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THE IMPORTANCE OF A FIRM REPRESENTATIVE  
AND INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS FOR  
CORPORATE BRAND CREATION

— *Case Study of MiTale*

Master's Thesis in International marketing  
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Abstract for Master's thesis

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>This study answers to the call for further research on the Interactive Network Branding (INB) process. It uses theoretical conceptualisation of INB and studies those processes in empirical settings. Moreover, this study concentrates on how individuals influence corporate brand creation through interpersonal interactions in business networks. Corporate brand is thus created through an INB process that evolves through internal, external and boundary-spanning interactions between the company's representatives.</p> <p>Previous literature regarding corporate branding is heavily focused on large companies, although the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) for the economy is enormous. Therefore, this study explores SME corporate branding activities in more depth. With the creation of a strong corporate brand through INB processes, SMEs can succeed in industries dominated by large companies. The empirical evidence obtained for this study was collected from an SME, which operates in the Finnish game industry.</p> <p>Based on prior academic research and the empirical results of this study, corporate branding as a phenomenon is still found to be an unfamiliar topic among the SMEs. The empirical results confirm that the role of an individual for corporate brand creation is essential. The results further indicate that the entrepreneur has significant responsibility for creating and managing the corporate brand through an INB process. Exploiting this new approach, SMEs can improve their corporate brand without major investments.</p>	
Keywords: Interactive Network Branding, interactions, corporate brand, reputation, identity, individual	
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## **GLOSSARY**

SME: Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (see section 2)

INB: Interactive Network Branding (see section 3)

IMP: Industrial Marketing and Purchasing group

B2B: Business to business

PR: Public relations

CEO: Chief executive officer

Actor: A participant within the network, for instance: a seller or a buyer

Stakeholder: Corporate, a group, an organisation, a third party

Market-based assets: Customer relationships, Channel relationships, Partner relationships

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will first introduce the background of this study. Secondly, it will provide the problem statement and research objectives, followed by a structure of the thesis. Lastly, it will present the focus of the study and the delimitations.

## 1.1 Background

Previously, the corporate brand has been studied mainly from the perspective of large companies (Ahonen, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2013; Odoom et al., 2017). Interest in SME branding has increased only in recent years. Nevertheless, there is still little research regarding this subject. The importance of SMEs for the economy is undisputed, as SMEs currently account for 99 percent of all businesses in Europe (European Commission, 2019).

Meanwhile, in the technology era, entering the game industry is easy, as there is no significant investment required to start a business. However, success there requires selling expertise and networks. Even if the company can develop a great game or an application, it needs to be able to sell it.

The Finnish game industry has grown significantly in recent years. However, the game industry has faced challenges, due to, for instance, increased competition and lack of marketing skills. As Ylä-Outinen (2018) states in her article, Finnish game companies are currently suffering from a lack of skilled marketing. One reason for this is that corporate branding has been considered as a secondary activity among SMEs (Krake, 2005; Mann and Kaur, 2013, Odoom et al., 2017) In addition, market openness has only highlighted these existing problems, which could be solved through strong corporate branding.

Several studies have shown that the corporate brand benefits the company's success (Centeno et al., 2013; Asamoah, 2014, Odoom et al., 2017). Branding enables SMEs to thrive in areas that are dominated by large companies (Agostini et al., 2015, Odoom et al., 2017), such as in the game industry. According to a systematic review between years 2006 and 2015, SME branding has only had 69 relevant published articles on the subject (see Bocconcelli et al., 2018). This is somewhat strange, because SMEs offer the majority of jobs in Finland and Europe. (European Commission, 2019). Current literature provides

empirical studies on the subject, but most of them are related to large companies, and thus, their proposals are not suitable for SMEs. (Odoom et al., 2017)

Therefore, it is worth examining these challenges and focusing on SMEs and how their corporate brand is formed and what significance it has for the company.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Marketing scholars have recently started to combine the IMP network approach with corporate branding literature, while focusing on interpersonal interactions (Koporcic and Törnroos, 2015, Koporcic, 2017, Koporcic & Halinen, 2018). However, since these studies were mostly focused on the conceptual development of the Interactive Network Branding (INB) concept, there is a limited amount of data and empirical evidence on the topic. In addition, these concepts highlight that SMEs are often neglecting corporate branding as an activity, although its importance for the success of the company is vital (see chapter 2.1).

As INB lacks empirical research and is a relatively new and poorly understood phenomenon among the entrepreneurs, it makes it a fascinating topic to study. It consists of many different concepts that require in-depth understanding, which are examined in this study.

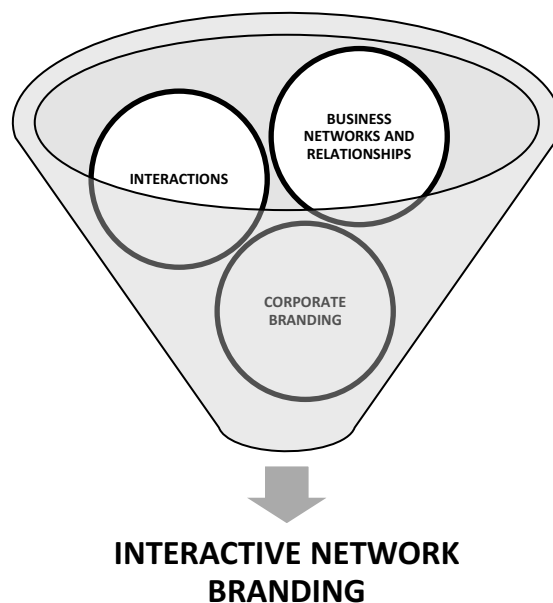




Figure 1: Conceptual Background of INB.

Figure 1 provides the conceptual background of Interactive Network Branding, where interactions, business networks and relationships, and corporate branding regarding SMEs in the B2B context are all combined. Understanding the importance of INB can boost the success of entrepreneurs without any significant investment. In addition, the results of this thesis can reduce an entrepreneur's ignorance regarding corporate branding and encourage concentrating on the interpersonal interactions between business partners.

### **1.3 Research Questions and Objectives**

The main objective of this thesis is to investigate the role of INB in the SME game industry, and the way companies create their desired network positions. In order to investigate the phenomenon in its depth, the main objective of the thesis has been divided into the following secondary objectives:

RO1: To examine the concept of INB in the SME context

RO2: To help the case company to understand the importance of INB

RO3: To analyse the importance of a firm representative in corporate brand creation of an SME

The research questions of this study are the following:

RQ1: How can SMEs create a corporate brand through interpersonal interactions?

RQ2: What is the role of an individual in corporate brand creation?

RQ3: How can INB be used in order to ensure the success of a business?

RQ4: How to manage INB properly?

## **1.4 Structure**

This thesis is divided into eight main chapters, and it begins with an introduction. This is followed by a literature section, which is divided into two main parts. At first, a review of the SMEs and their typical characteristics will be given. It will then be followed by a review of the game industry and its current market situation. After that, the case company and its main products and services will be presented.

In the second literature chapter, the most important concept for this study, INB, is presented. After that, essential concepts related to INB are covered, to clarify INB as a concept. Then a summary of the literature is presented and the most critical points of the theory is discussed. The fifth chapter presents the chosen research methods. Then it continues with an analysis of the methodology used in the study, collecting data, processes and analysis. Finally, the reliability and validity of the research are considered.

In the sixth chapter, the empirical findings are presented, followed by a discussion. Finally, a conclusion with theoretical and managerial implications and possible further research topics are presented. The last chapter of the thesis consists the Swedish summary.

## **1.5 Focus and Delimitations**

This study consists of numerous heavy concepts and, in order to avoid any confusion between the concepts, some concepts are delimited. The focus is on INB and, more specifically, the role of individuals for creating the corporate brand.

In order to fully understand the multidimensionality of INB, business networks and relationships, interactions, and corporate branding theories are presented, as INB is the combination of those. However, the key concept of INB is delimited to interpersonal interactions, which is the core of INB and this study.

Although B2B branding literature has mostly focused on large companies, here we focus only on SMEs, based on their specific characteristics and way of conducting B2B branding.

The next delimitation is to focus on corporate branding in a B2B SME context. However, due to the lack of specific B2B and SME branding literature, the conclusions are drawn partly from literature that is designed for large companies.

Regarding the presented empirical results, this study is delimited to the game industry. Therefore, these results are not generally applicable to all industries. However, this study can serve as a framework for future studies.

In the following chapters, the relevant theories and concepts of this subject are presented. Later on, those theories are used in the analysis of the empirical findings.

## 2 SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

Small and medium-sized enterprises are defined by their amount of personnel and the amount of turnover or balance sheet. The table below demonstrates in more details the factors that define the company's category.

Company category	Staff headcount	Turnover	or	Balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m		≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m		≤ € 2 m

Table 1. Definition of SMEs by figures (adapted from the European Commission 2019).

The contribution of the SMEs for the whole economy in the European Union (EU) is crucial, as according to the European Commission (2019) SMEs' represent 99 per cent of all businesses in the EU. While in Finland 99,8 percentage of all enterprises are SMEs. Currently, the number of starting entrepreneurs in Finland is below the EU and OECD average, which is surprising considering that many surveys state that Finns highly values entrepreneurship. However, during the last two decades, SMEs in Finland have managed to create jobs for almost 105 000 people (The Federation of Finnish Enterprises, 2019a) and employing 65,4 percentage of all enterprises and sectors, which is in a total of 931 146 employees. The turnover created by SMEs in 2017 was 240 billion euros, which represents 59 percentage of the turnover of all enterprises and 40% of the Finnish GDP (Federation of Finnish Enterprises, 2019b).

### 2.1 Branding in SME

Based on the study of Krake (2005) most of the SMEs suffers from a lack of understanding of the brand management. Therefore, its use is negligible, and it is considered as a non-priority task. It is either too complicated to understand, or it is regarded as an unnecessary activity. In addition, it is considered only as a matter of the highest management level and all the other personnel are left out of it. Any changes to be

made regarding design or branding policy are implemented by the entrepreneur. There is only a handful of SMEs with a person responsible for marketing that could control the brand management, but their utilisation in brand management is non-existent.

The decision-making regarding delivering the brand message is limited due to SME budget constraints. Since public relations (PR) is free, and it reaches a wide range of people, it is the preferred method of communication for SMEs. Moreover, most of the names of the companies and brands purposefully differ from each other. In many cases, the companies are using one or two brand names, but only a few SMEs are exploiting brand synergy by having a third brand name. The idea of cooperation or co-branding with other businesses has been ignored. Lastly, half of the companies stated that the characteristics of the entrepreneur are vital for recognition of the name, and that the entrepreneur itself is the brand (Krake, 2005).

SMEs are mainly driven by their products, which they are incredibly proud of. This pride is reflected in product quality, attractiveness and design. It is typical for an SME to aim primarily at revenue growth and simultaneously to increase its brand awareness. However, due to niche resources, such as staff and capital, the company is mainly focusing on what gains most profit, i.e. selling its products or services (Krake, 2005).

According to a study by Merrilees and Wong (2005), SMEs experience branding as a minimal entity and expect it to be just about advertising and the logo. However, many SMEs believe in the power of the brand and its impact, but they are already worried about daily chores and business and the time it requires. To better understand and manage the brand, SMEs should remove time from other tasks, which is rarely possible. Because of this, the time spent on branding is limited even though there might be a clear interest. As the company grows, entrepreneurs are willing to focus on branding if time permits, which is undoubtedly interesting, assuming that as the company grows, there will be even less time left for other tasks.

Mowles and Merrilees (2005) in their study on branding Australian SME wineries found that there are two types of branding approach used by SMEs, which are product- and marketing-driven.

The product-driven approach was identified as the wine **itself** was the brand, and it was the differentiation factor.

The marketing-driven approach was identified as some of the wineries were creating experiences for the consumers at the winery, instead of concentrating only on the wine.

Based on these findings, it can be argued that in many SMEs, the importance of brand management is slightly misunderstood, given its low emphasis by SMEs in their daily activities. Although it is the responsibility of the entrepreneurs themselves, less often the entrepreneur has time to manage it, in addition to their daily tasks. The fact that SMEs are refrained from using their partners for collaboration purposes and customer confusion with two different brands is a definite obstacle for creating a strong brand (Krake, 2005).

In summary, it is inevitable that traditional promotional tools are for larger firms and SMEs need to market themselves personally to prove their benefits, which in turn reduces the time available for performing other activities (Wong and Merrilees, 2005). It is normal for SMEs to use all their available resources for product development instead of brand building (Ojasalo et al., 2008) since branding is considered only as a marketing tool for larger companies (Wong and Merrilees, 2005). Lastly, the role of the owner is all in everything, both managing the company and managing the brand (Aaker, 1996).

## **2.2 Game Industry**

Since the introduction of games to consumer households in 1980, the global game industry has developed and grown explosively. Currently, the value of the global game market is as high as the literature market. According to earlier forecasts, in 2018, 2.2 billion of the world's population were active players, and a total of about €122 billion was spent on games. In addition, the global game industry is expected to see annual growth of over 10% for the coming years (Neo Games Finland Association, 2019b), which is also reflected in the development of the Finnish game industry.

The game industry in Finland has been growing during the last years, until 2017 when the net sales fell slightly from the previous year. In 2017, the game industry's net sales in Finland were approximately 2.36 billion EUR, employing approximately 3 000 people. Despite a slight drop in the net sales in 2016, 2017 was a significant year for the game industry, with four companies in the game industry listed on the Helsinki Stock Exchange. In addition, the number of new businesses grew to 260, and new games were established on the market with about 150, most of which were mobile games. In an international

comparison, Finland is the third largest game developer country in Europe and one of the world's leading game development countries in mobile games (Neo Games Finland Association, 2019a).

In the light of more detailed figures, the Finnish game industry is challenging to review, since the establishment of game companies is quite easy, and therefore there are no accurate, or up-to-date materials available. According to the report *The Game Industry Of FINLAND (2016)* produced by Neo Games Finland Association, the number of companies employing more than 50 people in 2016 was ten, and the number of companies with a turnover of over one million was thirty. In the same year, Rovio and Supercell accounted for 92.5 per cent of the total turnover, with Supercell alone accounting for 84.8 per cent (Rajala, 2017). Based on these figures, most of the companies in the game industry in Finland are SMEs, except four companies listed in the stock exchange. Although the results of the Finnish game industry are mainly based on these four big companies, the importance and potential of SMEs for the entire game industry should not be underestimated. We should not forget that these large listed companies have also started as SMEs, which encourages investors to seek the next big thing. Moreover, two successful serial entrepreneurs in the Finnish game industry founded a venture capital fund that invests in early-stage Finnish game companies (Lappalainen, 2018).

Currently, it is essential for the future of the Finnish game industry that the sector can overcome its many challenges. One of the major challenges the industry is currently facing is increasing global competition and user acquisition costs. Another major challenge is finding skilled people, i.e. a labour shortage (Neo Games Finland Association, 2019a). In addition to these challenges, marketing in the Finnish game industry is experiencing problems, which in turn can accelerate the growth of foreign competitors. The reason for this problem is simply the lack of proper marketing skills and finding the right people for that job (Ylä-Outinen, 2018), which could all be solved with successful SME branding through INB processes.

Next, one of the SMEs that are operating in the Finnish game industry is presented, to demonstrate the importance of SMEs for future development.

## **2.3 MiTale**

MiTale is a relatively new game development company with ambitious goals to expand globally and develop a better future through games. The company was founded at the end of 2016. However, it has been developing games for several years before, as the CO-Founder of MiTale Natasha Bulatovic Trygg and her old team created the first demo of Sanalanka, which is a Speech Therapy Interactive Book -application for mobile devices. Natasha's current team consists of 10 experienced professionals from the game industry. The whole team has a passion for interactive storytelling and serious games. MiTale also collaborates occasionally with two other companies; BitByByte Creations and Indium Technology regarding software development. In addition, it has Coronaria – Speech Therapy Services and the Finnish Speech Therapy Association as business partners and collaborators.

MiTale's primary focus is on producing games that combine the globally recognised high-quality Finnish education and mixed reality solutions through gamification. This includes narrative-driven cross-platform development, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), mixed reality (MR) and extended reality (XR) games. In addition, the company provides various kinds of services, starting from a game design and moving even to consulting (Website of MiTale, 2019).

After presenting the SME, which is in the focus of this thesis, we move next to presenting the specific branding strategy, used by SMEs in business-to-business (B2B) context.



### 3 INTERACTIVE NETWORK BRANDING

The Interactive Network Branding (INB) concept is relatively new, which is why there are only a few studies about it (Koporcić and Törnroos, 2015; Koporcić, 2016; Koporcić, 2017; Koporcić and Halinen, 2018). Its purpose is to combine two well-studied paradigms: corporate branding and network approach by the IMP group. According to the current literature, these two paradigms have been studied extensively and proven to be extremely useful, but their emphasis has been limited and has serious research gaps regarding their combination. For instance, corporate branding lacks a business network perspective, and the business network and interaction approach ignores the corporate branding (Koporcić, 2017; Koporcić and Halinen, 2018).

Koporcić (2017) defines the concept of Interactive Network Branding as “*a socially constructed value outcome of mutually interacted processes between connected actors in business networks*” (p. 23). It is created in order to understand how branding occurs in business networks. Instead of focusing on the traditional understanding of corporate branding, it investigates the business relationships and network connections, especially the process of how corporate identity and the reputation of an SME are emerging through interpersonal interactions. Moreover, within this concept, the control of the brand shifts from a single company to individuals of the company and the perceived value of the corporate brands are created through individual human interactions (Koporcić, 2017).

INB emphasises the importance of individuals in creating identity and reputation, as individuals from companies interact with other individuals from other companies. Individuals are representing their company, and without those individuals, the company’s product or service would be worthless. Particularly in SMEs, the importance of an individual is even more critical, since entrepreneurs are considered as the figurehead of the company, both internally and externally. Moreover, all the daily tasks are mostly executed by the entrepreneur. How these individuals interact largely determines the reputation and identity of the company, which are two elements of the corporate brand (Koporcić and Halinen, 2018). Thus, it is essential to identify the following three types of interpersonal interactions and how those are related to each other in order to analyse the created brand perception (see figure 2).

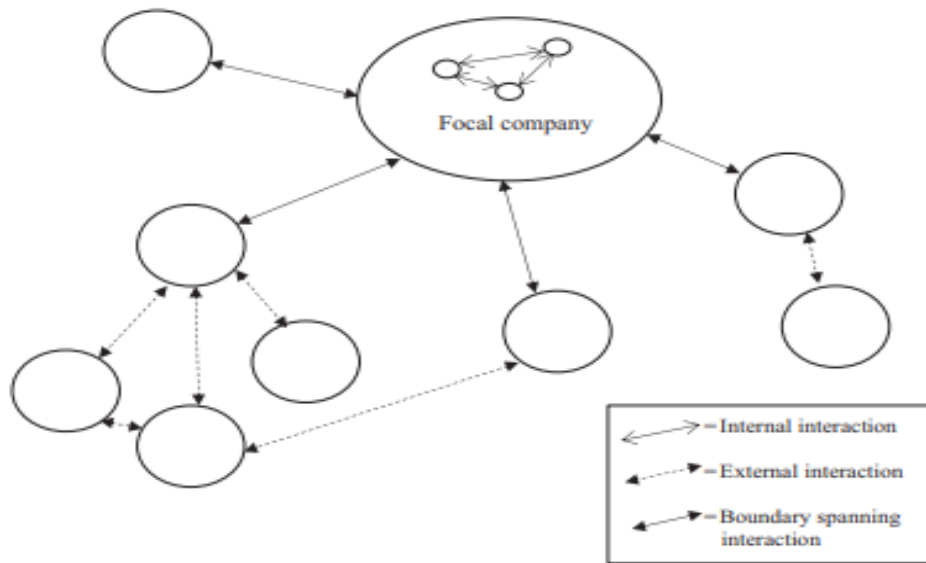


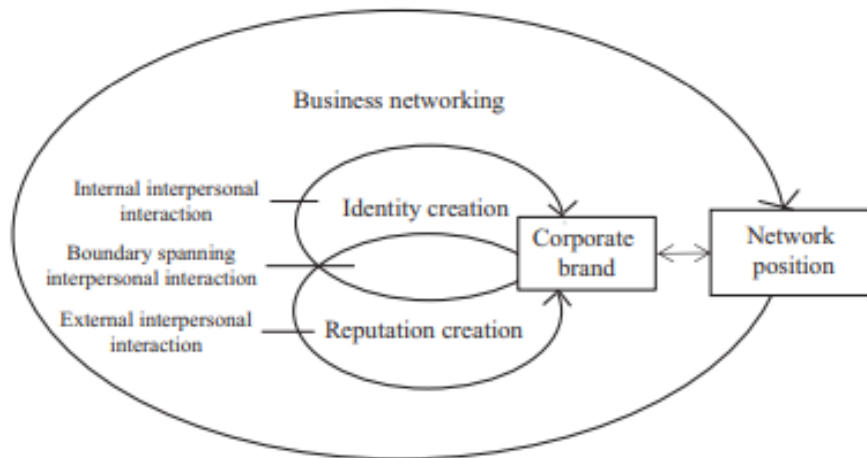
Figure 2. Three types of interpersonal interaction in Interactive Network Branding. Source: Koporcic and Halinen, 2018: 399.

Internal interactions occur inside of the focal company between individuals who are in different positions and departments of the SME. For instance, the CEO interacts with the software developer. These interpersonal interactions are vital for creating the corporate identity of a firm (Koporcic and Halinen, 2018).

External interactions occur between individuals who are not a part of the focal company but are still connected, either directly or indirectly to the focal company. For instance, word-of-mouth, referrals, references and different perceptions are examples of creations of these external interactions. These external interactions are vital for creating the corporate brand reputation in business networks, especially in areas where the focal company is excluded (Koporcic and Halinen, 2018).

Boundary spinning interactions occur between individuals of the focal company and external actors at the borderline of the company's network environment. These boundary spinning interactions are common for sales and buying representatives (Koporcic and Halinen, 2018). For instance, sales representatives cooperate with many other companies and actors by exchanging information and knowledge. As an outcome, it influences the formation of identities between all the participants (Geiger and Finch, 2009), but reputation as well. In other words, in the boundary spinning interactions, "the internal

identity formation and external reputation creation collide and affect each other.” (Koporcić and Halinen, 2018: 398).



**Notes:** Circles indicate a process; rectangles indicate an outcome; arrows indicate an effect

Figure 3. A process model of Interactive Network Branding. Source: Koporcić and Halinen, 2018: 399.

Figure 3 illustrates the processual model of INB that is based on a business network and corporate branding literature. It highlights the importance of individual interactions in creating the corporate brand in business network settings. Using this model in SMEs could improve their corporate brands and branding without spending their already scarce resources. It is clear that INB could reduce the already mentioned challenges that are related to SMEs and corporate branding. However, the challenge with INB is the management of it, as it is associated with both planned and unplanned activities with external and internal actors (Koporcić and Halinen, 2018).

In summary, the INB is an extreme multidimensional concept, which consists of the following theories: interaction and network -approach, corporate branding and business relationships in the B2B context. Therefore, these relevant theories that build INB are presented within the next sections of this chapter.

### 3.1 Business Networks and Relationships

Business relationships are the core of the network, as Anderson et al. (1994, p.2) define a business network as “a set of two or more connected business relationships, in which

each exchange relation is between business firms that are conceptualised as collective actors.’’

The network itself is in a constant change, which is why it is challenging to manage it. Changes arise from interactions within relationships and, thus, the network can be considered as constantly evolving. Any activity within the network has either a direct or indirect impact on the whole network. Consequently, even a small act can have a significant impact on another actor within the network (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Figure 4 illustrates the connectedness of each actor and how the company’s identity is embedded in the network through its relationships.

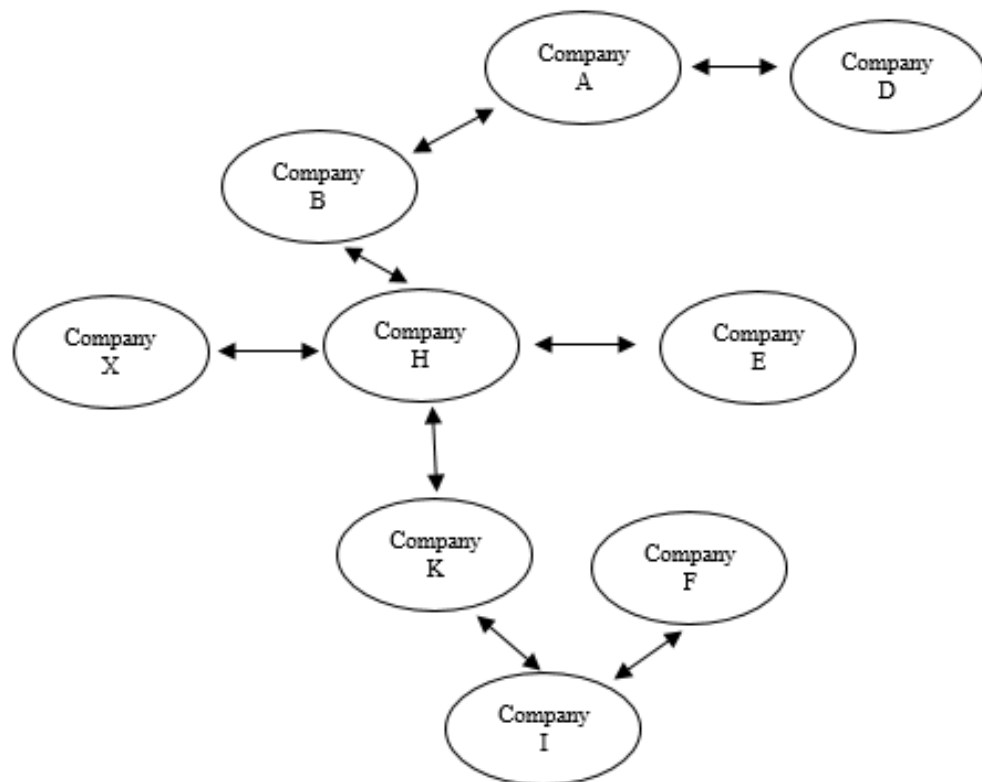


Figure 4: Connectedness between actors in the Business Networks.

It is typical that a business network includes several companies, only a few of which are essential to the focal company (Håkansson et al., 2009). Relationships with these few companies are categorised as close relationships that require larger investments and greater risk-taking from the company. With them, the company obtains better opportunities to grow its operations and access more resources. The rest of the

relationships that the company has are defined as weak relationships, which are the opposite of the close-relationships. However, the importance of weak relationships should be considered, as they provide valuable information and require fewer investments. In addition, there is always a possibility that these weak relationships can be developed into strong relationships (Håkansson, 1987).

A prerequisite for a functioning network is to develop the internal structure of the company to match the network world. More specifically, internal processes, resources and relationships must be connected. It is the responsibility of the entrepreneur to keep all employees up to date on the network and related activities, as the company's internal operations generally differ from the network's operations. Bringing individuals into the network reduces the burden on the entrepreneur and facilitates the information flow. However, it is almost impossible to observe or determine how individuals perform and its impact on the entire network which, in turn, makes it difficult to analyse the entire network. Furthermore, the more individuals are involved, the more challenging it becomes. (Håkansson et al., 2009).

Håkansson et al. (2009) compare the business world as a rainforest. The purpose of this comparison is to emphasise the success and fate of each entity depending on the other entity and vice versa; in other words, each entity is interdependent. These entities are customers, suppliers and other related companies and governmental and non-governmental organisations. Despite tough competition, sharing information between competitors is beneficial for both parties. Sharing information from past experiences can help avoid making bad decisions and, at the same time obtain better knowledge of what can and should be done. By gaining information about the competitors' customers and their experience, allows companies to produce better-tailored products for their customers, instead of producing products that the company itself only believes in. While sharing information with a competitor sounds terrifying, its primary purpose is to deliver benefits to both parties (Håkansson et al., 2009).

Interaction and business relationships enable the company to gain more access to resources, which enables companies to exploit their products and services more extensively and efficiently. In addition, businesses are always up to date on the current situation in the market and how others are performing. This allows companies to direct their actions in the right direction (Håkansson et al., 2009).

Exploiting and managing relationships is considered as a complex matter, because business relationships are multidimensional. Regarding managing these relationships, social skills are highlighted because the interaction process consists of individuals who are in constant interaction with each other. After all, the role of the individual is to create and develop the relationship, where trust and commitment plays a significant role (Håkansson et al., 2009).

Over time, companies are required to review the current relationships and whether they are in line with their vision and requirements. In order to avoid conflicts, it is worth knowing whether companies have different perspectives on the relationships and the future (Håkansson et al., 2009). In addition, companies should review and develop old and current relationships to a greater extent, since according to Håkansson (1987), old relationships are often forgotten and there is too much emphasis on finding new relationships. Partly because of this, some relationships are not beneficial to both parties, but these relationships are still maintained due to earlier agreements and investments. Furthermore, to terminate any relationship requires thorough analysis and understanding of the current relationship. (Håkansson et al., 2009).

These business relationships form the business network, which defines a certain position of the company within the network. The interaction studies are presented in the next section, in order to demonstrate why SMEs should focus more on interactions.

### **3.2 The Interaction model**

The interaction approach is created by the IMP group for the purpose of studying the interaction between the buyer and the seller in the industrial markets.

The interaction approach is based on certain factors that are typical for the industrial markets. According to Håkansson (1982), the market is open where both sides are active participants. Both the buyer and the seller can exploit new opportunities in the market and prepare for them. Relationships are characterised by their proximity and longevity, which is why marketers and buyers are likely to use most of the time to maintain established relationships, rather than straightforward selling and buying. Over time, these

connections become a stable relationship in which both sides have clear roles in different processes. However, that might require process and operation adaptation from either party or at least one of the parties. It should be recognised that these relationships can include both conflict and cooperation. Moreover, relationships with raw materials and component suppliers are often considered as close relationships, and the importance of previous random purchases and joint evaluation should be more emphasised.

In order to study the interactions between buying and selling companies, Håkansson (1982) has identified four different groups of variables and how they are related to each other. These variables are presented below, in figure 5. The variables of this model and their relationships between each other are analysed through the interaction approach.

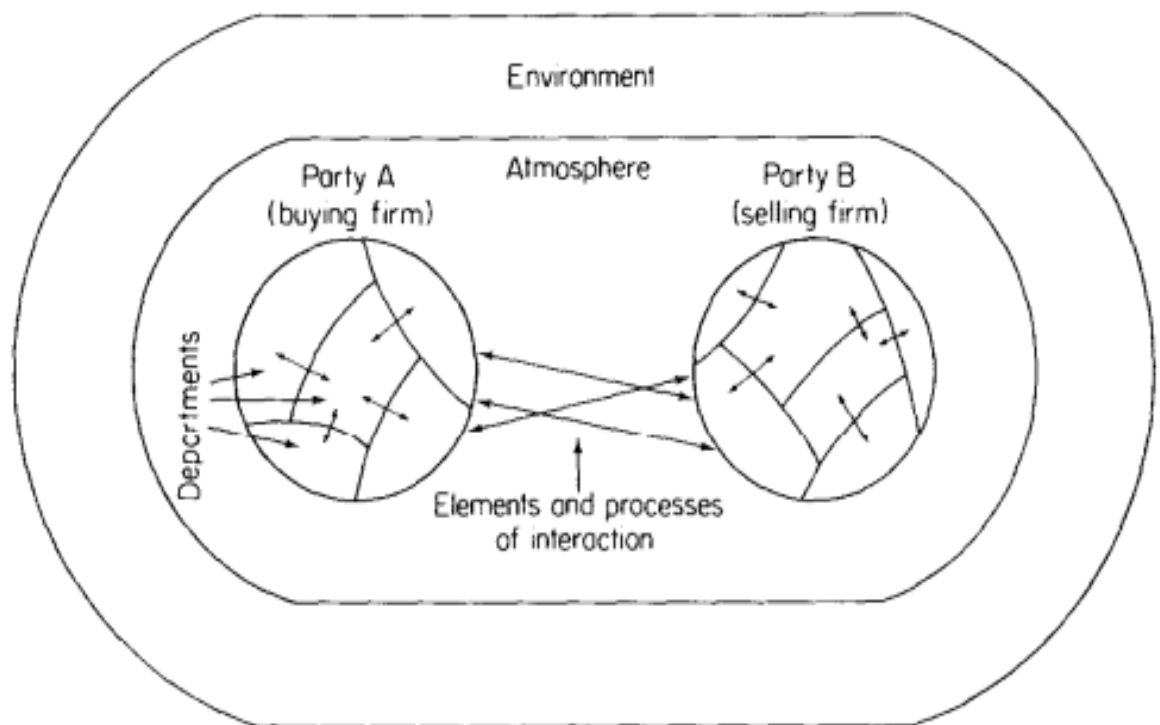


Figure 5: Main elements of The Interaction Model. Source: Håkansson 1982:15.

The interaction process is defined as a constant exchange process between at least two actors. Elements that are being exchanged are products and services, information, financial and social. These exchange processes are defined as short episodes that eventually evolve into long-term relationships and processes. None of these exchange elements can be identified as the most important. On the contrary, all of them are vital for the creation of relationships. The most common episode is the exchange of products and services, between the buyer and the seller, as it is one of the main reasons for the whole

interaction. The extent to which the exchange satisfies both parties largely determines the quality and duration of the relationship (Håkansson, 1982).

These four elements of exchange are an essential part of the interaction process, which is also affected by the characteristics and differences of each party. It is typical for companies and organisations that each company and organisation has different structures, resources, strategies, technology and objectives. They also differ in size, operating methods, products and market position. Individuals are again characterised by differences in age, background, experience, education, character and motivation (Håkansson, 1982). In addition to these, cultural and linguistic differences create an additional challenge in the international market.

The environment in the Interaction model reflects the environment where the interaction occurs. Within the interaction environment, the buyer and seller interactions are considered within a wider context that consists of multiple aspects such as market structure, dynamism, internationalisation, position in the manufacturing channel and the social system. It is important for the company to understand that the environment is truly multidimensional and extensive (Håkansson, 1982).

The last variable in the model is the atmosphere, which forms another group of intervening variables — consisting of different combinations of environmental, company-specific, and interaction process characteristics. Moreover, all the previously mentioned variables are also factors that are creating the atmosphere. Håkansson (1982: 21) has described the atmosphere “in terms of a power-dependence relationship which exists between the companies, the state of conflict or co-operation and overall closeness or distance of the relationship as well as by the companies’ mutual expectations”. In addition, they have identified that there are different kinds of advantages and disadvantages regarding different atmospheres. (Håkansson, 1982).

There is always a reason for starting any relationship, either it is a conflict or cooperation. These reasons can be analysed more thoroughly through economic and control dimensions (Håkansson, 1982).

Economic dimensions are related to economic benefits that a company can achieve through a relationship. With close relationships a company can reduce transaction and



production cost, increase revenue, optimise production, achieve positive gains, intensify activities and achieve more information (Håkansson, 1982).

Control dimensions are related to controlling its environment. With close interactions, a company can control the other party in order to reduce the associated uncertainties. By controlling another, the company can predict better and manage its environment. However, the possibility for becoming power-dependent needs to be considered, as controlling can reduce the power of the other. (Håkansson, 1982).

In conclusion, the balance between power and dependence in a relationship is a crucial factor. Before establishing any relationship, the company should consider the economic and control dimensions as well as the opportunity costs of that single relationship (Håkansson, 1982).

To summarise, the interaction process includes many different kinds of characteristics and participants that require understanding and adaption from both parties in order to create a long-term mutually beneficial relationship through the interaction process (Håkansson 1982). It should be considered as a long-term investment with both good and bad outcomes. They are created in purpose, spontaneously, occasionally and ad hoc. It enables companies to discover and create new opportunities. However, there is always a risk of failure in interaction, which can be detrimental both economically and socially. Another risk is a situation where one party fails economically or makes something unpredictable, which damages both parties due to the dependency. The interaction process is also associated with costs, especially at the beginning of it. However, these costs should be seen as a long-term investment, which pays themselves back over time. Different parties value the benefits of interaction in different ways. It is vital to take advantage of previous knowledge and experience, in order to learn and teach both sides. Building commitment and trust is essential for any successful interaction. Some of the relationships will fail, and some of the relationships become harmful (Håkansson et al., 2009), but eventually, the successful interaction processes between the individuals will form the long-lasting relationships. Furthermore, how the upcoming challenges and problems are solved will determine the success of the relationship (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995).

Next, we present branding, as a neglected part of business relationships and network domain.

### **3.3 Corporate brand, Identity and Reputation**

Examining the literature on corporate brand, organisational identity and reputation, it is clear that there is a lack of studies of these three concepts relating to SMEs. However, there are massive archives of studies related to larger companies that have already established their position in the market (see arguments by Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007; Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones, 2017).

Nilson (1992), and Gilmore et al. (1999) argue that these three concepts are extremely vital in creating the brand regardless of the size of the company. Furthermore, according to Keller (1998) brand strategies provide suggestions on branding for entrepreneurs and smaller companies. To a degree, it is clear that previous studies for larger companies are to some extent suitable for SMEs. As Abimbola and Vallaster (2007, p.342) state that “the concepts of brand, organisational identity and reputation means of meaning creation that cannot be associated with large organisation only”.

In the following sections, the literature on brands, organisational identity and reputation related to large companies and SMEs is presented.

#### **3.3.1 Creating The Corporate Brand**

According to current literature regarding corporate branding, branding is being considered as an organisational level activity. As such, the roles of individuals are ignored during the formation of the brand (Melewar et al., 2012), although they are behind the execution of the activities. Biraghi and Gambetti (2015) argue that corporate branding is just “a matter of corporate communication”, but as a concept, it is functional for both academia and practice purposes. In a sense, based on a review of the literature, corporate branding has been previously considered a tool or activity, which is just a part of business, nothing more.

However, during the last few decades the quantity of studies regarding corporate branding has increased (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). Furthermore, researchers have demanded a comprehensive study of theoretical perspectives in corporate branding concerning

relational, processual and constructionist approaches (Cornelissen et al., 2012; Biraghi and Gambetti, 2015). Simultaneously, it has created confusion within the corporate branding concepts (Koporcic, 2017). In order to fully understand the multidisciplinary roots of this concept, it is vital to perceive the three major shifts that have created the confusion (Biraghi and Gambetti, 2015).

The first shift in corporate branding concepts concerns the change from the traditional concept of focusing on products and external environment towards corporate objectives and internal environment (e.g. Balmer, 2001). In the second shift, the focus changed from customers and employees to organisational values and strategy creation (e.g. Urde, 2003; Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). Lastly, the third shift considers a completely new concept that branding itself is a constant process that emerges from a continuous interaction between organisations and stakeholders, instead of an organisation level activity (Biraghi and Gambetti, 2015).

The importance of brands is undoubtedly one of the essential matters regarding the company's success. To survive in the business world, it is a necessity to obtain a competitive advantage (Balmer, 1995) and regarding corporate brand it must stand for something. With strong brands companies create their credibility and awareness within their whole network, including customers, suppliers, manufacturers and partners (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007).

Corporate branding is one of the essential elements of marketing. Through the brand, the company is in constant interaction with the external environment, such as customers. Furthermore, it enables companies to create new relationships and partnerships, and to increase existing market-based assets, regardless of the company's size. Eventually, all of this leads to increased market share and consumer brand equity which, in turn, increases the company's profitability (Abimbola, 2001). In the case of SMEs regarding corporate brand creation, the importance of existing customer relationships and networks is only emphasised. SMEs tend to have a limited customer base (Stokes, 2000), which creates their challenges regarding business growth (Abimbola, 2001).

How to build a strong and well-known brand when the hands of entrepreneurs and SMEs are already tied up with the daily chores?

In order to survive in a constantly changing market where the boundaries of the internal and external environment are almost undetectable, SMEs are required to place a greater emphasis on the brand of the company, i.e. the corporate brand with the objective to create a sustainable basis for long-term success (Abratt and Mofokeng 2001; Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Kay, 2006). In particular, the brand must mark something and stand out from others (Kay, 2006).

Based on the current literature, there are only a few suggestions from which the company can benefit. Before applying any suggestions, it is vital to remember that, as each company and its brand are unique, those should be considered on a single case bases. Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) suggest that the company brand can be modified, for example, by changing its branding elements such as name, slogan or symbol. However, the outcome of any changes can be positive, or it can even damage the brand (Muzellec and Lambkin 2006, Gotsi and Andriopoulos, 2007). Thus, before any changes, it is vital to recognise the actual reasons that lead to the need for changes. Finally, the ultimate purpose behind every change is to create a new perception for the company and its brand in the eyes of stakeholders and competitors (Abimbola, 2001).

Melewar et al. (2012) present three arguments on corporate branding:

1. The impact on stakeholders must be considered during corporate brand building.
2. Individuals and the organisation create a corporate brand.
3. Corporate brand management is a dynamic process.

Based on previous literature, these arguments are to some extent suitable for entrepreneurs and SMEs, although the study of Melewar et al. (2012) considers corporate branding in general. Regardless, most of the corporate branding -related concepts are designed for larger companies. These arguments are excluded with financial and resource limitations, which are the main factors that differentiate the use of theory for SMEs. Although SMEs suffer from resource limitations, that impact can be minimised by careful planning and coherent understanding of the desired corporate brand. In addition, involving the entire organisation in brand creation reduces the effects, because, as opposed to strong brands with significant resources, the branding policy of SMEs requires precise planning and an implementation process (Abimbola, 2001).

The branding process consists of integration and implementation of various branding instruments such as logo, reputation, communication, trademark, name and design (see for instance Keller, 1998; Murphy, 1992). All these branding instruments are unlikely a fit for all companies, as each company is unique. Above all, is the recognition of the appropriateness and the importance of each instrument. Hence, it can utilise these instruments jointly, because, regarding a successful brand strategy, it is vital to concentrate on the entity, where all these instruments are utilised together effectively, rather than concentrating on just one instrument (Abimbola, 2001).

In the world, many successful companies are excellent examples for others, on how to create a strong brand by utilising brand policy. Notable is that these companies have started as SMEs. For instance, Apple and Amazon have established their business from a garage, and currently these two companies are among the world's leading companies, with strong brands. Even though SMEs are defeated by larger companies in the light of resources, the effect of the brand is undoubtedly exceptionally high in terms of growth potential and market-based assets (Abimbola et al., 1999). Furthermore, with consistent, coherent and integrated communication policy that can be achieved through brand awareness, a firm can earn credit (Abimbola, 2001).

Abimbola (2001) suggests five different notions that an SME should take into consideration:

1. During the preliminary phase of a brand, try to avoid confusion with other competing brands by concentrating entirely on complementary elements of brands such as names, symbols and logos that support your marketing activities.
2. In order to target specific brand associations, combine creativity and design to create a specific marketing program for that particular brand association. Furthermore, the importance of the brand and its use in other forms of communication, such as advertising, product packaging, and media, must be taken into account (Murphy, 1992). With creativity, the marketing program can be modified to meet future needs.

3. Primarily, it is essential to know how to create a set of brand elements that enhance brand awareness and brand image. The brand must be recognisable from the customer's point of view as simple and memorable (Blackett and Denton, 1992:79).
4. Target the specific audience, by designing an appropriate campaign for that audience. In particular, SMEs need to make use of networking and word of mouth in order to create successful and unique customer relationships (Keller, 1998). Moreover, it is important to appear at local events, as well as in sponsorship, which is known to be effective and affordable marketing tools.
5. Take advantage of your secondary associations. Already familiar businesses, events and endorsers are significant factors that can strengthen and emphasise the brand.

On this basis, it can be assumed that a systematic approach to brand strategy would improve brand efficiency. Hence, even SMEs suffer from a lack of resources. It can be assumed that this approach is more suitable for SMEs. due to the fact, that a systematic approach excludes financial and other internal resources. However, there is never any guarantee for the success of the brand, because ultimately it is the customers who decide the fate of the brand.

### **3.3.2 Creating The Identity**

The concept of corporate identity has several different definitions, and therefore it suffers from the lack of a precise definition. Consequently, it has frustrated the scholars and business people because, without a precise definition, studying, managing and controlling the identity is challenging (Melewar et al., 2003). The purpose of this chapter is to define the concept of corporate identity and provide an understanding of how multidisciplinary a field it is.

Although defining the concept has posed a challenge, organisations have understood the importance of strong corporate identity and what can be achieved with it. It is more than just a matter of designing a fancy logo and using it to obtain the attention of a particular

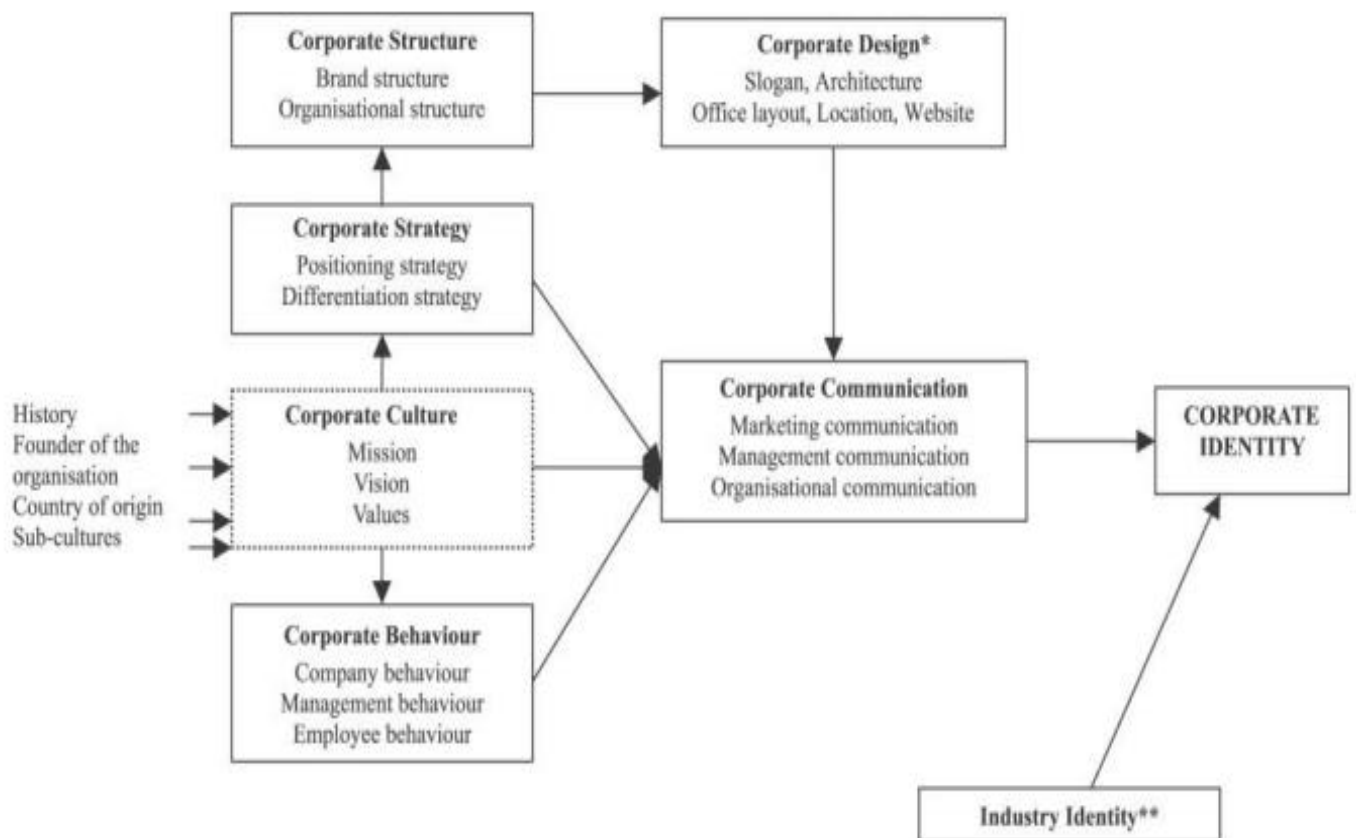
audience. Therefore, organisations are now striving to increase the company's attractiveness through identity. Creating a distinctive and robust identity vis-à-vis competitors, which employees are proud of, increases the employee motivation and at the same time, attracts other investors (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006). However, it is always vital to remember that SMEs are suffering from lack of financial and internal resources and budget limitations, while larger companies are fully equipped with financial and internal resources, which causes creating and shaping the identity of an SME a more difficult task (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007).

As a consequence of scarce resources, SMEs and entrepreneurs are forced to explore alternative ways to create their corporate identity. Without any marketing department nor resources, the solution lies inside of the company. The main task of the owners of SMEs and entrepreneurs is to deal with the daily routines and to lead the company, and also to be an example for other employees (Olins, 1978).

The way the owners of SMEs and entrepreneurs lead the organisation, based on their view of the world and previous experience is influencing the corporate identity (Wickham, 2001). According to Olins (1978), the corporate identity is formed through their daily actions that are based on the personality and the characteristics of the owner. Moreover, Einwiller and Will (2002) describe that an effective corporate identity consists of characteristics such as a reputation for high-quality products and services, a robust financial performance, meaningful workplace environment, and a reputation for corporate social responsibility. In other words, the corporate identity reflects everything that the company represents.

Comparing the organisational structure between SMEs and large companies, there is an enormous difference, since the large company has its own departments for almost every different operation, from customer acquisition to risk management, whereas in SMEs mainly the CEO is in response to all of the operations. This is beneficial for creating and maintaining the corporate identity. Due to a small organisational structure, most of the daily processes and responsibilities go through the owner's table, and it shortens the reaction time. Take, for example, customer feedback: In a small company, the information will be mainly directed to the CEO in the shortest possible time, while in a large company the feedback would probably never reach the person in charge (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007).

Although SMEs differs from large companies by their organisational structure and resources, the corporate identity includes the same factors. Identity building requires both accurate and careful planning and strategy creation. The most vital matter in creating an identity is to achieve a uniform idea of what a company is and what it wants to be, because the purpose of identity is to generate a competitive advantage over others. Before that, however, the company needs to be cognisant of all the influencing factors and how they are linked. For that purpose, Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006) have created a categorisation of all the different dimensions and sub-items that form the corporate identity, based on their findings while examining large companies and reviewing the literature of corporate identity as a concept (see figure 6).



**Note:**

\* Corporate Design (Visual Identity)

Figure 6: Categorisation of corporate identity factors Source: Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006: 865.



This categorisation enables companies to understand the multi-dimensional nature of the corporate identity and its complexity. By adopting all the relevant factors and their relationships with each other, companies can form the basis for strategy creation, not to mention that by utilising this categorisation the company can adapt the current strategy in order to target the desired stakeholders (Melewar and Karaousmanoglu, 2006). The desired identity for both SMEs and large companies can be achieved through thorough planning and engaging the entire organisation in the agreed matters, because eventually the actions of the company and its employees, based on the company's values and corporate culture, are the cornerstones of creating a corporate identity (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012).

### **3.3.3 Building The Reputation**

Reputation as a concept is extensive, and it has many different perceptions. Therefore, it is often confused with brand and image. To even measure or define a concept such as reputation is challenging due to its relative dependence on external factors (Abimbola and Kocak, 2007). Hence, there are various types of definitions of the corporate reputation concept and even a suggestion by Abimbola and Kocak (2007) that reputation and brand should be reviewed as one, because reputation is an outcome based on the customers' evaluation of the brand. The suggestion appears to be reasonable to some extent. Based on the other literature, both concepts are related to each other, but they differ in process, strategy and measuring.

A good reputation is essential for the success of every organisation and company. It will determine the fate of the organisation and without it an organisation will lose its sustainability (Firestein, 2006). The more stakeholders value the organisation, the more likely it is that potential stakeholders will be interested in the company (Fombrun and van Riel, 2003). Moreover, a higher number of interested stakeholders will more likely lead to a successful and profitable business (Roberts and Dowling, 2002).

However, it is vital to understand that building a sustainable reputation requires time and patience, as it arises from interactions between stakeholders and the organisation (Argenti and Druckemiller, 2004). Reputation in itself cannot be measured in units, as it is based on different stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). The

challenge of maintaining a great reputation is that perceptions change over time and that a good reputation is in danger to be lost extremely easily and quickly. Moreover, to restore it into the previous level is extremely challenging (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012) and sometimes it can be impossible.

A strong corporate reputation has a direct impact on successful customer relationships, and it even reinforces the existing customer relationships and customer satisfaction (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). One of the main spreading channels for reputation is word of mouth, which has a positive impact on organisations with large word-of-mouth advocacy rates and a diminishing effect on organisations with small word-of-mouth advocacy rates (Abimbola and Kocak, 2007).

Stakeholders are at the centre of creating a good reputation. The whole reputation is purely based on stakeholder experiences. Encounters with employees, the way the company communicates, and other factors that can be compared to competitors affect the company's reputation (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001).

It is vital to understand that stakeholders are experiencing matters in many different ways. Thus, in order to obtain a proper understanding of how stakeholders observe the organisation, organisations need to review the issue from the eyes of stakeholders. Thereby, organisations obtain a proper understanding of how stakeholders observe them and how they should be approached. In addition, it is essential to understand that all stakeholders have different levels of impact on the organisation's reputation. Therefore, the stakeholders are classified as primary and secondary categories (Clarkson, 1995; Wheeler and Sillanpaa, 1997).

The Primary category consists of stakeholders who regularly interact, such as customers, shareholders, investors and other business partners and competitors (Clarkson, 1995; Wheeler and Sillanpaa, 1997).

Secondary stakeholders are those who are less likely to interact without regular cooperation, such as the government, media influencers and competitors (Clarkson, 1995; Wheeler and Sillanpaa, 1997).

Although the stakeholders are divided into two unequal categories, both categories have a great significance regarding the reputation of the organisation, since today the access and dissemination of information are extremely easy and rapid.

In order to manage stakeholders, the organisation should create a strategy to achieve people's attention through positive experiences. The strategy should always be chosen carefully, and thorough analysis of the stakeholders should be conducted, as the strategy is yet easy to modify, in contrast to repairing a damaged reputation (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). Besides, it is vital to note that the same strategy is probably not suitable for everyone (O'Callaghan, 2007; Walker, 2010). After creating the strategy, it requires continuous development and monitoring in case of any changes regarding the current situation. In the case of SMEs and entrepreneurs, according to a study by Goldberg et al. (2003), the use a reputation building strategy has been limited, the cause of which is lack of resources (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007). To compete with scarce resources against larger organisations, entrepreneurs and SMEs need innovations, and the use of their own personal networks has a crucial role (Koporcic and Halinen, 2018).

The most crucial matter in creating a reputation for companies is to understand the vital factors that have the greatest impact on how different stakeholders perceive the company, since different stakeholders evaluate the company from different dimensions. Some may criticise the company based on its products and services, while others are only interested, in, for instance in involvement in community development and ethics (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012), not to mention that each stakeholder is unique and therefore, every company should develop its strategic plans for every stakeholder. It is almost impossible to execute a perfectly optimal strategy that would exclude any future challenges. The way those challenges are resolved determines the company's reputation. Despite the size of the company, managers are also required to understand the importance of stakeholders so that the entire organisation is in line with practices that are used to build and maintain the reputation. Since every interaction has either positive or negative effects (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007), the more positive experiences, the stronger and better is the reputation for the company (Fombrun and Rindova, 2000).

## 4 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE

Since we have already discussed the game industry and small-medium enterprises in previous chapters, the purpose of this chapter is to present how networking and relationships, interaction, and corporate branding studies can be combined. The Interactive Network Branding (INB) concept is presented, as an umbrella concept, including all the related concepts.

All of the concepts mentioned above have two starting points: individuals and interaction. Figure 7 demonstrates how the desired network position is created in network settings through corporate branding, which is created by the interactions between individuals.

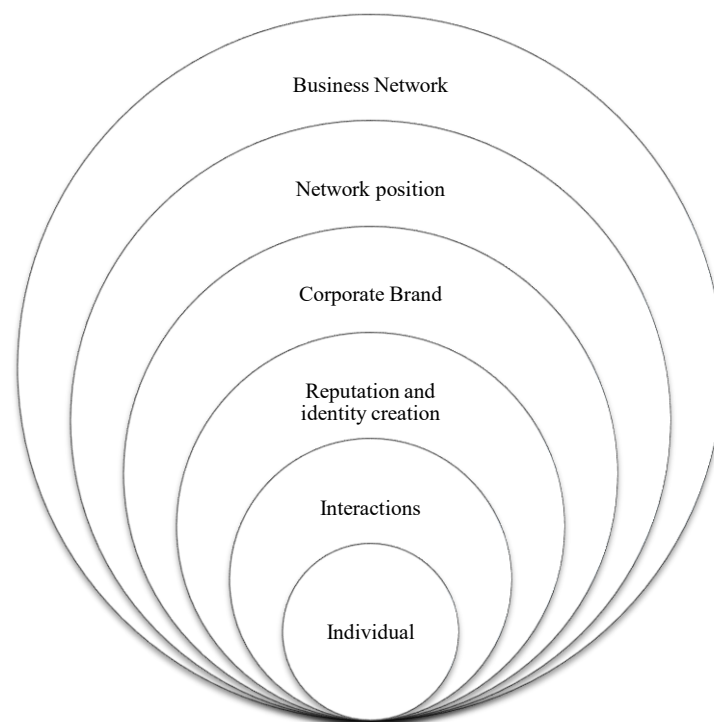


Figure 7: Conceptual model and a summary of INB concepts.

The business network concept is based on the actors and their relationships inside it, i.e. individuals connected to each other. The position that a company has in a network is entirely based on relationships with other network members (Anderson et al., 1994). These relationships, in turn, are entirely based on the interaction between the individuals that represent those companies.

The corporate brand itself is a constantly changing process that arises within the organisation and between stakeholders' interactions (Biraghi and Gambetti, 2015). Moreover, it consists of corporate identity and reputation. Identity consists of the daily activities of individuals and interactions, which again reflects everything the company represents.

The reputation of the company is again the evaluation of the interaction between the company and its stakeholders, i.e. interaction between two or more individuals in a different organisation. How other individuals experience corporate communication forms the reputation of a firm. In addition, the company's reputation is associated with external channels, which are challenging for the focal company to affect directly. Examples of these external channels are word of mouth and recommendations (Abimbola and Kocak, 2007).

When taking all these concepts into account, the process that spans over and connects all of the above mentioned aspects is the Interactive Networking Branding. As Koporcic and Halinen (2018, p.392) argue, INB is “an emergent process where the corporate identity and reputation of a small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) are created through interpersonal interaction. The INB process is socially constructed through interaction between individual people who act on behalf of their companies in business relationships and networks.”

## **5 METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the research strategies and methods related to this research. Initially, different research strategies and justification for the chosen strategy and method are presented. The data used in the study and its analysis are then described. Finally, the reliability and validity of the study are considered.

### **5.1 Research Type**

This study is practice-oriented, where the objective is to illustrate how a specific company can benefit from the INB concept. Therefore, this study is carried out as a single case study, because the objective of a case study is to investigate one, or at most a few, specific phenomena in its natural context (Daymon and Holloway, 2010). These studied phenomena can be “an issue, a campaign, an event or even an organisation within its social context, which is bounded by time and place” (Daymon and Holloway 2010, p.115). According to Dul and Hak (2008), businesses and business segments are the most common research areas in case studies. Moreover, certain business units, functions, processes, and structural characteristics can be investigated through case studies.

A case study is recognised as a practical and appropriate research strategy “(a) when the topic is broad and highly complex (b) when there is not a lot of theory available, and (c) when “context” is very important” (Jans and Dittrich 2008, p.24). Regarding the nature of this thesis, these three different conditions are all met, since there was an apparent lack of relevant theory in a particular context before the INB has been introduced and the topic consists of many broad concepts.

There are three different types of case studies, which have been identified as intrinsic, instrumental and collective (Stake, 1995). The collective study consists of multiple case studies in order to achieve a better understanding of a phenomenon or issue. In the intrinsic study, the researcher aims to study a topic or a phenomenon that is of interests and to provide a better understanding of it. It is typical for the intrinsic case study to have some generalisation; therefore, the reader needs to interpret the study within its context. The instrumental study is also limited to one specific phenomenon, but the purpose of the

research is to produce knowledge to another subject, rather than having an interest in the subject that is studied (Stake, 1995).

This study is an intrinsic case study, as the aim is to study *B2B corporate branding through INB process* (a specific phenomenon) *in the game industry* (particular context). Although this study specialises in a particular phenomenon in a particular context, it may provide valuable information to other readers, as long as the reader can apply the presented knowledge in its context.

Regarding case study design, it can be either a quantitative or qualitative research or a combination of both (Daymon and Holloway, 2010). Quantitative research usually includes questions such as how many or how much, and the purpose is to produce exact results to support already known theory and conclusions (Hirsjärvi et al., 1997). Qualitative research, in turn, explores a phenomenon comprehensively and seeks answers to questions such as how and what (Silverman, 2014). Therefore, it was a clear choice to choose the qualitative research method.

### **5.1.1 Qualitative Research**

According to Bryman and Bell (2007), qualitative research is recognised as the most commonly used method for case studies. Qualitative research aims to produce information for companies to better understand their activities (Koskinen et al., 2005). The qualitative research aims to study the subject as comprehensively as possible and to create an understanding of the phenomenon (Hirsjärvi et al., 1997).

The nature of qualitative research is to collect comprehensive data in a natural and real situation. The role of the researcher in data collection is to determine the right methods in which the perspectives and voice of the respondent are revealed. These methods include, for example, theme and group interviews, focus groups, observations and discursive analysis of various texts and documents (Hirsjärvi et al., 1997).

## **5.2 Collecting Data**

It is typical for case studies that data collection is carried out using a variety of methods and a combination of them (Silverman 2014; Daymon and Holloway 2010). According to Daymon and Holloway (2010), interviews are the most common sources for collecting

data in both qualitative and quantitative research. For data collection, it is vital to choose the appropriate method and to avoid collecting too much data. Focusing on authenticity instead of the size of the sample is crucial in qualitative research (Silverman, 2014).

### **5.2.1 Sources**

Each research is characterised by the fact that the researcher collects the needed sources for the research. The material that the researcher himself collects during the research is called a primary source (Hirsjärvi et al., 1997). The purpose of primary sources is to provide answers to a specific research problem. However, it is often costly and time-consuming. Therefore, the researcher can also utilise secondary sources (Hox and Boeije, 2005).

The researcher should review secondary sources critically, as they contain material collected by another for a different purpose. In order to utilise the secondary sources, the researcher is required to apply and adapt the material to correspond to its research purpose (Hirsjärvi et al., 1997). The advantage of secondary sources is fast access (Hox and Boeije, 2005).

In this study, both sources were used to obtain sufficient material for the study. Most of the sources are scientific articles that are retrieved from the internet, but there are also books that are used as sources. The secondary data has been utilised due to the lack of previous studies regarding SMEs. The collection of primary sources is explained in more detail in the following section.

## **5.3 Method**

Interviews are an effective and practical method of collecting information, as they are flexible, and they allow the interviewer to understand the respondent's perspective (Daymon and Holloway, 2010). For qualitative research, interviews are the most important and most common method to obtain information (Hirsjärvi et al., 1997).

Regarding interviews, it is vital to allow the respondent to respond as freely as possible, so that the answers are as accurate and truthful as possible. The respondent should be given time to think but, if necessary, the interviewer should be able to control and guide the course of the interview. During the interview, the interviewer can observe the



respondent's gestures and expressions. In addition, the interviewer may produce additional questions in order to obtain clarifying and in-depth answers (Daymon and Holloway, 2010; Hirsjärvi et al., 1997).

The disadvantage of the interview is the time it requires. The interview itself requires the time of the interviewer and the interviewee. In addition, the researcher must plan and prepare himself for the interview (Hirsjärvi et al., 1997).

There are three different types of qualitative interviews: structured and standardised, semi-structured and guided, and unstructured. Structured interviews include standardised and pre-planned questions with a certain order of questions. Therefore, it is considered as inflexible, and it might provide responses which are excluded in the social context of the study (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008).

Semi-structured interviews are partly pre-planned regarding the questions and the interview frame. However, it allows the researcher to create new questions and modify the interview frame during the interview. In addition, it allows the researcher to obtain in-depth responses. The challenge with semi-structured interviews is to control the interview, in order to cover all the needed topics within the agreed schedule (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008).

Unstructured interviews differ from these previous types, as it is usually quite informal without any pre-planned structure or specific questions. It is typical that the topic might change during the interview. Therefore, unstructured interviews require much time and usually more than one interview. The advantage of unstructured interviews is that it can produce completely unpredictable, new and different insights (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008).

The empirical part of this study was conducted using semi-structured theme interviews, for the study was to gain an understanding of how the interpersonal interactions between individuals affect the company's brand creation. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were chosen as they allow for obtaining extensive as well as different answers.

Interviews were conducted as one-to-one in depth with the case company's employees and the CEO. With this, every interviewer was allowed to answer questions without the influence of external factors. The owner of the company was chosen to be interviewed

first, along with three of the case company's employees. Interviews with the employees of MiTale allowed obtaining different answers from a different perspective, which are later presented in this study. A summary of the interviews is shown in table 2.

Interviewee (title)	Employee since	Interview date	Duration
Founder, CEO and Creative Director	2018	05.03.2019	60 minutes
Project Manager and Game Artist	2019	12.04.2019	40 minutes
Game Artist	2018	12.04.2019	40 minutes
Developer	2018	18.04.2019	40 minutes

Table 2: Summary of interviews.

The first interview with the CEO of the company was held in March 2019, in order to better understand the current situation and the plans of the case company. Other interviews with the employees were held in May 2019. Those were held at the premises of the case company and lasted about one hour. The questions that were presented for the employees were similar, but the questions presented for the CEO differed slightly. Three of the four interviews were conducted in English, and one interview was conducted in Finnish at the request of the participant and translated later on. The interview frame and questions were based on the concept of INB, which are included in this thesis as appendix 1, 2 and 3.

## 5.4 Sampling

In qualitative studies, sampling is essential for the research to achieve adequate results related to the studied phenomenon. Therefore, sampling in qualitative studies should be conducted purposefully and strategically. Hence, the researcher should determine the participants based on from whom the researcher expects to receive enough adequate and relevant information, and quality data. In addition, the researcher must ensure that these persons can be met in accordance with the schedule set for the research (Daymon and Holloway, 2010).

It is typical for research that the size of the sample varies from four to forty participants. However, when studying a particular phenomenon, a small sample is optimal. With a small sample, the researcher can focus in depth on the phenomenon, which corresponds

to the purpose of qualitative research. When selecting the sample, the researcher should ensure that the selected participants agree to share their thoughts and experiences openly (Daymon and Holloway, 2010).

The participants of this study are selected by using purposive sampling. For this particular method, it is typical that the researcher wants to study a particular group (Daymon and Holloway, 2010). The participants should be approached in advance, as they usually have limited time and already tight schedules, which can slow down the data collection (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

In this study, the purpose was to keep the sample small and, therefore, only the case company's core team was selected for the interviews. Each respondent was easy to approach and willing to share his/her experiences and opinions. Although the sample was kept small, similar answers from different respondents were received, which indicates successful sample selection.

## **5.5 Data Analysis**

When analysing qualitative data, it is important to be systematic and to create a transparent process of how the data is processed (O'Leary, 2017). In addition, it is essential to bear in mind that the answers can be simplified as well as rationalised (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Regarding processing the data, there are several different computer software that can be used in analysing the data (O'Leary, 2017). However, in this study, the amount of data is limited and processed without the use of various data processing software.

After each interview, the recordings were transcribed and translated during the same day. Until all the interviews were completed, all the collected data were sorted according to different themes. The essential objective of sorting the data was to discover the most important matters regarding the research. Once the raw data were sorted and analysed, the essential answers were analysed several times, in order to discover new findings.

## **5.6 Reliability and Validity**

Validity and reliability are two traditional concepts that are used in evaluating the authenticity and trustworthiness of the research; in other words, the quality of the research. While evaluating qualitative research, it should be noted that the meaning and connotations of these two concepts are different than in quantitative study (Daymon and Holloway, 2010).

Reliability is a classic and general concept to evaluate quantitative research. Its purpose is to determine how reliable the results of the research are and whether the same results can be achieved by replicating the original study (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Regarding qualitative research, it is challenging to assess the reliability, as research takes place in a specific context by the researcher. As a result of it, the characteristics of the researcher and his vision influence the results, which makes it challenging to replicate (Daymon and Holloway, 2010).

When evaluating the reliability of this study, it is important to note that the researcher does not have any previous relationship with the case company or its employees. In addition, the subject of this study is relatively new; the researcher had no previous experience or exceptional know-how, which could have created any wider assumptions about the subject.

Validity refers to testing the accuracy and thoroughness of the study, and the integrity of the conclusions (Daymon and Holloway, 2010; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). In qualitative research, its purpose is to examine whether the research reports and descriptions are correct (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Because of this, validity is considered as an essential concept for evaluating qualitative researches (Daymon and Holloway, 2010). According to Bryman and Bell (2007), there are different types of validity, and regarding this study, the most relevant other types are internal and external.

Internal validity refers to the results of the study and how those results are reflected in the participants' social worlds. In order to make sure of it, the researcher can present the

findings for the others (Daymon and Holloway, 2010), which is also called as ‘member checking’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, as cited in Daymon and Holloway, 2010).

Due to scheduling conflicts, member checking had to be excluded from this thesis. In order to ensure the relevance and the quality of the results, each interview ended with a summary of the respondents’ answers.

External validity refers to the basis of how and why particular organisations and individuals are selected to participate in the research. In addition, the primary purpose of qualitative research is to evaluate the possibility to generalise the results in other contexts (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

While testing the validity of this study, it should be noted that there is an insufficient amount of previous research to support the results of this study. However, comparing the interview results in this study, several similarities confirm the results of this study. Therefore, we can state that the triangulation of data validates the findings in this research.

Although the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of a specific phenomenon in a particular context, the presented research results may also be generalised and utilise in another context, as is described in Chapter 7 of this study.

## 6 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the interviews. The results are divided into different themes, in order to make them easier to analyse and interpret in chapter 7 and 8.

The answers are also included with direct quotes from the respondents for illustrative purposes.

### 6.1 Interactive Network Branding aspects

#### 6.1.1 The importance of Corporate Brand

According to the interviews, corporate branding is an extraordinary topic for most of the employees of MiTale. The Project Manager states: *“It is a totally unfamiliar area [...] The whole area is just so grey right now”*. Similarly, The Game Artist described corporate branding as an unfamiliar area. However, all the recipients believed that the corporate brand is important for the company, but not all of them could explain why. One respondent described the reason why it is held as important: *“there is so much talk about it that it does clearly matter”*.

While The Developer explained: *“I think it is, if I understand it correctly in my mind. I would say that in especially in the game industry, for small companies, corporate branding is pretty important, because it has to be, even the smallest companies has to be recognisable and memorable, and the brand is important especially in Finland where the competition is pretty rough. [...] because if you make one big mistake, then you do not have any sort of recognisable brand or image and getting customers might be next to impossible”*.

The respondents felt that they are all somehow responsible for the corporate brand, but it was sensible that not everyone knew how. The Project Manager states: *“If they are not happy with me, they are not happy with MiTale”*.

However, it was evidently clear that The CEO and The Project Manager are mainly in charge, as once they are absent the rest of the team do not know what to do. In addition, The CEO takes care of almost everything whenever it is possible. Currently, new projects

always begin with the CEO and once everything is agreed, the responsibility transfers to the Project Manager and then to others.

Tasks that require interactions between other stakeholders are mostly divided between The CEO and The Project Manager. The Game Artist's role is to deal with the written communication in Finnish, and the role of The Developer is contacting the customers during the development process.

The common factor for all the interviews was that every participant enjoys working at MiTale, but somehow some of them felt uncomfortable discussing the importance of corporate branding. In addition, it seemed that most of the external communication is the CEO's duties and the rest that she could not handle is transferred to The Project Manager's table.

### **6.1.2 The importance of Identity**

MiTale is perceived internally as an equal and fair company, which is run by a group of close friends. It is a small team, without any restrictions and the employees are incredibly flexible and proud of their work. All the employees can bring their opinion, and they are quite democratic about everything. Their passion is to make useful and educational games, which serves a greater purpose. Instead of producing commercial games only for monetary purposes, they have a greater vision and mission to help people with their games.

The Developer described the company as: *‘pretty easy place to work at, because from earlier stuff we all know each other [...] we have known each other for a long time [...] we are such good friends, we can speak openly, we can say what we want and everyone knows what to take seriously and what not. It makes stuff easier’*.

Moreover, The Product Manager explains that *‘it feels like it is my company as well, even though I do not hold any shares [...] it is some sort of family, I guess’*.

However, the company is still relatively young, and they are still discovering how to perform. They are ambitious and proud of their work. In addition, one respondent mentioned that embarrassing the owner would be a disaster, while another respondent explained that customers feels more important than they used to at his previous work. Both of these answers are showcasing the relevance of the CEO for identity creation.

### 6.1.3 The Importance of Reputation

According to the respondents, MiTale is perceived externally as a young, open and flexible company, where the CEO plays a major role in building and maintaining the company's reputation. Employees are open and eager to work with different kinds of projects regardless of the time of day, but still, the reputation relies heavily on the previous achievements and experiences of the CEO. The Developer described that MiTale is externally perceived as:

*“Reliable. [...] Actually, if I would have to say one thing ‘easy to work with’ [...] I kind of hope that the image that we managed to build for our self is that we can do all sort of things, depending on what is needed. And we are not concentrated on one single thing, and we know, what we are doing, and we are already released multiple products during this year, which hopefully have translated to other people that we can get stuff done”.*

The other companies within the game industry in Turku are quite similar regarding the size of the company. However, with the help of the CEO, the company is held somewhat above other companies, according to one respondent. The CEO itself is perceived as the bow figure of the company, and she is highly respected within the game industry, which also reflects positively on MiTale’s reputation. In addition, due to the strong background and business skills of the CEO, MiTale is also seen as a professional company and according to The Game Designer: *“we are able to bring out what we do, better than others, because we have more sales and marketing expertise than others”.*

While asking how MiTale differentiates from the other companies within the industry, the answers were:

*“Since, we got superwomen (Natasha) it put us somewhat above other companies when it comes to selling and getting customers, getting funding” – The Product Manager*

*“We have our CEO” – The Game Artist*

*“We have expertise from one range of fields, and of course it helps that we have Natasha, who has connections to places and has seen all sorts of*



*companies and projects that has been done well or has not been done so well, so it helps on getting our projects well designed and completed” –*

*The Developer*

#### **6.1.4 The importance of Interpersonal Interactions**

In the game industry, there are many communication channels, and there is no preferred way to communicate with others, according to interviewees. Daily communication is handled through emails, phone calls and face-to-face meetings. All interviewees felt that communication is essential, but some of them also find it somewhat uncomfortable. Therefore, some of them also try to avoid it.

When the interviewees were asked to describe their communication with stakeholders the answers have showcased the importance of interpersonal interactions:

*“I just try to be me: open, honest [...] I try to treat other people as people [...] I want them to feel comfortable, because if they don’t, it just does not work out [...] I want them to remember me, because then it easier for me to contact them in the future [...] I want to build some sort of relationships”.*

*– The Product Manager*

*“The reason why I communicate in the way I do, comes from the experience [...] I just try to explain the things that they need to hear and understand, I do not have to go into details. [...] I try to sound professional, without explaining two pages of technical stuff. So the customer is left with the impression that I know what I am talking about, even though I did not try to explain everything [...] Trying to leave the impression, we are doing our best and usually not explaining too much is the way to show that you actually know what you are doing [...] the background helps me a lot, because then I know what other people do as well”.* – *The Developer*

*“There is of course a certain role that I have to maintain [...] I want to be honest and realistic [...] I have a clear textbook that I follow. It may be even rigid sometimes, but with such logic and clarity”.* -*The Game Artist*

While communicating with stakeholders, all the respondents felt that there are certain challenges that they are facing. Since MiTale has projects with companies from different industries, there are different expectations and terminologies used within the industries. According to The Developer, most of the difficulties come from the lack of stakeholders' knowledge.

The Product Manager describes the challenges: *“Customers have a specific budget, and they are expecting between heaven and earth, with that small money. It is like; their expectations might be too high compared to the budget that they are willing to pay”*.

In addition, one of the interviewed mentioned that in the game industry words spread fast, and people discuss and gossip. Therefore, there is a need to be careful how to communicate, since it will influence how corporate brand is created.

### **6.1.5 The core of INB process**

According to the CEO, MiTale as a company is in a sense new, but the team is not, as they have been working in several companies and projects. The company itself is fully independent due to their various levels of expertise and skills, which is something that they would like to maintain. Currently, they can achieve much, depending on the customers' needs and their schedules. The CEO explained that her team is vital for the company:

*“Team is an essential part [...] Our team is a family [...] If you do not invest in your team and I am not just talking financially, I am talking about making them motivated, making them actually part that they are really big part, because, without them, there is nothing. [...] So basically, each individual absolutely precious. That's where having your core team and that's why in my eyes keeping it small and core team stays”*.

In addition, the CEO explained that they do not have any hierarchy and they do everything together with the team. Even freelancers and interns are included in every discussion.

Regarding growth and bringing any third parties into the company the CEO answered:

*“we are picky as we are veterans of the industry and the ones who know how things go out there as we are on the field [...] I prefer to work in*

*smaller team [...] want to grow under our this sort of like control [...] I think it's much better to grow slower than to grow and then explode [...] really want to be careful about when it comes to growth''.*

When asked how the CEO sees the competition in the industry:

*''We are way too little of us, especially game developers in Finland, that we should not be against each other [...] we share our goods and bads, we share our stories and we advise each other all the time [...] want to collaborate with other fellow professionals to boost both our businesses in order to get the most out of it''.*

The company has been working with various people and projects before and when asked how do they get customers the CEO explained: *''finding customers [...] most of the cases they do find us [...] we don't use websites to acquire customers [...] no one contacts us through websites [...] website is there just to be there [...] LinkedIn is much better [...] Facebook, half of my work is through Facebook [...] Messenger is my main work communication''.* She also explained that someone outside the industry would find them through recommendation. First, they would go with the prettiest website, then ask from other companies in the local industry for recommendations, and eventually find MiTale.

Marketing is differently conducted in the game industry. The CEO explained that branding comes from the quality of the work and the products. Once products are published, the company is out there, and the products speak for the company. In addition, it is the established trust of the company's expertise among stakeholders.

The challenge that the company is having between stakeholders is the lack of proper collaboration between professionals. To overcome these challenges, the CEO explained that *''we closely, closely work with these professionals and exactly know what they need. We tailor our design and everything according to the needs of each individual because that is the thing''.*

The results presented above clearly indicate that the importance of an individual and interpersonal interactions is essential in corporate brand creation and positioning in the business market.

## **7 ANALYSIS**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the results of the interviews, and more specifically, to review how the corporate brand is constructed and what is the individual's importance for corporate brand creation, thus demonstrating the INB in its core.

MiTale does not have a clear strategy or policy for how to create a corporate brand. Corporate branding is a somewhat unknown topic for some of the employees, but its importance to the company is, however, crucial. This corresponds to the study by Krake (2005) and Merrilees and Wong (2005) where they found that corporate brand is mostly an unfamiliar and misunderstood topic, but the importance of it is mostly recognised among the SMEs.

As is common for SMEs, MiTale also has scarce resources for creating a corporate brand. Therefore, the current literature on corporate branding is challenging to adapt to MiTale, as those suggestions are mainly associated with large budgets. In addition, most of the theories are originally designed for large companies (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007). Currently, all corporate brand and marketing tasks are entirely the responsibility of The CEO of MiTale, because she is the only person with the required expertise. Having only one person being responsible for marketing is typical for game companies, as well as other SMEs. This confirms the findings of Ylä-Outinen (2018) that game companies in Finland are currently suffering from a lack of proper marketing skills.

The employees of the company feel that their founder has primarily created the corporate brand, while The Founder of the company feels that her core team plays a significant role in creating the corporate brand. Both of these views are interesting, as they indicate that the employees are relying heavily on interpersonal interactions and boundary-spanning activities, as the main process of INB (Koporcic and Halinen, 2018). The unifying factor in these two findings is that in both, individuals are the creators of the corporate brand.

The company's employees feel that MiTale is a great place to work. All the employees have known each other for a long time. The company has no actual hierarchy, and everyone has the opportunity to voice his/her own opinions. Allowing everyone to speak openly is vital for the identity of the company, as those internal interactions create the

corporate identity and influence the creation of a reputation (Koporcic and Halinen, 2018).

Examining the identity of MiTale, it is clear that the company obtains a strong identity which their employees are proud of. Usually, in companies where the identity is strong, the employees are motivated. They have a shared vision of what they are doing, which is a crucial factor in building the identity (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006).

Based on the experience of the company founder, she has the desire to keep the company small, which also reduces the possible challenges during internal interactions.

It seems that the founder is highly respected within the industry which, according to Roberts and Dowling (2002), attracts stakeholders to do business with the company. Therefore, we can also assume that the company can position itself better within the business network. The statements by The Designer and The Developer only confirm these findings.

According to the employees, the company has a good and reliable reputation. The background of the company founder is perceived as one of the big reasons for the company's reputation. Some of the company's employees feel that the products speak for the company and create a reputation. To examine these findings, we could state that the personnel have a different kind of understanding for how they can influence building the reputation and how it is built.

In the gaming industry, it is typical that companies discuss with each other and the power of the word of mouth is strong. The rainforest comparison by Håkansson et al. (2009) corresponds well to the game industry, as even though the competition is fierce, companies are sharing their ideas and knowledge between each other. Collaboration allows MiTale to create various kinds of products and accelerate business growth.

Within the company, every employee feels that his interaction has an impact on corporate brand creation. However, how it impacts remains somewhat unclear for the employees. The boundary-spanning interaction between stakeholders is mainly the responsibility of the founder, which only highlights the role of the owner in managing the corporate and its brand. However, this also creates a threat to the company and raises the question: What if the owner is absent or she leaves?

The biggest challenge in interactions are misunderstandings between stakeholders and the company. According to the results, most of the partners that the company work with are from other industries. Therefore, communication requires clarity and politeness to obtain the needed answers.

Analysing the created conceptual model of INB and its link between the empirical findings it is clear that those are connected. As can be seen from the results of the study, the role of individuals is crucial to corporate brand creation. Without individual interactions, the corporate brand would be meaningless, as individuals represent the company and create meaning for the company. Consequently, the way how the firm representatives perform ultimately determines the network position.

## **8 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

As an aid to the reader, this final chapter of the thesis presents answers to the research questions and is followed by a discussion. The chapter ends with managerial implications and suggestions for further research.

### **8.1 Discussion**

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine Interactive Network Branding (INB) SMEs in the B2B context with the help of the empirical data collected from the case company. Specifically, the main objective has been to study the importance of an individual and interpersonal interactions, which forms the core of INB processes. Based on the current available literature and the results from the interviews, the answers to the research questions of this thesis have been gathered.

RQ1. How can SMEs create a corporate brand through interpersonal interactions?

SME corporate brand creation differs from large companies. While big companies have in-house expertise and a massive amount of resources for corporate brand creation, SMEs have to discover different ways to create a corporate brand, due to a lack of resources. Although the corporate brand is partly an unknown topic among SMEs, its creation can be considered as a rather simple process to execute, if executed in the right way.

Creating a corporate brand for an SME is a continuous and unfolding process, named INB. It consists of interactions between the company representative and stakeholders within the business network. Every interaction between the company representative and a stakeholder influences the corporate brand creation. These interactions are internal, external and boundary-spanning. Depending on the company and its size, the responsibility for these different types of interpersonal interactions varies, as explained next.

The corporate identity, which is part of the corporate brand, is created by the company's internal interactions between the company employees. The company's reputation is created within the network by external interactions, between actors that are not part of the

focal company. Finally, boundary-spanning interactions, as the main part of INB, take place between firm representatives and affect both identity and reputation. As the results of this study indicated, all employees with their contribution and interactions, create the corporate brand. However, the impact of the individuals varies depending on the company.

RQ2. What is the role of an individual in corporate brand creation?

The importance of individuals in creating a corporate brand is immense. The fewer employees in the company, the more the importance of one individual will be. In addition to this, the more a company works with other companies, the more the importance of individuals is emphasised.

The role of each individual cannot be underestimated because every individual within the company represents the company. However, as with previous studies and the results of this study demonstrates, the company founder has the most significant role in creating a corporate brand.

Building a firm's reputation in boundary spinning interactions is entirely up to the founder, which sometimes also creates a risk of one person being so responsible. Building a company identity can also be held under the responsibility of the owner, as the founder is responsible for who is hired for the company. Also, the founder is seen as the role model for other employees, which can be reflected on employee behaviour. Lastly, it is the founder who determines the company's internal policies which, in turn, is reflected in the company's identity building.

RQ3. How can INB be used in order to ensure the success of a business?

By understanding the INB approach, SMEs and entrepreneurs can significantly improve their business brand. Instead of focusing on previous studies on corporate brands, INB includes everything they need. Adopting the INB approach does not require any financial investment or major changes within the company. The only issue companies need to understand is the impact of individual interaction on corporate brand creation. Although interactions between individuals can only be assumed as everyday interaction, their importance is even greater for the company's success.



As the results of the research showed, the experience of the company founder has made it possible for the company to have a good position in the network. In addition, the founder's previous experiences have helped her understand the importance of the team. Besides, as the research showed, INB also reveals potential vulnerabilities within the company, as the results showed that the company's corporate brand was largely the responsibility of the owner.

RQ4. How to manage INB properly?

Managing INB is somewhat challenging because the interpersonal interactions are challenging to monitor. Based on the research results, employees of the case company are old friends, so their internal interactions are open and friendly, which is also reflected in their atmosphere. Boundary-spanning interactions are primarily the responsibility of The Founder and The Product Manager. External interactions are essential in the game industry, because the field is small and the word of mouth effect is high. The challenge for INB is the potential growth of the company, as current relationships are largely confined to individuals. If relationships are dependent on individuals, what happens when one of the individuals leaves? Or what happens when a business grows, and current individuals no longer have time to communicate with every new stakeholder. A solution to this problem can be, as indicated in the case study, in keeping the team small.

It is essential for the management of the INB that the company has clear and unified goals that everyone follows. The effect of individual interactions cannot be fully observed, but for example, the well-being of every employee can. It is obvious that when employees are satisfied, it is also reflected in the work of employees, and internal and boundary-spanning interactions. However, external interactions cannot be directly managed as they occur outside of the focal company, but their effects can be monitored, for example, by the demand of the focal company. In addition, utilising the existing network, company representatives can ask for feedback about the company, sometimes even informally.

In summary, the only way to build a strong corporate brand is to give the control of the brand in the hands of the individuals of the company. In other words, SMEs need to be aware of the INB and the opportunities it can bring for the firm's success in the business network.

## **8.2 Managerial Implications**

Based on the results of this study, there are two managerial implications that can be drawn. First, the company should adopt the INB approach. By adopting the concept, individuals can obtain a better understanding of corporate branding and how they can influence it. In addition, The Founder and the employees should together decide what kind of a corporate brand they would like to create and how. In the current study, they are aware of the importance but do not understand how. As the results indicated, MiTale has scarce branding and marketing resources, so by utilising the INB the company could enhance their corporate brand as it does not require financial resources.

Secondly, the results reveal that MiTale is dependent mainly on The Founder when it comes to marketing and branding activities. Thus, by educating and allowing other employees to represent the company in boundary spanning activities, it would equalise the division of labour and reduce the dependence of The Founder. However, if they are not interested or there is not enough time to execute such kinds of activities, hiring a new employee for marketing and branding -related activities could be an option. Hiring an employee gives the owner more time to focus on her core competence and reduces the current workload.

Of course, hiring a new person requires training of the selected person, which again takes time from other tasks. Besides, currently, the company's employees have known each other for a long time, which is also reflected in the strength of the company's identity. Thus, there is also a risk in hiring a new employee. Will a potential new employee be able to adapt to the company and how will it affect the current atmosphere? Another potential challenge is the acceptance of existing stakeholders if they have so far been used to dealing only with the founder. Moreover, the relationship between companies has been formed between MiTale's founder and stakeholder representative. When a potential new employee takes responsibility for customer contact, it should first be executed together with The Founder. It will allow the CEO to advise the employee and she can introduce the employee to current stakeholders, which could potentially facilitate the trust building between the new employee and the stakeholders.

Lastly, it is also good to take into account the background of the employee and the previous experience. Does a potential new employee have earlier experience in the field,

or does he have already suitable contacts that the company can potentially benefit from? Based on this study, the game industry is somewhat different from the other industries, so a person already working in the industry could reduce the need for training. Alternatively, a person coming from a completely different field can also bring in new perspectives and ways of working, which the company can use to further strengthen their good network position.

### **8.3 Researcher's Comments**

This research produced interesting results about the impact that one individual has on building a corporate brand and in addition, it proved the INB theory to be valid. Although the researched case company is a game company, the results can also be used by SMEs in other industries. The challenges that emerged in the case company are, according to theory, typical for SMEs. However, utilising the results of this research, the user should implement them to its industry.

Because of the challenging subject of the research, some criticality in reviewing the results of interviews is also desirable. In addition to the schedule challenges, only the employees of the case company were interviewed, even though the reputation is formed in the eyes of the external individual.

Lastly, I would like to point out to the readers the role of the researcher in this study, as it is a qualitative case study. While this study was the first attempt to use the INB approach in the game industry, it can be concluded that the approach is valid and useful. Research can be considered a success because each research question was answered.

### **8.4 Suggestion For Further Research**

The whole INB concept is relatively new, thus any kind of empirical research would be useful. In connection with this research, a longitudinal study on how the case company is evolving in forthcoming years would be interesting. Whether they have benefited from the INB approach or not, would be worth following. In this case, the company would probably already obtain a better understanding of the entire corporate branding, and it would be interesting to observe whether it was useful or not.

In addition to this, such a study could further explore the boundary-spanning interactions and involve stakeholders in the research. Interviewing stakeholders would provide empirical evidence of how stakeholders perceive the company, i.e. would provide an external view of the corporate brand. Because in this study, the perceptions of the stakeholders were only understood through the case company employee's thoughts.

Finally, for further research, it would be fruitful to choose an aspect where there would be more than one SME from different industries. It would produce more comparisons and differences, resulting in stronger and more reliable results of the study. From the researcher's point of view, this, of course, brings its challenges, as researching more companies is time-consuming.

## 9 SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

### 9.1 Inledning

Under de senaste decennierna har forskning inom företagbranding fokuserat på stora företag och negligerat små och medelstora företag (SMF) (Ahonen, 2008; Mitchell m.fl., 2013; Odoom m.fl., 2017). För tillfället finns mindre än hundra studier om företagsbranding i små och medelstora företag i dagens litteratur (Bocconcelli m.fl., 2018) trots att små och medelstora företag står för 99 procent av alla europeiska och finländska företag (Europeiska kommissionen, 2019).

Vikten av ett företags varumärke för framgång för SMF är extremt stor. Det är ett av de viktigaste marknadsföringselementen genom vilka företaget samverkar med den yttre miljön (Abimbola, 2001). Forskningen har ändå visat att företagbranding är delvis okänd för små och medelstora företag och är en av orsakerna till att många små och medelstora företag har gått i konkurs några år efter etableringen (Horan m.fl., 2011; Odoom m.fl. 2017)

Spelindustrin har utvecklats i snabb takt, men samtidigt har konkurrensen ökat inom branschen, och orsakat marknadsförings- och brandingproblem för finländska spelbolag (Ylä-Outinen, 2018). Därför är det värt att undersöka dessa utmaningar och fokusera på små och medelstora företag och hur deras företags varumärke bildas och vad dess betydelse är för företaget.

### 9.2 Avhandlingens syfte och forskningsfrågor

Huvudsyftet med denna avhandling är att undersöka vad interaktiv nätverksbranding (eng. Interactive Network Branding, INB) innebär i spelbranschen för små och medelstora företag, och hur företag skapar sin önskade nätverksposition genom företagbranding. För att undersöka huvudmålet är avhandlingen uppdelad i sekundära mål.

De sekundära forskningsmålen för denna studie är:

RO1: Att undersöka konceptet INB i små och medelstora företags kontext

RO2: Att hjälpa fallbolaget att förstå vikten av INB

RO3: Att analysera vikten av en representant i företagets varumärkesskapande av små och medelstora företag

Forskningsfrågorna i denna studie är följande:

RQ1: Hur skapar små och medelstora företag företagets varumärke genom interpersonella interaktioner?

RQ2: Vad är en persons roll i skapandet av företags varumärken?

RQ3: Hur kan INB användas för att säkerställa framgång för ett företag?

RQ4: Hur dirigerar man INB korrekt?

Denna studie behandlar av stora mängder komplexa koncept och för att undvika förvirring mellan koncepten finns det vissa avgränsningar för denna avhandling. Huvudfokus är att studera INB och mer specifikt individens roll när det gäller att skapa varumärke för företag i små och medelstora företag. Dessutom är detta en fallstudie, som är avgränsad till spelindustrin. Dessa resultat är därför till största delen inte tillämpliga på alla branscher. Dessa resultat kan dock användas som referens.

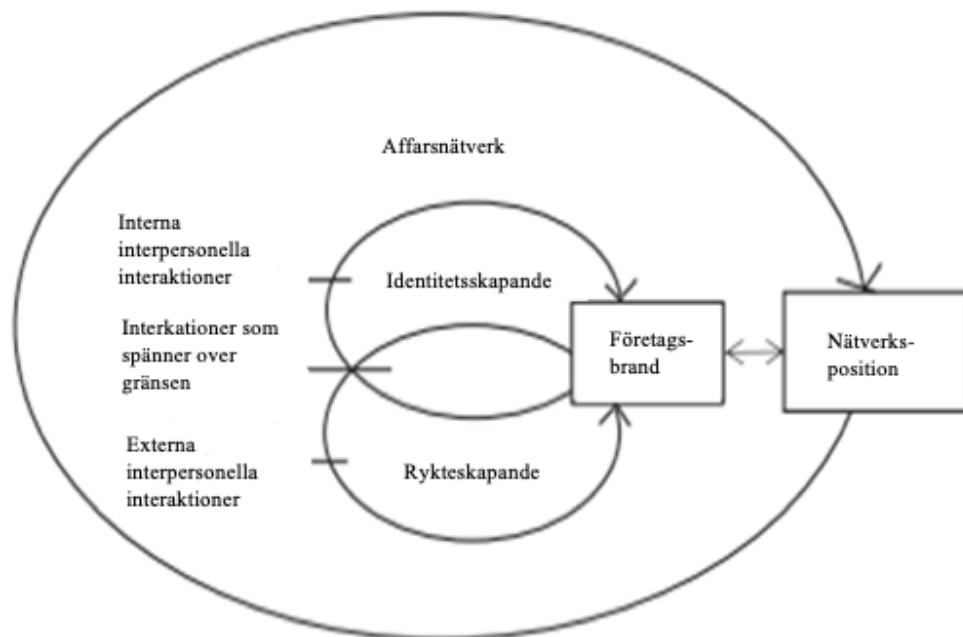
## 9.3 Teori

Den globala spelindustrin har utvecklats och vuxit snabbt sedan 1980, då de första spelen kom till i allmänt bruk. För tillfället är värdet på den globala spelmarknaden lika stort som på bokmarknaden och förväntas växa med tio procent per år. (Neo Games Finland Association, 2019b). Spelindustrin i Finland har också vuxit snabbt ända fram till år 2017 då tillväxten avtog en aning. Finland är dock det tredje största spelutvecklingslandet i Europa och ett av världens ledande spelutvecklingsländer i mobilspel. Det finns ungefär 260 företag i den finska spelindustrin, varav de flesta är små och medelstora företag, förutom de fyra stora företagen som är noterade på Helsingforsbörsen 2017 (Neo Games Finland Association, 2019a).

Små och medelstora företag definieras av utifrån antalet personal och omsättningen eller balansräkningen. Företag med mindre än 250 anställda och intäkter mindre än 50 miljoner euro eller den totala balansräkningen är mindre än 43 miljoner euro (Europeiska kommissionen 2019). De små och medelstora företagens bidrag till hela ekonomin i Europeiska unionen (EU) är avgörande, eftersom dessa företag enligt Europeiska kommissionen (2019), utgör 99 procent av alla företag i EU.

Baserat på Krakes undersökning (2005) lider de flesta små och medelstora företagen av brist på förståelse av varumärkesförvaltning och därför är användningen av den liten och det anses inte vara en prioritering utan endast en fråga för högsta ledningsnivån. Många små och medelstora företag tror fortfarande på varumärkets kraft och dess inverkan, men de är alltför upptagna med dagliga uppgifter och affärer samt den tiden kräver. (Wong och Merrilees, 2005). För tillfället betraktas branding endast som ett marknadsföringsverktyg för större företag (Wong och Merrilees, 2005) och ägarens roll är det ända som räknas, när det gäller att förvalta företaget och varumärket (Aaker, 1996).

Interaktive nätverksbranding är ett relativt nytt multidimensionellt koncept som kombinerar affärsnätverk och relationer, interaktion och företags brandingsteorier. Syftet med INB är att skapa en förståelse av hur branding sker i företagsnätverk. Mer specifikt, undersöker den affärsrelationer, nätverksanslutningar och processen för hur små och medelstora företags identitet och rykte uppstår genom interpersonella interaktioner (Koporcic, 2017). För att fullt ut förstå effekterna och komplexiteten i INB presenteras figur 3 nedan och härnäst presenteras relevanta begrepp relaterade till INB.



**Anteckningar:** Cirklar indikerar en process; rektanglar indikerar ett resultat; pilar indikerar en effekt.

Figur 3. En processmodell av Interaktiv nätverksbranding. Källa: Koporcic and Halinen, 2018:399.

Affärsnätverk består av två eller flera anslutna affärsrelationer, där varje utbytesrelation är mellan företag som conceptualiseras som kollektiva aktörer (Anderson m.fl., 1994). Med hjälp av nätverket kan ett företag få bättre möjligheter att öka sin verksamhet och få tillgång till fler resurser (Håkansson, 1987). Men nätverket i sig utvecklas, ständigt och därför är det utmanande att hantera det (Håkansson och Snehota, 1995). Dessutom har varje aktivitet i nätverket antingen direkt eller indirekt påverkan på hela nätverket (Håkansson och Snehota, 1995).

Affärsrelationer är kärnan i nätverket, och dessa definierar en viss position hos företaget i nätverket (Anderson m.fl., 1994). Dessa relationer är vanligtvis förknippade med att dela kunskap, information och resurser (Håkansson m.fl., 2009). När det gäller att hantera dessa relationer, markeras sociala färdigheter, eftersom interaktionsprocessen består av individer som står i en konstant samverkan med varandra. Trots allt är individernas roll



att skapa och utveckla relationen där tillit och självförtroende spelar en stor roll (Håkansson m.fl., 2009).

Samspelesprocessen definieras som en konstant utbytesprocess mellan minst två aktörer. Element som utbyts är produkter och/eller tjänster, information, ekonomi och sociala element. Dessa utbytesprocesser definieras som korta episoder som så småningom utvecklas till långsiktiga relationer och processer (Håkansson, 1982).

Att undersöka litteratur om ett varumärke, en organisationsidentitet och ett rykte är svårt eftersom det saknas studier av dessa tre begrepp som berör små och medelstora företag. Företagsbranding är en av de viktigaste delarna av marknadsföring. Genom varumärket är företaget i ständig växelverkan med den externa miljön som exempelvis kunder (Abimbola, 2001). Därför måste varumärket markera något och utmärka sig från andra (Kay, 2006).

Med en stark och särskiljande identitet gentemot konkurrenter, vilken anställda är stolta över, ökar medarbetarnas motivation och samtidigt lockar det övriga investerare i ett företag (Melewar och Karaosmanoglu, 2006). Enligt Olins (1978) bildas företagsidentiteten genom dagliga handlingar som är baserade på ägarens personlighet och egenskaper.

Ett gott rykte är avgörande för framgången inom varje organisation och företag. Det kommer att avgöra organisationens öde, och utan det kommer organisationen förlora sin hållbarhet (Firestein, 2006). Det är ett resultat baserat på kundernas utvärdering av varumärket (Abimbola och Kocak, 2007). För att skapa ett önskat rykte måste företagen förstå hur olika intressenter uppfattar företaget och hur varje interaktion påverkar ryktet.

## 9.4 Metodval

Denna studie är praktiskt inriktad, där målet är att illustrera hur ett specifikt företag kan dra nytta av INB-konceptet. Därför utförs denna studie som en fallstudie, eftersom målet med en fallstudie är att undersöka ett eller högst några specifika fenomen i sitt naturliga sammanhang (Daymon och Holloway 2010). När det gäller fallstudier erkänns kvalitativ forskning som den vanligaste metoden, eftersom den syftar till att ge företag information att bättre förstå sin verksamhet (Koskinen m.fl., 2005) genom att använda frågor som hur

och vad (Silverman, 2014). Därför var det ett klart val att välja den kvalitativa forskningsmetoden.

Datainsamlingen för denna studie började i början av mars, 2019. Intervjuer valdes som metod för insamlingen av empiriska data, eftersom det är en effektiv och praktisk metod för insamling av information (Daymon och Holloway 2010). Intervjuerna var semistrukturerade och antalet deltagare var begränsat till fyra, eftersom de utgör den inre kärnan i företaget. Dessutom intervjuades bolagets verkställande direktör (vd) i början av mars, för att bättre förstå dagens situation och framtida planer för fallbolaget. Intervjuerna varade i ungefär en timme och hölls hos fallföretaget. Frågorna som presenterades för de anställda var likadana, men företagets vd fick andra frågor än de anställda.

Nästa kapitel presenterar resultaten av denna studie.

## 9.5 Resultat

Baserat på intervjuerna är företagets varumärke delvis okänt för företagets anställda. Respondenterna ansåg att företagets branding var oerhört viktig för företaget, men några av dem kunde inte förklara varför det var viktigt. Alla de intervjuade ansåg att de var ansvariga för att skapa ett företags varumärke, men de kunde inte förklara hur de var ansvariga för det. Baserat på resultaten anses företagets grundare vara den mest ansvariga för att skapa ett företags varumärke. Dessutom rapporterade de intervjuade att uppgifter som kräver samspel mellan intressenter är huvudsakligen vd:ns ansvar. Om det är nödvändigt, hjälper projektledaren företagets vd med arbetet.

De intervjuade ombads att beskriva MiTale som företag och hur man arbetar där. De beskrev företagets identitet med följande ord: rättvis och flexibel. De intervjuade är redan bekanta med tidigare arbete och projekt. Till följd av detta känner de intervjuade att det är mer fritt att tala med andra och att uttrycka sina egna åsikter, även om någon skulle bli sårad. Utvecklaren beskrev företaget som en enkel och bekväm plats att arbeta, medan produktchefen förklarade att företaget känns som hans eget trots att han inte äger några aktier i bolaget.

De intervjuade ombads reflektera över och beskriva hur de tror intressentgrupperna ser MiTale. Utöver detta blev de ombuds att beskriva hur bolaget sticker ut från andra

företag i branschen. Baserat på resultaten kan företaget beskrivas som ungt, öppet och flexibelt. Även om Mitale är ett ungt företag är dess anställda redan veteraner i branschen, och företaget betraktas också som pålitligt. Med öppenhet och flexibilitet påpekade intervjuarna att de var glada att göra olika typer av projekt. Även om de intervjuade var väl medvetna om MiTales rykte var det tydligt att företagets rykte till stor del skapades av grundaren och företagets grundare också anledningen till att de känner sig annorlunda

Slutligen ombads de intervjuare att beskriva interaktionen med intressenterna. Resultaten visade att varje anställd interagerar med olika intressenter, men vissa anställda är mer interaktiva än andra. Merparten av kommunikationen sker via e-post och telefon. Varje anställd ansåg att det sätt de kommunicerar med är viktigt för företagets rykte, men vissa kände också att de var obekväma i situationer där de var tvungna att kommunicera med intressenterna.

Dessutom nämnde en av de intervjuade att andra företag diskuterar mycket med varandra, så de bör också vara försiktiga i sin kommunikation. Den största utmaningen för de intervjuade är att de andra intressenterna är okunniga. De flesta av MiTales kunder är från olika sektorer och därför har företag höga förväntningar på sin egen betalningsvillighet. Produktchefen påpekade att företag tenderar att ha för höga förväntningar på vad de är villiga att betala. Syftet med intervjun med företagets grundare var att få hennes vision om företaget och spelbranschen. Grundaren beskrev också henne företag som en familj, men hon betonade starkt vikten av sitt team in företaget. Enligt henne är teamet allt och varje individ är extremt viktig för företaget. Baserat på resultaten tror grundaren inte på den traditionella hierarkin och vill ge alla medarbetare frihet att agera och uttrycka sina egna åsikter. När det gäller tillväxt är företaget mycket försiktig för att hon vill hålla sitt team litet. Slutligen ombads företagets grundare att beskriva spelindustrin och dess konkurrens. På sett till resultaten är spelbranschen i Finland extremt liten, varför alla företag i branschen ska arbeta tillsammans. När det gäller marknadsföring skiljer sig spelindustrin från andra områden, och hon sa att de flesta kunder kontaktar henne direkt via Facebook. Dessutom känner hon att företagsspel består av produkter snarare än individer.

## 9.6 Analys

Vid analys av resultaten av studien var det uppenbart att företaget inte hade någon klar kunskap eller strategi för hur man skapade ett företags varumärke. Trots att företags grundare har expertis baserad på tidigare erfarenhet, saknade företaget en konsekvent idé om ett företags varumärke. Baserat på resultaten är bolagets identitet stark eftersom varje anställd beskriver företaget som en bra arbetsplats. Dessutom motiverades de av företags motivation och stolthet, som också har identifierats som starka identitetsgenskaper (Melewar och Karaosmanoglu, 2006). Svar på företags rykte visar att företaget anses vara tillförlitligt och professionellt. Resultatet är emellertid i konflikt med rykteskaparen. Några av dem ansåg att produkten skapade ryktet, medan andra kände att individer skapade ryktet. Men baserat på svaren kan det hävdas att bolagets vd insats för att skapa rykte har varit och fortfarande är enorm. För det mesta är kommunikationen fortfarande upp till grundaren och dessa kommunikationer mellan intressenter utgör bolagets varumärke (Koporcic och Halinen, 2018).

## 9.7 Diskussion

På grund av de begränsade resurserna måste företagsbranding av små och medelstora företag genomföras på olika sätt. Trots att det finns mycket litteratur om ämnet, identifieras ingen av dem i varumärket B2B-företag och små och medelstora företag. Företags varumärke för små och medelstora företag är en kontinuerlig process av samverkan mellan företrädare för företagen och intressenter. Varje interaktion som har gjorts har en inverkan på hur intressenterna uppfattar företaget. Dessa uppfattningar av intressegrupper utgör företags rykte. Samverkan inom företaget utgör företags identitet.

Personer vars inflytande inte bör undergrävas är den viktigaste faktorn för skapandet av företags varumärken. Oavsett individ och dess roll är dess inverkan på företags varumärke stor. Som de tidigare resultaten och resultaten av denna studie visade har företags grundare störst inverkan på skapandet. När det gäller identitet är grundaren ansvarig för företags interna politik, vilket i sin tur återspeglas i det dagliga arbetet med anställda och kommunikation. När det gäller rykte, i små och medelstora sektorn, är

grundaren främst inblandad i intressenter och är därmed den största faktorn för ryktebyggande. Även om resultaten av studien visade att vissa de intervjuade känner att produkten talar för företaget. Det kan dock hävdas att företaget utan grundare och hennes kunskaper inte skulle ha kunder som produkterna skulle göras till.

När man tittar på INB-strategin kan det vara användbart på många sätt för små och medelstora företag. Först och främst kräver det inte stora investeringar från företaget. För det andra, som ett resultat av denna studie, kan ett företag upptäcka nuvarande brister när det gäller att skapa ett företags varumärke, eftersom resultaten av fallbolaget i stor utsträckning var baserade på grundaren. För det tredje är syftet med INB-konceptet att betona vikten av interaktioner mellan individer och, från företagarens synvinkel, investeringar i det kräver inte mycket kunnande.

Med tanke på styrning kan företagare känna att INB är antingen enkelt eller utmanande. Det är utmanande att analysera enskilda interaktioner och man har inte resurser att övervaka varje anställd i företaget. Men genom att fastställa tydliga och gemensamma mål och linjedragningar kan ett företag förbättra sitt varumärke. Viktigaste är att acceptera faktumet att företagets varumärke är i händerna på individer och således måste man lita på övriga anställda i företaget.

Från framtidsperspektivet kommer MiTale tillsammans med alla sina medarbetare att ha en enhetlig bild av företagets varumärke och hur det kommer att skapas. Även om företaget inte har stora resurser att använda för marknadsföring eller branding, med sitt starka samarbete kan de förbättra sitt nuvarande företags varumärke. Den största utmaningen för ett företag är dess beroende av att skapa ett företags varumärke. För tillfället är företaget nästan uteslutligt beroende av grundaren. Det skulle därför vara tillrådligt att även andra anställda i företaget skulle utbildas för att hantera kundrelationer. Således skulle grundaren ha tid att göra annat arbete och företaget skulle inte längre vara baserat på det. Men om anställda inte är villiga att utföra dessa uppgifter, ska företaget leta efter hjälp på arbetsmarknaden.

Att anställa en ny medarbetare som skulle vara ansvarig för kunder och marknadsföring i framtiden skulle avsevärt underlätta den nuvarande situationen. Att anställa en ny medarbetare innebär naturligtvis alltid utmaningar som den tid som krävs för att träna och

bli van vid företagspraxis och branschpraxis. Att anlita en person som redan har erfarenhet av spelbranschen, marknadsföring och branding kan påskynda en persons arbetsberedskap. För, som denna forskning visade, avviker spelbranschen från andra områden, det är lämpligt att ha tidigare erfarenheter inom området. Men när en person kommer från ett annat fält kan han eller hon ha olika perspektiv och praxis som gör det möjligt för företaget att stärka sin nuvarande position på marknaden.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – Preliminary Guide For The First Interview

#### MiTale

- Purpose? Mission/Vision?
- Games?
- B2B?
- B2C?
- Co-Operations Kela and Moomin connection?
- Other software developers/speech therapy partners?
- Profit or Non-Profit?
- Future goals?
- Customers?
- For educating purpose?
- Which one and why?
- Sanalanka and my first calendar?

#### Internationalizing process

- Already entered to emerging markets?
  - What market?
- Network?
- Challenges?
- Purposes?
- Initial execution?
- Other parties?

#### Branding?

- How is it conducted? How would you described it?
- What is that MiTale creates for customers?
- Biggest competitors?
- The story behind of of MiTale?
- What do you think about MiTale and its' websites?
- How do you market MiTale?
- How do you think your client sees MiTale?
- Current practice with B2B branding with customers?
- Your own achievements and network?
- Your success related to MiTale?

## **Appendix 2 – Interview Guide In English**

### **Background**

Could you tell me who are you and what kind of a background you have?

Do you have any other memberships or projects besides Mitale?

### **MiTale (B2B SME firm)**

How would you describe MiTale?

What do you think how others perceive MiTale?

How Mitale differentiates from others within the industry?

### **Corporate Branding**

How important is corporate brand in your mind?

-Reputation?

-Identity?

What is your role regarding the corporate brand creation?

What do you think who is the responsible for MiTales corporate brand creation?

### **Interaction**

How do you think your interactions can influence MiTale and:

-Creating new partnerships?

- Gain recognition in the market?

-Good position in the network?

How do you communicate with other stakeholders?

- Which channels?

Can you describe what is important in your mind regarding the interpersonal interactions with stakeholders?

Do you think that your previous connections and experiences has helped MiTale?

-If yes, then how?

What have you learned from your previous collaborations with stakeholders and other professionals?

What kind of challenges have you faced during interpersonal interactions?



## **Appendix 3 – Interview Guide In Finnish**

### **Tausta**

Voisitko kertoa minulle, kuka olet ja millainen tausta sinulla on?

Onko sinulla muita jäsenyyksiä tai projekteja MiTalen lisäksi?

### **MiTale**

Miten kuvailisit MiTalea yrityksenä?

Miten sinun mielestä muut kuvailevat Mitalea?

Miten Mitale eroaa muista alan yrityksistä?

### **Yritysbrändi**

Kuinka tärkeä yrityksen brändi on mielestäsi?

    Maine?

    Identiteetti?

Mikä on roolisi yritysbrändin luomisessa?

Ketä on sinun mielestäsi vastuussa MiTalen yritysbrändin luomisesta?

### **Vuorovaikutus**

Miten luulet, että vuorovaikutuksesi voivat vaikuttaa MiTaleen?

    -Uusien kumppanuuksien luomisessa?

    - Tunnustuksen saamisessa markkinoilla?

    -Hyvän aseman halutussa verkostossa?

Miten kommunikoit muiden sidosryhmien kanssa?

    -Mitä kanavoita käyttäen?

Voitko kuvailla, mikä on mielestäsi tärkeää vuorovaikutuksissa?

Luuletko, että sinun aikaisemmat yhteydet ja kokemukset ovat auttaneet MiTalea?

    -Jos kyllä, niin miten?

Mitä olet oppinut aiemmasta yhteistyöstäsi sidosryhmien ja muiden ammattilaisten kanssa?

Millaisia haasteita olet törmännyt ihmissuhteiden vuorovaikutuksessa?