TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

School of Business and Governance

Department of Business Administration

Elisabeth Moborg

# CREATIVE SMES' APPROACH TO CORPORATE BRANDING - CASE STUDIES FOODY ALLEN, ROCKSERI AND TWENTYONE

Bachelor's Thesis

Programme International Business Administration, specialisation marketing

Supervisor: Laima Gerlitz, PhD

Tallinn 2020

I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis/paper independently

and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors

have been properly referenced and the same paper

has not been previously presented for grading.


The document length is 10,570 words from the introduction to the end of the conclusion.


Elisabeth Moborg ……………………………

*(signature, date)*

Student code: 166301TVTB

Student e-mail address: contact@elisabethmoborg.com


Supervisor: Laima Gerlitz, PhD:

The paper conforms to requirements in force


……………………………………………

*(signature, date)*


Chairman of the Defence Committee:

Permitted to the defence


…………………………………

(*name, signature, date*)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# ABSTRACT

As much as creative 'knowledge workers' have proven as the key asset in building a successful company in the creative industry, the strategic relationship between creativity and control in the ongoing brand management process remains uncertain. While the corporate management research has focused mainly on the processes of large corporations, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), especially in the creative industry of Finland, have remained in the shadow of researchers' efforts.

The purpose of this research is to describe the meaning of corporate branding and the approach to corporate brand management in practices of successful small and medium size creative enterprises and further explore if and how design thinking is integrated to the corporate culture as a brand management tool.

The study is framed to researching corporate branding from the perspective of three creative SMEs operating in Finland. The study aims to answer what approaches creative businesses have towards corporate branding, what practical operations the businesses undertake to build their corporate brands both internally (resource-based view) and externally (stakeholder-based view), what benefits the companies incorporate in a strong corporate brand and how the concept of design management is perceived. The study was conducted as a qualitative case study and the approach is descriptive. The materials used were interviews, observation and secondary sources such as journal articles and videos. The material analysis was implemented with thematising and typology.

Keywords: Corporate branding, organisational culture, creative industries, strategic brand management, design thinking

# INTRODUCTION

During the past years a shift in the marketing emphasis has been seen evolving further from product brands to the direction of comprehensive corporate branding.

Operating in the creative industry can be challenging to manage; every project may vary and require renewed project management approaches which in turn requires design thinking, and the level of control in a day-to-day creative setting has to be optimal to maintain both creative worker's workflow and stakeholders' trust in the long run. The challenges have existed since art and creativite services were first commercialized, but the diversity of creative supply has grown hand in hand with the demand for creative products and services, pushing these companies to continuously refine and re-think their practices to stand out from the crowd.

The aim of this paper is to gain insight on the branding of successful creative organizations in practice, to explore what happens behind closed doors to achieve a strong corporate brand in the competitive creative industry, and what meaning is given to a corporate brand in the case companies. This study helps to bridge the gap of understanding these dynamics by providing case study-based qualitative data on the topic.

The paper examines the approaches towards corporate branding taken by three selected creative SMEs operating in Finland, how they manage the resource-based and stakeholder-based actions and whether design thinking as a management tool plays a role in the corporate branding process. The research indicates what type of brand building practices have been proven viable by the case companies and thus by comparison it can provide new viewpoints and give guidance to existing or upcoming businesses in similar or other creative fields. Corporate brandings' connection to creative small and medium sized enterprises in Finland specifically has not been directly researched prior to this study.

Supporting the research, the author introduces Balmer's 6C model of corporate marketing and the Danish Design ladder. Research in the thesis is qualitative and is based on case studies with three creative companies from different creative sub-fields. Based on the research results and the theoretical background presented in the paper, the author discusses the corporate branding approaches taken by the case companies.

The stimulus for this thesis dates back from the author's personal interest and enthusiasm towards creative entrepreneurship and ways of managing creative environments. The author has practiced as a creative design freelancer and has plans to establish a creative company within the field of visual design in the future. That being said, the author conducted the study with high passion for gaining understanding on the topic from the perspective of the researcher.

The main research questions are:
1. How creative SMEs approach corporate branding in their integrated organisational culture and strategy?
2. What activities and attitudes creative companies undertake in their daily operations to manage the internal (resource-based) and external (stakeholder-based) environments and factors that affect the corporate brand?
3. How creative SMEs incorporate design thinking as a tool in their branding strategies?

The thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter incorporates theoretical background of the main concepts embraced in the research based on secondary data from previous academical research. The second part introduces the reader to the methodology of the research, the research subjects, data collection and analysis, and reliability and ethics. Finally, the third chapter presents the findings and lastly the author provides a conclusion and answers the research questions.

# 1. CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRY

This chapter introduces the reader to the main concepts and theories around the research, firstly by explaining what the creative industry means in general, and further by introducing the reader to some of the essential branding concepts within the industry. Design thinking and service design play important roles in the branding activities especially in creative organizations, and the Danish Design Ladder helps to grasp the nature and level of the beforementioned activities inside an organization. To understand how creative companies undertake their individual paths amongst their competition it is important to also consider the strategic brand management activities in practice, both from the internal and the external perspective, for which the Balmer's corporate marketing mix offers comprehensive points of reference.

## 1.1 Creative industry

As described by Gotsi (2000), "the creative industry comprises a diverse range of sectors, including advertising, architecture, design, software developers and other business entities that produce novel and appropriate ideas, processes, products or services to tackle clients' problems or opportunities identified".

It has been acknowledged that creativity is an important source of competitive strength within organisations in the creative industry (Cook 1998) and the main determinant for developing successful, well-reputed corporate brands (Sutton & Kelley 1997). According to Powell (2007), "creative organisations such as architectural practices, design consultancies and advertising agencies rarely engage in formal marketing communication activities as a means of managing their corporate brands and enhancing corporate reputation. They therefore mainly rely on more informal, internal mechanisms for enhancing creativity in their work in order to build a reputation for their creativity and hence strengthen their corporate brand".

As heterogeneous as these creative industries are, researchers and practitioners identified the conflict between creativity and control to be a fundamental issue in all of them (Sutton 2001). According to Eikhof & Haunschild (2006), "creative work is reported to be spontaneous, unpredictable and following no strict rules, whereas interference with the market brings about the need to manage, plan and organize processes of creative production". Powell (2007) describes the common issue in many small and medium size creative organisations to be the evolving nature of the organisational identity and brand as the company grows, where both are often seen to be in a state of ongoing flux.

Research by Ensor *et al.* (2001) revealed that employees may in fact only have a vague understanding of a creative organisation's vision due to rapid growth, structural changes and changes in ownership. Some have suggested that due to the increased levels of complexity and ambiguity, exceptionally high levels of management skills are needed within knowledge-based organisations. In this context Powell (2007) concludes that the individual qualities of the creative employee, the approach or methods used by owners and managers, as well as the contextual environment around them, are all seen as significant elements for the creative process and output.

Eikhof & Haunschild (2006) discuss the dependency of creative industries on artistic motivation as their primary resource for economic production and suggest that the tensions have to be bridget at individual, organizational and field level. Art as a sphere of aesthetic performance in its own right deliberately negates economic market orientation. It thrives not only on being art for art's sake, but also on being non-economic (Bourdieu 1999).

Within these industries, many of the creative employees can be thought of as 'knowledge workers', meaning "professional or expert workers who use non-tangible inputs, such as intellect, to specifically produce a creative output" (Powell 2007). Powell (2007) explains that "knowledge worker loyalty is often to the expertise rather than the employer or any other stakeholder group, and the expertise they offer often leads to a high level of autonomy and discretion over the design and execution of their daily work and tasks". According to Gotsi (2000), creative organisations need to recognise the creative output of their employees' as their key asset towards successful brand building and hence should aim to provide their employees with the appropriate environment for enhancing creativity in their work. And, while companies in the Creative Industries rely heavily on the creativity that is ingrained in their employees and freelancers (Küng 2007; Hotho

& Champion 2011), strengthening the individual competences will impact the firm's efficiency, the organizational innovation capabilities and the corporate strategy (Doyle 1995; Soosay 2005).

According to Ensor, Cottam, & Band (2001), "the approach taken by the creative agencies in building their working environment may also be appropriate for organisations in the 'new knowledge-based economy'. These organisations are generally relatively small service-oriented businesses, employing a young workforce faced with a dynamic and fast-changing environment. To stay abreast of these changes, they will have to utilise explicit knowledge to create new products/services and processes on a continual basis and exploit communities of practice to manage each new development." (p.147-155)

### 1.1.1 Design thinking as a brand management tool

Design thinking is generally considered as the ability to combine empathy, creativity and rationality to analyse and fit solutions to particular contexts (Wrigley & Straker 2017). Design management, in contrast to the term design thinking, is described as the ongoing management— and leadership —of design organizations, design processes, and designed outcomes (Cooper, Junginger & Lockwood 2009). Designers and designerly methods are nowadays increasingly being called on to contribute in restructuring and shaping company strategy, brand strategy and communications; formulating new or improved business models and visions; as well as in driving organizational change and strategic renewal (de Mozota 2003). According to de Mozota & Kim (2009), the design-driven companies lionized in the design management community understand design as a resource and a way in which to build sustainable competitive advantage.

Design has for decades been about products and brand. In today's competitive marketplace, however, that perspective is too narrow. Design, now, must illuminate a broader and more strategic range of organizational activities (Cooper *et al.* 2009). According to Topaloglu (2017), while the more traditional roles for design inside businesses have been largely limited to the design and development of products and services, especially over the last decade, the roles for design have broadened towards more upstream activities and responsibilities concerning the overall business context, strategy and organization (Topaloglu 2017).

While design thinking has its roots in manufacturing, its focus developing through marketing and branding products, design management is changing its course from one of *designing as managing*

to one of *managing as designing*. In this context, design thinking focuses on the characteristics of a problem. This change is strongly supported by IDEO (a design innovation consulting firm) and the Stanford D-school (Institute of Design at Stanford University), where Design Thinking is conceptualised as a specific way that non-designers evaluate and use design methods (Wrigley & Straker 2017).

Table 1. Historical development of Design Management

| Period | Main Perspective | Design Role | Design Management Focus | Cases |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1940's to 1950's | Design as function | Product quality | None | AEG, Olivetti |
| 1960's to 1970's | Design as style | Quality communication | Project management | Alessi, Braun |
| 1980's to 1990's | Design as process | Innovation | NPD innovation management | Philips, Sony |
| 1990's to 2000's | Design as leadership | Creativity strategy | Brand | Apple |
| 2000's to now | Design thinking | New business model | Creative organisation | IDEO |

Source: de Mozota & Kim, 2009

The table above presents the historical development of design management, compiled by de Mozota & Kim (2009), and it categorizes the current focus of design management under a "creative organisation"- label, which was initially presented by IDEO as mentioned above.

De Mozota & Kim demonstrated that there are two ways to build a company's competitive advantage through design. One way is through design as an external competitive advantage —that is, strategy as "fit" (with the external environment or market), referred to in this paper as the stakeholder view. This view of design is reactive—the vision of the company's potential with regard to its competitive environment. Consequently, it is a passive vision of design's strategic value. The other way is to consider design as a core competency or as a sustainable competitive

advantage. This approach built on another theoretical framework of strategy—the resource-based view (de Mozota & Kim 2009).

It appears that design thinking provides managers with a new way to think of new products and services and about ways of designing them (Cooper *et al.* 2009). Cooper *et al.* (2009) conclude that design thinking applied to business strategy and business transformation involves the visualization of concepts and the actual delivery of new products and services. According to Lockwood (2010), businesses need to develop their own design culture by applying design leadership and applying effective design management practice, in order to produce effective design and achieve business results. Only then will the idea of design as a business resource achieve its true power as a means of reaching business objectives.

### 1.1.2 Service design in service branding

According to Balmer (2001), in recent years, reference to the "corporate brand", or what is sometimes termed "service branding" (Balmer 1995; De Chernatony 1999) has replaced reference to "corporate identity".

Branding is often described as a challenge in the services sector. According to Samli and Frohlich (1992), irrespective of the fact that the service organisation may have developed a well conceived positioning for their corporate brand, the brand's successful positioning depends on the careful attention to the role the staff play in producing and delivering the service. Powell (2005) points out that it is important to realise that 'moments of truth' service encounters and the interactions with clients are likely to have an impact on the corporate brand. Fast-moving consumer goods brands often focus on brand-building activities, whilst services organisations need to decide whether to build the brand on a specific product or on the corporate identity (Papasolomou & Vrontis 2006). According to Papasolomou & Vrontis (2006) there is a need to instill a customer-focused service culture, which is a prerequisite for delivering consistently high-quality services and for building successful corporate service brands.

De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1999) propose that "the success of service brands depend on carefully nurtured relationships between the employees and customers, which develop staff's and consumers' respect for certain functional and emotional values of the brand". Empirical analysis by Schneider and Bowen (1993) has shown that, not only are the actions of employees

fundamental to a high-quality delivery of the service, but also that the morale of staff influences consumer satisfaction with a service brand. Papasolomou & Vrontis (2006) conclude that the implication of the abovementioned information is that today's managers must ensure that every employee in all parts of the organisation is involved in the delivery of quality throughout the internal customer supplier chain.

### 1.1.3 The Danish Design ladder

The Danish Design Ladder, developed by the Danish Design Centre (Kretzschmar 2003), is a four-step model used to measure the level of design activity in Danish businesses, based on their attitudes to design. The higher up the ladder, the greater the strategic value that design has within the company (Kretzschmar 2003). Wrigley & Straker (2017) explain, that when used as a framework, the ladder aims to demonstrate the extent to which design can enhance creativity, innovation and competitiveness. Through design intervention programmes, the value of design is questioned, challenged and slowly shifted further up the ladder over time. In other words, the four steps illustrate four stages of design maturity (Wrigley & Straker 2017):
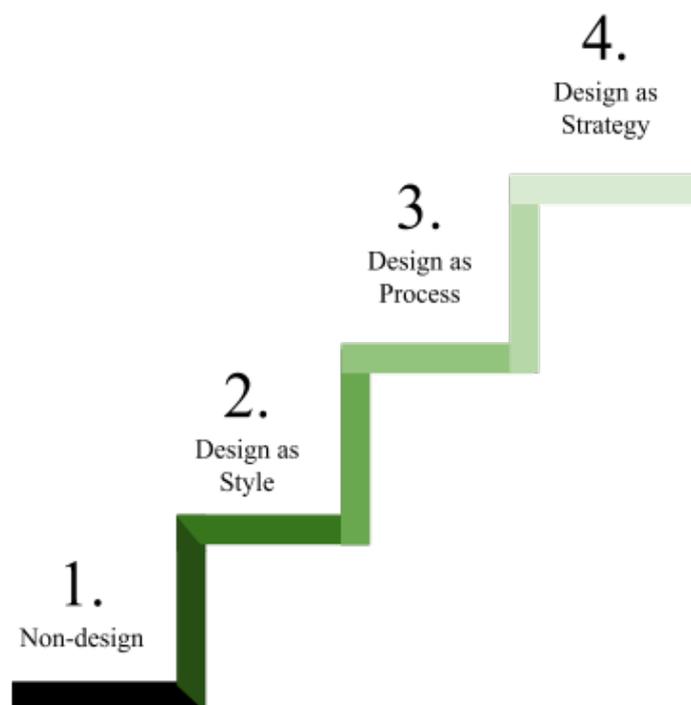


Figure 1. Danish Design Ladder (modified from Kretzschmar, 2003)

Wrigley & Straker (2017) explain the meaning of each step of the ladder as follows. A company is assessed on the first step, "Non-design", in cases where the company simply has no tangible approach to design. A step upward the ladder, "Design as Style" considers the relevant aesthetic decisions such as style, appearance and ergonomics used in the company. The third step, "Design as Process", is considered as a process or method in product or service output, only embedded in the initial stages of development; design solution is procured externally and is adapted to the requirements of the end user, using a multidisciplinary approach. To be assessed on the fourth and highest step, "Design as Strategy", design must be an integral part of a company's continuous renewal of their business concept as a means of encouraging innovation - the process is fused with the company's key objectives, and plays a role in every stage of development. (Wrigley & Straker 2017)

## 1.2 Strategic brand management

The corporate brand is not just about creating a new campaign, ad or logo, but rather the firm's overall strategic positioning in the marketplace based on the company and market beliefs and values. Especially, companies need to draw on the rich resources that are centralized in their organizational culture and make it an integrated part of the effort to build a strong corporate brand. The fundamental question in the field of strategic management is how firms achieve and sustain competitive advantage (Teece, Pisano & Shuen 1997). In the hyper competitive, knowledge-driven economy of the 21st century characterized with consumer sophistication, the need for companies to differentiate themselves from the competition by adopting strategically different approaches and methods is crucial.

Teece *et al.* (1997) find different approaches to strategy view sources of wealth creation and the essence of the strategic problem faced by firms differently. According to their research, the *competitive forces framework* sees the strategic problem in terms of industry structure, entry deterrence, and positioning; *game-theoretic models* view the strategic problem as one of interaction between rivals with certain expectations about how each other will behave, whereas *resource-based perspectives* have focused on the exploitation of firm-specific asset (Teece *et al.*1997). Further, according to Keller (2000), a strong corporate branding strategy can add significant value in terms of helping the entire corporation and the management team to implement the long-term vision, create unique positions in the marketplace of the company and its brands,

and to unlock the leadership potential within the organization. Hence a corporate branding strategy can enable the corporation to further leverage on its tangible and non-tangible assets leading to branding excellence throughout the corporation (Keller 2000). The field of strategic management is avowedly normative. According to Teece et al (1997) it seeks to guide those aspects of general management that have material effects on the survival and success of the business enterprise. It can be concluded that the choice of corporate branding as a strategic tool has impact on the competitive market.

Brand and effective brand management are integral part of the strategic marketing management. Branding today, as a marketing tool has been recognized as a source of sustainable strategic competitive advantage tool in the organization.

Further, innovation projects must be secured by letting the corporate brand act as a heuristic – an everyday rule of thumb. According to Urde (1999), adhering to this brand-oriented management logic can help ensure that a strategic beacon for decision making is always readily accessible. The extent to which the brand can successfully act as such a heuristic will always rely on a commonly shared and sound interpretation of the brand platform as a whole (Schultz & de Chernatony 2002).

Shedding light to situational intelligence, which means combining the traditional situational awareness with the collective intelligence of those at the center of the situation, Nedergaard & Gyrd-Jones (2013) conclude that situational intelligence depends on the cultivation and pervasiveness of the brand throughout all organisational layers. Further, this should preferably start with top management embracing the brand as a strategic resource communicating about how decisions should be made within such a brand-oriented logic, creating the transparency and clarity needed to set an example for functional or divisional directors to follow through for instance powerful narratives as mentioned above (Nedergaard & Gyrd-Jones 2013).

### 1.2.1 Corporate organizational structure

Various concepts about corporate-wide marketing (corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate image, corporate reputation, and corporate communications) have captured the imagination of scholars and practitioners since the 1950s (Balmer, J. M., & Greyser, S. A. 2006, p.2). According to Ries (1998), a brand is a singular idea or concept that a product owns inside the mind of the prospect (p.34). Above all, a powerful brand offers the company defence against fierce competition (Papasolomou & Vrontis 2006, 299). In fact, Ajike (2015), believes a strong corporate

brand is more powerful than any sales and marketing tool or technique available (p.25). Balmer (2001) discusses that the acquisition of a corporate brand has been identified as an objective of corporate identity management (Balmer 2001).

Different conceptual frameworks for corporate branding have emerged from marketing, corporate and organizational identity studies. One of them is the corporate marketing mix developed by Balmer (2006), which identifies six aspects of the organization that serve as building blocks for a strong corporate brand.



**CHARACTER**
(Corporate identity)
*"What we indubidably are"*

**COMMUNICATION**
(Corporate communication)
*"What we say we are"*

**CULTURE**
(Organisational identity)
*"What we feel we are"*

**COVENANT**
(Corporate brand)
*"What is promised and expected"*

**CONSTITUENCIES**
(Corporate stakeholders)
*"Whom we seek to serve"*

**CONCEPTUALISATIONS**
(Corporate image/reputation)
*"What we are seen to be"*
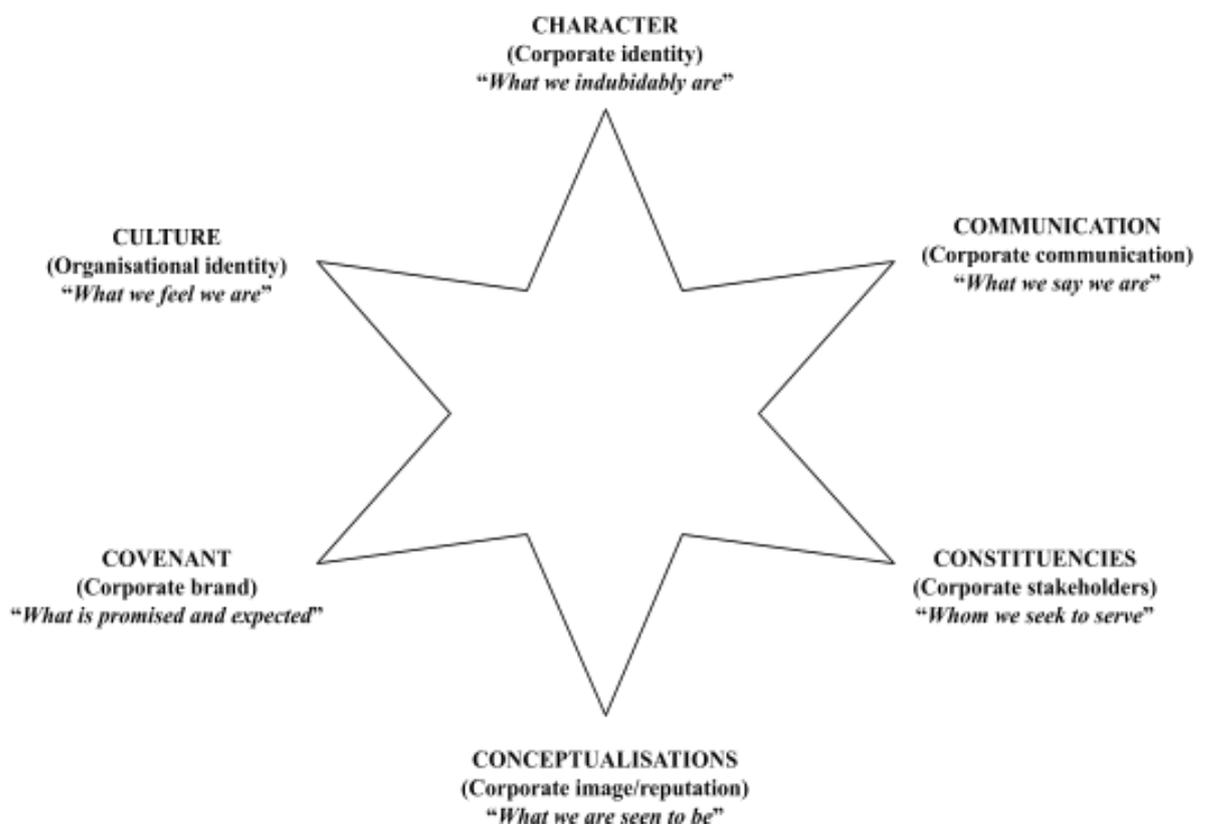
Figure 2. Corporate marketing mix (Adopted from Balmer, 2006)

According to Balmer (2001), "corporate brand involves the conscious decision by senior management to distil and make known the attributes of the organisation's identity in the form of a clearly defined branding proposition." He states that this proposition underpins the organisational efforts to communicate, differentiate, and enhance the brand vis-a-vis key stakeholder groups and networks (Balmer 2001). Further, a corporate brand should be seen as more than a product or service brand but rather a powerful branding platform for creating, building and approving a

company's market offering and portfolio or products and services now, and in the future (Ajike 2015).

Melewar, Gotsi & Andriopoulos (2012) conclude three characteristics of corporate branding; firstly, corporate branding needs to engage stakeholders to co-construct brand meaning and influence branding strategies yet maintain some needed degree of coordination and consistency; secondly, corporate branding results from and manifests itself at both the organizational and the individual level; and thirdly, corporate branding is a task of dynamic rather than static alignment.

A bibliometric analysis by Fetscherin & Usunier (2012) identified seven core research streams related to corporate branding and:

1. product, service and sponsorship evaluation;

2. corporate and visual identity;

3. employment image and application;

4. corporate crime;

5.financial performance;

6.brand extension; and

7. corporate image. (Fetscherin & Usunier 2012, p.747)

It has been recommended that organizations should invest in effective corporate branding to enable the organization the ability of enhancing their position in the competitive industry (Ajike 2015). In this regard, the corporate brand is regarded as playing a key strategic role in developing the company and its brands (Hatch & Schultz 2003). Ajike also claims that powerful corporate branding can equip most any new product or service with instant credibility and value that cannot be reproduced with any sort of product-focused marketing campaign (2015).

Schultz (2005) suggests that corporate branding is explicitly linked to processes of organisational change simply because of its strategic nature within the organisation, that is, corporate branding results in the need for organisational innovation. For the reasons mentioned above and echoing previous research, corporate branding should be a main priority for any company whether it's small business or a large corporation in any market and industry. Despite the increasing interest in corporate branding, an examination of the literature by Melewar *et al.* (2012) discloses that several important issues in this debate remain largely unexplored.

Over recent years, marketing researchers have begun to focus on corporate concerns to a greater degree than before. Along with such development has been recognition of the importance of employees and, more importantly, the importance of corporate culture. According to Balmer (2001), as with other scholars, the question of culture has confronted marketing scholars with important epistemological and ontological issues. As described by Papasolomou & Vrontis (2006), "the corporate culture defines the core organisational values and subsequently, encourages and endorses preferred forms of staff behaviour". As argued by for example, Schultz and Hatch (2006), corporate brands require a cultural foundation within the organisation. According to de Chernatony (1999), "it has been argued that culture is not something management can rigidly control, but rather is a context within which employees interpret a brand's identity". De Chernatony discusses the differentiation paradigm of culture, and how it is likely that there will be several subcultures in a firm.

### 1.2.2 Brand building using internal and external views

With the term 'internal view the paper refers to a resource-based view, and with the term 'external view' the paper refrs to a stakeholder-based view.

As noted by de Mozota & Kim (2009), design managers, designers, and design educators, when pleading for strategic design, should think about how they define their corporate strategy. Is it strategy as fit, or strategy as a resource-based view? As we see now, according to design management has been moving from considering design as an external competitive advantage (fit with the external environment) to also thinking of design as an internal, sustained competitive advantage (a resource or a core competency) (de Mozota & Kim 2009). But what about internal and external brand management?

The resource-based theory of competitive advantage was first developed by Wernerfelt in 1984 and was elaborated by Helfat and Peteraf in 2003. A resource refers to an asset or input to production (tangible or intangible) that an organization owns, controls, or has access to on a semi-permanent basis. Prahalad and Hamel argue that information based invisible assets, such as technology, customer trust, brand image, corporate culture, and management skills, are the real resources of competitive advantage, because they are difficult and time-consuming to accumulate and difficult to imitate, and they can be used in multiple ways simultaneously (de Mozota & Kim 2009).
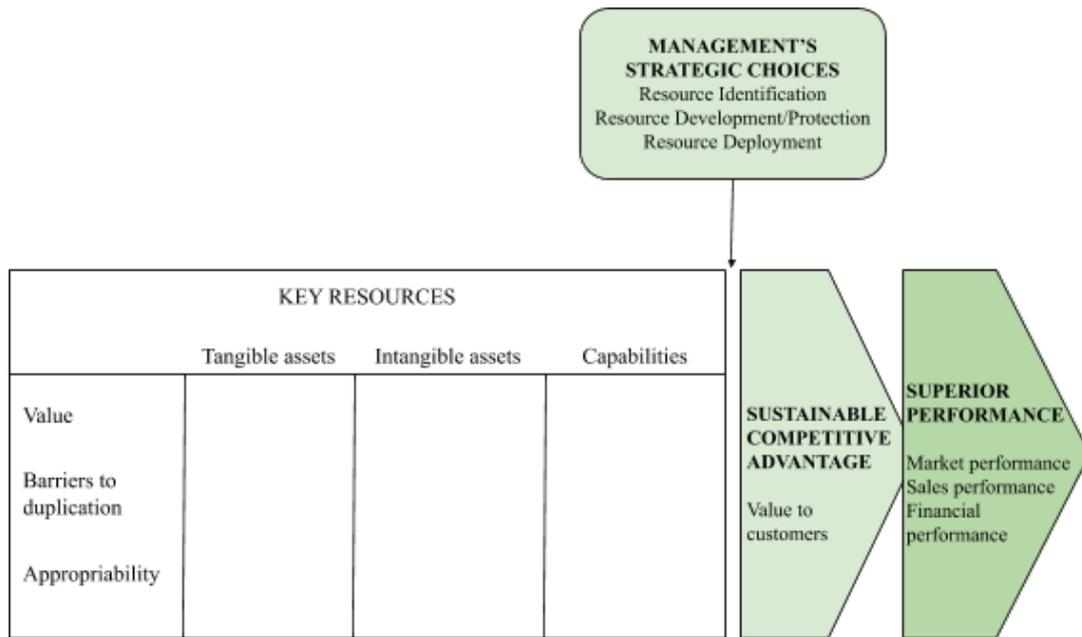
Figure 3. The resource-based view of a firm. (Adapted from Fahy, 2000)

Figure 3 above presents the theory of a resource-based firm, by including a table where key resources are assessed, and from there depending on the strategic choices undertaken by the management, creating value for the customers and further achieving superior performance in the market and financially.

According to Powell (2007), creative organisations, for one, rely heavily on their own employees and internal processes for enhancing creativity, which in turn enhances their creative reputation and strengthens their organisational brand. For design managers, Powell explains that simultaneously, the resource-based view means valuing design skills as rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable— and this is in addition to the value of design outputs (2007). De Mozota & Kim (2009) note that within a strategic long-term vision, design management can also be used as an efficient trigger by capitalizing on new knowledge after each design project, and by taking a process view to change management's view of design management.

In high-velocity markets, organisations have to prioritise innovation and this will be reflected in their prioritisation of resources (Nedergaard & Gyrd-Jones 2013). Ajike (2015) concludes that "corporate branding is a powerful concept that has the potential to align the resources of the organization towards the achievement of strategic competitive advantage".

A corporate brands' identity is experienced by its stakeholders through every point of contact they have with the corporation. The stakeholders of a corporate brand experience the company's identity through every point of contact they have with it. Gyrd-Jones and Kornum (2012) believe that "to create and maintain sustainable brands, companies cannot just rely on top management initiatives but should draw on the whole ecosystem of the brand consisting internal workgroups and external stakeholders". From a structural perspective, Schultz and Hatch (2006) recommend the encouragement of decentralised processes that encourage flexibility and knowledge sharing among and between internal and external workgroups. Echoing de Chernatony (2001) and Schultz and Hatch (2006), strength in the decentralised system can be maintained through a strong focus on communication tools such as narratives and metaphors, ensuring relevant clues to the cultural enactment of delivering on the brand identity and core promises across different professions and subcultures.

Table 2. A comparison between corporate and product brands

|  | Product brands | Corporate brands |
|---|---|---|
| Management | Middle manager | CEO |
| Responsibility | Middle manager | All personnel |
| Cognate discipline(s) | Marketing | Strategy/multi disciplinary |
| Communications mix | Marketing communicator | Total corporate communications |
| Focus | Mainly customer | Multiple, Internal and external stakeholder groups and networks |
| Values | Mainly contrived | Those of founder(s) + mix of corporate + other subcultures |

Source: Balmer, 2001

The table above highlights the comprehensive nature of corporate branding by presenting differences between product and corporate brands. Due to the broad stakeholder focus of corporate branding, the customer-oriented culture needs to invade the entire organisation so that customer

satisfaction both internal and external becomes second nature for all employees, as described by Papasolomou & Vrontis (2006).

Highlighting the importance of design integrated in a company's culture, Ajike (2015) states that "the stronger an organization's culture for design, the greater its commitment to using design as a resource". In order to support this type of organisational culture, some researchers have suggested that advertising agencies need to be 'barrierless and boundaryless' in terms of the organisational structure. This is based on a belief that without fluid structures there cannot be a genuine flow of ideas.

# 2. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to explore the corporate brand management practices of small and medium size enterprises operating in the creative industry in Finland, to narrow down the gap of unknowns in the area of corporate branding in organisational culture and brand success, particularly in creative SMEs. Considering the human-centered nature of the topic, the best way of exploring it is with qualitative research, for the author seeks to bring out insights and opinions that illuminate the complex phenomena of corporate branding instead of seeking for overly generalized deductions.

The main research questions that the author seeks deeper understanding for are:
1. How creative SMEs approach corporate branding in their integrated organisational culture and strategy?
2. What activities and attitudes creative companies undertake in their daily operations to manage the internal (resource-based) and external (stakeholder-based) environments and factors that affect the corporate brand?
3. How creative SMEs incorporate design thinking in their branding strategy?

By interviewing, the researcher also has a chance to deepen information, clarify answers and the potential to get good, descriptive examples about the topic at hand. Deeper insight was gathered with interviews in terms of the research questions than, for example, by sending surveys to the interviewees.

Since the objective was to obtain in-depth knowledge about corporate branding, its building, benefits and the evaluation of its importance inside small and medium size creative enterprises, for those and abovementioned reasons, interviews were the absolute choice for one research method in order to collect rich data. Since the aim of this study is to research the concept of corporate branding through the actions and beliefs of creative SMEs, the materials are collected

from the sort of creative business experts that have practical knowledge and thus can provide an expert view on the topic.

The interview questions were thematic and directive, since the author wanted the interviewed people to share what came in mind instead of having to think of carefully structured answers. The interviewer could then better capture the true feelings, values and attitudes of the interviewee, as well as remain open to receiving spontaneous thoughts.

The next sub-chapters consider the case companies, data collection methods, data analysis and reliability and ethics of this study.

## 2.1. Tracing creative SMEs' approach to corporate brand building

In this sub-chapter the author describes the implementation of the research in more detail by describing the course of the research process and by presenting the used research methods and materials. Firstly, the case companies are introduced. The choices made in the study are rationalized based on secondary methodology literature.

The sample of the case studies incorporates three young businesses operating locally in Finland, and the sample is chosen to represent as well as possible the varieties and similarities between successful SMEs operating in the creative industry. Choosing the sample companies was based on two main criteria: they are operating in the creative industry in Finland and have achieved a strong corporate brand within their specific field. Next, the author provides context for the reader by introducing the case companies in more detail.

### 2.1.1. Foody Allen, advertising agency

Foody Allen was founded in 2013 and is the only advertising agency in Finland to be specialized in food industry advertising. The company operates in Turku, Finland and offers nationwide content creating and communication services for the food market, serving both the retail and wholesale markets, as well as Finnish media houses that distribute the contents. The company has five full-time employees in addition to the two owners, Aki and Nina, and four outsourced freelancers such as videographers working closely with the company. With no direct competitors,

the price point of Foody Allen's services is mid-range compared to typical non-specialized SME advertising agencies but lower compared to largest advertising agencies.

Foody Allen was chosen to be a case company for it has found a unique creative market niche and the operations have been growingly successful. The interview was conducted in the office space of Foody Allen, with the founder and half-owner

### 2.1.2. Rockseri, fashion design

Rockseri Oy is a Finnish family business that began its operations by establishing a fashion brand, R-Collection, in Kajaani and Helsinki back in 1978. Rockseri serves both B2C and B2B markets, and the B2C product range includes, among many other products, R-Collections' classic clothing line and seasonal collections. The B2B market consists of mainly custom-made branded work clothes for organizations such as the Finnish Post.

The company has around 30 employees operating nationwide in Finland, and while some factories and fabrics come from abroad, the operations focus mainly on designing and producing durable and timeless clothing as near as possible, with smart prices in regards of the high-quality clothing. Rockseri was chosen to be a case company due to its established and experienced nature in the creative field of fashion brand management. The interview was conducted in a R-Collection store in Helsinki with Oskari, a member of the owner family and a client recruiter of Rokseri.

### 2.1.3. TwentyOne Media & Records, video and music production

TwentyOne is a small family business of four people, the mother, the father, the son and the son's best friend, operating in the media industry in Helsinki. Their operations include video- and sound production, such as music- and business videos, and their target market includes businesses, artists, record labels etc. TwentyOne's services are sold mainly online and through social media. The interview was conducted in the studio space of TwentyOne, with "the son" and a music producer, Vincent. TwentyOne was chosen to be a case company because of their representation of a fundamentally knowledge-based creative culture and successful branding efforts.

## 2.2 Collecting qualitative data

Choosing the research methods depends on which methods best provide answers to the research questions. For this research, three case studies were chosen as the most suitable research strategy. Like other traditions within the qualitative research paradigm, case studies are used primarily when researchers wish to obtain an in-depth understanding of a relatively small number of individuals, problems, or situations (Patton 1990). Because case studies are intended to take the reader of the research into the world of the subject(s), case studies can provide a much richer and more vivid picture of the phenomena under study than other, more analytical methods (Marshall & Rossman 1999).

Explained by Robson (1993), "a case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence" (p.146). Further, according to Fidel (1984), data collection would be accomplished using approaches determined by the subject matter; these could include direct observations, interviews, or document analysis.

For this study, interviews, observing and secondary materials were used to collect data (see table 3.). With each thematic interview the researcher had the chance to observe the physical premises of the case companies to experience the culture on the scene.

The table describes the interviewee's position in the case company, the abbreviations for referencing to interviewee's, the duration of the interview, a short description of the company's nature and the materials collected of each company are listed. Three thematic interviews were the primary sources of information and the other collected material formed a secondary source of information.

In this research the interview is an essential part of the data collection, for it enables the interviewee to share his/her in-depth opinions and beliefs about the topics. Semi-structured interviews accompanied by practical demonstrations by the interviewed people were conducted via face to face meetings.

Table 3. Presenting case companies, interviewees and materials

| Company | Interviewee | Materials |
|---|---|---|
| **Foody Allen**<br>Advertising agency<br>Founded in 2013 | CEO (length of interview 37 minutes)<br>**H1** | Thematic interview<br>Observing<br>Journal article |
| **Rockseri**<br>Fashion Design<br>Founded in 1978 | Family business member<br>(length of interview 50 minutes) **H2** | Thematic interview<br>Observing<br>Journal article |
| **TwentyOne**<br>Video and music production<br>Founded in 2017 | Founder (length of interview 22 minutes) **H3** | Thematic interview<br>Observing<br>Video |

## 2.3 Material analysis

For analysing the material, the author uses content analysis, which is a method used to analyze text or text-formatted material such as transcribed interviews, like in this study. In the material-oriented content analysis, the material guides the analysis to the direction where conclusion can be made. The challenge for the researcher is to be frank to the material and to analyze the material without the theoretical knowledge of affecting the issues that might arise from the interviews (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009).

The materials were transcribed from iPhone and Macbook voice recordings soon after each interview was conducted. An iterative approach to data collection and analysis is recommended in case studies so that the results of previous analysis could direct further investigation. The desired outcome of the investigation is to be both "comprehensive understanding" and the development of "general theoretical statements about regularities" (Fidel 1984, p. 274). Thus, the analysis used thematising and typology as analysing methods. The thematic interview frame was created based on the existing theories on corporate branding presented in this paper.

## 2.4 Reliability and ethics

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher as a tool is crucial. When conducting research, the researcher needs to carefully question the validity and the reliability of the research. Validity means the qualification of the research and is fair when the target audience and questions are based on the research effect. Reliability, on the other hand, means the consistency of the research, and is achieved among other things with a well-chosen sample with minimal bias and good data analysing and reporting methods. While planning the research, the author took aforesaid into account and used semi-structured interview as the base of the case studies and thus, the research.

Interviews were conducted in Finnish since the researcher and interviewees shared a common language, still, in all discussions, English keywords were used to clear some phenomenon and subjects. The participation on the research was based on volunteering and the author disclosed all objectives and research methods to the case subjects transparently. All the interviewees also agreed that the interview could be recorded to help the researcher to access the interview later on, as well as pictures of processes that might support and give better understanding to the verbal explanations might be shared in the paper. The author wrote the interviews following the records and summed up the interviewee's answers as realistic as possible.

# 3. FINDINGS ON BRANDING PRACTICES

This chapter presents the findings gathered from all the research materials. The findings have been divided according to the material themes, that were also used in material analysis, and they spotlight the essential content of each theme, as in the typical characters that came to surface when analysing topic area. In this chapter, the author also mirrors the findings to existing theories that were discussed previously in the paper. The conclusions are presented after the findings in the last chapter.

## 3.1 Internal (resource-based) approaches on corporate branding

As the case companies were originally chosen for this study for their successful performance in the creative industry, it can be stated that the case companies have all achieved a sustainable competitive advantage. But, how do the companies perceive the resource-based view?

By using the resource-based view (Figure 3.) as a framework we may contemplate how the management's strategic choices have brought sustainable competitive advantage, or even superior performance, to the case companies. All of the three case companies were quick to identify their internal resources when thematically asked to describe their corporate character, covenant and culture. However, it is the management of these resources that can strengthen the corporate brand and thus bring competitive advantage.

*"- we want to focus on one thing and do it well, and also for us it's super important that we are able to continuously teach and enrichen our clients' know-how and skills.---*

*For example, if it's a meat company, a typical advertising agency would also do meat advertising, but we do it in a way that we enrich their knowledge about the worldwide meat-trends, and that's like the most important thing, that we don't only deliver what the client asks, but we create additional value to them, and that's our strength.*

*(H1)*

Rockseri recognized the need for a strong corporate brand from the very beginning of their journey. Being true to their corporate brand, accompanied with well delivered results in terms of their apparel, has been the recipe to Rocksteri's success throughout decades.

*"- but initially it started from a mail order clothes selling side business in the 1970's. From there they began designing their own clothes, and collection started to grow, and then it was time to open the first store. They had a strong vision and have always done what feels right to them. At that time, R-Collection was something that didn't exist before, so they wanted to execute that vision, which they did, and here we are today." (H2)*

*"What makes us personal, among other things, is that alongside our main activities we have a small record label that produces music, and the visual side is possible, thanks to our versatile know-how, to be kept inside the family and the team." (H3)*

### 3.1.1 Corporate cultures

The case companies had quite different approaches and perceptions when asked to describe their cultures; for Foody Allen, culture means freedom and trust; for Rockseri, it is viewed as the deep philosophies connecting people within the company, and TwentyOne explains how their knowledge and experience make them who they are as a business. Firstly, the absence of working hours and the boundaryless 'office' provided by Foody Allen for their employees tells about high levels of trust within the culture:

*"I would hope that our staff things of it in a way that we are very family community-like, which means that our employees don't have to work at the office, they can work wherever they wish to, home or wherever. We never determine when to come to work, you can come to work when it fits your life situation the best, if you want to come at eight you come at eight, if at ten, then you come then. We don't count working hours in any way, like how many each employee does, but instead the idea is to make the work profitable and motivating for the employee in a way that everyone has the same opportunity to merge one's work into one's personal life." (H1)*

*"I'd say our company is built on sustainable values that we share with our employees, but also with our customers and business partners." (H2)*
*"-, Rockseri has a strong philosophy concerning a few issues that are seen as the most important pillars of the brand. Firstly, the designing and manufacturing philosophy is that the R-Collection*

*products are designed to last. The quality of the materials we use is primarily important, hence the material selections are the starting point of our design process. We want our clothes to be durable and easy to maintain. We strive to design timeless products, so we don't religiously follow trends. We want our products to be as topical in five years as they are now, and that they can be passed down from one generation to another." (H2)*

*"As we are a family business, we have experience, know-how and views from a wide age range towards our creative work. ---" (H3)*

### 3.1.2 Promises, expectations and design thinking

*"It would be really important for us to be realistic about our promises, so we don't paint the skies or anything, but now that we expanded our activities in the beginning of the year (2019), we should be brave about promising more than we have promised before. People have a proper six years of experience of Foody's brand, and that experience is based mainly on content creating, and now that we add also communications, advertising and digiplanning to that, it means that we must be brave at expressing what we can do. And then the brand image has to eventually match the new situation." (H1)*

*"We also want to manufacture our clothes as close by as possible, so the design process begins at our factory in Kajaani and the final sewing is done in Estonia. The majority of our products, around 90 percent, are manufactured in Finland and in Estonia. --- We aim at adding transparency to our production because we believe that an open activities culture is the key to a sustainable future. We also aim at reducing environmental load by using eco-friendly materials in shipping our products, for example we pack our online-store orders to domestically produced paper that's made of recycled paper and we avoid using any plastic when shipping the products ---We continuously aim to use more and more environmentally friendly materials in our production, such as in fabric selections, as well." (H2)*

*"We represent an easy to approach, lightweight and agile performing company to our stakeholders." (H3)*

Design thinking as a tool can be a challenging topic to grasp. For TwentyOne, everything they do, they perceive as design thinking. For Foody Allen and Rockseri, in the other hand, design has its

own place and meaning in the process. The evaluation of work projects afterwards can be a key aspect of design thinking to improve the business with out of the box- solutions.

*"Yeah so before the process was largely a content focused process, so we got the client's order and then we made it accordingly and held to the schedules and delivered it. But now it has evolved into a creative process. So, in a way we have the client personnel that are in charge of the clients. If it's concept building of an advertising campaign, it's very creative at first, so we begin with creatively brainstorming in three- to four person teams. When the creative phase is done, it shifts to a more of a production phase, and then scheduling, how the project is going to proceed from there." (H1)*

*"We have Monday-morning meetings pretty much every Monday, sometimes we have them and sometimes not, sometimes we don't have time, but mainly we try to have the meetings. In the meetings we go through every ongoing project at that time and how everyone is proceeding and so on." (H1)*

*"The designing begins at our factory in Kajaani, and when the idea has evolved into a sketch, it will be taken to the pattern maker, the pattern is made for sewing the initial model. The model is refined in Kajaani with the pattern maker and the model sewer. Production ready products are cut, embroidered and printed with our silk press in Kajaani, from where they will be sent to Estonia for sewing." (H2)*

## 3.2 External (stakeholder-based) approaches on corporate branding

### 3.2.1 Communication efforts

Foody Allens' B2B nature as an advertising agency and content creator means relying heavily on the portfolio of past projects, and that communicating the Foody Allen brand itself had for that reason been a secondary issue for too long. Rockseri, in the other hand, takes communications seriously and utilizes almost every possible communication channel that they can to efficiently communicate with shareholders. The values and attitudes TwentyOne represent as individuals and as a family are expressed in a visual (video) form, which are then shared online and in social media in the form of brand or project promotion.

*"Nannu (an employee) is doing it now, she has a list of businesses that she calls to and books meetings and tells about Foody Allen, but that also goes to the B2B.*
*So that's how our communications are basically, not at all a great situation, but it's just something that we should do but our own work gets passed forward into the future while the client works go ahead." (H1)*
*"An additional problem, that is a pretty big problem, is that the types of client jobs we do don't typically launch until half a year into the future. Like at the moment we're doing Christmas. So, there's the problem that we can't communicate our projects when they happen for confidentiality reasons and all. So, we have to be very careful about what we share and what we tell we are working on. So usually we just have to wait until the later launch date to share things." (H1)*

In the same topic area, Rockseri had a very different approach. For them, stakeholder relationships and communication is a well thought out practice that takes place in multiple different mediums.

*"The various communication channels include e-mail, email lists, newsletters, social media, which in our case is Facebook and Instagram, media releases, events, trade fairs, journal articles, radio, television, leaflets, online chat, blogs and telecommunications. I might have forgotten something. In any case, communication is an important part of managing the relationship between our internal and external stakeholders." (H2)*

In contrast to the careful planning and management of Rockseri's corporate brand, TwentyOne's efforts focus on being actively present on their external stakeholders' news feeds.

*"We sell our services mainly through marketing in social media and online, and many of our current customers have been obtained through successfully dealt with customer relationships from the past. So, in other words, the marketing works more efficiently through our concrete, published work." (H3)*
*"In stakeholder communication we use actively different social media channels and we can produce content to them diversely and extensively, also for example with our record label artists." (H3)*

### 3.2.2 Constituencies

A topic that came up was the challenge for the creative companies of how to align the company's promise with the initial customer brand perception. As Rockseri openly discloses their values on

sustainability as an important part of their corporate brand, importantly, their actions and choices support these values.

*"We aim at adding transparency to our production because we believe that an open activities culture is the key to a sustainable future. We also aim at reducing environmental load by using eco-friendly materials in shipping our products, - .*
*We take our philosophies seriously, as you can see, and live by our words. We continuously aim to use more and more environmentally friendly materials in our production, such as in fabric selections, as well." (H2)*

Foody Allen, in the other hand, wants to bring additional value to their B2B customers by sharing them expert insights on a specific field, thus enriching the customer company's knowledge, in comparison to the typical advertising agencies that cannot provide the value of such broad services or expert knowledge.

*"We seek to serve the Finnish food industry, that's our number one thing. And we want to win customers from advertising agencies to shift to us, so that they can have more value as they have the whole service ready behind one door. They get product development, content elements such as videos and recipes, and they get the communications and sharing services in different medias, a target group analysis, and in addition they get an advertising concept that we build." (H1)*

TwentyOne has a self-confident approach to corporate branding, relying on their internal skill sets and experiences to convince the external stakeholders about the true nature of their business.

*"As we are a family business, we have experience, know-how and views from a wide age range towards our creative work. We represent an easy to approach, lightweight and agile performing company to our stakeholders. What makes us personal, among other things, is that alongside our main activities we have a small record label that produces music, and the visual side is possible, thanks to our versatile know-how, to be kept inside the family and the team. (H3)"*

### 3.2.3 Stakeholder conceptualizations

It seems that for small, creative companies that are constantly growing and spreading their wings further by adding products and services to their selection as their knowledge and experience in the field grows, inspecting stakeholder brand perceptions seems to be a secondary matter. Asking an

interviewee to describe how they assume their customers perceive them can be challenging without consistent measuring of the brand images. A similarity found in both Foody Allen and TwentyOne, is that a project is considered a success based on the initial face-to-face intercourse during and after the project, and that it does not necessarily require additional ways of measuring or reassuring as long as the turnover increases and the clients keep coming back.

*"We have lots of room for improvement in the feedback collection with follow-up questions after the projects and we should definitely be better at that. We should be more active in that regard. Now it's like if we don't hear anything from them we assume the client is pleased with us. The aftermarketing and the sales that could come from it… we could do much more."* (H1)

*"As a trustworthy, high-quality and easy to approach videomaker and music publisher! I mean, that's what our customers tell us (we are), and they keep coming back, so…"* (H3)

*"Well, during the past few years our brand has been in an excellent upswing nationally as well as globally. The reception has been great, and we've also received some constructive criticism that we paid attention to right away. A company is never quite ready, so it needs to grow and evolve at all times."* (H2)

## 3.3 Mirroring the findings with existing models

As Balmers' 6Cs of corporate marketing (see figure 1.) was the basis of the framework for the themes of the data collection, the interviews were assessed to provide answers as to how each of the six Cs was approached by the case companies.

Mirroring the research findings with the corporate marketing mix was easy due to the interview being thematized based on the model. The effortless answering style and ready answers of each interviewee when asked to describe each of the six sections in corporate branding, tells that the driver behind such passionate answers lies within the deep family/owner affiliations.

Table 4. Case companies applied to Balmer's corporate marketing mix

| 6Cs | Foody Allen | Rockseri | TwentyOne |
|---|---|---|---|
| Character "What we indubidably are" | A forerunner in the food advertising field | An established, ethically operating fashion brand | An experienced content and music producing family business |
| Communication "What we say we are" | A company that provides full food advertising service and beyond | An apparel designer and manufacturer for timeless durability | Lightweight and agile content and music producers |
| Constituencies "Whom we seek to serve" | Businesses in food industry | Both individual customers and business clients | Businesses, artists, record labels |
| Conceptualisations "What we are seen to be" | A company with a trendy, value-adding and innovative approach to food advertising | A fashion brand that can be trusted with timeless and durable clothing | A family of trustworthy and easy to approach video and music producers |
| Covenant "What is promised and expected" | Challenge that came with broadening the service offering: learning how to promise more than stakeholders expect | Rockseri promises to aim for designing more and more sustainably produced clothing and hence challenges the customer to expect a great level of social responsibility | The company's portfolio is a basis for both internal promises and external expectations |
| Culture "What we feel we are" | A family-like, non-hierarchical community without control over employees | Culture that is built on sustainable values shared with internal and external stakeholders | A family-centered, knowledge-based culture |

Source: Author's own

Next, the author mirrors the case companies on the Danish Design ladder (see Figure 1.) based on the research findings and materials. Foody Allen could be placed on the third step: Design as Process. In this step, design is considered as a process or method in product or service output, only embedded in the initial stages of development; design solution is procured externally and is adapted to the requirements of the end user, using a multidisciplinary approach, hence this description fits Foody Allen, and outsourcing the production has been a successful way of operating for them. Though, it is possible that Foody is slowly lifting its foot to step on the fourth step.

The author contemplates that Rockseri and TwentyOne could both be placed on the fourth step due to their strong, integral design processes and continuous renewal of their business concepts. As H2 put it, "*A company is never quite ready, so it needs to grow and evolve at all times".*

## 3.4 Discussion and suggestions

The results indicate that corporate branding in the case companies is not a matter of black and white guidelines or strictly planned strategies. The branding is mostly based on the initial vision of the founder of the company and it evolves as they learn and grow as individuals – the companies grow with the owners and with the realizations learned during the years of practice. Thus, the results suggest that for a creative organization to build a strong brand it depends, in principle, on a strong vision of the founder and the founder's ability to communicate it clearly to the employees. Also, in a low hierarchy setting it seems that also the founders are more open to brainstorming with employees and hearing their suggestions to improve their performance as a team. For this to work efficiently in practice also implies and even demands high levels of design thinking.

These results also support Powell's (2007) statement that creative organizations rarely manage their corporate brands by engaging in formal marketing communication activities, but rather rely on their internal means to enhance their employees' creativity and this way build a reputation which in turn strenghtens the corporate brand. Of the three case companies only Rockseri partially engages in traditional marketing communications with advertising their products by storytelling, whereas Foody Allen and TwentyOne only communicate their real-life projects and activities through their social medias without a curated storyline. Foody Allen had just begun cold calling to other businesses, revealing a need for some structure in their otherwise organic branding activities, while TwentyOne fully relies on their creative outputs and word of mouth.

Eikhof & Haunschild's (2006) discussion about artistic motivation being creative companies' primary resource for economic production is supported by the findings of this research, that show the case companies' organizational cultures are built around getting the most out of their employees' potential by offering freedom and low levels of hierarchy - this is especially visible in the cases of Foody Allen and TwentyOne. Rockseri, being a medium size company, has compartmentalized their activities, and the team responsible for design operates in largely like the other two companies, meaning the scale of their business demands designers to focus on design alone whereas in the two smaller case companies all employees are involved.

The generalizability of the results is somewhat limited by the geographic location (Finland) and its culture, even though these kind of approaches towards corporate branding might take place in, or bring success to, creative companies around the world. The methodological choices were constrained by time and research experience of the author. The author contemplates that further research is needed to establish the correlation between different corporate branding activities and financial success in the creative industry, for which also a company's cash flows should be taken into account. Future studies could also take into account companies outside of the SME scale for broader comparison.

# CONCLUSION

To address the research question of how SMEs approach corporate branding, it is clearly a matter of careful planning for the fashion designer Rockseri to maintain and build their corporate brand. Foody Allen and TwentyOne, in the other hand, rely more on their portfolios and previous customers for building their corporate brand, hence the focus on corporate branding itself was not as clear - nevertheless, when opening the topic areas of corporate branding, each case company did possess their own, individual approaches.

What arose from the findings from the three case companies was that all had different approaches towards building their unique corporate brands in the fields of content creating, music production and fashion design. The case companies had quite different approaches and perceptions towards their corporate cultures; for Foody Allen, culture means freedom and trust; for Rockseri, it is viewed as the deep philosophies connecting people within the company, and TwentyOne explains how their knowledge and experience as a family of musicians make them who they are as a business. Their internal cultures manifest notably in their corporate brands.

What distinguishes Foody Allen and TwentyOne from Rockseri is the size, in terms of employees, and the personalized creative service of the first two, versus the standardized creative product market offerings of the latter. Even though Rockseri can do personalised products for B2B clients, it has to focus on taking all the B2C stakeholders into account as well. The findings make the author wonder if these differences (size, service/product) are the root reason for such different corporate branding approaches in the case companies. The data also suggests that creative companies do not have a unified approach to corporate branding any more than companies operating in other fields, even though the possibility and often natural decision to build the brand on the corporate portfolio presents a unique chance in the creative industry to give the most value, brand-wise, to the past creative outputs of a firm. Design thinking, in the other hand, was strongly present in all case companies.

To address the research question about resource-based and stakeholder-based approaches to corporate branding, based on the materials of all case companies it is clear that what is promised and what is delivered to external stakeholders are both variables defined by the founders of the creative companies, and that the execution depends on the management skills of the founders as to how to take forward the matter of the corporate branding.

It seems that for small, creative companies that are constantly growing and spreading their wings further by adding products and services to their selection as their knowledge and experience in the field grows, inspecting stakeholder brand perceptions seems to be a secondary matter. A similarity found in both Foody Allen and TwentyOne, is that a project is considered a success based on the initial face-to-face intercourse with the client during and after the project, and that it does not require additional ways of measuring or reassuring as long as the turnover increases and the clients keep coming back. Despite that, Foody Allen has recently increased their communication efforts with cold calling, in the hope of collecting valuable customer insights and attracting new B2B customers.

The author contemplates that the fashion industry demands brands to stay consistent with their branding and to promote values that their target group can relate with. Contemplating further, whereas an advertising agency or a record label can mostly rely on building a strong portfolio, a fashion brand needs to build a story around the values of the brand and carefully design the visuals such as store layouts in order to give meaning to their designed products, to achieve the benefits of a strong corporate brand, for a product alone can rarely build one. Surely, having a strong B2C customer base is an important driver for the B2B market, as well, as is the case with Rockseri.

The path that each company has undertaken in their approach to corporate branding has been the most natural for each company under their individual circumstances, resources and skill sets. The interviews show that as small, creative businesses, the corporate branding all comes from internal efforts and each company has different pain points in terms of how to build their brands to reflect the corporate culture and resources to the external stakeholders.

# LIST OF REFERENCES

Andriopoulos, C., & Gotsi, M. (2000). Benchmarking brand management in the creative industry. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, *7*(5), 360–372. https://doi.org/10.1108/14635770010359900

Ajike, D., Goodluck, N. K., Hamed, A., Onyia, V., & Kwarbai, J. D. (2015). Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurial Intentions: The Role of Theory of Planned Behaviour. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Social Engineering and Development Strategies*, *3*(1).

Balmer, J. M. T. (2001). Corporate identity, corporate branding and corporate marketing - Seeing through the fog. *European Journal of Marketing*, *35*(3/4), 248–291. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560110694763

Balmer, J. M. T., & Greyser, S. A. (2006). Corporate marketing: Integrating corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate communications, corporate image and corporate reputation. *European Journal of Marketing*, *40*(7/8), 730–741. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610669964

Borja de Mozota, B. (2003). *Design management: using design to build brand value and corporate innovation*. New York, NY: Allworth Press : Design Management Institute.

Bourdieu, P. (1999). In *Modernity: Cultural Modernity*. *Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. Modernity: Cultural Modernity, 2, 351.*

Cook, P. (1998). The creativity advantage - is your organization the leader of the pack? *Industrial and Commercial Training*, *30*(5), 179–184. https://doi.org/10.1108/00197859810225652

Cooper, R., Junginger, S., & Lockwood, T. (2009). Design Thinking and Design Management: A Research and Practice Perspective. *Design Management Review*, *20*(2), 46–55. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1948-7169.2009.00007.x

de Chernatony, L. (1999). Brand Management Through Narrowing the Gap Between Brand Identity and Brand Reputation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *15*(1–3), 157–179. https://doi.org/10.1362/026725799784870432

de Chernatony, L., & Dall'Olmo Riley, F. (1999). Experts' Views About Defining Services Brands and the Principles of Services Branding. *Journal of Business Research*, *46*(2), 181–192. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(98)00021-6

de Mozota, B. B., & Kim, B. Y. (2009). Managing Design as a Core Competency: Lessons from Korea. *Design Management Review*, *20*(2), 66–76. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1948-7169.2009.00009.x

Doyle, P. (1995). Marketing in the new millennium. *European Journal of Marketing*, *29*(13), 23–41. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090569510147712

Eikhof, D. R., & Haunschild, A. (2006). Lifestyle Meets Market: Bohemian Entrepreneurs in Creative Industries. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, *15*(3), 234–241. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8691.2006.00392.x

Elsbach, K. D., & Stigliani, I. (2018). Design Thinking and Organizational Culture: A Review and Framework for Future Research. *Journal of Management*, *44*(6), 2274–2306. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206317744252

Ensor, J., Cottam, A., & Band, C. (2001). Fostering knowledge management through the creative work environment: a portable model from the advertising industry. *Journal of Information Science*, *27*(3), 147–155. https://doi.org/10.1177/016555150102700304

Fahy, J. (2000). The resource-based view of the firm: some stumbling-blocks on the road to understanding sustainable competitive advantage. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, *24*(2/3/4), 94–104. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090590010321061

Fetscherin, M., & Usunier, J. (2012a). Corporate branding: an interdisciplinary literature review. *European Journal of Marketing*, *46*(5), 733–753. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561211212494

Fetscherin, M., & Usunier, J. (2012b). Corporate branding: an interdisciplinary literature review. *European Journal of Marketing*, *46*(5), 733–753. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561211212494

Helfat, C. E., & Peteraf, M. A. (2003). The dynamic resource-based view: capability lifecycles. *Strategic Management Journal*, *24*(10), 997–1010. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.332

Hotho, S., & Champion, K. (2011). Small businesses in the new creative industries: innovation as a people management challenge. *Management Decision*, *49*(1), 29–54. https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741111094428

Jo Hatch, M., & Schultz, M. (2003). Bringing the corporation into corporate branding. *European Journal of Marketing*, *37*(7/8), 1041–1064. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560310477654

Kavan, C. B., Frohlich, C. J., & Coskun Samli, A. (1994). Developing a Balanced Information System: Establishing Strategic Superiority for Service Organizations. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *8*(1), 4–13. https://doi.org/10.1108/08876049410053249

Keller, K. L. (2000). The brand report card. *Harvard Business Review*, *78*(1), 147-158.

Kornum, N., Gyrd-Jones, R., Al Zagir, N., & Brandis, K. A. (2017). Interplay between intended brand identity and identities in a Nike related brand community: Co-existing synergies and tensions in a nested system. *Journal of Business Research*, *70*, 432–440. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.06.019

Kretzschmar, A. (2003). The economic effects of design, Danish national agency for enterprise and housing.

Küng, L. (2007). Does Media Management Matter? Establishing the Scope, Rationale, and Future Research Agenda for the Discipline. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, *4*(1), 21–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2007.11073444

Lockwood, T. (2010). Integrating design into organizational culture. *Design Management Review*, *15*(2), 32–39. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1948-7169.2004.tb00159.x

Melewar, T. C., Gotsi, M., & Andriopoulos, C. (2012). Shaping the research agenda for corporate branding: avenues for future research. *European Journal of Marketing*, *46*(5), 600–608. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561211235138

Mietzner, D., & Kamprath, M. (2013). A Competence Portfolio for Professionals in the Creative Industries. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, *22*(3), 280–294. https://doi.org/10.1111/caim.12026

Nedergaard, N., & Gyrd-Jones, R. (2013). Sustainable brand-based innovation: The role of corporate brands in driving sustainable innovation. *Journal of Brand Management*, *20*(9), 762–778. https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2013.16

Papasolomou, I., & Vrontis, D. (2006). Building corporate branding through internal marketing: the case of the UK retail bank industry. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *15*(1), 37–47. https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420610650864

Powell, S. M. (2005). *Creativity and the corporate brand within small to medium sized creative organisations* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Strathclyde).

Powell, S. (2007). Organisational marketing, identity and the creative brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, *15*(1), 41–56. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550109

Powell, S., & Dodd, C. (2007). Managing vision and the brand within the creative industries. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *12*(4), 394–413. https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280710832533

Schneider, B., & Bowen, D. E. (1993). The service organization: Human resources management is crucial. *Organizational Dynamics*, *21*(4), 39–52. https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(93)90032-V

Schultz, M., & De Chernatony, L. (2002). The challenges of corporate branding. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *5*(2/3), 105-113.

Soosay, C. A. (2005). An Empirical Study of Individual Competencies in Distribution Centres to Enable Continuous Innovation. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, *14*(3), 299–310. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8691.2005.00348.x

Sutton, R. I., & Kelley, T. A. (1997). Creativity Doesn't Require Isolation: Why Product Designers Bring Visitors "Backstage." *California Management Review*, *40*(1), 75–91. https://doi.org/10.2307/41165923

Topaloğlu, F., & Er, Ö. (2017). Discussing a New Direction for Design Management through a New Design Management Audit Framework. *The Design Journal*, *20*(sup1), S502–S521. https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2017.1353000

Urde, M. (1999). Brand Orientation: A Mindset for Building Brands into Strategic Resources. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *15*(1–3), 117–133. https://doi.org/10.1362/026725799784870504

van Riel, C. B. M., & Balmer, J. M. T. (1997). Corporate identity: the concept, its measurement and management. *European Journal of Marketing*, *31*(5/6), 340–355. https://doi.org/10.1108/eb060635

Wrigley, C., & Straker, K. (2017). Design Thinking pedagogy: the Educational Design Ladder. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *54*(4), 374–385. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2015.1108214

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1. Sources

Foody Allen:

Website
http://foodyallen.fi/

Journal article (in Finnish)
https://www.sokoshotels.fi/fi/ajankohtaista/uutinen/foody-allen-mukana-uuden-ravintolan/014432278_419558

Rockseri:

Website
https://www.r-collection.com/

Journal article (in Finnish)
https://www.kauppalehti.fi/uutiset/anorakeista-tunnettu-rockseri-nousi-ahdingosta-uusi-sukupolvi-vie-vaatteita-kajaanista-maailmalle/b04ca4fc-9800-395f-b388-830bcdaafe38

TwentyOne media & records:

Website
https://www.twentyone.fi/

Video materials on TwentyOne's
Vimeo: https://vimeo.com/twentyonefamily/about
Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8TdpFsuIQbpdrIS5iJ9j4w
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/twentyone.fi/
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/twentyone.fi/

## Appendix 2. Interview transcripts

<u>Foody Allen interview transcript</u>

Interview transcription 1.
Interviewer: Elisabeth Moborg, referred to as **E.**
Interviewee: Aki Wahlman, CEO of Foody Allen, referred to as **H1**
Time: 12ᵗʰ of May 2019, 1pm-1:30pm
Location: Foody Allen workspace
Source: Recorded interview a phone microphone

**E:** To begin with, I ask you to describe the nature of Foody Allen as a company.

**H1:** We are the only advertising agency in Finland to be specialized in food industry advertising and we do content creating and marketing communication services for both retail and wholesale markets, and also media houses, like Sanoma and Alma (Finland's biggest media houses) and corporations like that. We provide content for those communications companies to handle the distribution of the contents that we make.

**E:** Can you shortly describe the history of the company?

**H1:** So, I began working under a trade name in 1996 and Foody was founded six years ago (2013), so until that it was my own entrepreneurship and when Foody was established we hired people to work for us.

**E:** And how many people do you employ?

**H1:** We have five full-time employees in addition to me and Nina, we own 50-50 as it's a limited company, and there's around three to four freelancers that we outsource all the time, videographers mostly.

**E:** What price-point services do you offer?

**H1:** Well, as we don't have any direct competitors it's not so easy to compare, but if we compare to the non-specialized advertising agencies, we are pretty much mid-range in terms of prices, more expensive than bloggers since they don't have nearly the same resources or wide service offerings, but still more affordable than the biggest advertising agencies in Finland.

**E:** Can you describe the tangible assets of the company?

**H1:** Yeah so, we practically have three rental spaces, one in the Itäinen Pitkäkatu (in Turku), a studio-space in Logomo (Turku) and an apartment in Helsinki because we work there on a weekly basis. But no fixed ownership on those. We own all the computer equipment and some of the softwares that the designers use are bought, some are rented, depends on the software.

**E:** And you might continue to the non tangible assets, such as knowledge…

**H1:** The skills we have in-house, well… of course the network of our contacts comes from me (has been in the food industry for over two decades), sales organization comes from me, then we have styling/decoration, so the visual side, that we have in-house, and then the concent production meaning video editing. Videography is more out sourced but video editing and the digital making of advertisements is in house. Outsourced we have digiplanner, AD (art director) and videography

**E:** How would you describe Foody Allen's philosophy?

**H1:** I think the philosophy is that we want to focus on one thing and do it well, and also for us it's super important that we are able to continuously teach and enrichen our clients' know-how and skills. So, in a way a normal advertising agency makes an advertising out of trhe sketch, but we, in the other hand take the sketch and in addition to the advertising and content we give the client also new information of their own field.
For example, if it's a meat company, a typical advertising agency would also do meat advertising, but we do it in a way that we enrichen their knowledge about the worldwide meat-trends, and that's like the most important thing, that we don't only deliver what the client asks, but we create additional value to them, and that's our strength.

**E:** How would you describe the culture inside and amongst people in Foody (Allen)?

**H1:** I would hope that our staff thinks of it in a way that we are very family community-like, which means that our employees don't have to work at the office, they can work wherever they wish to, home or wherever. We never determine when to come to work, you can come to work when it fits your life situation the best, if you want to come at eight you come at eight, if at ten, then you come then. We don't count working hours in any way, like how many each employee does, but instead the idea is to make the work profitable and motivating for the employee in a way that everyone has the same opportunity to merge one's work into one's personal life.

**E:** Sounds like the level of trust is very high.

**H1:** Yes, very high level of trust in our culture. We share openly the company earnings, and losses if that's the case, everything is shared openly so that we get the goals and motivators, not so much rewarding individual employees, or if someone has had a great continuum of work we can buy a dinner or a Helsinki-trip or something. But more of rewarding the whole group, as Nina takes care of it very well, that if it's the new years or Easter or something that she brings wines to everybody, or sweets or some small everyday things that warm everybody's hearts. Or when we go on a vacation (with Nina) we can bring champaigns or something for everyone as a souvenir.

**E:** How would you say your organizational culture comes across to the client?

**H1:** Well, yeah that might vary. It's that our group is so small, and some of them are in contact with the customers a lot, and some are less, and those that are less in contact with the customers are mainly behind the computer screens or at the filming studio so there the culture doesn't maybe come out as much, but those that are in contact with the customers the most have learned to internalize our culture and can communicate it through their actions

**E:** That brings us to the next theme, which is communication with all different stakeholders

**H1:** Very little, we are very bad at that, but it is partly because we are in the mids of renewing our website and the whole social media channels, so maybe it's for us a big area that needs improvement, the communnication. We should tell about us a lot more, but we should also do quite a lot more of B2B marketing, since we do very little of B2C anyway, because our clients are not private individuals, so the private individuals don't really have to have any association with us.

Anyway, from the beginning of this month we have somewhat increased the communications, we began doing cold-calling, or Nannu (an employee) is doing it now, she has a list of businesses that she calls to and books meetings and tells about Foody Allen, but that also goes to the B2B.
So that's how our communications are basically, not at all a great situation, but it's just something that we should do but our own work gets passed forward into the future while the client works go ahead.

An additional problem, that is a pretty big problem, is that the types of client works we do don't typically launch until half a year into the future. Like at the moment we're doing Christmas. So there's the problem that we can't communicate our projects when they happen for confidentiality reasons and all. So, we have to be very careful about what we share and what we tell we are working on. So usually we just have to wait until the later launch date to share things.

**E:** Good answer. Now I ask you to continue the sentence "we seek to serve…"

**H1:** We seek to serve the Finnish food industry, that's our number one thing. And we want to win customers from advertising agencies to shift to us, so that they can have more value as they have the whole service ready behind one door. They get product development, content elements such as videos and recipes, and they get the communications and sharing services in different medias, a target group analysis, and in addition they get an advertising concept that we build. So that's our focus group, businesses that make products to the food market and want their products to be a success.

**E:** Next I ask you to describe what you promise as a company and what, according to your perceptions, is expected of Foody

**H1:** It would be really important for us to be realistic about our promises, so we don't paint the skies or anything, but now that we expanded our activities in the beginning of the year (2019), we should be brave about promising more than we have promised before. People have a proper six years of experience of Foody's brand, and that experience is based mainly on content creating, and now that we add also communications, advertising and digiplanning to that, it means that we must be brave at expressing what we can do. And then the brand image has to eventually match the new situation. So yeah, it hasn't gone that bad.
In addition, many of our client companies that know what our offerings were previously, we can always tell them what we offer more today than before, but it always takes some time for the brand image to progress in the new way so it doesn't just stay like what it was before.

**E:** What is your internal perception of Foody's reputation?

**H1:** Well, actually now that Nannu has been calling through the company lists and has called to hundreds of companies, the companies that did know about Foody had a very good brand perception of us, except for one company, which anyway had bought our services after the bad experience, so yeah. So, the brand perception indeed seems to be very good and we try our best to be an up to date, trendy company, with fast and reasonable priced services, so it's nice to hear that most of our customers feel the same way.

**E:** That's nice. Next, I would ask you to describe the course of a typical project you do for your clients.

**H1:** Yeah so before the process was largely a concent focused process, so we got the client's order and then we made it accordingly and held to the schedules and delivered it. But now it has evolved into a creative process. So, in a way we have the client personnel that are in charge of the clients. If it's concept building of an advertising campaign, it's very creative at first, so we begin with creatively brainstorming in three- to four person teams. When the creative phase is done, it shifts to a more of a production phase, and then scheduling, how the project is going to proceed from there.
And well, the projects are documented the whole time, by filling the calendar and writing memos of them and naming the responsible persons. And the task for the responsible persons is to make sure we keep on schedule and at the same time the person buys all necessary outsourced services around the project, whatever is needed in each project.
For example, if we do work for Atria (one of the major Finnish food manufacturers), and Atria wants a new sausage thing, at first, we begin by brainstorming creatively the sausage-part, basically inventing a name for it. After that we can think about products and recipes, media where it's presented, and then we go to the responsible person like Samuli (one of the employees), and Samuli begins booking videographers to film the recipe, chooses chefs to cook the foods, pics the AD, calls to a digiplanner who finds the target audiences. Then we settle the media money, and then it's pretty much a productional process from there. So the beginning is when the creative planning happens.

**E:** Do you have your ways of discussing the projects afterwards?

**H1:** We have Monday-morning meetings pretty much every Monday, sometimes we have them and sometimes not, sometimes we don't have time, but mainly we try to have the meetings. In the meetings we go through every ongoing project at that time and how everyone is proceeding and so on. And if Nina has already sent the project invoice, we go through what the feedback on that project was, but often the feedback comes not until the client comes back to buy our services again. In those cases, we kind of just ask the client how it went, and ask for feedback, even though coming back says a lot too.
We have lots of room for improvement in the feedback collection with follow-up questions after the projects and we should definitely be better at that. We should be more active in that regard. Now it's like if we don't hear anything from them we assume the client is pleased with us. The aftermarketing and the sales that could come from it… we could do much more.

**E:** It's good to recognize the need of improvement. Lastly, I would like you to shortly describe the direction Foody Allen is going as a business

**H1:** We have planned it in a way that this year we are looking at an approximately +30% growth in turnover and the next year +50% and the year after that would be +80%. That is like our three-year alignment. And simultaneously we try to have the productivity grow, so if we get 20% the turnover in profit, that's the aim. Under the present conditions these objectives will be realized, especially now that we have the communication services on top. We need big clients, but we have already had them and hence this year has been the best year for the company in its lifetime.

Rockseri interview transcript

Interview transcription 2.
Interviewer: Elisabeth Moborg, referred to as **E**
Interviewee: Oskari Saastamoinen, referred to as **H2**
Time: 13th of May 2019, 7pm to 8pm
Location: Rockseri workspace
Source: Recorded interview with a phone microphone

**E:** I would like you to begin by describing the nature of your company

**H2:** Rockseri Oy is a Finnish family business, a limited company, that began its operations by establisihing a fashion brand, R-Colleciton. Rockseri sells to consumers and businesses, so it operates in both B2C and B2B markets. The B2C markets reach far abroad and so far, the B2B sales have taken place nationally. The B2C range of products includes R-Collection's classic clothing line and the seasonal clothing lines, meaning spring/summer and fall/winter collections. At the moment the range includes collab products with Finnish brands such as Karhu, WWF and Maria Korkeila. We sell our products in R-Collection stores, our online-store and we have retailers nationally and also abroad.
The B2B product range includes around 40 product brands, and the B2B product range is very broad, more than 3000 products, and it consist of different product categories, that we've felt sell well or that bring value to the company directly or indirecly. The sales occur via direct sales, online store, which is not yet active, and by marketing in different channels.

**E:** What price-point is Rockseri compared to the markets?

**H2:** At the moment the price-point is higher than the average brand, but it's not in the luxury-brands' price point either.

**E:** How many people does your family employ?

**H2:** We currently have around 30 employees in our payroll.

**E:** How would you describe the philosophy of R-Collection/Rockseri?

**H2:** Yeah, Rockseri has a strong philosophy concerning a few issues that are seen as the most important pilars of the brand. Firstly, the designing and manufacturing philosophy is that the R-Collection products are designed to last. The quality of the materials we use is primarily important, hence the material selections are the starting point of our design process. We want our clothes to be durable and easy to maintain. We strive to design timeless products, so we don't religiously follow trends. We want our products to be as topical in five years as they are now, and that they can be passed down from one generation to another.
We also want to manufacture our clothes as closeby as possible, so the design process begins at our factory in Kajaani and the final sewing is done in Estonia. The majority of our products, around 90 percent, are manufactured in Finland and in Estonia. We have an employee in Estonia assuring the quality of the production and keeping an eye on the working conditions of the sewers that work there. We aim at adding transparency to our production because we believe that an open activities culture is the key to a sustainable future. We also aim at reducing environmental load by using eco-friendly materials in shipping our products, for example we pack our online-store orders to domestically produced paper that's made of recycled paper and we avoid using any plastic when shipping the products, and we are environmentally friendly in many other areas as well, which you can read more about on the website where it's stated pretty clearly. We take our philosophies seriously, as you can see, and live by our words. We continuously aim to use more and more environmentally friendly materials in our production, such as in fabric selections, as well.

**E:** Could you shortly walk me through the history of Rockser?

**H2:** My parents opened the first R-Collection store in Helsinki in 1982, but initially it started from a mail order clothes selling side business in the 1970's. From there they began designing their own clothes, and collection started to grow, and then it was time to open the first store. They had a strong vision and have always done what feels right to them. At that time, R-Collection was something that didn't exist before, so they wanted to excecute that vision, which they did, and here we are today.

**E:** How would you describe the culture in Rockser?

**H2:** I'd say our company is built on sustainable values that we share with our employees, but also with our customers and business partners.

**E:** Could you describe the ways you communicate with stakeholders?

**H2:** The message we communicate to our stakeholders is basically that we have created practical, high quality clothes for life itself, for many decades. The core of R-Collection is in that. In ordinary clothing – anoraks, t-shirts and sweatshirts. Ordinary doesn't mean boring, it means high-quality, classical and timeless. These clothes we are proud of, and these we are known from.
The various communication channels include e-mail, e-mail lists, newsletters, social media, which in our case is Facebook and Instagram, media releases, events, trade fairs, journal articles, radio, television, leaflets, online chat, blogs and telecommunications. I might have forgotten

something. In any case, communication is an important part of managing the relationship between our internal and external stakeholders.

**E:** Continue the sentence "We seek to serve…"

**H2:** We seek to serve good working environments to all our internal employees and people, and a comfortable atmosphere to all other stakeholders of our company, as well. We believe that having a good spirited organization on the inside, it also reflects to the external stakeholder groups. We believe that we influence our stakeholder groups positively by sticking to our own values and working towards having a positive orientation at all times, and we believe we're going to achieve that by developing our practices continually to be more effective, more ecological and more ethical. A successful business is largely the key to this.

**E:** The approval of the public can be seen as the "operating license". How has Rockseri been received to the local communities?

**H2:** Well, during the past few years our brand has been in an excellent upswing nationally as well as globally. The reception has been great, and we've also received some constructive criticism that we paid attention to right away. A company is never quite ready, so it needs to grow and evolve at all times.

**E:** How would you describe the clothes designing and manufacturing process?

**H2:** The designing begins at our factory in Kajaani, and when the idea has evolved into a sketch, it will be taken to the pattern maker, the pattern is made for sewing the initial model. The model is refined in Kajaani with the pattern maker and the model sewer. Production ready products are cut, embroidered and printed with our silk press in Kajaani, from where they will be sent to Estonia for sewing. We color our anoraks in Estonia and our sweatshirt and tricot materials in Finland. Our wool sweaters are made in Finland and Lithuania from Italian merino wool. The designing and production processes vary quite a lot depending on the product, but all in all, we seek to find the solutions that fit our values.

TwentyOne interview transcript

Interview transcription 3.
Interviewer: Elisabeth Moborg, referred to as **E**
Interviewee: Vincent Nordström, referred to as **H3**
Time: 15ᵗʰ of May 2019, 5pm to 5:45pm
Location: TwentyOne record studio
Source: Recorded interview with a phone microphone

**E:** Describe the nature of TwentyOne

**H3:** We are a small family company operating in the media industry. Our operations include video- and sound production, such as music- and business videos. We sell our services mainly through marketing in social media and online, and many of our current customers have been

obtained through successfully dealth with customer relationships from the past. So, in other words, the marketing works more efficiently trough our concrete, published work. The company is a limited company and as it is a family company its CEO is my dad. We are four persons altogether in the company.

**E:** How would you describe the culture of TwentyOne?

**H3:** As we are a family business, we have experience, know-how and views from a wide age range towards our creative work. We represent an easy to approach, lightweight and agile performing company to our stakeholders. What makes us personal, among other things, is that alongside our main activities we have a small record label that produces music, and the visual side is possible, thanks to our versatile know-how, to be kept inside the family and the team.

**E:** Right. And, how about the external communication with stakeholders?

**H3:** In stakeholder communication we use actively different social media channels and we can produce content to them diversely and extensively, also for example with our record label artists. Our customers are businesses, artists, record labels… Our promise to them is to provide new videos at an even pace, and to be active on the music side.

**E:** And how would you like to think the stakeholders perceive TwentyOne?

**H3:** As a trustworthy, high-quality and easy to approach videomaker and music publisher! I mean, that's what our customers tell us, and they keep coming back, so…

**E:** And if you could describe a typical work project, how would it go?

**H3:** Honestly, our every project is unique and our ways of proceeding differ from case to case.

## Appendix 3. Non-exclusive licence

A non-exclusive licence for reproduction and for granting public access to the graduation thesis

I _____ (*author's name) (date of birth*:…………………..)

1. Give Tallinn University of Technology a permission (non-exclusive licence) to use free of charge my creation

_____

_____

_____,

(*title of the graduation thesis*)

supervised by_____,

(*name of the supervisor*)

1.1. to reproduce with the purpose of keeping and publishing electronically, including for the purpose of supplementing the digital collection of TalTech library until the copyright expires;

1.2. to make available to the public through the web environment of Tallinn University of Technology, including through the digital collection of TalTech library until the copyright expires.

2. I am aware that the author will also retain the rights provided in Section 1.

3. I confirm that by granting the non-exclusive licence no infringement is committed to the third persons' intellectual property rights or to the rights arising from the personal data protection act and other legislation.

1. The non-exclusive licence is not valid during the access restriction period with the exception of the right of the university to reproduce the graduation thesis only for the purposes of preservation.