovative design goods, which Thule proudly express:

Thule: *“But if we didn't have the great products we have today, we wouldn't be where we are, but it's a combination of product development and being relevant with the product development so that you have the right products in order to be competitive. We have incredibly talented development engineers. ...and we have a tremendously talented design department.”*

The competence of superior product development and design reflects the core values of passion and smart solutions as Thule focuses on providing its consumers with easy-to-use high-quality innovative design goods. Furthermore, the core value to enable active life is also fully reflected since the competence provides goods for enabling active life. Since Thule’s competence fully reflects all core values, the competence is competitive which can be further confirmed by the following example:

Thule: *“...People try to make copycats sometimes, but they fail because their products are not as good as what we are doing. They try to copy perhaps our way of making pictures and movies,*

there may be a few trying to be like us, but they fail in delivering the experience of the product later on.”

The quote demonstrates that the incorporation of Thule’s core values in their competence is what makes them unique and cannot be copied, thus the competence is competitive.

Concluding Thule’s competence, superior product development, and product design, fully reflect all core values of passion, smart solutions, and enable active life, thus, the competence is competitive. Hence, we estimate the internal brand identity element, competence, to have a high degree of incorporated core values.

Table 19. Thule’s degree of incorporated core values in competence

Low		High	
The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive

Summary

To conclude the level of Thule’s internal corporate branding is estimated to be high as the majority of the internal brand identity elements' degree of incorporated core values are high, thus, Thule is living its corporate brand.

Table 20. Thule’s degree of internal corporate branding

Degree of internal corporate branding		Low		High	
Internal Brand identity elements	<i>Mission & Vision</i>	The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders
	<i>Culture</i>	A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity
	<i>Competence</i>	The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive
⇒ High degree of internal corporate branding					

4.5 External Corporate Branding

The essential elements of corporate branding externally are the external brand identity elements; Value proposition, Relationship, and Intended position, and the communication elements; Expression, Brand ambassadors and Storytelling. The external brand identity elements are evaluated on the degree of incorporated core values and the communication elements are evaluated based on the usage of communication techniques, as seen in Table 21.

Table 21. Degree of external corporate branding

Degree of external corporate branding		Low		High	
External Brand identity elements	<i>Value Proposition</i>	The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions
	<i>Relationship</i>	The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers
	<i>Intended position</i>	The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible
Communication elements	<i>Expression</i>	Several messages and no unified visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning
	<i>Brand ambassadors</i>	No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of external brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship
	<i>Storytelling</i>	Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used and generates limited emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition

As you can see in Table 21 there are three external brand identity elements as well as three communication elements. Suppose the elements are to be ranked to a tie with three highs and three lows. In that case, the summed ranking will correspond to how the company ranks in the external brand identity elements rather than based on the communication elements. This reasoning is based on the inside-out mindset, seen that the level of incorporated core values strengthens brand-

oriented corporations to a greater extent in external brand identity than the degree of communication. Furthermore, the communication elements are techniques of communicating external brand identity elements which implies that without strong core values in the external brand identity elements, it is difficult to demonstrate the highest degree of communication.

Regarding the external brand identity elements, the degree of incorporated core values is measured if a minority of core values are incorporated, and the degree of implementation for the specific element is considered low (the first quadrant). If the majority of core values are incorporated, the degree is also considered low (the second quadrant). If all core values are incorporated to some extent in the internal brand identity element, the degree is considered high (the third quadrant). Lastly, if all core values are fully incorporated, elements are based on core values, and executed to perfection, the degree is also considered high (the fourth quadrant). The degree, high or low, for each element, is then summarized to compile the degree of internal corporate branding.

Regarding the communication elements, corporations communicate the brand identity through their communication of expression, brand ambassadors, and storytelling, it was on these communication dimensions that we assessed the companies. First, expression is evaluated on a scale from several messages and no unified visual expression (the first quadrant) to a unified message and visual expression (the fourth quadrant). Second, in terms of brand ambassadors, the scale stretches from not using brand ambassadors at all (the first quadrant) to using both internal and external brand ambassadors (the fourth quadrant). In between companies are placed that only use external brand ambassadors (the second quadrant) and only use internal brand ambassadors (the third quadrant). The explanation why the use of internal brand ambassadors is evaluated higher is because the theory, as earlier mentioned, stresses the importance of internal brand ambassadors as they provide an interface for communication between internal and external environments which helps to strengthen the corporate brand. Third, storytelling is assessed in terms of use and the degree to which it stirs emotions in stakeholders. On a scale, storytelling is then reflected from hardly stirring any emotions in stakeholders if used (the first quadrant) to being seen as the main way of communicating and evoking very strong emotions in stakeholders (the fourth quadrant).

4.5.1 Pantamera

4.5.1.1 External brand identity elements

To determine the degree of incorporated core values in the external brand identity elements for Pantamera, we first refresh our minds with Pantamera's core values; Accountability, Innovation, and Collaboration.

Value proposition

Pantamera's key offering and appeal is the deposit money and feeling that you do something good for the environment as well as being perceived as someone who cares for environmental questions, which Pantamera illuminates:

Pantamera: *"We have the deposit money which is, of course, a motivator and we have the climate benefit which is one...but it's about getting people to feel that it's a good idea and that it is a good company that stands behind and takes care of the packaging."*

The functional benefits of Pantamera's offering and appeal, as highlighted in the quote, are the rationality of gaining monetary value from the deposit money. Whereas, Pantamera's emotional benefits are connected with the feeling of doing something good for the environment. Lastly, the self-expressive benefits may be the desire to identify as a part of the climate movement.

The mentioned benefits constitute Pantamera's value proposition which is based on the core values of accountability and collaboration. To exemplify, the benefits are based on accountability and collaboration as Pantamera provides an offering that allows them, together with the Swedish people, to take responsibility for the environment. However, the value proposition cannot be argued to be based upon core value innovation.

Concluding Pantamera's value proposition, the provided benefits are based on the core values of accountability and collaboration but not the core value of innovation. Therefore, Pantamera's value proposition is based on the majority of core values. Hence, we estimate the external brand identity element, value proposition, to have a low degree of incorporated core values.

Table 22. Pantamera’s degree of incorporated core values in value proposition

Low		High	
The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions

Relationship

Pantamera aims to have different relationships with its stakeholders. They explicitly pinpoint that they want to take on different roles depending on the relationship they try to build:

Pantamera: “... *We usually talk about Returpack [brand towards other corporations] being a sustainable pioneer while Pantamera [brand towards Swedish population] is perhaps more of a sustainable buddy.*”

With the Swedish population, Pantamera wants the relationship to be humorous and easygoing, whereas, the relationship with other corporations should be supporting and reassuring, as illustrated in the following quote:

Pantamera: “*Because then somehow Returpack is the serious part, even if Pantamera is a serious brand, we can still afford to work with humor and music and kind of entertainment in a different way. If Returpack were to do that, there is a great risk that the operators who are dependent on Returpack, for example, producers, importers, traders, and even the authorities, then perhaps confidence in the Returpack brand would be tarnished down instead.*”

The quote highlights that the relationship Pantamera intends to have with stakeholders is built upon different values. Pantamera’s relationship with other corporations is somewhat built upon the core values of accountability, innovation, and collaboration. However, the relationship with the Swedish population, the most important stakeholders, are not built upon the core values. Thus, the relationship does not instill trust and create credibility for the brand which the intention is.

Concluding Pantamera’s relationship, Pantamera aims to have different relationships depending on the stakeholders, thus, the relationship is built upon a minority of core values. Hence, we

estimate the external brand identity element, relationship, to have a low degree of incorporated core values.

Table 23. Pantamera’s degree of incorporated core values in relationship

Low		High	
The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers

Intended position

Pantamera's intended position in the hearts and minds of key customers differs from the one for non-customer stakeholders. To illustrate, for consumers, Pantamera wants to be perceived as fun, credible, and relevant whereas they want their other corporations to perceive them as a safe and obvious partner:

Pantamera: *“One part that should be more fun, credible and relevant [...] and one positioning is that we should be some kind of like, a knowledgeable and safe and obvious partner in situations where you are, maybe producing or manufacturing or selling packaging in this country that must be included in the deposit system. Then you should know that if you contact us, we will make sure that everything is solved.”*

To differentiate through having two different intended positions in the hearts and minds of key customers and non-customers does not offer stakeholders clear insight into what the corporate brand can provide them with. On one hand, the intended position towards other corporations is rooted in the core values of accountability, innovation, and collaboration, while on the other hand, the substantial intended position towards customers is not rooted in the core values, demonstrating that the overall intended position is not rooted in the core values.

Concluding Pantamera’s intended position, is different for key customers, the Swedish population, or non-customer stakeholders, other corporations, thus, rooted in a minority of core values, hence we estimate the incorporated core values considered to be low.

Table 24. Pantamera's degree of incorporated core values in intended position

Low		High	
The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible

Communicating the brand identity

To determine the degree that Pantamera communicates the brand identity, the following dimensions are considered: expression, degree of storytelling, and use of brand ambassadors.

Expression

Pantamera communicates through several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression. To illustrate, when Pantamera was asked if they aim to have a unified expression, they replied the following:

Pantamera: *"No, we don't want it to be unified, we kind of see Pantamera [brand towards Swedish population] and Returpack [brand towards other corporations] as two different people you could say, that's how "we know who we are in some way" and "who we should be in different contexts".*

As illustrated in the quote, Pantamera adapts its message depending on the receiving stakeholder. Implying that they do not communicate with a unified message. To further strengthen the argument, Pantamera adapts the content depending on the stakeholder they are targeting which indicates that they make use of several messages:

Pantamera: *"...So in that way, you can say that you adapt the content a little bit, but the tonality and the visual impressions and so on, it somehow stays the same. "*

Additionally, the quote above highlights that the visual expression stays mostly the same. Regardless of the different messages, the visual expression, according to Pantamera, is always to be positive and colorful:

Pantamera: *"A colorful and kind of positive communication..."*

This implies that the visual expression of color, colorful, and tone of voice, is positive, and is somewhat unified. On the basis of an expression of several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression, stakeholders might perceive the corporate brand differently.

Concluding Pantamera’s expression, even though Pantamera communicates several messages, they still try to have a somewhat unified visual expression to be colorful. Hence, we estimate Pantamera's expression to be low.

Table 25. Pantamera’s degree of expression

Low		High	
Several messages and no unified visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning

Brand ambassadors

Pantamera does not make use of brand ambassadors, instead, they collaborate short-term with influencers or create characters:

Pantamera: *“...We have been doing an esports campaign for many years and we have been working with one person in particular for many years, however, it was not a conscious choice from the beginning or a strategy, it just has become like that ... And as for Pantamera humor, you have the characters or icons ... rather than said profiles [influencers]. So there are not so many long-term collaborations, I cannot say that we have...”*

However, short-term collaborations with influencers or fictional characters are not brand ambassadors, since they are defined in this research as an authorized person representing the corporation long-term with the aim to create corporate identification. Therefore, Pantamera has no usage of brand ambassadors.

To conclude, Pantamera does not use brand ambassadors as they only exploit influencers short-term or fictional characters. Hence, we estimate Pantamera's use of brand ambassadors to be low.

Table 26. Pantamera’s degree of brand ambassadors

Low		High	
No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of external brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship

Storytelling

Pantamera’s communication does not generate emotions. Often, Pantamera tells their corporate history, as demonstrated in the following quote:

Pantamera: “...We were one of the first countries to start a deposit system and that history is something we often come back to...”

However, Pantamera express that more often than not, their storytelling focuses on the functionality of service than generating emotions:

Pantamera: “..we have storytelling that builds more on facts than on arousing emotions”

On this basis, Pantamera’s primarily communication through facts, leads to stakeholder referring and perceiving the corporate brand as an “it” rather than a “they”. Further, per definition, in the literature and in this research, the kind of stories Pantamera tells does not count as using the technique of storytelling as they focus on facts rather than generating emotions.

Concluding Pantamera’s communication does not generate emotions. Hence, we estimate Pantamera’s degree of storytelling to be low.

Table 27. Pantamera’s degree of storytelling

Low		High	
Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used and generates limited emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition

Summary

Table 28. Pantamera's degree of external corporate branding

Degree of external corporate branding		Low		High	
External Brand identity elements	<i>Value Proposition</i>	The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions
	<i>Relationship</i>	The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers
	<i>Intended position</i>	The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible
Communication elements	<i>Expression</i>	Several messages and no unified visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning
	<i>Brand ambassadors</i>	No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of external brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship
	<i>Storytelling</i>	Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used and generates limited emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition
⇒ Low degree of external corporate branding					

4.5.2 Haglöfs

External brand identity elements

To determine the degree of incorporated core values in the external brand identity elements for Haglöfs, we first refresh our minds with Haglöfs' core values; Curious, Reliable, and Proud.

Value proposition

Haglöfs key offering and appeal are that they provide stakeholders with the opportunity to be part of the outdoor community through purchasing quality products that keep them warm and dry when performing outdoor activities which creates a feeling of safety no matter the weather conditions.

Haglöfs functional benefits include keeping users warm and dry through quality which explains the rationale why consumers should buy their products. The following quote by Haglöfs illustrates the functional benefits further:

Haglöfs: *“From a practical point of view...it's all about staying warm and dry and the product lasting and the quality and so on, it's a much more rational side to why you buy a Haglöfs product.”*

The quality of the products that enable the people that use them to be dry and warm also provides emotional benefits, explicitly the feeling of safety in all weather conditions. Moreover, the self-expressive benefits connected with purchasing or using products of Haglöfs include being part of the outdoor community. The campaign “Outsiders by Nature” portrays this outdoor community:

Haglöfs: *“I would say that you want to feel attracted to what "Outsiders by Nature" stands for, that it's some kind of, that those who are portrayed in the Haglöfs world and portrayed and it's like you feel part of it... part of some kind of outdoor community ...”*

Through portraying the outdoor community and inviting consumers to take part of it through purchasing and using Haglöfs products, Haglöfs leverage the desire to be a part of the community to become more appealing.

The mentioned benefits constitute Haglöfs’ value proposition, which is fully based on the core values of reliable and proud. The functional benefits of being dry and warm provide the emotional benefits of feeling secure, which is based on the core value reliable. Furthermore, the value proposition is also based on the core value proud as Haglöfs is proud of what they offer and the people who use its goods. However, the core value of being curious is not clearly expressed within Haglöfs value proposition.

Concluding Haglöfs’ value proposition, the provided benefits are based on the core values reliable and proud, but not the core value curious. Therefore, Haglöfs’ value proposition is based on the majority of core values. Hence, we estimate the external brand identity element, value proposition, to have a low degree of incorporated core values.

Table 29. Haglöfs’ degree of incorporated core values in value proposition

Low		High	
The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions

Relationship

Haglöfs aims to create an adventurous and trustful relationship with their stakeholders. First, they want to create a relationship with consumers who are looking for new experiences, therefore the nature of the relationship is adventurous:

Haglöfs: *"[...] and there are people, as we see it, that are adventurous, who like to be outside and do a lot of different things ... a slightly different relationship to outdoor life than what maybe a Fjällräven and Lundhags customer has... "*

However, the relationship also needs to be characterized by trust, that the product will keep the consumers safe, as the activities performed are high-performance. The following quotes illustrate Haglöfs' emphasis on the emotional attachment they want their consumers to have to the brand:

Haglöfs: *"I trust Haglöfs to keep me alive in the mountains..."*

The adventurous part of the relationship is clearly built upon the core values of being curious, while the trustful part of the relationship rather is built upon the core values of being proud and reliable. Since the relationship is fully built upon all core values, trust between the corporate brand and consumer is created which leads to loyal consumers.

To conclude Haglöfs intended relationship with its stakeholders is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal customers. Hence, we estimate the external brand identity element, relationship, to have a high degree of incorporated core values.

Table 30. Haglöfs’ degree of incorporated core values in relationship

Low		High	
The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers

Intended position

Haglöfs intended position on the market is to be an advanced high performance outdoor company while still being perceived by stakeholders as trustworthy and fun:

Haglöfs: *“For us, being outdoors is something you do with friends or something. So the combination of this advanced high performance with this little bit more social and new angles on things- that it's not just about the goal but the journey“*

The intended position on the market to be advanced high performance is rooted in the corporation's core values to be reliable and proud of their safe products. Haglöfs wants to be perceived as trustworthy as it is crucial that the consumers can trust their products when they engage in high-performance outdoor activities.

Furthermore, Haglöfs also intends to be perceived as fun by focusing on the journey instead of only the goal, which differentiates Haglöfs in the mind and hearts of consumers:

Haglöfs: *“And it's also a bit of a reaction to what we see in the outdoor industry, that everyone is always talking about that mountaintop or that powder lake and that's apparently why you're doing the stuff, but that's not the case, you're doing it because it's something fun, that it's the way there and the whole experience that counts as well...”*

The last core value, curious, can also be viewed to be well reflected in Haglöfs’ intended position as they, in contrast to competitors, focus on the journey. Focusing on the journey makes Haglöfs stand out in the crowd and a better way to do something in order to stay relevant which is why the intended position is rooted in being curious.

To conclude Haglöfs' intended position can be viewed to be rooted in the core values of reliable, curious, and proud. Hence, we estimate Haglöfs' degree of incorporated core values to be high.

Table 31. Haglöfs’ degree of incorporated core values in intended position

Low		High	
The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible

Communicating the brand identity

To determine the degree that Haglöfs communicates the brand identity, the following dimensions are considered: expression, brand ambassadors, and storytelling.

Expression

Haglöfs communicates with a fairly well unified strategic message and a unified visual expression. When Haglöfs talked about their brand expression, they described how their communication consists of three main campaigns:

Haglöfs: *“...Every season we try to define three pieces of campaigns or stories that we do. One is pure branding, and it should be connected to "Outsiders by nature"... Then in the middle, we have something that we call our concepts... But it's not just one product but it's a lot of products*

in one concept and it's linked very clearly to an activity ... And then we usually try to have a campaign that is more product-focused or category-focused for example that, want to help, we want to sell more shell jackets, then we have a campaign for that ... So, and then we have, like, a little bit beside that, we have our sustainability communication, which is also a very important part of brand building... ”

In the quote, it can be stated that brand building is a big part of Haglöfs' communication, with a focus on highlighting the bigger picture of what they provide their stakeholders with. As to whether these communication campaigns are unified is supported by the following quotation:

Haglöfs: *We are focusing on making it all about expressing that it is not just the goal but the journey, that's kind of our brand expression today, that we further want to go towards ... the way we have done it before it can be trickier is to keep the expression together if you know what I mean ”*

On this basis, Haglöfs' strategic message is fairly well unified, as the core lies in striving to have one voice through the focus on the journey rather than the goal, as they put continuous effort into communicating that they are there for their stakeholders throughout the journey. However, they do not fully have a unified strategic message as they see improvements.

Moreover, when it comes to the visual part, Haglöfs' visual expression aims to be unified, although, there are potential areas of improvement, to become fully unified as the focus has been on incorporating the logo:

Haglöfs: *“We make sure that the expression on the page is right and that the images are taken correctly, that the copy is right and the content itself ... Well, it's [the logotype] going to last and it's supposed to stay the same... I think we can be a bit better at making sure that all our photography has something special, or I think the campaign has something beyond just the logo that makes it feel like Haglöfs ”*

To conclude Haglöfs’ expression, Haglöfs has a fairly well unified strategic message and unified visual expression. Hence, we estimate Haglöfs’ expression to be high.

Table 32. Haglöfs’ degree of expression

Low		High	
Several messages and no unified visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning

Brand ambassadors

Haglöfs make extensive use of external brand ambassadors. Their external brand ambassadors are professional athletes who perform high-performance outdoor activities which, according to Haglöfs, is essential:

Haglöfs: *“But I think it's very important for a number of reasons because it builds credibility in general, it gets people connected, it's another channel to get your message out. Especially if we think about climbing and freeriding, it just doesn't make good photography either if you don't use professionals.”*

The quote stresses the importance Haglöfs puts on using professionals as brand ambassadors to convey a credible image. Moreover, Haglöfs highlights certain criteria for how they choose their external ambassadors:

Haglöfs: *“I don't know how much we chose ambassadors based on these criteria in the past, but we certainly do it today ... It implies that one should perform on a high level, be interesting without showing off. Perhaps, they should not feel like somebody in the crowd, but rather, a bit different, and that is somehow the most crucial thing. And then we also have quite high sustainability requirements on our ambassadors, so we do not collaborate with anyone who, for example, fly helicopters, go skiing and these sorts of things anymore ... ”*

On this basis, it can be separated that external brand ambassadors are a crucial part of getting Haglöfs consumers to identify with the corporate brand. However, in order to actually strengthen the relationship and be perceived as trustworthy, internal brand ambassadors are also needed.

To conclude Haglöfs’ use of brand ambassadors, Haglöfs make extensive use of external ambassadors but so far Haglöfs has not used any internal brand ambassadors in their communication. Hence, Haglöfs’ use of brand ambassadors ranks low.

Table 33. Haglöfs’ degree of brand ambassadors

Low		High	
No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of external brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship

Storytelling

Haglöfs fairly well makes use of storytelling. For Haglöfs, it is very important to generate emotions in order for their consumers to identify with the brand and find the value proposition more appealing. Haglöfs primarily evokes emotions through following their external brand ambassadors on their outdoor activities and journey while filming and taking photos. To illustrate, Haglöfs express the following when referring to storytelling and the importance of communicating through this technique:

Haglöfs: *“I think it’s especially important when you have very expensive products that the consumer have to feel something for the brand ...we do that [evoke emotions] by using professionals in all our travel photos and videos we have, we do that by broadcast these people who are quite extreme in what they do and we help sponsor their stuff and so on. You create a kind of credibility there ... so that you feel that Haglöfs is for me, that I identify with this.”*

However, Haglöfs express that they want to invest in even more storytelling to better reach out with their brand identity:

Haglöfs: “*I would say that we are a little bit on the journey of being able to invest and talk even more about the brand and what we stand for and values and stuff like that.*”

To conclude Haglöfs’ storytelling, it is evident that Haglöfs make use of the technique of storytelling, however, as they still are on the journey, their storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions. Hence, Haglöfs’ storytelling is considered to be high.

Table 34. Haglöfs’ degree of storytelling

Low		High	
Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used and generates limited emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition

Summary

Table 35. Haglöfs’ degree of external corporate branding

Degree of external corporate branding		Low		High	
External Brand identity elements	<i>Value Proposition</i>	The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions
	<i>Relationship</i>	The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers
	<i>Intended position</i>	The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible

Communication elements	<i>Expression</i>	Several messages and no unified visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning
	<i>Brand ambassadors</i>	No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of external brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship
	<i>Storytelling</i>	Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used and generates limited emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition
⇒ High degree of external corporate branding					

4.5.3 Gunnarshögs Gård

External brand identity elements

To determine the degree of incorporated core values in the external brand identity elements for Gunnarshögs Gård, we first refresh our minds with Gunnarshögs Gård's core values; Generosity, Going beyond, and Durability.

Value Proposition

Gunnarshögs Gård's key offering and appeal include providing genuine products, activities on the farm for all generations, feelings of enjoyment and surprise as well as supporting locally produced products.

The functional benefits and the product attributes of Gunnarshögs Gård, are the pure ingredients that are found in their products. When Gunnarshögs Gård express what they focus on and value, genuine products are first pointed out:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“It's obvious that we have some kind of, what can I say, the value to provide genuine products”*

Furthermore, as Gunnarshögs Gård also operates a form of service, visits to the farm, a shop and cafe, the functional benefits of this is an excursion for all generations:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *”... When they come around the corner and see how much there is here that is adapted for the children, for the whole family, not just one generation, I think they are so pleasantly surprised and then they never want to leave...So it becomes across generations because here you can spend time together...”*

The emotional benefits can also be found in the above quote, the feeling of enjoyment and surprise that is created when purchasing and using Gunnarshögs Gård's products and when visiting the farm. Furthermore, the self-expressive benefits when taking part in Gunnarshögs Gård's offering might be to be perceived as conscious by supporting local producers. To strengthen the argument, Gunnarshögs Gård states that through purchasing their products, the money goes towards developing the local community:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“It goes to our community, that we invest the profit there in the company, it goes right into a new project, so a building or something else.”*

The mentioned benefits that constitute Gunnarshögs Gård's value proposition are based upon the core values of generosity, going beyond, and durability. Providing genuine products with pure ingredients, and inviting people to the farm is both genuine and long-term. Moreover, Gunnarshögs Gård's emotional focus within their operations also has an impact on their value proposition aligning with the core values of generosity, going beyond, and durability. However, the value proposition does not directly drive purchasing decisions.

Concluding Gunnarshögs Gård's value proposition is based on the core values of generosity, going beyond, and durability. Therefore, Gunnarshögs Gård's value proposition is based on all core

values to some extent. Hence, we estimate the external brand identity element, value proposition, to have a high degree of incorporated core values.

Table 36. Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of incorporated core values in value proposition

Low		High	
The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions

Relationship

Gunnarshögs Gård aims to involve their stakeholders, foremost consumers, as much as possible in their organization, thus, creating a meaningful and personalized relationship. To illustrate, Gunnarshögs Gård reinforces the relation through communicating meaningful and personalized content:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“...I don't want to tell you about something that is not meaningful. And there's a lot going on on a farm like this, there's 18 of us working full time, that's quite a lot, we can follow them in different aspects when it comes to activities on the farm “*

To only communicate with the stakeholders what is meaningful permeates Gunnarshögs Gård’s mindset and is the foundation for creating a meaningful relationship. Furthermore, the quote also touches upon providing personalized content which Gunnarshögs Gård further emphasizes the importance of in the following quote:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“...then it's social media that we're trying and also reflect the day to day a lot, the animals here, the people who work here and make it personal ... I want you to be part of us, it will be some kind of co-production as I call it. In our company where the visitor is, well, co-producer I would call it, and then you also need to know who works here to give that personal touch”*

To invite stakeholders into the organization, both through social media and in reality, clearly portrays that the relationship is built upon the core value of generosity. Further, a meaningful and personalized relationship is built upon the core value of durability as it is long-term.

To conclude Gunnarshögs Gård’s relationship, is built upon the core values of generosity and durability but not going beyond. Therefore, the relationship is built upon the majority of core values. Hence, we estimate the external brand identity element, relationship, to have a low degree of incorporated core values.

Table 37. Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of incorporated core values in relationship

Low		High	
The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers

Intended position

The intended positioning Gunnarshögs Gård aims to have on the market and in stakeholders mind is to be perceived as genuine:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“... But it's important for us to have this, well the genuineness towards the customer and towards our customers that is the end consumers that I'm talking about and also B2B. You can simulate that in different ways, so I think and hope that we have succeeded in reaching out as we think we want to be perceived.”*

The intended position to be genuine is rooted in the core value of durability as it is sustainable and long-term to be building a relation on being authentic. The core values of going beyond and generosity are not evident building blocks in creating a genuine relationship.

To conclude the intended position, Gunnarshögs Gård aims to be perceived as genuine which foremost builds upon the core value of durability. Therefore, we estimate Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of incorporated core values to be low.

Table 38. Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of incorporated core values in intended position

Low		High	
The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible

Communicating the brand identity

To determine the degree that Gunnarshögs Gård communicates the brand identity, the following dimensions are considered: expression, brand ambassadors, and storytelling.

Expression

Gunnarshögs Gård communicates with several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression. When communicating, Gunnarshögs Gård often communicates what they feel like in the moment and solely returns to the original plan if they are out of ideas:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“...we have some kind of original plan on how to communicate and so on, if I am out of ideas I can go back to it, otherwise, there is a lot going on at the farm, we are here and now a lot in our communication”*

An expression that is primarily based on spontaneously will likely create several messages rather than one distinct one, as a continuous strategic structure is required to create consistency and one voice within the expression. Moving other to the visual expression, Gunnarshögs Gårds tone of voice often is foremost authentic through unstyled and natural pictures of the farm:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“And it doesn't always have to be styled images, it can be like a simple image. In newsletters, I try to have more professional images because it looks better aesthetically but in the communication material used on social media I want it to be more simple images because we are not professional photographers and we shouldn't pretend to be either. It's kind of just life on the farm.”*

However, as mentioned in the quote above, the corporation sometimes makes use of professional photographers, mostly for their newsletter, creating an entire other expression. Thus, the visual expressions of Gunnarshögs Gård are somewhat unified.

To conclude expression, as Gunnarshögs Gård adapts its message depending on the channel, they communicate with several messages, however, with a somewhat unified visual expression. Therefore, we estimate Gunnarshögs Gård's expression to be low.

Table 39. Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of expression

Low		High	
Several messages and no unified visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning

Brand ambassadors

Gunnarshögs Gård makes use of internal brand ambassadors. For them, it is important to share insights on social media about who works at Gunnarshögs Gårds, as the following quote exemplifies:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *...today it's Magnus cleaning the windows or Ella baking this cake or Tina receiving you in the store or whatever it is, and it is of importance that it gets out. So I of course ask everyone who starts working here, are you prepared to be on social media? I try to explain that it is so that more people can understand our work, our important work that is behind the scenes”*

As demonstrated in the quote, Gunnarshögs Gård’s employees are expected to act as internal brand ambassadors to portray the organization's brand identity.

To conclude brand ambassadors, Gunnarshögs Gård makes use of internal brand ambassadors. Hence, Gunnarshögs Gård’s use of brand ambassadors ranks high.

Table 40. Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of brand ambassadors

Low		High	
No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of external brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship

Storytelling

Gunnarshögs Gård states facts about what they do rather than communicating through the technique of storytelling. Through the newsletter, Gunnarshögs Gård aims to replicate the feeling people get when visiting the farm:

Gunnarshögs Gård: *“A lot of people are sometimes far away and can't visit us and we want them to still have some small part of our experience ... I want them to have basically the same feeling as when they walk into the farm shop here. A newsletter with good and healthy recipes for both children and adults and nice information about what is happening on the farm for those who can not be here with us and still get to experience being close to us on Österlen.”*

Even if the hope is to evoke emotions and create feelings similar to when visiting the farm, the communication is based on facts such as healthy recipes or other information regarding the farm, that does not generate any strong emotions. In order to evoke emotions, storytelling needs to focus on who and what the corporations are, rather than the functionality of the product or service.

To conclude, Gunnarshögs Gård hardly makes use of storytelling and does not generate emotions as the communication focuses on facts. Hence, Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of storytelling is considered to be low.

Table 41. Gunnarshögs Gård’s degree of storytelling

Low		High	
Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used and generates limited emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition

Summary

Table 42. Gunnarshögs Gård's degree of external corporate branding

Degree of external corporate branding		Low		High	
External Brand identity elements	<i>Value Proposition</i>	The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions
	<i>Relationship</i>	The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers
	<i>Intended position</i>	The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible
Communication elements	<i>Expression</i>	Several messages and no unified visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning
	<i>Brand ambassadors</i>	No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of external brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship
	<i>Storytelling</i>	Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used and generates limited emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition
⇒ Low degree of external corporate branding					

4.5.4 Thule

External brand identity elements

To determine the degree of incorporated core values in the external brand identity elements for Thule, we first refresh our minds with Thule's core values; Passion, Smart Solutions, and Enable active life.

Value Proposition

Thule's key offering and appeal are the conveniences that their goods provide which makes it effortless and uncomplicated to bring things along as well as making people feel more athletic.

Thule's functional benefits include that it is easy to use their products which enables people to more conveniently bring their life, as expressed in the following quote:

Thule: *"Everything and our products do what they offer and make life easier to live an active life, both as an individual and especially as a family and with children..."*

Additionally, Thule's campaign "Bring your life", which is described as follows, demonstrates the functional benefits but foremost the emotional benefits:

Thule: *"Whatever your passion, whatever your pursuit. Wherever you're going, whatever you're bringing. With Thule, you're free to live your active life to the fullest"* (Thule, 2015).

The usage of their products is connected with feelings such as uncomplicated and effortless, the emotional benefits. Furthermore, the self-expressive benefits, according to Thule, are the possibility to portray oneself as active:

Thule: *"...People want to look active and sporty and want to drive around with bikes and kayaks and ski racks and sup's on the roof of their cars or have strollers that look sporty even though they might not actually run."*

The quote illuminates that consumers purchase or use Thule’s goods to convey an athletic image.

The mentioned benefits that constitute Thules’s value proposition are fully based upon the core values of passion, smart solutions, and enable active life. To exemplify, Thule’s appeal is based on the core values of smart solutions and enable active life as it is easy to “Bring your life” through their smart products. Furthermore, this would have not been possible without Thule’s dive, highlighting the core value of passion. Additionally, an athletic image is also based on the core values as people buy into the idea of having an active life.

Concluding Thule’s value proposition, the provided benefits are fully based on the core values of passion, smart solutions & enable active life, thus driving purchasing decisions. Hence, we estimate the external brand identity element, value proposition, to have a high degree of incorporated core values.

Table 43. Thule’s degree of incorporated core values in value proposition

Low		High	
The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions

Relationship

Thule aims to have a supportive relationship with their consumers, to help them bring their outdoor equipment in an easy way. When Thule explains the foundation of the relationship with their consumers, and what their purpose is, they highlight that all they do surrounds helping consumers bring their life:

Thule: *“We make what is relevant to the end consumer, we make it easy to include your life in one way or another, whatever life is for you? But one way or another we bring your life.”*

This quote illustrates that the relationship is fully built upon the core values of passion, enable active life, and smart solutions. Thule fosters an active life for their consumers through smart solutions that simplify for the customer to live their passion, which brings an emotional attachment

through being supportive. Furthermore, by fully building the relationship upon core values, Thule fosters loyal consumers. To illustrate Thule’s loyal consumers, people want to be anchored with the brand which again is connected to the emotional attachment:

Thule: *“More people follow us or feel proud to be anchored in one way or another with the brand”*

Concluding the estimation of Thule’s relationship, they want to support their consumers which fully is built upon all core values. Hence, we estimate Thule’s relationships to be highly built on core values.

Table 44. Thule’s degree of incorporated core values in relationship

Low		High	
The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers

Intended position

Thule intended position in the market and hearts and minds of consumers and non-customer stakeholders is to be perceived as the evident choice for smart solutions to transport all outdoor equipment:

Thule: *“We want our consumers to relate to our brand when they are looking for solutions to transport their equipment in their active life. They should imagine the smart solutions we provide them, how easy it is to use the products, and how safe and well-designed they are.”* (Thule Group, 2022d)

The quote provides evidence that the intended position is rooted in all core values of smart solutions, enable active life, and passion.

Further, the intended positioning differentiates Thule from their competitors as they have a breadth of being able to offer transporting solutions in several different areas, as illustrated in the following quote:

Thule: *“It's a bit hard to find a brand that's like Thule because we're a bit unique in that we have many different categories and do many different things”.*

Concluding Thule’s intended position, smart solutions for transporting outdoor equipment are fully rooted in all core values and, thus, are perceived as both credible and distinct. Hence, we estimate the external brand identity element, intended position, to have a high degree of incorporated core values.

Table 45. Thule’s degree of incorporated core values in intended position

Low		High	
The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible

Communicating brand identity

To determine the degree that Thule communicates the brand identity, the following dimensions are considered: expression, brand ambassadors, and storytelling.

Expression

Thule communicates a fully unified strategic message and visual expression. Thule is able to have a unified message through consistently returning to a set long-term strategic plan:

Thule: *“We should be consistent in everything we do [...] many things are very exciting and very tempting, but I think the difficult thing there is to have some ice in your stomach, to go back to your plan or our plan, to hold on to the fact that this is where we are, this is what we stand for. This is how we want to talk about it, these are the people who inspire us, these are the stories we want to work with, and so on long-term.”*

This quote illustrates the continuous effort that Thule puts into communicating a unified strategic message. Furthermore, Thule emphasizes the importance of having a unified visual expression:

Thule: *“ And then it's been about us trying, which is really hard, but trying to look the same everywhere... I think the more time and focus we put on the visual material, the more we want to use it and the more impact we get. And the stronger the brand shines through ”*

The continuous effort put into communicating a unified visual expression, evidently pays off as expressed in the quote, that Thule’s brand shines through and is more distinct and recognizable. The unified visual expression, therefore, strengthens the position which also can be interpreted from the above quote through Thule arguing to have a larger impact when working with a unified visual expression.

Concluding Thule’s expression, Thule communicates with a unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening its positioning. Hence, we estimate Thule’s expression to be high.

Table 46. Thule’s degree of expression

Low		High	
Several messages and no unified visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning

Brand ambassadors

Thule uses both internal and external brand ambassadors. In the following quote, Thule emphasizes the importance of using ambassadors in their communication:

Thule: *“It has been a very important part of our journey where we have constantly gone back to the fact that we believe that when working with brand communication and long-term communication, then ambassadors are the way to go for us...we work with a bunch of big names in different sports and activities and professions that we think are relevant to our products and credible to our products...even with our own employees...”*

As illustrated in the quote, Thule makes use of external brand ambassadors by having famous professionals within different sports and activities as well as their own employees as internal brand ambassadors. To further strengthen the weight Thule puts on using internal brand ambassadors, this is what they write on their website:

Thule: *"Our employees are our best ambassadors"* (Thule Group 2022c)

To use both external and internal brand ambassadors strengthens Thule’s relationship with consumers as they can identify themselves foremost in the external brand ambassadors and the internal brand ambassadors creates trust.

Concluding Thule’s brand ambassadors, Thule stresses the importance of brand ambassadors when communicating the brand identity and uses both external and internal brand ambassadors which makes the estimation high.

Table 47. Thule’s degree of brand ambassadors

Low		High	
No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of external brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship

Storytelling

Thule makes comprehensive use of the technique of storytelling to generate emotions. In fact, Thule primarily tells stories of their external brand ambassadors:

Thule: *“We show the world that they inspire us and tell true stories about them and maybe film them, or write articles if they report or let them tell their story in their own way [...] to highlight who they are, what they do, and what they stand for that's important to us. [...] Where we have tried to get our [external] ambassadors involved as much as possible...”*

The quote illustrates how Thule’s external brand ambassadors, authorized people for marketing purposes, are chosen to convey the brand identity by embodying the corporation’s values. Furthermore, the quote illuminates that Thule’s storytelling evokes strong emotions as they tell

inspiring and true stories that focus on who the people are rather than the functionality of their products. On this basis, Thule strengthens the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition by telling true inspiring stories of their external brand ambassadors which makes the brand more appealing.

Concluding Thule’s storytelling, Thule comprehensively uses storytelling, thus strengthening the value proposition. Hence, we estimate Thule’s degree of storytelling to be high.

Table 48. Thule’s degree of storytelling

Low		High	
Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used and generates limited emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition

Summary

Table 49. Thule’s degree of external corporate branding

Degree of external corporate branding		Low		High	
External Brand identity elements	<i>Value Proposition</i>	The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions
	<i>Relationship</i>	The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers
	<i>Intended position</i>	The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible

Communication elements	<i>Expression</i>	Several messages and no unified visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning
	<i>Brand ambassadors</i>	No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of external brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship
	<i>Storytelling</i>	Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used and generates limited emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition
⇒ High degree of external corporate branding					

4.6 Levels of corporate branding

Our preliminary idea that corporate branding might be a matter of levels has been strengthened and illustrated by the four case corporations in the analysis. After a presentation and analysis of four case corporations' degrees of internal and external corporate branding, we are now able to compile the internal and external degree of corporate branding into four levels of corporate branding (Table 50).

Table 50. Four levels of corporate branding

	“Minor CB”	“External CB”	“Internal CB”	“Major CB”
Internal corporate branding	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>High</i>
External corporate branding	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
	Pantamera	Haglöfs	Gunnarshögs Gård	Thule

Table 50 presents four levels of corporate branding: Minor CB (Pantamera), External CB (Haglöfs), Internal CB (Gunnarshögs Gård), and Major CB (Thule). To further illustrate the degree of the internal and external corporate branding that is associated with each level, we present the two-dimensional framework: “Levels of corporate branding” (Figure 3).

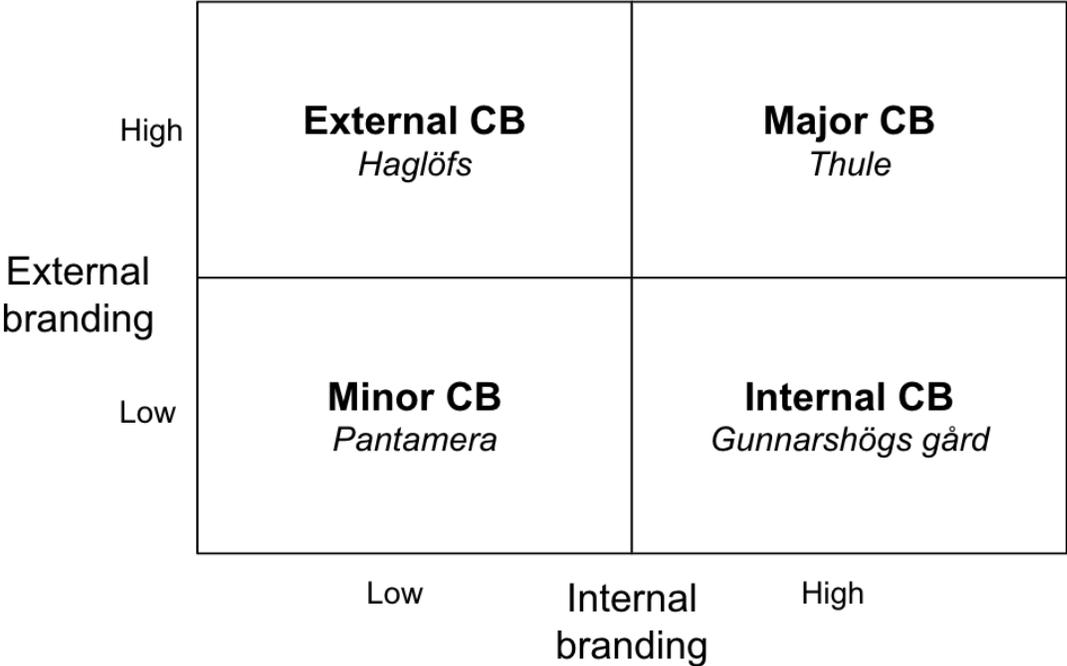


Figure 3. Levels of Corporate Branding Framework

The corporate branding level “**Minor CB**” is associated with a low degree of internal corporate branding and a low degree of external corporate branding. This level implies that the corporate core values are hardly incorporated into the internal and the external corporate brand identity and that the communication of corporate brand identity is not effective nor efficient. Thus, corporations that identify with the level of corporate branding “Minor CB” will likely have an incoherent brand identity and brand image, reaping few benefits of being a corporate brand.

The corporate branding level “**External CB**” is associated with a low degree of internal corporate branding and a high degree of external corporate branding. This level implies that the corporate core values are hardly or somewhat incorporated into the organization, in the internal corporate

brand identity elements. Additionally, the corporate core values are incorporated and expressed externally, in the external corporate branding elements, as well as communicated effectively and efficiently which gets the desired message across. Thus, the corporations that identify with the level “External CB” will likely be perceived similarly by stakeholders and therefore have a unified brand image. However, as the brand identity does not permeate the entire organization, the brand image and brand identity are scattered which leads to a hollow corporate brand which in turn, the corporate brand only provides a short-term competitive advantage.

The corporate branding level “**Internal CB**” is associated with a high degree of internal corporate branding and a low degree of external corporate branding. This level implies that the corporate core values are incorporated into the internal corporate brand identity, and solely hardly or somewhat incorporated into the external brand identity. Thus, the corporations that identify with the level “Internal CB” will likely be perceived similarly by all internal stakeholders that also share promises, beliefs, and values, and have core values that are deeply rooted in the internal brand identity as well as permeates the entire organization. However, as the brand identity is not expressed and communicated effectively externally in order to get their desired message across, in turn, brand identity and brand image do not fully correspond to each other.

The corporate branding level “**Major CB**” is associated with a high degree of internal corporate branding and a high degree of external corporate branding. This level implies that the corporate core values are incorporated into the internal and the external corporate brand identity. Thus, the organization is living and breathing its corporate brand as it permeates the entire organization and expresses so efficiently and effectively a compelling message that stakeholders identify with the brand. The delivery of the corporation's promises and core values with commitment and passion creates a coherent brand image and brand identity. Mastering corporate branding, on an internal and external level, Mastering corporate branding provides the corporation with a unique, sustainable long-term advantage.

Furthermore, Table 51 is a summarization of the theoretical levels of corporate branding demonstrating how to distinguish one level of corporate branding from another.

Table 51. Theoretical levels of corporate branding

Levels of corporate branding		“Minor CB”	“External CB”	“Internal CB”	“Major CB”
Degree of Internal corporate branding		Low	Low	High	High
Internal Brand Identity Elements	<i>Mission & Vision</i>	The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders
	<i>Culture</i>	A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity
	<i>Competence</i>	The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive
Degree of External corporate branding		Low	High	Low	High
External Brand Identity Elements	<i>Value Proposition</i>	The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions
	<i>Relationship</i>	The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers
	<i>Intended position</i>	The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible
Communication Elements	<i>Expression</i>	Several messages and no unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning
	<i>Brand ambassadors</i>	No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use external brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship
	<i>Storytelling</i>	Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used, but hardly stirs emotions in stakeholders	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition

Furthermore, we reason that the levels of corporate branding can be placed on a spectrum, stretching from a low degree of corporate branding to a high degree of corporate branding (Figure 4).

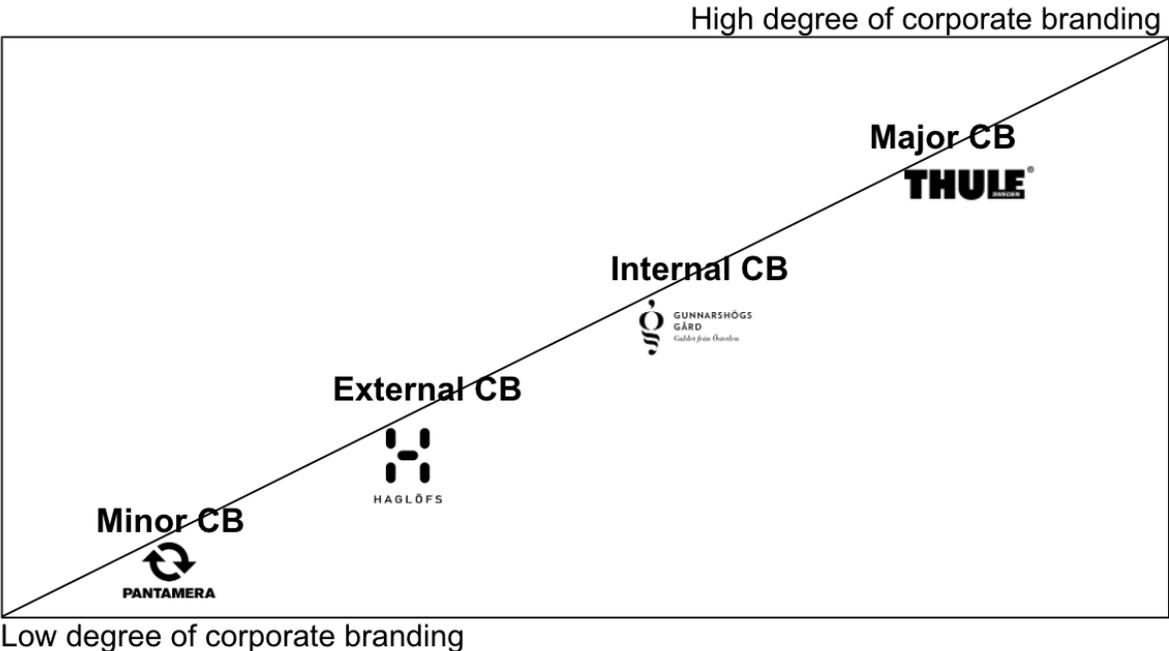


Figure 4. Corporate Branding Spectrum

The lowest level of corporate branding that we have identified is “Minor CB” and the highest level is “Major CB”. In between, we place “External CB” on a lower level than “Internal CB” as we argue that the dimensions of internal corporate branding are more corporate branding than focus on the external. The argument that the degree of internal corporate branding is of more importance for the level of corporate branding than the degree of external corporate branding resides within the literature where an emphasis is placed on the inside-out approach, taking ground in the core values to permeate both the internal organization, the external elements and corporate communication. Additionally, the internal anchoring of corporate identity is more long-term than focusing on the external dimension as the communicated brand promises otherwise will be perceived as hollow.

5 Discussion

The fifth chapter abstractly discusses, reflects, and elaborates on the findings of our research. Additionally, our findings will be viewed and discussed in relation to previous literature.

In the analysis, Table 51 presented the findings on how to theoretically distinguish one level of corporate branding from another. Each level of corporate branding had a unique degree of the essential elements of corporate branding that characterizes a certain level. However, the observant one realizes that the unique degree of element connected with a certain level is not identical to how the case corporations that fall under each level were assessed. Therefore, there is a flexibility in the Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix that allows some deviations from the degree of essential elements that characterize all levels. This flexibility implies that other corporations than the case corporations with ease could identify their level of corporate branding through the matrix and framework as it is meant to be a tool applicable for all corporations that practice corporate branding.

Speaking of the Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix, the essential elements of corporate branding in this study were not given any particular importance in relation to each other. All elements are viewed as having equal importance in corporate branding; however, we are aware that this probably is not the case in reality. For instance, the literature emphasizes the importance of internal brand identity element culture. However, the adding of weight to each element was not applicable in this research as this was the first attempt to determine the essential elements of corporate branding by compiling and comparing previous theories as well as adding and changing the elements after analyzing the empirical material. Nonetheless, the added weight would have contributed to reducing the gap between theory and reality even more.

The previous scope of corporate branding was quite narrow, with one level that reflected all corporate branding. However, our findings suggest that there are four levels of corporate branding, thus, extending the current scope of corporate branding to better reflect reality. Otherwise, the four

case corporations in this research would have fallen under the same level of corporate branding even though, as we have illustrated in the analysis, they are very diverse. Furthermore, only Thule is argued to be a Major CB and included in the definition of corporate branding in the existing literature. Additionally, the existing literature is not able to provide Pantamera, Haglöfs, or Gunnarhögs Gård with suggestions on how to become more corporate branding as only one level exists. On this basis, identifying and defining levels of corporate branding is of utmost importance. Corporate branding is more complex than previously thought or illustrated in the literature, as one size cannot reflect all corporate branding which we have exemplified and illustrated throughout the analysis.

One finding of the essential elements of the corporate branding that surprised us was the communication element of brand ambassadors. Brand ambassadors were not that evidently described in the literature with certain connections to corporate branding but rather a general technique. The employees as brand ambassadors had been given some attention in recent years but the interaction between internal and external brand ambassadors or how these might complement and should be used together was not highlighted. There are no clear distinctions in the literature regarding external brand ambassadors or internal, rather brand ambassadors or employees as brand ambassadors. The element of brand ambassadors was only detected as an essential element of corporate branding when similarities and differences were viewed cross-sectional.

6 Conclusion

The final chapter of the thesis will summarize and revisit the purpose, discuss and answer the research questions, and demonstrate whether the study's purpose was fulfilled. Moreover, the research's theoretical contributions and managerial implications will be discussed, followed by a presentation of the limitations and future research.

The purpose of this research was to identify and define levels of corporate branding, in order to better reflect, understand, and manage corporate branding. We sought to fill the gap within the current literature that was unable to distinguish between corporate branding, identify the current level of corporate branding, and how an organization can move towards a higher level of corporate branding. Therefore, the three following research questions guided the research in order to fulfill the purpose:

RQ1: How to distinguish one level of corporate branding from another?

RQ2: What degree of internal and external corporate branding is associated with different levels?

RQ3: Why is it important to identify and define levels of corporate branding?

The study compiled and compared previous theory within internal corporate branding, external corporate branding, and corporate communication to determine essential elements of corporate branding. Through a thematic analysis of the empirical data, collected on four case corporations using qualitative interviews, the essential elements were altered and new was added. The essential elements of corporate branding were then quantified into a scale that could measure the internal and external degree of corporate branding, which resulted in various findings and contributions. These findings constitute theoretical contributions and will therefore be linked to our research questions in the following section.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

We present three key theoretical contributions:

How to distinguish one level of corporate branding from another

The first theoretical contribution our findings provide is the possibility of distinguishing one level of corporate branding from another based on the degree of internal and external corporate branding. The degree of internal and external corporate branding is determined through the new Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix, a qualitative scale that measures the essential elements of corporate branding. The three internal elements that set corporate branding apart are the incorporation of core values in the internal brand identity elements: *mission & vision*, *culture*, and *competence*. The six external elements that set corporate branding apart are the incorporation of core values in the external brand identity elements: *value proposition*, *relationship*, and *positioning*, as well as the usage of communication techniques to communicate the brand identity, the communication elements: *expression*, *brand ambassadors*, and *storytelling*.

What degree of internal and external corporate branding is associated with different levels

The second theoretical contribution is that the levels of corporate branding relate to different degrees of internal and external corporate branding. The Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix estimates corporations' internal and external degree of corporate branding that results in a specific level of corporate branding in the framework. The framework's four levels of corporate branding were placed on a spectrum ranging from a low degree of corporate branding to a high degree of corporate branding. A low degree of internal and external corporate branding is associated with the lowest degree of corporate branding, namely "Minor CB". A low degree of internal corporate branding and a high degree of external corporate branding is associated with the next lowest level of corporate branding, namely "External CB". A high degree of internal corporate branding and a low degree of external corporate branding is associated with the next highest level of corporate branding, namely "Internal CB". A high degree of internal and external corporate branding is associated with the highest degree of corporate branding, namely "Major CB".

Why it is important to identify and define levels of corporate branding

The third theoretical contribution concerns why it is important to identify and define levels of corporate branding. A single level of corporate branding is *not* sufficient enough to capture the complexity that resides in reality.

Our findings nuance corporate branding as it extends the single level of corporate branding by classifying corporate branding into four different levels. The previously single level of corporate branding can be adequate to the highest level of corporate branding, however, as we have illustrated with our case corporations, only one of these falls under the previous single level. Therefore, we bring nuance to corporate branding through a classification that better reflects reality, thus, decreasing the gap between literature and reality.

6.2 Managerial implications

Our study offers three significant managerial implications:

How to measure the level of corporate branding

The first managerial implication is that our findings have provided a way for management and organizations to measure the level of corporate branding. Through the Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix, managers can identify their current level of corporate branding and view their current standpoint to consider if they are satisfied with their corporate branding or if it is desirable to reach a higher level.

Previous theories within corporate branding did not offer this possibility and therefore created managerial headaches as they could not evaluate the efforts taken which evidently made the management of the corporate brand much more difficult. The opportunity to measure corporate branding also opens up for using the result as an argument for investing more in the corporate brand.

Understand the level of corporate branding

The second managerial implication is that our findings of this research as we have made the theory's description of reality more graspable by reflecting some of the complexity, in reality, can help managers to better understand their corporate branding. The previous knowledge managers could gain from the literature was typically general tools and guidance regarding the single level of corporate branding. However, by identifying and defining four levels of corporate branding, managers can now understand their individual corporate branding and what it implies to be on a certain level. Therefore, our tool creates an interest to explore their own corporate branding as they are provided with the knowledge of what it implies for them to be on a certain level, offering a deeper understanding of the levels of corporate branding.

How to move to a higher level of corporate branding

The third managerial implication is the possibility for organization's to gain a higher level of corporate branding. After identifying their current level of corporate branding, the essential elements of corporate branding that the corporation scored poorly on can be used as a checklist for improvement in order to move to a higher level of corporate branding. Thus, our findings provide individual suggestions for how corporations can become more corporate branding which previous literature could not provide.

6.3 Limitations & further research

This research has defined and identified levels of corporate branding. Our findings can be seen as quite unique as we are among the first ones to nuance the concept of corporate branding. However, even though we have paved the way for future researchers to explore the levels of corporate branding further, there is still a long way ahead to capture the complexity of corporate branding to truthfully and with precision reflect reality in theory. Not the least, as the study is one of the first of its kind, certain limitations exist.

One limitation of this study is that we did not distinguish between the importance of the elements used to evaluate the levels of corporate branding, all criteria were viewed equally. Therefore, further research could put an emphasis on the most important criteria as well as add more if necessary. For instance, correlating the corporate branding elements to the success of a corporate

brand to determine the importance of each element as well as determining that these are relevant elements for evaluating the degree of corporate branding. Moreover, another research direction could be to get inspired by our procedure and provide similar levels to better reflect the reality of companies engaged in product branding as well. At last, we truly believe that the testing and developing of the Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix would be beneficial and strengthen its potential and applicable in practice. Another limitation is that we have assumed that all managerial have extensive knowledge within their corporate branding and core values that are up to date. However, this corporations at the lower degree of corporate branding, might perhaps not have these insights.

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Appendix

Appendix A - Corporate Branding Assessment Matrix

Degree of internal corporate branding		Low		High	
Internal Brand identity elements	<i>Mission & Vision</i>	The statements are derived from a minority of core values	The statements are derived from the majority of core values	The statements are derived from all core values to some extent	The statements are fully derived from all core values, thus engaging and inspiring stakeholders
	<i>Culture</i>	A minority of core values are embraced	The majority of core values are embraced	All core values are embraced to some extent	All core values are fully embraced by the whole organization, thus sustaining credibility and authenticity
	<i>Competence</i>	The competence reflects a minority of core values	The competence reflects the majority of core values	The competence reflects all core values to some extent	The competence fully reflects all core values, and thus is competitive
Degree of external corporate branding		Low		High	
External Brand identity elements	<i>Value Proposition</i>	The value proposition is based on a minority of core values	The value proposition is based on the majority of core values	The value proposition is based on all core values to some extent	The value proposition is fully based on all core values, thus driving purchasing decisions
	<i>Relationship</i>	The relationship is built upon a minority of core values	The relationship is built upon the majority of core values	The relationship is built upon all core values to some extent	The relationship is fully built upon all core values, thus fostering loyal consumers
	<i>Intended position</i>	The intended position is rooted in a minority of core values	The intended position is rooted in the majority of core values	The intended position is rooted in all core values to some extent	The intended position is fully rooted in all core values, thus is perceived as distinct and credible

Communication elements	<i>Expression</i>	Several messages and no unified visual expression	Several messages and a somewhat unified visual expression	Fairly well unified strategic message and visual expression	Fully unified strategic message and visual expression, thus strengthening the positioning
	<i>Brand ambassadors</i>	No usage of brand ambassadors	Use of external brand ambassadors	Use of internal brand ambassadors	Use of internal and external brand ambassadors, thus strengthening the relationship
	<i>Storytelling</i>	Storytelling, if used at all, does not generate emotions	Storytelling is somewhat used and generates limited emotions	Storytelling is fairly well used and generates emotions	Storytelling is comprehensively used, thus strengthening the emotional and identificational benefits of the value proposition