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**EMPLOYEES' ROLES IN CORPORATE BRAND IDENTITY CO-CREATION IN B2B
CONTEXT**

Master's Thesis

Marketing

April 2024

Unit Department of Marketing, Management and International Business			
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Title Employees' roles in corporate brand identity co-creation in B2B context			
Subject Marketing	Type of the degree Master's degree	Time of publication April 2024	Number of pages 74 + 3
Abstract			
<p>In the light of recent research, corporate brand identity is a temporary result of a dynamic process which involved multiple stakeholders, both internal and external ones. But what are the roles of employees in that process, those remain unknown. Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the following research question: "What are the roles of employees in corporate brand identity co-creation?" Previous research has described the co-creation process and roles of business partners, yet falls short on identifying the roles of employees, i.e. pivotal actors.</p> <p>This study was conducted in a digital marketing agency. As a result of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, seven action-based roles were identified. Aligning with the underpinnings of role theory, this study found that employees' roles are either assigned or proactively adopted. Hence, company-assigned roles are <i>Internalizer</i>, <i>Representative</i>, <i>Innovator</i>, <i>Marketer</i> and <i>Founding Member</i>. Proactively adopted roles are <i>Advocate</i> and <i>Contester</i>.</p> <p>This study contributes to theoretical knowledge multiple ways and offers valuable managerial implications. Results support previous findings but also elaborate on current knowledge. First and foremost, each employee and role 1) benefits corporate brand identity 2) participates in co-creation. This thesis suggests that managers should recognize not only the roles but also employees' reasons and motivations for participating since by tapping into the potential employees possess, managers can develop, transmit and strengthen corporate brand identity. While some employees' participation means planning and developing, others focus on representing the corporate brand identity to external stakeholders. Most importantly, this thesis puts emphasis on people. Ultimately, that is what corporate brand identity co-creation is all about.</p>			
Keywords corporate brand identity, co-creation, business-to-business, performativity theory, role theory			
Additional information			

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1	Introduction to the topic and justification	6
1.2	Purpose of the study and research questions.....	8
1.3	Key concepts	8
1.4	Research methodology	10
1.5	Structure of the study	11
2	CO-CREATING CORPORATE BRAND IDENTITY IN BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS CONTEXT	12
2.1	Brief history of corporate branding	12
2.2	Corporate branding in business-to-business context.....	15
2.3	Corporate brand identity	16
2.4	Corporate brand identity creation as a co-creational and interactive process	19
2.5	Performative outlook on corporate brand identity co-creation.....	22
2.6	Action-based roles	25
2.7	Theoretical synthesis.....	27
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	33
3.1	Research strategy	33
3.2	Data source and data collection	34
3.3	Data analysis	37
4	EMPIRICAL FINDINGS.....	40
4.1	Company-assigned roles	40
4.1.1	Internalizer	40
4.1.2	Representative.....	41
4.1.3	Innovator	43
4.1.4	Marketer.....	44

4.1.5	Founding member	46
4.2	Proactively adopted roles	47
4.2.1	Advocate	47
4.2.2	Contester	47
4.3	Reasons and motivations for participating in corporate brand identity co-creation	49
4.4	Differing perceptions	51
4.5	The temporal dimensions	52
5	CONCLUSION	53
5.1	Answers to the research questions.....	53
5.2	Theoretical contributions	56
5.3	Managerial implications	59
5.4	Evaluation of the study and future research suggestions.....	62
REFERENCES.....		65
Appendix 1: Outline of a semi-structured interviews: employees.....		75
Appendix 2: Outline of a semi-structured interviews: managers.....		78
Appendix 3: Reporting the use of artificial intelligence		80

FIGURES

Figure 1 Towards corporate branding (adapted from Knox & Bickerton, 2003, p. 1002) ...	13
Figure 2 The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (adapted from Urde, 2013)	17
Figure 3 Co-creation (adapted from Sarasvuo, Rindell & Kovalchuk, 2022, p. 547)	20
Figure 4 Corporate brand identity co-creation process (adapted from Iglesias et al., 2020)	21
Figure 5 Codes and themes.....	39

TABLES

Table 1 Employees' performances and roles in employer brand co-creation (adapted from Näppä et al., 2023).....	30
Table 2 Interviews	36
Table 3 Employees' roles in corporate brand identity co-creation.....	55

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the topic and justification

Although branding as an academic field of study has a long history, corporate branding emerged only in the mid-1990s and early 2000s (see e.g. Balmer, 1995; Hatch & Schultz, 2001). According to Balmer (2012), at the nascent stages, corporate brand was perceived as something that managers both determined and controlled. Therefore, corporate brand was this managerial creation that was not in the hands of employees nor other stakeholders.

Especially during the past ten years, the traditional perspective of corporate branding has been challenged (Iglesias, Ind, & Schultz, 2020, p. 3–23). Instead of a top-down managerial process, corporate branding is nowadays considered to be co-created with numerous stakeholders, both internal and external (e.g. D. Aaker, 1996; Koporcic & Halinen, 2018; von Wallpach, Voyer, Kastanakis, & Mühlbacher, 2017). Iglesias and Bonet (2012) state that in today's hyperconnected world, corporate brand is built within and outside of the organization. Alongside the introduction of this new era, the idea of managerial control has faded away (Wider, von Wallpach, & Mühlbacher, 2018).

This thesis aims to elaborate on current theoretical knowledge in corporate brand identity co-creation and bridge the research gap as pointed out in existing literature. First, it should be pointed out that research on corporate brand co-creation is at its nascent stages. The paradigm shift from a traditional to co-creational perspective has provided new insights into corporate brand identity, but also raised questions and the need for more research, as noted by e.g. Iglesias et al. (2020), Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones (2017) and von Wallpach et al. (2017).

The focus of this thesis is on who and how – the actors' actions and roles in corporate brand identity co-creation – instead of e.g. power of the brand or managing brand equity, which have attracted the most interest in business-to-business branding literature (Seyedghorban, Matanda, & LaPlaca, 2016). Employees as well as internal stakeholders in general are considered central actors in branding in the light of recent

research (see e.g. Iglesias, Ind, et al., 2020; Iglesias, Landgraf, Ind, Markovic, & Koporcic, 2020; Näppä, Ek Styvén, & Foster, 2023; Siano, Vollero, & Bertolini, 2022). Employees not only contribute to the success of the brand, but also actively co-create the brand (Balmer & Podnar, 2021; Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Mühlbacher, 2022). Despite the recognized potential and participation of employees, knowledge on the roles they can adopt or be assigned, is scant. Prior research has focused on for instance business partners' roles on corporate brand image co-creation and the corporate brand identity co-creation process itself, but employees – pivotal stakeholders – remain underresearched (Iglesias et al., 2020; Saraniemi, 2022). Need for further research on employees' roles is recognized in previous studies (e.g. da Silveira & Simões, 2022).

This thesis takes a performative perspective to corporate brand identity co-creation. Performativity theory offers novelty to this study since it has been utilized in branding research, but only to some extent. To provide a few examples, Iglesias et al. (2020), Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones (2017), von Wallpach et al. (2017) and Näppä et al. (2023) applied performativity theory in their research. As Kristal, Baumgarth and Henseler (2020, p. 250) suggest, “interdependencies, synergies and tensions between the different identities are unfolded which supports the argument for researching corporate brand identity from a performative perspective”. Performativity theory allows to examine the process of corporate brand identity co-creation: e.g. who are the involved actors and what performances are enacted (Iglesias et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, & Espersen, 2017). The process, and the performances which constitute the process, also necessitate more research to fully understand the complex phenomenon of corporate brand formation (Mühlbacher, 2022).

When it comes to the context of this study, business-to-business branding has received little attention compared to branding research that is set in the business-to-consumer environment (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011). In fact, business-to-business branding requires more research for multiple reasons. As an example, at the heart of business-to-business branding are relationships: employees 1) deliver the brand 2) represent their employer 3) influence external stakeholders' perception of the (corporate) brand (Ind & Schmidt, 2019, p. 233; Saraniemi, 2022). Tapping into the potential of these

interaction opportunities is especially crucial for SMEs where the resources for corporate branding are more than often limited (Koporcic & Halinen, 2018). Yet, how employees are involved or what their roles are besides their formal position in corporate brand co-creation, remain unclear. By recognizing the brand-related performative actions employees enact and employees' roles, managers could better learn to utilize a valuable asset, employees. From a managerial perspective, this could in turn 1) help advance corporate brand identity co-creation 2) assist in noticing the most valuable and irreplaceable employees. From a theoretical perspective, identifying employees' roles could be beneficial for the brand management literature as action-based roles offer insight on employees' (expected) behavior (Heikkinen, Mainela, Still, & Tähtinen, 2007).

1.2 Purpose of the study and research questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the roles of employees in corporate brand identity co-creation in business-to-business context.

The main research question is as follows:

What are the roles of employees in corporate brand identity co-creation?

To answer the main question, the following sub-questions are presented:

What types of brand-related performative actions can be observed?

How employees and managers describe the roles?

1.3 Key concepts

In this thesis, the key concepts are as follows: *corporate brand identity, corporate brand identity co-creation, role, brand-related performative action.*

Corporate brand identity

Corporate brand identity is a concept that has evolved over time, but it is also the main element of a corporate brand (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020). Corporate brand identity is what makes a corporate brand 1) unique and 2) relevant to its stakeholders (Jean-Noel Kapferer, 2008 via Iglesias et al., 2020). Corporate brand identity consists of multiple elements: value proposition, relationships, position, expression, core, personality, mission & vision, culture and competences. It is thus an integrated whole and a combination of multiple elements, both internal and external.

This thesis applies da Silveira, Lages and Simões' (2013) definition of brand identity. In the article (da Silveira et al., 2013, p. 35), brand identity is defined as:

“a dynamic process developing over time through mutually influencing inputs from brand managers and other social constituents (e.g., consumers)”

Corporate brand identity co-creation

Corporate brand identity co-creation refers to the process through which corporate brand identity is created together with multiple stakeholders. Co-creation is first and foremost continuous, an incessant process. In branding, co-creation refers to 1) interaction 2) influencing among stakeholders that influence a brand (Sarasvuo, Rindell, & Kovalchuk, 2022). It results in an everchanging, temporary corporate brand identity (see e.g. Iglesias, Ind, et al., 2020; Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Sarasvuo et al., 2022).

Role

Traditionally, a role is defined as:

“behavioral expectations attached to an individual’s position in a social structure (Stryker, 2007; Stryker & Burke, 2000)”

A role not only predicts and shapes the behavior of an individual but also influence individuals' lives (Anglin, Kincaid, Short, & Allen, 2022). Roles stem from actions, and are thus action-based (Heikkinen et al., 2007). The formation and nature of roles as well as the streams of role theory will be discussed in depth later.

Brand-related performative action

In this thesis, corporate brand identity co-creation is approached with and viewed through the lens of performativity theory. The performative outlook is further discussed in chapter 2.5. In essence, brand-related performative actions refer to performative actions that stakeholders enact and that co-create the corporate brand identity. This thesis elaborates von Wallpach et al.'s (2017) and Iglesias et al.'s (2020) findings and understandings of stakeholder performances and activities. However, the term *brand-related performative action* is utilized to better illustrate and explain the activities.

1.4 Research methodology

This study is qualitative since the aim is to form a holistic understanding of the phenomenon in question and the topic is quite new (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Literature review in chapter two covers central theoretical concepts which are corporate branding, performativity theory and role theory. This thesis approaches building theoretical knowledge in an abductive way as existing theory is necessary but not sufficient for answering the research questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

In this study, data is collected with semi-structured interviews since the objective is to gather rich data (Myers, 2013, pp. 119–123). Interviews are held with employees and managers of a selected case company, a Finnish digital marketing agency. The criteria are explained and case company is introduced in chapter 3. Interview questions are formulated based on the research questions and previous theoretical knowledge. The data is then analyzed following the thematic analysis process and compared to the existing knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 4–6). Lastly, results are explained and the findings are categorized into theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

1.5 Structure of the study

This study is structured in the following method. First, the reader is introduced with the topic of the study as well as given justification to the chosen topic. Additionally, purpose of the study is explained and research questions determined. Then, key concepts are defined and research methodology discussed.

Chapter two covers the theoretical framework. The reader is introduced with corporate branding as a concept and phenomenon. By providing a brief overview of the history of corporate branding, the evolving nature of the concept is described. After that, corporate branding in B2B setting, and namely, the impact of the context is explained. Next, corporate brand identity as well as corporate brand identity as a co-creational process are discussed more in depth. Then, performative approach to corporate brand identity co-creation and role theory are explained. At the end, theoretical concepts are summed up and the reader is given a theoretical synthesis.

After building the theoretical foundation, research strategy and reasoning for the chosen methodology are explained. Then, the case company is introduced and data collection described. Next, data analysis method and process are disclosed.

Chapter five focuses on results. The gathered data is presented and analyzed to provide a strong foundation for discussion and concluding remarks. Additionally, data is evaluated based on the theoretical foundation provided previously.

In the final chapter, theoretical contributions and managerial implications of the study are discussed. After that, limitations of the study are evaluated. Lastly, elaborating on the findings and limitations of the study, further research avenues are proposed.

2 CO-CREATING CORPORATE BRAND IDENTITY IN BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS CONTEXT

This chapter provides a theoretical foundation for the study. Brief history overview functions as a basis for understanding the development of corporate branding. Next, state of research in business-to-business branding is explained to set the scene better. After that, reader is introduced to the main concept, i.e. corporate brand identity. Corporate brand identity is first discussed at a general level and then as a co-creational and interactive process. Then, performativity theory and the application of it are described. Since employees' roles are of interest in this study, role theory and formation of roles are reviewed. Lastly, the theoretical concepts are synthesized.

2.1 Brief history of corporate branding

As stated in the introduction, corporate branding emerged in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. Although the roots of branding as practice and academic field can be traced to the early 1900s, corporate branding was a non-existent concept for rather long. However, Iglesias et al. (2020) state that it is the longer history and development of branding at a general level and in other sub-categories that have played a fundamental role in the emergence and evolution of corporate branding.

Considering the topic of this thesis, it should be noted that the development of services branding literature laid a foundation for the emergence of corporate branding (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Iglesias, Ind, et al., 2020, p. 4). According to Iglesias et al. (2022, p. 4), services branding broadened the scope of branding. Previously, the focus had been on product branding which emphasizes the importance of customer satisfaction and is transactional by nature (Balmer, 1995; Iglesias, Ind, et al., 2020, p. 4). Services branding on the other hand extended the timespan and scope of branding as well as began shedding light on the importance of establishing long-term relationships with customers (Iglesias, Ind, et al., 2020, p. 4).

What also changed, was the role and importance of employees. Before the shift in thinking, products were in the central position. (Iglesias, Ind, et al., 2020.) However, product-centric approach has limitations, and is not as applicable in the services

context (Shostack, 1977). Researchers started to recognize the importance of employees as the deliverers of a service brand. That is, employees not only deliver the service, but also the brand. (Berry, 2000; Vargo & Lusch, 2004.) Thus, a clear shift in thinking was taken which paved the way for corporate branding.

In addition to the academic development in the field of branding, similar topics to corporate branding had also been prevalent in academic discussion and research in organizational studies. Knox and Bickerton (2003) argue that developments in organization theory “have mirrored developments of the brand concept in the marketing literature”. While brand image, brand positioning, brand identity and corporate association had been of interest in the branding literature, in organizational studies academics researched corporate image, corporate personality, corporate identity and corporate reputation (Figure 1). Knox and Bickerton (2003) see the emergence of corporate branding as the joining of these two advancements. Hence, corporate branding has multidisciplinary roots.

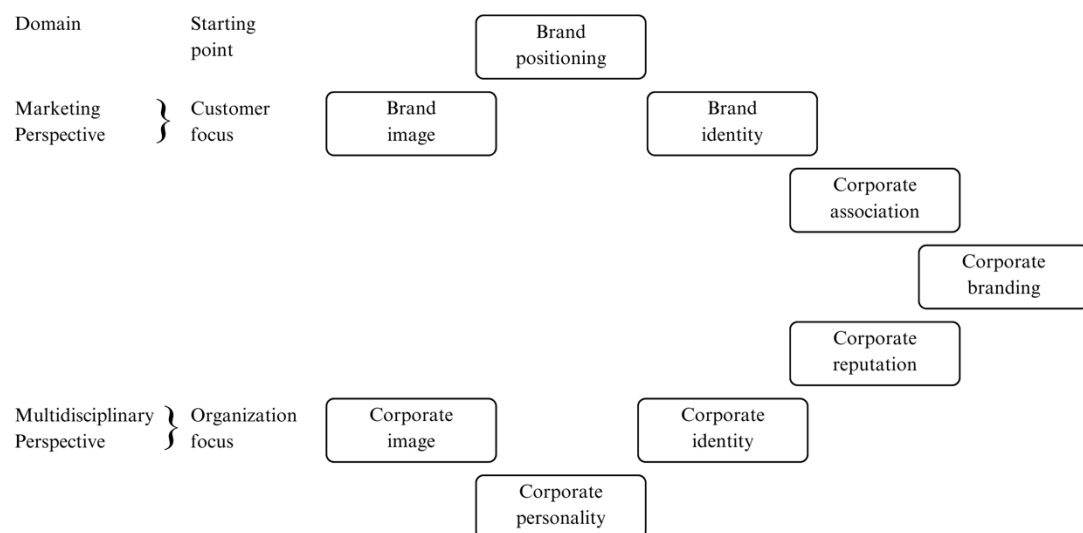


Figure 1 Towards corporate branding (adapted from Knox & Bickerton, 2003, p. 1002)

During its nascent stages, corporate branding was understood differently than it is nowadays. Especially in the mid- and late 1990s, corporate brand was perceived as

something that managers both determined and controlled (Balmer, 2012). For instance, Harris & de Chernatony (2001) state that “managers first need to define a brand’s values and then ensure employees’ values and behaviour are consistent with them”. The authors acknowledge that employees do play a role in corporate brand building and communicate the corporate brand to the company’s customers, but their role is rather limited (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001). In the early ages of corporate branding, employees were referred to e.g. as brand’s ambassadors and as transmitters of the corporate brand (Balmer, 1995; Hemsley, 1998 via Harris & de Chernatony, 2001).

Although the approach to corporate branding was different, it was understood that a favourable and strong corporate brand has numerous benefits, such as increasing the value of products and services (D. A. Aaker, 2004; Balmer, 1995). It was also acknowledged that corporate branding should be done, and the corporate brand itself managed (Balmer, 1995).

Over time, corporate branding as a concept evolved. Strategic approach began to emerge and gain wider acceptance as well as recognition (Schultz, Antorini, & Csabai, 2005). The scope of salient stakeholders widened: it is no longer solely the managers who should be interested in corporate branding. Instead, corporate branding became a more permeable, an enterprise-wide, concept that concerns all stakeholders, both internal and external ones. Corporate brand has an impact on the whole organization and its activities, from top to bottom. (Hatch & Schultz, 2008, p. 10.)

The multi-stakeholder perspective started gaining momentum not only in corporate branding literature, but also branding research in general (see e.g. Gregory, 2007; Mäläskä, Saraniemi, & Tähtinen, 2011; Roper & Davies, 2007; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). As a result of emerging technologies and stakeholder empowerment, stakeholders’ role changed from passive recipients to active participants and traditional persuasion strategies were no longer sufficient. Instead, winds of change begun to blow in brand management as well: communication and negotiation with stakeholders entered the picture. (Siano et al., 2022; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013.)

This shift in operation and thinking lead to a new era where stakeholders’ roles, nature of the (corporate) brand and brand management were and had to be redefined. It should

be noted that the shift was not minor. In fact, academics describe it as paradigm shift, a research avenue that considers (corporate) branding as a co-creative process. (Iglesias, Ind, et al., 2020, pp. 6–8.) Co-creation and corporate branding as those are currently seen in branding literature, are discussed further in chapter 2.4.

2.2 Corporate branding in business-to-business context

For rather long, branding research focused on business-to-consumer setting instead of business-to-business context. Some academics even suggested that the practical relevance of branding is insignificant for business-to-business companies. (Baumgarth, 2010.) While conceptualizations of brand-related issues and models for brand construction in B2C settings have existed for a long time, in B2B branding the level of development is lower (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011).

Recently, B2B branding has gained increasing interest (e.g. Iglesias et al., 2022; Iglesias et al., 2020; Kristal et al., 2020). However, the underlying foundation is heavily based on B2C branding research. The conceptualizations utilized in B2B branding have been transferred from B2C literature in a rather straightforward manner although characteristics and dynamics of the two settings differ fundamentally (Seyedghorban et al., 2016). Therefore, conceptualizations of brand related terms and understandings of brand management should not be adopted directly. Instead, the learnings should be adapted accordingly. (Baumgarth, 2010.)

What differs B2B brands from B2C brands, is the fundamental nature of the brand and impact of business setting. That is, relationships and long-term interactions form the foundation for and permeate B2B brands (Ind & Schmidt, 2019, p. 232–234). The process of business-to-business corporate branding will be discussed later, however, corporate branding essentially occurs when individuals interact with each other (Koporcic & Halinen, 2018; Kristal et al., 2020). In business-to-business settings, individuals are in fact the key drivers of (corporate) branding. Individuals not only represent themselves but also the organization they work in. (Koporcic & Halinen, 2018.) This emphasizes the importance that 1) the whole organization understands the brand and 2) employees agree with the brand message (Ind & Schmidt, 2019, p. 233). Particularly in knowledge-intensive business services, corporate brand and external

stakeholders' perception of it, relies heavily on employees' behavior (Saraniemi, 2022). Consistent delivery of the brand is vital since the lack of it might lead to uncertainty at the receiver's end (Ind & Schmidt, 2019). Especially when it comes to knowledge intensive business services (KIBS), trust, stability and reliability are valued, if not required by clients (Karantinou & Hogg, 2009). Interpersonal interaction and constant communication with clients are characteristic to KIBS and the delivery of those: services are often customized and carried out in intense collaboration with clients, which further highlights the importance of interaction (Cabigiosu & Campagnolo, 2019). Additionally, despite the limitedness of resources for branding in SMEs, criticality and impact of interpersonal interactions should be understood. Boundary spanning interactions, i.e., interactions between internal and external stakeholders constitute the most important ground for corporate branding. (Koporcic & Halinen, 2018.) This indicates that companies should put effort into and take advantage of situations where company representatives can interact with external stakeholders, such as potential customers.

Though B2B sector is heterogenous, it is widely understood that a strong B2B brand brings benefits to the company, such as reduced risk in purchasing and being seen in a more favourable light (Ind & Schmidt, 2019 p. 232-234; Saraniemi, 2022). Benefits impact especially the purchasing process, interaction with network and relationships, and as those are at the heart of B2B branding and B2B business logics, value and necessity of B2B branding is undeniable (Ind & Schmidt, 2019 p. 232-234; Mäläskä et al., 2011).

2.3 Corporate brand identity

While corporate brand identity is a sub-concept and one element of corporate brand, corporate brand identity itself consists of multiple elements (Urde, 2013). As a response to the lack of a framework to corporate brand identity, Urde (2013) provided one, the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (figure 2). Utilization of the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix, i.e. the CBIM, in this thesis is twofold: 1) it provides a framework for understanding the elements of corporate brand identity 2) it functions as a sense-making tool in the semi-structured interviews with which corporate brand identity is explained to interviewees.

When it comes to the advantages of the CBIM, it offers a comprehensive tool for understanding and planning a corporate brand identity since it covers both external and internal elements as well as those that are at the interface of both. As figure 2 illustrates, core is at the center of corporate brand identity. Constituting of key promise and core values, the core should reflect on all other elements. Vice versa, every other element should reflect the core. All elements are thus related to each other and form an entity, and as Urde (2013) states “content of one element *echoes* that of the others, with the core as the centre of elements”.

External	Value proposition	Relationships	Position
External / Internal	Expression	Core	Personality
Internal	Mission & Vision	Culture	Competences

Figure 2 The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (adapted from Urde, 2013)

Internal elements, *Mission & Vision*, *Culture*, *Competences*, connect to the everyday life in a company (Urde, 2013). That is, why a company exists, where is it heading and how it operates (Collins & Porras, 1997; De Chernatony, 2010). The CBIM includes culture and competences which signals that corporate brand identity is in fact a somewhat mundane concept. Organizations’ capabilities as well as internal attitudes, ways of communication and company’s place of origin each play a vital role in corporate brand identity (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Jean-Noël Kapferer, 2012; Urde, 2013).

Internal-external elements, which are *Expression*, *Core* and *Personality*, connect internal and external elements of corporate brand identity. As stated above, *Core* is at the heart of corporate brand identity, and answers to the question “What do we promise and what are the core values that sum up what our brand stands for?”. *Personality*, on the other hand, refers to corporate character. Although the brand in question is

corporate brand, not the employees' own personal brand, employees' personalities influence the company's brand. Therefore, a company's personality, as corporate brand identity overall, cannot be wholly determined or controlled by managers. Thirdly, *Expression* includes the verbal, visual and other types of identifiers. It consists of both tangible and intangible features, in essence the visual identity of a company. (Urde, 2013.)

External elements, *Value Proposition*, *Relationships* and *Position*, influence external stakeholders' perception of a company. However, the influence is limited and requires consistency with the six other elements. (Urde, 2013.) *Value proposition* refers to the persuasive arguments directed to external stakeholders, both customers and non-customers (Frow & Payne, 2011; Rintamäki, Kuusela, & Mitronen, 2007). *Relationships* is concerned with business relationships as well as how those are built (Urde, 2013). Since companies generally have established numerous relationships and external stakeholders might influence others, this element requires consideration and effort (Farquhar, 2005; Fournier, 1998). Lastly, *Position* addresses how management wishes the corporate brand to be positioned from three perspectives: 1) in the market 2) in the minds of customers 3) in the minds of non-customers (Keller, Aperia, & Georgson, 2012 via Urde, 2013). It should be noted that *Position* is indeed the intended position, not necessarily the current position of the corporate brand (Urde, 2013). In conclusion, corporate brand identity consists of nine elements which should be in harmony with each other to achieve full potential and benefit.

According to the traditional understanding, corporate brand identity is a unique and stable combination of values, attributes and associations that are defined and controlled by managers (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Keller, 1993). In the light of recent and current research, this interpretation no longer holds true. While numerous definitions for corporate brand identity exist, common and widely accepted characteristics can be identified, many of which are interconnected.

As mentioned, this thesis applies da Silveira, Lages and Simões' (2013) definition of brand identity. Nowadays, as da Silveira et al.'s (2013) definition also indicates, the nature of corporate brand identity is considered more dynamic and temporal. Though the core values lay a foundation for corporate brand identity and generally mirror both

the brand's origin and founders' values, permanency cannot be expected (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Urde, 2003). Even core values can change over time and corporate brand identity is a temporary outcome of a dynamic process. Thus, corporate brand identity is in a constant flux. (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020.)

In addition to being dynamic and temporal, corporate brand identity is also polysemous (Zamparini, Visconti, & Lurati, 2022). Polysemic nature of corporate brands indicates that multiple perceptions of a brand co-exist, and those stem from co-creation that occurs between internal and external stakeholders. In other words, as stakeholders interact, re-interpretations of corporate brand identity emerge. (Michel, 2017; von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, et al., 2017; Zamparini et al., 2022.)

It should also be noted that the thought of corporate brand identity being endogenous to an organization has been challenged (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). Since corporate brand identity develops in a social process involving multiple stakeholders, both internal and external, brand identity is not immune to change nor external pressure (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). Hence, corporate brand identity is shaped by multiple people, i.e., co-creational, and processual. (da Silveira & Simões, 2022.) Co-creation and the process will be discussed further in the next sub-chapter.

2.4 Corporate brand identity creation as a co-creational and interactive process

Sarasvuo, Rindell and Kovalchuk (2022) describe co-creation as 1) interaction or 2) influencing without interaction (figure 3). Influencing leans on the fundamental idea of branding, which is to influence (Aaker, 1996). Influencing and being influenced occurs on a mental level indicating that the brand is not necessarily or directly impacted, but an individual's perception of a brand is. Additionally, influencing might occur unintentionally. Although interaction and intention are emphasized in the definition of co-creation, influencing without interaction is still suggested as co-creation. (Sarasvuo et al., 2022.)

Sarasvuo et al. (2022) explain that multi-stakeholder interaction (a process) functions as a foundation for co-creation. Interaction can emerge in numerous ways and contexts. Examples of interaction range from workshops (online and offline), discussions that

revolve around a brand, brand-related competitions and so forth. (Sarasvuo et al., 2022.) Even though co-creation that takes place in an offline context typically impacts a smaller group of people, it might strengthen the bond between stakeholders better, especially when it comes to the bond between the company and external stakeholders (Chepurna & Rialp Criado, 2018; Sarasvuo et al., 2022). Thus, benefits and disadvantages of both online and offline co-creation should be considered when planning co-creation activities.

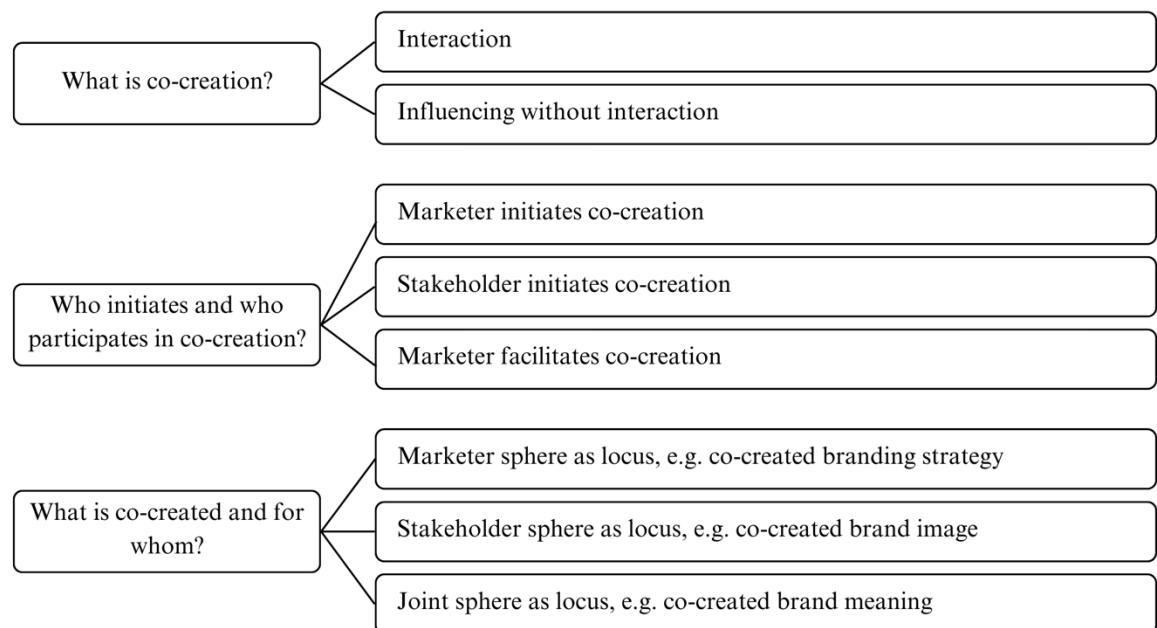


Figure 3 Co-creation (adapted from Sarasvuo, Rindell & Kovalchuk, 2022, p. 547)

Co-creation brings stakeholders together, is longitudinal and results in corporate brand development (Abratt & Mingione, 2022, p. 24–41; Ind, Iglesias, & Markovic, 2017). It is a dynamic, active and social process that builds on interaction between stakeholders (Ind & Schmidt, 2019, p. 232–234).

When it comes to initiation and participation, Sarasvuo et al. (2022) suggest that co-creation might be asymmetrical. On some occasions, stakeholders (e.g. customers and business partners) initiate co-creation, and on others, marketers may act as initiators or facilitators. Each approach comes with its advantages and disadvantages. For instance, marketer-initiated co-creation may benefit marketers or participants but not both. On the other hand, when marketers act as facilitators, stakeholder influences

must be overseen, but managers should accept stakeholder participation and influence while simultaneously facilitating the ongoing dialogue. Hence, conflicting views may arise, and co-creation means both enabling and managing. (Sarasvuo et al., 2022.)

Sarasvuo et al.'s (2022) perspective of marketers acting as facilitators of co-creation aligns well with how co-creation and the process of it is commonly understood in corporate branding literature that is set in B2B context. Although it is recognized and accepted that corporate brand identity co-creation is a process, the process itself has been researched and illustrated only by a few scholars (e.g. Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017).

Corporate brand identity co-creation process as described by Iglesias et al. (2020) is illustrated in figure 4. Iglesias et al. (2020) approach corporate brand identity co-creation process with performativity, and consider that the process consists of stakeholder performances which influence the corporate brand identity and cause it to evolve. Performativity and stakeholder performances will be discussed more later.

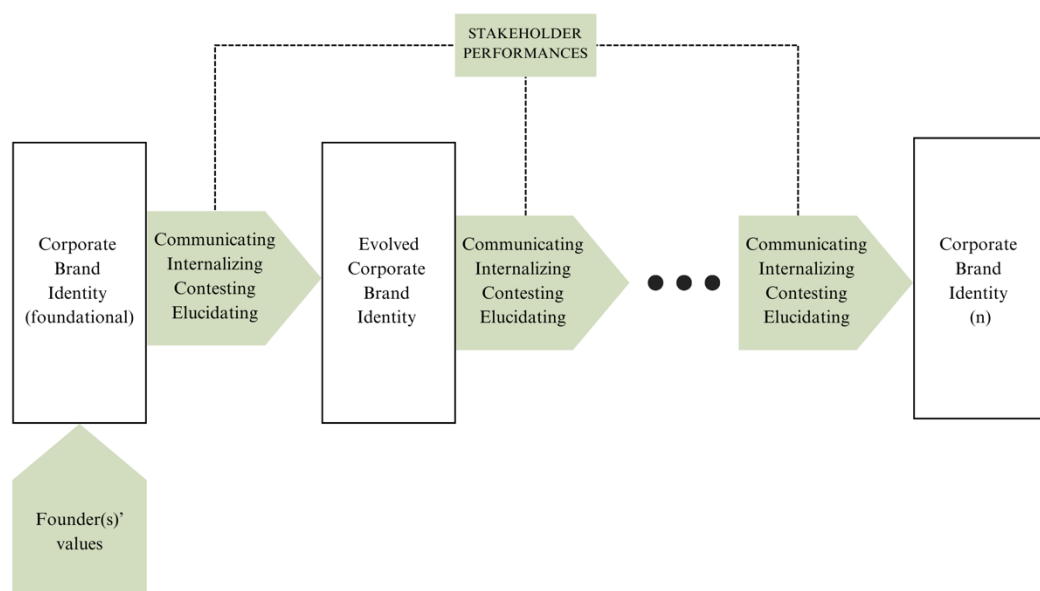


Figure 4 Corporate brand identity co-creation process (adapted from Iglesias et al., 2020)

When it comes to corporate brand identity development, it is continuous, interactive and involves multiple stakeholders (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, et al., 2017). The process is in fact a rather mundane one. In other words, it takes place in the everyday life of a corporation and is inseparable from daily activities. Corporate brand identity co-creation occurs, whether it is intended and active or not. (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017.)

In branding literature, it is agreed that company founders' values, identity and expertise influence the corporate brand identity significantly especially at the beginning. Though the impact may decline over time, founders often offer and form the foundation for corporate brand identity. (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017.)

Lastly, corporate brand identity co-creation process is a continuous entity. It occurs incessantly, is impacted by several stakeholders and factors, some of which are interdependent and/or overlapping. The process is also interactive and involves multiple stakeholders which in turn indicates that numerous individuals from different stakeholder groups influence the development corporate brand identity. Since the process involves multiple stakeholders' participation and input, differing perceptions of corporate brand identity may arise during the process. Consequently, the perceptions might be reconciled. (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017.)

2.5 Performative outlook on corporate brand identity co-creation

This thesis applies a performative approach to corporate brand identity co-creation. Performativity theory functions as a sense-making tool, a lens to understand the phenomenon. Therefore, in this thesis, focus is on employees' performative actions and consequently, the action-based roles of employees.

In branding literature, performativity theory has been applied in some studies set in both B2C and B2B contexts. Typically, with performativity theory, researchers illustrate and showcase brand co-creation on a concrete level. More precisely,

performativity theory has been utilized to explore the stakeholder performances that stakeholders enact and that create the brand, such as corporate brand. (see e.g. Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Lucarelli & Hallin, 2015; Nakassis, 2012; von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, et al., 2017.)

By approaching corporate brand identity co-creation with performativity theory, the phenomenon can be examined more closely and on a deeper level. Performativity theory helps answering the questions *how* and *who*, instead of *why* or *what*. In a sense, focus shifts from e.g. benefits or elements of a corporate brand to people, relationships and interaction between stakeholders. (e.g. Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; von Wallpach et al., 2017) It should be noted that the latter three focus points are at the heart of B2B branding (Ind & Schmidt, 2019, pp. 232–234). Hence, performativity theory offers a fruitful base for exploring the issue.

In short, performativity theory is about performative constructions of real life, or constituting and performing identity (von Wallpach et al., 2017). Performative acts and processes bring things into existence, but also have repercussions (Butler, 2010). A performance does not occur in a void nor is it an inherent feature of a social object (see e.g. Butler, 2010; von Wallpach et al., 2017). Instead, performances take place as social objects interact with each other. By interacting, communicating and discoursing, reality is constituted through language as well as practices. Depending on the conceptualization, the performed issue varies from discourse to identity, gender and socio-material entities. (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016.)

In corporate branding literature, commonly referred articles include e.g. Goffman (1959), Austin (1975) and Callon (1998). Therefore, popular understandings of performativity in said field are presenting self (Goffman), doing things with words (Austin), constituting self (Butler) and transforming theory into being (Callon).

What unites all approaches to performativity theory, is communication and social actors. Communicative practices and social actors (whether humans or non-humans) are antecedents for performances. This indicates e.g. that humans must come together and engage with each other in order to 1) carry out performances and 2) bring reality into being. The centrality of communication and interaction are instilled in corporate

branding literature where performativity theory is applied as those are more than often emphasized. (see e.g. Iglesias, et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; von Wallpach et al., 2017.)

When it comes to how performativity theory is applied in corporate branding literature and the findings of those studies, numerous similarities can be observed. Firstly, the nature of performances varies, but so does the composition of actors. Some performances might be carried out solely or mainly by a certain stakeholder group, a single individual often enacts multiple performances, and lastly, multiple stakeholders may participate in one performance simultaneously (e.g. Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). To provide an example, in corporate setting this might mean a manager communicating about the corporate brand identity to a subordinate or an employee discussing about their perception of the corporate brand identity with colleagues (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020).

Secondly, performances might occur independently but also as a consequence of something, such as an employee forming their own perception of the corporate brand identity or an individual wishing to be part of a community. Performances might also overlap each other or be enacted as an event sequence. (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; von Wallpach, Voyer, et al., 2017.) Thus, interdependency and the impact of a context are factors to consider.

Thirdly, as noted above, performances take place between social objects, in interaction (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, et al., 2017). Consecutively, interaction can occur but is not limited to face-to-face situations. In other words, stakeholders may also participate in performances that take place in a digital environment. (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020.) And although the brand identity in question is corporate brand identity, brand-related performances can be enacted outside the corporate setting. Performative construction of the corporate brand identity therefore spans beyond the corporate boundaries, and though influenced by contextual factors, is not limited to a specific geographic location. (von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, et al., 2017.)

2.6 Action-based roles

The concept of role can be utilized to predict and explain an individual's behavior (Anglin et al., 2022). Roles permeate everyday life and span from e.g. career roles to status roles. Roles may accumulate and as a consequence, an individual often possesses multiple roles: one can enact the role of a manager, subordinate, spouse and many more. (Sluss, van Dick, & Thompson, 2011.)

What should be noted is that roles are positional and context-specific. Positional nature indicates that roles are typically expressed in a relation to something or someone. (Anglin et al., 2022.) Context-specificity on the other hand means that specific roles cannot be applied to another context *as is*. Therefore, contextual factors must be understood and taken into account as those may impact significantly e.g. the name and content of a role. (Knight & Harland, 2005.)

Depending on the situation and context, roles are played either simultaneously or separately (Sluss et al., 2011). For instance, in an organizational setting an individual might be both a manager and subordinate. On some occasions (e.g. in meetings and projects) the manager may also be a subordinate, and on others the individual might enact only the role of a manager. In addition to being able to shift from one role to another within the current role set, the roles one possesses can also change. This change can be very rapid and catalyzed by several factors, such as ambitions, connections and resources. Hence, roles are dynamic by nature. (Heikkinen et al., 2007.)

Role theory is typically approached either from a structural functionalist or a symbolic interactionist viewpoint (Anglin et al., 2022; Ashforth, 2000). Structural functionalism emphasizes social structure and society at large as a function that sets certain behavioral expectations and in essence, determines roles (Anglin et al., 2022; Sluss et al., 2011). Thus, roles are given and fixed as well as guide the behavior of groups of people. An individual has limited influence and power over role expectations: certain role comes with certain expectations, despite individual differences. (Anglin et al., 2022.) Though quite rigid, roles are considered as beneficial to social systems (Merton, 1957; Parsons, 1951).

Symbolic interactionist approach on the other hand argues that roles are emergent and negotiated understandings between actors (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Roles can be made or unmade through social interaction indicating that instead of being stable, roles are in fact fluid and subject to change (Anglin et al., 2022; Ashforth, 2000). Definition or expectations of a specific role are established by individuals themselves, that then adjust their behavior to align with the jointly developed definition (Ashforth, 2000). Fundamentally, individuals' interpretations, experiences and preferences lay the foundation for forming roles (Ashforth, 2000; Sluss et al., 2011). To sum up, the symbolic interactionist viewpoint emphasizes the impact of individual people whereas the structural functionalist viewpoint perceives social systems as the main determinant and deciding body.

In an organizational context, both approaches are relevant and applicable. Some expectations of roles can be institutionalized and pre-determined. As an example, managers are often expected to e.g. allocate resources and give performance feedback to subordinates. Thus, the position of an individual in a social system determines their responsibilities, but only to some degree. (Sluss et al., 2011.) Expectations might also be set by other actors in the organization. For instance, managers may expect employees to internalize the company's brand and act accordingly and therefore, become a brand representative. (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Piehler, 2018.)

On the contrary, roles can also be proactively adopted (Ashforth, 2000; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018). The catalyst for this varies, but generally necessitates interaction between one or more organizational members. As an example, organizational members can shape and strengthen roles by interacting with each other, which usually occurs when e.g. an individual receives a positive performance rating, commits to an organization or experiences role conflict. (Sluss et al., 2011.)

Whether assigned by another actor or shaped together with other actors, roles essentially stem from actions. Although a formal position predicts an individual's behavior, it does so only to some degree. (Heikkinen et al., 2007.) As mentioned above, a manager might be expected to complete certain tasks due to their position, but the title solely is not sufficient to determine how a manager – let alone a certain manager

– acts (Sluss et al., 2011). In this thesis, actions are utilized to identify and determine the roles of employees in corporate brand identity co-creation process.

2.7 Theoretical synthesis

In this thesis, it is understood that corporate brand identity is co-created by various stakeholders through brand-related performative actions. To sum up, (corporate brand) identity is performatively constituted and re-constituted through occurrences that revolve around communication. Corporate brand identity co-creation process is understood to unfold as the stakeholder performances occur. (e.g. von Wallpach et al., 2017.) As Iglesias et al. (2020) state, the performances are different but interrelated which indicates that performances impact each other but can be observed separately.

Drawing on the findings of Mäläskä et al. (2011), Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones (2017) and Iglesias et al. (2020), everyday life and development of corporate brand identity is about people, i.e., stakeholders. Stakeholders are not only a diverse group of actors, but also the ones who determine, create and challenge the corporate brand identity. Corporate brand identity, and especially various perceptions of it, exist in the minds of stakeholders, but are brought to life through performances. (Iglesias et al., 2020.)

Stakeholders include e.g. founders, managers, employees, customers and investors (Iglesias et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). All stakeholders have their own roles and responsibilities but also influence the corporate brand identity in different ways. Each stakeholder holds some type and level of power and has means for impacting the corporate brand identity. (Iglesias et al., 2020.)

Corporate branding does not take place in a void (Mäläskä et al., 2011; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018). Instead, corporate brand identity develops within a broader stakeholder network and is impacted by numerous internal and external factors. Actors inside the company (employees, managers and founders) cannot completely control the corporate brand identity nor the developmental process of it. (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017.) In fact, engagement between stakeholders is an antecedent and root cause for the process. That is, stakeholders must interact with each

other in order for performative actions and process of corporate brand identity co-creation to occur. (Iglesias et al., 2020.)

However, urging all stakeholders to participate, let alone expecting participation on a voluntary basis, is not that straightforward which in turn problematizes use of the term *all brand stakeholders* (da Silveira & Simões, 2022, p. 144; Merz, Zarantonello, & Grappi, 2018). Though corporate brand identity creation is a collaborative process, some stakeholders are more salient than others, and some stakeholders may not be willing nor motivated to participate (Cova & Dalli, 2009; Michel, 2017; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). According to da Silveira and Simões (2022, p. 144), co-creation is a voluntary performance by nature, and to occur, stakeholders themselves must initiate participating in it.

Previous research has identified some stakeholders' roles and brand-related (performative) actions they enact (see e.g. Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; von Wallpach, Voyer, et al., 2017). First, business partners. Törmälä and Saraniemi (2018) explored business partners' participation and roles in corporate brand image co-creation. It should be noted that performativity theory was not utilized in this study. Törmälä and Saraniemi (2018) discovered that business partners participate in corporate brand image co-creation in multiple ways, for instance through engaging in marketing activities, promoting the corporate brand and offering knowledge. By utilizing role theory, the study identified seven roles, both company-assigned and proactively adopted. The roles are as follows: co-innovator, co-marketer, brand specialist, knowledge provider, referee, intermediary and advocate. (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018.)

Second, founders and managers. Founders influence corporate brand identity significantly, especially at the beginning (Iglesias et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). In case corporate brand identity is not yet well-established nor presented to the public, it reflects the founder, their personal identity and values (Iglesias et al., 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). Additionally, since corporate brand identity is a reflection of the founder's personal identity, they disseminate, nurture and tend to protect it (Iglesias et al., 2020).

When it comes to acted performances, founders and managers are more so in a leading position and responsible for e.g. communicating the corporate brand identity and providing adequate training for new employees. Though managers should enable conversation about corporate brand identity and encourage to give feedback about it, they might hold tight to the core values and be resistant to change. (Iglesias et al., 2020.) After all, being understanding, responsive and receptive to both internal and external stakeholders are prerequisites for successful branding (Gregory, 2007; Roper & Davies, 2007). If managers do not enable interaction or truly attempt to learn, contesting and elucidating – and consequently, corporate brand identity co-creation – cannot be carried out effectively (Iglesias et al., 2020).

Nowadays, it is understood that managers' having full control over corporate brand identity is merely an illusion. Though managers can hold a powerful leadership position, they are not the sole controllers nor creators of the corporate brand identity. (Wider et al., 2018.) Adhering to a control-centric approach may in fact harm the brand: Wider et al. (2018) argue that such perspective hinders accepting that brands are complex processes, for both managers and researchers.

Recent brand management literature suggests that managers should in general adopt an open and participatory leadership role and shift their part from decision makers to discourse facilitators (Moffitt & Dover, 2011 via Siano et al., 2022; Siano et al., 2022). Michel (2017) and Iglesias et al. (2020) describe managers' role with the word *conductor* indicating that managers operate in a jungle of stakeholders' differing brand perceptions as well as expressions and aim to harmonize those. In a way, managers orchestrate the brand "in continuous interaction with all other stakeholders participating in the brand" (Wider et al., 2018, p. 304). Management leadership impacts corporate brand identity co-creation process significantly, and the underlying reason can be found in the consequences of managers' actions. That is, stakeholders' performativity is triggered by managers' leadership behaviour. (da Silveira & Simões, 2022.)

Though corporate branding has democratized, managers are responsible for balancing stability and change (da Silveira & Simões, 2022, p. 144). As stated previously, corporate brand identity is enduring and dynamic, as well as driven by the tension

between internal and external stakeholders (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020). The dynamic nature necessitates a counterbalance, which is the managers (da Silveira & Simões, 2022).

Third, the role(s) of employees in corporate brand identity co-creation process in business-to-business context remains unclear (Michel, 2017). While it is known that stakeholders interact with other stakeholders in various social contexts, such as communities, organizations and institutions, employees' role has attracted little interest (Wider et al., 2018).

Näppä et al. (2023) explored the roles of employees as co-creators of employer brand. While the study is set in 1) business-to-consumer 2) tourism and hospitality context and discussed about employer brand equity, it provides valuable insight into the performances employees enact and the roles they can adopt. As illustrated in table 1, employees can enact multiple performances and be co-creators, internally and externally. (Näppä et al., 2023.) By dividing performances into two categories, *in-role performances* and *extra-role performances*, Näppä et al. (2023) showcase that role behavior can be voluntary and not tied to their position. Näppä et al. (2023) suggest four roles for employees: *brand member*, *brand representative*, *corporate influencer* and *brand advocate*. These roles enable participation in brand co-creation and spreading the message which offers employees opportunities to influence the employer brand.

Table 1 Employees' performances and roles in employer brand co-creation (adapted from Näppä et al., 2023)

	Internal co-creation	External co-creation
In-role performances	Brand member <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiate identity and brand meaning • Participate in organizational processes and collective experience 	Brand representative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase familiarity and create associations in service encounters • Deliver brand values
Extra-role performances	Corporate influencer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redefine and create organizational processes • Actively inspire and increase engagement and loyalty • Develop social identity 	Brand advocate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase familiarity and create associations through word-of-mouth

Yet, the power, especially decision-making power, that employees hold, is quite limited (Näppä et al., 2023). This aligns with e.g. Iglesias et al.'s (2020) and Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones' (2017) findings: employees tend to have less power over the initial corporate brand identity but are capable of influencing it in multiple ways and remarkably.

When it comes to e.g. the performative actions that employees enact and that influence the corporate brand, several have been identified. Iglesias et al. (2020) identified four stakeholder performances: communicating, internalizing, contesting and elucidating (figure 4). It should be noted that Iglesias et al. (2020) discuss about internal and external stakeholders but employees can participate in all four performances. These performances are interrelated and together constitute the corporate brand identity co-creation process (Iglesias et al., 2020).

Although employees participate in corporate brand identity co-creation process, their participation may be different in terms of e.g. proactivity and significance depending on the performance. As an example, in *contesting* employees might be rather vocal and express their thoughts or concerns about a company's corporate brand identity, but in *internalizing* employees are mostly responsible for learning and immersing themselves into the company's daily activities. (Iglesias et al., 2020.)

During the onboarding process, employees build understanding and start developing their own perception of the corporate brand identity, as well as how it is carried out in mundane activities. Whether employees understand and interpret the corporate brand identity correctly or not, is quite dependent on the training they receive. (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020.) As da Silveira and Simões (2022) state, employees performativity is triggered by managers' behavior.

Employees might also contest, which means contrasting their own perception of the corporate brand with 1) corporate brand identity 2) corporate brand image of competitors 3) someone else's perception of the corporate brand. As a result of contesting, employees and stakeholders in general either reaffirm or challenge the corporate brand identity. Additionally, if managers enable to do so, the contesting employee confronts manager(s) with their thoughts. Lastly, elucidating is an important

part of the process: it is about finding common ground through discussing together. By elucidating, managers and other stakeholders aim “to build a shared understanding of the corporate brand identity” by conversing with each other about differing perspectives on corporate brand identity. Elucidating, like the other performances, is a continuous process: the flow of feedback and suggestions should be constant. (Iglesias et al., 2020.)

Brand-related performative actions enacted by employees have been identified in other studies as well. Chung and Byrom (2021) suggest that when employees are gathered into teams (forums), they may become enablers of co-creation and better understand the importance of strategic brand identity. Employees might also communicate about the corporate brand to external stakeholders. For instance, when the working climate is positive and the company possesses a good reputation, employees may promote it to potential employees. Therefore, employees can act as ambassadors and spread positive image of a company. (Saraniemi, 2022.) Communication and knowledge-sharing occurs inside of the company as well: by doing so, employees build an internal brand community. Brand communities in turn perform actions that impact and co-construct the corporate brand hence increasing the importance of employees communicating and sharing knowledge in corporate brand co-creation. (Saraniemi, 2022.)

To conclude, employees are involved in various activities spanning from learning, to communicating, creating a community and being an ambassador. Previous research has identified several brand-related performative actions that stakeholders, including employees, enact. However, as mentioned, more research is needed in this field to increase and deepen knowledge.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter covers methodological issues from research strategy to data source, data collection and data analysis. Chosen methods are explained and justified. Moreover, the case company is introduced and interviews described. Lastly, data analysis is discussed and codes and themes presented.

3.1 Research strategy

The objective of this research is to explore the roles of employees in corporate brand identity co-creation. To understand roles, which stem from performative actions, a profound understanding of those actions, the actors and context is required. Therefore, this research is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is suitable when the aim is to build a deep and holistic understanding of the phenomenon in question (Braun & Clarke, 2022). One major advantage of qualitative research is applicability since it can be used for exploratory research and when the topic is rather new. Qualitative research helps to observe and understand people and context in detail. More precisely, how people act in a specific context and why they act in such way. (Myers, 2013, pp. 5–9.)

The data of this research is collected with semi-structured interviews. Thus, empirical data in this research is primary data. Interviews in general “allow us to gather rich data from people in various roles and situations”. Semi-structured interviews as a data collection method offers both structure and flexibility. Pre-set questions guide the interview but there is also room for improvisation, i.e., new questions and additional insights that may emerge over the course of the conversation. (Myers, 2013, pp. 119–123) Since the goal of interviews is to discuss on a specific topic but also offer the possibility to add extra questions or comments, semi-structured interviews are the most suitable data collection method.

Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen as the data analysis method since it is accessible, flexible and suitable for new researchers. With thematic analysis, patterns within data can be identified and analyzed in a systematic yet flexible manner. It allows to focus on implicit and explicit ideas, i.e. themes, and consequently, form a more comprehensive view which is necessary due the topic of this thesis. (Braun & Clarke,

2022, pp. 4–8.) Additionally, this study is neither inductive nor deductive: instead, the research is conducted with an abductive approach. Theory functions as a foundation, a starting point, for the research and will be complemented with empirical data. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008.) Considering the topic of this thesis, existing research solely is not sufficient for answering the research questions. Thus, abductive approach supports the objective of this thesis. The data analysis process will be described in more detail later.

3.2 Data source and data collection

Data was collected with semi-structured interviews that were held with employees and managers of a selected case company. The topic, aim and research method imposed several criteria for the case company. The criteria are as follows: 1) the company must operate in business-to-business context 2) the company must have co-creational practices in place 3) sufficient number of employees to ensure validity.

Since the aim of this research is to build a deep and comprehensive understanding the phenomenon, context and individuals' (employees and managers) perceptions, narrowing down the number of companies to one was not only beneficial but also essential. Interviewing employees and managers of only one company enables to truly comprehend the company, its mode of operation, the context, how employees and managers interact with each other, co-creational practices and brand-related actions. This, in turn and again, helps to guarantee more valid results.

The chosen company (later Company A) is a small business and a digital marketing agency located in Finland. Company A offers a wide variety of digital marketing services ranging from e.g. search engine optimization to paid advertising. At Company A, employees and managers often work remotely. Depending on the day and person, some employees and managers may work from the office but ultimately, remote work is the most common option. Consequently, a significant part of communication and interaction occurs on digital platforms, on e.g. online meeting app and messaging app. On the messaging app, Company A has numerous channels for different purposes. For instance, there are channels for informing about current issues at the company, asking for help from colleagues, sharing knowledge about e.g. new features of digital

marketing tools, and more informal channels. Some channels are team-specific but there are also company-wide ones, and this is determined by the nature and purpose of the channel. Level of activity depends on the channel as well as the person: some are more active than others and vice versa.

In addition to communicating on the online messaging app, virtual meetings is a central means of communication as well. Composition and topic varies: some are weekly team meetings, while others are company-wide or less formal meetings, such as virtual coffee breaks. Employees communicate with other internal stakeholders but also with external stakeholders. Employees who work in digital marketing hold monthly check-in meetings and sometimes planning meetings with clients, constituting the main contact towards existing clients. Sales representatives are responsible for customer acquisition and networking with potential customers, but also sometimes participate in client meetings. In summary, employees interact with external stakeholders regularly and occurrences for co-creation are frequent.

It should be noted that Company A has co-creational practices in place in the form of e.g. office days. During these office days, there is typically a program that may include sharing knowledge, learning to use new tools, discussing about current issues and going through joint practices. Sometimes Company A has events, for individual teams and for all company members. To conclude, Company A's employees and managers interact with each other frequently, mostly virtually but sometimes gather together face-to-face.

As mentioned previously, semi-structured interviews is the chosen data collection method. Altogether 8 one-to-one interviews were conducted and lasted between 27 to 58 minutes. All interviews were held in Finnish to ensure well-functioning communication since all participants' native language is Finnish. Interviews were held on virtual meeting platforms, recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Selected quotes from interviews were translated from Finnish to English. The participants consisted of 6 employees and 2 managers (table 2).

Table 2 Interviews

Interviewee	Department	Duration
Employee A	Digital marketing	58 min
Employee B	Sales	33 min
Employee C	Digital marketing	27 min
Employee D	Digital marketing	33 min
Employee E	Sales	40 min
Employee F	Digital marketing	36 min
Manager A	Management	32 min
Manager B	Management	45 min

When it comes to conducting the interviews, all participants were informed about privacy issues and asked consent to record the interviews. At the beginning of each interview, a general idea of the topic of the thesis as well as key concepts were briefly explained to ensure that each interviewee had sufficient understanding. Urde's (2013) Corporate Brand Identity Matrix was utilized in interviews to illustrate corporate brand identity elements to interviewees. Interviews were conversational and some new questions emerged.

Predefined questions (see appendix 1 & 2) guided interviews and provided structure. There were two sets of predefined questions: one for employees (appendix 1) and one for managers (appendix 2). This split was made to ensure questions are suitable and beneficial as well as to offer flexibility. Interview questions were formulated based on theory and focused on the following key themes: corporate brand identity, co-creational practices and employee participation. The questions were open-ended, and the interviewees were encouraged to express their thoughts freely but also to provide detailed responses.

3.3 Data analysis

As noted above, thematic analysis was used to analyze data. The data analysis process therefore consisted of six phases: 1) dataset familiarization 2) data coding 3) initial theme generation 4) theme development and review 5) theme refining, defining and naming 6) writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 34). The process is not completely straightforward as it includes going back and forth, for instance returning to data and fine-tuning themes, potentially several times (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 3). The outcome of thematic analysis are themes, in other words, central organizing concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 77). According to Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 77), a theme is “a pattern of shared meaning organised around a central concept”. In this research, themes and thus end result, was the roles of employees. Codes in turn were the performative actions which employees enact and which also constitute the roles.

The interviews were first transcribed and then read through. After gaining initial understanding of the data, the transcriptions were coded, then again read through, and coded further. During the first round of coding, codes were rather arbitrary and after the second round of coding, the codes were more refined and harmonized. At the beginning, focus of coding was on single performative actions and motivations for said actions. After that, codes with similar meaning were combined and renamed and redundant codes removed. Although in thematic analysis frequency of a code does not determine its significance and codes that appear only once might be noteworthy, this step ensured that only significant codes were left (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 52).

Next, codes and their meanings were analyzed further to ensure deep understanding of the data. Codes with a shared meaning were then grouped together and consequently, initial themes emerged. It should be noted that already at this stage, it was evident that some roles were assigned by company, and others proactively adopted by employees. Therefore, the roles, i.e., themes, were categorized into two main themes based on whether the role is company-assigned or proactively adopted. Codes and themes are illustrated in figure 5.

During the latter phases of the analysis, themes were developed and refined. However, only minor adjustments were made, such as modifying the name of some roles to better

reflect the meaning. The end result of analysis consisted of seven roles divided into two main themes. Results are further explained and exemplified in the next chapter.

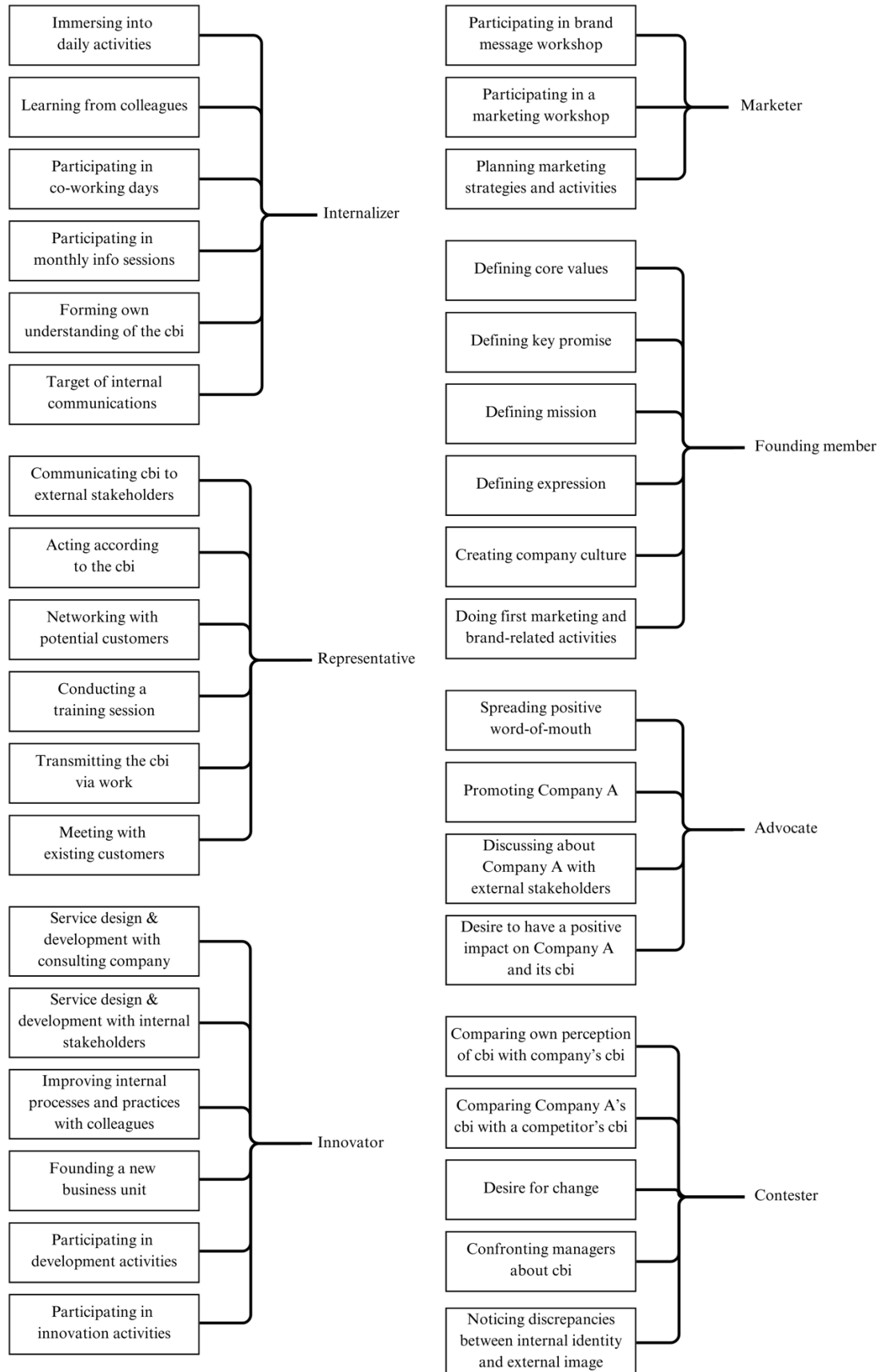


Figure 5 Codes and themes

4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this chapter, empirical findings are presented. As a result of the data analysis, seven roles were identified. Roles were divided into two categories based on whether the respective role is company-assigned or proactively adopted. The company-assigned roles are as follows: *Internalizer*, *Representative*, *Innovator*, *Marketer* and *Founding member*. The proactively adopted roles are as follows: *Advocate* and *Contester*. Next, roles and brand-related performative actions of each role are described.

4.1 Company-assigned roles

4.1.1 Internalizer

Internalizer learns about the corporate brand identity from other stakeholders, primarily colleagues and managers. Internalizing covers a plethora of learning activities: it occurs when managers communicate about corporate brand identity directly or indirectly to employees, as employees interact with each other, and when new hires build connections with other stakeholders. Internalizing is not limited to a single environment or face-to-face interaction with other stakeholders: it can also occur in a digital environment, such as online meetings. To conclude, internalizing is a more passive performance in a sense that an internalizer themselves does not produce or innovate anything: instead, they usually are at the receiving end.

The role of an internalizer is very common, and each interviewed employee at Company A filled the criteria of this role. Though some employees to a larger extent than others, there were zero employees that showed no signs of internalizing. What united the responses, was that in Company A, employees are regularly communicated about corporate brand identity and current issues. In other words, employees have frequent and regular opportunities for internalizing.

”I think it is quite clear to everyone what kind of a company we are, after all we have gone over our values and vision in our monthly info sessions”
(Employee E)

”During the monthly info sessions top management communicates about this company’s values, what we want to develop, what is going at the moment” (Employee A)

”We have these monthly sessions during which top management tells about this company’s financial situation and general issues, such as what has happened in the past month” (Employee F)

However, internalizing requires time and effort. New hires might not be aware of corporate brand identity or customs at the beginning. This may then lead to new employees e.g. turning to other employees in order to receive answers to their questions, in other words, to internalize.

”Especially at the beginning, new hires might not have the courage to for example voice their opinions or they might not know how formally or casually should they act” (Employee A)

”Some new employees might ask in private from colleagues, not from the managers, about company policies or how things should be done” (Employee A)

Internalizer is a company-assigned role, and necessitates e.g. immersion into daily life at the workplace and communication about corporate brand identity from management’s end. Company A’s managers reported that the employees have internalized the corporate brand identity.

”I feel like our employees reflect this company” (Manager B)

”They have accepted well our company policies et cetera that we have in place” (Manager B)

However, it should be noted that some employees feel unsure how Company A’s corporate brand identity should be described or what does it mean to act according to it. This will be discussed and exemplified further in the next sub-chapter.

4.1.2 Representative

Representative represents the corporate brand identity to other stakeholders, in a sense is an embodiment of the corporate brand identity. Representative is a prominent and

common role: it is recognized in literature (e.g. Ind & Schmidt, 2019) and by the data of this study that all employees represent the corporate brand identity in one way or another.

“Everyone represents Company A’s brand and in a way all of the mundane tasks and connections to customers are in a way cherishing Company A’s brand and acting in accordance with Company A’s brand” (Manager A)

Representing the corporate brand identity covers various activities with numerous stakeholders. Generally, being a representative refers to interacting with other stakeholders either face-to-face or in a digital setting. To provide examples, representing can be e.g. holding a monthly meeting with an existing customer, creating new contacts in a networking event and meeting potential customers. In other words, representing is a routine activity to many.

“...face-to-face meetings with partners where we tell about us to those who do not know about us yet and try to make new connections who could then recommend us and offer our services” (Employee E)

“I have attended some events in which I have represented the brand”
(Employee B)

Since both the marketers’ and account managers’ job position necessitates interacting with external stakeholders, carrying out the role of representative is inherent part of Company A’s employees everyday life therefore making it a company-assigned role. It should be noted that the role of representative is typically carried out in a work-related setting.

What comes to the importance of acting in accordance with corporate brand identity, especially the managers consider it crucial. Manager B pointed out that employees are the most important resource for Company A and, in essence, the only tangible asset. Still, Manager B emphasized that representing the company should come naturally:

“if the question is *how important is it that people act according to the company’s corporate brand*, well of course it is, but it needs to be genuine”
(Manager B)

However, some employees were not sure how to represent Company A's corporate brand. The uncertainty stemmed from not being aware what Company A's corporate brand identity is and what does representing it entail.

"...that we would have been told what Company A's brand is and what is wanted from employees and how employees should represent or something else, that we have not gotten" (Employee C)

Another employee reported that representing the company, and more importantly in what fashion it is done, is rather uninstructed and unsupervised:

"it is neither measured nor assumed that we go by certain rules and maybe it is trusted that one is an employee of Company A and it emerges from that" (Employee B)

To conclude, while the role of representative is company-assigned, it is not fully controlled by managers.

4.1.3 Innovator

Innovator participates in company's innovation and/or development projects to either create new or define existing. The target of innovation or development in question varies and might range from improving existing services to modifying company policies and mode of operation. Though development projects generally concern a single service or specific topic, sometimes the aim might be to establish a new business unit. Therefore, the impact of innovator's activities can be great and long-term.

"I've been doing a lot of product development for a long time, and our [name of business department] is one example of an end result from a development project" (Employee F)

Innovators collaborate with other individuals, usually internal stakeholders, but sometimes also external stakeholders. Cooperation and interaction are at the heart of innovator's role: typically, e.g. service development processes include co-creational workshops and other types of collaboration. Innovators often ideate, ask for feedback from other employees, refine ideas and so forth.

”we have these development projects which consist thinking together, writing ideas down and possibly asking for others’ feedback, that’s quite a lot of co-creation” (Employee A)

”the [name of service] development project that we worked on ... we worked with a business design company” (Employee E)

What unites innovation projects in Company A, is that employees are nearly always involved. Hence, *innovator* is a rather popular role and not tied to a certain job position. Employees are involved in most development projects and thus influence corporate brand identity directly.

”quite a significant portion of employees have worked on development projects” (Employee A)

The role of innovator is assigned by company with the aim that an innovator may provide their knowledge, input and creativity in order to improve the end result of the project in question. It should be noted that while the role of innovator is not a proactively adopted one, employees generally felt like possibilities to participate in innovation are at a satisfactory level. On the contrary, some employees’ job position necessitates participating in development projects or activities in general.

”there are also employees such as team leaders and instructors who must engage in development activities” (Employee A)

4.1.4 Marketer

Marketer engages in marketing activities by participating in planning, providing ideas and knowledge. Marketer is a member of Company A’s own marketing team but not the sole responsible one. Marketers often interact and cooperate with other marketers, which allows the actors to effectively co-create and perform their roles. Co-creation in turn can appear in multiple contexts and ways: in face-to-face workshops, online meetings, on messaging apps and so forth.

”[I participate in] our company’s own marketing although I’m not necessarily the one doing it but I partake in planning and designing marketing materials” (Employee E)

”Together with our team, we think about what we want to tell about us [Company A] and next we have to redesign our sales materials since the service development project is coming to an end, these kinds of things impact many things” (Employee E)

Although marketers influence Company A’s marketing and corporate brand identity widely, their greatest impact was on two elements of corporate brand identity: expression and personality. Marketers do not focus on the strategic elements of corporate brand identity or broad lines. Instead, marketers adjust marketing plans and strategies to align with company goals and reflect the core of corporate brand identity. However, it should be noted that marketers impact corporate brand identity directly by for instance defining Company A’s core brand message:

”We had the marketing and communications themed workshop” (Employee B)

”The workshop where we redefined our core message was quite a good example: several employees from different teams participated instead of just the top management and a consultant” (Employee E)

The role of marketer is a company-assigned one: to perform this role, an employee must become a member of the company’s own marketing team which requires e.g. the employer to allocate resources (time) for such. Over time, composition of the company’s own marketing team has changed, and the size of it expanded. Therefore, the role of marketer is not permanent and can be acquired by employees who are not yet marketers. Although some employees are assigned the role of marketer, it is not tied to a certain job position or department. In fact, the company’s own marketing team includes employees from both sales and digital marketing department and thus, marketers partake in cross-functional collaboration. It should be noted that such collaboration is characteristic to this organization; marketers are not the only ones that cooperate with employees from other departments.

”Nowadays we have more people in our company’s own marketing team, of course it depends, but some employees have assigned tasks that they accomplish, such as being responsible for our company’s social media accounts” (Employee F)

4.1.5 Founding member

Founding member has been employed in Company A since the early stages and involved in establishing the brand. In addition to the temporal dimension, what separates this role from others, are the elements of corporate brand identity and fundamental impact that founding member has had on corporate brand identity. It should also be noted that the role of founding member is unique and cannot be adopted anymore as the company is no longer in the start-up phase.

Founding members, together with the then chief executive officer, e.g. created Company A's values and mission. By co-creating and developing core elements of Company A's corporate brand identity, founding members have had a direct and long-term impact. Founding members were a vital resource for the company, at least at the beginning.

"I am one of those who created the brand" (Employee A)

"I have probably participated in everything especially at the beginning, even in determining Company A's values, and have participated in service development projects and creating strategies" (Employee C)

In addition to co-creating e.g. Company A's values in meetings, some founding members mentioned how everyday life in the office impacted corporate brand identity, more precisely company culture. By interacting with each other, company culture developed.

"Already back then we started to create a culture in which humor and telling jokes is okay, like a positive and accepting environment" (Employee A)

The role of founding member was assigned by the company, and interviewees reported that they were either asked or persuaded into participating. Majority of founding members have participated in brand-related activities at the beginning but also later on, thus continuing to influence corporate brand identity.

"As I have worked a long time in this company, I have participated in a plethora of development projects" (Employee F)

4.2 Proactively adopted roles

4.2.1 Advocate

Advocate spreads information about the corporate brand identity and promotes it to external stakeholders. Advocating impacts the corporate brand directly, and in general, advocates aspire to have a positive impact on corporate brand identity.

Advocates operate on voluntary basis: in other words, this is a proactively adopted role. This role might include e.g. discussing spontaneously and positively about Company A, display exemplary behaviour and overall, advance corporate brand identity. Employee A believes that a single individual can have an impact, and that everyone should do one's share when it comes to for instance company culture:

"the thing is that you yourself are creating an open culture of dialogue"
(Employee A)

Additionally, advocates consider it important to pay attention to the tone with which one talks about their employer:

"when you for example talk about Company A to people outside this organization, you take into consideration how you talk about it, do you talk about it in an excited or uninterested way" (Employee A)

Though managers wish that employees would spread message about the company, it is not a requirement nor tied to anyone's job position:

"my objective is that people would be proud that they work here and want to tell about that to people outside this organization" (Manager B)

4.2.2 Contester

Contester compares corporate brand identity with their own perception of corporate brand. For contesting to occur, an individual must first form their own perception of the corporate brand. Contester may for instance observe and evaluate discrepancies between internal identity and external image:

”I think there’s a quite big mismatch between what we look versus what our company culture is” (Employee D)

”What our personality is like externally and internally, I think there’s a discrepancy” (Employee B)

Contester is a proactively adopted role. Though not the most common role, multiple interviewees showed signs of the role of a contester. In general, among the interviewees, contesting was either critical or negative by nature. Contrasting itself might concern different elements of corporate brand identity. While some contesters reported that Company A’s expression should be different or does not match internal identity, others offered criticism about company culture.

”Do we have shared culture of what it means to be a member of Company A, well not exactly” (Employee B)

”Is our expression personal? Not really. Maybe it’s more generic, typical corporate communications” (Employee F)

”Well I’d like to showcase our humor and playfulness via social media and also what kind of people we are, that we are not too no-nonsense, that it’s actually nice to work with us” (Employee D)

On some occasions, the target of contrasting might be a competitor. Multiple contesters expressed that corporate brand identity is not unique, i.e. blends into the crowd. Therefore, the outcome of contrasting might also be that the company in question is too similar to others, instead of not possessing certain qualities a competitor has.

”We don’t really stand out from the crowd” (Employee C)

Contesters often interact with managers, which is a central element of contesting and requirement for effective contesting (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020). For the most part, interviewees reported that in Company A, possibilities for voicing one’s own opinion and influencing are at a good level. Employer offers forums for employees to express their thoughts. Hence, the circumstances are good from this perspective.

”We have these occasions where we think together, discuss about our corporate brand and these kinds of things, on those occasions you have a possibility to comment” (Employee F)

However, interacting with managers and expressing one’s own perception might not always have a favorable outcome. Tensions may arise when for instance a contesteer is given an opportunity to co-create or discuss with managers but does not feel like their opinion was truly taken into consideration. Contesteer might have e.g. participated in a development project, given their input and then come to the conclusion that their contribution had little to no influence.

”Have we been asked about values, well yes we’ve been asked how we see them but how those are implemented, that also – it’s a totally different thing to ask but what’s the end result, that’s whole another question” (Employee B)

Several contesters and employees in general shared concern whether the corporate brand identity is good or enough. Few contesters reported that the corporate brand identity is incoherent, incomplete or undesirable in some other way. It should be noted that managers’ perceptions were consistent with this argument. Therefore, a commonly shared understanding of corporate brand identity seems to be lacking.

”A bit scattered, sometimes we think about what our advertisements look like, what is our expression like, what kind of content do we post on social media, but sometimes we do not think about these things and the person in charge has changed multiple times during the past couple of years” (Manager B)

”All over the place, I think we are a bit lost with our brand” (Employee B)

”In my opinion we should think more about what we actually look like in the eyes of people outside this organization” (Employee D)

4.3 Reasons and motivations for participating in corporate brand identity co-creation

In addition to identifying employees’ roles, several reasons and motivation to participate in corporate brand identity co-creation. Before diving deeper, it should be pointed out that five out of the seven identified roles are company-assigned, and thus, often the reason for acquiring a role is as straightforward as obligation to acquire the

role, no questions asked. Although being assigned a certain role due to one's job position or knowledge, that is not the sole existing reason. Several other reasons were identified that can either hinder or advance participation in corporate brand identity co-creation and acquisition of certain role.

Most frequently mentioned reason for participating in brand-related co-creational activities was resources. The term *resources* covers multiple elements from available time to mental capacity but essentially refers to the capability of an employee to participate in corporate brand identity co-creation. When asked from employees why they would like to participate more – or less – in co-creation, most interviewees mentioned resources. Typically, the limitedness of them decreased employees' desire or willingness to participate. Especially employees from the digital marketing team mentioned that they must prioritize their own work responsibilities, i.e., what their formal position necessitates them to accomplish, over tasks that are not mandatory. In general, brand-related activities were perceived as non-obligatory and therefore often not paid attention to. Though it should be noted that corporate brand identity co-creation occurs continuously and is not an isolated activity, many employees associated brand-related activities with brand communications or activities that require conscious effort.

Alongside resources, own willingness is a central determining factor whether one participates in co-creation and acquires a role or not. Understandably, some interviewed employees stated that they want to strictly focus on their own work responsibilities and not partake in anything that is perceived as additional by them. Some of these employees still participated in brand-related activities. However, in general, being willing and motivated to participate indicated more active involvement in corporate brand identity co-creation and more likely acquisition of one or more roles. Stronger willingness, more precisely desire, does not however predict participation: some employees communicated that they would love to participate but do not. Nevertheless, being motivated to partake in corporate brand identity co-creation enhanced employees' attitudes towards it.

Next, personality was among the influencing factors. Interestingly, it was the other stakeholders' personalities that interviewees mentioned, not their own. This was

reported by both interviewee groups, managers and employees. Radical outspokenness and strong personality of another stakeholder might cause an individual to withdraw into oneself and consequently, not participate in e.g. development projects or other co-creation activities. That is to say, other stakeholders might have negative impact.

Lastly, employees who reported some of the following aspects were more active co-creators and/or showed more positive attitude towards co-creation: 1) pleasant employee experience 2) managers had communicated the corporate brand identity well 3) employee can stand behind Company A's corporate brand identity 4) corporate brand identity resonates with the employee. Furthermore, the aforementioned aspects typically predict proactively adopting the role of an advocate.

4.4 Differing perceptions

While similarities between employees' and managers' answers could be observed, there were also differences. In general, employees and managers agreed that employees have and should have opportunities to participate in (corporate brand identity) co-creation, it is important that differing opinions are heard and taken into consideration and employees are an invaluable resource to the company. Additionally, the managers wish that every employee would participate on a voluntary basis and have the courage to express their opinion.

Though employees reported that the managers' leadership style by and large is open, respectful and transparent – all of which are desired leadership qualities according to current brand management literature – issues still arose. Employees' statements indicated e.g. occasional ineffective communication, lack of brand instructions and unawareness of Company A's corporate brand identity. Some employees associated corporate branding with merely brand communications and/or were not aware that corporate brand co-creation occurs incessantly. The main connecting factors between the issues employees pointed out were communication about brand-related issues and effort on corporate branding, more precisely, the lack of it. Despite the fact that the leadership style matched with the main recommendations of current literature, brand management was not at a sufficient level.

When it comes to the reason for participating in corporate brand identity co-creation, some of the interviewed employees reported that although they would have preferred to steer clear from e.g. development projects, they had been persuaded to participate and felt like declining the opportunity was not a true option. The employer on the other hand emphasized that employees are asked to participate, but employees' participation in co-creation activities should always be self-motivated and stem from own willingness. This indicates clear differences in perception. Being forced, or heavily persuaded into participating typically lead to tensions or negative attitudes towards the employer.

4.5 The temporal dimensions

The data analysis showed that both the brand-related performative actions and roles include a temporal dimension. That is, some performative actions and roles occur only or more frequently at a certain point in time.

First, brand-related performative actions. Some actions, such as *transmitting the cbi via work* and *meeting with existing customers*, occur frequently and continuously. These actions are typically embedded in everyday actions, enacted by multiple employees regularly. However, others occur rarely. Some brand-related performative actions take place only or more frequently at a specific point of employment. For instance, internalizing is stronger at the beginning of employment. Additionally, some performative actions occur or occurred at a certain time in company history. To exemplify, e.g. core values and key promise were defined initially several years ago. These are examples of brand-related performative actions that do not occur often, but ones that still impact the corporate brand identity.

Second, roles. While most of the roles are actively enacted by employees and are not connected to a specific point in time, exceptions exists. The role of founding member is unique in this sense. Founding members were the first employees to participate in corporate brand identity co-creation and leave a fundamental impact. Founding members co-created the core elements and essentially are the ones that established the corporate brand identity. The six other roles are enacted, assigned and adopted actively by several employees.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Answers to the research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to explore employees' roles in corporate brand identity co-creation. The topic is approached with a performative outlook to corporate brand identity co-creation which enables observing the phenomenon on concrete level, identify employees' performative brand-related actions and consequently, their roles. As mentioned previously, in this thesis, roles are determined based on the employees' brand-related performative actions instead of their formal job positions. To discover and describe the performative action-based roles, an empirical study was conducted.

To support answering the main research question, two sub-questions were formulated. First sub-question is: *What types of brand-related performative actions can be observed?*

In short, employees can enact numerous brand-related performative actions (figure 5). Nature and characteristics of the actions vary: employees are not restricted to only a limited set of brand-related performative actions. First and foremost, brand-related performative actions occur in various settings and with numerous stakeholders, both internal and external. Some brand-related performative actions, such as *participating in monthly co-working days* and *creating company culture* take place inside the organization and among internal stakeholders. At the other end of the spectrum are for instance *networking with potential customers* and *conducting a training session*: these are examples of boundary-spanning brand-related performative actions. While some brand-related performative actions revolve around transmitting the corporate brand identity, others are more about creating or developing the corporate brand identity. The action of *communicating the cbi to external stakeholders* falls into the category of transmitting, and essentially influences an external stakeholder's perception of the corporate brand identity. On the other hand, *participating in brand message workshop* or *defining core values* are brand-related performative actions that are about consciously creating and shaping the corporate brand identity. These impact the corporate brand identity directly and are typically enacted when there are multiple internal stakeholders present, and possibly a few external stakeholders. In other words,

the impact of a brand-related performative action can be either direct or indirect, and some actions occur generally in specific settings or among certain stakeholder groups. What also differs, is input level of the actor. When an actor is the *target of internal communications, learns from colleagues* or *notices discrepancies between internal identity and external image*, the actor themselves is at the receiving end, generally a recipient of communication from one or more stakeholders. However, an employee can also transmit the corporate brand identity, and perform brand-related actions that are in a sense more active by nature and require more input. It should be noted that the level of input is a spectrum, not two extreme ends. An actor might simultaneously be a recipient, but also transmit the corporate brand identity and offer their own perception. For instance, *planning marketing strategies and activities* is typically carried out with several stakeholders, in for instance a workshop or a meeting where every participant offers their input but is also the target of others' inputs. To conclude, multiple types of brand-related performative actions exist, and these can be enacted in different settings with various stakeholders, both internal and external.

The second sub-question is: *How employees and managers describe the roles?*

When analyzing how employees and managers describe employees' roles, it became apparent that while they shared viewpoints, differences also emerged. Understandably, managers and employees approach the issue from their own position: what might be self-explanatory to one, is not that to the other. In general, managers' descriptions of employees' roles were either neutral or positive whereas employees' statements included also critique regarding for instance managers not enabling efficient contesting. Managers however do put a conscious effort towards e.g. involving employees in development projects and communicating about company-wide issues (including corporate brand identity). They perceive employees as invaluable assets to the company and actively assign roles to employees in order to benefit the corporate brand identity as well as improve the co-creational, dynamic process of it. Managers identified and discussed about most of the roles, such as *internalizer, innovator* and *representative*. Proactively adopted roles received less attention from the managers' end, although nearly every employee showed signs of contesting. To conclude, though employees and managers agree on the majority of issues, differing opinions surfaced, some of which lead to negative outcomes, such as tensions inside the organizations.

And lastly, the main research question is: *What are the roles of employees in corporate brand identity co-creation?*

As illustrated in table 3, this study suggests a classification of seven roles of employees co-creating the corporate brand identity. Each role explains and describes the corporate brand related performative actions, predicts an employee's behavior and explains the impact of the role in question on corporate brand identity.

Table 3 Employees' roles in corporate brand identity co-creation

Company-assigned roles	Proactively adopted roles
Internalizer	Brand advocate
Representative	Contester
Innovator	
Marketer	
Founding member	

Roles can be assigned by the employer, and the company-assigned roles are as follows: *internalizer*, *representative*, *innovator*, *marketer*, *founding member*. The assignment of a role varies, indicating that acquiring a company-assigned role might occur in multiple ways, depending on the role itself. Acquiring the role of *innovator* typically occurs when an individual is invited to a development project. Yet, the acquisition of some company-assigned roles is less formal and common. To exemplify, assigning the role of *internalizer* is rather mundane and might be as simple as managers communicating the corporate brand identity to an employee.

Conversely, roles can be proactively adopted. Proactively adopted roles are as follows: *brand advocate* and *contester*. Though these roles are proactively adopted, managers' behaviour might trigger an employee adopting the role of an advocate or contester. In other words, if managers communicate the corporate brand identity sufficiently and employee has had a positive employee experience, they are more likely to adopt the role of an advocate. Critical or even negative thoughts about the corporate brand

identity can also trigger proactively adopting a role, however, those typically lead to adopting the role of contestator.

A single employee might possess multiple roles, acquire new roles over time and conversely, lose one or more roles. In fact, employees' role(s) might change over time, a single employee might possess multiple roles simultaneously, and conversely, several employees may obtain same role at the same time. To provide an example, an employee can enact the roles of e.g. marketer, innovator and representative at once. Hence, roles may accumulate and fluctuate.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

This study builds on and elaborates the research in corporate brand identity co-creation in business-to-business context. Previous research has focused on for instance the performances stakeholders enact in corporate brand identity co-creation process and the democratization of corporate brand management (Abratt & Mingione, 2022; Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020). This thesis shifts the focus from e.g. value, elements and phases to the actors, more precisely employees, who co-create the corporate brand identity with other stakeholders. In a sense, the perspective and applied theories of this study allow to take a mundane approach. That is, discover the everyday activities which essentially co-create the corporate brand identity and influence numerous stakeholders' perception of it. This thesis attempts first and foremost understand individual people, their behavior and motivations. Thus, this study is human-oriented.

This thesis is the first to observe corporate brand identity co-creation only from the perspective of employees and their interaction. Previous research has approached corporate brand co-creation from the perspective of company, business partners and process (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020; Siano et al., 2022; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018). This study provides a new perspective and thus, new insights.

This thesis takes a new outlook to the phenomenon while simultaneously elaborating existing research in corporate brand identity, co-creation, performativity theory and role theory. This study also addresses the need for further research and provides future

research suggestions. By applying role theory and performativity theory, this thesis contributes to the corporate branding literature in four ways.

First, this study discovers and defines the roles that employees can enact in corporate brand identity co-creation. Previous research has identified for instance the roles of business partners in corporate brand image co-creation, the role of a strong internal brand community in corporate brand co-creation and the roles of employees as co-creators of the employer brand (Näppä et al., 2023; Saraniemi, 2022; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018). Although in branding research, it is acknowledged that employees do participate in corporate branding and can act as brand ambassadors, employees' roles have received little attention (Hemsley, 1998 via Harris & de Chernatony, 2001). It should be noted that certain performances enacted by employees have been discovered (see Iglesias et al., 2020). As mentioned previously, Iglesias et al. (2020) stated that employees internalize and contest and are central actors in corporate brand identity co-creation process in business-to-business contexts. Yet, employees' roles had been undiscovered.

Many of the identified roles shared similarities with roles that have been identified in previous branding literature. Comparing to the findings of Näppä et al. (2023), this thesis agrees that employees act as brand representatives. While Näppä et al.'s (2023) study discussed about employer brand co-creation, the role and contents of it are highly similar. This supports also previous branding literature: employees represent the organization they work in which in turn highlights the importance consistent delivery of the brand (Ind & Schmidt, 2019).

It also became evident that employees act as brand advocates, a finding that is supported by Näppä et al. (2023) and Törmälä and Saraniemi (2018). Interestingly, employees can enact similar roles as external stakeholders, more precisely business partners (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018). This study supports Näppä et al. (2023) and Törmälä and Saraniemi's (2018) conclusions that enacting the role of an advocate occurs on a voluntary basis, and is not required by the company, although managers might hope that employees spread positive word-of-mouth about the company.

This study succeeded in identifying a new and unique role, the role of a contesteer. While contesting has been identified as a performance, it is new as a role in corporate brand co-creation in business-to-business context (Iglesias, Landgraf, et al., 2020). As a noteworthy remark, although contesting can include comparing the company's corporate brand identity with a competitor's corporate brand identity, confronting is generally targeted towards internal stakeholders, often managers.

Overall, employees can influence directly and indirectly both external and internal 1) elements of the corporate brand identity 2) stakeholders. To exemplify, employees at Company A represent the corporate brand identity in networking events, meet with customers monthly and spread word-of-mouth about the company to external stakeholders. Therefore, even though employees are internal stakeholders, their impact on and participation in corporate brand identity co-creation extends beyond company borders.

Second, this study aligns with findings of existing literature: it has been both stated that all stakeholders participate in corporate branding and questioned usage of the term all brand stakeholders (da Silveira & Simões, 2022; Merz et al., 2018). As mentioned previously, this is because some stakeholders might not be willing to participate. Co-creation is above all a voluntary performance and therefore requires stakeholders' own initiative (da Silveira & Simões, 2022, p. 144). However, it should be noted that being voluntary does not equal participating in corporate brand identity co-creation. Therefore, this thesis suggests that voluntariness should be considered a prerequisite for participating in corporate brand identity co-creation, not the sole influencing factor.

Continuing on the same notion, this study shed light on employees' reasons and motivation to participate in corporate brand identity co-creation. In short, employees' participation in corporate brand identity co-creation and role acquisition is influenced by multiple factors. This thesis supports Törmälä and Saraniemi's (2018) notion that roles can be assigned by a company or proactively adopted. It should be understood that although the type of a role, i.e. whether it is company-assigned or proactively adopted, indicates why an employee acquires certain role, it does so only to some extent. This study found that both internal factors (e.g. level of motivation) and external factors (e.g. resources and other stakeholders' personalities) trigger

participation, but sometimes also limit it. Törmälä and Saraniemi (2018) touched on the actors' motivation and willingness but noted that gaining deeper insight on motivators requires further research, which is the suggestion of this study as well.

Third, building on the conceptualizations of role theory, the results of this thesis indicate that roles of corporate brand identity co-creators are neither permanent nor determined by formal job position (Heikkinen et al., 2007; Sluss et al., 2011). Some roles are more prevalent during a certain stage of the company's journey (founding member) or the duration of an employees' employment (internalizer). Additionally, some performative actions take place only or more frequently at a certain point in time. As the empirical data of this study showcase, roles fluctuate and are dynamic by nature, which supports the findings of previous research (Heikkinen et al., 2007). To conclude, performative actions and roles include a temporal dimension.

Fourth, by applying performativity theory, this study contributes to the understanding that corporate brand identity is co-created through performative actions and requires interaction between stakeholders. While Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones (2017) studied new business-to-business venture corporate brand identity development and Igleasias et al. (2020) explored corporate brand identity co-creation process, previous research falls a bit short on understanding employees' performative actions thoroughly. This study reveals new performative actions and demonstrates that corporate brand identity co-creation is indeed a process. Employees co-create the corporate brand identity continuously and are focal actors whose influence or involvement cannot be ignored.

5.3 Managerial implications

The seven company-assigned and proactively adopted roles that were identified showcase that there is great potential in employees when it comes to corporate brand identity co-creation. Employees not only provide knowledge, but also ideas and resources. By tapping into the potential employees possess, managers can develop, transmit and strengthen corporate brand identity.

Employees constitute the main contact to external stakeholders, such as existing and potential customers. Though corporate brand identity is communicated also e.g. on the

company's website, social media accounts and by managers, employees are the main transmitters of corporate brand. Each interviewed employee met the criteria of representative and are in contact with external stakeholders which indicates that employees indeed can have a considerable impact on the perception an external stakeholder holds about Company A's corporate brand identity. Moreover, as discussed, business relationships are one of the key elements in business-to-business branding, thus increasing the importance of understanding the value of such relationships (Ind & Schmidt, 2019, pp. 232–234).

Elaborating on the topic, managers can and should utilize knowledge of corporate brand identity co-creator roles to their advantage. Identifying roles that exist inside a specific organization could help enhance brand management in numerous ways. For instance, recognizing employees' expertise could advance integrating employees in the corporate branding process. To clarify, managers should evaluate the overall qualities each employee possesses and assess the corporate brand co-creation potential. Selecting right employees and assigning roles in a suitable manner could expand the scope of opportunities and generate value, particularly in the long run. Managers should especially identify key actors, i.e., those who could have the best and most influence on the corporate brand identity as well as those with invaluable impact, without whom delivering the corporate brand turns into a challenge.

In addition to recognizing the roles, managers and corporate brand co-creation would benefit from identifying individuals' motivations and reasons for engaging in co-creation. As mentioned in theoretical contributions, more research on this topic is needed. Nevertheless, drivers and reasons for participating in corporate brand co-creation should be understood. And conversely, which factors decrease willingness or motivation to engage in co-creation. The results of this study and previous research indicate that if employers wish to turn employees into active corporate brand co-creators, the corporate brand itself must be such that employees can agree with. To put it differently, if a corporate brand is approved by and resonates with employees, willingness to participate in corporate brand co-creation increases. It should be noted that reasons for engaging in co-creation vary. While some employees participate in corporate brand co-creation because they want to improve or fix certain issues, others reported that for them, participation is a given. However, in return, employees expect

to gain (mutual) value and that e.g. the outcome of a development reflects their influence. Employees' participation therefore should not be taken for granted. By increasing knowledge on this topic, managers could utilize motivational factors to their advantage and remove barriers, and consequently, facilitate corporate brand co-creation better.

When it comes to the impact of the identified roles, each role can benefit the corporate brand in its own way. The identified roles influence various stakeholders and multiple elements of the corporate brand identity: *representative* interacts with external stakeholders, *innovator* offers their input to development projects, *advocate* spreads positive word-of-mouth unprompted and so forth. Even though some roles, such as *contester*, might impact corporate brand identity negatively or pose challenges to co-creation, contesting is still an inherent part of corporate brand identity co-creation, may help harmonize differing perceptions and alleviate tensions. When each role is played by someone or multiple individuals, the vast majority of elements of corporate brand identity and stakeholders are covered.

Strengths, weaknesses and benefits as well as overall knowledge of each role should be given broad consideration in decision-making. For instance, when composing the company's own marketing team, building networks as well as during recruiting and on-boarding processes. Considering the characteristics of business-to-business branding in SMEs, identifying those employees that can influence most positively on corporate brand identity by interacting with external stakeholders, is especially vital.

This study demonstrates that employees' and managers' perceptions as well as descriptions of employees' participation or roles may differ. Therefore, discrepancies between understandings of these two stakeholder groups exist. Managers' description about employees' participation in corporate brand identity co-creation was mainly positive. Managers believe that employees provide valuable insights, act according to Company A's corporate brand identity and in general feel positive towards participating in co-creation. While managers did note that not everyone wants to participate, some employees' views conflicted with managers' understanding.

Some employees were unaware of Company A's corporate brand identity and how to act according to that. However, when managers were asked if Company A's employees' behavior aligns with its corporate brand identity, they answered in the affirmative. Although the primary focus of this study were the roles of employees, the interviews revealed also issues that might hinder corporate brand identity co-creation or cause tensions inside the organization. Differences in perception might stem from ineffective communication and lead to for instance following situations: an unmotivated employee participates in brand-related activities out of pure obligation or employees represent the corporate brand to external stakeholders though not knowing how to do so.

This study suggests that 1) clear and frequent communication about brand-related issues from manager's end is vital to effective corporate branding 2) managers should enable if not encourage true contesting. Taking into consideration that the case company operates in business-to-business context and offers professional services, employees' behavior aligning with the corporate brand is highly important. In essence, employees are the face of a company and inconsistent delivery of the brand might lead to a negative outcome. In addition to that, this thesis highlights the need for further research in managing corporate brand co-creation, especially in relation to the discovered roles and how to effectively manage in an organization where multiple roles are enacted.

5.4 Evaluation of the study and future research suggestions

Single case study method allowed to gain a deep understanding of the context and perspectives of multiple interviewees. This laid a strong foundation for providing a comprehensive overview of employees' performative actions, and consequently, their roles. Because of the time constraint and limited resources, data was collected only with semi-structured interviews. Observation research could add further insights and generate richer data since observing participants would assist in forming a better understanding of observants' daily activities, collaboration, group dynamics and so forth (Angrosino, 2007, pp. 53–56).

It must be understood that corporate brand identity co-creation is a highly context-dependent phenomenon. Contextual factors such as company culture and co-creational practices affect and cannot be disregarded. As an example, are employees actively involved in brand-related activities, what is the managers' attitude towards co-creation and how motivated the employees are to participate in co-creation. Each company has their own mode of operation, customs and corporate brand which might impact enacted performative actions, and consequently, emerging roles. The case company is located in Finland, operates in business-to-business context, offers professional services and is an SME. Furthermore, the company and its managers encourage co-creation, actively involve employees in e.g. development projects and in general are open towards improvement suggestions. These factors offer a fruitful starting point for co-creation, more precisely corporate brand identity co-creation. However, the state of affairs might be different in some other companies. In summary, all variables and influencing factors should be acknowledged.

Continuing on the notion of context-dependency, contextual factors limit the generalizability of results. In addition to the aforementioned issues, branding in business-to-business context is different from branding in business-to-consumer context. Applying the results in a direct manner to e.g. business-to-consumer context or another differing setting would likely be unreasonable. As stated, although these contextual factors impact the general applicability of the results of this study, they also offer noteworthy suggestions for further research. It could be interesting to repeat the study by selecting a case company that operates in a different business-to-business field and compare the results. Would employees who work in e.g. an accounting company or consulting be as eager to participate in co-creation or as capable to enact the role of marketer? Furthermore, the selected company in this study is an SME with limited resources, which was reported as one of the main reasons to not participate in corporate brand identity co-creation, and thus, it would be intriguing to analyze whether the size of the company or available resources affect corporate brand identity co-creation.

Although it was not the primary focus, this study succeeded in addressing some motivators and reasons for co-creating corporate brand identity, both endogenous and exogenous. Role theory generally emphasizes the motivation and triggers for role

behavior. Gaining deeper knowledge could offer valuable insight and investigating the drivers would help better understand e.g. why an employee acquires a certain role, what are the main barriers for acquiring a specific role and how could role behavior be prompted.

Another issue to note is that research in corporate brand identity co-creation, especially research that is set in business-to-business context, is at its beginning stages. As mentioned in the introduction and conclusion, further research is needed. Moreover, the research is rather fragmented and theoretical framework lacks. Some frameworks and conceptualizations do exist, e.g. Urde's (2013) Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (see figure 2) and Iglesias et al.'s (2020) illustration of corporate brand identity co-creation process (see figure 4), but there is no widely adopted and accepted theory.

As recognized by previous research and this study, the role(s) managers enact influence employees' performative actions and thus, their roles. That is, employees performativity or co-creation is triggered by managers' leadership behavior. Despite managerial control being merely in illusion, managers are still responsible for facilitating corporate brand identity co-creation (Wider et al., 2018). In a way, ensuring that corporate brand identity co-creation process is as frictionless as possible. Thus, in line with previously published articles, this study calls for more research on modern brand management (da Silveira & Simões, 2022; e.g. Mühlbacher, 2022). Although the complexity of the phenomenon poses challenges for finding a generalizable yet specific framework for modern brand management, corporate brand identity co-creation still provides a fruitful foundation for future research.

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Appendix 1: Outline of a semi-structured interviews: employees

1. Mitä teet työkseksi?
What do you do for work?
2. Voisitko kuvailla omaa työarkeasi?
Could you describe your typical workweek?
3. Kuvailisitko työnteon tapoja tässä yrityksessä?
Could you describe the ways of working in this company?
4. Voisitko kertoa vuorovaikutuksesta kollegojen kanssa? Esimerkiksi kuinka usein olet yhteydessä kollegoihisi, minkälaisista asioista ja missä vuorovaikutus tapahtuu?
Could you tell me about your interaction with colleagues? For example, how often are you in touch with your colleagues, what things do you discuss about, and where does the interaction take place?
5. Miten kuvailisit tämän yrityksen yritysbrändi-identiteettiä?
How would you describe Company A's corporate brand identity?
6. After initial response, interviewees were shown and familiarized with Urde's (2013) Corporate Brand Identity Matrix and asked to reflect their answer to it.
7. Minkälaisia yhteisen tekemisen tapoja tässä yrityksessä on? Yhteisen tekemisen tapa voi olla esimerkiksi yhteisiä toimistopäiviä tai tapaamisia, joissa tehdään kehitystyötä.
What kinds of co-creational practices exist in this company? *Co-creational practice* refers to e.g. organized office days or meetings that revolve around on development.
8. Miten kuvailisit työntekijöiden osallistamista tässä yrityksessä? Esim. päätöksenteko, tuotekehitys, strategiatyö, yhteisten toimintatapojen kehittäminen, arvojen määrittäminen
How would you describe employee involvement in this company? For example, in decision-making, product development, strategic work, developing common practices, and defining values.
9. Jatkokysymys, jos vastaus ei riittävä: Voisitko kuvailla työntekijöiden osallistamista suhteessa yritysbrändi-identiteettiin?
If the response is insufficient, interviewees were asked a follow-up question:

How would you describe employee involvement in relation to the corporate brand identity?

10. Miten itse olet osallistunut näihin?

Please describe your participation in these activities?

11. Kuvailisitko brändityötä tässä yrityksessä?

Could you describe branding in this company?

12. Jos vastaus ei riittävä: kertoisitko konkreettisia esimerkkejä brändityöstä tässä yrityksessä?

If the response is insufficient, interviewees were asked a follow-up question:

Could you provide concrete examples of branding in this company?

13. Koetko, että työntekijöiden odotetaan osallistuvan brändityöhön?

Are employees are expected to participate in branding?

14. Jos vastaus on myöntävä: Millä tavoin odotetaan osallistuvan?

If the answer is yes: In what ways are they expected to participate?

15. Jatkokysymys: Mistä odotukset tulevat?

16. Follow-up question: Where do the expectations come from?

17. Jos vastaus on kieltävä: Miksi ajattelet näin?

If the answer is no: Why do you think so?

18. Minkälaisena näet mahdollisuutesi vaikuttaa yritysbrändi-identiteettiin?

How would you describe your opportunities to influence the corporate brand identity?

19. Voisitko antaa esimerkkejä tilanteista, joissa olet ollut mukana luomassa yritysbrändi-identiteettiä?

Could you give examples of situations where you have been involved in creating the corporate brand identity?

20. Voisitko kuvailla kollegoidesi osallistumista yritysbrändi-identiteetin luomiseen?

Could you describe your colleagues' participation in corporate brand identity creation?

21. Toivoisitko voitavasi osallistua enemmän brändityöhön tässä yrityksessä?

Would you like to participate more in branding in this company?

22. jos ei: Miksi et?

If no: Why not?

23. jos kyllä: Miten haluaisit osallistua?

If yes: How would you like to participate?

24. Onko jotain, mitä haluaisit lisätä?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 2: Outline of a semi-structured interviews: managers

1. Mitä teet työkseksi?
What do you do for work?
2. Voisitko kuvailla omaa työarkeasi?
Could you describe your typical workweek?
3. Kuvailisitko työnteon tapoja tässä yrityksessä?
Could you describe the ways of working in this company?
4. Voisitko kertoa vuorovaikutuksesta kollegojen kanssa? Esimerkiksi kuinka usein olet yhteydessä kollegoihisi, minkälaisista asioista ja missä vuorovaikutus tapahtuu?
Could you tell me about your interaction with colleagues? For example, how often are you in touch with your colleagues, what things do you discuss about, and where does the interaction take place?
5. Miten kuvailisit tämän yrityksen yritysbrändi-identiteettiä?
How would you describe Company A's corporate brand identity?
6. After initial response, interviewees were shown and familiarized with Urde's (2013) Corporate Brand Identity Matrix and asked to reflect their answer to it.
7. Minkälaisia yhteisen tekemisen tapoja tässä yrityksessä on? Yhteisen tekemisen tapa voi olla esimerkiksi yhteisiä toimistopäiviä tai tapaamisia, joissa tehdään kehitystyötä.
What kinds of co-creational practices exist in this company? *Co-creational practice* refers to e.g. organized office days or meetings that revolve around on development.
8. Miten kuvailisit työntekijöiden osallistamista tässä yrityksessä? Esim. päätöksenteko, tuotekehitys, strategiatyö, yhteisten toimintatapojen kehittäminen, arvojen määrittäminen
How would you describe employee involvement in this company? For example, in decision-making, product development, strategic work, developing common practices, and defining values.
9. Jatkokysymys, jos vastaus ei riittävä: Voisitko kuvailla työntekijöiden osallistamista suhteessa yritysbrändi-identiteettiin?
If the response is insufficient, interviewees were asked a follow-up question:

How would you describe employee involvement in relation to the corporate brand identity?

10. Miten itse olet osallistunut näihin?

Please describe your participation in these activities?

11. Kuvailisitko brändityötä tässä yrityksessä?

Could you describe branding in this company?

12. Jos vastaus ei riittävä: kertoisitko konkreettisia esimerkkejä brändityöstä tässä yrityksessä?

If the response is insufficient, interviewees were asked a follow-up question:

Could you provide concrete examples of branding in this company?

13. Koetko, että työntekijöiden odotetaan osallistuvan brändityöhön?

Are employees are expected to participate in branding?

14. Jos vastaus on myöntävä: Millä tavoin odotetaan osallistuvan?

If the answer is yes: In what ways are they expected to participate?

15. Jos vastaus on kieltävä: Miksi ajattelet näin?

If the answer is no: Why do you think so?

16. Voisitko antaa esimerkkejä tilanteista, joissa yritysbrändi-identiteettiä on luotu yhdessä työntekijöiden kanssa?

Could you give examples of situations where corporate brand identity has been co-created with employees?

17. Onko yhdessä luomisessa tai siihen osallistumisessa eroja eri a) työntekijöiden b) työntekijäryhmien (tiimien) välillä?

Are there differences in co-creation or participation among different a) employees b) employee groups (teams)?

18. Kuinka tärkeänä pidät sitä, että työntekijät toimivat yritysbrändi-identiteetin mukaisesti?

How important do you consider it for employees to act in accordance with Company A's corporate brand identity?

19. Koetko, että työntekijöiden toiminta on linjassa yritysbrändi-identiteetin kanssa?

Do you feel that employees' actions are in line with the corporate brand identity?

20. Onko jotain, mitä haluaisit lisätä?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 3: Reporting the use of artificial intelligence

Out of the available artificial intelligence applications, only ChatGPT was utilized. This was done in a considerate manner, acknowledging the limitations of artificial intelligence. ChatGPT was utilized at the very beginning of the thesis process, i.e., when coming up with the topic of the thesis. The author used various prompts that revolved around e.g. topical issues and interesting opportunities in corporate branding.

Since ChatGPT 3.5 has its shortcomings and does not always produce correct information, the information and statements it produced were verified and compared to scientific publications to ensure validity. After initial ideating, artificial intelligence applications were no longer utilized.