PURSUING THE ILLUSIVE BUT TRUE IDENTITY –
THE CORPORATE BRAND IDENTITY IN
STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT:
A qualitative single case-study of Supercell Oy

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A brand is an intangible asset which adheres to a product, conferring it with extra added values and providing the customers additional reasons for choosing a product. Thus, branding becomes an ever more crucial means to be used to survive and differentiate a company from uprising competition. Within brand management literature, the concept of “brand identity” is progressively gaining the spotlight. Identity is a contemporary concept in today’s society and it is over-saturated with various technological means of communications. The majority of literature published on the brand identity concept is clustered around product brands. However, recently in the last decade, corporate brands have turned out to be the foremost research scope, but so far, scholars exclusively concentrated on large organizations and well-known brands. The scope of research into corporate brands is becoming greater compelling as more and more companies are beginning to shift their marketing strategies from a focus on product brands to their corporate brand. Consequently, with the transition to corporate brands, the study of “corporate brand identity” evolved as a “distinctive institutional-identity type” from product brands. As an emerging area of research revolves around corporate brands, companies are beginning to engage their marketing focus on corporate brand oriented strategies. Accordingly, this crucial transition allows corporations to leverage on their corporate culture and vision as part of their value proposition. A corporate brand, therefore, stands behind the company’s offerings, and functions as an endorser or as a driver. A corporate brand oriented strategy converts the whole company into a brand, and it has a longer-term focus than a product brand oriented strategy. Long-term benefits can accrue if the branding process is managed accordingly and branding becomes more than just a nice logo.

The research area in corporate brand identity, specifically, is still in its infancy, and the same with corporate brand building functions in smaller organizations. The intersection of these two fields is an insufficiently explored frontier. Realizing the existence of a research gap through the lack of empirical data from the practitioners in an undeveloped research area combined with the recent and extraordinary global success of mobile gaming companies in Finland, the author is overly inspired to explore and reveal the corporate brand identity of a successful Finnish mobile gaming developer, Supercell, by examining its corporate brand development at different growth stages. Due to its
worldwide accomplishments, Supercell is presently one of the brightest stars in Finland’s booming tech heaven. And, by the writing of this thesis, the author aims to contribute to this area of research with the findings of a qualitative single case-study and participate into the discussion.

The research strategy is a single case study method through an abductive approach in identifying and describing the corporate brand identity of the case company at different growth stages in accordance to its corporate brand building. This research study is positioned from the perspectives of the case company on its corporate brand identity (a brand-oriented approach vs. a market-oriented approach) and not on its brand image since it is all about the case company’s inner thoughts and feelings about its corporate brand identity. The thesis acquires the position of an interpretivist and a constructionist. It is a qualitative case study with a semi-structured in-depth interview with a key game developer from the case company. To strengthen the findings, the case study utilizes available public information from company’s press release, company’s official website, games blogs, past interviews and web articles as sources for secondary data.

The thesis is emerged from an exclusive selection of leading literature and academic articles within the fields of branding, brand marketing, product brand identity, corporate branding, corporate brand identity and corporate brand building from an SME context. The corporate brand identity also refers as the promise and expectations associated with a corporate brand name. Thus, the corporate brand identity is in some ways the essence of a brand, and the corporate brand stems from the corporate identity, the corporate brand identity can be thought of as a distillation of a company's corporate identity. As a result, in corporate brand building, it is imperative to identify the corporate brand and align it with the corporate identity in order to be able to manage and build a strong corporate brand.

The presentation of the growth stages is represented as a timeline of significant events from the company’s business history. The data consist of findings from face-to-face interview (primary) and secondary data from company press releases, company’s official website, games blogs, past interviews and articles on the Internet.

From the findings, the author identifies and reveals the illusive but true corporate brand of the case company. Throughout the growth stages of the company, its corporate brand identity has been shaped and influenced by the company’s four (4) available games brands, ‘Hay Day’, ‘Clash of Clans’, ‘Boom Beach’ and ‘Clash Royale’. The empirical findings further support that the case company’s corporate brand identity has been developed and emerged from the company’s games brands since the date of inception.
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1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter acquaints the reader with the surrounding circumstances with regard to the case company commencing with background information, the research gap and objective and an outline of the study structure.

1.1. Background

In the explosively fast growing and bigger than ever games market environment, the mobile gaming development industry is in the finest state it has ever been. Gaming companies are increasingly finding it more and more challenging to differentiate them or stand out amongst hundreds of games released every day (Stenbacka, 2007). There are thousands of games currently available for a variety of mobile platforms making the gaming industry an intensely overcrowded market. As a result, gaming companies need to think rigorously about their marketing strategy, and particularly pay special attention to branding tactics, in order to differentiate itself from the fierce competitive environment. It is noteworthy that a brand can act as an entry barrier (Melin, 2002) and source of differentiation (Aaker, 2004) because brand instils a product with both tangible and intangible values which greatly affect customer’s purchase decisions (Aaker, 1996). A brand has to be strong in all of its glory, otherwise as Stenbacka (2007) points out, when the brand is weak, “even a good quality [mobile] game [it] cannot compensate for the negative impact of a weak brand” (p. 13).

Brand management as a discipline or field of study within marketing has been increasingly prevalent in the last decade and is considered to be a “vast and rapidly growing field” (Bresciani & Eppler, p. 2, 2010). Within the last decades, academics as well as marketing practitioners have started to realize that there are additional values in brands and they can be also evaluated as being strategic assets, not just only being intangible and conditional as traditionally viewed (Kapferer, 2012).

In May 2010, Supercell was founded as a tech start-up to create mobile games which are designed from the ground up specifically for the touch and mobile platform. The company works relentlessly in its first five (5) years of existence to release only 4
games (*Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach and Clash Royale*). However, these games instantly become an international phenomenon and a household brand within a few short years. According to Business Insider, Nordic, (June 14, 2016), Clash of Clans is the highest grossing app of all time. In 2013, *Hay Day* and *Clash of Clans* generated 2.4 Millions USD per day. ([nordic.businessinsider.com](http://nordic.businessinsider.com))

Thus, the growth of the case company from their humble roots and identity in the mobile gaming industry to evolve into a powerhouse within the entertainment industry is phenomenal and exemplary, but yet unexplored case when viewed from a corporate brand perspective.

### 1.2. Research gap and objective

Kapferer (2012) defines a brand is an intangible asset which adheres to a product, conferring it with extra added values and providing the customers additional reasons for choosing a product. Thus, branding becomes an ever more crucial means to be used to survive and differentiate a company from uprising competition (ibid). Within brand management literature, the concept of “brand identity” is progressively gaining the spotlight. The concept was initially explored by Kapferer in 1986, subsequently with Aaker in 1991, again with de Chernatony in 1999 and it becomes even more widely studied in recent years. Identity is a contemporary concept in today’s society and it is over-saturated with various technological means of communications (Kapferer, 2008), therefore, defining and understanding the brand identity is a crucial step as it helps to “distinguish the makes from one to another” (p. 174).

The majority of literature published on the brand identity concept is clustered around product brands (Kapferer, 2008). However, recently in the last decade, corporate brands have turned out to be the foremost research scope (Aaker, 2004; Balmer, 2008, 2010; Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Urde *et al.*, 2007; Urde, 2009 and 2013), but so far, scholars exclusively concentrated on large organizations (Urde, 2003, 2009 and 2013; Balmer, 2008) and well-known brands (Berthon *et al.*, 2008; Bresciani & Eppler, 2010; Rode & Vallaster, 2005). The scope of research into corporate brands is becoming greater.
compelling as more and more companies are beginning to shift their marketing strategies from a focus on product brands to their corporate brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Kapferer, 2008). As stated by Balmer (2008), “just like brand identity is important when looking into product brands, identity fulfils the same functions for a corporate brand” (p. 281). Balmer (2010) continues “corporate brands are marshalled by individuals and groups to define who they are and who they are not”. Consequently, with the transition to corporate brands, the study of “corporate brand identity” evolved as a “distinctive institutional-identity type” from product brands (p. 181).

As an emerging area of research revolves around corporate brands, companies are beginning to engage their marketing focus on corporate brand oriented strategies (Kapferer, 2008). Accordingly, this crucial transition allows corporations to leverage on their corporate culture and vision as part of their value proposition (Ackerman, 1998; Balmer, 1995; de Chernatony, 1999 and 2001). A corporate brand, therefore, stands behind the company’s offerings, and functions as an endorser or as a driver (Aaker, 2004). A corporate brand oriented strategy converts the whole company into a brand (Morsing, 2002), and it has a longer-term focus than a product brand oriented strategy (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Long-term benefits can accrue if the branding process is managed accordingly and “branding is more than just a nice logo” (Inskip, p. 364, 2004).

Prior to recently, marketing practitioners had only product brand identity based models to work with, which resulted in inconsistent, complicated and ineffective results. This is due to the fact that a corporate brand has to be managed differently in respect to a product brand (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Balmer, 2010; Urde, 2013). Hence, there is an urgent need for a model or framework specifically designed for identifying or describing the corporate brand identity (Urde, 2013).

To address this urgent need, Urde (2013) designs the first framework to define and align the corporate brand identity, or often described as the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM). Based on this framework, this master thesis can now identify an organization’s corporate brand identity and provide its management with a better understanding and overview of their organization’s corporate brand identity.
1.2.1. Motive for adopting the appropriate theoretical model

The research area in corporate brand identity, specifically, is still in its infancy, and the same with corporate brand building functions in smaller organizations. The intersection of these two fields is an insufficiently explored frontier. In the writing of this thesis, the author aims to contribute to this area of research with a single case-study analysis and participate into the discussion. Realizing the existence of a research gap through the lack of empirical data from the practitioners in an undeveloped research area combined with the recent and extraordinary global success of mobile gaming companies in Finland, the author is overly inspired to explore the corporate brand identity of a successful Finnish mobile gaming developer, Supercell. Due to its worldwide accomplishments, Supercell is presently one of the brightest stars in Finland’s booming tech heaven.

In choosing to analyze the progress of Supercell’s branding strategy starting from the company’s date of inception until the present time, the author’s passion is to investigate when it developed, and what its corporate brand is by examining its corporate brand identity throughout different growth stages. A few earlier exploratory researches within corporate branding in a small business context (Inskip, 2004; Rode & Vallaster, 2005; Witt & Rode, 2005; Bresciani & Eppler, 2010; Juntunen et al., 2010) have been conducted and paved the way for this master thesis.

Utilizing Juntunen et al., (2010) study findings as a landmark, the case company is presented in a time line, both on growth stages and corporate brand building. The findings of Juntunen et al., (2010) also predicate that in order for a company to be successful, corporate brand building should be implemented even before the company is found. Establishing a clear and coherent corporate brand identity is one of the most crucial steps in the process. To be able to successfully analyze and to illustrate the corporate brand identity of the organization, Supercell, the case study is additionally grounded on Urde (2013) Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM) since it “define[s] a corporate brand identity and also to align its different elements so they come together as an entity” (p. 3).
The CBIM framework helps companies to examine, specify, coordinate and develop a corporate brand identity (Urde, 2013). In this case study, the CBIM is applied to the case company to identify and to describe its corporate brand identity so that its management can have an overview and understand what their corporate brand identity is, and therefore they can make better strategic marketing decisions in the future that align with their corporate brand objectives. Companies, whose fail to align their corporate strategy as they grow, are also be overshadowed by their own successful product brands and might act as a barrier which hinders their future growth or success (ibid).

1.3. Research questions and aim

To achieve the aim of the case study, an exploratory, yet descriptive research approach is used. A qualitative single in-depth case study design is implemented. The main instrument of primary data collection is a semi-structured face-to-face interview with a senior executive who is also a brand manager and game developer. He has been with the company since its early inception stage. Additional support data used to strengthen the findings are secondary data collected from the company’s press releases, company’s official website, games blogs, past interviews and web articles.

The aim of this thesis work is to identify and describe the corporate brand identity of a successful start-up tech company in the mobile games industry by investigating its corporate brand development in different growth stages. This work intends to address the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What is the corporate brand identity of an organization at various growth stages?

**RQ2:** How does a product brand identity influence on a corporate brand identity?

**RQ3:** Why does an organization progress from a product brand to a corporate brand-oriented strategy?

1.4. Study structure

The case study is organized in such way to be best suitable in presenting the theoretical concepts and then support them with the empirical findings to fulfil the
research goal. Following the introductory chapter, chapter two assesses the underlying theoretical concepts in which brand, product brand identity, corporate brands, brand building in start-ups, corporate brand building in SMEs, growth stages of an organization and brand management are explained. In chapter three, the methodological process wherein research approach, research philosophy, research strategy and methods of data collection and data analysis are introduced. In addition, details concerning the primary and secondary data sources, how the collected data were analyzed, ethical issues, trustworthiness and limitations are presented. Chapter four introduces the case company with details of its business activities spread out on a time line. Additionally, an analysis presentation of the empirical findings exhibits in accordance to different growth stages as well as the development of the corporate brand identity of the case company in concurrent with its product brand identity. Chapter five provides discussions and arguments through the theoretical and managerial implications of the study. In the closing section of the thesis, chapter six, conclusions are drawn up and suggestions for future research are stipulated.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

*This chapter contains an extensive review of the academic literature and research that are related to the scope of this thesis. The review begins with the discussion of branding from the consumer perspective. Afterward, several other studies about the corporate brand are introduced, and the connection between product brand and the corporate brand is explained. Furthermore, the focus of the thesis is on the literature review on the brand identity and not image which results from company’s inner thoughts and feelings about its corporate brand identity. The chapter ends with the study of growth stages of corporate brand in brand management.*

### 2.1. The concept of brand

In academic research, brand is one of the most debated topics among theorists. The earliest concept emphasizes the role of a brand as a guarantee of the product’s origin. Melin (2002) points out a distinguished attribute between a product and a brand.
According to Melin (2002), a product can be copied or reproduced, while the brand is unique in itself. Furthermore, the brand is also a mark of exceptional quality. In Aaker’s (1991) view, “a brand is a distinguishing name and or/symbol intended to identify the goods or services of one seller from those of competitors” (p. 110). Nonetheless, some earlier views fell short in demonstrating how brands are able to create values for the consumers and to consider brands as tangible assets. Additionally, “a brand is a perceptual entity that is rooted in reality but reflects the perceptions and perhaps even the idiosyncrasies of consumers.” (Kotler & Keller, p. 275, 2006)

In recent years, cognitive psychology develops into a greater extent a popular approach in marketing, thus, branding is further associated with consumer benefits and communications. It also accentuates a unique selling proposition (Keller, 1998). Consequently, (Kapferer, 2012) defines brand as “a set of mental associations that added to the value of the product itself” (p. 11). However, some earlier researchers founded another critical component of brands – the emotional bond between the individual and the brand. Farquhar (1989) describes an affect that brings forth “emotions or feelings toward the brand” (p. 27), (i.e, the brand makes me feel good about myself, the brand is a familiar friend, and the brand symbolizes status, affiliation, or uniqueness). This view is later confirmed by succeeding researchers. Arvidsson (2005) believes that through communication, an effect of the emotional bond is created. Soon later, Kapferer (2012) emphasizes the ability of the brand in creating a community through interactions and communication. According to Kapferer (2012), to develop a strong bond with consumers, the brand should not only a mark of quality and ownership but “to symbolize a long-term engagement, crusade or commitment to a unique set of values, embedded into products, services, and behaviors” (p. 11-12).

Since, this master’s thesis follows the social constructivist approach, Arvidsson’s (2005) and Kapferer’s (2012) approaches are considered to be relevant and they will be used often throughout this thesis writing
2.1.1. The capabilities of branding

In the brand building process, Kapferer (2008) describes “brand name is one of the most powerful sources of identity” and one of the “distinctive signs” (p. 193–228). Thus, this concept is crucial for marketers as they often explore beyond the superficial understanding of what a brand is, or the usual boundary of a brand name, symbols or logotypes. Kapferer (2008) also contends that not every organization with a name should be considered as a brand. Nevertheless, many organizations often fail to recognize this and spend little time or effort in creating a brand name, especially in small businesses (Mowle & Merrilees, 2005). Kapferer (2008) critically forewarns “consumers don’t just buy the brand name; they buy branded products that promise [both] tangible and intangible benefits created by the efforts of the company” and a brand’s name often reveals the brand’s intention (p. 4). Simultaneously, Balmer (2008) clarifies that “brand names have meanings” (p. 182). Subsequently, in choosing a name whether it is objective or subjective reveals insights into what characteristics an organization wants to communicate with its brand name. Kapferer (2008) asserts that an organization might also choose a name without any “apparent objective or rational [logic], but that it still has the capacity to mark the brand’s legitimate territory” (p. 193). In brief, a brand name can be considered as the starting point in the creation of an identity for an organization.

In many companies, the risk of a business failure is high due to a lack in corporate brand building (Ouimet & Zarutskie, 2014; Blank, 2013; Bresciani & Eppler, 2010). Additional studies also explicitly point out that large corporations through vast resources in capital, economy of scale and power, may succeed in corporate brand building (Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015). In their daily business operations, these companies develop routines and problem-solving skills, as well as trying to establish positional advantages such as a higher market status and power (Carroll & Khessina, 2005). They further focus in to ideas, skills and commitment to enhance the firm’s status and ability to develop more products or services in order to promote the likelihood of profitability and being established in the market environment where they are operating in (Muñoz-Bullona, Sanchez-Buenoa, & Vos-Saz, 2015; Braunerhjelm & Henrekson, 2013). In addition, studies such as Ojasalo et al., (2008) prove that small businesses can also grow
creative, targeted and affordable ways in branding to effectively establish their brands even with limited budgets at hand. Berthon et al., (2008) confirm this finding since “even with constrained budgets, small businesses marketers can creatively manage and leverage the full potential of their brands” (p. 28).

In a market’s normal environment, companies are customarily presenting or competing with each other. Thus, it is imperative for firms to differentiate themselves and heighten their chances of surviving and getting established on that market. Hence, corporate branding is the right and powerful tool to achieve this goal (Merrilees, 2007; Inskip, 2004). Consequently, Inskip (2004) stresses the importance of branding for small companies through building a long-term value far reaching beyond the current perception of the brand. Although building a brand is vitally essential, many companies do not yet realize this fact (ibid).

On the other hand, recent scholars, argue that nowadays many companies are well aware of the importance of corporate brands (Juntunen, 2012; Bresciani & Eppler, 2010). According to Juntunen et al., (2010), companies are taken it seriously in contemplating about their corporate branding long before selling or unveiling a product or service into the market. As a result, based on the findings from Juntunen et al., (2010), the study on the case company is built upon and further illustrated in this master’s thesis work. Nonetheless, Bresciani and Eppler (2010) further warn that companies can put themselves in jeopardy when they refrain from defining and building their corporate brand at the company’s inception. The right branding is therefore mandatory since it can greatly differentiate a company as well as providing significant values for the company.

2.1.2. Brand characters, symbols and logotypes

In the daily living environment, brands are visually displayed everywhere all around us. Whether it is the brightly color wrapped chocolate in the local supermarket, or the more discretely brightly colored shoes at the gym; brands have become fully an integrated part of our everyday existence (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Kapferer, 2008; Roper & Fill, 2012). The term ‘branding’ or ‘to brand something’, was historically referred to
as markings one’s property to deter from theft. Cattles, for example, were branded with hot irons to indicate who the true owner was if the animals were stolen. Since its origin, the term ‘brand’ has taken in a more complex meaning than a mere marking of one’s property. In fact, despite extensive research on the topic, the precise definition of brand has ironically been one of the hottest topics of discussion in marketing literature (Kapferer, 2008; Roper & Fill, 2012).

There are several different theories to explain and to define what a brand is. Balmer and Gray (2003) foresee that brands can be much more than just the traditional definition as “marks denoting ownership, image-building devices, or symbols associated with key values, or means by which to construct individual identities and a conduit by which pleasurable experiences may be consumed” (p. 973). However, a fairly common definition of a brand is that a brand can be thought of as ‘signs’ or ‘symbols’ that represent or communicate a meaning, attributes or ideas (Gardner & Levy, 1955; Levy, 1959; Guiraud, 1971 and Mick, 1986 cited in Urde, 2013). Essentially, a brand represents a visual summary of meanings or ideas when the name of the brand is heard, or the logo of the brand is seen (Roper & Fill, 2012). Following this definition, to manage a brand can also be equivalent to ‘managing signs and symbols’ (Urde, 2013). From a product branding perspective, the brand can be described as “the manufacturer’s way of adding value and giving its product or service an individuality that sets it apart from the rest” (Roper & Fill, p. 1089, 2012). Relatively, this means that a company is personifying their products or services in a way that makes them more attractive to the consumer beyond the actual function the service or the product holds.

Choosing a good brand name will transform an organization into a favorable source of identity. This is further enhanced or supplemented by supporting attributes such brand characters, visual symbols and logotypes (Kapferer, 2008). These visual elements generate instant brand recognition (Duncan, 2002) and become a part of the company’s identity (Smith & Taylor, 2002). However, Reizebos (2003) notes there are distinctions between brand identity and visual identity since visual identity is only a visual representation or extension of the brand identity.
Kapferer (2008) asserts that it is not enough to use only symbols in identifying the brand while most often a brand is identified with them. In addition, “symbols help us [people] to understand the brand’s culture and personality” and as brands are a company’s capital, emblems are a brand’s equity (p. 195). Furthermore, “an emblem serves to symbolize brand identity through a visual figure other than the brand name” (p. 194). Kapferer (2008) categorizes a few functions of emblems as:

- To help identify and recognize the brand
- To guarantee the brand
- To give the brand durability
- To help differentiate and personalize

For the last function, Kapferer (2008) further specifies that animal emblems are often used because animals tend to symbolize the brand personality, but also are representatives of the “psychological characteristics of the targeted public” (p. 194).

Logotypes, like symbols, are visual images that customers or stakeholders interpret as something’s meaning at one point in time and maybe something different at a different point in time (Kapferer, 2008). Different customers can find or be exposed to a brand logo, which may infer different meanings at different times. A company’s logo can relatively easily be changed to align with a new marketing or branding strategy such as during a transition when the company is growing. This creates a new image of the company to customers and other stakeholders, but the identity may remain unchanged. (ibid)

2.2. Brand identity

Brand management is a term that is well rooted in the theoretical world. Until recent years, brand management has been mainly concerned about how the brand is perceived through its brand image (Kapferer, 2004). The contemporary world is flooded with brand contact points that deliver an impression strengthening or weakening a customers’ view of the company (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Numerous and diverse brand images make the brand more difficult to co-ordinate and strengthen (Aaker, 2002). Thus,
brand identity increasingly gains the foreground and this is why prior to knowing how a company is perceived; it is crucial to know who it is (Kapferer, 2004; Urde, 1999). Kapferer (2004) defines brand identity as “identity expresses the brand’s tangible and intangible characteristics – everything that makes the brand what it is, and without which it would be something different. Identity draws upon the brand’s roots and heritage – everything that gives it its unique authority and legitimacy within a realm of precise values and benefits” (p. 102)

Brand identity provides brand consistency and continuity. It is now taking the role of the core concept of brand management (Kapferer, 2004). Three main reasons for companies to focus on their brand identity and its communication are brands needs to be durable, to send out coherent signs, and to be realistic (ibid). These three reasons reveal how identity is firmly rooted in core values and what the brand stands for in creating a brand image which is both idealized and resilient. Consequently, a strong brand identity must be formed before an intended image can be created by the public (ibid). Additionally, the concept of identity is fundamental to a brand-oriented organization and it provides an understanding of the lasting inner values (Urde, 1999).

In branding terminology, brand image can be viewed as being on the receiver’s side of marketing communications, while brand identity represents the sender’s side of communications (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Kapferer, 2008). It is important to understand these different sides of a brand because consumers can discover a brand at different points in time, therefore the image of a brand can change over time in the mind of the consumer (receiving), while identity is rooted in the brand essence (Aaker, 1996), or core values of the company (Collins & Porras, 1998; Kapferer, 2008) and resistant to change once established. In this view, brand identity is also considered to “precede image” (Kapferer, p. 174, 2008) as can be seen in Fig.1. Seeking out the identity helps companies formulate current and future business strategy by making a brand unique (Harris & de Charnatony, 2001).

For the suitability of the case study in corporate branding, it is the brand identity (the sender side) in which the master’s thesis work will be mainly focusing on.
Christensen, Torp & Firat (2005) connect the consumption communication with the identity as “consumption, rather than being a passive act of unpacking and discovering the meaning intended by the producer, is an active and creative process through which consumers continuously produce and reproduce their own identity” (p.268). This is a significant remark because by connecting communication with identity creation; brands represent the product in a manner that brands are perceived as sources of products, services and satisfactions (Kapferer, 2004). The following Figure 1 shows the relation in the traditional communication model between identity and image. Where the sender is directly linked to brand identity and the receiver is directly linked to brand image, since this is how a person views the brand. When companies communicate their offerings (products or services) to customers, a transaction is made as they send a message and it is received.

![Figure 1: Identity and Image](Source: Kapferer, p. 98, 2004)

### 2.2.1. Brand identity prism

In corporate brand identity, the term brand identity is often associated with product brands. Identity has already been explored from organizational perspective decades ago (Schwebig, 1988; Moingeon & Soenen, 2003, cited in Kapferer, p.271, 2008). However, the identity construct is still not received as much extensive research as its counterpart, image. In fact, image was already being studied earlier in the 1950’s (Boulding, 1956, cited in Harris & de Chernatony, 2001) while brand identity has become
immensely popular only after Kapferer (1991) first disclosing of the brand identity prism. The brand identity prism is based on the phenomenon that in communication, one is always saying much more than what intended (Kapferer, 2004). All types of communication implicitly provide something about the sender, the source and the receiver. Communication creates a linkage between the participants, the sender and receiver. The medium, in which communication occurs, facilitates the connection. Recognizing the structure of brand identity by the utilizing the brand identity prism, such as brand’s specific and unique attributes reveals what the brand really means overall (Figure 2).

Brand identity prism is a hexagonal shape with six different variables to form what is being conveyed about the brand identity. These six variables are presented from top to bottom – from sender to receiver by three internal and three external aspects.

![Brand Identity Prism](Source: Kapferer, p. 182, 2008)
Starting from top half of the prism, Picture of Sender (the organization) is the organization inwardly perspective on its brand identity. This top half comprises of Physique and Personality facets of the organization. Personality facet overlaps with Internalization side.

**Physique:** comprises of noticeable and important salient parts such as the immediate objective features that come to mind when a brand is mentioned (Kapferer, p. 182, 2008) such as unique features or frequent colors used. Physique is what comprises the brand prototype: What is it concretely? What does it do? What does it look like? Also, it is often referred to as a brand’s strength of character and source of its tangible added value, usually comprised of a flagship product that is representative of a brand’s qualities.

**Personality:** is the form which the brand conveys its products or services to reveal what kind of a person it would be if it were a human (Kapferer, p. 183, 2008). A brand is said to develop a personality by adopting human characteristics as it gradually builds up character. Personality is internal and intangible to an organization, but equally important as it fulfills a psychological function. Kapferer (2008) further states that the easiest way to create a personality is to give a brand a figurehead or spokesperson whether real or symbolic. This is often done by disseminating in a specific style of writing, design features and color schemes of the brand. Also endorsements are used to give flesh to a brand’s character.

Moving clockwise to the right side of the Prism, the Internalization side encompasses elements such as Personality (from Picture of Sender), Culture and Self-Image (from Picture of Receiver).

**Culture:** this facet describes the basic values and principles on which a brand sets up its products and communication. According to Kapferer (p. 184, 2008), a brand is a culture [and] a brand should have its own culture. Despite being a vital facet, it is often being neglected by organizations as they focus too heavily on brand personality instead. Culture is an intangible asset that is constructed from a set of values embedded within the
organization which originates internally or through associations with the organization. It generates as a great source of a brands aspirational power. A strong brand culture allows the development of a cult brand, which later enables brand differentiation from competitors. Culture is the direct link between the brand and the organization. Cultural associations are often linked to the country of origin of the brand.

The bottom half of the Prism is Picture of Receiver (the consumer). This half of the prism represents the organization’s outwardly perspective on brand identity. It contains Self-image (from Internalization) and Reflection (from Externalization) elements.

**Self-image:** is the mental image the consumer conceives of himself or herself with the brand. A user of a brand may envision what others would think about him/her while using a particular brand. Brands are heavily influence on consumer’s attitude and behavior. Self-image is the established connections of inner-self with brands (Kapferer, p. 186, 2008). This facet is an intangible asset which is easily perceived as “I feel” or “I am” (Kapferer, 2008; Urde, 2013) which acts as the target audience on one’s own internal self-reflection when engaging with the brand. Possessions of specific brands can evoke strong emotions, influence attitudes and create a sense of belonging. Self-image intuitiveness is crucial when creating a brand identity and the knowledge of the underlying intrinsic drivers of consumption can help improve the brand and give marketers reasons to elic it on.

**Reflection:** is referred to the stereotypical user of the brand as a source of identification. However, it is not an impression of the brand’s target group. Kapferer (p. 186, 2008) elaborates that brand managers do not need to make a realistic reflection of the actual target group in image campaigns, but to present a mirror representation of a person or group who appeals to the members of their target group. Reflection is the target audiences outward mirror or known as “they are” (Kapferer, 2008; Urde 2013). It aims to showcase (or reflect) how a customer would like to be perceived as a result of using a particular brand. Reflection is intangible as it deals with customer perception of others and even stereotypes, but it can appeal to many different segments for different reasons.
Relationship: is the Externalization opponent of the Culture element. It signifies a brand’s figurative connection between actors. Service brands compared to product brands have the most obvious use of relationship while a service is, by definition, a relationship. It is the vehicle for a brand conveys itself and transact with stakeholders. A relationship is very crucial for service sector brands as their business model revolves around relations and networks. A relationship can further be both a tangible and/or intangible assets for a brand (Kapferer, p. 185, 2008). In other words, this facet displays the way the brand acts, delivers services and communicates to its customers, and defining management’s behavior as it is identified with the brand which, in turns, defines the mode of conduct that most describes the brand.

These six aspects of the Brand Identity Prism enable brand practitioners to assess strengths and weaknesses of their brand as well as the boundaries. The Prism demonstrates that all of the mentioned aspects are interconnected to give a collaborated identity. Therefore, the brand identity prism allows for semiotic analysis of the communication process by attempt to realize the original plan behind the brand’s objectives, products and symbols. The underlying plan is often implicit and is not written down or clearly communicated internally, hence managers unconsciously act it out in their daily decisions (Kapferer, 2004). As a result, this fact confirms that the brand prism is appropriately theoretically useful for the case study.

2.2.2. Brand-oriented approach vs. market-oriented approach

When an organization pursues the identity approach to branding, Urde (1997 and 1999) refers to it as the “brand-oriented approach” where the organization is taken an inside-out perspective. It internally establishes its brand and core values and then communicates or transmits outwardly these values to customers and stakeholders (Urde et al., 2013). This concept of brand orientation projects a brand as a resource and strategic hub and it enables the organization to make better strategic decisions as it places a “greater emphasis to the organization's mission, vision and values” (p. 15).
The alternative approach is the image driven approach by which is termed as “market-oriented approach”. Here, an organization takes an outside-in perspective with the aid of external parties such as customers whose define the brand and its core values. In other words, what the market demands, the organization will supply. However, Urde et al., (2013) advise that both approaches should be used in collaboration with each other in which would result in a new branding phenomenon. These two different orientations, brand and market orientated approach, are illustrated in Figure 3.

![Figure 3: Brand-oriented approach and market-oriented approach. (Source: Urde, 1997)](image)

2.3. Corporate brand

The topic of corporate brands has been gaining resonance since the mid-1990s, giving rise to corporate branding as a new marketing branch and generating a remarkable development in this area of interest (Balmer, 2010). In this section, the concept of corporate brand and the benefits of a strong corporate brand to the company are presented. As earlier explained in the previous section in brand identity, there are
additional differences between a corporate brand and a product brand, and they will also be further explained in this section.

### 2.3.1. The concept of corporate brand

Due to a multitude of available studies, the concept of the corporate brand is becoming complexly defined and vague. However, Balmer and Gray (2003) define the corporate brand concept wholesomely. They characterize corporate brand as communicating core values through various strategies to be differentiated on the market, and ways to positively influence stakeholders. (p. 991)

The corporate brand gives the company “a clear and publicly stated sense of what it stands for” (Inskip, p, 358, 2004) and can consequently be regarded as the “face of the organization” (Balmer & Gray, p. 991, 2003) as it “makes it known to the world through the use of a single name, a shared visual identity, and a common set of symbols” (van Riel & Fombrun, p. 107, 2007). It ideally serves as a strategic source and a competitive advantage for growth and sustainability; and it is aimed at multiple stakeholders (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Kapferer 2008; Urde, 2013; Wallström, Karlsson & Salehi-Sangari, 2008). According to Urde (2013), the term ‘corporate brand’ suggests the interaction of a company with the public by which is internally expressed with the pronoun “We” and externally with the pronoun “They”. In order to build positive associations and reputation with all stakeholders, companies commence with a set of activities in which can be seen as the process of corporate brand building (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). The concept of corporate branding or corporate marketing grew forth from researchers through the common general realization that a company’s identity, culture and organization can be utilized for strategic benefits (Balmer, 2001). This realization also brought forth waves of studies in marketing and organizational behavior in which leads to the practice of corporate branding (Balmer, 2001 and 2011; Balmer & Gray, 2003).

Schultz et al., (2005) divide those theories of corporate brands into two further different ideologies. Authors from the first ideology consider the corporate brand as an extension of the product branding approach where a company’s practices are short-term
and are associated with marketing and campaign thinking. The second ideology focuses on long-term establishing long-term relationships with stakeholders (ibid). For this thesis work, those theories from the first school of thought are deemed to be relevant to the case company in its present time.

Hatch and Schultz (2003) maintain that globalization causes product differentiation more and more difficult to achieve, and because of increasing fragmentation and complexity of markets, companies are shifting their focus from product branding to corporate branding (Kapferer, 2008). A corporate brand allows a company to leverage on its vision and culture as part of its value proposition (Ackerman, 1998; Balmer, 1995; de Chernatony, 1999 and 2001; Ind, 1997), focusing not on positioning individual products, but on the entire corporation (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Therefore, as Aaker (2004) concludes “the corporate brand defines the firm that will deliver and stand behind the offering that the customer will buy and use” (p. 6) by providing possibilities for the company to use its vision and culture as part of its value proposition (Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

Given the complexity of today’s markets and the multitude of products, brands and sub-brands in the marketplace, corporate brands can play an important role in a company’s brand portfolio. Either as a driver or as an endorser, a corporate brand can “help differentiate, create branded energizers, provide credibility, facilitate brand management, support internal brand-building, provide a basis for a relationship to augment that of the product brand, support communication to broad company constituencies, and provide the ultimate branded house” (Aaker, p. 10, 2004).

Furthermore, Hatch and Schultz (2003) assert that successful corporate branding is founded on the synthesis of strategic vision, organizational culture and corporate image. To achieve this, effective communication among members of the organization from all levels and external stakeholders is necessary. In fact, Urde (2009) states “a corporate brand cannot be stronger externally than it is internally” (p. 616). The corporate brand evolves into the symbol for the organization as a whole. Unlike product branding, it gives companies the opportunity to truly address and identify the brand with all of their
stakeholders, employees, shareholders, investors or consumers (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Roper & Fill, 2012). For this reason, when corporate branding works, it creates a sense of belonging for the various stakeholders to the organization, as the stakeholder’s personal values align with those of the organization (Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

Nonetheless, the concept of a corporate brand remains ambiguous. Many studies argue that the corporate brand concept is derived from a corporation’s ‘corporate identity’ (Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Urde, 2013). A corporate identity is a somewhat ubiquitous term in which essentially answers the questions ‘what are we?’ and ‘who are we’ about an organization (Balmer & Gray, p. 979, 2003). Since, the corporate identity constantly changes and adapts with the organization (Balmer, Stuart & Greyser, 2009), then consequently, the same for corporate brand (Balmer, Stuart & Greyser, 2009, Urde, 2013). Thus, a corporate brand is also constantly evolving and must be continuously managed and nurtured (Roper & Fill, 2012; Urde, 2013).

2.3.2. The characteristics of corporate brand

In corporate brand, the brand goes beyond a representation of merely a product or service. Instead, a corporate brand represents the organization as a whole (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Urde 2009; Balmer 2011; Roper & Fill, 2012; Urde, 2013; De Roeck et al., 2013). Following the previously given above definition for a brand, the symbol for a corporate brand can be thought of as various stakeholders associated with an organization, as well as the logo and the company name. In other words, it is the ‘perception’ that various stakeholders hold for a company which fundamentally creates an outwardly projected image or a communicated meaning of the corporation. Urde (2013) further explains this ‘perception’ as a phenomenon in which corporate brand management literature describes as a company’s ‘corporate brand identity’ or the ‘brand promise’. These two key terms often arise when discussing about corporate brands and corporate brand management.

Even though corporate brands stem from an organization’s corporate identity, a corporate brand is not synonymous to a corporate identity. In fact, Balmer and Gray
(2003) stress that there is a series of critical differences between these two terms. First of all, corporate identity exists in every organization, whilst the same does not have to be said about corporate brands “a corporate identity is a necessary concept, whereas a corporate brand is contingent” (p. 980).

For organizations providing service products, it is advantageous to leverage a corporate brand (Aaker, 2004; Balmer & Gray, 2003). In fact, many service branding literatures are similar to corporate branding literature, in the sense that service branding also takes into context of employees and customers loyalty to the organization as a whole, not just the product (Aaker, 2004; Balmer & Gray, 2003).

Balmer (2001) created the mnemonic “C2ITE” in order to organize and distinguish the various characteristics of a corporate brand. “C2ITE” stands for Cultural, Commitment, Intricate, Tangible and Ethereal (p. 976). First, corporate brands are often argued to have strong cultural roots, whether this refers to the corporate, professional or national culture, a corporation's uniqueness is often found in the various subcultures that exist in an organization (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Roper & Fill, 2012; Urde, 2013).

Secondly, a corporate brand should be intricate. Corporate brands are often characterized to be incredibly complex and yet clear. In brief, a corporate brand tends to be multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional, as it affects an organization's many stakeholder groups and procedures, and is ultimately communicated throughout the organization using various channels of communication (Urde, 1999 and 2009; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Balmer & Greyser, 2006).

Thirdly, the tangible aspects of a corporate brand are products or services the organization provides, and essential features such as its quality. The tangible aspect also reveals the organization’s actual geographical coverage, internal measurements of performance, profit margins, pay scales etc. It also means the company logos, building architecture, etc. (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Urde 2013).
Fourthly, a corporate brand also has characteristics of being ethereal, meaning that it is delicate and that it often evokes emotional responses to elements such as the country-of-origin or the industry in which the brand acts (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Ethereal also includes elements such as ‘lifestyle’ or ‘style of delivery’ that can be associated or found in a corporate brand (Balmer & Gray, p. 977, 2003).

Finally, a corporate brand requires commitment from all stakeholders it is associated with (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2001 and 2003). In addition to, a solid corporate brand should elicit commitment from all personnel within the whole organization. It is vital that the senior management dedicate time and resources, especially financial and those related to communication, to the corporate brand (Urde, 1999; Balmer & Gray, 2003).

The characteristics explained in the C2ITE mnemonic are recurring concepts in several more recent studies on the topic of corporate branding. For instance, Hatch and Schultz (2001 and 2003) consolidate some of the features mentioned in the C2ITE framework, into their framework, The Corporate Branding Tool Kit, to explain the necessity of the imperative interrelation between an organization’s strategic vision, organizational culture and corporate image. A company’s strategic vision is “the central idea behind the company that expresses top management’s aspirations for what the company will achieve in the future” (Hatch & Schultz, p. 1047, 2003).

The organizational culture can be thought of as “the way we do things around here” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982 cite in Roper & Fill, p. 56, 2012). It is the “internal values, beliefs and basic assumptions that embody the heritage of the company and communicate its meaning to its members” (Hatch & Schultz, p. 1047, 2003). When a corporate brand fails to integrate the organization’s culture into its foundation, it is very likely that the corporate brand will be perceived as non-authentic and will not function as a successful strategic tool (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Urde, 2009). Finally, corporate image refers to the outside world’s overall impression of the company including the views of the customers, shareholders, the media, and the general public and so on (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Nevertheless, the C2ITE framework is not obvious in demonstrating that the actual
relationship between these three elements is crucial and not the independent elements themselves. Hatch & Schultz (2003) also highlight the importance of a manager's awareness of an organization’s subcultures, and the alignment of these into the strategic vision and corporate image. Hatch & Schultz (2003) further added that “values imposed and sustained by autocratic authority will not have the same credibility in the marketplace as expressions of genuine value and belief” grounded in the culture of the organization (p. 1058). Essentially, it is crucial that the corporate brand comes from within the organization and from the essential stakeholders, otherwise the corporate brand is most likely to be perceived as not trustworthy and it will be met with resistance. It is this alignment between the organization’s strategic vision, organizational culture and corporate image that creates a strong corporate brand. Ultimately, Hatch & Schultz (2003) study is the way for managers to think and act when building or managing a corporate brand. (ibid)

2.3.3. Corporate brand vs. product brand

From the aim of this master’s thesis work, the adopted management perspective is that corporate brand management engages in the process of identifying and building the corporate brand identity. Thus, it is necessary to differentiate corporate brand management from the typical product brand management. Various researchers found there are many differences between corporate and product brands, and on how they are managed (Balmer, 2010; Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Keller & Richey, 2006; Urde, 2013). The following section explains these differences between corporate brand and product brand

Firstly, product branding generates different brand identities between different products (Xie & Boggs, 2006), where the role of product brands is to enhance a product’s differentiation and preference (Knox & Bickerton, 2003) in order to “distinguish the products and services of one company from another” (Kapferer, 1997). However, this role contrasts in a corporate brand strategy where the company strategically and consistently communicates the values and identity of the company exclusively (Mukherjee & Balmer, 2008).
Secondly, Morsing (2002) confirms that corporate branding implies the conversion of the whole company into a brand, while not focusing solely on branding its products. Leveraging the corporate brand is a growing trend since companies are facing increasing demand for responsibility and transparency (Kapferer, 2008). Moreover, companies that leverage on their corporate brand are able to take advantage of the so-called “halo effect”, where the image and reputation of the product brands influence the corporate brand, and vice-versa (ibid).

Thirdly, amongst several possible branding strategies that a company might implement, it is very likely that the company selects one of the two most common strategies: the product brand strategy and the corporate master brand strategy (Kapferer, 2008). Thus, a thorough understanding of these two different strategies is useful to grasp the fundamental distinctions between corporate and product brands. A corporate master brand strategy is characterized by a unique brand level, and it is mainly implemented by companies within the industrial, public and service sectors (Kapferer, 2008). On the other hand, in a product-brand strategy, the product brand conceals the organization (Kapferer, 2008).

Harris & de Chernatony (2001) found that a corporate brand has to be managed distinctively in respect to a product brand, since the former necessitates lesser focus to the organization. As a matter of fact, Keller & Richey (p. 75, 2006) state that “a corporate brand is distinct from a product brand in that a corporate brand can encompass a much wider range of associations”. Indeed, even though the managerial responsibility of a corporate brand is assumed by the CEO, the function and general responsibility are assumed by the whole organization and personnel (Balmer, 2010). This also suggests a change in the traditional role of employees in which now takes on the role of a brand’s ambassadors, becoming central in the corporate brand building process, and being able to influence the company’s values and image (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001). According to Balmer (2001), a corporate brand involves the conscious decision of senior management to infuse and to make known the attributes of the organization’s identity in the form of a clearly defined branding proposition. This proposition underpins the organizational efforts to communicate, to differentiate, and to enhance the brand vis-à-vis key
stakeholder groups and networks. A corporate brand proposition requires total corporate commitment to the corporate body from all levels of personnel.

Balmer (2010) also argues that while product brands focus on consumers only, corporate brands communicate to multiple stakeholders, consequently, the focus shifts from products to the organization (Xie & Boggs, 2006). Likewise, the time horizon is different, since a product brand has a relatively short life span (life of the product) whereas a corporate brand lasts as long as the company exists (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Additionally, Aaker (2004) states that corporate brand has stronger heritage and deeper roots than product brands. As a whole, managing a corporate brand has a greater strategic relevance, and even though it results can be complex (Knox & Bickerton, 2003), but building a strong corporate brand enhances companies’ competitiveness, especially in nowadays-fragmented markets (Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

In summary, a product tends to be the first source of brand identity, which makes product branding more practical for companies as a brand reveals its plan and uniqueness through the products (or services) it chooses to endorse to its customers (Kapferer, p. 190, 2008). Nevertheless, because of the fragmentation of markets caused by globalization and the increasing demand for transparency (Hatch & Schultz, 2003), building a strong corporate brand is becoming increasingly pertinent. This is particularly true for companies which are growing and expanding, and catering to new multiple customers and stakeholders.

2.3.4. Corporate brand identity matrix (CBIM)

In the business world, great emphasis is placed upon managerial implications. Previously, managers had to struggle with multiple frameworks based on product brands. The CBIM is structured in a way that gives management a “structured overview of the corporate brand identity and clarifies what it is, how it works and how to build it”. Urde (2013) further clarifies that it is “vital for understanding, internal support and commitment from the organization, its top management and the board” (p. 758). This is done through the placement of these elements and their corresponding arrows indicating a
relationship between them. Thus, the CBIM allows an organization to understand their corporate brand, if they have one or how to develop one, based on the chosen elements in the CBIM.

The corporate brand identity also refers to “the promise and expectations associated with a corporate brand name” (Balmer, p. 1336, 2001). Considering the corporate brand identity is in some ways an essence of the brand, and the corporate brand stems from the corporate identity, the corporate brand identity can be thought of as a distillation of a company’s corporate identity (Balmer, 2010 cited in Urde, 2013). With this thought and the consideration of the nature of corporate brands, it becomes somewhat imperative to identify the corporate brand and align it with the corporate identity in order to be able to manage and build a corporate brand (de Chernatony, 2001; Roper & Fill, 2012; Balmer et al., 2009; Urde, 2009). There have been several studies aiming to identify frameworks or models that bridge the gap between theory and practice, to facilitate the identifying and consolidating of a company’s corporate brand identity, to be used in order to manage the corporate brand (de Chernatony, 2001; Kapferer, 2008; Roper & Fill, 2012). For instance, Urde (2013) draws upon a multitude of relevant literature in the construction of his framework, the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM). The literature includes popular branding frameworks, such as Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism (2008), which outlines the six crucial elements that help outline and define a product brand’s identity (Kapferer, 2008; Urde, 2013). These six elements are a product brand’s physical appearance and qualities, the brand’s personality, the culture, the relationship associated with the brand, the customer reflection of the brand and how the brand speaks to our self-image (Kapferer, 2008) (See Figure 2: Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism). The theory is widely accepted and is often used and cited in the brand research and strategy world (Urde, 2013), and it helps to provide a basis for Urde’s (2013) CBIM. The CBIM also draws upon other theories such as AC3ID test from Balmer, Stuart and Greyser (2009), which explains that a corporation has to align the various identities in order be able to use them in a strategic manner, as well as Hatch and Schultz’s (2001) Corporate Branding Tool Kit, which focuses on the aligning of vision, culture and image.
The underlying key theory, which provides the basic structure of the CBIM, is the principle developed by several researches that there are two different key perspectives when defining a brand: the ‘inside-out’ and the ‘outside-in’ view (Knox & Bickerton, 2003; Baumgarth et al, 2011; Urde et al., 2011 in Urde, 2013). The ‘inside-out’ view refers to the view of the brand from the inside of an organization, whilst the ‘outside-in’ view refers to the customers and external stakeholders’ view of the organization. These views are synergetic, and together form the brand’s core and promise (Urde, 2009 and 2013), and it is this way of thinking becomes the basis for how the CBIM is to be used and perceived. Building on these and other previously mentioned theories, the CBIM addresses the various elements that make up a corporate brand identity, and aims at offering “academics and managers a theoretical and practical guide to the describing, defining and aligning of corporate brand identity” (Urde, p. 742, 2013).

Those facets of the CBIM can be explained as follows. Externally, the CBIM looks at a company’s value proposition to customers, the relationships between stakeholders and the company’s current position in the market.

**Value proposition:** is “combinations of appealing arguments directed to customers and non-customer stakeholders” (Frow & Payne, 2011 and Rintamäki et al., 2007 cited in Urde, p. 753, 2013). The value proposition is from the Brand Identity Planning Model developed by Aaker (1996). Aaker (1996) defines value proposition as the “statement of the functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits delivered by the brand that provide value to the customer [...] and drive purchase decisions” (p. 7). The inclusion of value proposition is crucial for management because it ensures a consistency in communication, while at the same time remaining true to the brand core. The CBIM draws special attention to the combinations of appealing arguments, and demonstrates how these can be linked back to the image and perception that the customers hold of a company and its brand (Urde, 2013).

**Relationships:** is adapted from the Brand Identity Planning Model by Aaker (1996) and Kapferer (1991) Brand Identity Prism. According to (Urde, 2013), a corporate brand identity is defined and reflected upon over time as it is being built through
relationships (p. 753). Additionally, relationships describe in what manner a “corporate brand delivers service to its customer, works with them, and relates to them, needs to be reflected in the corporate brand identity” (ibid). In the CBIM, there is a vertical arrow linking relationship and culture. Unlike a product brand, a corporate brand “typically has multiple audiences to which it has to relate, multiple relationships have to be integrated, in that one forged with one stakeholder group potentially influences relations with others” (Farquhar, 2005 and Fournier, 1998, cited in Urde, p. 753, 2013). Thus, relationships refer to all of the relationships that the company has such as its suppliers, external stakeholders, primary customers, its clients and any other there might be. The relationships are crucial for the company as they are an external reflection of elements within the company (Kapferer, 2008; Urde, 2013). Relationships can also be a key to a company’s reputation, as association with various stakeholders can cause a brand’s reputation to become dependent on that of the associated stakeholder. This can be both beneficial and detrimental for a brand – take for example the popular clothing line Nike and its relationship to its sweatshop suppliers, which caused an incredibly negative reputational association for Nike (Greyser, 2009; Roper & Fill, 2012).

**Position:** is from the Brand Identity Planning Model by Aaker (1996) and “it defines how management wants the corporate brand to be positioned in the market, in the hearts and minds of key customers and non-customer stakeholders (Keller *et al.*, 2012, cited in Urde, p. 753, 2013). The choice of an intended position is a way to differentiate the brand identity (Esch, Tomczak, Kernstock, and Langner, 2006). In the CBIM, there is an arrow linking the position and “mission and vision” since Urde (2013) views that a corporate brand’s intended position needs to be reflected in the organization’s “reason for being and direction” (p. 753). Therefore, the CBIM refers to the current positioning of the company. This can be both the position in the market and the position of the company and its brand in the mind of the consumers and stakeholders (ibid).

The CBIM also contains those elements that can reflect both external and internal qualities such as a company’s personality, expressions and the core values.
**Personality:** this element is taken from the Kapferer (1991) Brand Identity Prism, however, it aims to define the corporate character instead of a product brand personality evident in the prism as (Keller & Richey, 2006, cited in Urde, 2013) it makes the distinction between product brand personality and corporate brand personality. Keller & Richey (2006) argue that corporate brand personality is “much more about [the] perceptions of employees and [...] that corporate brand personality reflects the values, actions, and words of all employees of the corporation” (p. 76). For this reason, in the CBIM, there is an arrow linking personality with expression. As Urde (2013) prescribes, the company’s personality can be thought of as a direct personification of the company, and is simplest explained to answer to the question “What combination of human characteristics or qualities forms our corporate character?” (p. 754)

**Expression:** Urde (2013) defines expression in the CBIM as involving “verbal, visual and other forms of identification as part of a corporate brand identity” (p. 752). Expression can either be tangible or intangible features such as “tone of voice, design, graphic style and logotype (Olins, 1989 and Mollerup, 1997 cited in Urde, p. 752, 2013). Kapferer (2008) has similar sentiments in his use of brand characters and visual symbols to help differentiate a brand’s qualities. Urde (2013) explains that since the CBIM embraces the visual identity aspect of a corporate brand identity, therefore it does not consider it to be essential or “at the heart” (p. 752) of corporate brand identity. Expression also refers to words, colors or other variables that the company uses to identify itself. These expressions can take place both internally in the company and towards external stakeholders, and can be thought of as the visual or spoken representation of the company in the minds of the various stakeholders (ibid).

**Core:** Urde (2013) defines the core of the CBIM as the brand promise and the company’s core values, which are closely linked to the corporate identity (de Chernatony, 2001; Roper & Fill, 2012; Urde, 2013). The brand core is derived from the Brand and Market Orientation Framework by Urde et al., (2013), The Brand Identity Planning Model by Aaker (1996) and Core Ideology Model by Collins and Porras (1998). These frameworks are focusing on core values, promise and the essence of a brand (Kapferer, 2008). The brand core is the heart of a corporate brand identity, and therefore it is
positioned at the center of the CBIM to highlight its significance (Urde, 2013). Urde et al., (2013) define that the brand core can be viewed as being core values that support and lead to a “promise” by the brand and “the importance of a brand core is its capacity to give focus, guidance and coordination in the management of brands”. It is the core of the CBIM that helps decide what exactly the brand identity of a corporate brand is, and that can help identify conflicting elements or elements that do not correlate to the identity of the brand. The Figure 4 below provides an overview of the CBIM framework.

Figure 4: The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix  
(Source: Urde, p. 758, 2013)

Lastly, the bottom layer of the CBIM is composed of internal elements that “relate to the realities of the organization and its values” which shape the corporate brand identity of an organization and considered to be a unique feature of the framework (Urde, p. 751, 2013). Internally, the CBIM identifies a company’s mission and vision, the established culture of the company and its unique competences.

Mission and Vision (M&V): is taken from De Chernatony’s Brand Vision Model (De Chernatony & Riley, p. 1083, 1998). It is considered to be vital to the corporate brand identity (Urde, 2013) as it explains and provides reasoning why a company exists
“beyond the aim of making money” (Collins & Porras, 1998 cited in Urde, p. 751, 2013). De Chernatony & Riley (1998) define brand vision as the component which “specifies the brand’s purpose, its philosophy and view on the world, from which evolves its mission, indicating what the brand needs to do to achieve its vision” (p. 1083). The corporate mission can be described as the reason behind why an organization “exists and what engages and motivates it, beyond the aim of making money” (Collins & Porras, 1998 cited in Urde, p. 751, 2013). If an organization takes a brand-oriented approach (Urde et al., 2013) the mission typically represents a point of departure in the process of defining corporate brand identity (Urde, 1994 and 1999 cited in Urde, 2013).

The corporate vision can be thought of as the strategic vision put forth by Hatch and Schultz (2003), and is in short an extension of the corporate mission “by formalizing its view of where it is heading and what inspires it to move forward” (de Chernatony, 2001, cited in Urde, p. 751, 2013). These two concepts are fairly similar though not synonymous, but are kept together as one entity in the CBIM for precisely one reason - to facilitate the use of the model and minimize the confusion between these very similar terms (ibid).

**Culture:** this element is strongly rooted in the corporate brand identity as an intangible resource. Culture is taken from Kapferer (1991) The Brand Identity Prism and Hatch and Schultz (2003) The Corporate Branding Tool Kit. Culture differs from organization to organization, providing it with potential competitive advantages (Brexendorf & Kernstock, 2007 and Burmann et al., 2009 cited in Urde, 2013). Culture is considered to be a reflection of “corporate attitudes, values and beliefs, and of the ways in which it works and behaves” (Hatch & Schultz, 2003 and Schroder & Saltzer-Morling, 2006, cited in Urde, p. 751, 2013). Some components that the CBIM includes is the heritage and track record (Urde et al., 2007), country of origin (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011) and iconic leaders (Holt, 2004). Urde (2013) argues that there “are potentially significant aspects of a corporate culture that influence the nature of the corporate brand identity” (p. 751). The culture can be related to the organizational culture that is predominant in all organizations, and the company’s unique competences can be thought of as the company’s capabilities and processes. The inclusion of competence in
the CBIM is of added strategic value to management as it relates to the “creation and maintenance of sustainable competitive advantage” (p. 752).

**Competences:** is a set of skills or know-how that provides a sustainable competitive advantage over its competitors because an organization will know what it is good at and how it can do better than its competitors (Urde, 2013). Ideally speaking, an organization wants core competences (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990) because a core competence is not easy for competitors to imitate, it can also be re-used for many products and markets and it provides a significant contribution to the perceived customer benefits of the end product. Therefore, a core competence is important in the definition of corporate brand identity and included in the CBIM (Urde, 2013).

Urde et al., (2013) explain that these nine elements are keys to identify a corporate brand identity and a company can solidify its corporate brand identity by aligning the various elements in the CBIM in horizontals, verticals and diagonals that crisscross through the core (ibid). For example, a company’s mission and vision should correlate with its core value and brand promise in order to achieve a market position which compliments to the corporate brand identity (Urde, 2014). Similarly, a company’s value proposition should be in line with the core values and brand promise to the same extent as the company’s competences in order for both value proposition and competences to be truly connected.

### 2.4. Brand building in start-ups

Building a brand is a continually adapted dynamic process which can greatly influence a start-up’s success immensely (Kapferer, 2008; Gregory, 2007). As a first and foremost criterion, Balmer and Gray (2003) state that the brand identity needs to be defined in order for the corporate brand to be established. According to Wallström, Karlsson and Salehi-Sangari (2008), the brand identity is the sum of the core identity and the extended identity, reflecting the way the organization wants the corporate brand to be understood. The extended identity completes the brand through significant associations made with other parts of the brand such as the product or the personality while the core
identity is described as “the timeless essence of the brand” (p.42). Since the core identity is comprised of the start-up’s core values and it affects all parts of the corporate brand, the corporate brand building process starts with defining the core values of the company (Urde, 2003; Gregory, 2007). Core values can consequently be regarded “as guiding lights for the brand building process”, and providing “continuity, consistency and credibility in a value-creating process” (Urde, p.1017 – 1036, 2003).

Merrilees (2007) asserts that corporate brand building can serve as a focusing tool for start-ups, saving time and effort at a point further along in the new venture process. Juntunen et al., (2010) further support with “the corporate brand can be used as an orientation when refining the core values and strategies, to maintain the intended corporate brand” (p.127). In order to keep a reflective perspective on the corporate brand, the start-up needs to sustain the corporate identity and corporate image (ibid). In light of this master thesis, the identity involves corporate design, communication as well as the corporate personality; nevertheless, the image is the way all stakeholders interpret it (Rode & Vallaster, 2005; Roper & Fill, 2012; Wallström, Karlsson & Salehi-Sangari, 2008). Corporate culture and behavior are inter-woven since the former relates to the way an organization behaves both internally and externally. Hence, how a start-up’s team behaves and portrays the brand towards investors, customers, and other parties, affects the experience of external stakeholders (Juntunen et al., 2010; Roper & Fill, 2012; Rode & Vallaster, 2005).

Furthermore, the entrepreneur can be seen as part of the brand (Roper & Fill, 2012; Merrilees, 2007). For a start-up in a developmental premature stage, the managing entrepreneur has an immense impact on the corporate image since the corporate identity is often closely related to his or her identity (Juntunen et al., 2010). Corporate communication is essential and involves an alignment of behavior and symbolism, where the credibility of the sent message is determined by the perceived expertise, trustworthiness and likeableness of the source (Balmer, 1995; Roper & Fill, 2012). Additionally, Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard and Hogg (2010) argue that the source affects the impact on consumers, whereof one factor is credibility. If the communication results in positive brand credibility, it affects the overall brand image and, eventually,
Therefore, Roper & Fill (2012) assert that it is important to be associated with the organizations which can reflect positively on the own company, the so-called “halo effect”.

Balmer (1995) divides communication into planned and unplanned, where planned communication is controlled by the company and can be referred to as traditional marketing activities, such as public relations (PR), and social media marketing. Unplanned communication includes Word-of-Mouth (WOM) between third parties (Balmer, 1995). According to Bresciani and Eppler (2010), start-ups benefit from developing innovative and promotional brand building activities in the form of events and fairs, creating online campaigns, and actively working to generate WOM between third parties. Research shows that PR is a beneficial activity for small businesses, but many start-ups do not make use of it as a brand building tool (ibid). This might be the case since it is hard for start-ups to invest in PR as traditional marketing and advertising is costly (Silverman, 2001).

In the early growth stage, the brand’s functions increase. By revising strategies, creating corporate image, identity and consistent brand communications, assuring employees’ involvement and monitoring feedback, the start-up can attain revenues, and start growing (Juntunen et al., 2010). To be effective in their brand communication, the start-up should decide on the choice of traditional or innovative branding activities. As a form of innovative branding, the Internet provides lucrative opportunities for creativity, low-cost and wide-reach favorable branding circumstances (Bresciani & Eppler, 2010).

### 2.5. Corporate brand building in SMEs

Brand building – even though imperative – can be highly costly for scarcely resourced start-ups (Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007; Bresciani & Eppler, 2010). Hence, it is indispensable for start-ups to make a knowledgeable decision in their brand building activities (Bresciani & Eppler, 2010). Juntunen et al., (p.117, 2010) classify six (6) functions in forging a corporate brand. These functions are defining the corporate personality, brand-oriented strategic planning, creating and maintaining the corporate
identity, creating consistent brand communications, assuring employees’ involvement, and creating the corporate image. These functions are further grouped into three (3) distinctive phases: the pre-establishment stage, early growth stage and effective growth stage. Nevertheless, the first two functions are initially formed and developed in the pre-establishment phase according to Bresciani & Eppler (2010), and include defining the brand strategy, mission and philosophy. During the early growth stage, more functions are developed so that when the start-up reaches the effective growth stage, the corporate brand is already established. Furthermore, throughout the process, it is essential to maintain and periodically adjust these functions accordingly in order to adapt the corporate brand (Juntunen et al., 2010).

In the small business context, there is an even smaller niche which focuses on corporate branding. Inskip (2004) examines why corporate brands can offer real opportunity for differentiation for B2B SME companies; Abimbola and Kocak (2007) take a resource based perspective on the brand, organization identity and reputation within SME’s; Juntunen et al., (2010) look at corporate brand building in stages of small business growth; and Spence and Essoussi (2010) assess brand identity, equity and brand management in SME’s. In order to answer the aim of this master thesis research, the author exploits Juntunen et al., (2010) findings as the vehicle for the study because Juntunen et al., (2010) study focuses on the corporate brand building functions at the various growth stages that small companies endure. Therefore, instead of taking into consideration the whole corporate brand building process, this master thesis simply focuses on the corporate brand identity development at the different growth stages to establish at which stage the corporate brand and identity were being created.

2.6. Growth stages of an organization

Juntunen et al., (2010) findings present various growth stages a company experiences in order to better determine the corporate brand building activities in the advancement of corporate brand identity. Consequently, Juntunen et al., (2010) study is the core pillars for this master thesis, since it focuses both on growth stages and corporate

In their study, Scott & Bruce (1987) found that businesses undergo through various stages in the course of their growth. Even though this process can be correlated to the product life cycle, but differ from products, businesses can remain in the same stage for longer periods of time (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Gaibraith (1982) initially maintains that during these growth phases, managers often have to face different kind of issues since they usually are not aware or plan stage wise. The model from Scott & Bruce (1987) is based on the product life cycle and comprises of five (5) stages: inception, survival, growth, expansion and maturity. The model includes crisis points that are often caused by moving from one stage to another, and that can be either external or internal. This model is the basis of Juntunen et al., (2019) study.

2.6.1. Growth stages in corporate brand building

Juntunen et al., (2010) work is constructed on the findings of Scott & Bruce (1987) and generate an explorative examination in concern to the corporate brand building process of small businesses at different growth stages. This resulted in a framework of “specific functions for brand building at each growth stage” (Juntunen et al., p. 115, 2010). Within the objectives of this master thesis, an extracted summary of these functions from Juntunen et al., (2010) research can be illustrated in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small business growth stages</th>
<th>Corporate brand building functions</th>
<th>Corporate brand building activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-establishment stage</td>
<td>Defining the corporate personality</td>
<td>Developing a company idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning company’s structure and characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deciding on the company name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand oriented strategic planning</td>
<td>Begins the forming of core values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early growth stage</td>
<td>Specifying the corporate personality</td>
<td>Forming of corporate strategy begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating corporate identity</td>
<td>Deciding on core values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emanating from daily operations and</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
products of the company. “Arises on its own”, not developed consciously
Close to the owner-managers ‘ identity
Includes corporate culture, corporate behavior, corporate internal communications and corporate design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assuring employees’ involvement</th>
<th>Unifies identity and image</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating consistent brand communications</td>
<td>Communicating core values (complex nature but somehow congruent and differentiated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing corporate branding relationship</td>
<td>Developing new relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring with feedback</td>
<td>Collecting from several sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling the corporate personality</td>
<td>Re-defining core values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizing brand-oriented strategic planning</td>
<td>Adopting brand-oriented thinking profoundly Revising the strategies. Forming new strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining corporate identity</td>
<td>Emanating from daily operations and products of the company. Includes corporate culture, corporate behavior, corporate internal communications and corporate design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining corporate image</td>
<td>Created by proactive communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining consistent brand communications</td>
<td>Establishes in every new contact and relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing corporate branding relationships</td>
<td>Communicating core values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing new relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintaining existing cooperative</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Corporate brand building functions and activities. *(Adapted from Juntunen et al., 2010)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring with feedback</td>
<td>Collecting feedback from several sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Revising the functions based on feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Juntunen *et al.*, (2010) allocate the growth stages into three (3) categories as pre-establishment, early growth and effective growth stage. In the first stage, ‘pre-establishment’ phase, the main corporate brand building functions involves defining the corporate personality, which include, “the development of a business idea, defining the company structure and characteristics, planning and deciding a company name and forming core values” (p. 123). Moreover, the pre-establishment phase also engages brand oriented strategic planning and managing corporate branding relationships (ibid).

The second stage is termed as ‘early growth’ phase. In this phase, the corporate branding activities significantly intensify. Operating within the concept of corporate brand identity, the main functions at this stage are specifying the corporate personality (core values), creating corporate identity, creating consistent brand communication and assuring employees’ involvement (ibid).

Lastly, in the ‘effective growth’ stage, the organization has already developed a corporate brand, and the previously implemented functions from the preceding stage are to be maintained and to be further developed. In addition, the organization obligates to form the corporate personality by re-defining core values, and accentuate brand-oriented strategic planning (Juntunen *et al.*, p. 127, 2010). Furthermore, during this phase, the market and environment in which the company operates might be unsettled and unstable, which requires the company to acclimate to the changing environment (ibid). Thus, corporate brand identity, corporate brand image and communications need to be consistent with the progress of the corporate brand (ibid). Juntunen *et al.*, (2010) study describes specific corporate brand building functions that occur in the different growth
stages of a company. Additionally, it establishes that the corporate brand building process starts either in the early growth stage of a company’s development or even before its actual foundation (ibid). Although Scott & Bruce (1987) model is linear, the framework of Juntunen et al., (2010) is not. The organization can be in multiple stages at once because it may go back and forth between stages (Smallbone & Wyer, 2006, cited in Juntunen et al., p.119, 2010).

2.7. Brand management

When an organization takes into consideration of the consumers’ opinions about its products or services or to understand and to see from the consumer’s perspective, then it is what the management of the brand all about. Melin (2008) defines brand management is the brand owners’ focus on the internal perspective of the brand. In brand management, there are two different disciplines, classical or contemporary approach. The classical discipline focuses on either marketing or the organization, while the contemporary discipline rather concentrates on finance or accounting (ibid). The development of the contemporary discipline is the result of the development and exploitation of brand research during the 1980s – 1990s. In other words, during the 80’s and 90’s, the contemporary discipline comes into existence when the branding process shifted from being a marketing communication task as a strategic management step through strategic approaches in finance and accounting. Nevertheless, these two disciplines together create brand management in which the brand owner’s creation, maintenance and distribution of the brand are its main functions. (ibid)

Nonetheless, Kapferer (2004) found that “today there are too many people, both internally and externally, taking part in the management of each brand. The more participants there are the more distortions, personal interpretations and variations in style… [brands] should be managed by an enlightened despot, not by a democrat” (p. 82). Here with, it implies that only the top-level management should have the overall power and control of the brand by ensuring the core values of the company are kept intact through the extensive utilization of market data and consumers’ opinions. Consumers do
not have any feelings or the long-term interests toward the brand unlike stakeholders (ibid).

On the other hand, there are different opinions between authors with regard to bringing consumers into the conversation and letting go of control and management of the brand. Hatch and Schultz (2001) argue that well designed visions will fail if they are not aligned with what customers expect from the company; therefore the conflict between outsider images and management's strategic visions presents as an obstacle when creating an effective corporate brand. However, Urde (1999) forewarns that it could be an enormous risk to the organization’s identity and competitive advantage in adapting the brand identity to purely satisfying customers by responding unconditionally to their wants and needs. The question is thus whether or not the changeable preferences of customers would provide long-term stable grounds for brand development, while constantly adopting popular positions does not hold credibility and integrity in the long run. (ibid)

Thus, in this dilemma, some researchers such as Day (1994), Hunt and Morgan (1995) and Urde (1999) still strongly uphold the market-oriented approach while they see it as an organizational competency and therefore a competitive advantage. Nevertheless, this approach must be taken with consistent sensing, interpreting, foreseeing, and reacting to changes in the market while developing relationships with the customers (Day, 1994; Urde, 1999).

2.8. Summary of literature review

To satisfy the aim of the case study, those underlying theories for the case study are briefly organized and summarized in the following section. A complete overview is presented in Table 2.

There are many concepts for brand. Through cognitive psychology view, Arvidsson (2005) sees communication is the catalyst for the emotion bond between the customers and the brand while Kapferer (2008 and 2012) views brand as a source of
identity and as strong bond with customers that signifies a mark of quality and ownership, and symbolizes a long-term commitment to a unique set of values, embedded into products, services, and behaviors. Christensen et al., (2005); Harris & de Chernatony (2001); Kapferer, (2004 and 2008); Urde (1999), these authors explain the difference between brand identity and brand image and those components of Brand Identity Prism. The organization can approach brand identity through either brand-oriented or market-oriented approach or both (Urde, 1997 and 1999; Urde et al., 2013).

The topic of corporate brand also generated a lot of interests among theorists. In line with Arvidsson (2005) view’s brand as a communication means, Balmer and Gray (2003) characterize corporate brand as communicating core values through various strategies to be differentiated on the market, and ways to positively influence stakeholders. Schultz et al., (2005) segregate corporate branding into short-term vs. long-term branding approach. In light of the thesis’s aim, it is the short-term approach through marketing & campaign because of the short-term findings yield from the case company. Additionally, characteristics of corporate brand and the differences between corporate brand and product brand and their style of management are discussed. The CBIM provides the framework to reveal the case company’s corporate brand strategy through the displaying of those CBIM elements such as core values, culture, personality, etc.

Corporate branding is built upon an organization’s core values. It is the identity the organization shares with its stakeholders through long term relationships. Managing the corporate brand requires the full responsibilities of the organization’s management in ensuring that the core values are being communicated effectively throughout the organization in constant monitoring, maintaining and fine tuning the brand management process.

Lastly, brand building process and its necessities for start-ups, particularly for corporate brand building in SMEs with the underlying framework of Juntunen et al., (2010) as the basis for the case study and the capacity of brand management are presented.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Concept(s)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farquhar (1989); Aaker (1991); Keller (1998); Melin (2002); Kotler &amp; Keller (2006)</td>
<td>Brand concepts</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Communication creates the effect for emotional bond</td>
<td>Theoretical significance to the case study:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kapferer (2012)</td>
<td>A set of mental association. A symbol of the long term commitment to a unique set of values imbedded into products and services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kapferer (2008)</td>
<td>Brand name is a source of identity and reveals the brand’s intention</td>
<td>Theoretical significance to the case study:</td>
<td>The capabilities of branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ouimet &amp; Zarutskie (2014); Blank (2013); Bresciani &amp; Eppler (2010); Weiblen &amp; Chesbrough (2015); Carroll &amp; Khessina (2005); Muñoz-Bullona et al., (2015); Braunerhjelm &amp; Henrekson, (2013); Ojasalo et al. (2008); Berthon et al., (2008); Merrilees (2007); Inskip (2004); Juntunen (2012); Bresciani &amp; Eppler (2010); Juntunen et al., (2010)</td>
<td>Brand building and its crucial role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balmer &amp; Gray (2003); Kapferer (2008); Roper &amp; Fill (2012); Urde (2013); Duncan (2002); Smith &amp; Taylor (2002); Reizobos (2003)</td>
<td>Brand characters, symbols, logotypes</td>
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<td>Kotler &amp; Keller (2006); Aaker (1996 and 2002); Collins &amp; Porras (1998); Christensen et al., (2005); Harris &amp; de Chernatony (2001); Kapferer, (2004 and 2008); Urde (1999)</td>
<td>Brand Identity</td>
<td>Theoretical significance to the case study:</td>
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<td>Kapferer (2008)</td>
<td>Brand Identity Prism</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>Sender &amp;</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
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<th>Inside-out vs. Outside-in</th>
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<td>Urde (1997 and 1999); Urde et al., (2013)</td>
<td>Brand-oriented vs. market-oriented approach</td>
<td>Inside-out vs. Outside-in</td>
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<td>Balmer &amp; Gray (2003); Kapferer (2008); Aaker (2004); Wallström et al., (2008); Balmer (2001, 2010 and 2011); van Riel &amp; Fombrun (2007); Ackerman (1998); Balmer (1995); de Chernatony (1999 and 2001); Ind (1997); Hatch &amp; Schultz (2003); Roper &amp; Fill (2012); Balmer, Stuart &amp; Greyser (2009), Urde (2009 and 2013)</td>
<td>Definitions for corporate brand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schultz et al., (2005)</td>
<td>Definitions for corporate brand</td>
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<td>Balmer (2001 and 2010); Hatch &amp; Schultz (2003); Keller &amp; Richey (2006); Urde (1999 and 2013); Xie &amp; Boggis (2006); Knox &amp; Bickerton (2003); Kapferer, 1997 and 2008; Mukherjee &amp; Balmer (2008); Morsing (2002); Harris &amp; de Chernatony (2001); Keller &amp; Richey (2006); Aaker (2004)</td>
<td>As a perception about the whole organization for its corporate brand identity or ‘brand promise’</td>
<td>Characteristics of corporate brand</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Corporate brand vs. product brand</td>
<td>Differences in characteristics and management style</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. METHODOLOGY

In this section, the reader is acquainted with the research approach, philosophy and strategy that were chosen to construct the study in order to satisfy the research aim,
as well as the justification of how and from where the data were collected and based on. This section also includes a few notes on ethics to underline the obligations incur in the research process. The section ends with an evaluation of the credibility and trustworthiness of the chosen method used to conduct the study while providing the limitations of the study.

3.1. Research philosophy

Bryman and Bell (2011) allege that, in business research, there is an intricate relationship between social ontology, epistemology and the research itself (p.23). Social ontology concerns with the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith et al., p.17, 2012; Saunders et al., p.108, 2007), and it consists of two main positions: objectivism and constructionism (Bryman & Bell, p. 20, 2011).

In consideration of the research questions in the case study with the inductive approach to the research, the author prefers a constructionist stance. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), constructionism affirms that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (p. 22). Saunders et al., (p.108, 2007) refer to this concept as subjectivism and assert that social phenomena are originated from the perceptions and actions of the social actors involved, and are in a continuous state of reconsideration. Truly, brand identity is a concept rooted in the core values (and brand promise) of the company and it requires constant nurturing and maintenance, thus it assumes a subjective meaning depending on the company, and it can also evolve with time. Kapferer (2008) further declares that “brand identity never results from a detail, yet a detail can, once interpreted, serve to express a broader strategy” (p.43).

Epistemology involves with investigating into the nature of things (Easterby-Smith et al., p. 21, 2012). Thus, an epistemological stance deeply affects how knowledge should be gained. In this research, the author employs an interpretivist position. Accordingly, while the main idea of positivism is to study and measure the social world by means of objective methods, the aim of interpretivist is to enter the social world of the
research subject and understand it from the point of view of the individuals involved (Saunders et al., 2007). Nonetheless, Bryman and Bell (2011) added that interpretivist is more concerned with the understanding of subjective meanings of social reality (p.17); for that reason, the author presumed that taking such a position is appropriate in order to effectively achieve the research’s aim.

3.2. Research strategy

In academic research, it is compelling to present both advantages and disadvantages on a chosen methodological approach (Bryman & Bell, 2010; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) independent from the research’s positioning, philosophical standpoint and stance (Willmott, 1993). Because a research question, issue or topic may be investigated from either a qualitative or quantitative method, or both, depending on the researcher’s inner knowledge, world perception, attitude and experiences (Alvesson, 2003). However, within both the qualitative and quantitative methods there are a vast amount of different methods that can be adapted in order to gain the desired outcome of a research. By any means, since this master thesis research’s theoretical framework is conceptualized within social interactions, relationships and networks, the researcher of this thesis selected on the qualitative method.

For the research design, the author selected the qualitative, descriptive single case study method by utilizing both inductive and deductive approach (also known as the abductive approach). The first crucial step for the case study is to determine on what type of approach strategy to guide the research process. Bryman and Bell (2011) describe the two most common strategies, deduction and induction, and how theory and empirical findings compare to different viewpoints. When applying a qualitative strategy, the most common is the inductive approach in which empirical findings will generate relevant theory. In contrast to induction, deductive approach emphasizes theoretical concepts that are being deduced from a hypothesis (ibid).

According to Yin (2011) most qualitative research follows an inductive approach as it leads to the emergence of concepts (p. 94). As the focus of this research involves
identifying and describing the corporate brand identity from the mobile gaming industry at different growth stages, the inductive approach is suitable for developing a theory from it (Greener, p.16, 2008).

On the other hand, Bryman and Bell (2011) describe a deductive approach as drawing upon established theory and inferring hypothesis that must be tested by empirical findings (p. 11). Even though, it is usually associated with quantitative research, a deductive position can also be adopted while conducting qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, p.13, 2011; Yin, p. 94, 2011). Furthermore, Saunders et al., (p.487, 2007) confirm that “[using] existing theory to shape the approach that you adopt to the qualitative research process and to aspects of data analysis”. In this case study, a deductive approach is taken when applying the Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 1991) for the product brands, the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013) for the corporate brand and Juntunen et al., (2010) for the corporate brand building functions in relation to the growth stages.

In brief, the research strategy for the case study is a qualitative, descriptive single case study method through an abductive approach in identifying and describing the corporate brand identity from the mobile gaming industry at different growth stages in accordance to its corporate brand building functions.

3.2.1. Qualitative research

Since focusing on the case company’s growth stages and corporate brand identity to display everything chronologically on a time line, an in-depth method is relevant to get a comprehensive understanding of the interested phenomenon. Bryman and Bell (2011) recommend that qualitative research is preferred when underlying factors of a certain social group is of interest. This research study is positioned from the perspectives of the case company on its corporate brand identity (a brand-oriented approach vs. a market-oriented approach in Urde, 1997) and not on its brand image since it is all about the case company’s inner thoughts and feelings about its corporate brand identity to be studied. Consequently, a quantitative research strategy with statistical data, as empirical outcome, will not provide any relevance insights (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Furthermore, a
qualitative study is suitable in this case because it allows the researcher to gain access to insights and details in thoughts and feelings (intangible) that concrete and tangible numerical data could not provide (Bryman and Bell, p. 387-389, 2011; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). This choice is also highlighted by the significance of disclosing the respondent’s perception of the world in qualitative research (McCracken, 1988), allowing the researcher to investigate the social world through the eyes of the respondents, and to reveal things that the researcher, as an outsider, might not have expected (Bryman & Bell, p. 402-403, 2011)

3.2.2. Exploratory case study

In relation to the decided approach of qualitative research strategy, the author employs a research design in such way to structure the research process and select data collection methods (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Saunders et al., (2007), an exploratory study is particularly useful to clarify a deep understanding of a problem particularly when the precise nature of the problem is uncertain (p. 133). Additionally, an exploratory case study design to be suitable for this research. To be in line with the master’s thesis work purpose, Eisenhardt (1989) asserts that case studies can be useful to achieve research objectives as they provide a descriptive understanding and generating theory. Daymon and Holloway (2002) further highlight the needed commitment in exploratory research to collect multi-dimensional and comprehensive information regarding a specific case or a few numbers of cases. As a result, a single-case research design is suitable for this study as it will stipulate detailed accounts of research object (ibid).

Yin (2009) stresses the importance of ‘how’ research questions tend to strive toward the acceptance of a case study design, since operational links need to be investigated, in order to approach and understand a complex social phenomenon. Furthermore, case study research design is applicable when contemporaneous events, within real-life context are being explored (ibid). Eisenhardt (1989) earlier found that when handling with small sample sizes within a population or a single specific case is of interest, case studies provide a comprehensive understanding within the dynamics of
these settings. Therefore, researchers often combine several qualitative methods to attain insights from the case of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2010). Likewise, Alvesson and Sködberg (2009) suggest that an iterative research approach is commonly used within case study based management research in practice. Hence, iterative approach gives researchers the flexibility in gathering additional relevant factors that may have an impact into the empirical data (ibid).

### 3.2.3. Single case study research

The case study approach is prominent in qualitative research designs (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007 cited in Bryman & Bell, p. 59, 2011; Yin, 2011). Its main strength is the emerging theory from the case study is the theory that is likely to be empirically valid (Eisenhardt, 1989). Single case studies are the most common form of study in business and management research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Nevertheless, one of the general misunderstandings of case study research is that it is not recommended to generalize from an individual case since a singular case study does not contribute to scientific development. As a result, Flyvbjerg, (2006) stipulates that researchers can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as a supplement or an alternative to other methods. In any case, formal generalization as a source of scientific development is overvalued, whereas the strength of the case as an example is underestimated (p. 228).

Furthermore, to be able to identify and describe the case company’s corporate brand identity at different growth stages, this master thesis takes on an ideographic style of writing (or symbolical writing) in which the objective is to make clear the unique features of the case (Bryman & Bell, p. 60, 2011). The primary unit of measurement and analysis is the organization “Supercell”, where the author focuses on three (3) key growth stages of the company starting from the pre-establishment stage, early growth stage and effective growth stage.

Additionally, the thesis work takes on the path of a single-case study because it is a unique case. Saunders et al., (p. 140, 2007) suggests that a single case may be selected
when it is typical or because it provides an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon that few have considered before, which is in the case of Supercell, because their product brands *Hay Day*, *Clash of Clans*, *Boom Beach* and *Clash Royale* are better known than their corporate brand. Eisenhardt (1989) conveys that case study is particularly well-suited to new research areas or research areas in which existing theory seems inadequate (p. 548).

Supercell is a Finnish mobile video game developer known as the developer of its first successful mobile game ‘*Hay Day*’ launched in June, 2012 on Apple’s iOS mobile devices. Since its inception in 2010, the company has been rapidly expanding through the global success of additional mobile games after *Hay Day* such as *Clash of Clans*, *Boom Beach* and *Clash Royale* generating 2,1 billion euros annually, even though, reportedly it has only 210 employees globally in which makes it an SME (small and medium-size enterprise) organization in terms of employees headcount according to the EU guidelines for an organization. The company’s marketing and brand strategy can be argued to be that of a product brand because while operating as Supercell, it adopted its mobile games as its main selling points, while the company is largely hidden behind these games brands.

The company has grown into a global multi-billion dollar success in a short few years on a handful of available games they developed (Table 3). Despite its games successes, the games developer company continues its existence in the background of its products. As a developer, it is does not attract as much attention as its games (products), due to the fact that customers or gamers around the world may not identify instantly Supercell as a corporate brand, since it is largely obscured by its games brands. Despite its rocketing global success, the company remains humble in its nucleus form by staying small and agile as well as giving donations to charities and investing into non-profit organizations.

Furthermore, by not categorizing it as a single-case study, other companies with some unique characteristics could have also been incorporated. This is an objectionable option since by not narrowing the field of research; many negative effects can be found.
and contaminate the empirical findings. Examples of negative effects considered are, for instance, unique company characteristics e.g. level of interaction between company and customer (players). Supercell has a high level of customer interaction through game blogs, games community forum and virtual clubs with players’ feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game title</th>
<th>Launch date</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hay Day</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clash of Clans</td>
<td>August 2012</td>
<td>Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boom Beach</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
<td>Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clash Royale</td>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>Available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: List of currently available video games  
(Source: Supercell.com)

3.3. Primary data collection

Primary data is the empirically collected data by the author of this thesis. Observations and interviews, and questionnaires are some of the means of primary data collection for case studies (Saunders et al., 2007). For this case study, the author employed the interview method since it can reveal multiple realities that allow the author to understand the case from different perspectives and to gain interpretations and descriptions of the events from the decision-makers of the company (Stake, p. 64, 1995). The author engaged in a semi-structured interview with the case study company executive and marketing/branding manager through the help of an interview guide. The interview guide questions were based on Urde (2013) “indicative questions for the application of the CBIM framework”, but also included customized questions for participants to answer to questions regarding his specific role or function at the company). A full list of the interview questions is enclosed in the Appendix section of this thesis work (see Appendix 1: Interview Guide).

Primary data collection method used is applicable to the case study purpose as the author attempts to see from the management of the company perspective in the area of games (product) and corporate brand identity. (Urde, 2013)
3.3.1. Semi-structured interview

There are many forms of qualitative interviews. However, a common factor between them is that they have simpler structured than other research data collection within qualitative research such as structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The main advantage of using qualitative interviewing is that answers provided by the interviewee are from his personal point of view, enriched with details and information. Additionally, due to the less structured approach, it provides flexibility in terms of questions asked and direction of the interview which may take a different turn and may allow new insights to come forth that were not previously considered by the researchers (p. 472). The author’s aim has been continuously redefined during the thesis writing process as new revelations being uncovered. The author’s objective is to gather detailed and informative data from key management members of the case company. It is achieved by a face-to-face interview with a key personnel in which enable the interviewee to share his own points of view and express it from his own perspective (p. 474). The interview questions are based on the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix schematic (Urde, p. 758, 2013) in which correspond to the elements in the matrix. A brief outline of the interview questions is presented as follow. (Table 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General personal information</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>Establish the identity of the interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General info about Supercell</td>
<td>4, 5, 6</td>
<td>General viewpoint and motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value proposition</td>
<td>16, 17, 18, 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>20, 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
<td>Elements of the Corporate Brand Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission &amp; Vision</td>
<td>9, 10, 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>12, 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competences</td>
<td>23, 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: The allocation table of interview questions (Adapted from Urde, 2013)

The structure of the interview is semi-structured which facilitates flexibility and at the same time gives the researcher the possibility to ask a set of questions based on the CBIM as designated in Illustration 1. Furthermore this interview approach permits the
participant to move away from the main topic of discussion from time to time and allow the interviewee to share ideas and thoughts from other areas that he feels important and relevant. It also allows the researcher conducting the interview to come up with new questions in response to the participants’ answers, and/or change the order of the questions (Bryan & Bell p. 474, 2007).

Illustration 1: Interview questions based on CBIM  
(Adapted from Urde, p. 758, 2013)

For this study, the semi-structured interview is employed to gather responses in specific topics and actions within corporate brand identity through the application of a theoretically designed interview guide. The interview questions are both open and close-ended to give the interviewees the freedom to express opinions both in broad terms and or allow other related topics to be explored and discussed in depth such as the branding strategy during the different growth stages. (Appendix 1)
The main criteria in participant selection is the participant has to have a functional role within the specific area of research such as a product, marketing or brand managers of the case study company or of a strategic management position such as the chief marketing officer or marketing director. These key people would be aware of strategic long term planning of the case study company’s marketing and branding strategies. Since the case company is an SME, the interviewee is responsible for all of the above duties in his daily work. Therefore, the interviewee is a key employee who is knowledgeable and capable of providing the necessary data in the research.

The author was able to gain access to the participant due to social ties because personal contact was easily achieved through phone calls or e-mails to schedule face-to-face meetings. On the other hand, there was an exception to this circumstance. Due to his enormous responsibility in managing a multi-billion dollar games company, Mr. Ilkka Paananen, the company’s co-founder and CEO, with whom the interview data were given through e-mail correspondence. The first in-person interview was carried out at the participant’s place of residence on January 15, 2017 with Mr. Jani Lintunen (a key game developer and marketer). The participant’s place of residence and outside of office hours were often scheduled as the ideal place and time because company’s executives would feel more at ease at home, allowing a greater relaxed atmosphere where discussions could be created through exchanges of information which might feel less intrusive, natural and enable trust to be developed between the researcher and the participants.

The interview was digitally recorded on a handheld personal device (iPhone) and was later manually transcribed by the researcher himself with the duration of each interview as listed in Table 5. The reason for using an iPhone is because of the numerous advantages it has. Some features are beneficial for interviews, such as its small design and unobtrusive presence during the interview, as well as being able to record for longer periods of time than an audio recorder (Bryman & Bell, p. 489, 2007; Greener, p. 84, 2008). With the built-in the playback feature from the recording device, the researcher could re-play the interviews and to extract direct quotes at a later time, thus allowing the researcher to have greater focus during the interview to probe questions and to promote deeper discussions to gain the extra details and information that would be later on
beneficial to the findings (Saunders et al., 2007).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of participant</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Primary data collection mode</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jani Lintunen</td>
<td>Artist (game developer &amp; marketer)</td>
<td>Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>60 min.</td>
<td>04.11.2016</td>
<td>15.01.2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilkka Paananen</td>
<td>Co-founder &amp; CEO</td>
<td>Web interview</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.11.2016</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Primary data from interview participant(s)

3.4. Secondary data

Secondary data is previously collected information for other purposes or studies (Greener, 2008; Saunders et al., 2007). Therefore, it is not directly gathered by the researcher himself, but it is still applicable in the realm this research paper. In order to understand and to study the company in greater details, the author found a handful of informative and useful materials from the company’s corporate and product website, company press releases, official blogs, previous interviews and speeches held by Supercell marketing or brand executives at various mobile games conferences.

Additionally, Stake (1995) affirms case study researchers often make use of media such as newspapers, annual reports, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and the like (p. 68). The author also utilized Boolean algorithm search engine on the Internet such as Google Scholar and in academic journal databases (i.e. Lubito, Ebscohost, Elsevier, etc.) to find and gain access to credible peer reviewed articles and literature. Because, corporate brand identity is still a relatively unexplored area of research, secondary data from these data bases were in limited amount and provide only a general picture of the research topic, thus additional data from company’s press releases, games blogs, past interviews and articles from the Internet were supplemented. However, by asking specific and direct questions in interviews in order to acquire a deeper knowledge of the issue (Saunders et al., 2007), accordingly, can overcome the deficiency and thus, gain a full understanding of how the corporate brand strategies were practiced in various growth phases of the case company in which can be later used to reveal the corporate brand identity.
3.5. Data analysis

In this section presents how primary and secondary data are analyzed in the case study. The main focus is on the interview, since it is the primary source of information, and supplements it with secondary data contributing to the author's general understanding of the research problem and findings. The interview was audio-recorded in order to carefully listen and transcribe them later; it is a common practice in qualitative data analysis (Saunders et al., 2007). The researcher listened and transcribed the interview on the same day right after it was conducted, allowing immediately write down unspoiled reflections and thoughts.

When transcribe the interview, having generous space in the document permits encoding and additional notes to be made (Greener, 2008; Saunders et al., 2010; and Yin, 2011. As soon as the transcribing was done, the transcript was double-checked against the recording (Greener, 2008), the author started to analyze and encode the obtained qualitative data. The coding process allows the researcher to begin moving methodically to a slightly higher conceptual level (Yin, p. 187, 2011; Saunders et al., p. 502, 2007). It is one of the first steps to take in analyzing qualitative data, to permit the raw empirical material to be rendered into theoretically derived categories. Furthermore, this crucial step also facilitates the analysis process of the collected empirical findings faster and easier.

Nevertheless, in choosing interviewing as a data collection method in the research design, it imposes a major drawback as it demanded a labor intensive and time-consuming twelve (12) weeks study and analysis. Also, the author, as a researcher, has to be aware and accept the possibility that the collected data could be flawed due to the subjective interpretative nature of how the researcher and the interview participants view of the social world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The face-to-face communication during the interviews may provide a potential threat of bias as a result of the characteristics of the interviewer in relation to personality, age or interview skills (Bryman & Bell, p. 423, 2007). As the researcher is an inexperienced interviewer, but has a profound interest in the company, he believes that bias towards his other characteristics would be minimized.
Since the case company is a Finnish company and the author has social ties with the company’s key executives, it might have factored into the company’s hospitality to allow the interviews happened and the participant(s) incline to be responsive in the interview(s). This may cause the interviewee to subject of consent bias and or providing socially desirable answers. However, Bryman and Bell (2007) claim that this bias is ambiguous in research (p. 235).

On the other hand, Easterby-Smith et al., (2012) found a weakness in using the constructionist epistemological view in qualitative research. The analysis and interpretations of the empirical data and findings can be a challenge to obtain (p. 28). This flaw can be further lead to generalization from the research study (Bryman & Bell, p. 423, 2007).

3.5.1. Text-mining

In order to gather informative and useful materials from the case company’s news and events, company press releases, official blogs, previous interviews and speeches held by Supercell marketing or brand executives at various mobile games conferences, the author utilized the Boolean algorithm search engine available on the Internet such as Google and Google Scholar. These data are then aggregated. As the author now has access to all web articles and then supplements a text-mining analysis to these articles. The author expect that the use of text mining would provide some further insights that would be otherwise difficult to obtain using only the aggregate data (Matsumura, Yamamoto & Tomozawa, 2008; Yamamoto & Matsumura, 2009).

The text-mining procedure was as follows. First, the author examined all web articles found, which totaled approximately 50,000. Then, the following steps were performed:
1. Classify search words into lexical categories (e.g., substantives, verbs and terms).
2. Eliminate all (lexical) articles and prepositions.
3. Select articles with key search words that would be beneficial to the case study analysis.
This task was laborious because it involved frequent human intervention to ensure that the classification and word relevancies were correct. The author performed this process for each of the relevant search word. These key search words are listed according to their rank of relevancy to the case study in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rank of relevance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Lexical category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supercell</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>79 000</td>
<td>Substantive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilkka Paananen</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 860</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hay Day</td>
<td>Game</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>487 000</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clash of Clans</td>
<td>Game</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>175 000</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boom Beach</td>
<td>Game</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>417 000</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clash Royale</td>
<td>Game</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18 100</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supercell games community forum</td>
<td>Virtual community</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 560</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video game(s)</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14 800 000</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile game(s)</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46 000 000</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eSports</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 500 000</td>
<td>Substantive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netflix</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15 200 000</td>
<td>Substantive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nintendo</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4 660 000</td>
<td>Substantive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: List of key search word(s)  
(Source: Google.com)

As noted above, the objective was to gather additional information to the case findings. The author conducted exploratory analyses using all 12 search words and finally retained the articles and postings that were relevant and appeared to have general predictive power. The author speculated that these articles were found to have some explanatory power because other researchers and consumers would find posts that contain these words to be useful in terms of making their own decisions with regard to engaging with the case company.

In conclusion, these data are unique in that they enable the author to focus on relevant web articles and postings about the company. The availability of the actual web articles and postings text offer further opportunities for deeper analysis in combination with the primary data received.
3.6. Ethics

Conducting a research study of this magnitude requires consideration of various ethical and political dimensions. A possible ethical issue arises in this research study is the choice of convenience sampling (Greener, 2008). Using personal ties in order to obtain access to the company can result in biased findings, since the interviewees may be eager to please, and render socially desirable answers (Greener, 2008; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Thus, during face-to-face interviewing the game developer, Mr. Lintunen, open-ended questions were solicited to promote discussion as well as to minimize any personal bias.

Secondly, confidentiality issues also need to be dealt in utmost respect or such ways that the researcher may not cause any harm to the participants (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Carelessly releasing or providing sensible information about a current company’s brand strategies which might result in a reduction of any current competitive advantages should be avoided. Therefore, the author discretely omitted any sensitive issues arise during the data collection process that might cause harm to either company or participants taking part in the research.

Thirdly, political aspects of the research should also not be underestimated, since gaining initial access to the information needed, especially for university students, is enormously challenging. Easterby-Smith et al., (p. 90, 2012) differentiate formal and informal access to the company. In this research study, the author managed to gain informal access to the company due to social ties with a key game developer, Mr. Lintunen, to conduct the empirical study and through him, the author gained access to Mr. Paananen via e-mails correspondence. (ibid)

Bryman and Bell (2011) recommend that right after the initial permission is gained; the interviewees must be informed immediately about the nature and aim of the research project (p. 473). However, even when the initial access has been obtained, collaboration from within the company is still need to be acquired in order to successfully carry out the empirical study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). To achieve internal
collaboration, the author clearly and transparently presented and explained the aim of the research project when sending out e-mails to the case company representatives to establish online correspondence (p. 91).

3.7. Trustworthiness

Bryman and Bell (2007) suggest using trustworthiness and authenticity of the empirical data to obtain reliable results for this case study (p. 396). However, because the research study does not have any political impacts, authenticity is not in focus (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In addition, for this case study, the qualitative method is preferred because of the interpretive epistemological nature of the research. The approach could be different if the study is in quantitative methods, where the data can be measured in terms of high reliability and validity distilled from statistical tests and numerical data. However, using the same approach to measure the accuracy of a qualitative study is not as reliable because the focus is on words rather than numbers (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Greener, 2008).

On the other hand, Yin (2011) suggests that a qualitative research should satisfy three objectives to achieve trustworthiness and credibility. They are transparency, methodic-ness and adherence to the evidence. Yin (2011) defines transparency as to describe and to document the research procedures in such ways that others can also inspect, review and understand them (p. 40). Additionally, using anonymity and pseudo names for participants and company in the study would reduce the trustworthiness (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As a result, in subsequent chapters of the case study, excerpts of the transcripts are provided, giving the reader a window to the raw materials gathered. Actual names of the participants are also given, thanks to the generosity and co-operation of the case company. In doing so, it bolsters the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

Methodic-ness refers to the process of ensuring the research design adequate room for discovery and allowance for unanticipated events whilst minimizing careless work being carried out by the researcher. Yin (2011) exclaims that being methodical also
includes avoiding unexplained bias or deliberate distortion in carrying out research (p. 41). In this study, the author indicates which data and interpretations are made and from which point of view (i.e. CEO or other). Eisenhardt (2006) recommends describing with utmost sensitivity, in a self-reflexive manner, the assumed interaction between the researcher’s positioning (as a research instrument), events, and participants in the field (p. 577).

Adherence to evidence is the final objective. The qualitative research needs to be based on an explicit set of evidence (Yin, 2011). The goal is to base conclusions on data that have been collected and analyzed fairly (p. 41). For this research, conclusions and analysis are based on explicit evidence permeate through the data collected from the primary and secondary data.

3.8. Limitations

There are a few limitations to be acknowledged in this research paper.

*Limitation within the qualitative approach:* the limitation of the researcher’s approach is the choice of conducting a single case study of Supercell. Due to that choice, the findings of from the case study may not provide any generalizations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The mobile gaming industry is a unique industry and its findings may have limited applicability to other companies in different industries.

*Limitation with data analysis and interpretation:* In conducting the interviews with management and senior executives, the author should not assume that they have told everything the researcher needed to know (Yin, 2011) in formulating a complete picture of Supercell. Most founders or owners of Supercell were out-of-reach and so many ‘behind the scenes’ or specific details and events were left undiscovered, which if they were provided, they would have given a thorough overview of the case company and further improve the analysis of its corporate brand. Nonetheless, attempts were made to minimize this limitation by including important key decision maker in interviews.
Limitation in the choice of research on brand identity: In this master thesis, the author mainly focuses on the identity concept within product and corporate brands and not on the overall corporate brand building process. In writing the thesis, the author describes the management ‘inside’ identity based perspective instead of a consumer ‘outside’ image based perspective. This is because identity precedes image (Kapferer, 2008). To minimize this limitation, distinctions between these two aspects, identity and image, were sufficiently provided in Chapter 2, and not so much at all on brand image.

4. ANALYSIS

The chapter begins with a historical timeline overview of the company’s growth stages through the data collected from conducted face-to-face interview and secondary data source. It provides the reader a comprehensive path to understand the case company Supercell growing from a humble beginning as a mobile gaming app developer to become a global success story due to their game brands. The section is structured on observed significant business events during the growth stages and to serve as a reference in exploring the corporate brand identity building process of the case company. (Figure 6)

Based on the empirical data, the three growth stages of the case company can be identified as pre-establishment, early growth and effective growth stage. Nevertheless, the empirical data were not sufficiently detailed to determine when the exact stage the company had been in during the activities discussed or further support could be achieved in differentiating between the stages. Please note that some functions overlap in some stages, and therefore the early and effective growth stages both contain some similar activities. This could be explained when the brand orientation in the pre-establishment and early growth stages had not reached the same level of development, leaving the function unfilled and influencing the following activities in the next stage. Furthermore, the data do not support nor deny the interpretation. Then, the reader is acquainted with Supercell’s product brands and its brand identity prism; follow with Supercell’s corporate brand and its CBIM and Supercell’s corporate brand identity. The summary section recaps and ends the chapter.
4.1. The case company, Supercell Oy

“Supercell is a company based on an idea that the founders have worked on other companies before and they felt that it was very bureaucracy. Bureaucracy was like developing games kinda felt for them that they were fighting against bureaucracy. And they felt like they can do better if there wasn’t such needed if the whole team was basically professionals as good as it can get so there wouldn’t be any kind of management or wouldn’t be a need for management in that sense and that was kinda of the basic idea where Supercell was created and that is why they are called ‘supercells’ because the idea is that those ‘cells’ would be self-performing and taking all the risks they feel like needed to be taken and doing what they feel as the right thing to do and no one outside can more or less influence on what they are doing in some senses.” (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)
Supercell Oy is a mobile game development company founded in June 2010 in Helsinki, Finland, as a tech start-up to create mobile games designed from the ground up specifically for the touch and mobile platforms of Apple’s iOS and Android devices. The company's debut game was the browser game Gunshine.net, and after its release in 2011, Supercell shifted its strategy toward developing games for mobile devices. In the mid-summer of 2012, Supercell released Hay Day and Clash of Clans. The company works relentlessly in its first four (4) years of existence to release and maintain only three (3) games (Boom Beach in 2014). However, along its way of creativity and production, starting with Gunshine, it also terminated a few other developed games such as Magic, Pets vs. Orcs, Tower, Battle Buddies, Spooky Pop and Smash Land. As of date, the company fully released only four (4) games: Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach, and Clash Royale, which are freemium games and have been very successful for the company. According to Business Insider, Nordic, (June 14, 2016), Clash of Clans is the highest grossing app of all time. In 2013, Hay Day and Clash of Clans generated 2.4 Million USD per day. (nordic.businessinsider.com)

However, with these only four (4) working titles, Supercell becomes one of the most successful game development companies in Finland with its products being among the world's most successful video mobile games. From all the games developing companies distributing their games through Apple’s iTunes™ App Store, Supercell held the highest monthly grossing app in revenues in 2013, in two and a half years since its inception. Furthermore, these games instantly became an international phenomenon and a household brand within a few short years. This is an extraordinary accomplishment in consideration that Supercell is in the same league with enormous corporations such as Electronic Arts (EA) with over 969 titles for iOS platform. (App Annie Index, 2012).

The secret to Supercell’s success is its focusing on the development of free-to-play games that yield profits through the in-game micropayments. The company's objective is to concentrate on building successful games that can stay popular for years to come. Revenue generation is not its intention, and the company adheres on the principle of “just design something great, something that users love” (Lappalainen, p. 176-182, 2015). To get the desired level of quality, Supercell ensures every step to hire talented
people, and keep teams small. Game development centers around ‘cells’ or team of three (3) to fifteen (15) people which sparks with a concept materialization and then follows by an evaluation from the CEO. Subsequently, the team develops the concept into a game, which the rest of the company's employees get to test play, follow by a field test in Canadian Apple’s iTunes App store. When the Canadian’s Apple’s App Store reception generates significant statistics, the next step is a global launch. As a result, Supercell discontinued a total of 14 game projects as they did not deem promising enough for one reason to another. However, these failed games are viewed as successful failures which are celebrated (with sparkling wine) by and reflected among employees. For instance, *Battle Buddies* was one of those games. It was cancelled after it was well advanced into the development phase. It was well received in the test market, but the amount of players was still too small. The final decision for cancelling a project is always done by the development teams themselves (Strauss, p. 50–52, 2013).

Founded in the mid-2010, Supercell is considerably a young company with only six and a half years in existence on the global success arena; but its founders already have a relatively long history in game developing. Before founding Supercell, Mikko Kodisoja and Ilkka Paananen worked at Sumea, a mobile game company. Kodisoja was one of the founders of Sumea in 1999, and Paananen was hired as the company's CEO in 2000. In 2004, Digital Chocolate acquired Sumea and made the company its Finnish headquarters and Paananen its European manager. Kodisoja, who was the creative director at the time, felt that the business culture took a more problematic direction despite an increase in the business activity. In dissatisfaction, he left the company in 2010, and soon after, Paananen resigned as well (Lappalainen, p. 167-171, 2015).

Then, Paananen briefly worked at Lifeline Ventures as an advisor, a financing company. In yearning to become an entrepreneur himself, Paananen intended to found a game company where executives would not disrupt the creativity of the game developers (Image 1, Appendix 2). As a result, Paananen, Kodisoja, Petri Styrman, Lassi Leppinen, Visa Forstén, and Niko Derome who had known each other through work connections, joined together and founded Supercell in 2010. (ibid)
Currently, Supercell has only 210 employees worldwide, including 70 developers, and team groups are often made up of 3-15 people, relatively a meager figure in comparison to its revenue, and even to the company's biggest rival developer, King, has 1,400 employees. The organization has a flat structure because Supercell does not have a middle management. Thus, the ‘cells’ or teams have a lot of independence and freedom in doing what they want, but due to the lack of middle management, they have a lot of responsibility for their results. New employees are on a four (4) months’ probation, and the turnover rate has been great. (ibid)

4.2. Supercell’s corporate brand according to the growth stages

Looking at the milestones defined in the empirical findings as presented in Figure 6, it appears to be straightforward to allocate them into the three growth stages as identified in the theoretical framework of Juntunen et al., (2010).

4.2.1. Pre-establishment stage (prior to Jun 2010)

In the pre-establishment stage, the organization was still purely and simple, including all the activities and preparation that take place before the company is officially established, and involves, for example, the entrepreneur(s), owner(s), his / her family and friends and potential investors. The formal registration process (for example, company forms, official statements needed and so on) and the financial status of the entrepreneur(s) influence enormously on the functions and activities within the unfounded organization, as well as the actors involved (ibid).

Following Juntunen et al., (2010) definition, the pre-establishment stage of Supercell can be established as the time period from prior to the company’s inception in June 2010, starting from when Ilkka Paananen left Digital Chocolate and during his advisory role in Lifeline Ventures, Mr. Paananen developed his desire for entrepreneurship, and he joined together with Mikko Kodisoja, Petri Styrman, Lassi Leppinen, Visa Forstén, and Niko Derome who had known each other through work connections, and founded Supercell in 2010. The company’s aim was to create the best possible mobile games by the best game developers.
As a start-up, Supercell did not have any existing or established identity or reputation and the organizational structure is still needed to be built (Petkova et al., 2008; Rode & Vallaster, 2005). The corporate personality, which includes the development of a company’s idea, company’s structure and characteristics and company’s name and core values (Juntunen et al., 2010), began to partially built. While the company’s aim was clear, and the name was established, the company was still in its infancy to have an explicit form, as “[it] is still completely informal, including all the activities and planning that take place before the company is officially established” (p. 123). Likewise, there were some indications of core values found in the empirical study. In this stage, the corporate brand identity aspect was slowly developed at the case company.

“One of our core values is about giving the very best talent the independence and resources they need to do what they do best......” (Mr. Paananen, CEO, Web Interview).

During this time, the name “Supercell” was only a vocalized term for the company, thus, it did not yet meet the requirements for a corporate brand. Hatch & Schultz (2001) assert that a corporate brand gives the company the possibility to integrate its vision and culture into the value proposition, which in Supercell was not yet developed. Similarly, “Supercell” did not even yet meet the criteria or definition of being a brand since the name call “Supercell” lacks tangible and intangible values and meaning used for the purpose of differentiation. However, Kapferer (2008) states that even just selecting an exceptional name, the organization could still create a favorable identity since a brand name is a powerful source of identity. Additionally, a brand name reveals its intention even without “[any] apparent objective or rational [logic], but that it still has the capacity to mark the brand’s legitimate territory” (p. 193).

When Supercell selected the color black and white and the presented the name in square letter blocks in the graphical logotype, it displays characteristics of strength; drive and ambition, which are core elements that define the corporate brand identity today (see Illustration 2). These are strong visual symbols for Supercell and they also guided the growth of the company by establishing a source of identity through the chosen logotype and symbol.
“….if you’d do a t-shirt or kinda of something, it would look cool and people would want to wear it so it was more based on recognition and having a kinda impactful logo in some sense.” (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

Illustration 2: Supercell logo (Source: cdn.supercell.com/)

Furthermore, the initial findings from the case study seem to support one of the main outcomes of Juntunen et al., (2010) as it describes “[the] corporate brand building does indeed start even before the corporation in question exists” (p. 127). In other words, during this stage, the founders performed activities that aim to define the corporate personality by establishing corporate branding relationships with stakeholders and defining a brand-oriented corporate strategy through the help of their friends and investors. As a result, these activities kick-started the company’s corporate brand building process and forming company’s core values, which is further gained momentum in the early growth stage that follows.
4.2.2. Early growth stage (Jun 2010 – Oct 2013)

As the corporate brand building continued and the supporting activities were overlapping between the stages, after receiving a substantial investment of 12 million USD from Accel Partners in May 2011, the company welcomed a new board member (Kevin Comolli from Accel Partners) on its board of directors; Supercell started to grow and entered the ‘early growth’ stage. The corporate brand building functions and corporate brand building activities were starting to gain momentum in this phase. Through the time line presentation in Figure 6, these functions and activities can be sequentially synchronized according to Juntunen et al., (2010) theoretical frame work.

Armed with the new capital injection as well as a new board member, the company had the necessary capital and direction to embark on issues that plague small businesses such as resources and limited know-how. Consequently, Supercell was able to restructure the company strategically and pursued new strategies by changing its business strategy to only focusing on the mobile gaming market (from PC to tablet/mobile platforms) as well as investing into intellectual resources such as hiring the best game developers and designers to create the best games while gaining core competencies as means to differentiate the company from competition (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990).

"After working for big companies and shipping over 165 games across 12 platforms, we all wanted to build a different kind of game company, the one we’d always dreamed of," says Mr. Paananen, "Quite simply, we thought that the best people make the best games and our main goal should be to get those people and create a zero-bureaucracy type of environment for them. That was our inspiration." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

In this “early growth stage”, the corporate brand building functions and activities were further taking shapes and defined in accordance to Juntunen et al., (p.123, 2010). The company started in 2010 in a cramped 30 square meter office in Espoo with a small work force of 15 employees. With the previous working experience from Digital Chocolate and Remedy, Mr. Paananen and his friends utilize their industry know-how to
build a company of their dream around a number of small elite teams of game developers that operate sovereignly.

"The teams decide what they work on, and we only measure them based on the results. There really are no processes dictated by the management, and our organization is optimized for speed. We're also very transparent and open; we share all data with everyone, every single day. And we have a very high degree of trust in our people, which is really what is required to make this type of approach work." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

Nevertheless, theoretically speaking, as the founders defined and established the company’s core values in the previous stage, in this following stage, the corporate identity and personality were slowly taking shape while the core values and the corporate brand identity were partially developed as mentioned in the pre-establishment stage. The company’s core values and corporate brand identity, these principle elements already formed before the company was founded. As an example of these core elements, the Supercell Model was created on the inspiration of Netflix, according to Mr. Paananen:

“"A few years before founding Supercell, I came across Netflix’s culture deck online and I was impressed by the way they described their culture, particularly the “freedom and responsibility” part of it. Instead of managing complexity by introducing additional layers of management or process, they wanted to manage complexity by hiring better people and giving them more freedom. They also said something along the lines of wanting to be a professional sports team instead of a family or kids recreational club. All of this was very inspirational for me at the time.”” (Mr. Paananen, CEO, Web interview)

Instead of the traditional management style “Top Down” model, Supercell utilizes “Bottom Up,” where the game teams are empowered to make final decisions, and the CEO (on the bottom), is only there to nourish and maintain the culture and environment. That is how the Supercell Model was created to bring out the creativity of the game team to freely bring out the company’s best products. (Illustration 3)

"Giving orders like a top-down management just doesn't work at all. I think the information just flows so much better. There's the feeling of 'we're all in this
together’. It makes sense in our relatively fast-moving and dynamic environment too. It's just good to have everyone as close by as possible." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

Illustration 3: The Supercell Model  (Source: Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

In creating corporate identity, Juntunen et al., (2010) state that the essence of its creation is “emanating from daily operations and products of the company, ‘arises on its own’, not developed consciously, close to the owner-managers’ identity, includes corporate culture, corporate behavior, corporate internal communications and corporate design” (p. 124). These elements are identified through evidences from the data collected. For instance, at Supercell, processes or bureaucracy are refrained to a minimal extent. Even though, in some situations, undergoing through a process is unavoidable. As a result, there has to be an excellent reason to start a process in the company. Mr. Paananen indicates that transparency is a vital part of the organization culture. From the beginning of each work day, every employee in the organization receives daily an automated E-mail about the performance data of the company’s products. The E-mail provides user statistics, revenue figures and critical performance indicators such as retention rates. Thus, Supercell creates transparency in the company and in the work they do.
“Even if I wanted to keep something secret I can't, because I force myself to send all the data every single morning, and there's nothing I can do about it! It actually helps the management of the company, because it makes our culture very results-driven, and there's no politics.” (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

Another core value of Supercell is being small and agile combine with zero-bureaucracy and transparency. These qualities are the core part of Supercell’s corporate brand and vision. Supercell does not commit any individual game designers to just develop any specific parts of the games. Developers work as a team and everyone in the team is responsible for the end-user experience of that game in which they developed. Supercell has a flat organization structure without a mid-level management thus bureaucracy is limited to a point of none existence (zero-bureaucracy). Free and accessible working spaces are for everyone as no one is restricted to an office space or a cubicle, and teams are unrestricted to operate independently. An employee can raise his/her opinion in any part of the developing process regardless of his/her position in the company. According to Mr. Paananen, the open environment compels to a further agile company that can respond swiftly in the regarded volatile and fast paced game industry. Furthermore, Armstrong, Kotler, Harker and Brennan (p.590, 2012), theorize that the team based product development approach or simultaneous product development approach, generates efficiency when various departments within the organization work closely together and overlap product development processes to save time.

With the company structure in place and the elements of corporate identity (corporate culture, corporate behavior, corporate internal communications and corporate design) are consistently “emanating from daily operations and products of the company” (Juntunen et al., p. 125, 2010), investors begin to take notice on the company. Supercell initially embarked upon the venture of creating a browser-based social game, releasing a free-to-play web and on Facebook platform, Gunshine.net in 2011 with a substantial funding 12 million USD from Accel Partners. Regrettably, after landed on the tail-end of the Facebook game boom, Gunshine was shut down after just 18 months as it failed to generate enough player interest. (Image 2, Appendix 2)
"We learned quite a few lessons from that experience," says Mr. Paananen. "Most importantly, how incredibly hard it is to create a free-to-play game that has both a wide appeal and high engagement and retention. Gunshine definitely was not one, but since then we've been lucky enough to get a few games right." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

Then, the trade wind shifted in favor of the company with the release of a new product from Apple, the iPad, in 2011. Set its sails on the trade wind, Supercell reaps its rewards in the mobile game industry.

"In 2011 we simply fell in love with the iPad," says Mr. Paananen. "We felt that its technical capabilities, from its processing power to multi-touch UI [user interface] to screen size, combined with its mobility and accessibility made it the ultimate games platform. Also, looking at the market for tablet games, we realized we could offer some truly unique games for this platform, something that no one was doing yet." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

Realizing its strategic vision in the mobile game market, Supercell shifted its strategy from PC to tablet/mobile platforms and focusing on the new Apple’s product, Supercell embarked on the new journey with all its might.

"We adopted a 'tablet-first' strategy," adds Mr. Paananen. "What that means is our games are handcrafted for the tablet. We make no compromises for other platforms. Only after our games are fully baked and ready for the tablet, do we then look to optimize them for smartphones." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

In this stage, the corporate identity is beginning to form further. According to Juntunen et al., 2010), it “unifies identity and image” and “great influence on what the company is like, how it will develop and how it is seen in the market” (p. 124). Indeed, according to Mr. Paananen, the company’s approach is to create the best possible mobile games. As part of Supercell's new plan of action, Battle Buddies was the first game revealed, a colorful strategy title which delivered cross-platform play across Apple iOS and Android devices. However, it didn't spread out beyond the borders of Canada and
Nevertheless, embarking on the new strategy is never without costs. The company had some casualties. During the early part of 2012, in addition to Gunshine.net and Battle Buddies, Supercell cancelled two further projects after they were launched (i.e. Pets vs. Orcs, Tower).

"It is how we make sure that we are providing players with only the best experiences," Mr. Paananen explains. "We want players to know they can trust the Supercell name for giving them nothing but great games. All four games were retired at different stages in the product development lifecycle. Gunshine had been live in the market for some time, two games were in public beta and one game was still early in development. In each of those cases, we gathered invaluable learning that has helped the company and our other games move forward." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

Despite the initial hurdles in the approach to the new business strategy, Supercell is not a typical mobile game development company as it relentlessly stays on its new path. According to Mr. Paananen, CEO, his company celebrates the death of each game in stride and performs a post-mortem to learn from it and contemplates on what could be done better in the next game.

"In each of those cases, we gathered invaluable learning that has helped the company and our other games move forward." Mr. Paananen discloses “We also think failure, or to be more specific, learning from failures is a very integral part of creating successful games. Therefore we've tried to create an environment where failing is not only okay, it is actually celebrated. Every single time we need to cancel a product we buy bottles of champagne for the team that was behind that product. That is not because we love failing - who would? - but because we feel that it's important to celebrate what you learn when you fail." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

When the corporate brand ‘arises on its own’ by staying true to its core values as defined by the founders of the company “close to the owner-manager’s identity” coupled
with employees’ motivation (Juntunen et al., p. 124, 2010), Supercell then had something far more concrete to celebrate. In the summer of 2012, the company launched two game titles within a few weeks apart that catapulted the company to stardom. The first of these two titles is *Hay Day*. It was based on the concept of Farmville and customized the experience to Apple’s iPad in such a way that immediately reverberated with players around the world.

"We saw the tablet as a huge opportunity to broaden the appeal of an already popular game genre and bring it to new audiences." Mr. Paananen asserts. "Using multi-touch and swiping controls to replicate the activities of a farm make the genre more engaging and fun, and the tablet screen gave us the power to make a farm game more beautiful than ever before. And, we wanted to take the level of social game play to the next level. One of the ways we do this in *Hay Day* is the real time trading system that has been incredibly popular among our players."

(Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

As of date, *Hay Day’s* popularity remains unrivaled, taking up a seemingly perpetual seat in the upper reaches of the top grossing game charts, thanks to a swiftly effective in-app purchasing scheme. (Image 5, Appendix 2)

Supercell's next game, the city-building PVP (player vs. player) title “*Clash of Clans*”, performs even better. Learning from its preceding failures, Supercell aims to satisfy the hard-core gamer with a wider audience appeal. (Image 6, Appendix 2)

"For *Clash of Clans*, we wanted to build a resource management game with player-vs-player combat that would have a mass appeal," declares Mr. Paananen. "We wanted to take a fresh take on this genre, and create a game that was built for the tablet and mobile platform from the ground-up. It was always our goal to take a genre that typically veers toward the core gamer, and make a game that would have wider appeal, bringing new audiences to this type of game." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

The strategic move, by the development of *Clash of Clans*, paid off handsomely with these two global hits on the company’s hand. With estimated monthly revenue
between 700,000 USD to 1,000,000 USD per day, it's reasonable to say that Supercell is presently a force to reckon with in mobile gaming.

"Our primary focus is on engagement and retention, not revenue or charts," says Mr. Paananen. "We believe if you create very compelling experiences with high engagement everything else will fall into place. We also believe in focusing on only a limited number of great games instead of a large portfolio." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

In addition, Juntunen et al., (2010) asserts “the corporate brand can be used as an orientation when refining the core values and strategies, to maintain the intended corporate brand” (p.127). In order to keep a reflective perspective on the corporate brand, the start-up needs to sustain the corporate identity and corporate image (ibid).

In light of this master thesis, the corporate identity involves corporate design and communication as mentioned in the earlier chapter. From the data, the findings show the company made its communication into planned and unplanned, where planned communication is controlled by the organization and can be referred to as traditional marketing activities, such as public relations (PR), and social media marketing. Unplanned communication includes Word-of-Mouth (WOM) between third parties. According to Bresciani & Eppler (2010), organizations benefit from developing innovative and promotional brand building activities in the form of events and fairs, creating online campaigns, and actively working to generate WOM between third parties. As shown in the time line presented in Figure 6, in 2012, Supercell was chosen as the best Nordic start-up company (Laakso, 2012) and received the Finnish game developer of the year title (Rautio, 2012). In the following year, Supercell won the Finnish Teknologiakasvattaja 2013 contest, and the company was chosen as the software entrepreneur of the year (Talotekniikka, 2013). As a result of these PR activities (planned and unplanned, the company became an object of desire due to these strategic achievements and stakeholders take notice. Softbank and GungHo, struck a merger deal with Supercell and acquired 51 per cent of its shares on Oct 2013. The company further opened a branch office in San Francisco, USA.
Through the empirical data, it is probable that Supercell implemented a market-oriented approach, the predominant marketing paradigm (Urde et al., 2013) as the company’s organizational approach to brands and the game market at the time had an ‘outside-in, image-driven’ approach.

“From the beginning until when we launched Clash of Clans, I remembered being part of, in some senses at least, how we want to market the company or the game or both things and we decided to go fully games first because our thinking was the players don’t really care about the company, they don’t really need to care about the company at some senses, ... it doesn’t just make sense if you’d want to do games for people that just want to experience the game then it makes all the sense to just focus on the brand identity of the game itself so that’s why it is sadly quite common that people don’t know that Hay Day or Clash of Clans are from the same company ....” (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

From May 2011 to Oct 2013, Supercell discontinued four (4) games and created two (2) global hits, Hay Day and Clash of Clans, as they catapulted the company into stardom. Supercell was satisfying the needs and wants of the vast gaming audience, which was at the time, finally able to play and ‘experience the game’ on a mobile handheld device. Games are made on a project basis and although there are some common themes and genres found such as strategy, characters and social play. Despite the fact that Supercell did not show what the brand stood for but its brand was unconsciously developing through its achievements and business decisions in this stage. Furthermore, in a brand-oriented approach, the brand is seen as a resource and strategic hub (Urde, 1994 and 1997). Supercell’s corporate brand begins to grow at a fast pace in this stage and it continues to be seen in the next growth stage.

Additionally, corporate identity tends to arise on its own rather than being developed consciously by the company. The corporate identity is often seen through the output of the internal personnel in daily operations and also in the products. In other words, as Juntunen et al., (2010) state, “the people in the organization observe the company through the products that are the outcome of their work. The nature of the products is present in all decision making and evaluation of the operations of the
company” (p. 125) and this is the case with Supercell through its flagship game brands *Hay Day* and *Clash of Clans*. The whole organization and employees are deeply involved in these game brands and their characters as they continue to work on the games by providing latest updates for gamers to download. Focusing on the games performance and transparency, Supercell employs a data analyst to monitor the games statistics and provide feedbacks to the game teams. This is another main feature of companies within the early growth stage. Surely, Juntunen et al., (2010) study found that during these growth stages, employees contribute “to unifying the corporate identity and the corporate image” (p. 125), influence on how the company is perceived and how it will develop in the future. This is further supported by Supercell’s case study findings. During this time period, employees were seen proudly wearing the company’s logo t-shirt in their workplace; they increased their efforts and creativity in developing the products (games) and these games became global hits. At this stage, the corporate brand was obviously developed and mostly hidden behind the product brands since those games brands have a high degree of freedom. Simultaneously, Supercell seems to follow a ‘procterian dogma’ because it has two flagship product brands in marketing while “brand must correspond to one, and only one, product” (Kapferer, p. 295, 2008) which was made famous by Proctor & Gamble.

Nonetheless, as evidenced in the semi-structured interview and validated through secondary data observation, the name Supercell and its logotype are visible and displayed with pride throughout the company activities and events (Image 7, Appendix 2). Additionally, the logotype appears in each game release in either small font or at the beginning of the game launch to indicate the source of the material, to create positive associations and awareness of the corporate brand from the customer perspective. Furthermore, the corporate brand identity is vigorously flourishing based on the core values established earlier in the pre-establishment stage. It was also obvious that the corporate brand building activities were overlapping between the stages as a part of the growing process.
4.2.3. Effective growth stage (Oct 2013 – present)

Within a very short time period of the three years since the launch of these two games, *Clash of Clans* (a mobile strategy game) and *Hay Day* (a social farming game), hundreds of millions of dollars have been generated for Supercell, and they still pull in tens of millions annually on Google Store and Apple App Store™. However, the video game developer Supercell isn’t just any other face in the crowd. Beside from creating exceptional games, one of the benefits of being a successful mobile game developer is its capability to spend hundreds of millions of dollars marketing its games. Carry on its PR strategy in ‘planned communication’ (Balmer, 1995), during the release of its third [available] game, *Boom Beach*, in early 2014, Supercell displays its financial resources and virtue to market the game for a successful launch into fame and fortune. And in Feb 2015, Supercell spent nine (9) million USD for a 60 second promotion of *Clash of Clans* on the US Super Bowl XLIX in front of 119 million viewers. Most mobile developers will generally allocate between 20 to 30 percent of overall revenues on marketing and Supercell is no exception. Massive media coverage combined with regular updates is the key to *Boom Beach*’s early success. (Image 8, Appendix 2)

"TV advertising boosted *Boom Beach* into the US top 10 grossing charts." (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

Supercell released and actively maintained only four (4) games and two of them generate over a billion dollars annually. These four games, *Hay Day*, *Clash of Clans*, *Boom Beach* and *Clash Royale* (Image 9, Appendix 2) become worldwide successes and they are continuously on the 10 most downloaded games list. It seems that Supercell is at the peak of success with these four (4) games and with that the company enters the ‘effective growth’ phase.

During the effective growth stage, the corporate brand can be actively built upon as its core values are projecting outwardly (Juntunen et al., 2010). In conjunction with the current stakeholders, additional businesses as well as individuals continuously learn about the company throughout its life. For these new stakeholders, the corporate brand is visible and strong as they learn about its presence from other stakeholders and the
company. Maintaining its ‘planned communication’, in three (3) consecutive years, from 2012 to 2014, the company earned a few public acknowledgements in the media (two (2) in the early growth stage) as well as participated in charitable events. In 2014, T-Media, research and consultancy agency, selected Supercell as Finland's most reputable company in its Luottamus & Maine report (Mäntylä, 2014). From an outsider prospective, during the period from Oct 2013 onwards, starting with additional capital through the merger and acquisition with Softbank and GungHo (secured 51 per cent ownership on Oct 2013 and then increased to 75 per cent) plus generated revenues from the games, plus acknowledgements in charities and awards, Supercell has the resources to grow and increase its work force. It expanded its offices in Tokyo, Soul and Beijing. Its work force also increased three (3) fold (from less than 50 to 180 employees from 30 different countries). Additionally, with its impressive game developing performance, new stakeholders are likewise interested in acquiring the company under their wings. On June 2016, Tencent took over the holdings of Softbank and attained 84,3 per cent shares in Supercell through a merger deal.

Following the chain of events on the time line, Supercell’s growth in this stage is correspondingly consistent with Juntunen et al., (p. 129, 2010) findings. Upon analyzing those events in this stage, the company seems to have developed and maintained a corporate brand accordingly which is derived from its product brands of the four (4) games. However, theoretically speaking, the term “corporate brand” still remains ambiguous as of date. Thus, there is an urgent need for a unified and widely applicable definition or theory on corporate brand in the new corporate brand research paradigm. Furthermore, on account of corporate identity, as a social construct, is subjective to interpretation which can take on different meanings to diverse thinkers such as Aaker (2004); Hatch & Schultz (2003); Kapferer (2008) and Balmer (2010).

For the purpose of this master’s thesis, Balmer (2010) characterizes a corporate brand as “involves the conscious decision by senior management to distil and make known the attributes of the organization's identity in the form of a clearly defined branding proposition” (p. 281). When applying this meaning of a corporate brand, it is plausible to sum up that Supercell fulfils Balmer (2010) definition fully since the data
collected in this study support the fact that senior management makes known the attributes of Supercell’s organization identity in the form of a clearly defined branding proposition, a brand-oriented approach throughout the release of their products (games).

In the effective growth stage, Juntunen et al., (p. 127, 2010) findings reveal that, in corporate brand building activities, a corporation needs to ‘maintain’ those activities and when necessary, ‘develop’ them further. Through the data collected, the case company appears to maintain its corporate identity and corporate brand building activities instead of developing them further as apparent with their strategy of creating a hit game and then supporting it. Because the data collected neither support nor deny their corporate brand strategies due to confidentiality issue, it is unclear whether or not a revision of strategies would be additionally in place. Juntunen et al., (2010) further states that re-defining core values is evident at this growth stage, as a result, this is not evident with the activities of Supercell, although interestingly, their product brands (game brands) re-define their core values as they move from a mobile game developer into the consumer market and start to instill meaning and intangible associations with the game brands such as “social” and “longevity” through developing a stronger personality and relationships with customers who they refer to as “fans”. Juntunen et al., (2010) also suggest the corporation should implement brand-oriented strategies, however, this is evidenced at Supercell as they seem to have a short-term, market-oriented strategy of catering to the hard core gamer masses through different games with ‘for the player’ attitude (Urde et al., 2013) where the game brands are developed and maintained within established core values. In addition to, it is probable that Supercell choose a classic strategy of branding by utilizing their best or leading brand (game brands) for the corporation just as with the ‘Walkman’ by Tokyo Tsuhin Kogyo of Sony (Kapferer, 2008).

“A company coins its identity by focusing on one or two key values (Schwebig, 1985). These are the values, which feed the brand, give it the company’s outlook on the world and the impetus to transform the product category. This ‘source-value’ gives meaning to the brand.” Kapferer (p. 206, 2008)

Supercell is a first class video mobile games developer; it is feasible that they would offer “more than a strictly functional product” (ibid) with a brand that fans can
engage with and always aims to ‘be social and longevity’ to them. Kapferer (p. 206, 2008) affirms that over time the relationship between brand [product] and company would be usually switched around and the company’s “outward image is reflected inside and becomes far more effective in mobilizing the workforce”. The organization is unique in this sense since the entire workforce is all already working under the covers of the products [games] brands, but the corporate company is only known as Supercell.

In brief, at this stage, the corporate brand identity of Supercell is rather pale in comparison to its prominent product brands. Supercell is a weak corporate brand and it is not being strategically leveraged on their corporate culture and vision as part of their value proposition. A solid corporate brand stands behind the company’s offerings, and functions as an endorser or as a driver. Therefore, a corporate brand oriented strategy converts the whole company into a brand, and it has a longer-term focus than a product brand oriented strategy. Long-term benefits can accrue if the branding process is handled properly and the brand becomes more than just a nice logo as well as the “halo effect” where the image and reputation of the product brands influence the corporate brand, and vice-versa.

Nevertheless, the company focuses on the strong products [games] brands and everything is seem to revolve around that, thus the corporate brand identity is being directly shaped by the strong product brand identity. Currently, the [games] products brands are the flagship brands and representation of the company, while “Supercell, the corporate brand” lurks in the background. From the data collected, the company pursues the identity approach to branding. Urde (1997) refers to it as the “brand-oriented approach” where the organization is taken an inside-out perspective. It establishes its brand and core values internally and then communicates or transmits these values outwardly to customers and stakeholders. This concept of brand orientation projects a brand as a resource and strategic hub as it enables the organization to make better strategic decisions and it places a “greater emphasis to the organization’s mission, vision and values” (Urde et al., p. 15, 2013). Aside from the brand oriented approach, the company displays elements of market-orientation as ‘fans’ are directly affecting the brand identity as Mr. Lintunen says,
“… if you’d want to do games for people that want to just experience the game then it makes all the sense to just focus on the brand identity of the game itself…”, indicating a marketing paradigm where these two approaches co-exist and benefit each other through synergies (Urde et al., 2013).

Juntunen et al., (2010) prescribe re-defining core values is a part of controlling the corporate personality. In the case study, its personality can be characterized as a ‘risk taker’, ‘investigator’, ‘innovator’ and ‘expert’. Those qualities are further evidenced by Supercell's flat organization structure without any bureaucracy or process (process transparency and opened-working environment) and each of the game cells (team) is responsible for its own end-user experience through the game developing expertise and showing the entrepreneurial and exceptional drive of the company in a ‘can-do’ corporate attitude.

From the events presented in the time line for this period, the merger and acquisition with Tencent on Oct 2013 fits well with Juntunen et al., (2010) findings. Indeed, Supercell did not only ‘maintain’ its corporate brand building activities, but also further ‘developed’ them (ibid). As a result, it was at this milestone that Supercell’s corporate brand identity was fully formed after its fourth (4) game launch (Clash Royale in Jan 2016), acquired its strength and resonance and started to be strategically leveraged by the company over a fan base that these games acquired as Balmer (p. 281, 2001) asserts “a corporate brand involves the conscious decision by senior management to distil and make known the attributes of the organization's identity in the form of a clearly defined branding proposition”. Additionally, the company’s strategies are revised and new ones are formulated, as expected in this stage, such as the decision to expand their realm of business operation.

“There are actually a couple of different ideas that we’re discussing internally at the moment. They range from investing in other like-minded developers to setting up remote studios in locations outside Helsinki. One of our core values is about giving the very best talent the independence and resources they need to do what they do best. So, we’ve been thinking whether there would be ways for us to
enable also other teams to make a bigger impact by using this philosophy outside the existing Supercell teams.” (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

Mukherjee and Balmer (2008) explain in a corporate brand-oriented strategy, the company systematically communicates its core values and identity to multiple stakeholders. The company continues its rapid growth, characterized by opening offices in Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing and PR events. When view through Bruce and Scott (1987) study, Supercell would also fall within the maturity business stage, as major investments are becoming focused on marketing. Despite its financial prowess and being the survivor after a few mergers and acquisitions (M&A), Supercell continues to be agile, independent and small, to avoid complicated bureaucracy and to remain transparency to keep its competitive edge in games development (Churchill & Lewis, 1983).

“We’re only 190 people. We’re small and highly creative. That’s not the best fit for the public markets which are all about the next quarter’s results,” Mr. Paananen, CEO, continues “Supercell will never go public because that would kill the Finnish unicorn.” (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

Juntunen et al., (2010) suggest that the corporation should also manage their corporate branding relationships by developing new relationships and further maintaining existing co-operative relationships through “management, key customers, [...] and all external stakeholders” (p. 128). Supercell actively engages in finding key strategic partners with leading brand names in various areas of business (licensing, merchandising, etc.); and develop and maintain a relationship with them as their own colleagues with a long-term approach to create win-win scenarios to all partners. In turns, these multiple relationships benefit the game players or ‘fans’ of the corporation from all levels through Supercell new products and brands experiences. In the M&A with Tencent, an Asian internet giant, Supercell upholds its core values and makes clear its corporate brand identity.

“[...] this deal enables us to keep Supercell privately held. That is a better match with our small size and unique culture than being a public company where our concern would be the pressure from financial markets to think short term. However, while enabling us to stay private, the partnership with Tencent provides
us with some of the benefits of being public: as part of this transaction, our employees will be able to sell their shares in Supercell over time (everyone at Supercell is an owner). The total equity value of $10.2 billion dollars also recognizes the value of the phenomenal company that our people have built.”

(Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

In conclusion, as the company reaches its peak after the launch of its fourth (4) games, and enters the effective growth phase, the company appears to strengthen its corporate brand identity by establishing strategic relationships with key stakeholders and intensifying the partnerships. In corporate brand-oriented strategy, the company additionally enlarges its focus to all stakeholders and not just only focusing on its customers.

4.3. Supercell’s product brands

Starting 2007, smart phones are broadly used by consumers, especially after the release of the iPad and the Apple’s App Store™ in 2011, creating big opportunities in the mobile gaming industry. As small tech start-up in an extremely crowded and fast growing game developing market, Supercell wanted to differentiate themselves from their competitors by a branding approach to infuse their products with meanings through intangible and tangible attributes which would later formed well-known international brands. Product branding generates different brand identities between different products (Xie & Boggs, 2006), where the role of product brands is to enhance a product’s differentiation and preference (Knox & Bickerton, 2003). Additionally, in the mobile games industry, Stenbacka (2007) study shows that when the brand is weak, “even a good-quality [mobile] game [...] cannot compensate for the negative impact of a weak brand” (p. 13). Therefore, branding in the mobile games industry can be seen as a precursor to both growth and success.

Based on the empirical data, the case company, Supercell, implements a product/service-brand strategy through their games brands, ‘Hay Day’, ‘Clash of Clans’, ‘Boom Beach’ and ‘Clash Royale’, and it is apparent after the games successes on the
Apple’s App Store™. The corporate brand, Supercell, is concealed behind these games brands. Mr. Lintunen confirms that the company “decided to go fully games first”. As an SME with limited resources (Okopu et al., 2007) and time (Boyle, 2003), there was not any guide or support for the company in ‘how to build a brand’ since much of the existing academic literature are based on large organizations or from well-known brands. The existing theory on building a brand within the SME context is after all limited with little or not any direct relevance which could be applied to the mobile gaming industry, or could be used in analysis of Supercell in various growth stages as defined in Juntunen et al., (2010).

As flagship brands for Supercell, the four (4) products or games, *Hay Day*, *Clash of Clans*, *Boom Beach* and *Clash Royale*, are well-known international games brands by all gamers around the world. With these games, the company is able to create their own roadmap in how to build a brand and shape the brand’s identity. In the interview, Mr. Lintunen reference to animated characters and globally well-known brands such as Super Mario Bros™ of Nintendo as an indication of benchmarking and what the brand wants to be an enduring brand which built around memorable characters. Additionally, Supercell was found on the idea of making the best games for all gamers. For Supercell, their animated characters are the characters in their four (4) available games. Each of the games has its own logo and can also be argued to be an emblem itself, since it “serves to symbolize brand identity through a visual figure other than the brand name” and can also “help identify and recognize the brand” (Kapferer, p. 194, 2008).

4.3.1. Supercell’s brand identity prism

Through the worldwide success of their four (4) games brands, the company grows exponentially in a short span of time, thus it is thought provoking to discover how much the product brand identity of these products impact on the corporate brand identity of Supercell. In order to have a complete understanding of the product brand identity of Supercell; Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2012) is utilized. The Prism allows the understanding and evaluating the combined identity of the four (4) games brands. Illustration 4 displays a representation of the brand identity prism by Kapferer (2012)
based on the findings from interviews of Supercell’s key personnel, secondary data (such as game blogs, player’s feedback and online game community forums) and personal observations. Based on the empirical findings, the elements in the Prism are as clarified below:

**Physique:** *Animated characters, typography, quality game app, consumer products*

Physique is made of noticeable and important salient parts such as the immediate objective features that come to mind when a brand is mentioned such as unique features or even frequent colors and themes used. The physique describes the external elements of a brand, what can be seen and touch. *Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach* and *Clash Royale* are video mobile games; players see these brands as a fun and exciting video mobile games or applications when playing the games. Game play can be achieved through simply a finger swipe movement on the screen of an iPad™ or smart phones. These games have a strong presence in the mobile devices or online game communities as they continue to captivate the players’ interests (long game life) as well as sociability. These game brand characters and typography are in vibrant colors; animated graphics spell out game titles distinctively, and communicate consistently since the start, which creates familiarity and consistency of the brand. The animated characters on these games are the main external and visual representation of the brand physique.
Illustration 4: Supercell’s brand identity prism  
(Adapted from Kapferer, 2008)

**Personality:** fun, sociable/multiplayer, simulative, strategy, exciting, explorative

Personality is the form which the brand conveys its products or services to reveal what kind of a person it would be if it were a human. Brand personality portraits human characteristics of the brand, and they can be real or symbolic. A brand develops the personality by adopting human characteristics as it gradually builds up characters. Personality is an internal and intangible trait of an organization, and vitally important as it fulfils a psychological function. *Hay Day* is a sociable simulate farming game. *Clash of Clans, Boom Beach* and *Clash Royale* are multiplayer strategy games. Personalities associated with these games are the game characters themselves or with other online players, which are fun and exciting or challenging in the games storyline or strategy. There are always new tasks and objectives to achieve in the games which give the game experience enjoyable, fun to play and to eagerly anticipate the next level of in the game.
Culture: transparency, open, speed, passion, zero-bureaucracy, ‘freedom and responsibility’

Culture is the basic values and principles on which a brand builds up its products and communication. According to Kapferer (p.184, 2008), a brand is a culture [and] a brand should have its own culture. Supercell has an open and transparency culture, with the least process, zero-bureaucracy, for speed and passion in a flat hierarchy where the game teams have the “freedom and responsibility” to decide every move in the developing the games and every employee can voice his or her own opinion. The Supercell Model (see Illustration 2) exhibits an ‘upside down’ structure compared to standard corporate culture norms. “There's the feeling of ‘we're all in this together’. It makes sense in our relatively fast-moving and dynamic environment too” says Mr. Paananen, CEO. This is a common entrepreneurial trait in startups where structures are open and free at the beginning, but disperse when the organization grow larger and bureaucratic (Rode & Vallaster, 2005). Supercell executives and employees proudly display the company’s logo by wearing it in the office as well as in public. This also creates a form of unity and pride amongst the organization about their work and showcasing it to others. Creativity flows freely and employees feel good in doing their work. Top quality is central to all process from gaming to the products and experiences because Supercell wants to provide fascinating games brand experience to its fans. In these games, quality and their fans are always the priority and its culture reflects this.

Self - Image: entertaining, sociable, longevity

Self-image is the established connections of inner-self with brands. This facet is another intangible asset which is easily perceived as “I feel” or “I am” (Kapferer, p. 186, 2008; Urde, 2013) which acts as the target audience on one’s own internal self-reflection when engaging with the brand. The games are multiplayer games; they are entertaining and millions of players participate in these games daily. Multiplayer games result in groups and groups facilitate sociability. Since these games continuously stay on the top 10 list, they become part of pop-culture with longevity (long game life). Additionally,
playing these games brings forth positive emotions such as feelings of happiness and laughter.

**Reflection: for everyone, pop-culture, personal values**

Reflection is the target audiences outward mirror or known as “they are” (Kapferer, p. 186, 2008; Urde, 2013). It aims to showcase (or reflect) how a customer would like to be perceived as a result of using a particular brand. These four games have become a global phenomenon and as a part of the pop-culture. The brand’s characters in these games are quite comical with their various skills set and personalities reflecting many types of individuals in society. There seems to be a farmer or a clan member or a soldier in everyone, which makes these games very personal and inclusive brand that speaks to personal values. Some would say that these are ‘just a game’, but to others it’s a way of expressing your personality through the levels and rewards or points achieved. The largest reflection of Hay Day is that it is family-friendly and can be played with the entire family. There are many different characters to fit a family member.

**Relationship: passionate, time, fan-centric**

Relationship represents the way the brand acts, delivers services and communicates to its customers, and defines management’s behavior as it is identified with the brand which, in turns, defines the mode of conduct that most describes the brand. *Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach* and *Clash Royale* have a very unique relationship between their customers. The relationship is profoundly fan-centric. They do not use the term ‘customers’, but use the word ‘fans’. This creates a more personal and emotional connection with the brand, and in turns, increases engagement with the brand. Every game teams (developer teams) is responsible for each game’s end-user experience and actively engage with their fans in on social media in dedicated game communities by responding to all player’s comments and feedback as well as to fix bugs and provide games updates. Mr. Paananen comments:

“The Clash teams are constantly working on ways they can improve and deepen the game – that's why it looks very different today from the game that launched
three years ago. I think our players like that and also appreciate the fact that their feedback can have an impact on what these changes are,” he adds. “There is a great community amongst Clash players and we’re always listening to them and asking what they want from the game.” (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

4.4. Supercell’s corporate brand

In less than two (2) years starting from the date of inception, Supercell has grown from a small startup to a mobile video games powerhouse as their games [products] achieved global success. As laid out on the time line in Figure 6, the company progresses through periods of growth and transitions. These occurrences greatly forged the evolution of its corporate brand and along with the corporate brand identity. However, it is pertinent to make a distinction between Supercell the company and its brand as they both share the same phonetic term, thus, it is even less certain to resolve that Supercell is a corporate brand or a commercial brand. Nonetheless, these assumptions can exist and valid. After looking through the empirical findings from the context, objectives and target of communication, it can be concluded that Supercell is a corporate brand.

Consequently, Balmer (1995, *cited in* Balmer, p.187, 2010) found that “increasingly, institutions will find it difficult to hide behind their product brands with a more astute public wishing to know more about corporations”. In Supercell’s case, the motive to cultivate the corporate brand can be disputed that the corporate brand is not meant to eventually be overshadowed by the games [product] brands. Mr. Lintunen adds:

“Luckily we [Supercell] are such a big brand in some sense because our Supercell’s games are super super popular. People know Supercell but it could be much more well-known itself”. (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

Progressing from a product brand to a corporate brand oriented strategy brings various advantages. Hatch & Schultz (2003) state that the product brand has a relatively short life-span in comparison to the corporate brand since the corporate brand lasts as long as the company. Having a powerful corporate brand allows Supercell to leverage on the values and value propositions that it represents from all facets of the company, and
not just limited to one product or games. Besides strengthening a company’s credibility and trustworthiness in a specific market, leveraging on a corporate brand further allows company to differentiate and to enhance competitiveness in fragmented markets (Aaker, 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

From the empirical findings, it becomes transparent that Supercell is additionally beginning to leverage and develop on their corporate brand as they are entering into eSports (also known as electronic sports). It is a form of competitive (video) gaming, professional (video) gaming, or pro gaming. As a game developer, Supercell is using their corporate logo as their mobile game apps icon, creating visual associations with the corporate brand to reach professional gaming audience at these games conferences. New gamers in these eSports events would become fans of Supercell and recognize the quality and positive associations with the corporate brand of Supercell named titles.

“We’re still very excited about the potential of our games as eSports, particularly Clash Royale, which has already established a presence in that area. I guess we are still trying to figure out our way to do events and also enable competitive play”. (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

According to Aaker (p.10, 2004) Supercell is the endorsing corporate brand that could eventually become an “ultimate branded house” strategy like Disney had used. It would make a lot of sense since Supercell makes reference (i.e. the Supercell Model) and benchmarks itself to Netflix™, and Nintendo™ brands.

“We want to have a brand at some point that is recognized in similar fashion like Nintendo” (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

4.4.1. Supercell's corporate brand identity matrix (CBIM)

The CBIM differentiates itself from product brand frameworks by including ‘competencies’ element and focuses on the internal components of a corporate brand identity. (Urde, 2013) prescribes that “a distinctive theoretical feature of the CBIM is its combination of elements surrounding the brand core and the key correspondences between it and those elements” and “the CBIM uniquely positions the core values and
promise as a beacon to guide the internal and external brand building processes. (p. 758). Moreover, Urde (2013) is significantly able to integrate both marketing paradigms of a market-oriented approach and brand-oriented approach into the CBIM, “the CBIM is in that sense balanced, and reflects the theoretical proposition that those paradigms are different but synergistic” (ibid).

As a result, integrating the empirical findings from the case company into Urde (2013) CBIM, the outcome is represented in the following Illustration 5 below:

Illustration 5: Supercell’s corporate brand identity matrix  (Adapted from Urde, 2013).

4.4.2. Supercell’s corporate brand identity

By describing the corporate brand identity of the case company, it brings forth a general comprehension of ‘what’ the Supercell corporate brand identity actually is. Many organizations are not even aware that they have a corporate brand; therefore they cannot
utilize it for differentiation or to gain a competitive advantage. Thus, the CBIM matrix is the appropriate tool specifically made for identifying the corporate brand identity and helping the company’s management with this issue.

On Supercell’s official website (Illustration 6), it is written “Supercell has brought four games to the market – Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach and Clash Royale”. Combining this statement on its homepage together with the empirical findings, it is plausible to conceive that Supercell is a master or corporate brand and those four games are the product brands. Subsequently, these four games brands are in the form of ‘daughter brand’ which influenced and shaped Supercell’s corporate brand identity. As Kapferer (2008) states “many companies that based their success on product brands have now decided to create a corporate brand in order to make company actions, values and missions more salient and to diffuse specific added values” (p. 27).

![Supercell’s home page](http://supercell.com/en/our-story/)

Nevertheless, Supercell’s corporate brand, which took shape and illustrated in the earlier pre-establishment and effective growth stage sections, shares many common elements found in Supercell’s Brand Identity Prism (see Illustration 4) as well but with
additional elements in accordance to its core values. However, as the company continues to grow, there will be differentiations between the two brands and the separation will be clearer as Supercell is heading into its future plan and re-defining its core values as stated by Juntunen et al. (2010).

Based on the empirical findings, those elements (and their attributes) of Supercell’s corporate brand identity from its CBIM (see Illustration 5) are as described below commencing with the external elements such as the case company’s value proposition to its customers, its relationships between stakeholders and the company’s current position in the market.

**Value Proposition:** *Entertaining, transparent, unbiased, high quality, successful*

Supercell is apparently beginning to leverage and develop on their corporate brand as they are entering into eSports. It is a form of competitive (video) gaming. As a game developer, Supercell is using their corporate logo as their mobile game apps icon, creating visual associations with the corporate brand to reach professional gaming audience at these games conferences. New gamers in these eSports events would become fans of Supercell and recognize the quality and positive associations with the corporate brand of Supercell named titles in which creates value to the customer or ‘fans’. Fans are aware that these products and services are coming from a reputable company which has provided them with continuously on-going great entertainment with consistently high quality games and experiences.

"Our primary focus is on engagement and retention, not revenue or charts," Mr. Paananen continues "[.....]We also believe in focusing on only a limited number of great games instead of a large portfolio". (Mr. Paananen, CEO. Web Interview)

Supercell’s games are free and accessible to all players. These games are unbiased to all players (non-spenders vs. spenders) because they do not force players to make in-app purchases (for gems or points) to get to the next level in the game. Kapferer (2008) asserts that a stronger corporate brand has an influence in how consumers perceive the
company’s product brands, “especially if they share the same name as the corporation or are visibly endorsed by the former” (p. 28). Thus, the essential value proposition of Supercell is that through transparency of process as its strategy, stakeholders receive the best and high quality products and services, regardless of which they are, much like what Netflix™ or Nintendo™ have been able to accomplish with their brand.

“Transparency is very big part of Supercell. We get daily mails of all the metrics of how did games do yesterday compare to a week ago, all the information, the full history how the games I have been doing are available to everybody. That is how we’re motivated; we want good games, successful games and give them long lives so we need to have information” (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

Relationships: Fan-centric, partnerships, good friends, passionate, motivated

Supercell approaches to relationships through their product brands. Their fans are everything to the company. At Supercell, ‘it’s for the fans’ brand. Developers work as a team and everyone in the team is responsible for the end-user experience of that game in which they developed. The active fan-centric focus enables the relationships to be intimate, personal (as good friends) and long lasting. It is the catalyst which excels Supercell ahead of other game brands. The emergence of social media creates a two-way communication between companies and customers. Now brands needs to be available around the clock to provide service and support to their customers, but also to listen and respond to them (ibid). Supercell understands this fact well. They created a dedicated space for ‘fans’ through their ‘www.supercell.com’ official Web page. It is the Supercell community forums (Image 10, Appendix 2) to be readily respond to all ‘fans’ posts and comments or suggestions about their games or services (i.e. downloads and updates). In the CBIM theoretical model, there is an arrow linking the two elements, relationship and culture, which indicates the relationship between Supercell’s fan-centric mindset and their internal culture of not doing what others are doing (the Supercell Model). In turns, this differentiates Supercell from other game developers and to stand out by creatively envisioning ways to provide the best entertaining experience to their fans.

“I would say that the relationship between the company and the players is really important. We [Supercell] wouldn’t be anything if we wouldn’t have players who
are passionate and motivated. And I hope and I think that we are doing a good job of having that relationship between the players and the company.”

(Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

**Position: A [humble] peer-to-peer game developer in Finland**

In the CBIM theoretical model (Urde, 2013), the position element is not identical with the brand positioning definition from Kapferer (2012). According to Urde (2013), position pertains to how the company prefers “the corporate brand to be positioned in the market” (p. 17), and to be perceived by customers and stakeholders. Supercell’s position in the marketplace is a service company because of their products offerings. Supercell sees itself as one of the best game companies in Finland and a peer to other games developer companies. Developers talk to each other and knowledge-share their know-how at social events. One of those popular social events is often organized by the IGDA (the International Game Developers Association) on the first Tuesday of the month in the evening in which Supercell is one of the affiliates. (Image 11, Appendix 2)

“In Finland, game companies they don’t feel threatened by each other but rather they’re like peers and not competitors as I feel. And there is a lot of knowledge sharing between companies so that’s like very normal thing to do . . . Nowadays, of course everybody is kinda wanted to hear the “secret sauce” of Supercell. It’s more complex nowadays.” (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

The Supercell’s CBIM also contains those elements which reflect both external and internal qualities such as a company’s personality, expressions and the core values.

**Personality: risk taker, innovator, investigator, expert**

The corporate personality differs from the product personality in that it should reflect the “values, actions, and words of all employees of the corporation” (Kelly & Richely, p. 76, 2006). From the empirical findings, Supercell, through its employees as a whole, has the personality traits of a risk-taker, innovator, investigator and expert. Due to the company’s flat structure with zero-bureaucracy and a flair for “freedom and responsibility”, developers in each game team make their own decision from starting to
finish during a game’s creation. Thus, they are the risk-taker who bears all the risks and pressures from making to launching the game into the market. As evident in its timeline display presentation (see Figure 6), Supercell’s team already terminated eight (8) games (one was still in its beta phase) and kept only four (4) games. But, when they decided to kill a game, the team “celebrates” the failure over a bottle of champagne and performs a post-mortem to understand “what and why did it happen” and to learn from it (Image 12, Appendix 2). They become the investigator of the failures as well as the successes. Additionally, in game developing, they are not “re-inventing the wheel” and starting things from scratch, instead they focus on innovating new ways on the existing ideas with their expertise in mobile games.

“[…] it is always not the right thing to kinda of re-invent the wheel. You kinda have to re-invent like parts of a big puzzles. Like you have a big thing to do, it is not good to re-invent the whole thing of them, like usually how products are done, it’s not that you’d take something from scratch and never been done before but you actually improve upon something that has been done before. So I think it is usually good to recognize what you should focus on […].” (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

**Expression:** Recognition, storytelling, memorable cells

As Urde (2013) states, the “expression element is concerned with verbal, visual and other forms of identification” (p. 16). The Supercell logo is represented in a square block with the letters SUP, ERC, ELL arranged in three rows against a background of black and white colors (see Illustration 2). It is definitely a thought-provoking and eye-catching visual element. Furthermore, using special characters to create visual symbols to provoke storytelling and instant recognition increases a brand’s qualities (Kapferer, 2008). With its logo, the company successfully created a memorable and attractive image with strong associations to the games in engagement with its fans.

“The idea was a recognizable logo and it was a big discussion about that can you even read it, but, as long as you can recognize this is done by that company and that’s the main point. But the games would still always come first so we wouldn’t have to kinda spill it out this is the company’s name . . . but if you’d do a t-shirt or
 kinda of something, it would look cool and people would want to wear”. (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

**Core (values and brand promise): game services for the widest group of people possible, longevity, game play and social**

Supercell’s core values and promise are ‘to create game services with longevity’ for the widest group of people possible. Simple and fun games play that almost everyone could get into. The sources of strength which they wanted to preserve this longevity are game play and social. These values are the driving force in every game, project and event. Supercell employs the best talent for every position in the company and maintains its zero-bureaucracy promise to stay agile and open for creativity. As a result, these core values and promise locate in the center of Supercell’s CBIM and all other elements (such as value proposition, relationships, position, expression, personality, M&V, culture and competences) only evolve around it. As stated on its homepage:


Furthermore, Urde (2013) asserts that “the importance of a brand core is its capacity to give focus, guidance and coordination in the management of brands” (p. 752). As Supercell expands from the average game players market to the hardcore professional game players market (eSports) with its latest game, Clash Royale, it seems that the core does not change. Most Supercell’s fans are irresistibly addicted in playing the game due its robust bug fixes and attractive updates. Since its inception (Jan 2016), Clash of Clans already received two best games awards, The Small Screen Game of the Year 2016 and The Finnish Game of the Year 2016 ([www.pocketgamer.biz](http://www.pocketgamer.biz))

The bottom layer of the CBIM is composed of internal elements that “relate to the realities of the organization and its values” that make up the corporate brand identity of an organization and considered to be a unique feature of the framework (Urde, p. 751,
Internally, the CBIM identifies Supercell’s mission and vision (M&V), the established culture of the company and its unique competences.

**Mission and Vision: make the best games; create a truly global games company**

Mission and vision are considered to be vital to the corporate brand identity (Urde, 2013). The corporate mission is the reason behind why an organization “exists and what engages and motivates it, beyond the aim of making money” (Collin & Porras, 1998 in Urde, p 751, 2013). If an organization takes a brand-oriented approach (Urde et al., 2013) the mission typically represents a point of departure in the process of defining corporate brand identity (Urde, 1994 and 1999, cited in Urde, 2013). On their official homepage, it states “the mission, of the founders and management, of Supercell, is to acquire the best talent, and to create the best possible environment for them, with zero bureaucracy. A place where the best people could be free to make the biggest possible impact and nothing, including financial incentives, would hinder them.” (http://supercell.com/en/our-story/). In brief, Supercell’s mission is to make the best games out there and they will stop at nothing to make it happen.

De Chernatony & Riley (1998) define brand vision as the component which “specifies the brand’s purpose, its philosophy and view on the world, from which evolves its mission, indicating what the brand needs to do to achieve its vision” (p. 1083). As stated on Supercell’s official Web site, their vision is to find exciting new ways to let everyone on the planet about their games. Through the advancement of technology in smartphones, they realized the lucrative possibility in creating a truly global games company with their core values. A company with the potential of offering hit games in western markets as well as eastern markets like Japan, Korea and China.

**Culture: 'freedom and responsibility’, the Supercell Model**

In theory, the culture element is strongly rooted in the corporate brand identity as an intangible resource. Furthermore, Urde (2013) adds that there “are potentially significant aspects of a corporate culture that influence the nature of the corporate brand identity” (p. 751). Culture can be related to the organizational culture that is predominant...
in all organizations, and the company’s unique competences can be thought of as the company’s capabilities and processes. The inclusion of competence in the CBIM is of added strategic value to management as it relates to the “creation and maintenance of sustainable competitive advantage” (p. 752). Therefore, the empirical findings have already been discussed in earlier section (see Section 4.5.1). Due to Supercell’s unique ability to embrace the “Bottom Up” management style in its flat hierarchy company’s structure, the corporate culture of Supercell is truly thrive in ‘freedom and responsibility’ where the game teams are empowered to make final decisions, and the CEO (on the bottom), is only there to nourish and maintain the culture and environment (see Illustration 3).

“ […] it is the freedom of the cells that kinda creates this environment of not for control. The control of the game is inside the cells and everything else is like there to support it structurally of those cells I would say. Of course, we have to have marketing, we have to finance, legal and those things. It’s mandatory for the company to have those but the purpose is still to serve the game team.”

(Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

**Competences:** Talented developers around the world, passion for the game, games with sociability and long life, work independently

Competence possesses a strategic management value as it relates to the “creation and maintenance of sustainable competitive advantage” (Urde, p. 752, 2013). Supercell is in a prime “real estate location” of mobile games where global predecessor Nokia and Finnish society forged and strengthen the growth of game development as “the Silicon Valley of games in the world” (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017). The core competence of Supercell is its personnel, who are extremely talented and are recruited around the world for their extraordinary skills and creativity in mobile games. From the successes of their games, Supercell attracts best talents to the company as evidenced by the increasing number in its workforce from 15 in 2010 to 210 as of date. Supercell manages its brands very carefully and enjoys its high brand awareness and reputation globally through eSports events and apps stores.
“[I work with] other developers around the world that are really talented and also most of them are becoming really good friends of mine. [the ideal employee should have] the number 1 passion and that kinda professional ability to do stuff really well independently.” (Mr. Lintunen, Interview 2017)

4.5. Summary

Supercell’s corporate brand was just a faint whisper at the pre-establishment stage, partially fit in some criteria in the early growth stage and started to fully develop as a corporate brand when the company entered into the early and effective growth stage. But all along, the corporate brand has been largely concealed behind their games brands of *Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom beach* and *Clash Royale*. Thus, the corporate brand can be viewed as being weak or detached. The company was not even aware that the corporate brand was starting to take shape already in the pre-establishment and then grew larger in early growth stage as Mr. Lintunen says:

“From the beginning when we launched Clash of Clans, I remembered being part of in some senses at least how we want to market the company or the game or both things and we decided to go fully games first because our thinking was the players don’t really care about the company, they don’t really need to care about the company at some senses, all everything”.

However, when defining the brand identity as a source of power as stated by Kapferer (2008), Supercell, at the early growth and effective growth stage, was showing signs of a brand as evidenced by the choice of a good name and strong visual emblems that add values and instill meanings. The Supercell logo presents in square block letters against a black and white background might not have had any special meaning when these colors and form were being chosen at the beginning but they have been some meanings since those colors and block letters format represents simplicity and pure, both which are characteristics and organizational traits unique to Supercell’s core. Through its core competences, Supercell has been offering the best mobile games in the market and diligently maintaining their relationships with the fans to ensure active engagement with the brand. (See Figure 8)
Furthermore, as the empirical findings show, Supercell is continuously making an effort in making associations to its corporate brand (logo) through their games (product). Hence, in theory, it is feasible to determine that the product brand identity of their games is significantly impacting on the corporate brand identity of Supercell. For instance, its logo is visibly shown in their Webpage for the community forums or employees proudly wearing the company’s t-shirt in news releases, to bring forth an identity for the company.

Lastly, those nine elements of the CBIM are keys to identify Supercell’s corporate brand identity. The company can also solidify its corporate brand identity by aligning the various elements in the CBIM in horizontals, verticals and diagonals that crisscross through the core. For example, Supercell’s mission and vision should correlate with its core value and brand promise in order to achieve a market position which compliments to the corporate brand identity. Similarly, its value proposition should be in line with the core values and brand promise to the same extent as the company’s competences in order for both value proposition and competences to be truly connected.

5. DISCUSSIONS

In this section, theoretical and managerial implications of the research study are presented.

5.1. Theoretical implication

The research study finds that in the pre-establishment, early growth and even effective growth stages, Supercell encounters with problems like in any other startups or small businesses as what researchers commonly described as issues with finances (Kirby, 2002), limited know-how (Rode & Vallaster, 2005), resources (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007; Okopu et al., 2007) and time (Wong & Merriles, 2005; Boyle, 2003). In the case study, it would seem to indicate that finances or money (Kirby, 2002), as a primary form of capital investment, to be the greatest threat as well as the catalyst for growth at the pre-establishment and early growth stage (Juntunen et al., 2010) but not anymore in the
effective growth stage. Therefore, capital investment acts as a threshold which the company must cross over in order to get to the next growth stage (Juntunen et al., p. 119, 2010).

As a result, after receiving substantial investment from Accel Partners in May 2011, the company has a new member (Kevin Comolli from Accel Partners) on its board of directors. Then, it had the necessary capital to solve other issues that plague small businesses such as limited know-how and resources. With the new capital investment, Supercell as able to restructure the company strategically and pursue new strategies by changing its business strategy (from PC to tablet/mobile platforms) and investing in intellectual resources such as hiring the best game developers and designers to create the best games while gaining core competencies (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990) which would serve to differentiate them from competition. Consequently, from June 2011 to Aug 2012, Supercell discontinued several games and launched global hits (*Hay Day* and *Clash of Clans*) which catapulted the company into stardom. Therefore, this study contributes an empirically valid theory that capital investment would be the pre-requisite and needed catalyst to progress between growth stages and to pass a crisis point as it provides a small company the means to overcome its operational issues or difficulties.

In 2010, Balmer (p. 194, 2010) predicted that these next 15 years are an exciting time for corporate branding scholars, policymakers and consultants. Corporate branding is a new marketing philosophy since, in writing the case study at this present time, the author had to reflect on some key marketing concepts. For instance, the findings of this case study indicate that while Supercell was building its corporate brand, it integrated and employed both brand-oriented and market-oriented approaches. Urde et al., (2013) anticipate that in modern organizations there is a possibility of joining these two opposing marketing paradigms. These marketing paradigms, despite being different, are interdependent and can be used together (ibid). For this reason, this research study also provides a theoretical validity to the “the market and brand-oriented approaches model” from Urde et al., (2013). In this model, the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM) is built upon and it gives the ability to understand the corporate brand identity of any organization (ibid).
Additionally, a prominent theoretical contribution of the CBIM is that it integrates [credible] existing theory into a single framework (Urde, p. 758, 2013). Still, it is very subjective in terms of deciding how much existing theory should be used to create the framework. While conducting the study, the author found the term “brand reputation” being mentioned in interview. Kapferer (p. 26, 2008) defines brand reputation is formed by familiarity, i.e. “I know it well”, “I use it a lot”, and by brand perception of uniqueness, i.e. “this brand is unique”, “this brand is different”, and “there is no substitute”. This view is similar to Aaker (2004) and it contributes to differentiation (ibid). Nevertheless, this view is not found in the current CBIM matrix. Urde (p. 753, 2013) gives the CBIM external element a value proposition to lead to a favorable reputation (Greyser, 2009), while claiming that image and reputation influence significantly over how corporate brand identity develops (ibid).

Therefore, the author proposes a revised CBIM matrix with brand reputation as an additional element with factors from ‘creating corporate reputations’ introduced in Dowling (2002). Additionally, from more recent and fluid thinkers such as Balmer (2010) who foresees corporate brand reputation as the new identity and brand scape. Further studies into brand reputation, and even more explicitly, adding the corporate brand reputation to the existing CBIM framework from Urde (2013), it would further serve to validate the framework as it is viewed as both of theoretical and managerial importance in understanding and management of the corporate brand identity.

5.2. Managerial implication

This research study aims to identify and describe the corporate brand identity of a successful company from the mobile games industry. The growth and expansion of Supercell into the entertainment industry provides numerous new opportunities as well as challenges for the company. As the result of this thesis work, the management of Supercell will have an overview and understanding of its corporate brand identity through the presentation of the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix. The main objective going forward from there is what to do with the identity, to understand how it works and how to make it stronger (Urde, p. 758, 2013). One suggestion is Supercell derive compelling
marketing strategies that enable the company to leverage its corporate brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2003) in order to gain the halo effect (Kapferer, 2008) from the games’ (Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach and Clash Royale) on the fan base to further strengthen the corporate brand of Supercell.

These game brands (Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach and Clash Royale) have over a billion fans globally, so if Supercell can create the halo effect and transfer the core values of ‘fun’, ‘social’ and ‘longevity’ to its corporate brand strategy, it would substantially expand its corporate brand identity and allow future endeavors by the company. In other words, Supercell will be more easily recognized by consumers as a provider and source of high quality social entertainment and fun. This would further differentiate Supercell from other entertainment brands, as consumers would become to be more aware about what to expect from Supercell products and services. Additionally, consumers may incline to greater reciprocate and be at ease in trying or engaging with Supercell brand experience, products and services, allowing Supercell to reach its vision of creating games with longevity in years to come for the widest group of people possible.

Lastly, the corporate brand identity of Supercell is also being shaped and greatly influenced by the company’s employees from all levels. The findings and structure of this case study would be beneficial for new employees and summer interns at Supercell. The historical account of the company timeline on its events and growth phases would serve as a guide for new and current employees to understand the history of the company and see where the company is currently at. It also allows the new and old employees to better assimilate to the existing corporate culture, to enhance the corporate brand identity and to support the overall company strategy progressing forward.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents a recap of the research aim, draws the main conclusions for the case study, and provides suggestions for future research.
The aim of this paper is to identify and to describe the corporate brand identity of a successful company from the mobile games industry, examining its corporate brand development at different growth stages.

In order to reveal the Supercell’s corporate brand identity, implementing Juntunen et al., (2010) study in growth stages of SMEs as guidelines, the author follows Supercell’s time line in its corporate brand development throughout different growth stages. At the first growth stage (pre-establishment), when Supercell was founded, it was a startup where the corporate brand was non-existent, but according to Juntunen et al., (2010) corporate brand building starts at the pre-establishment growth phase, and there was empirical evidence found along these steps. However, according to definitions of a corporate brand, Supercell did not fulfil the criteria and therefore could still not be considered yet a corporate brand at the time. However, in the subsequent growth stages, starting from early growth, the corporate brand flourished and blossomed alongside with its products brands.

Subsequently, there were some elements of a corporate brand development as evidenced by the choice of a good name and strong visual logotype for Supercell. After the release of their first two successful mobile games, Hay Day and Clash of Clans, the company entered the early growth stage. It was at this stage that Supercell started to further develop its corporate brand, which was strongly being influenced by its flagship and globally successful product brands of Hay Day and Clash of Clans. Due to these games’ success, the company entered the effective growth stage as they were attractive for a few known merger and acquisition and formed new strategies. It was finally at this time that Supercell’s corporate brand started to become stronger and greater developed as it acquired strength and resonance with the release of Supercell’s name related events and intellectual property values of the games. Now is the time for Supercell to strategically starting to leverage its corporate brand, mainly across the audience that the games have developed in order to successfully enter new markets or industries.

Through Supercell’s case study, it is possible to conclude that a strong product brand identity can remarkably influence the corporate brand identity. As shown in the
analysis section, the core values and culture from the Supercell’s product brand identity influenced heavily the corporate brand identity of Supercell and then overshadowing it. From the empirical data, it can be argued and contributed to the theory that in SMEs, when a strong and successful product is developed, it can greatly affect the future development of the company, influencing the corporate identity, the core values and, consequently how the corporate brand identity develops.

To summarize, based on the analysis of the empirical data, firstly, the corporate brand building activities of Supercell was examined in order to find out if it had a corporate brand and at what point in time it developed a corporate brand. Then, to derive the brand identity of its flagship brands, Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach and Clash Royale, the product brand identity prism was used to identify the product brand based strategy where the corporate brand is mostly concealed behind those games brands. The author now has enough evidence to conclude that Supercell’s corporate brand has grown alongside the games brands and that the brand identity of those games has been influencing the corporate brand identity of the company. When applying the CBIM to Supercell, the author succeeds in identifying and describing the similarities that are shared with the product brand identity of those games, but also the differences that are unique to Supercell, the corporate brand identity. The author can also conclude that it is only in recent years that the Supercell corporate brand becomes stronger and diverged from those games brands. Progressing forward with expansion into new markets (eSports for the professional and hard-core gamers), Supercell should align its marketing and branding strategies with the currently revealed corporate brand identity and stay true to its core promise to delight and surprise its fans for years to come. This fan-centric mindset is its source of differentiation and providing the company with a sustainable competitive advantage over its competitors in an overcrowded market, where branding fitness is the norm.

6.1. Suggestions for future research

Firstly, from a strategic brand management perspective and in light of the recent events at Supercell, such as giving to charities or supporting non-profit organizations, it
would be very interesting to see what sort of brand architecture and brand strategy (or specifically in brand reputation) would be used going forward in expanding the corporate brand. The company is moving towards a corporate brand, but it is interesting to see whether they employ more of a house of brands strategy or branded house strategy. So a suggestion would be to investigate Supercell’s future marketing strategies comparing these two brand architectures.

Secondly, in addition, the research of other unique cases could be studied within the same framework by using Juntunen et al., (2010) and Urde (2013) studies. The findings from the research of these cases can be used to see if these findings can be generalized as industry specific or company specific. A first investigation could be to include other mobile gaming companies from Finland such as Rovio, Sumea and Dark Chocolate to find out similarities and differences regarding corporate branding functions within the mobile gaming industry within Finland.

Thirdly, Supercell is a unique case as it is in the process of transitioning itself from a mobile games company into an entertainment brand (Clash-o-rama); it could be rare to find comparative or similar case studies. But becoming an entertainment brand could be focal point of a study, especially entertainment brands that are also character based. The author would suggest studying the corporate brand of Sanrio and how much its flagship brand Hello Kitty has influenced on the development of Sanrio corporate brand identity and whether this process is similar or different than what Supercell is currently experiencing or going through.

Fourthly, the case study research outlines the basic concept of corporate brand identity and corporate brand building functions at different growth stages. Many researchers use different definitions and have multiple opinions in reference to what a brand means and what is meant by the terms corporate brand or corporate brand identity. In future studies, researchers should aim to take a critical branding perspective and contrast how corporate brand identity is viewed from a contemporary perspective by comparing for example Balmer (2008 and 2010) with Kapferer, (2008 and 2012).
Finally, Supercell acclaims to be the first entertainment brand to actively engage with all of their fans on social media. This could become an industry standard, where other companies follow suit and benchmark to Supercell. Therefore, it is called for an examination of Supercell’s current social media strategy where attention is paid to the research area of collaboration and brand co-creation with fans or users of the brand.
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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: The case study interview guide (questions asked only if needed)

Introduction:

1. Where do you come from, which languages you speak, what is the working language at Supercell?

About Supercell:

2. How would you describe Supercell? What is Supercell to you? In your opinion, what is the perception which stakeholders and fans have about Supercell?
3. What is your favorite thing about Supercell?
4. Why did you choose to work at Supercell? Did you know about this company before you applied for the job?
5. What motivates you to create the company Supercell? Is it financial rewards or benefits?
6. In your opinion, what is an ideal employee at Supercell?
7. How was the name Supercell chosen? How was the Supercell square block logo created? Is there any significance or an intended purpose?
8. Were there reasons why Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach and Clash Royale are more well-known brands than Supercell?
9. How do you create the brand awareness for Supercell using the company logo?
10. How well do you think your current fans would recognize the 4 games (Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach and Clash Royale) brand?
11. What are the perceived benefits in making your existing fan base familiar with these 4 games brands?

A. Core Values
12. What would you say Supercell stands for? Quoting from your website “…Our dream was to create game services with longevity like that. And we wanted to create them for the widest group of people possible. …The two core pillars around which we wanted to build this longevity would be game play and social.”

13. How can you explain the mission of Supercell? What are the values that stand behind its business? How would you describe your company logos (Supercell and the 4 game brands)? How they were created? What do those logos stand for?

14. What does Supercell’s promise to its fans? What is important to Supercell??

B. Mission & Vision

15. What kind of value could a clearly defined M & V bring to the company?

16. How or Do you incorporate the M&V into your daily work?

17. What drives the company, beyond the aim of making a profit? Is it still your mission to become the best game developer with games that people play for years? Where do you see the company to be in the next five years? Doing what?

18. Please explain about the 3 reasons to kill Gunshine (not deliver the product vision, what is the product vision?)

C. Culture

19. In your own words, how would you describe ‘the supercell organization model’? (Ref. http://supercell.com/en/our-story/) “Our organizational model is optimized for speed and passion, not for control”.

20. How would you describe working at Supercell?

21. On your website, the dress code seems to be informal or employees wear a few Supercell logo t-shirts in the work place. Why is that? Supercell is a SME (Small and Medium-size Enterprises) with 150 plus employees, does it feel like it? Or do you consider yourself as a corporation? As a Finnish company, do share Finnish culture traits in the office or multi-cultural?

D. Personality
22. If Supercell were a person, which 3 characteristics would you use to describe it? (Exhibit 1)
23. If you had to compare some human characteristics or qualities to Supercell’s games brands character, what would they be?

E. Expressions

24. How would you describe Supercell? Aesthetically (something beautiful or ugly)? (Exhibit 2)
25. Does Supercell have a unique or special way to communicate to the mobile game market? If yes, what is it? If no, why not?

F. Value proposition

27. What is Supercell’s greatest asset?
28. What is your favorite Supercell’s product? What are the facts or events in the company’s history that you are proud of?
29. What could Supercell do for you (as the employee)? For a fan?
30. Why do people play your games instead of others? What is your value proposition for these games? How do you want your value proposition to appeal to your fans (and stakeholders)? What does Supercell do better than others?

G. Relationship

31. Who would you say that you work daily with?
32. Which relationship is most important for Supercell?
33. What kind of relationship does Supercell maintain with its ‘fans”? What is the relationship with your stakeholders? How important are these relationships to Supercell?
**H. Positioning**

34. How would you compare Supercell to one of your competitors (for example, Rovio)?
35. Where does Supercell see itself in 5 years? What do you hope to be recognized for and known for amongst your fans? Do you want to be the best selling or the most grossing mobile games developer company?

**I. Competences**

25. What makes Supercell better than other mobile gaming developers?
26. What makes you stand out from other game developers and companies? Are the human factor (fans, employees) important or is the game more important? Where are most of the employees of Supercell from? What does Supercell do better than any other companies right now? Why would someone want to work for Supercell?

**Direct/closing questions to use at end of interview**

26. Where would Supercell be in 5 years? Remain as a mobile game industry or expand into other industry like investment, charity, education, etc.?

*Interview transcripts available upon request*

**Exhibit 1: Brand Identity Personality traits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement-oriented</th>
<th>Exciting</th>
<th>Intelligent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adventurous</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>Pro-active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Problem solver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careful</td>
<td>Glamorous</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charming</td>
<td>Handsome</td>
<td>Rational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheerful</td>
<td>Hardworking</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>Sincere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool</td>
<td>Humble</td>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>Young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daring</td>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exhibit 2: Brand Identity (as visual image)

1. Expert
2. Businessman
3. Charming
4. Risks taker

5. Innovator
6. Best friend
Appendix 2

Supercell’s personnel

Image 1: Ilkka Paananen, CEO and Mikko Kodisoja, CD (Source: pocketgame.biz)

Image 7: Supercell in Espoo, Finland (Source: www.finest2011.com)
Supercell’s products (games)


Image 6: Clash of Clans  
(Source: http://supercell.com/en/our-story/)

Image 8: Boom Beach  
(Source: http://supercell.com/en/our-story/)

Image 10: Supercell community forums  (Source: https://forum.supercell.com/)
What is IGDA Finland?

IGDA Finland is the local Finnish chapter of IGDA, the International Game Developers Association. IGDA is a non-profit professional society that is committed to advancing the careers and enhancing the lives of game developers by connecting them with their peers, providing professional development, and advocating on issues that affect the developer community. Go to [www.igda.fi](http://www.igda.fi) to learn more.

In 2017 the Finnish Game Cluster (IGDA Finland, Nuuggesoo Finland and Polhvitie 7) received the Internationalization Award of the President of Finland. IGDA Finland has also been recognized as one of the most efficient and fastest-growing

Image 11: the International Game Developers Association  
(Source: [www.igda.fi](http://www.igda.fi))

Image 12: A champagne celebration at the office  
(Source: [http://supercell.com](http://supercell.com))