Aalto University
School of Business

The role of corporate identity in university branding: Case Aalto University School of Business

Finnish Business Communication

Master's thesis

Eeva Tähtinen

2014

Department of Communication
Aalto University
School of Business

Author Eeva Tähtinen

Title of thesis The role of corporate identity in university branding: Case Aalto University School of Business

Degree Master of Science

Degree programme Finnish Business Communication

Thesis advisor(s) Pekka Pälli

Year of approval 2014 **Number of pages** 82 **Language** English

Abstract

Objectives
The aim of the thesis is to study the role of corporate identity and corporate brand in universities. To differentiate in the growing international competition, universities have recently adopted business-like models of operation, including strategic planning, stakeholder-centered thinking and communicating a unique identity and brand. The objective of the thesis is to study how the case university presents its corporate identity in the external communications targeted at prospective students and prospective academic staff.

Data and methods
The thesis is conducted as a qualitative case study looking into the presented identity and brand of a single Finnish higher education institution, Aalto University School of Business (formerly Helsinki School of Economics) in 2006 and 2013. The data consists of strategy texts, brochures and website presentations that are purposefully used to promote the case university in the eyes of the key stakeholders. The documents are approached in discursive terms, where the objective is to find out on which discourses the ideal identity is built, and how these discourses reflect the overall change and commercialization of universities.

Findings
The results of the thesis support the understanding that universities need to struggle between various demands. The findings indicate that universities are not only expected to be conductors of higher research and educators of future professionals but also long-term partners of businesses, societal contributors and international centers of innovation, and they constantly need to seek for a balance between a set of expectations. To keep up with the competition, universities have moved towards business-like ideals, and they strive to differentiate by communicating a strong corporate identity. In its public presentation, the case university emphasizes quality, international competitiveness, patnerships, societal contribution and interplay between tradition and future innovativeness.

Keywords universities, Aalto University, Aalto University School of Business, corporate communication, corporate identity, corporate brand, discourse

Tekijä Eeva Tähtinen

Työn nimi Identiteetin ja brändin merkitys yliopistoissa: case Aalto-yliopiston kauppakorkeakoulu

Tutkinto Kauppatieteiden maisteri

Koulutusohjelma Talouselämän viestintä

Työn ohjaaja(t) Pekka Pälli

Hyväksymisvuosi 2014 **Sivumäärä** 82 **Kieli** Englanti

Tiivistelmä

Tavoitteet
Tutkielman tavoitteena on tarkastella identiteetin ja brändin merkitystä yliopistoissa. Erottautuakseen kasvavassa kansainvälisessä kilpailussa yliopistot ovat viime aikoina omaksuneet yrityksille ominaisia toimintatapoja, joita ovat muun muassa strateginen suunnittelu, sidosryhmäajattelu ja yksilöllisen identiteetin ja brändin viestiminen. Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten case-yliopisto rakentaa identiteettiään ulkoisessa viestinnässä, joka on suunnattu tuleville opiskelijoille ja tulevalle akateemiselle henkilöstölle.

Tutkimusaineisto ja -menetelmä
Tutkimus on laadullinen tapaustutkimus, jossa tarkastellaan viestittyä identiteettiä ja brändiä yksittäisessä suomalaisessa korkeakoulussa, Aalto-yliopiston kauppakorkeakoulussa (aiemmin Helsingin kauppakorkeakoulu) vuosina 2006 ja 2013. Aineistona on strategiatekstejä, esitteitä ja verkkotekstejä, joiden avulla organisaatio viestii tietoisesti myönteistä kuvaa itsestään. Tekstejä tarkastellaan diskursiivisesta näkökulmasta, ja tavoitteena on selvittää, millaisten diskurssien varaan yliopisto rakentaa ihanneidentiteettiään. Lisäksi tutkielmassa huomioidaan, miten nämä diskurssit kuvaavat laajempaa yliopistojen toimintaympäristön muutosta ja kaupallistumista.

Tulokset
Tutkielman tulokset tukevat käsitystä siitä, että yliopistoilta vaaditaan aiempaa enemmän. Case-organisaation viestinnästä löydetyt diskurssit osoittavat, että yliopistojen odotetaan olevan paitsi tutkimusyksikköjä ja tulevaisuuden osaajien kouluttajia myös yritysten kumppaneita, yhteiskunnallisia hyväntekijöitä ja kansainvälisesti kilpailukykyisiä innovaatioyhteisöjä, joiden on jatkuvasti tasapainoiltava eri roolien välillä. Pärjätäkseen kilpailussa yliopistot siirtyvät kohti kaupallisia toimintatapoja ja pyrkivät erottautumaan viestimällä vahvaa identiteettiä. Case-yliopiston viestinnässä korostetaan laadukkuutta, kansainvälistä kilpailukykyä, kumppanuutta, yhteiskunnallista vaikuttavuutta ja perinteiden ja tulevaisuuden innovaatiokyvyn välistä vuoropuhelua.

Avainsanat yliopistot, Aalto-yliopisto, Aalto-yliopiston kauppakorkeakoulu, viestintä, identiteetti, brändi, diskurssi

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The higher education sector in Finland and internationally has witnessed powerful changes during the past decades: it has become a global business in which education has turned into a service marketed worldwide. Universities and other higher education institutions are increasingly competing for the brightest students and academic staff at international level. At the same time, they have moved towards a business-like, competitive model of operation. Universities are no longer just institutions of higher learning but also businesses (Melewar and Akel 2005; Bunzel 2007) which contradicts the traditional role of universities as independent institutions creating and disseminating autonomous knowledge (Jarvis 2001).

The new way of operation requires adopting models and concepts from the business world. In the competitive higher education markets, universities have realized the value of a distinctive corporate identity as a strategic resource. As in commercial organizations, corporate identity and brand are now seen as a basis for successful communication to various stakeholders, and most importantly, as a powerful source of differentiation. (Melewar and Akel 2005.) This transformation may be called "marketization of academic discourse" which refers to the general reconstruction of social life on a market basis and the incorporation of higher education into the commodity market. As a result, a highly promotional discourse has been colonizing universities which were previously unrelated to the economy. (Fairclough 2010.)

In response to the growing competition, the Finnish higher education sector has undergone significant changes during the past years (Dobson 2008a; Michelsen 2004). To make the operations more effective, Finnish universities have entered a phase of institutional mergers, among which is the formation of Aalto University in 2010 as a merger of three universities. Furthermore, Finnish universities have encountered mutations concerning their form, funding and governance. Universities were earlier state-run and primarily financed from the national higher education budget but have recently gained more independency concerning their funding and management. (Dobson 2008a.) This has increased the pressures faced by universities but also allowed them to more clearly profile themselves in order to compete in the international environment (OKM 2009).

One of the primary ways in which organizations manage relationships with their stakeholders is by building a corporate reputation and brand (Cornelissen 2011). Branding a university, like any commercial organization, draws on a strong and distinctive corporate identity which is managed to communicate the organization's key characteristics to a variety of stakeholders (Balmer and Gray 2003). A growing number of universities have recently established branding programs in order to burnish their profile and win competitive edge over their competitors (Balmer and Gray 2003). One of these institutions is the Finnish Aalto University School of Business which has been renewing its profile as part of strategic positioning.

At the same time, due to the generic characteristics of higher education, universities and schools have paradoxically become harder to distinguish from each other by their features, and the presentation of a distinct identity has become difficult (Argenti 2000; Melewar and Akel 2005). As Levine (1997) suggests, higher education has moved from its growth stage to a mature stage industry, and as a result, universities have to move from comprehensive institutions to more focused entities. It is therefore extremely crucial to determine what makes them unique.

1.2 Research objectives

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how the corporate identity is presented by a single Finnish higher education institution, Aalto University School of Business (formerly Helsinki School of Economics, HSE) in its deliberately planned external communications. The purpose is to look into a single institution's branding efforts in response to the changing operating environment, growing competition and overall marketization of the academic world.

This study observes the presented corporate identity at two stages. The objective to compete in the international environment was strongly recognized in the HSE strategy launched in 2006, which serves as the starting point for the study. The School of Business has recently been re-defining its profile as part of the multidisciplinary Aalto University, and the present situation is therefore the second point to be examined. The data comprises material from both stages and includes documents that can be seen projecting the corporate identity: strategy documents, mission statements, brochures and presentations. Since the international competition mainly concerns recruiting students and academic staff, prospective students and prospective faculty are regarded as the key external stakeholders.

Based on the data, the major corporate identity themes are recognized and divided into main themes which are treated as discourses. The discourses can be seen to make sense in terms of the organization's core objectives in two different operational environments. A further objective is to investigate how these discourses reflect the overall marketization of academic institutions and struggles between traditional and commercial university values. Finally, the findings are used to interpret the School's efforts in response to the growing competition in the education market.

The study is guided with a particular interest to find out how the ideal corporate identity of a "world-class business school" is constructed in the selected documents. Becoming world-class was stated as a key objective in the HSE vision 2006, and the goal has remained unchanged in the present situation. Aalto University School of Business now aims to be a world-class business school within the upcoming ten years, which is externally measured by a top 10 placing in the European Business School Rankings published by *Financial Times*. This objective is in line with Aalto University's aim to reach a world-class standing by 2020 by combining the expertise in the fields of business, arts and technology.

Research questions of this thesis are the following:

(1) Which discourses and themes does the School employ to present its corporate identity in 2006 and at present?
(2) How does the ideal world-class business school identity appear in the light of the selected documents?
(3) How do the findings reflect the changing operational environment and overall marketization of higher education?

1.3 Key theoretical concepts

The thesis draws on literature on *corporate identity* and *corporate brand*, and regards them as part of socially constructed activity of strategizing, approached with an understanding that promotion is among the key functions of a strategy (Osman 2008; Pälli *et al*. 2009; Cornut *et al.* 2012). The study views identity building and corporate branding as strategic processes of managing an organization's overall public image and adding value to its stakeholders relations and differentiation strategy (Melewar *et al*. 2006; Osman 2008). Concepts closely related to corporate identity and corporate brand include *corporate image* and *corporate reputation*, which are, however, only mentioned in the present study. Brief definitions for the concepts are given in the following.

Corporate identity is an organization's distinctive public image that a corporate entity communicates (Cornelissen *et al*. 2007). It is construed internally by the organization's stakeholders (Brown *et al*. 2006) and made visible in communications. In this study, the concept is defined as follows:

> Corporate identity is related to a company's public presentation. It is a firm's strategically planned and purposeful presentation of itself in order to gain a positive corporate image in the minds of the public.
>
> (Alessandri 2001.)

Corporate identity encompasses visual elements as well as all other forms of communications to the public (Baker and Balmer 1997; Melewar *et al*. 2006; Cornelissen *et al*. 2007). It forms a basis on which brand, image and reputation are built (Melewar *et al*. 2006; Balmer and Gray 2003).

Corporate image equals the attributes of corporate identity as perceived by individual stakeholders (Alessandri 2001; Balmer 2008; Cornelissen *et al*. 2007). Corporate image, as a reflection of the identity, is an "end-product" of corporate branding (Curtis *et al*. 2009; Argenti 2000). Further, *corporate reputation* is the sum of the individual images of an organization; it describes the totality of individuals' perceptions of an organization (Argenti 2000).

Corporate brand refers to the attributes of corporate identity made known to stakeholders via branding efforts of a company (Alessandri 2001); its aim is to create favorable images in the stakeholders' minds. Corporate brand incorporates the dimensions of corporate identity construed internally in an organization and corporate image perceived by stakeholders. As such, it is an interface between an organization's values and stakeholders' interpretations of these values. (Curtis *et al*. 2009.) In this thesis, the focus is on branding efforts made by the case organization itself, and brand therefore is used to refer to an organization's target image.

As such, the concept of corporate brand comes very close to that of corporate identity. Instead, the perspective of image, brand and reputation as perceived by the public is excluded from this study.

The definitions are summarized in Table 1.

***Table 1**. Definitions of the key concepts (Cornelissen et al. 2007; Alessandri 2001; Argenti 2000; Curtis et al. 2009; Balmer 2008; Melewar et al. 2006).*

Concept	Definition
Corporate identity	An organization's strategically planned, purposeful presentation of itself in order to gain a positive corporate image
Corporate branding	The efforts made by an organization to create favorable image and brand based on the corporate identity
Corporate brand	Attributes of corporate identity made known to stakeholders; a target image that an entity communicates
Corporate image	Attributes of corporate identity as perceived by individual stakeholders; the end-product of branding
Corporate reputation	The sum of the individual images of an organization

Moreover, as this study addresses corporate identity and brand from a discourse analytical perspective, *discourse* is one of the key concepts. Following the definition by Fairclough (2010), discourses are defined as the ways in which different aspects of the material and social world are constructed and represented by means of language. In the present study, central discourses include *traditional academic discourse* and *marketization discourse*. In the discourse of marketization, the role of universities is defined from a promotional perspective. The academic discourse, on the other hand, is a way to discuss universities drawing on their traditional role: as autonomous creators and providers of higher knowledge.

This thesis' approach to discourse, corporate identity and corporate branding touches upon the studies of strategy discourse, where there has been an explicit call to study the micro-level elements of strategy texts and the ways they contribute to the meso-level of specific organizational narratives and broader societal and macro-level of discourse (Vaara 2010). Therefore, this study particularly adds to the previous investigations of strategy texts, where textual characteristics of strategy texts are combined with the considerations of the texts' social functions (Cornut *et al.* 2012; Pälli *et al*. 2009).

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into seven sections. Chapter 1 introduces the background and research objectives. Chapter 2 takes a look into the broader context of the study, that is, the overall commercialization of higher education both worldwide and in Finland. Chapter 3 discusses the prior research on corporate identity and branding both generally and in the specific higher education setting. Chapter 4 introduces the case organization, Aalto University School of Business. Chapter 5 presents the data and methods used to conduct the study, and chapter 6 goes on to present the discourses that appear in the School's strategic communication. The findings are finally summarized and discussed in chapter 7.

2 THE CHANGING ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

2.1 Universities in the growing international competition

In the present day, higher education institutions face pressures from both external and internal environments as they have to struggle between the tendencies of innovation and standardization. On the one hand, universities are expected to be innovative with a specific organizational mission and distinct profile; on the other hand, they need to be an integrated part of a growing, highly international and standardized higher education industry network. (Stensaker and Norgård 2001, 473.)

As suggested by Stensaker and Norgård (2001), university organizations may respond to economic, societal and cultural demands by two different ways of adaptation. The first option is to respond for reasons of legitimacy and survival, which means a change towards standardization within the organizational sector. As a result, the institutions of higher education become increasingly similar. Another choice for universities is to seek for a strategic niche in order to successfully compete for the students and improve financial support and relations with the society at large. (Stensaker and Norgård 2001, 473–474.) In regard to the latter option, Levine (1997, 32) considers universities as mature stage businesses that should make themselves more specialized and unique in response to the external pressures. Innovation may be seen as a necessary condition for organizational survival, and it is this strategic change that has been a solution sought by many universities to respond to the growing pressures (Stensaker and Norgård 2001, 473–474).

The powerful changes recently witnessed in the economic environment, such as internationalization, mergers, deregulation, market privatization and growing number of relevant stakeholders, require new tools for organizations to face such dynamics (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 138). Towards the end of the 20th century, the role of universities started changing from serving the state in managing society to serving the industry and commerce in ensuring that people are employable. The governments were forced to decrease funding for the universities, and as a result, many institutions started assuming a more corporate form and functioning more like a business entity. (Jarvis 2001, 2.) It is in this context that a commercial model of operation has arisen as a potential strategic resource for universities (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 138).

In the competitive higher education markets universities are no longer only institutions of higher learning but they increasingly come to operate as if they were businesses competing to sell their products. For instance, universities are required to raise an increasing proportion of their funds from private sources. (Fairclough 1993, 101.) As greater competition among schools and universities exists to attract the best students and faculty, the institutions of higher education become marketers of “educational services” both nationally and internationally. To differentiate, they need to strive for a distinct profile. (Melewar and Akel 2005, 41; Bunzel 2007, 152; Curtis *et al*. 2009, 404.)

As a result, many universities have set up corporate communications departments whose responsibilities include managing corporate information and projecting a positive image of the institution (Osman 2008, 58–59). At the same time, the number of relevant stakeholder groups has grown which has increased the need for consistent communications (Melewar & Akel 2005, 47; Argenti 2000, 176).

There are, however, many ways in which universities are unlike businesses. As already noted by Fairclough (1993, 101) a major reason for the difference is that government funding makes up a significant part of universities’ income. Curtis *et al*. (2009, 404) further point out that many university administrators have avoided seeing themselves as marketers or brand managers. Nevertheless, many institutions are making major organizational changes which accord with a market mode of operation, such as making the departments financially more autonomous, using managerial approaches and paying much more attention to marketing (Fairclough 1993, 101).

Despite the opposing views seeing business world morally contradicting to the values of education (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007, 942) and the lack of domestication of commercial knowledge to higher education (Maringe 2005, 564), universities have recognized opportunities coming from marketing and PR (Baker and Balmer 1997, 371; Melewar and Akel 2005, 41). Along with this shift, building a unique corporate identity and brand has become crucial in universities and other higher education institutions (Melewar and Akel 2005, 41; Curtis *et al*. 2009, 404).

2.2 Changes in Finnish higher education

As noticed by Michelsen (2004) and Dobson (2008a), the Finnish higher education sector has recently been subject to powerful changes, and it has, like the higher education elsewhere in the world, faced both internal and external pressures during the past decade. The competition once limited within the national borders has along with globalization, European integration, and explosion of information led to a wholly new operational environment for the universities. Internally, Finnish universities have confronted demands for higher efficiency from e.g. the Ministry of Education. (Michelsen 2004, 30–31, 40; Dobson 2008a.)

The global education market is determined by European and American top universities enjoying financial independency and having long traditions of providing top-level research and teaching (Michelsen 2004, 15–16). The Finnish universities, on the contrary, were long state-run and primarily financed from the national higher education budget (Dobson 2008a). This was about to change along with the university reform executed in 2009. The new Universities Act, which took effect in 2009, separated Finnish universities from the state and extended their financial autonomy by changing their legal status from state universities to either corporations subject to public law or foundations subject to private law. According to the Ministry of Education, the key objective was to facilitate operation in the international environment so that universities are better able to diversify their funding base, compete for international research funding and cooperate with foreign universities. Additionally, its purpose was to make university operations more effective as well as encourage innovation. (OKM 2009.)

Along with the University reform, the Finnish network of universities and other higher education institutions was reshaped to make it function more effectively. For instance, the universities of Joensuu and Kuopio formed the University of Eastern Finland, and the University of Turku and the Turku School of Economics were merged. Probably the most radical change, though, was the formation of Aalto University between the Helsinki University of Technology, the Helsinki School of Economics, and the University of Art and Design Helsinki. The new university comprises three fields of study: technology, business, and art know-how. (OKM 2009; Dobson 2008a.)

The university reform in Finland moved university governance towards managerial ideals. University staff is no longer employed by the state but their employment relationship has become contractual. The reform opened new ways of management and decision-making for the universities as they are able to pursue their own human resources policies, improve their attractiveness as an employer, and in this way, strengthen their competitive advantage in order to recruit qualified personnel. The reform allows universities to develop stronger profiles based on their strengths and improve their capacity for operating in the international environment. The new Act has tightened public funding and pushed the universities to seek for alternative ways of financing their operations. At the same time, it has allowed them to supplement their financials with donations and business activities. (OKM 2009; Dobson 2008b.)

Despite the recent legislative reforms, the degree education in Finland is still provided free of charge. The reforms will, however, make it possible to charge tuition fees on a trial basis to students from outside EU/EEA countries who are taking part in separate master's programs. (OKM 2009.) Charging tuition fees to students from outside European Economic Area has recently evoked much discussion in Finland.

As with university reform elsewhere in the world, Finland has reacted to economic and technological globalization by revolutionizing universities' structures (Dobson 2008b). Due to the re-structuring of Finnish higher education, universities have adopted a more business-style thinking in their operations (OKM 2009), and education has moved towards a service offered. At the same time, universities face increasing pressures to distinguish themselves from their competitors. This is exactly where managing a corporate identity and corporate brand comes into play. (Melewar and Akel 2005; Curtis *et al*. 2009.)

3 CORPORATE IDENTITY AND BRANDING IN UNIVERSITIES

3.1 Corporate identity

3.1.1 From multiple identities to corporate identity

Organizational and corporate identity have attracted increasing interest among scholars and practitioners during the past decades (Hatch and Schultz 2003; Melewar *et al*. 2006; Balmer 2008). As Balmer (2008, 880) points out, identity is currently in the forefront of corporate marketing and management literature. The discussion on identity, however, incorporates perspectives from multiple disciplinary domains and literatures: corporate communications, management, marketing, organizational behavior, social and organizational psychology, human resources, and strategy (Cornelissen *et al*. 2007, S1).

As Balmer (2008, 885) suggests, identity is a "portmanteau expression with a variety of meanings". The scholars have made a distinction between social, organizational and corporate identity. Whereas social identity refers to *an internalized knowledge structure*, organizational identity is seen as *a system of shared meaning*. As for corporate identity, it is seen equal to *a projected image* of an organization. Its focus is mainly on external, symbolic dimensions of identity. Social identity, on the other hand, is defined as involving a mental framework and internal identity processes of individuals within an organization, and organizational identity as a combination of internal and external aspects of identity. The boundaries are not, however, quite clear; e.g. corporate identity shares connections with organizational identity. (Cornelissen *et al*. 2007, S3–S7.)

The reasons for the interest in identity are historically quite diverse. In corporate communication and marketing, the interest arises from companies positioning and promoting themselves to others as well as integrating visual identity, corporate public relations and management communication messages. (Cornelissen *et al*. 2007, S1; Van Riel and Balmer 1997, 341.) Different approaches of identity have recently started to overlap, and a need for greater integration between the disciplines has been recognized (Cornelissen *et al*. 2007, S1).

The present study mainly draws on the discipline of corporate communication and concerns the dimension of corporate identity, for which the literature has shown a wide variety of definitions as well (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 139). Corporate identity was long associated with what is now more appropriately called visual identification, that is, the logo and other forms of symbolism used by an organization (Baker and Balmer 1997, 368; Balmer 2008, 880; Melewar *et al*. 2006, 139). In the more recent literature, company logos and other elements of visual design are regarded as part of the process of corporate image formation and presentation, leading to stakeholder perceptions and corporate associations (Van Riel and Balmer 1997, 342).

In addition to visual appearance, the interest among the academics and practitioners has risen towards a more in-depth corporate identity, i.e. the elements that make an organization specific and distinct from the others (Baker and Balmer 1997, 368). A broader, interdisciplinary definition of corporate identity has been adopted, and growing research into the concept has shown that it is far more than just a logo or livery (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 139; Balmer 2008, 880).

Corporate identity is fundamentally concerned with reality and what an institution really is (Argenti 2000, 176; Melewar *et al*. 2006, 138–139). Differing views exist as to what defines the uniqueness of an organization. Van Riel and Balmer (1997, 355) maintain that identity defines the corporate ethos, aims and values and presents the individuality that helps an organization differentiate. Balmer and Gray (2003, 981) see corporate identity arising from subcultures, strategy, structure, performance, and communication. According to Melewar *et al*. (2006, 138–139), central corporate identity traits include strategy, philosophy, company history, business scope, type of products and services offered, corporate personality as well as all forms of internal and external communication.

Furthermore, as Balmer and Greyser (2002) suggest, there are five kinds of identities present in any organization. *Actual identity* involves the current attributes of a company and refers to e.g. organizational structure, ownership, and product range. *Communicated identity* is most clearly revealed through controlled forms of corporate communication, whereas *conceived identity* refers to perceptions of an organization held by its stakeholders. *Ideal identity* and *desired identity* are related to the optimum positioning of an organization, that is, future prospects and visions held by strategic planners and the top management. (Balmer and Greyser 2002, 73–75.)

The present study defines corporate identity as an organization's strategically planned public presentation, established and managed in order to gain a favorable corporate reputation over time, and as such, deals with the dimension of communicated identity. The study further touches upon the ideal identity that the case university is aiming at in the long term. The School's objective to become "a world-class business school" well exemplifies a future vision that the institution holds.

3.1.2 The role of communication

The identity model by Melewar and Jenkins (2002; Figure 1) unites the psychological, graphic design, marketing and public relations paradigms of the corporate identity, and as such, represents different views and schools of corporate identity. The model is a widely acknowledged corporate identity model as it aims at a balanced combination between different disciplines (Melewar and Akel 2005, 43). The model suggests that corporate identity is composed of the following sub-constructs:

(1) Communication and visual identity;
(2) Behavior;
(3) Corporate culture; and
(4) Market conditions (Melewar and Jenkins 2002, 81).

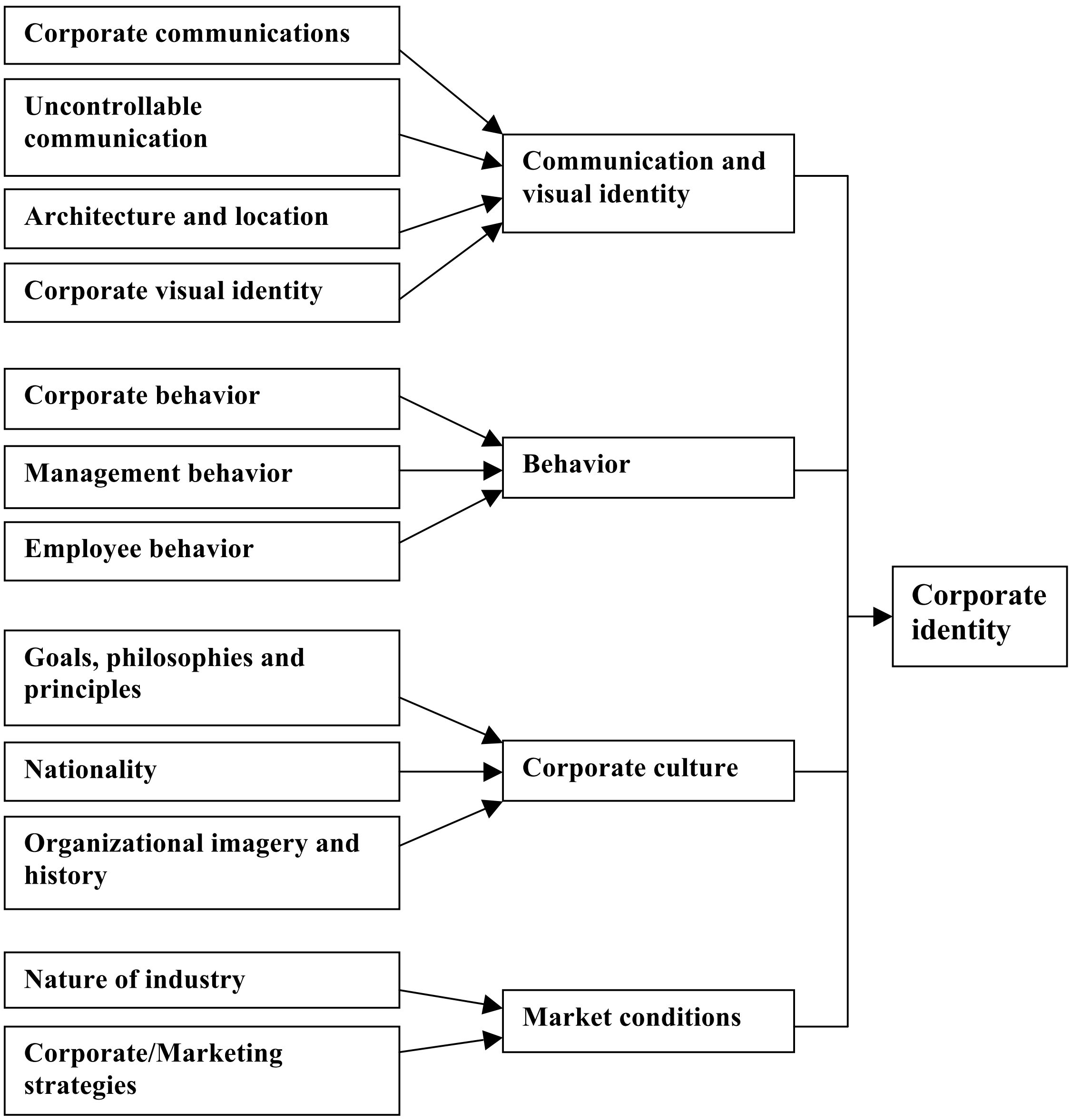

Figure 1. *The corporate identity model by Melewar and Jenkins (2002, 81).*

With its emphasis on the role of communication, the present study employs the model by Melewar and Jenkins with a focus on its first section: communication and visual identity, and their role in projecting a distinct corporate identity (Figure 2). The special focus of this thesis is on the first point: purposefully planned communications of the case organization.

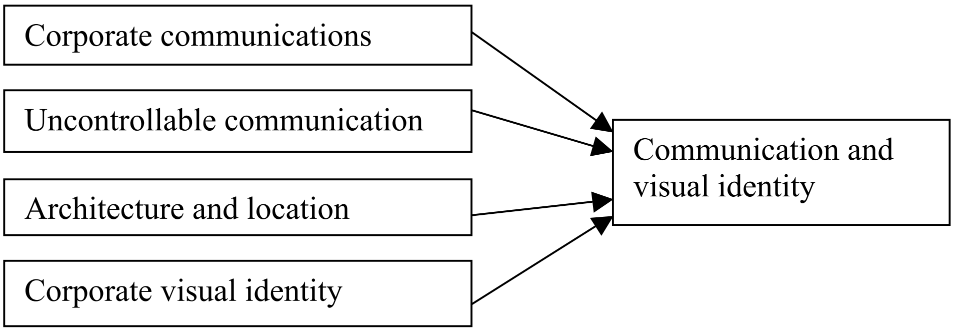

Figure 2. *Communication and visual identity (Melewar and Jenkins 2002).*

Corporate communication is a corporate function employed to harmonize all consciously used forms of internal and external communication to create favorable relationships with the stakeholders (Van Riel 1995, 26). Cornelissen (2011) defines corporate communication as a management function that provides a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favorable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent. Instead of looking at specialized disciplines or separate stakeholder groups, the corporate communication function has its focus on the organization as a whole. An integrated approach to managing communication is therefore seen crucial. (Cornelissen 2011, 4–5.)

It is further suggested that corporate communication covers three types of communication: management, marketing and organizational communication. Management communication refers to how managers at different levels convey information to the employees on the daily issues as well as on the broader aims of a company. (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 142.) Marketing communication consists of those forms of communication that are used to support sales of particular goods or services (Van Riel 1995, 10) whereas organizational communication can be divided into a variety of activities: investor relations, public affairs, media relations, internal communication, crisis communication, social responsibility and community relations (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 143; Cornelissen 2011, 4).

In addition to deliberate forms of communication, unintentional messages through third party reports and informal communication are being transmitted, and *uncontrollable communication* therefore forms a part of the corporate identity (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 143).

The recent years have shown a growing shift from organization-centered relationship management towards a dialogue on issue arenas that are outside an organization's control. The explosion of new and social media has significantly contributed to this mutation. (Luoma-aho and Vos 2010, 322; Cornelissen 2011, 153–154.)

As Melewar *et al*. (2006) suggest, an organization's physical *location* is a significant part of corporate identity. Having a suitable location is essential for a successful organization in projecting the desired image; a key location may provide a company with constant exposure to the general public and support its way of doing business. Furthermore, the *architecture* of a company building may have an influence on how the identity is perceived. (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 144.)

Finally, visual appearance contributes to the corporate identity formation. According to van den Bosch *et al*. (2005, 108), visual identity is reflected by corporate name, symbol and logotype, typography, color, and slogan. These symbols are used to present the central idea of an organization in order to gain favorable stakeholder perceptions (Van Riel and Balmer 1997, 342). In their study on visual identity in university organizations, Baker and Balmer (1997) suggest that visual identity has a significant role in communication to both internal and external stakeholders. A university's consistent visual identity communicates the size, strength and reputation to the external groups. Internally, it is a central source of identification to the institution for the employees. (Baker and Balmer 1997.)

3.1.3 Benefits of a strong corporate identity

As Melewar *et al*. (2006) argue, reasons for the growing interest in corporate identity result from the major changes in the economic environment that require new tools for organizations to face them. This is where corporate identity has arisen as a potential strategic resource. (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 138–139.) A strong corporate identity provides an organization with various benefits. Firstly, it is an essential source of differentiation strategy which may lead to a sustainable competitive advantage over time. Creating a distinct image and standing apart from its rivals may help an organization win competitive edge over its competitors. The search for distinctiveness today appears in the growing amount of companies' re-branding activities. (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 140; Melewar and Akel 2005, 41; Cornelissen 2011, 60–61.)

Secondly, a strong corporate identity inspires stakeholder commitment. A clearly defined identity is valuable for a variety of internal and external stakeholders to whom the characteristics are communicated. (Melewar and Akel 2005, 41–42; Melewar *et al*. 2006, 139; Figure 3.)

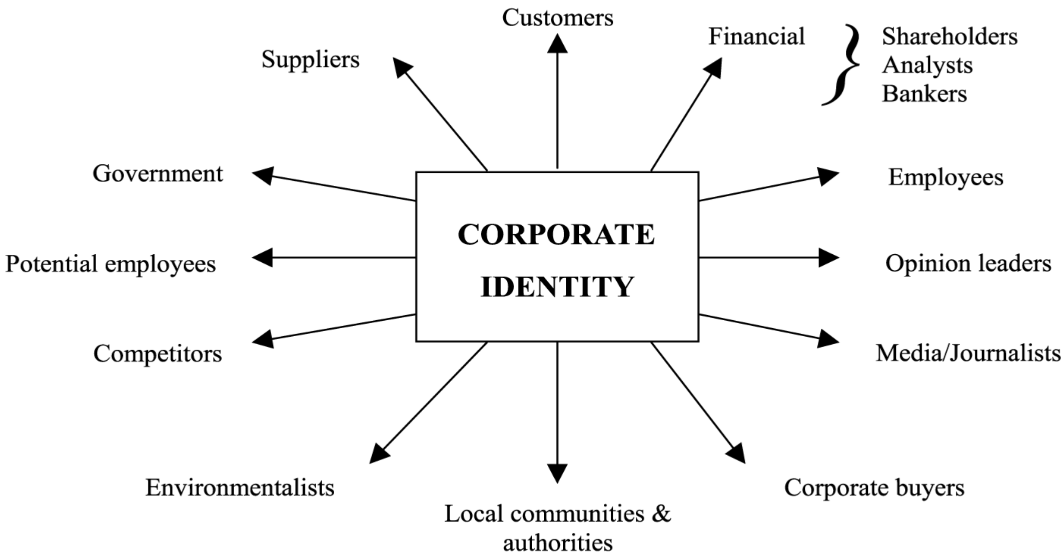

Figure 3. *Corporate identity stakeholders (Melewar and Akel 2005, 42).*

As Melewar *et al*. (2006, 139–140) and Cornelissen (2011, 60) suggest, a clear corporate identity breeds employee motivation: personnel will feel more motivated if they identify with the company they work for, and if this company, at the same time, promotes a strong image and has a good reputation. Strongly motivated personnel are essential for a company as they are likely to contribute to increased productivity and profitability. (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 139–140.)

A well-defined corporate identity creates commitment in external audiences as well: they will be provided with consistent signals and communication, which helps them develop a clear picture of the organization. A strong corporate identity inspires confidence in customers, financial stakeholders, potential employees, and society at large. When a company succeeds in managing its corporate identity, it will be able to build commitment among its diverse stakeholders, which, in turn, results in ability to attract and retain customers and employees, achieve strategic alliances, gain support from financial markets, and generate a sense of direction and purpose. (Melewar *et al*. 2006, 139–140; Cornelissen 2011, 61.)

Furthermore, a clear corporate identity provides a central platform upon which corporate communications policies are developed and corporate images are formed (Balmer 2008, 886). By having a strong corporate identity, an organization ensures that all forms of its communication to the stakeholders are consistent. (Melewar and Akel 2005, 41–42; Melewar *et al*. 2006, 139; Cornelissen 2011, 61.)

3.2 Corporate brand

3.2.1 Corporate-level brand as a strategic resource

A brand represents everything that a product or service means to consumers. Brand is therefore considered one of the most important intangible assets of any organization. As brands are a key element in the company's relationships with its customers, managing them is a critical factor affecting the attitudes towards an institution. (Kotler and Armstrong 2010, 259–260; Curtis *et al*. 2009, 405; De Chernatony 2002, 115.) Brand management has become a crucial part of operation as strong brands are claimed to affect almost all marketing activity and have higher overall preference (Kotler and Armstrong 2010, 260). However, branding theory has been largely established on the role of product branding in commercial organizations, and it still needs further application to e.g. services and corporate-level branding (Balmer and Gray 2003, 979; Chapleo 2010, 169–170).

Among the key changes affecting businesses as they move towards globalization is a shift in marketing emphasis from product brands to corporate branding (Balmer and Gray 2003, 972–974; de Chernatony 2002, 114). As Hatch and Schultz (2003) argue, differentiation in today's business environment requires positioning, not only product-wise, but also regarding the whole corporation. The values and emotions symbolized by an organization become key elements of differentiation strategies, and the corporation itself moves to center stage (Hatch and Schultz 2003, 1041). Drawing on this, there has been an increasing realization that corporate-level brands serve as valuable strategic resources (Hatch and Schultz 2003, 1041; Balmer and Gray 2003, 972–974).

Corporate brand, in contrast to the marketing-focused product brand, involves establishing differentiation and preference at the level of the organization rather than its individual products or services. The organization itself is a brand. (Morsing and Kirstensen 2001, 25–

26.) Corporate brand is considered an intangible asset combining corporate values, strategy, vision, products and corporate responsibility. A successful corporate brand is a valuable source of differentiation and competitive advantage. (Balmer and Gray 2003, 978–979; Morsing and Kirstensen 2001, 26.)

Furthermore, as Hatch and Schultz (2003) point out, a strong corporate brand breeds loyalty from a wide range of stakeholders. It expresses values that attract key stakeholders to the organization and encourages them to feel a sense of belonging. Whereas product brands are often driven by short-term approaches and developed by marketers, corporate-level brands tend to be focused on sustainability and based on a set of core values that connect the entire organization. (Hatch and Schultz 2003, 1045–1046.) Managing corporate brand is without doubt a senior management issue which requires company-wide support including an integrated effort of HR, communications and marketing (Balmer and Gray 2003, 978–979).

Corporate branding is likely to increase a company's visibility, recognition and reputation in ways not fully appreciated by product brand thinking. Whereas customers are recognized as key stakeholders of product branding, the audiences of corporate branding include various groups: employees, customers, suppliers, investors, partners, regulators, and the community. (Balmer and Gray 2003, 976, 978–979; Hatch and Schultz 2003, 1042.) To deliver a brand's values to diverse stakeholders, the role of integrated communications and strategic positioning of the messages is crucial (Van Riel 1995; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007, 944).

Corporate brand forms an element of the company strategy. As suggested by Hatch and Schultz (2003, 1043–1044), corporate branding practices need to be multi-disciplinary, combining the elements of strategy, corporate communications and culture. Employees are seen key to building relationships with all of the company's stakeholders and contributing to the meaning of a brand. Employees' role in delivering the corporate brand's values is crucial as they can be considered a link between an organization's internal and external environments. (Balmer and Gray 2003, 978–979; Hatch and Schultz 2003, 1043–1045.)

As de Chernatony (2002) maintains, corporate brand represents a dynamic interface between an organization's values and actions and stakeholders' interpretations of these values. It can be defined as a cluster of functional and emotional values, promising a particular experience.

The success of a brand depends on the extent to which there is harmony between the managerially defined values, the implementation of values by employees, and appreciation of these values among external stakeholders. (De Chernatony 2002, 116.) This is supported by Hatch and Schultz (2003) suggesting that the foundation of corporate branding includes an interplay of strategic vision, organizational culture and corporate images held by the stakeholders (Hatch and Schultz 2003, 1047).

3.2.2 The connection between identity and brand

As the literature shows, the concepts of corporate identity and corporate brand share apparent connections: both are regarded as strategic sources of differentiation and commitment from various stakeholders. Moreover, both are multidisciplinary and organizational-wide by nature, and need to be constantly managed. It is widely acknowledged that corporate brand management must be well founded in and coherent with the corporate identity. In this regard, the concepts may be referred to as overlapping or even interchangeable. However, differences can be shown between the two. (Balmer and Gray 2003, 979.)

One of the differences is that identity is applicable to all organizations and entities; it is something every organization has. Instead, all organizations do not necessarily have a brand. (Van Riel and Balmer 1997, 355; Balmer and Gray 2003, 979–980.) According to Balmer and Gray (2003), identity is related to the distinct features of an organization, and it as such addresses the questions “What are we?” and “Who are we?”. Corporate identity is closely linked with the business scope and corporate subcultures (Balmer and Gray 2003, 979–980).

Whereas a corporate identity draws on the mix of organizational traits, the essence of corporate branding is to be found, as Balmer and Greyser (2002) put it, from the values which are associated with the brand and which represent an informal contract between the institutional brand and its various stakeholders (Balmer and Greyser 2002, 76). A brand is derived from an organization’s identity but as Kotler and Armstrong (2010) argue, it eventually exists in the minds of consumers. A brand represents customers’ perceptions and feelings about a product, service or organization (Kotler and Armstrong 2010, 260). Balmer (2008, 894) regards corporate brand as a distinctive identity type which, unlike corporate identity, may have a life of its own as it can be bought, sold or borrowed.

In the present study, corporate identity is regarded as an organization's purposeful presentation of itself in order to gain a positive public image. The focus is on the process of corporate branding, which refers to the efforts of an organization to create a favorable image and brand based on the corporate identity. Since the study is outlined to exclude the stakeholder perceptions of a brand, brand is rather used to refer to a target image that an organization communicates.

3.3 Managing identity and brand in higher education

3.3.1 Identity and branding in universities

The attributes of a strong corporate identity and brand have been widely investigated in commercial organizations but as Chapleo (2010, 169–170) notes, there has only been limited academic attention on corporate brand management in more specialized areas like higher education. Pinar *et al*. (2011, 725) point out that branding efforts are not limited to consumer products only, and organizations in various industries have thus been trying to utilize branding strategies to create stronger profiles. Balmer and Gray (2003, 975) and de Chernatony (2002, 116) suggest that corporate-level brands are complex and well applicable to non-commercial entities.

According to Balmer and Gray (2003, 979–980), the need for corporate branding might not be very strong within some parts of the public sector, but in others, including universities, it most certainly is. Curtis *et al*. (2009, 405) emphasize the importance of a distinctive identity and brand in higher education: as they point out, the intangibility and inseparability of higher education services make branding particularly crucial in the field. As Bulotaite (2003, 451) suggests, universities are complex organizations, and branding can simplify the complexity and promote attraction and loyalty to the organization. This is supported by Jevons (2006, 466) who maintains that for the benefit of existing and potential students and staff, universities should develop meaningfully differentiated brands to communicate their strengths.

Branding higher education can be incorporated into a wider trend of marketing and branding entities that are non-commercial by their very nature (Fairclough 2010). Fairclough (1993) notes a profound transformation in public services and institutions: they have begun to resemble commodities. Along with this shift, public institutions such as universities have moved closer to the economy. (Fairclough 1993, 99.) As a result, promotional discourse has been colonizing public domains which were previously unrelated to the economy. During the past decades, branding research has witnessed an increasing amount of studies focusing on branding such entities as countries, regions, cities and public institutions (Balmer and Gray 2003, 975; Fairclough 2010). Fairclough (1993, 101) believes that the recent changes affecting higher education are a typical example of the processes of marketization in the public sector.

As a part of this shift, branding has become a strategic managerial issue for universities. The vast number of universities are competing for the same students, and the marketization may be regarded even necessary for the institutions to promote their programs. (Osman 2008, 57.) According to Argenti (2000), the value of a strong brand to an individual university is that it will be able to attract the best recruits and faculty and have fewer crises. Bulotaite (2003) believes that university brands actually have the potential to create stronger feelings than most brands. The key to success in this, as Bulotaite (2003) suggests, is to create a “unique communicative identity”.

Among the factors that have influenced higher education branding are the school rankings which have recently become a special tool for attracting students (Bunzel 2007). Business school rankings, originated in the US in the late 1970s, have gained an important position among the schools, and top rankings are readily employed when marketing schools to prospective students. As emphasized by Argenti (2000, 173–174), rankings have affected business schools and their marketing orientation more than any other industry.

According to Wolverton (2006), differentiation of a university organization has to do with how universities identify themselves and the audiences they choose to serve. Corporate identity stakeholders (see Figure 3) involve special constituencies in the university setting. Internal stakeholders of a university include current students, faculty and staff; external stakeholders, on the other hand, comprise prospective students and faculty, companies and recruiters, alumni, media, donors and local community. (Melewar and Akel 2005, 41; Argenti 2000, 177.)

The stakeholder groups may, however, hold different levels of importance for a university. As research and teaching may be considered the basic responsibilities of a university, students and faculty are without doubt among the most crucial stakeholders. Pinar *et al*. (2011) regard the student learning experience as the driving force for all value creation networks in university branding, and therefore, students are seen as the most important constituency of a university. Teaching and research represent the core value creation activities for students' learning experience. Further, supporting value creation activities include student life, sports, and community activities. As suggested by the authors, each of these activities contributes to a student's overall university experience and brand perception. (Pinar *et al*. 2011, 731–732.)

As Hatch and Schultz (2003, 1046) emphasize, corporate branding importantly concerns the sense of belonging. According to Balmer and Liao (2007), the award of a degree may provide a student with a life-long membership to a university and a sense of identification with the corporate identity and brand. As they suggest, the identification to a university can be a means of self-definition even after graduation. (Balmer and Liao 2007, 357.) Furthermore, a strong corporate brand is likely to provide employees with identification to the corporate culture and values. The role of employees in delivering the brand values to various stakeholders is therefore crucial, and several studies emphasize the importance of internal branding and employees' engagement in the branding process. (Whisman 2009; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007.)

Brands in the university setting have characteristics of both product and corporate branding. As Pinar *et al*. (2011) suggest, a university might be seen providing students with a range of educational products and services. Following this, students may be regarded as customers whose experience is in the core of the branding (Pinar *et al*. 2011, 726). Other studies, on the contrary, see the school name and values communicated at the corporate level the most determining aspect of attraction towards a university. In this regard, branding a university not only touches upon the student orientation but rather concerns managing the brand of the institution as a whole. (Whisman 2009, 368; Argenti 2000, 176.) As noted by Argenti (2000) and Whisman (2009), the marketing mentality in universities, focusing merely on short-term marketing to specific constituencies, has failed to look at the overall reputation and to adopt corporate-level branding strategies.

3.3.2 Attributes of a university brand

There are a number of individual attributes on which higher education institutions can promote themselves, for instance, academic program offerings, quality of teachers and resources, facilities, campus life and services (Curtis *et al*. 2009, 404; Pinar *et al*. 2011, 727). However, to more deeply identify themselves, universities have realized the importance of a comprehensive corporate identity as a source of competitive advantage (Melewar and Akel 2005, 41). The attributes of a strong corporate identity and brand in higher education institutions have been studied in several papers (e.g. Moogan 2001; Gray *et al*. 2003; Wolverton 2006; Chapleo 2010). Despite the attention paid on the subject, there seems to be no uniform model of the features determining a strong university brand. Some major attributes can, however, be shown.

Wolverton (2006) emphasizes the importance of both identity and audience in the context of business schools determining their program distinctiveness. The basis for creating a strong identity lies in establishing unique programs as well as purposefully targeting the audiences to be served. (Wolverton 2006, 507–508.) Wolverton determines several behaviors on which business schools have established their identities over time, with a conclusion that the institutions with strong identities are e.g. able to:

(1) Recognize what the overall organizational identity is and use it to frame its view of the community to be served;
(2) Determine their strengths and build on them;
(3) Remain focused in their program offerings;
(4) Stay connected to the communities they serve.

(Wolverton 2006, 517.)

Chapleo (2010) has investigated the factors of successful university brands. He notes that there is no uniform strategy to build a strong brand, but instead, number of factors exists that can be associated with top-rated university brands. According to Chapleo, a deliberate positioning strategy might be the most important prerequisite for creating a successful university brand. The attributes suggested by Chapleo include the following:

(1) *Clear vision*. The institutions that are most strongly identified as having successful brands are those that clearly articulate and position their vision and purpose. The strategic vision is "bought in" and supported internally as well as consistently communicated to external stakeholders.
(2) *Support from leadership*. As a corporate-level brand serves as a crucial tool of university branding, supportive and informed leadership is seen as an important factor in managing a university brand.
(3) *Location and its synergy with the city brand*. In some institutions, location significantly contributes to the success of a university brand. There might be a great deal of synergy between a successful university brand and the brand of the city it is located in.
(4) *Use of public relations*. Press and publicity activity appears to be an important tool of choice for strong university brands.

(Chapleo 2010, 177–179.)

A study by Gray *et al*. (2003) suggests a set of promotional features that education marketers could employ in order to develop an effective positioning strategy. Among the most salient features to attract international students are recognition (reputation), learning environment and academic instruction (quality of teachers and resources), graduate career prospects, and campus life (added features). (Gray *et al*. 2003, 117.)

As Moogan *et al*. (2001, 183–185) emphasize, institutions with a well-known brand, a good reputation and easily accessible comprehensive information will have better chances to recruit students as well as faculty and staff. Those universities become strong brand names providing clear positioning in stakeholders' minds, and as a result, the audiences will exactly know what those names stand for (Moogan *et al*. 2001, 184–185; Curtis *et al*. 2009, 405). Knowing this, a growing number of universities have started to create and enhance corporate identity and branding programs as a part of their strategic positioning and expansion (Baker and Balmer 1997, 373; Curtis *et al*. 2009, 404). Various corporate marketing strategies, such as re-branding programs including name changes, new visual identity packages and increased admission criteria, are being employed as universities search for ways to create a distinctive profile and improve their ranking (Bunzel 2007, 152).

In some papers, branding effort in higher education has been criticized for its narrow focus. Pinar *et al*. (2011) say that much of the branding still appears to be established on promotion like logos, mottos, names and advertising, which are largely concerned with external branding without a holistic understanding of what constitutes a corporate brand. As the authors suggest, universities should adopt a wider internal and external context for branding (Pinar *et al*. 2011, 727). Likewise, Ng and Forbes (2008) note that the university experience creation involves various parties, and it is a co-created and emergent process rather than a series of promotional actions.

3.3.3 Limitations of corporate branding in higher education

As several studies show, the increasing use of business models and terminology in the education context have become an acknowledged part of universities' operations (e.g. Bunzel 2007; Curtis *et al*. 2009). The commercialization has, however, attracted criticism arising from diverse perspectives. As pointed out by Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007, 942–943), there have been fundamental concerns seeing business world morally contradicting to education. Maringe (2005, 564), on the other hand, notes that much of the higher education branding practice borrows from commercial knowledge, and efforts to adjust branding theory to higher education have been limited. Bunzel (2007, 153) states that the objectives of branding higher education organizations may still be unclear, and the question remains if university branding is even worth the time and cost spent on the branding activities.

As the literature indicates, education marketing has moved closer to consumer goods marketing (Melewar and Akel 2005, 41). However, seeing students as customers may be considered problematic. Argenti (2000) notes that if students are treated as customers, they should have a voice in designing curriculum as well as deciding on the teaching and research focus. This would, as Argenti puts it, be like the tail wagging the dog. (Argenti 2000, 175–176.) Balmer and Liao (2007) suggest that students should rather be treated as life-long organizational members of a corporate brand community. The relationship between a university and a student is a very special one, and it is far more than a marketer-customer relationship. (Balmer and Liao 2007, 357.) As a solution, Argenti (2000, 176) suggests that universities should focus on building an overall reputation by strengthening the interface between the school's brand and its various stakeholders rather than solely marketing to a specific "customer" group.

According to Bunzel (2007) and Jevons (2006), there seems to be an implicit assumption that branding is desirable and increasingly necessary for universities – but only little empirical evidence on the outcomes of the branding efforts. In this regard, it remains unclear whether a branding program really creates a change in stakeholder perceptions or rankings. In his review on top universities in US, Bunzel (2007) notes that the top 25 ranked university brands seem to remain the same year after year. This implies that branding efforts might not be necessary for the top universities but could, instead, be justified for universities on the verge of achieving a top university status. Furthermore, as other universities tend to simulate the top-ranked ones, school rankings serve as a standardization tool for universities. To better look into the causality, Bunzel suggests that universities should learn another business concept, namely the return on investment, to determine if branding really profits. (Bunzel 2007, 153.)

Higher education institutions use corporate branding in order to differentiate themselves and stand out in the rising competition. However, as Levine (1997) points out, there are a vast number of universities in the marketplace, and most of them are fundamentally alike. Even though each university has its own history and culture, they still look very much similar to one another; their functions, governance and degree system are alike (Michelsen 2004, 12). The proliferation of branded programs has led to difficult choices: with hundreds of programs, distinguishing an individual school has become extremely difficult. More schools gain accreditation, offer identical degrees, and employ same kind of branding programs. At the same time, they become more and more similar by the features emphasized in marketing and communications. (Argenti 2000, 174.)

Drawing on this, a question remains whether branding a university really creates a competitive advantage. Instead of differentiation, branding seems to have become a tool of standardization. (Argenti 2000, 174; Melewar and Akel 2005, 52.) As Levine (1997) suggests, higher education has moved from its growth stage to a mature stage industry with stable or declining resources, and universities are therefore forced to move from "full-service department stores to more specialized boutiques”. As a result, they should be able to make selections in their offerings and position themselves in a more focused and unique way. (Levine 1997, 32.)

4 CASE: AALTO UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

4.1 Case organization presentation

Helsinki School of Economics (HSE) was founded in 1911. It operated as a private university until 1974 when it was nationalized. Today, the School is the leading business school in Finland with 4 000 students, over 500 members of faculty and staff, 70 professors, and seven academic departments. Its main campus is located in the Helsinki city center and the other campus in Mikkeli, Eastern Finland. As of 2013, the School provides a bachelor’s program both in Finnish and English and master’s degree programs in nine disciplines. Furthermore, the School of Business takes part in three cross-disciplinary master’s programs within Aalto University. It is also a member university of the international CEMS network (The Global Alliance in Management Education). (Aalto University School of Business 2013.)

In 2010, the School became part of Aalto University which was established as a merger of three Finnish universities: the Helsinki School of Economics, the Helsinki University of Technology and the University of Art and Design Helsinki. The Finnish Government decided on the merger in 2007, and Aalto University began operating on January 1, 2010. The new university comprises three of Finland’s strategically important fields: technology, business, and art know-how. Its name is a tribute to a Finnish architect, designer and academic Alvar Aalto who distinguished himself in the fields of technology, economics and art. The name was chosen to reflect the spirit, values and goals of the new university. With 20 000 students, 5 000 staff members and 350 professors, Aalto University is one of the largest universities in Finland. (Aalto University 2013.)

Like other Finnish universities, HSE was a fully state-owned entity after its nationalization in 1974 (Aalto University 2013). This was about to change along with the new Universities Act in 2009 which separated the Finnish universities from the state and extended their financial autonomy. Aalto University is a foundation-based university with a diverse funding base. As an independent foundation acting under private law it is no longer financed from the national budget only. (OKM 2009.) Its funding was made up of state foundation principal and donations from private persons, companies and other foundations. The university is governed by a foundation Board. The executive bodies of the University are the Board, the President and the University Academic Affairs Committee. (Aalto University 2013.)

Even though the three institutions were merged to form a cross-disciplinary university, the former autonomous universities continued existing as sub-units within the new university. Aalto University now comprises six schools. The School of Technology was divided into four separate schools in 2011. In 2012, the School of Art and Design and the Department of Architecture at the School of Engineering merged to form the School of Arts, Design and Architecture. The School of Economics was renamed the School of Business as of August 1, 2012. The new name was viewed to better describe the School's broad expertise in all fields of business and economics. It further follows a world-wide trend of the schools in the field calling themselves business schools. (Aalto University 2013.)

Aalto University has a strong international strategy with an aim to recruit students and academic staff from all over the world. In 2012, the amount of international students at Aalto University was 10,2% (2011: 9,1%), and the proportion of international professors and postdocs was 16% (2011: 13%). (Aalto University 2013.)

Likewise, the School of Business is highly oriented to internationalization. Already in the 1990s HSE defined its objective to become an European top business school. The School strengthened its international position in the early 2000s and achieved quality accreditations and memberships in international networks. As a result, HSE was the first Nordic business school to receive the Triple Crown accreditation in 2007. The School currently holds labels of excellence in three quality accreditations: AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS. In the strategy 2006, the international focus was broadened beyond the European area. (Knuutinen 2013.) Today, the School of Business is constantly aiming at international student and faculty recruitment. The rate of international students in 2012 was 11,5% (2011: 9,9%) (Aalto University School of Business Student services 2013).

Aalto University's international strategy is supported by several actions. In 2010, a new Tenure track career program was launched to attract international faculty to the university. Tenure track is an academic career system established to offer young research talents a career path towards a permanent professorship. (Aalto University 2013.) To enable internationalization, the language strategy of the University strives to adopt English as the third language equal to Finnish and Swedish (Aalto University Strategy 2012). In line with this objective, the School of Business' language policy focuses on having English as an equal language to Finnish. As of 2013, the majority of the master's programs in the School of Business are provided in English, which, along with attracting international students, has been attracting discussion concerning the position of Finnish language in the higher learning. At the moment, 90% of the master's level courses and all of the doctoral level courses at the School are taught in English. (Aalto University School of Business 2013.)

4.2 Corporate identity and branding

As the literature (e.g. Baker and Balmer 1997; Melewar *et al.* 2005; Curtis *et al*. 2009) shows, there has been a growing interest in universities around the world to create and enhance corporate identity and branding programs as a part of their strategic growth. In accordance with this, HSE brand along with the new strategy was established in 2006 as a response to the changing operational environment. The former, mainly national competition was slowly turning into an international one, and attracting students and faculty worldwide became a central objective of the School. In this respect, HSE might be regarded as a forerunner in the Finnish higher education context since at that time, most institutions in Finland still had their emphasis on national recruiting strategies. (Knuutinen 2013.)

The HSE strategy covers the period from 2006 to 2009. As of 2010, the School faced a new situation as the merger into Aalto University took place. Along with the merger, the separate school brands were merged into a monolithic Aalto University brand, and the autonomous HSE strategy was integrated into the Aalto University strategy which was first launched in 2010 and updated in 2012. Individual schools continued, however, existing after the merger, which brought new challenges to the branding work. Aalto University strategy now draws up guidelines to the School of Business strategy published in 2013. (Knuutinen 2013.) However, consistencies exist between the former HSE strategy and the new Aalto University strategy, and many themes emphasized in the HSE strategy are visible in the Aalto strategy as well.

With the monolithic Aalto brand, no actual sub-brands exist for the individual schools, but they do have separate profiles. As a result of the re-organization of the schools, Aalto University schools redefined their identities and updated their branding strategies during 2011 and 2012. In some schools, like the School of Arts, the identity work was more profound by nature whereas in others, like the School of Business, the goal was rather to uplift the profile than to redefine the entire identity. (Knuutinen 2013.) The main goal of the profiling work was to clarify each school's identity, special strengths and core messages, including the following points:

(1) Goals and purpose;
(2) Differentiation and competitive advantage;
(3) Values and culture; and
(4) Corporate visual identity.

(Proposal for the identity development 2011.)

The final objective of the profiling work was to define each school's identity, while, at the same time, strengthen Aalto University as a clear entity in the stakeholders' minds. This dual goal may be concerned a special challenge of the identity work; how to build a consistent Aalto brand while, at the same time, promote a distinctive identity of each school. (Proposal for the identity development 2011.)

The profiling work at Aalto was closely tied to each school's strategizing work and strategic goals. Both the former and the present strategies are developed with an aim to guide decision-making of future students and employees and make them conscious of the corporate brand. (Knuutinen 2013.) In line with the suggestions made by several authors (e.g. Melewar *et al.* 2006; Cornelissen 2011), the identity work strives to enhance these stakeholders' commitment to the university and strengthen student and faculty recruitment marketing. The emphasis of the strategy documents is therefore on teaching, research and services.

Aalto University strategy is guided with the institution's long-term objective to become a world-class university within the upcoming ten years. A similar kind of goal was stated by HSE already in 2006, and the new School of Business strategy shares the common objective: to become a world-class business school by 2020. The key indicator of a world-class standing is the placing on the internationally recognized European Business School Rankings published by *Financial Times*, whose ranking criteria include the career and salary development of the graduates and the overall international dimension of teaching. The School's objective is to be among the top 10 schools on the list by 2020. (Aalto School of Business 2013.)

The top position in the Finnish and European context is further justified with the Triple Crown Accreditation held by the School as well as the membership of CEMS, which is only allowed for the leading business school in each country (Knuutinen 2013). The analysis that follows in chapter 6 will investigate the discourses on which the world-class identity is built on a more implicit level.

5 METHODS AND DATA

5.1 Research data

This study is conducted as a qualitative case study looking into a single higher education institution's way of presenting its corporate identity. The data comprises written texts and documents published by the case organization, Aalto University School of Business, formerly Helsinki School of Economics (HSE). According to Alessandri (2001, 177), corporate identity is most visibly projected via planned forms of corporate communication. Text data was selected for this thesis as the purpose is to look into the identity and brand as they are deliberately projected by the case organization. As these documents already existed prior to this research project, the data can be concerned secondary data (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008, 77–78), which, as Eskola and Suoranta (2008, 117) suggest, serves as a suitable source for a range of qualitative studies.

The research data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Research data.*

Year	Documents
2006	• HSE Strategy (including Vision, Mission and Values)
2012/ 2013	• Aalto University Strategy (including Vision, Mission and Values) • Aalto University School of Business Strategy (including Vision, Mission and Values) • Aalto University School of Business Presentation on the School's website • Aalto University School of Business Brochure for Prospective Students • Aalto University Brochure for Prospective Faculty

The data includes documents from two stages: years 2006 and 2012/2013. The first part exemplifies the earlier stage of the Helsinki School of Economics as an independent university. The latter describes the current situation: School of Business as part of the Aalto University. These documents were selected as data since they share a common strategic goal of promoting an organization and reflecting its corporate identity on a general level. Strategy texts, mission statements and presentations are, among their other purposes, employed by organizations to promote the institution and its services and to create a positive corporate image over time (Pälli *et al*. 2009; Osman 2008; Williams 2008).

Strategizing has become a central process in businesses as well as in other organizations. As Pälli *et al.* (2009) suggest, the communicative purposes of a strategy text include education, self-legitimation, guiding future action, building identity and promotion. As the authors note, image building as well as promotional function is an essential part of the strategy text as it strives to build favorable images among the stakeholders. (Pälli *et al.* 2009, 303, 307–309.) Likewise, Williams (2008) maintains that mission statements serve as common corporate reporting and promoting tools. Organizations are urged to create mission statements to assert leadership, inform stakeholders about their goals, serve as a public relations tool, and to inspire enthusiasm for the company. Mission statements are decidedly persuasive by nature, and they are employed as a part of corporate identity building. (Williams 2008, 94, 97–100.)

According to Osman (2008), the communicative purposes of a university brochure include providing information about the academic programs and other services, portraying a corporate image, and promoting the university as an academic institution. Although informative by nature, the rise of promotional elements in university brochures is evident, and they are regarded as even more promotional than informative. (Osman 2008, 61–63.)

Syed Alwi (2009) further suggests that a company website is used to strengthen the corporate brand. A website that includes functional and emotional elements will support the customers' intention to visit the site again and as a result, increase loyalty to the brand (Syed Alwi 2009, 4). A corporate webpage may therefore be regarded as a promotional form of communication. In my view, the presentation part of the website is particularly promotional as it shares the functions of a university brochure: providing information and portraying the corporate identity. Concerning their promotional function, I assume that strategy texts, mission statements, university brochures and website presentations serve as applicable sources for analyzing the case organization's corporate identity.

In a specific higher education setting, the data can be viewed to present, as Fairclough (1993, 100) puts it, "the marketization of public discourse". According to Fairclough, the contemporary culture can be characterized as “promotional” or “consumer” culture which means regarding new domains, such as higher education, equal to commodities, and the general reconstruction of social life on a market basis. In discursive terms, the concept of promotional culture can be understood as the generalization of promotion as a communicative function. (Fairclough 1993, 99.) Xiong (2010, 321) notes that universities have started to use commercially loaded language and concepts such as “customers”, “corporate identity” or “mission statement” which, as such, indicate the transformation in how the functions of higher education are being perceived. The present study observes the marketization of discursive practices in a single Finnish higher education institution, for which purpose I find the research data to be well applicable.

5.2 Discourse analysis as a method

From the selection of qualitative methods, discourse analysis was chosen as the method for this study. As several authors (e.g. Potter and Wetherell 1987; Phillips and Jørgensen 2004) note, discourse analysis is, rather than a strict method, a relatively broad theoretical framework combining different fields of research. It can be regarded as the major concept for a set of approaches employed in various disciplines that share a common interest to examine the reality and meanings constructed via language use. Discourse analysis may therefore be adapted to several fields of study such as linguistics, social sciences and communication studies. (Fairclough 1992.)

Discourse analysis comprises various schools which can be broadly divided into two groups according to their social orientation to discourse: non-critical and critical approaches. The major difference between these approaches is that the critical one not only describes the discursive practices but further shows how discourse is shaped by hidden inequalities and relations of power, and which kinds of constructive effects discourse has upon social relations. (Fairclough 1992, 12; Flowerdew 2004, 582; Phillips and Jørgensen 2004, 2.) This study draws insights from both approaches. It regards language use as social and socially constructed activity, and it pays attention to power relations as it investigates the discursive struggles between different discourses that arise from the data. However, the study does not represent any strict approach to discourse analysis.

In this study I refer to discourse as spoken or written language use and define discourses as the ways in which we discuss and understand our social environment (Fairclough 1993; Phillips and Jørgensen 2004). As Fairclough (2010, 4) notes, discourse analysis not only concerns the inspection of discourse in itself but most prominently, analyzing the dialectical relationship between different discourses and other objects of the social world. As such it presupposes that discourse, which is instantiated in various systems like language, is an integral part of all social processes (Flowerdew 2004, 582). Following this view, language not only describes the objects existing in the natural world, but rather actively constructs a version of those events and therefore has social and political implications (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 6).

In the present study I refer to two major discourses which I consider relevant in the context of universities' changing position: *traditional academic discourse* and *marketization discourse*. The first one refers to ways of defining public universities in traditional terms, apart from commercial influences: as autonomous creators of higher knowledge and providers of education. The latter, on the other hand, reflects the arising way of discussing the role of universities in commercial terms. In this discourse, universities are viewed as part of the economy. Like in commercial organizations, promotion is among their main functions. (Fairclough 1993, 101.)

As Fairclough (2010) suggests, discourse analysis can be conducted to show how the dialectical relations change and how particular discourses gain prominence or become marginalized over time. The analysis may further reveal how different discourses are brought into dialogue and contestation within processes of strategic struggle. (Fairclough 2010, 19.) Accordingly, the dialogue between the discourses of marketization and traditional academic values might involve discursive struggles.

A further difference can be made between *social structures*, *social practices* and *social events* (see Table 3). Social structures, as Fairclough (2003) suggests, are very abstract entities. A social structure, such as an economic structure or a language, defines a potential, a set of possibilities. Individual texts, on the other hand, can be regarded as parts of social events, since one way in which people act and interact in the course of social events is via speaking or writing. However, the relationship between what is structurally possible and what actually happens is a complex one. Social events can not be directly derived from the abstract social structures but there are intermediate organizational entities between structures and events, which Fairclough calls social practices. These practices can be thought of as ways of controlling the selection of certain possibilities and the exclusion of others. Social practices represent the retention of these selections over time in particular areas of social life. (Fairclough 2003, 21–24.)

The rise of commercial practices in higher education institutions, presented above as the marketization of academic discourse, is an example of a social practice. It is linked with traditional university practices, and together these practices provide a certain framework for discussing the roles of a university. (Fairclough 2003, 21–24.) In the present study, the language use is contextualized in a particular context of changing operational environment of universities. Strategy texts, missions and presentations of the case organization represent the realized social events which take place in certain social frameworks: traditional as well as commercial university practices.

Table 3 presents the relationship between social structures, social practices and social events in the context of this study.

Table 3. *Social structures, social practices and social events (Fairclough 2003, 24).*

	Definition	**Example in the context of this study**
Social structures	Language as a broad potential	Language system as a broad set of possibilities
Social practices	Ways of controlling the selection of possibilities in particular areas of social life	Practices in which the universities' changing position is discussed: traditional academic practice; marketization practice
Social events	Individual spoken or written texts constructed in particular social practices	Case university's strategy texts and other texts in the frame of traditional and marketization practices

Texts as elements of social events are not simply derived from the potential defined by a language. Thus, one needs to recognize the intermediate organizational entities of a specifically linguistic sort, which Fairclough (2003) calls *orders of discourse*. An order of discourse is a network of social practices in its language aspect. It represents the totality of discursive practices of an institution and relations between them (Fairclough 2010). The orders of discourse include discourses, genres and styles which select certain possibilities defined by languages while excluding others. They therefore control linguistic variability for particular areas of social life. (Fairclough 2003, 24.)

Fairclough (1993, 95) emphasizes the interrelations that exist between different discursive practices and discourses. Individual texts are constituted based on diverse discourses and genres, which make them *interdiscursive* by nature. Interdiscursivity is, as he puts it, a part of the normal heterogeneity of a text, and it can be defined as the constitution of a text from diverse discourses and genres (Fairclough 1993, 96). The level of interdiscursive analysis can be viewed as mediating by nature: on the one hand, discourses, genres and styles are realized in a concrete form of linguistic features of texts; on the other, they are categories not only of textual analysis but also of analysis of orders of discourse (Fairclough 2010, 7). Xiong (2012) notes that discourse approaches to higher education marketization have proven effective in bridging micro-discursive analysis and macro-level theorizations. Conducting the analysis in terms of these categories helps to link the micro-level analysis of texts to various forms of social analysis of practices and organizations. (Xiong 2012, 323.)

An interdiscursive analysis of texts is concerned with identifying which discourses are drawn upon, and how they are articulated together (Fairclough 2003, 128). In the present study I work with a method to analyze texts in an interdiscursive setting, that is, to find out which discourses are drawn upon a text and how they interrelate. The objective is to find out which discourses and discursive practices are employed by the case organization in order to communicate its corporate identity. The discourses are assumed to serve as a part of a particular discursive order: other practices and characteristics are highlighted while others are excluded in the chosen social events.

5.3 Conducting the study

This thesis originated in 2012 as I was doing an internship at the Aalto University School of Business' Communications. The profiling work of the Aalto University Schools was going on at the time, which was why I became interested in how universities build their identity and brand in accordance with the business-like models. I was further interested to observe how this particular business school has branded itself, and how the established brand is adapted in the merger context. The research data was provided by the Communications unit of the Aalto University School of Business.

After getting familiar with the literature on corporate identity and branding I began analyzing the data. I started with picking extracts from the documents and divided them in smaller thematic groups. Having gone through all the data, I gathered the themes that frequently came up from the documents and began to group the examples under a number of themes. The most common themes were finally recognized and treated as discourses which I see reflecting the ways of defining a single university's position in the changing university market.

As a result, I came up with five discourses from both years' documents, which will be analyzed in the sections that follow. These discourses, reflecting specific ways of discussing the roles of a university, can be viewed as sub-discourses operating under the major discourses of traditional university values and marketization. The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part (chapter 6.1) introduces the corporate identity discourses arising from the HSE strategy 2006: *internationally competitive player*, *high-quality business school*, *valued partner*, *societal contributor* and *innovative community*. The second part (chapter 6.2) presents the corporate identity discourses of the Aalto University School of Business at present: *innovative community with long tradition*, *internationally local university*, *high-quality business school*, *valued partner* and *societal contributor*. To better illustrate the discourses, each of them is demonstrated with examples picked from the data.

The separation of different discourses, however, is not exactly straightforward: the discourses may overlap and include several themes. As Fairclough (2010) notes, the separation of discourses is not a purposeful starting point for the analysis but it might rather be more purposeful to observe the interdiscursive relations between discourses and other objects (Fairclough 2003, 124). Following this, the analysis includes bridges between different themes. However, the discourses are separated on the main level which allows each of them to be observed in more depth. Finally, in chapter 7, the findings are discussed in the light of the overall marketization of the academic world.

5.4 Evaluating the reliability of the study

The study is conducted as a qualitative single case study. This approach, as Yin (2003, 2) suggests, allows analyzing the case organization and the particular communicational event in a thorough manner. The analysis typically seeks to understand the background and motives of a particular phenomenon (Eskola and Suoranta 2008, 19) in relation to its social and cultural context (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008, 115). As Yin (2003, 1) suggests, case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. In a specific business research setting, a case study research can be used to gain a better understanding of changing business practices in their social contexts (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008, 116). A case study conducted with a qualitative approach was therefore seen the most applicable one to investigate and understand the presented identity of the case organization in the context of universities’ changing position.

The single case approach, however, has certain weaknesses. As an investigation of a single case, the results are not to be generalized more broadly. This indicates that the results are only applicable to a particular organization. (Yin 2003; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008.) However, the findings of a single case study have the potential to offer a good overall understanding of the case, which might provide some guidance for understanding similar kinds of phenomena in other organizations as well.

The research data, consisting of strategy documents, mission statements, brochures and website presentations, may be considered suitable for conducting the study whose objective is to analyze the presented identity of the case organization. In my view, the amount of data is adequate for the purposes of this particular study, since these documents are the central tools of a university to project its planned corporate identity. A possible limitation of the data is related to its comparability: the data available from years 2006 and 2012/2013 is asymmetrical. However, I consider all the selected documents relevant in the light of the research questions. Each of them delivers the key messages of the institution, and therefore, I do not consider it a problem that the data of 2006 is not as broad as that of the latter stage.

As stated in chapter 1.2, this thesis seeks to investigate how the corporate identity and corporate brand are communicated by the case organization itself. I assume that the study is conducted in a suitable manner to clarify the purposefully planned identity of the case organization. However, since brands are further considered relationships between the brand created by an institution and the conceptions held by stakeholders of the brand, this study, excluding the stakeholders' perspective, is inadequate to thoroughly analyze the dimension of the university brand. The thesis therefore has its emphasis on the branding efforts made by the case organization itself.

6 FINDINGS

6.1 Corporate identity discourses of the former HSE

6.1.1 Internationally competitive player

The influence of the arising international competition between universities can be detected even by a quick look into the HSE strategy 2006. In line with the new competitive environment and the School's strategic goals launched at the time, a highly international approach is without doubt the most visible theme in the strategy. The School focuses on international student and faculty recruitment which is regarded as its central objective (examples 1 and 2), and presents itself as an international environment to study and work in.

1. We are improving our system of student recruitment, which is based on open international competition, especially for the English-language master's programs. (*HSE Strategy*)

2. Recruitment of students and teachers at HSE is international and programs train students for international responsibilities. We offer high-quality degrees in English at every level, and are developing joint international programs further. (*HSE Strategy*)

Examples 1 and 2 show the explicit nature of the internationality discourse: student and faculty recruitment is very straightforwardly told to be based on international competition. The novelty of this approach can be seen in the way internationality is projected in the text: it is presented as a growing trend that is highly emphasized throughout the document. Moreover, the possibility to finish a degree in English is highlighted even though it is quite evident that competing on the international education market requires offering degree programs in English. Example 2 extends the internationality to concern the career prospects of the students who have finished a degree at the School, promising an opportunity for an international career after graduation.

Being a credible player in the international market requires the ability to compete for students and faculty with other universities. The significance of international competitiveness for the School is apparent knowing its vision: HSE's long-term objective is to become a world-class business school. Along with internationality, becoming *world-class* calls for competitiveness in comparison to other business schools, and, in line with this, HSE presents itself as an internationally comparable institution of higher education. Competitiveness is associated with the overall operating environment (example 3) as well as with more specific university operations: teaching, research, and services offered. The strategy highlights that HSE provides competitive programs which are likely to attract motivated students (example 4), and uses advanced methods in the faculty recruitment (example 5). The research conducted at the School is further told to be competitive with that of other universities (example 6).

3. HSE seeks to secure an internationally competitive environment. (*HSE Strategy*)

4. The Helsinki School of Economics seeks to develop dynamic teaching programs that are competitive and comparable internationally, and that will attract excellent students who are committed to economics and business. (*HSE Strategy*)

5. In filling key positions, we pursue an applications policy that is competitive and to a large extent international. (*HSE Strategy*)

6. Research findings should be comparable to those achieved in other top universities and competitive with them. (*HSE Strategy*)

As these examples show, the themes of competitiveness and internationality are tightly bound together. According to its new strategy, HSE wishes to be considered competitive with its rivals abroad, or, as put in example 6, to *other top universities*, which implies that the School already wishes to position itself in the class of top universities.

The strategy further includes more implicit ways of presenting the School as an internationally accredited player. As example 7 suggests, taking part in international rankings is an indicator of comparability to other business schools. Moreover, promoting the areas of strength (examples 8 to 9) can be regarded as part of the competitiveness discourse: it provides an impression of a university that is aware of its own fields of priority and competes with a focus on them.

7. We take part in international accreditation, rankings, and benchmarkings and are developing our own quality system on the basis of them. (*HSE Strategy*)

8. We concentrate our efforts and resources on chosen areas of priority. (*HSE Strategy*)

9. We are reducing the number of programs and concentrating on areas of strength. Increasing emphasis will be placed on general management in the master's programs. (*HSE Strategy*)

According to the strategy, the number of programs offered is reduced which better allows the School to build its competitiveness based on the strong areas. Examples 8 and 9 provide an understanding of a self-confident business school that is able to recognize its strong areas and utilize them to attract students from the international higher education market.

Besides the highly international focus, HSE highlights its Finnish background and context. In the strategy, the School appears as an international entity yet operating in the Finnish environment and providing Finnish society with various benefits (examples 10 to 12).

10. National and international responsibility (*HSE Values*)
11. We build closer cooperation with our networks both abroad and in Finland. (*HSE Strategy*)
12. HSE seeks to provide Finnish society with the best and most diverse international environment in Finland for business studies and research and to promote business expertise on a wide front through life-long learning. (*HSE Mission*)

These examples indicate the School's aim to find a balance between national and international environments. In its values, HSE equally emphasizes national and international responsibility (example 10). Likewise, it highlights the cooperation with both international and Finnish networks (example 11). This might be considered a reminder of the School's position: despite its growing international focus, HSE remains to be a Finnish university that has a special role in the national context. Yet with a focus on international business studies and research, HSE particularly wishes to *serve Finnish society* (example 12).

6.1.2 High-quality business school

Besides being internationally competitive, becoming a world-class university essentially requires providing high-quality operations. Another core discourse in the HSE strategy is that of high quality which is closely related to the previous discourse of international competitiveness. Quality is promoted on a general level as well as from different stakeholders' point of view. Firstly, potential students are attracted with arguments of the School's excellence: to draw students, HSE emphasizes the quality of its studying environment, e.g. degree programs and teaching and learning methods (examples 13 to 14).

13. Teaching at HSE is based on high-quality international research and close cooperation with the business community. (*HSE Strategy*)

14. We train students for independent and interactive study and also in holistic problem-based learning. All programs will have an integrative, management-oriented course. (*HSE Strategy*)

In the strategy, the degrees offered are generally presented to meet high international standards. Examples 13 and 14 illustrate the quality discourse in a more specific setting: that of teaching and learning. Example 13 promotes the excellence of teaching which is said to be based on high-quality international research. Example 14 exemplifies the shift in universities' learning environment. As Jarvis (2001) notes, the learning process has recently turned from disseminating knowledge through teacher-centered methods and face-to-face lecturing into a more student-centered model that emphasizes learning as a process of individuals constructing and transforming experience into knowledge and skills (Jarvis 2001, 60–63). Example 14, describing the learning methods to be independent, interactive and to train students in holistic problem-based learning, is consistent with this particular shift. The example promotes the quality of teaching, which is finally wished to result in students' superior learning outcomes.

Secondly, the School employs arguments of quality from the potential employees' perspective. In the strategy, HSE names recruiting qualified faculty and conducting research of high international standard as its central objectives (example 15). To support successful recruitment, HSE promotes its competitive doctoral programs and top-level career opportunities for the researchers (example 16) as well as opportunities for professional development for the faculty (example 17).

15. Top-level professors, researchers, and research are the goal of the Helsinki School of Economics. (*HSE Strategy*)

16. We are developing competitive career paths for researchers from the doctoral to the post-doctoral level and to professorships, and will establish an active program of international exchange. We will offer an international doctoral program and a separate industrial doctoral program. (*HSE Strategy*)

17. We value teaching skills. We support the professional development of teachers by offering pedagogical education. We also encourage teachers to take part in management education. Teaching skills are a key criterion in filling positions. We are improving support and information systems so that teachers can focus on teaching. (*HSE Strategy*)

Examples 16 and 17 demonstrate the School's goal to attract international faculty, which is promoted with arguments of quality and international competitiveness. As suggested in the strategy, HSE provides academic career paths and international doctoral programs of good quality. It is further devoted to support its employees' career development by offering pedagogical education to teachers. All these can be regarded as indicators of a high-quality university: recruiting top-level researchers and skillful teachers as well as supporting their professional development can be seen building the world-class business school identity HSE is aiming at. Moreover, the School presents itself as a responsible place to work in (example 18). Responsible management practices and employees' well-being at work may be seen as part of the high-quality discourse as well.

18. We work to improve our management practices, hone them through regular performance appraisals, and give feedback that contributes to positive development. We promote well-being at the workplace and seek to make salary an incentive. (*HSE Strategy*)

Finally, HSE emphasizes the quality of its administrative services supporting the core activities. According to the strategy, these services meet high standards, which is in line with the ideal of the School as a focused entity. Running effective administrative services allows the university to concentrate on its key areas of priority: conducting top-level research and providing students with an excellent learning environment.

6.1.3 Valued partner

Osman (2008) notes that universities were previously known as pinnacles of learning and creating non-utilitarian knowledge. The traditional value of public universities was based on principles of freedom and autonomy: universities were claimed to be independent of societal and political influence. (Osman 2008, 57–58.) As Jarvis (2001) suggests, the traditional role of public universities was to manage society by producing scholars in various fields of study so that they can "go out to make the world a better place" or join the academia. Past decades have, however, shown a major shift in the universities' autonomy. As suggested by Jarvis (2001), their role has changed from serving the state in managing society to serving the industry and commerce to ensure that people are employable. As governments have abolished academic tenure and decreased funding for public universities, these institutions have been growingly transforming into more corporation-like entities (Jarvis 2001).

As a part of this shift, universities today are not merely independent providers of knowledge but they growingly need to adopt a stakeholder-centered thinking and seek for cooperation with various players. In the HSE strategy, partnership is among the major discourses on which the School communicates its corporate identity (example 19).

19. We will maintain active cooperation with businesses, universities, and networks in all priority areas. (*HSE Strategy*)

Business schools, in particular, have long traditions of collaboration with the industry. HSE, for instance, was originally founded by the business community and had tight relations with the business world from the very beginning (Aalto School of Business 2013). HSE was a forerunner in Finland to launch a systematic Partnership program with companies as early as in 1999. The program allowed the relationship with the companies to be long-term and beneficial for both sides. (Väisänen 2010, 245.) As the following examples (20 to 22) show, partnering with companies appears as the most crucial connection for the School as it promotes cooperation with companies and business representatives.

20. HSE seeks to be a career-long partner to management, experts and researchers. (*HSE Mission*)
21. The business community plays a versatile and active role in teaching, and program teams will include representatives from business. (*HSE Strategy*)
22. We are increasing our financial latitude through exports of training, sales of services, cooperation with business, and donations and sponsoring. (*HSE Strategy*)

In the partnership discourse HSE appears as an institution open to commercial influence and willing to interact with the business community: company managers, experts and entrepreneurs. The cooperation is projected to be valuable for both sides. On the one hand, HSE is presented as a beneficial long-term partner for management and experts; on the other, the business people are said to have an influence on the School's operations in the form of teaching and taking part in study program teams. The latter may be considered a major mutation in the university environment, as having business representatives involved in teaching and study program planning is contradictory to the traditional ideal of an independent university. Example 22 specially indicates the growing need of alternative forms of funding for universities. With the decreasing public funding, donations, sponsoring and other forms of cooperation with businesses stand for new ways of financing university operations.

Another crucial partnership for the School is with the academic world, that is, research networks and other universities. The strategy shows a trend of cooperation with other universities both in Finland and internationally (examples 23 and 24).

> 23. We will develop international marketing and recruiting in cooperation with Finnish universities and especially with business schools belonging to the CEMS network. (*HSE Strategy*)
>
> 24. We build closer cooperation with our networks both abroad and in Finland, especially with the Helsinki University of Technology and the University of Art and Design Helsinki. We promote entrepreneurship together with our partners. (*HSE Strategy*)

As an increasingly international institution, HSE strives for cooperation with other business schools in Europe and beyond. The School particularly highlights its CEMS membership that provides it with opportunities to connect with leading business schools, corporations and NGO's all over the world. Belonging to certain networks of accredited business schools may be seen as a justification of a high-standard position and as a means of building a favorable identity. Example 24 reveals the arising interest in networks surpassing traditional discipline boundaries. The aim of close cooperation with the Helsinki University of Technology and the University of Art and Design Helsinki, executed four years later in the formation of Aalto University, is presented already in 2006. The following further highlights the ideal of the multidisciplinary cooperation.

> 25. Our teaching takes place in demand-driven, multidisciplinary programs; each has a director and team that manage the program and monitor its quality. The programs cross subject boundaries and may also involve other universities, both in Finland and abroad. (*HSE Strategy*)

In example 25, HSE underlines its networks in the academic world. The multidisciplinary teaching environment is emphasized, and the study programs are said to be expanded to include other Finnish and international universities as well. Moreover, the programs are described to be well-managed and demand-driven, which may be seen as a signal of education marketization: instead of defining the study programs from its own premises, the program contents are driven by market need, which, again, indicates the importance of the industry relations to the School.

6.1.4 Societal contributor

In addition to being a partner for businesses, universities and other stakeholders, there is a growing expectation that universities should be able to support the development of the surrounding society. In line with this, HSE presents itself as a benefactor in Finnish society at large. The strategy underlines both connections with society and serving society's needs (examples 26 to 27).

26. We seek to have a meaningful voice in society at large and to be an active participant in public debate, an international management educator, and a producer of life-long services. (*HSE Strategy*)
27. We play a significant role in public debate and in support for decision-making through research, memberships on the boards and committees of organizations, and service as experts. We offer a forum and an open portal for research findings and economic policy discussion. (*HSE Strategy*)

As these examples indicate, society is considered one of the university's stakeholders, for which the School has much to offer. HSE projects itself as an active participant in public discussion and emphasizes its influence through memberships in various boards and committees. Producing relevant research findings is a central way for a university to contribute to society, and conducting high-quality research is said to be a crucial part of HSE's public role. The School further presents itself as a partner that serves society as a management educator and expert in the economic field. Moreover, the research conducted at the School is presented to be beneficial for society at large, not only in the field of business and economics.

The example that follows summarizes the multiple roles of a university and reveals the ambitious goals HSE is aiming at: its objective is to make a scientific contribution, to disseminate research findings, to have practical relevance, and finally, to make a difference in society at large.

28. We aim to make a scientific contribution, to have practical relevance, to disseminate research findings and to make a difference in society at large. (*HSE Strategy*)

In the discourse of societal contribution, HSE appears as a "benefactor" in various areas. In addition to having theoretical and practical implications, it has a broader meaning: the university presents itself as a supporter of society's development. In this discourse, the existence of a single university is justified with arguments of a broader meaning beyond being an expert in a selected field.

6.1.5 Innovative community

One of the communicative purposes of a strategy text is to guide future action. Strategic planning literature emphasizes that strategy is a plan for the future; it is a means of getting from here to there (Pälli *et al*. 2009, 308), and it is therefore evident that a strategy text is future-oriented in itself. Accordingly, the HSE strategy involves a strong future orientation and expressions of future time such as *developing*, *innovative* and *tomorrow*. The discourse of future orientation is, however, embedded in the HSE strategy on a more profound level. The final discourse arising from the strategy is that of innovativeness (examples 29 to 30).

29. HSE seeks to create innovative business expertise that improves competitiveness for those in positions of leadership today and tomorrow, for companies, and for society at large. (*HSE Mission*)

30. We are actively developing the innovation environment of Metropolitan Helsinki and of the South Savo region. (*HSE Strategy*)

HSE promotes innovativeness from various viewpoints. Firstly, it is highlighted in the context of constantly creating business expertise in the future (example 29). Example 29 further relates innovation with competitiveness. In its mission, the School relies on the power of innovative expertise and the dynamic way of operation in order to enhance its competitiveness in the future. Secondly, HSE strives to create an innovative operational environment on both of its campuses (example 30).

Finally, the discourse of innovativeness is related to the rising ideal of a multidisciplinary university. The cross-disciplinary approach is connected with the discourse of innovativeness since seeking for cooperation with other fields of study can be considered a future way of operation for universities. In this discourse, the university appears as an innovative community open to influences and combining strengths from various disciplines in a new way (example 31).

31. We will concentrate on program-based and dynamic areas of priority dealing with broad research themes across subject boundaries; such areas will be designated in response to demand and success. We will also support quality research outside these areas. (*HSE Strategy*)

As this example shows, the School wishes to concentrate on *dynamic areas of priority*. These areas are described to include broad themes, to cross subject boundaries and to have a market-driven course. HSE not only strives to be an excellent educator in the field of economics but also to extend its research focus beyond the traditional areas. Emphasizing the multidisciplinary approach may be seen as an introduction to the School's future environment: the formation of which was first called "Innovation University" and now known as Aalto University. In this respect, the strategy 2006 paves the way for a major future change: the formation of the Aalto University with the idea of bridging three different fields of study. The new environment is to be discussed next as the focus turns into the projection of corporate identity in the Aalto University School of Business.

6.2 Corporate identity discourses of the Aalto University School of Business

6.2.1 Innovative community with long tradition

As the merger into Aalto University took place in 2010, Helsinki School of Economics along with other Aalto schools faced a new situation where it has to be recognized as part of the newly established university brand while, at the same time, strive for a distinct profile. The former independent universities all have long tradition in their respective fields, which is obviously a strength they are not willing to ignore in the merger: both Aalto University and the School of Business (formerly HSE) present themselves as innovative entities yet having long and respected history (examples 32 to 34). The School of Business, in particular, highlights its traditional standing in the field of business and economics.

32. Aalto University is comprised of six schools, each exhibiting its distinctive strengths and areas of unique expertise developed throughout a history of more than a hundred years. (*Aalto Strategy*)

33. The Aalto University School of Economics was established by a group of business pioneers a hundred years ago. Today, the School of Economics provides the most versatile environment in Finland for research and education in economic sciences. (*Aalto Strategy*)

34. 100 years at the forefront of Finnish research and teaching in economics and business administration. (*Aalto School of Business Website*)

These examples show that the university presents long tradition as a part of its identity. The presentation, however, not only illustrates the historical dimension of the university but also indicates the interaction between history and present time. The roots dating back a hundred years are used as an argument of long-time expertise and trustworthiness: the excellence of today is seen possible because of the long tradition the institution holds. The School of Business is projected as a forerunner throughout its history. It was *established by a group of business pioneers a hundred years ago*, and has been *at the forefront* in its field ever since (example 34). This further implies that the School wishes to continue holding the leading position in the future.

A study by Moogan *et al*. (2001) suggests that reputation is considered to be lower at "new" universities compared to "old" institutions. However, it does not seem to affect the majority of potential students from applying to the newly established institutions, since new universities are viewed to offer more degrees relevant to industry with modern ideas and updated resources. (Moogan *et al*. 2001, 184–185.) In the case of Aalto University, the approaches of tradition and novelty are incorporated: the university communicates an identity that is strongly future-oriented, but, at the same time, builds on 300 years of history of three highly regarded universities (example 32). In this respect, the present and future expertise are justified with arguments of long tradition.

Even though history and tradition form a part of the School of Business' corporate identity, its main focus is on the future. The future orientation along with innovativeness is one of the core themes on which the university builds its ideal identity (examples 35 to 37).

35. The School of Economics educates responsible experts to solve the problems of tomorrow. (*Aalto Strategy*)

36. We also aim to recognize and invest resources in emerging research fields. Over the long term, the areas on which the University will focus our research need to be determined as part of a dynamic process. Certain disciplines, phenomena and research groups start up, develop and, in time, cease to exist. Investment in new areas can sometimes mean giving up others of lesser overall significance for the University. (*Aalto Strategy*)

37. The school aims to develop future generations of experts and leaders with the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that are essential in multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and interconnected business world. (*School of Business Brochure*)

These examples show a set of expressions of future time: *tomorrow*, *develop* and *over the long term*. It is apparent that strategizing is all about planning the future, however, in the Aalto context this orientation seems to be a more profound one. The whole idea of the newly established university is founded on the innovative environment combining the fields of business, art and technology in a new way. As projected in example 36, the University's focus will be on the emerging disciplines and research that will support the development of innovative areas. This may mean, in some cases, giving up old or less significant ones.

As part of the future orientation, the School of Business highlights the role of innovativeness and dynamic networks. This theme was already present in the HSE strategy 2006 (see chapter 6.1.5) at which time the innovation through cross-disciplinary collaboration was about to emerge. Today, the ideal of a multidisciplinary university has been put into practice (examples 38 to 39).

38. Scientific breakthroughs, inventions and innovations are often created through interdisciplinary collaboration with one field of science studying, testing and pushing the borders of another. Aalto University supports multidisciplinary research by creating and encouraging opportunities for spontaneous and dynamic cooperation between experts from different fields. (*Aalto Strategy*)

39. We believe in innovation through creative blends of the arts, business and technology. We encourage our students to find their strengths, goals and multi-disciplinary dream teams. This has resulted in award-winning research, art and entrepreneurship. Aalto gives you the freedom to succeed. (*School of Business Brochure*)

Innovation at Aalto University is strongly believed to be bound to collaboration among experts from different disciplines, which is thought to lead, as example 38 suggests, to *inventions and scientific breakthroughs*. According to example 39, students are encouraged to find their *strengths, goals and multidisciplinary dream teams*. Furthermore, the ideal of freedom and boundless opportunities is among the values Aalto seems to respect highly. In its values, the university promotes creative thinking and the ideal of challenging traditional working methods, all of which may be seen building an identity of a dynamic university. Accordingly, the strategy is filled with words such as *opportunities*, *dynamic*, *innovation*, *new* and *creative*. Example 40 finally summarizes that being multidisciplinary and creating innovations profoundly defines what Aalto wishes to be.

40. Aalto University's unique profile - one of combining science and art, technology, economics and design - stimulates interdisciplinary collaboration and facilitates the birth of new innovations. (*Aalto Strategy*)

As a sub-unit of Aalto University, the School of Business has to define its position from a new perspective. The School's focus still remains to be on conducting research and educating experts in economics and business, but in the new context it cannot ignore the interdisciplinary network it is part of. Example 41, presenting the strategic goals of the School, demonstrates the new position.

41. Strengthening and developing globally competitive business programmes surpassing traditional boundaries, among others by focusing on the opportunities for synergies within Aalto University and by focusing on the pedagogical development of faculty. (*School of Business Website*)

The School's objective is to provide *competitive business programs surpassing traditional boundaries,* and it wishes to draw on synergies within Aalto University. The present documents imply that the School still seems to be seeking for a balance between the business focus and utilizing new opportunities coming from the merger. Likewise, Aalto University as a novel institution seems to lack a sense of a clearly defined identity. The strategy therefore shows a need for the university to justify its position. Both Aalto University and the School of Business wish to present themselves as dynamic communities of students and employees coming from all over the world. The ideal of a vital university community, demonstrated in examples 42 to 44, is a strong theme that they are willing to emphasize.

42. As an inspiring, professional community, the University encourages lifelong learning. (*Aalto Strategy*)

43. The School of Business is an innovative and lively community of about 4,000 students and over 500 faculty and staff. (*School of Business Website*)

44. We strive to build an inclusive, multicultural academic community with excellent students, faculty members and staff from different countries. (*School of Business Strategy*)

The strategy presents the School of Business as a vital community of talented students and professionals. It projects an ideal state of a uniform university community, even though the actual sense of Aalto as a community is not yet fully shaped. As example 44 suggests, the uniform community is sought by building an inclusive, multicultural environment for students, faculty and staff. It is evident that innovativeness and vitality are aspired through the ideal of multidisciplinary collaboration.

6.2.2 Internationally local university

The former HSE strategy (chapter 6.1.1) revealed a highly pronounced focus on international student and faculty recruitment, which was predictable considering the School's increasing focus on internationality at the time. In the present documents, internationality is not as strongly emphasized as before, and overall, word *international* is less used. Instead, the School communicates an identity that combines internationality and locality.

Examples 45 to 47 illustrate the way of presenting internationality in the newer data.

45. The University's competitive position is determined by its capacity to attract the best students, researchers and leaders. Through internationalisation, universities expand their range in recruiting both researchers and students and participate in solving major global challenges together with other experts in their respective fields. (*Aalto Strategy*)

46. Be part of an international academic community and apply to the Aalto University tenure track career system. It is a world-class system built after international models and aimed at successful academics. (*Aalto Brochure*)

47. As a multicultural research and teaching community, international mobility is a natural part of the community members' daily lives. (*Aalto Strategy*)

The documents show that internationality is no longer promoted as something new for a Finnish university. Being international has rather become an acknowledged part of the School's operations, which, as a result, is projected in a more moderate way. Examples from 45 to 47 simply state that internationality forms a part of the university's environment; example 47 particularly highlights that it is *a natural part* of it. It is obvious that internationality is brought to a more concrete level: it is no longer an upper-level ideal but rather a part of the School's everyday reality. This calls for practical actions concerning the growing amount of international students and faculty, illustrated in the example that follows.

48. Internationalisation of the curriculum also means adjustments to teaching/learning approaches to accommodate students with diverse backgrounds. Services offered by the School, the university, and the student union (AYY) and student association (KY) aim at better integrating international students into the local academic environment, way of life as well as the broader Finnish society. (*School of Business Strategy*)

As example 48 shows, internationality has turned from a strategic objective into everyday actions where the adjustments required to integrate the international students and faculty to the university need to be considered from a practical perspective. Instead of only emphasizing internationalization, the School of Business rather seems to be seeking for a balance between international and national identities. The documents of 2012 and 2013 show an equal focus on these two approaches (examples 49 to 51).

49. Aalto University brings the best of Finland to a genuinely international and multicultural environment for its students and employees. (*Aalto Values*)

50. The aim of the School is to attract top talent from Finland and abroad to fill our Tenure Track positions. (*School of Business Strategy*)

51. The language policy of the School focuses on Finnish and English. - - In order to improve the bilingual competencies on part of the students, the aim is that B.Sc. and M.Sc. students are introduced to key professional terms in both Finnish and English in all programmes. (*School of Business Strategy*)

Example 49 projects Aalto University as a diversified entity drawing on the best parts of both Finnish and international environment. The university is presented as a genuinely international environment for students and employees. Example 50 explicates the School's goal to recruit faculty from both Finland and abroad, and example 51 further projects the balance between international and Finnish context in its language aspect. According to the example, the School's language policy is equally focused on both languages, and students are introduced to key professional terms in *both in Finnish and English*.

Melewar *et al*. (2006) suggest that physical location forms a part of the corporate identity mix, as having a key location may be seen projecting a desired image to the public. Moreover, the architecture of a company building may affect how the corporate identity is perceived. (Melewar *et al.* 2006, 144.) The significance of physical location and architecture is recognized by the Aalto School of Business, promoting its physical location and premises as part of the identity (examples 52 to 53). Emphasizing them may be seen included in the discourse of locality.

52. Aalto University School of Business Helsinki Campus is located in Helsinki's city centre. The three main buildings, where classes are held, are all within walking distance. Within the campus's facilities, functionality is combined with history: the premises have been renovated to meet modern standards and represent the "modern 20th century architecture" of the 1950s. (*School of Business Brochure*)

53. The premises strategy approved by the University is aimed at guaranteeing a functional setting for research, teaching and creative work and interaction. A further objective is to create an accessible, healthy, inspiring, aesthetic and safe working environment. (*Aalto Strategy*)

Example 52 draws on the location of the School and further projects the School's facilities as a unique combination of historical architecture and modern functionality. This combination might be seen reflecting the interplay of history and future discussed previously in chapter 6.2.1. Example 53 particularly promotes the learning environment and facilities. The university premises are said to meet the functional standards for research, teaching and interaction, which altogether create an *accessible, healthy, inspiring, aesthetic and safe working environment.* As stated in the School of Business' strategy, its future objective is to develop a modern learning environment which is considered to positively influence the student motivation and inspiration.

6.2.3 High-quality business school

Like the HSE strategy 2006, the presentation of the School of Business' identity shows a strong emphasis on high-quality operations. Concerning its objective to become a world-class business school, it is obvious that the School highlights the excellence of its operations. In the documents, the School communicates its overall excellence as well as the quality of teaching, management practices and other services from diverse stakeholders' point of view.

Promoting quality on a general level may be seen equal to what Argenti (2000) calls managing the overall reputation of a university. Instead of only targeting specific stakeholder groups, the brand of a university, as he suggests, should be managed as a whole (Argenti 2000, 176). Accordingly, Aalto University presents itself as an internationally competitive player in the education field. The School of Business, in particular, appears as an institution only accessible to the brightest students and faculty. The following are examples of the projection of overall quality.

54. Our goal for the University's entire operations is to achieve high international quality and recognition. (*Aalto Strategy*)

55. Aalto University's international visibility and reputation build strongly on the competence, commitment, quality and opinions of its faculty, staff and students. The University builds its reputation by investing in the quality of research and education it provides, improving its visibility among relevant stakeholders through systematic marketing and communication activities. Aalto aims to work with the best partners in its selected fields. (*Aalto Strategy*)

56. We benchmark ourselves against the leading business schools in Europe when staffing new positions, conducting performance evaluations and making tenure decisions. (*School of Business Strategy*)

57. Validated selection mechanisms are used in order to choose the best possible students. The validated and internationally standard GMAT or GRE tests are used for the M.Sc. and Ph.D. programmes, also to enable a comparison of applicants with different educational backgrounds. (*School of Business Strategy*)

As examples 54 to 57 suggest, the overall quality is built on recruiting competent employees and students, quality of research and teaching, and making them visible and attractive to various stakeholders. Networks of high standard are further used to justify the School's high standing: examples 55 and 56 emphasize cooperation with the best partners in the field. As for the faculty recruitment, the School says to benchmark against the best business schools in Europe. Example 57 underlines the high level of student selection: the selection criteria are said to meet high international standards. Emphasizing the external practices like this is used to validate the ideal of overall excellence.

Furthermore, the School emphasizes rankings and accreditations as external indicators of a high-quality standing (example 58).

58. The School of Business is among the top one percent of business schools worldwide that have received the Triple Crown accreditation, the most prestigious international quality accreditations in its field: AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS. This indicates that the School of Business has achieved and maintained high international standards of excellence in business and management education. (*School of Business Brochure*)

As example 58 presents, the School is among *the top one percent of business schools* that have received the Triple Crown accreditation of AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS, which is evidently used as an argument of excellence and exclusive quality. Words such as *best*, *leading* and *prestigious* are commonly used to describe the high-standard operations.

Recognizing the areas of strength and constantly developing the operations can be seen as a part of the discourse of high quality and competitiveness. The School of Business validates its overall quality with arguments of concentration, emphasizing the focus on areas in which it is able to *achieve a leadership position* (example 59). Example 59 further shows a growing need to invest in areas where there are potential synergies between the Aalto University Schools. Furthermore, assessing and improving the expertise on an on-going basis is seen crucial in order to gain a world-class status (example 60).

59. Investments in faculty resources will be made in core areas of business studies and economics. The School will support areas where we believe that we can achieve a global leadership position, including areas where there are potential synergies between different Aalto schools, our location, and/or where there are possibilities for access to unique and valuable research data. (*School of Business Strategy*)

60. Aalto University is constantly developing its expertise in all areas of specialisation and strives to rank among the top universities internationally. (*Aalto Brochure*)

Besides the overall quality, Aalto University promotes quality in regard to its key stakeholders, that is, prospective students and employees, as summed up in example 61 which combines the approaches of overall quality and student and faculty recruitment.

61. A successful university attracts the top faculty, staff and students in their fields, both nationally and internationally. Equally, researchers, teachers and students of excellent universities are sought-after employees in the global market. (*Aalto Strategy*)

From the potential students' point of view, the School promotes its excellent academic programs, quality of teaching, and learning environment that is described to be student-centered and target-oriented. Moreover, the practical approach of the studies and the career-orientation embedded in the curriculum are used as key messages delivered to prospective students (examples 62 to 63).

62. Aalto University School of Business is a leading international business school located in Finland. Our renowned BSc and MSc degree programmes equip you with advanced knowledge, specialised skills, and an appreciation of how to put these into practice in the global business environment. (*School of Business Brochure*)

63. The engagement and motivation of students are crucial for their study performance. Efforts are made to ensure that students know and internalize the learning goals across courses and programmes, and that they take active ownership of their own learning process. (*School of Business Strategy)*

64. Improving the faculty/student ratio (the aim being 1:10 in 2020), among others by increasing the number of faculty and reducing the number of B.Sc. students. (*School of Business Website*)

Example 64 presents a more measurable way of assessing the high quality of teaching: the School's explicit goal of decreasing the student-teacher ratio in the upcoming years. This can be seen not only as a means of attracting potential students with arguments on more personal teaching but also as a justification of the school's overall quality. The world's top universities are known to have lower faculty per student ratios, which is also a long-term objective of the Aalto School of Business to ensure its high standing in the future.

In the role of a high-quality academic employer, the School of Business emphasizes its excellent management practices, opportunities for career development for the faculty, and collaboration with the business and academic communities (examples 65 to 67).

65. The School's objective is to be an attractive employer with close ties with the business world and society at large, providing our faculty members with good opportunities for carrying out collaborative research projects. (*School of Business Strategy*)

66. In terms of training and development, pedagogical training for professors of the School forms an integrated part of faculty development. (*School of Business Strategy*)

67. The tenure track is based on the principle of commitment from the university and the individual to an academic career. The career path is well organised with clearly defined expectations, incentives and constant assistance in personal development. (*Aalto Brochure*)

In these examples, the School appears as a high-standard employer providing its employees with opportunities to individual career paths, collaborative research projects as well as training and development of pedagogical skills. Moreover, the Tenure track career system (example 67) is said to have clear objectives and structure, which promotes the career system as an excellent opportunity for academic talents. All these are used to promote the School as an attractive employer with high-standard management systems and broad possibilities of conducting research and developing professional skills.

In addition to basic university operations, the School's supporting services are said to follow high standards. These services comprise activities such as study planning, career services, library services and advanced use of information technology, which are projected to support the key activities, allowing the students and faculty to concentrate on their core academic tasks (example 68).

68. The overall purpose of the service functions is to allow faculty members and students to focus on and to be effective in their core academic tasks. The efficiency and effectiveness of the service provision is assessed and further development through benchmarking with other leading business schools and units of the university as well as through user surveys of the service provided. (*School of Business Strategy*)

As stated in example 68, the service provision is constantly developed through *benchmarking with other leading business schools*, which indicates the efforts put on the supporting services. Furthermore, the School premises, devices and equipment are presented as parts of the supporting functions. They allow the students and faculty to interact and concentrate on their core activities: conducting high-quality research and enhancing learning.

6.2.4 Valued partner

As with the former HSE strategy, cooperation with several constituencies remains to be one of the central themes the School of Business communicates. Creating long-term partnerships with the key stakeholders in academia and business world is seen crucial in the work towards the world-class status. This discourse is illustrated in the following examples.

69. The Aalto University School of Business engages in high-quality business research based on co-operation with the international scientific community, society and business, and industry. (*School of Business Presentation*)

70. Internationality and global networking are part of research and teaching at Aalto. We co-operate with the very best partners in the world. *(School of Business Website)*

Examples 69 to 70 present the cooperation with international partners as a foundation of being a high-quality business school. Furthermore, these examples project the high-quality education and research to be possible because of the collaboration with *the very best partners in the world*, indicating that the networks play a significant role in the university's core operations. In this respect, the School's high standing is justified with the network of excellent partners.

As stated previously in chapter 2.2, the new Finnish Universities Act in 2009 enabled the establishment of the foundation-based Aalto University and, after the nationalization era, allowed broader opportunities for Finnish universities to have close relations with the industry. The nationalization of the Helsinki School of Economics back in 1974 had evoked debate, since many believed it damaged the traditional and important relationship the School had with the business world. The relations remained present in the School throughout its existence, however, as a part of an independent foundation it is now even better able to promote its business connections. (Aalto University 2013.) The connections with the business community are highlighted in the following examples.

71. To have close corporate connections continues to be a crucial part of the School's overall strategy. In teaching, the School strives among others to include corporate perspectives into the learning process by involving corporate representatives as members of Degree Programme Committees and by using real corporate cases, teaching cases, student projects and internships as important parts of the learning process. In research, we view partnerships with corporations as critical not only to ensure practical relevance but also as a competitive advantage in terms of getting access to unique data. The School's researchers are encouraged to make contributions to practice through joint research projects with corporations and other stakeholders as well as executive education. (*School of Business Strategy*)

72. The School aims to have partnerships with leading Finnish and international firms. The collaboration with partner firms aims partly to contribute to the research and teaching/learning within the School; in part to contribute to the development and competitiveness of the partner organizations. (*School of Business Strategy*)

The strategy shows the essential role that business relations play in the School of Business. The School views close connections with the business community crucial in regard to its main activities: research and teaching. As stated in example 71, corporate perspectives are highly valued and included in study program planning and teaching. Cooperation with businesses is an arising way of funding research activities that are executed as joint research projects with corporations. Example 72 further emphasizes that collaboration has advantages for both sides: it not only contributes to the research and teaching at the School but also allows the partner firms to enhance their competitiveness.

Partnership with the industry is particularly promoted from the prospective students' point of view, assuming that business connections and practical insights are something that future students value in the business school curriculum. In this setting, the documents show a strong emphasis on practical approaches and career orientation (examples 73 to 74).

73. At Aalto, you will engage with our excellent academic staff and high-profile business partners, who bring a wealth of experiences and insights to the programmes. (*School of Business Brochure*)

74. The school is known for extensive business cooperation that guarantees the students a great practical foundation in terms of work experience. (*School of Business Brochure*)

Besides the corporate relations, the School projects itself as an accredited partner of other universities and business schools both in Finland and abroad. Collaboration with other higher education institutions is presented to be long-term and focused on areas where synergies exist between the institutions (examples 75 to 77).

75. Cooperation with universities and research institutions in the other Nordic countries and Russia will be enhanced through long-term partnerships. In Europe and North America, efforts are being made to develop even closer and more systematic partnerships with first-rate universities. In Asia, new opportunities will be pursued and Aalto University's local presence will be strengthened. (*Aalto Strategy*)

76. The School aims to collaborate and seek synergies with other business schools and universities whenever feasible. In Finland, the School will continue its collaboration with Hanken School of Economics in areas where there are significant synergies but we will also seek to deepen our collaboration with University of Helsinki. (*School of Business Strategy*)

77. In 2013 the School had a total of 172 partner universities out of which 73% had an international accreditation (AACSB, EQUIS or AMBA). (*School of Business Strategy*)

As emphasized in the Aalto Strategy (example 75), the University strives to strengthen its collaboration with higher education institutions all over the world. The School of Business, in particular, highlights the cooperation with Finnish universities located in Helsinki (example 76) but also with international institutions. Moreover, the discourses of quality and internationality are essential when promoting collaboration: the partnerships are said to be built with the first-rate universities in the world. The School of Business highlights that most of its partner universities have an international accreditation (example 77). In this respect, the School not only presents itself as a valued partner to other institutions but also validates its quality based on international networks of high standing.

6.2.5 Societal contributor

Besides their other responsibilities, societal influence is among the impacts that universities are expected to have. Accordingly, Aalto University as well as the School of Business define societal contribution as one of their key strategic objectives. In its strategy, the School defines its national mission to be a competitive institution and to promote welfare in the Finnish society. Its international mission includes an ambitious goal to *contribute to a better world*. Partnering with businesses, discussed in the previous chapter, is part of the School's societal contribution, as cooperation and using teaching methods such as real cases are believed to ensure that the latest knowledge generated in the School is transferred to society's benefit. The societal influence, however, has broader meaning for the university (examples 78 to 80).

78. Aalto University works towards a better world through top-quality research, interdisciplinary collaboration, pioneering education, surpassing traditional boundaries, and enabling renewal. The national mission of the University is to support Finland's success and contribute to Finnish society, its internationalization and competitiveness, and to promote the welfare of its people through research and by educating responsible, broad-minded experts to act as society's visionaries and change agents. (*Aalto Mission*)

79. Our work is inspired by the needs of society and we seek to contribute to the development of society. This requires systematic and inspiring dialogue between Aalto and many different stakeholders, businesses as well as the public sector. (*Aalto Strategy*)

80. The School is committed to making significant contributions to society in Finland and world-wide in line with its mission. At the core of our societal contributions are student learning and high-quality research on relevant topics. (*School of Business Strategy*)

As these examples indicate, supporting the development of the surrounding society is viewed as an important role of a university. The contribution is sought by conducting research on meaningful topics, educating responsible professionals, and collaborating with relevant stakeholders. Student learning and conducting high-quality research are presented to be at the core of the societal contribution (examples 78 and 80). Instead of a one-way influence of the university on the society, the strategy emphasizes active dialogue with different stakeholders (example 79). Furthermore, interdisciplinary collaboration is presented as a source of societal contribution: surpassing traditional boundaries is believed to lead to innovations, and eventually, to a better society (example 78). This dimension is further emphasized in the following example.

81. A solid expertise in business, arts and design, and technology enables the university to carry out world-class multidisciplinary research, teaching and education in active cooperation with the surrounding society. (*Aalto Brochure*)

Moreover, societal contribution is sought by memberships in different committees and boards both in corporate and non-profit sector. Such activities, as shown in example 82, allow the School to take part in legislation, government and other societal work as well as to engage in public discussion. Moreover, they allow the School to present itself as a responsible member of society.

82. The School increases the level of contribution of its faculty members and other employees across a range of societal activities. Such activities include commissions of trust, including the invited participation in the development of Finnish and international legislation, government and other societal committees and work groups, and corporate and non-profit boards. The School encourages and stimulates the participation of its experts in relevant public debates and discussions. (*School of Business Strategy*)

Further ways in which the School of Business wishes to contribute to society is enhancing life-long learning, executive education and entrepreneurship. As stated in example 83, Aalto University aims to become a leading provider of executive and entrepreneurship education by offering continuing education to working professionals. The School of Business appears as a supporter of entrepreneurship that provides the students with opportunities to learn about entrepreneurship, particularly related to social and sustainability matters (example 84).

83. Aalto University will be striving to become one of Europe's leading executive and entrepreneurship education providers. The University also aims to drive the implementation of the newest research findings into society through professional development and continuing education opportunities offered to working professionals. (*Aalto Strategy*)

84. The stimulation of entrepreneurship in Finland in particular is viewed as a crucial societal task of the School. One part of this task will be carried out through the education taking place within B.Sc. and M.Sc. programmes, which aim at enhancing the knowledge and skills as well as attitudes of the students towards entrepreneurship, including social and sustainability entrepreneurship. (*School of Business Strategy*)

The arising focus on sustainability is adopted as a part of the School of Business strategy, which is in line with the overall trend of having social responsibility as an inseparable part of business operations. Social responsibility is projected among the ways in which the School works towards a better society (example 85).

85. The School aims to increase the contributions of its faculty members and students to societal development projects of different kinds in Finland and abroad. One example is the organising of cross-disciplinary field projects carried out in developing countries where students seek to create entrepreneurial solutions to poverty alleviation together with local universities and non-governmental organisations. (*School of Business Strategy*)

As example 85 shows, the School emphasizes its wish to contribute to societal development projects both in Finland and abroad. It takes part in interdisciplinary projects in developing countries by creating e.g. entrepreneurial solutions to help alleviate poverty, which may be regarded as an example of a business school broadening its focus from traditional activities to contributing to social issues at large. In the discourse of societal contribution, the School's excellence is brought to a broader context. The high-standard and responsible operations are not only said to benefit the field of business and economics but also society at large; a single business school is not separated from other fields but instead, uses its expertise to help develop the social environment.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Summary of the key findings

In the previous chapters I have investigated the discourses that the Aalto University School of Business (formerly HSE) employs to present its corporate identity. These discourses stand for the multiple roles the institution holds, and comprise several themes on which the School builds its corporate brand. The strategy 2006 reveals five discourses: internationally competitive player, high-quality business school, valued partner, societal contributor and innovative community. The newer documents of 2012 and 2013 as well comprise five discourses: innovative community with long tradition, internationally local university, high-quality business school, valued partner and societal contributor.

The HSE strategy 2006 shows the School's pronounced wish to be regarded as an institution competing on the international education market. According to HSE's growing strategic objective at the time to attract students and academic staff from all over the world, the most apparent discourse is that of *international competitiveness* which is very explicitly emphasized throughout the strategy. HSE wishes to appear as an internationally accredited player in its field, and it therefore promotes its international environment, degree programs, and career opportunities for the students. As an internationally operating institution, the School needs to be able to compete for students and faculty worldwide. The international comparability is validated with arguments of overall competitiveness as well as being an excellent educator, employer and research community. The competitiveness is further promoted with arguments of focusing on strong areas of study.

In the current situation of the Aalto School of Business, the explicit emphasis on internationality has diminished and rather become an accepted part of the School's everyday reality. Internationality now calls for adjustments on a concrete level, e.g. on how to integrate the international students into the university community and student union. In the newer data, the theme of competitiveness is more implicitly embedded in the documents and bound to the discourse of quality. It is visible that the School is striving to find a balance between its *international and national identities*. Despite being a growingly international institution, the School of Business still draws on its Finnish strengths and locality. The School highlights its physical location and premises as part of the corporate identity formation. In the language aspect, the dual focus is supported by the School's aim to have Finnish and English as equal languages in its language policy.

When aiming at a world-class university status, the ability to provide operations of high standard is crucial. Along with the discourses of internationality and competitiveness, the School therefore promotes *high quality* which is presented in a very similar way at both stages. HSE is said to offer degree programs and learning methods of high international standard as well as to equip employees with an excellent academic environment to teach and make research in. It also highlights responsible management practices and the quality of the services supporting the core activities. In the present documents, the School of Business evidently promotes its overall quality which appears as the most important way of building a favorable corporate brand. The School emphasizes visibility and reputation created through communications and says to be accessible to the best applicants only, which can all be regarded as projections of the overall quality. On a more measurable level, the School emphasizes the quality accreditations it currently holds.

In contrast to the former situation where universities were perceived as independent providers of knowledge, they now need to adopt a stakeholder-centered thinking and seek for cooperation with various groups. In line with this expectation, the School projects itself as a *valued partner* to its stakeholders both in Finland and internationally at both stages. Based on the strategic documents, the business community appears as the most essential partner for the School, however, the networks with academic institutions are highlighted as well. Creating long-term partnerships that are beneficial for both sides appears crucial, and the excellence of the School is validated with arguments of partnering with the best institutions in the world.

The School of Business highlights strategic partnerships with the business world and public sector and justifies the connections with arguments of effectively transferring the university's expertise to society's benefit. In both years, *societal contribution* is among the key discourses on which the identity is built. The School justifies its position and importance with arguments of having a broader meaning in society. This role is approached from several perspectives: the School projects itself as an active participant in public discussion, a successful management educator, a provider of life-long learning, and a supporter of the decision-making through its expertise in the field of economics. It further presents itself as a benefactor of the Finnish society beyond its own field; as a single university that makes a difference in society at large.

The role of societal impact is brought to an even more emphatic level in the Aalto University School of Business Strategy. In the present documents, societal contribution is among the key strategic objectives of the newly established university that strives to promote welfare in Finnish society as well as contribute to a better world with innovative research projects and responsible management education. What is noteworthy here is the university's profound interest to build a better society, which is enabled through interdisciplinary collaboration, encouraging entrepreneurship and taking part in socially responsible activities. In this discourse, the School's excellence is brought to a broader context: the high-standard and responsible operations are projected to benefit not only the field of business and economics but also society at large.

As may be expected, *future-orientation* and *innovation* form a crucial part of the ideal world-class university identity. The discourse of innovativeness shows a high level of future orientation and emphasizes new possibilities and innovative ways of acting. The opportunities emerging from the multidisciplinary cooperation are already recognized in the HSE strategy 2006 which focuses on a dynamic environment and growing level of cooperation with other disciplines.

After the formation of Aalto University in 2010, the cross-disciplinary environment has been put into practice, and the newer documents reveal the ideal of a vital university community that is creating innovations through collaboration between different disciplines. The newer strategy highly values the ideal of a uniform university community contributing to innovations. However, the reality of the newly established university might not be that clear. The School of Business, in particular, seems to be balancing between the business focus and opportunities coming from the merger. Surpassing traditional boundaries can, however, be regarded as a future way of operation for the School.

Besides the strong future orientation, the School of Business draws its corporate identity on *long tradition* and a combination of two dimensions of time. Whereas Aalto stands for a new and innovative university, the School of Business represents a traditional higher education institution with expertise built over the history of more than hundred years. In this regard, the School utilizes its long tradition to justify its expertise of today and tomorrow.

The discourses and themes of the School's communicated identity are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. *Summary of the key discourses and themes.*

Year	Discourse	Main themes
2006	*Internationally competitive player*	• Internationality as a growing trend • Internationally competitive educator and research community
	High-quality business school	• High-quality educator, employer and research community • Overall quality
	Valued partner	• Partnering with businesses and universities • International networks • High-standard partnerships
	Societal contributor	• Serving society • Expert in public discussion • Broader meaning
	Innovative community	• Future orientation • Cross-disciplinary collaboration • Dynamic community
2012/ 2013	*Innovative community with long tradition*	• Long and respected tradition • Future orientation • Cross-disciplinary collaboration • Vital community
	Internationally local university	• Internationality as a mature trend • Finnish strengths and locality • Architecture and facilities
	High-quality business school	• Overall quality • Constant development of the operations • High-quality educator, employer and research community
	Valued partner	• Partnering with businesses and universities • International networks • High-standard partnerships
	Societal contributor	• Promoting societal welfare • Expert in public discussion • Social responsibility and broader meaning

As stated in chapter 4.2, the current identity and branding work in the Aalto University School of Business is built around its strategic goal to become a world-class business school by the year 2020. This thesis was therefore initiated with an interest to find out which attributes are employed to define the ideal world-class identity.

The external indicators of the Aalto School of Business' excellence include the quality accreditations, the recognition on the European Business School Rankings published by *Financial Times* and the membership of the international CEMS network. Moreover, the documents reveal a set of external practices which are used to validate the School's high international standing. Among these are the newly launched Tenure track academic career system, GMAT/GRE tests required in student admission and the Partnership program with an objective of long-term collaboration with businesses, all of which are promoted to constitute an understanding of a world-class business school. Moreover, the language policy of the School of Business, highlighting English as an equal language to Finnish, indicates a practice that the School has been deliberately working on in order to justify its international standing. These practices may be viewed as tools of making the strategic objectives more concrete, and to validate the institution's strong belief that it is aiming at the right strategic direction.

Beyond the external practices, the ideal world-class identity is communicated as a mix of several themes, as investigated in this study. These themes are realized in various discourses that can be understood as ways of discussing and validating the School's position as a top university. The core areas constitute a network of discourses where there is a constant dialogue between different themes. In summary, the ideal world-class identity is built upon five key attributes:

(1) International competitiveness and comparability to other business schools;
(2) Providing high-standard operations;
(3) Partnering with a number of highly regarded stakeholders;
(4) Contributing to the development of society; and
(5) Innovativeness that draws on the long and respected history.

7.2 Discussion

Universities and higher education institutions in Finland and worldwide have recently been through a phase of major mutations. As suggested by Stensaker and Norgård (2001) the institutions face pressures coming from both internal and external environments as they have to struggle between the tendencies of standardization within the industry and differentiation to create a specialized profile. The main responsibilities of universities have remained the same, namely to conduct scientific research and to provide the highest teaching based on that. However, the traditional role of universities as autonomous creators of higher knowledge has been subject to significant changes.

In Finland, the new Universities Act introduced in 2009 set universities in a new position: with decreasing public funding and governance they are pushed to have more responsibility for their own operations. At the same time, the reform has given them more autonomy concerning their funding, management and ways of cooperating with the selected partners. The institutions therefore have adopted new models of operation. This is where universities have moved closer to business ideals, or as Fairclough (2010) puts it, discourse of marketization, where university operations are discussed in commercial terms. Universities' branding efforts, including the aim to build a stronger corporate identity, well exemplify this shift.

The findings of this thesis indicate the growing demands faced by universities. With a study of a single Finnish university, Aalto University School of Business (formerly HSE) it illustrates the role of universities as standardized institutions yet striving for a distinct identity. The case organization aims to become a ”world-class business school”, a recognized and comparable part of the international higher education industry network that needs to find common features with other institutions. At the same time, the School wishes to attract high-standard applicants from all over the world, and it therefore needs to find and communicate a distinct profile to keep up with the growing competition.

Like other Finnish higher education institutions, the case university constantly needs to adapt to demands coming from different directions. The findings of this thesis reveal struggles between different ways of operation. On the one hand, universities need to be competitive and stand apart from their competitors, but, on the other hand, they are expected to build long-term partnerships with other institutions of higher education. Universities need to secure their competitiveness both in national and international context and contribute to society. They are not only expected to serve national needs and support the development of the surrounding society in the local context but also to be international centers for creating innovations. Business schools, in particular, are assumed to manage close relationships with businesses while keeping a credible identity of a scientific community. Furthermore, the Aalto School of Business seems to be balancing between its traditional business focus and new opportunities arising from cross-disciplinary cooperation after the merger into Aalto University in 2010.

In discursive terms, the struggles between different demands are realized in various ways of discussing universities' roles and position. The themes found in the research data reflect the processes and changes going on in the academic world. These themes, as Fairclough (2010) suggests, are open to a range of different representations, that is, different discourses and practices. On the upper level, the processes are represented in terms of two discourses: traditional academic values and marketization of universities. The traditional standing is apparent when discussing the School of Business as a research community, an educator of future professionals and a provider of life-long services. The commercial values, on the other hand, are particularly seen in the School's emphasis on differentiation from the competitors, strategies of attracting the best students and faculty, and partnership with the industry.

The selected strategic documents of the case university represent social events that take place within the social practices of traditional university values and marketization. Language used in these social events constructs a representation of the university's position within these social practices (Fairclough 1993). As Fairclough (2010) suggests, other discourses gain prominence and other become marginalized over time in particular social events. The data of this study reveals constant dialogue and struggles between different ways of discussing universities. The interdiscursive relations between the discourses, however, imply the dominance of the commercial practices in the case university.

In regard to the marketization discourse, one option for universities to respond to the changing environment is to move towards a business-like model of operation. It is in this context that promotion becomes one of the basic functions of a university, and various corporate marketing strategies are being employed to attract potential students and faculty. To differentiate, communicating a consistent corporate identity and brand has become essential for universities, thus closing in on commercial organizations in that sense (Balmer and Gray 2003). Many authors (e.g. Bulotaite 2003; Jevons 2006; Curtis *et al.* 2009) emphasize the importance of corporate branding in universities since it might simplify their complex profiles and promote the key stakeholders' attraction and loyalty to the organization. Moreover, a clearly defined corporate identity helps the organization win competitive edge over its competitors (Melewar 2006). Its value for universities, surrounded by growing expectations to find their strategic niche and manage relationships with their stakeholders, is therefore evident.

The relevance of a well-managed corporate-level brand is recognized in several earlier studies on university branding (e.g. Wolverton 2006; Pinar *et al*. 2011). A study by Wolverton (2006) highlights that the business schools with the most successful brands are able to build on their specific strengths and recognize the value of an overall identity. Likewise, Whisman (2009) and Argenti (2000) mention the school name and values communicated at the corporate level as the most determining aspects of attraction towards a university. The value of a strong corporate brand is recognized by the Aalto School of Business as well: when working towards a desirable world-class identity, the School highlights features that rather communicate an organization-wide brand than attributes targeted at specific stakeholder groups. Promoting overall quality and external labels of excellence well exemplify this approach.

The Aalto School of Business may be seen quite successful in determining and communicating its strengths, which is recognized as an indicator of a strong university identity (Wolverton 2006). In 2006, the strong international focus and the advantages arising from cross-disciplinary collaboration were rather unique attributes in the Finnish context. Starting from 2006, the School has been seeking its unique profile through concentrating on its strong areas and drawing on the advantages of multidisciplinary collaboration. In the present situation, the brand is most seemingly built on features such as combining internationality and locality as well as social responsibility and innovation emerging from the multidisciplinary university community, which are communicated as distinct features of the School.

In its public presentation, the Aalto School of Business draws on corporate-like ideals in many other respects as well. The School appears as an institution highly aware of stakeholder-centered thinking, differentiation, and creating value to its various partners, all of which are very similar to the models known in the business world. Like any organization, it needs to manage its relationships with several stakeholders, for which purpose having a clear corporate identity is essential (Melewar *et al*. 2006; Cornelissen 2011). As the findings of this thesis indicate, the network of qualified partners appears as one way of building a high-quality identity, and the School partly constructs its high-standard identity through its network of excellent partners.

The discourse of partnership can be further considered a counterpoint to the traditional ideal of universities as independent creators of knowledge and free from any outside parties' influence (Osman 2008; Jarvis 2001). The findings rather indicate a change in the ideal of independency: it has turned to refer to universities as autonomous organizations which may more independently define their models of operation and networks of suitable partners. Close connections with the industry and research funding from the businesses may be regarded as being harmful to their autonomy as creators of knowledge. Therefore, universities need to constantly compare the suitability of the received funding with their purpose. Anyhow, university independency seems to have shifted towards a new meaning: as the institutions are pushed to have more responsibility for their operations, they have also become more independent organizations that are growingly allowed to define their management practices, partnerships and models of funding by themselves.

The findings of this thesis are, in several regards, consistent with the ideals of university marketization. However, considering their basic function, there are still many ways in which universities are unlike businesses. Their purpose is very different from that of businesses, and despite the increasing cooperation with commercial organizations, much of their funding is still coming in the form of government funding. Branding higher education institutions cannot be directly drawn on commercial ideals, nor are the prior university marketing activities useful in today's changing environment. A university identity should rather be built somewhere between the traditional and business-driven models. Finding novel ways of defining its niche and communicating the strong areas appears as a key future mission for universities.

7.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

The objective of this thesis was to investigate the presented corporate identity of the case university as a reflector of the changes recently witnessed in the academic environment. As a thorough study of a single organization, the results contribute to a better understanding of the role of corporate identity and branding in the special field of higher education. The findings indicate the attributes that are utilized by a single business school to present its ideal world-class identity. The study therefore provides some insights to the discussion on branding in university organizations especially in the Finnish context.

The single case approach, however, sets certain limitations concerning the applicability of the findings. According to Yin (2003), a single case study is weaker than a multiple case study as the research findings cannot be applied in any other situations. Having only one organization involved may be regarded as a limitation of this study since the findings are only applicable in the particular case of Aalto University School of Business. The selected method, however, best fits the research objectives as it allows to have a thorough look into the case organization's communicated identity. A comparison with other Finnish and European business schools' branding efforts was not possible to carry out in the outline of this study, and it therefore remains a topic for further research. It would be valuable to investigate whether there are distinct ways of projecting the university identity, and to get broader knowledge on the possible standardization between the institutions of higher education.

This thesis focused on the corporate identity as it is projected by the case organization itself. A relevant subject for future research would be to review the stakeholder perceptions of the projected identity, that is, the images held by the audiences such as prospective students and prospective employees. In this way, the contribution could be advanced from branding as an effort made by an organization to understanding the corporate brand as a two-way relationship between the university and its stakeholders.

REFERENCES

Aalto University (2013). Aalto University website. Read on October 17, 2013 on http://www.aalto.fi

Aalto University School of Business (2013). Aalto University School of Business website. Read on October 17, 2013 on http://www.business.aalto.fi

Aalto University School of Business Student Services (2013). Statistics on the students of Aalto University School of Business.

Aalto University Strategy (2012). Strategic development of Aalto University. Edition January 2012.

Alessandri, S.W. (2001). Modeling corporate identity: a concept explication and theoretical explanation. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. Vol. 6, No. 4, 173–182.

Argenti, P. (2000). Branding B-Schools: Reputation Management for MBA Programs. *Corporate Reputation Review*. Vol. 3, No. 2, 171–178.

Baker, M.J. & Balmer, J.M.T. (1997). Visual identity: trappings of substance. *European Journal of Marketing*. Vol. 31 Iss. 5, 366–382.

Balmer, J.M.T. & Gray, E.R. (2003). Corporate brands: what are they? What of them? *European Journal of Marketing*. Vol. 37, No. 7/8, 972–997.

Balmer, J.M.T. & Greyser, S.A. (2002). Managing the multiple identities of the corporation. *California Management Review*. Vol. 44, No. 3, 72–86.

Balmer, J.M.T & Liao, M.N. (2007). Student corporate brand identification: an exploratory case study. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. Vol. 12, No. 4, 356–375.

Balmer, J.M.T. (2008). Identity based views of the corporation: insights from corporate identity, organisational identity, social identity, visual identity, corporate brand identity and corporate image. *European Journal of Marketing*. Vol. 42, No. 9, 879–906.

Brown, T., Dacin, P., Pratt, M. & Whetten, D. (2006). Identity, intended image, construed image, and reputation: an interdisciplinary framework and suggested methodology. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. 34, 95–106.

Bulotaite, N. (2003). University heritage: an institutional tool for branding and marketing. *Higher Education in Europe*, Vol. XXVIII. No. 4, 449–454.

Bunzel, D.L. (2007). Universities sell their brands. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. Vol. 16, Iss. 2, 152–153.

Chapleo, C. (2010). What defines "successful" university brands? *International Journal of Public Sector Management*. Vol. 23, Iss. 2, 169–183.

Cornelissen, J.P., Haslam, S.A. & Balmer, J.M.T. (2007). Social Identity, Organizational Identity and Corporate Identity. Towards an Integrated Understanding of Processes, Patternings and Products. *British Journal of Management*. Vol. 18, S1–S16.

Cornelissen, J. (2011). *Corporate Communication. A Guide to Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE.

Cornut, F., Giroux, H., & Langly, A. (2012). The strategic plan as a genre. *Discourse & Communication*, *6*, 21–54.

Curtis, T., Abratt, R. & Minor, W. (2009). Corporate brand management in higher education: the case of ERAU. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. Vol. 18, Iss. 6, 404–413.

De Chernatony, L. (2002). Would a brand smell any sweeter by a corporate name? *Corporate Reputation Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2/3, 114–132.

Dobson, I. (2008a). Finland: Merger fever hits universities. *University World News*, 20 April 2008. Read on November 22, 2012 on http://www.universityworldnews.com

Dobson, I. (2008b). Finland: Upheaval reshapes university sector. *University World News*, 23 November 2008. Read on November 22, 2012 on http://www.universityworldnews.com

Eriksson, P. & Kovalainen, A. (2008). *Qualitative Methods in Business Research*. SAGE Publications.

Eskola, J. & Suoranta, J. (2008). *Johdatus laadulliseen tutkimukseen*. 8th Edition. Vastapaino.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1993). Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketisation of Public Discourse: The Universities. In Fairclough, N. (2010): *Critical Discourse Analysis*. 2nd edition. London: Longman. 91–125.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analyzing discourse. Textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. 2nd edition. London: Longman.

Flowerdew, J. (2004). The discursive construction of a world-class city. *Discourse & Society.* Vol. 15, 579–605.

Gray, B.J., Fan, K.S. & Llanes, V.A. (2003). Branding universities in Asian markets. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. Vol. 12, No. 2/3, 108–112.

Hatch, M.J. & Schultz, M. (2003). Bringing the corporation into corporate branding. *European Journal of Marketing*. Vol. 37, No. 7/8, 1041–1064.

Hemsley-Brown, J. & Goonawardana, S. (2007). Brand harmonization in the international higher education market. *Journal of Business Research*. Vol. 60, No. 9, 942–948.

Jarvis, P. (2001). *Universities and Corporate Universities: the Higher Learning Industry in Global Society*. London: Kogan Page.

Jevons, C. (2006). Universities: a prime example of branding going wrong. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. Vol. 15, No. 7, 466–467.

Kotler, P. & Armstrong, G. (2010). *Principles of Marketing*. 13th Edition. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Levine, A. (1997). Higher education becomes a mature industry. *About Campus*. Vol. 2, No. 3, 31–32.

Luoma-aho, V. & Vos, M. (2010). Towards a more dynamic stakeholder model: acknowledging multiple issue arenas. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. Vol. 15, No. 3, 315–331.

Maringe, F. (2005). Interrogating the crisis in higher education marketing: the CORD model. *International Journal of Educational Management*. Vol. 19, Iss. 7, 564–578.

Melewar, T.C. & Jenkins, E. (2002). Defining the corporate identity construct. *Corporate Reputation Review.* Vol. 5 No. 1, 76–91.

Melewar, T.C. & Akel, S. (2005). The role of corporate identity in the higher education sector. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. Vol. 10, No. 1, 41–57.

Melewar, T.C., Bassett, K. & Simões, C. (2006). The role of communication and visual identity in modern organisations. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. Vol. 11, No. 2, 138–147.

Michelsen, K-E. (2004). *Kansainvälistyvä yliopisto. Suomalaisen yliopistojärjestelmän haasteet*. Edita Publishing Oy, Helsinki.

Moogan, Y.J., Baron, S. & Bainbridge, S. (2001). Timings and trade-offs in the marketing of higher education courses: a conjoint approach. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 179–187.

Morsing, M. & Kirstensen, J. (2001). The question of coherency in corporate branding: over time and across stakeholders. *Journal of Communication Management*. Vol. 6, No. 1, 24–40.

Ng, I. & Forbes, J. (2008). Education as service: the understanding of university experience through the service logic. *Journal of Marketing of Higher Education*. Vol. 19, No. 1, 38–64.

OKM (2009). Ministry of Education website. Read on November 22, 2012 on http://www.minedu.fi/

Osman, H. (2008). Re-branding academic institutions with corporate advertising: a genre perspective. *Discourse & Communication*. Vol. 2, No. 1, 57–77.

Pälli, P., Vaara, E. & Sorsa, V. (2009). Strategy as text and discursive practice: a genre-based approach to strategizing in city administration. *Discourse & Communication*. Vol. 3, No. 3, 303–318.

Phillips, L. & Jørgensen, M. (2004). *Discourse analysis as Theory and Method*. London: SAGE.

Pinar, M., Trapp, P., Girard, T. & Boyt, T.E. (2011). Utilizing the brand ecosystem framework in designing branding strategies for higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*. Vol. 25, No. 7, 724–739.

Potter, J. & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and Social Psychology. Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour.* London: SAGE.

Proposal for the identity development (2011). Identiteetin kehitysesitys. An internal material of the Aalto University.

Stensaker, B. & Norgård, J.D. (2001). Innovation and isomorphism: a case study of university identity struggle 1969–1999. *Higher education*. Vol. 42, No. 4, 473–492.

Syed Alwi, S.F. (2009). Online Corporate Brand Images and Consumer Loyalty. *International Journal of Business and Society*. Vol. 10, No. 2, 1–19.

Vaara, E. (2010). Taking the linguistic turn seriously: Strategy as a multifaceted and interdiscursive phenomenon. In Baum, J. & Lampel, J. (eds.): *The globalization of strategy research: Advances in strategic management*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 29–50.

Väisänen, R. (2010). Yrityksistä partnereita – kauppakorkeakoulun yritysyhteistyötä vahvistamassa. In Pöykkiö, E. & Åberg, V. (eds.): *Tulkintoja, tosiasioita, tarinoita. Helsingin kauppakorkeakoulun historiaa*. WS Bookwell, 242–252.

Van den Bosch, A.L.M., de Jong, M.D.T. & Elving, W.J.L. (2005). How corporate visual identity supports reputation. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. Vol. 10, No. 2, 108–116.

Van Riel, C.B.M. (1995). *Principles of Corporate Communication*. London: Prentice Hall.

Van Riel, C.B.M. & Balmer, J.M.T. (1997). Corporate identity: the concept, its measurement and management. *European Journal of Marketing*. Vol. 31 No. 5/6, 433–439.

Whisman, R. (2009). Internal branding: a university's most valuable intangible asset. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. Vol. 18, No. 5, 367–370.

Williams, L.S. (2008). The Mission Statement. A Corporate Reporting Tool With a Past, Present and Future. *Journal of Business Communication*. Vol. 45, No. 2.

Wolverton, M. (2006). Three Georgias in Atlanta: Lessons from business schools about finding your identity. *International Journal of Educational Management*. Vol. 20 Iss. 7, 507–519.

Xiong, T. (2012). Discourse and marketization of higher education in China: The genre of advertisements for academic posts. *Discourse & Society*. Vol. 23, No. 3, 318–337.

Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: design and methods*. SAGE Publications.

INTERVIEW

Knuutinen, L. (2013). Interview with Lotta Knuutinen, Communications Manager of the Aalto University School of Business, 31.10.2013.

DATA

Aalto University Brochure for prospective employees. A printed material, 2012.

Aalto University School of Business Brochure for prospective students. A printed material, 2012.

Aalto University School of Business Presentation. Read on October 17, 2013 on http://www.business.aalto.fi

Aalto University School of Business Strategy. Strategic plan 2013–2016. June, 2013.

Aalto University School of Business Website. Read on October 17, 2013 on http://www.business.aalto.fi

Aalto University Strategy. Strategic development of Aalto University. January, 2012.

Aalto University Website. Read on October 17, 2013 on http://www.aalto.fi

The Helsinki School of Economics Strategies. April, 2006.