Investigating the Role and Significance of Corporate Stories in Corporate Reputation Management

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The thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Portsmouth.

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Abstract

A recent topic of academic interest within corporate reputation is the use of stories to build reputation. However, there is little empirical research in this area. This thesis investigates how stories are used as a corporate identity cue and the influence of stories on audiences (particularly organisation members), in order to bring insight into the role and significance of stories in corporate reputation management.

The empirical study was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved content analysis of corporate history stories identified from the websites of 200 organisations in the for-profit and non-profit sectors. The second stage involved case studies of two organisations in the UK energy industry, with qualitative and quantitative data collected using semi-structured interviews, documentary research, and observation research.

The findings indicate that corporate stories can be used as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms which express corporate personality. However, the extent to which platforms are conveyed through corporate stories varies, indicating that the use of stories as a corporate identity cue is also variable. Using impression management theory to interpret corporate stories indicates that stories can influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation, and organisation members’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour. These findings bring new insight to the impression management literature, as well as supporting the existing literature. However, the findings indicate that stories need to be perceived as relevant and credible in order for stories to influence organisation members. Also, limited awareness of stories by managers and a lack of training in using stories are likely to limit the use of stories in corporate reputation management.
The thesis contributes to the corporate story literature by developing a framework illustrating how corporate stories act as a corporate identity cue and influence audiences. Guidance is also provided for managers regarding the use of corporate stories as part of corporate reputation management. Future research should build on this study by investigating corporate stories from the perspective of a wider range of stakeholder groups, and in other industry and organisational contexts.
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### Analysis:

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the methodology employed in the study, including the philosophical approach, research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, data analysis, pilot testing, and ethical considerations. It is followed by detailed findings in stages one and two, covering data collection, analysis, and the influence of corporate stories on organisation members.
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Declaration

Degree – PhD in Marketing
Candidate – Sara Spear

“Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award”

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Dissemination

**Journal articles:**


**Conference papers:**


Chapter 1 – Introduction and Rationale

1.1 Introduction

Storytelling is an intrinsic form of human communication which dates back to the prehistoric era, when stories would be painted onto the walls of caves. Most cultures throughout history have shared stories, in oral or textual formats, both as entertainment and as a means of passing on knowledge and information. Stories were traditionally used to influence members of a particular social group, by sharing common values and desired behaviours. Stories can have a timeless appeal, for example ancient Greek epics like The Iliad and The Odyssey by Homer have survived to this day. As such, stories need to be recognised in organisations as a potentially effective way of communicating with both internal and external stakeholders.

Some organisations have become renowned as engaging storytellers. For example, the story of Hewlett-Packard’s origins is widely known, with the company started by two friends, William Hewlett and David Packard, who originally worked out of one of their garages. A picture of the garage was shown in an advertising campaign run by the company (Dowling, 2006, p. 90), with the heading “Rules of the Garage” and the tagline “Invent”. The accompanying text included “If it doesn’t contribute, it doesn’t leave the garage”, which expressed the company’s philosophy of innovation, and the emphasis placed on developing products that would make a difference to customers. The full story of the company’s development is shared on the corporate website, including the significant role of the garage: “Bill and Dave became friends when they were both engineering students at Stanford...The humble one-car garage had little more than a concrete floor and a workbench...but it was enough space for Bill and Dave to develop prototype products” (“Founding HP”, 2014, pp. 1-2). Arguably, storytelling helped contribute to Hewlett-Packard’s “world-wide reputation for quality and innovation” (Evans, 2011). Having faced problems in recent years, current CEO Meg Whitman has referred to Hewlett-
Packard in the future as telling “one of the great comeback stories in American business” (Vance & Ricadela, 2013), indicating that stories are still key in driving Hewlett-Packard’s reputation.

However, despite well-known examples like Hewlett-Packard, it appears that stories are generally poorly managed in organisations, and that their potential is not being reached. It is possible to speculate as to why this is the case. There could be confusion regarding what stories are and the appropriateness of stories in organisations. There could also be a lack of understanding of how organisation members use stories and how stories can influence audiences. Lack of managerial appreciation for stories could be a result of inexperience and poor training of managers, particularly in terms of developing communication skills. This is a concern for organisations, as it could limit or negatively impact the role of stories in corporate reputation management.

1.2 Focus of this research

There are several areas that are insufficiently addressed in the existing literature, and in particular this thesis focuses on:
How do corporate stories play a role in corporate reputation management?
How are corporate stories significant as part of corporate reputation management?

In order to address these issues, two sub-issues can be identified, namely:
How are stories used as a corporate identity cue?
How do corporate stories influence audiences, particularly organisation members?

These are critical concerns for organisations, and are explored further in the sections below.
This chapter sets out the conceptual background of the study by providing a brief overview of corporate reputation and the principal building blocks of corporate reputation. These sections are important to establish the value of research in the area of corporate reputation, from both academic and practical perspectives. The discussion in these sections is also necessary to provide the background for the main arguments of the thesis in chapter two, concerning the role and significance of stories as part of corporate reputation management.

Following on from the conceptual background, chapter one introduces the potential role of stories as part of the communication element of the corporate identity mix. In particular, it addresses the use of stories within organisations, and the potential influence of stories on organisation members is emphasised as a key area of focus. The chapter concludes by considering gaps in the existing literature and outlining the contribution of this study to the literature and to business practice.

1.3 Overview of corporate reputation

1.3.1 Significance of corporate reputation

Corporate reputation is defined as “a stakeholder's overall evaluation of an organisation over time” (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, pp. 1049, 1058). This evaluation is based on stakeholders’ experiences and relationships with an organisation and its brand(s), including interactions with organisation members, communication about an organisation, and membership of brand communities, as well as stakeholders’ perceptions of an organisation compared to competitors (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1058). Other indirect factors can also contribute to corporate reputation, including the image of the country of perceived ownership of an organisation, images of products/services classes, and images of brand users (Worcester, 2009, p. 573). Although the above discussion implies a for-profit context, the concept of
corporate reputation is relevant for organisations in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors, as noted by Abratt and Kleyn (2012, pp. 1049, 1058).

The appearance of corporate reputation in the academic literature dates back to the 1960s (for example Finn (1961, p. 136) and Macleod (1967, p. 67)). However, the concept came to prominence in the 1990s, with authors such as Fombrun and Shanley (1990, p. 234), and into the 2000s, with authors including Balmer (2009, p. 548) and Dowling (2006, p. 98). It continues to be a key topic, with recent studies by authors including Abratt and Kleyn (2012, p. 1049) and Mishina, Block, and Mannor (2012, p. 460). The focus on corporate reputation from the 1990s has been driven by multiple environmental factors. Globalisation, accelerating product lifecycles, and increasing competition in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors have all led to the increasing importance of corporate reputation management.

This is due to the potential for corporate reputation to differentiate organisations and lead to a competitive advantage when introducing new products, entering new markets, and expanding internationally (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004, pp. 370-371; Balmer & Gray, 2000, p. 259; Boyd, Bergh, & Ketchen Jr., 2010, p. 588; Dowling, 2006, p. 138; Gray & Balmer, 1998, p. 695; Ponzi, Fombrun, & Gardberg, 2011, p. 15).

Deregulation and privatisation in some industries, and increased mergers, acquisitions, and divestitures have also led to a need for organisations to manage corporate reputation. These changes can result in an unclear corporate image, and gaps between stakeholders’ perceptions of an organisation and how the organisation wants to be perceived (Balmer & Gray, 2000, p. 259; Gray & Balmer, 1998, p. 695). Public expectations for corporate social responsibility have driven a greater focus on the organisations behind product brands, and it is argued that organisations can achieve superior financial performance by being perceived as “socially good” (Balmer & Gray, 2000, p. 259; Dowling, 2006, p. 134). These factors all highlight the significance of corporate reputation management for organisations.
Practitioners as well as academics have acknowledged the importance of corporate reputation. For example, it has been proposed by Reputation Institute that there is an emerging “reputation economy”, and that “people buy products, take jobs, and make investments based primarily on their trust, admiration and appreciation for the companies and institutions that stand behind them” (“2013 – Global RepTrak™ 100”, 2013, p. 9). Reputation Institute is an advisory and research company that aims to bring together academic research with business practice. Their research has demonstrated the significance placed on reputation by business leaders. A recent study found that 60% of business leaders believed having a robust reputation had a high financial impact on their organisation, and 68% believed that reputation had an impact on customer retention. 53% said that it drove sales, 40% said it drove market share, and 37% agreed that it helped retain employees and reduced hiring costs (“The World’s Most Reputable Companies in 2013”, 2013, p. 2).

Practitioners echo the academic perspective on the relevance of reputation management for non-profit as well as for-profit organisations. Reputation Institute proposes that the reputations of charities are now more important than ever. UK charities that have been found to have the strongest reputations include the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and The Royal British Legion (“Reputation Institute’s UK RepTrack™ Pulse 2011”, 2011, p. 19). Reputation Institute argue that the importance of reputation in this sector is due to charities facing increasing pressure as a result of public spending cuts and the general public “feeling the pinch in their purse”, alongside calls for increased transparency, and higher expectations from stakeholders (“Reputation Institute’s UK RepTrack™ Pulse 2011”, 2011, p. 1). However, as charities have traditionally lagged behind for-profit organisations in their marketing orientation, it is likely that many charities (particularly smaller organisations) still lack awareness of the potential significance of corporate reputation management.

Interest in corporate reputation from practitioners and the wider public has risen partly due to reputational rankings of organisations in the media, such as Fortune
Magazine and The Financial Times, as noted by Deephouse and Carter (2005, p. 329) and Martin and Hetrick (2006, p. 64). Fortune’s survey of the world’s most admired companies asks business people to vote for the companies that they admire most, from any industry. In 2013, Apple was voted number one, with Google second (“World’s Most Admired Companies”, 2013). Reputation Institute conduct an annual survey of the most reputable companies in the world, measuring respondents’ levels of trust, admiration, esteem, and good feeling towards the companies. BMW, The Walt Disney Company, and Rolex were the top three companies in 2013 (“2013 – Global RepTrak™ 100”, 2013, p. 17). The Sunday Times publishes an annual list of the best big, medium, and small companies to work for, with Pets At Home and Iceland Foods heading the UK list of big companies for 2013 (“The Sunday Times 100 Best Companies”, n.d.). This survey in particular indicates that corporate reputation could influence potential recruits, and may affect the quality of candidates that apply for jobs within an organisation. In general, the widespread recognition of these surveys, and their potential influence on stakeholders, supports the practical relevance of corporate reputation for organisations, and echoes the claims for reputation management made by academics.

One key issue highlighted in the literature is the existence of multiple reputations. Older studies (for example Fombrun, 1996) can be criticised for having a unitary approach to corporate reputation, whereas it is generally accepted in the more recent literature that an organisation can have multiple reputations. An organisation’s stakeholders are likely to be concerned with different organisational outcomes, and are likely to perceive different images of the organisation. This can lead to multiple reputations (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1050; Dowling & Moran, 2012, p. 27; Martin & Hetrick, 2006, p. 76). For example, an organisation’s reputation in the eyes of organisation members is likely to be based mainly on outcomes associated with the workplace, whereas with customers it is likely to be based on product/service outcomes, and with investors it is likely to be based on financial outcomes (Dowling & Moran, 2012, p. 27). Arguably, an individual could
hold multiple, yet compatible, reputations about an organisation which could also contribute to an overall reputation (Dowling & Moran, 2012, p. 27).

A similar perspective is adopted in practitioner approaches to corporate reputation. The Reputation Quotient measure of corporate reputation (designed by Reputation Institute) has a total score (equating to an organisation’s overall reputation) that is based on seven underlying reputation dimensions: products and services, innovation, workplace, citizenship, governance, leadership, and performance (“The RepTrak® Framework”, 2014). These are echoed in the reputation assessment tool from Harris Interactive (a leading market research agency), which identifies six dimensions of corporate reputation: products and services, financial performance, workplace environment, social responsibility, vision and leadership, and emotional appeal (“The Harris Poll Reputation Quotient® (RQ®)”, 2014). This indicates similarities between academic and practical perspectives of corporate reputation, which strengthens their validity and practical relevance.

A brief review of the academic literature shows that an ongoing challenge for researchers is determining the link between corporate reputation and organisational performance, and the value of corporate reputation as a strategic resource. Previous studies focusing on this area include Abratt and Kleyn (2012, p. 1057), Boyd et al. (2010, p. 604), Deephouse (2000, p. 1096), Dowling and Moran (2012, p. 27), Macleod (1967, p. 67), Roberts and Dowling (2002, p. 1079), Smith, Smith, and Wang (2010, p. 202), and Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, and Beatty (2009, p. 191). This is discussed in the next sections, in terms of the potential benefits of a positive corporate reputation, and also as part of the issues in corporate reputation management.
1.3.2 Benefits of a positive corporate reputation

A fundamental proposition in the literature is that corporate reputation can be a valuable organisational asset, as claimed by authors such as Balmer (2009, p. 545) and Cole (2012, p. 59). This is captured in the remark by Balmer (2009, p. 545) that “the strength of an organisation’s identity, corporate brand, corporate communications and corporate reputation can give institutions a strategic advantage”. It is evident from the literature that there are several ways in which a favourable reputation can lead to a competitive advantage for organisations. In terms of customer relationships, a positive reputation can reduce customers’ perceived risk and encourage customer loyalty, by making an organisation appear trustworthy. A positive reputation can allow premium pricing, if customers are willing to pay more for the products/services of a high reputation organisation (Dowling & Moran, 2012, p. 27; Fombrun, 1996, p. 57). Similarly, suppliers may also perceive an organisation to be trustworthy, and subsequently have less stringent contractual and monitoring requirements. This can lead to lower costs for an organisation. There can be benefits in terms of employee recruitment and commitment, as it is argued that existing and potential organisation members would generally prefer to work for high reputation organisations, and are likely to be more loyal and productive (Fombrun, 1996, p. 57; Roberts & Dowling, 2002, p. 1079). A strong positive reputation can lead to fewer risks of crises, and the goodwill accumulated from a positive reputation over time can limit the damage to an organisation if a crisis does occur (Fombrun, 1996, p. 57).

A key concern for both academics and practitioners is the role of corporate reputation in driving shareholder returns. Cole (2012, p. 59) identifies reputation contribution as the proportion of a company’s market capitalisation attributable to its reputation. This is based on annual studies by Reputation Dividend consultancy, which take measures of reputation strength from the Most Admired Companies studies (published by Management Today in the UK and Fortune Magazine in the US), and explain the economic consequence for the companies’ shareholders (Cole, 2012, p. 55; Reputation Dividend, 2014, p. 1). The combined value of
reputations across the FTSE 350 was found to be £911 billion at the start of 2014, up £108 billion (13%) from the previous year (Reputation Dividend, 2014, pp. 1, 3).

According to the Reputation Dividend study in 2014, Unilever, Diageo, and Royal Dutch Shell are the UK listed companies with the highest proportion of their market capitalisation attributable to their corporate reputation (over 54% for each company). This equals a reputation contribution of £42,238 million for Unilever, £28,281 million for Diageo, and £73,256 million for Royal Dutch Shell (Reputation Dividend, 2014, pp. 1, 3). The study indicated that the potential for reputation to create new shareholder value increased over the past year. A 1% rise in reputation strength would have produced an average market capitalisation increase of 1.7% in 2012, whereas the same improvement would deliver nearly 2% at the end of 2013, equating to £4 billion more shareholder value (Reputation Dividend, 2014, p. 5).

Practitioners support the benefits of corporate reputation proposed in the academic literature. For example, Reputation Institute claim that it is important for energy companies to manage their reputations in order to “attract top technical talent, retain current customers and win new ones, secure government concessions, engage business partners, and differentiate themselves in a crowded and global marketplace” (“Energy Industry Reputation Profile”, 2011, p. 5).

Benefits of corporate reputation are also evident in the non-profit sector. Studies by Bennett and Gabriel (2003, p. 276) and Meijer (2009, pp. 36, 40) found that the reputation of a charity is a critical factor in attracting donors, and has a strong influence on donor behaviour. Overall, the discussion in this section indicates that reputation can be a potentially important intangible asset for both for-profit and non-profit organisations.
1.3.3 Issues in reputation management

There is conflict, however, from both academic and practical perspectives, regarding the benefits and importance of corporate reputation, and also to what extent an organisation can manage its reputation. Reputations can be negative as well as positive, and a poor reputation can have a detrimental impact on an organisation. For example, a survey by PR Week found that British Airways had a reputation for being “expensive”, and that their reputation had been negatively impacted by industrial disputes (“Reputation Survey...”, 2010). BSkyB’s share price decreased between April 2011 and April 2012 after part-owner Rupert Murdoch was questioned as part of the News of the World phone-hacking scandal (Reputation Institute UK, 2012, n.p.). Cole (2012, p. 61) notes that out of 410 leading US and UK companies, corporate reputation created shareholder value in 91% of companies, but destroyed value in 9%, as reported in the Reputation Dividend study in 2012. Shareholders of the 25 companies with the lowest reputation contributions had reportedly lost $16 billion as a result of those companies’ reputation weaknesses. Sears Holdings had the lowest reputation contribution at -39.3%, which equaled a loss of $1335 million for shareholders (Cole, 2012, p. 63).

However, a contrasting critique of corporate reputation is that reputation may not have a direct effect on performance, as claimed by Boyd et al. (2010, p. 604), or may only affect performance marginally, as suggested by Fombrun and Shanley (1990, p. 255). It is unclear to what extent corporate reputation functions as a predictor or consequence of other variables (Walsh et al., 2009, p. 191), for example “whether a good reputation leads to better returns, or good financial performance leads to a good reputation” (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1057). There may not always be a correlation between reputation and success, as other variables may also influence stakeholders. For example, product-related issues such as price and quality may be more important for consumers than corporate reputation (Page & Fearn, 2005, pp. 305, 308). At the same time, some organisations appear successful despite a poor reputation. For example, Ryanair:
“While many consumers across Europe have a pretty dim view of Ryanair, that
does not put them off taking advantage of its low prices” (Shakespeare, 2013). This
indicates a need for organisations to be aware of the critical factors that
determine the organisation’s success with different groups of stakeholders.

Even if corporate reputation is assumed to be an organisational asset, there is
uncertainty around how organisations can build or improve corporate reputation
formation of corporate reputation is subsequently a key issue for academics, and
has been investigated by authors including Basdeo, Smith, Grimm, Rindova, and
corporate reputation costs time, money, and effort (Bromley, 1993, p. 165), yet
once built, corporate reputation can be quickly damaged, or destroyed (Balmer,
2009, p. 548). This is supported from a practitioner perspective, as the Reputation
Dividend study found that some companies’ corporate reputation had declined
between 2012 and 2013. For example, AstraZeneca’s reputation contribution
halved due to issues including the company’s marketing practices in China and an
ageing product portfolio (Reputation Dividend, 2014, p. 4). Corporate reputation
needs to be continually supported by an organisation’s actions and communication
in order to prevent it from depreciating over time (Dowling, 2006, p. 98). Yet the
intangible nature of reputation means that it is difficult to measure (Ponzi et al.,
2011, p. 15), which can cause difficulties in monitoring corporate reputation.

Managing corporate reputation can also be problematic due to organisations only
having limited control over their reputation (Bromley, 2001, p. 320). Stakeholders’
perceptions of an organisation are likely to be affected by communication from
the media and other third parties (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990, p. 234), and also by
the actions of an organisation’s competitors (Basdeo et al., 2006, p. 1205). For
example, the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 impacted the reputation of
the whole oil industry (“Energy Industry Reputation Profile”, 2011, p. 5). The
actions of suppliers can damage an organisation’s reputation, for example if
suppliers do not follow the same ethical principles as their client organisation.
Primark was criticised in the media for how workers in suppliers’ factories were treated in developing countries (Magee, 2010). Similarly, Apple received negative attention after workers committed suicide at factories owned by its supplier Foxconn, claimed to be due to tough working conditions in the factory (“Apple publishes supplier details…”, 2012).

It is apparent from this overview of corporate reputation that there is no consensus in the literature regarding the benefits of a positive corporate reputation, or how it can be managed by organisations. Corporate reputation management is arguably more important for some organisations than others (Page & Fearne, 2005, p. 312). In particular, more prominent organisations are likely to have higher motivation to manage corporate reputation (Carter, 2006, p. 1151), as they are more likely to come under scrutiny from the media and other stakeholders. However, it can be concluded that the potential benefits of a strong reputation are likely to outweigh the weaknesses and difficulties in reputation management for most organisations. This provides an incentive for organisations to engage in corporate reputation management, with the aim of building or maintaining a positive corporate reputation, as observed by Smith et al. (2010, p. 202). Based on this, corporate reputation management is a significant concern for organisations, and it is therefore important for organisations to understand and manage the building blocks of reputation. These are discussed in the following sections, in order to provide the conceptual background for introducing the potential role of corporate storytelling in building corporate reputation.

1.4 Principal building blocks of corporate reputation

A critical proposition in this section is that corporate identity is a key driver of corporate reputation, as noted by Abratt and Kleyn (2012, p. 1059). This section introduces corporate identity, as well as the associated concepts of corporate personality, organisational identity, corporate brand, and corporate image. The section discusses how these concepts act as building blocks to the development of
corporate reputation. There is a relatively long tradition of research in these areas evident in the literature. Academic literature on corporate image dates back to the 1950s, making it the first of the building blocks to be considered by academics, such as Bolger (1959, p. 7) and Eells (1959, p. 15). Corporate personality and corporate identity were widely focused on by academics in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Bateman (1975, p. 3) and Bernstein (1984, pp. 24-25), as well as by practitioners such as Olins (1978, p. 212). Corporate branding came to prominence in the literature in the 1990s (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012, p. 739), and remains a key concern for researchers today. These concepts all have wide literature bases and are viewed from multiple perspectives. Consequently, this section does not seek to review the literature in these areas, but instead gives a brief overview of the concepts.

A difficulty facing researchers in the area of corporate reputation, however, is the lack of agreed definitions of the building blocks. There are conflicting and overlapping uses of the concepts of corporate personality, corporate identity, organisational identity, and corporate image in the literature, both as the literature has developed over time and also as used by current authors. This causes problems when identifying key issues in this area, as it is evident from a brief review of the literature that the terms used by one author often do not align with those used by other authors. Subsequently this section defines each of the concepts according to the most current and widely agreed upon view in the literature, in order to set out the approach taken to the area in this thesis. The links between the concepts are outlined in Figure 1.1, as proposed by authors such as Abratt (1989, p. 70) and Bernstein (1984, pp. 24-25), and are discussed further below.
1.4.1 Corporate personality

Corporate reputation originates in corporate personality, as it is generally accepted that each organisation has a personality (Abratt, 1989, p. 67; Bromley, 1993, p. 160). Corporate personality is referred to as “what the organisation really is” (Bromley, 2001, p. 316), or “the organisational reality” (Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007, p. 422). Corporate personality is defined as the characteristics of an organisation (Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007, p. 422), which distinguish one organisation from another (Abratt, 1989, p. 67; Bromley, 1993, p. 160). This consists of “who” an organisation is, what it does, and what it stands for (Otubanjo, 2011, p. 265). An organisation’s strategy, vision, mission, philosophy, goals, culture, ownership structure (Otubanjo, 2012, p. 70; Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007, p. 422; Stuart, 1999, p. 205), and values (Stuart, 1999, p. 205; Suvatjis & de Chernatony, 2005, p. 819) are all proposed to be aspects of corporate personality.

There is, however, some debate over whether an organisation can have a personality. Davies and Chun (2002, pp. 146-147) propose that “brands and
organizations are not persons and cannot have personalities”. As human personality is a familiar concept for both academic and practitioner audiences, “personality” is instead suggested to be a metaphor for understanding brands and organisations. Davies and Chun (2002, p. 147) use corporate personality as a tool for measuring corporate image, by using human personality descriptor words to describe an organisation (such as “agreeableness” and “competence”). This follows in a similar vein to the work by Aaker (1997, p. 353) on brand personality dimensions (identified as sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness), although Aaker predominantly focused on product brands.

This is a restrictive view of corporate personality, however, based on a limited number of pre-set dimensions. This contrasts with the broader perspective discussed above, where corporate personality is seen as the distinguishing characteristics of an organisation (Abratt, 1989, p. 67; Bromley, 1993, p. 160; Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007, p. 422). As all organisations have certain defining characteristics, even in the most basic terms of what an organisation does, this thesis considers these characteristics to be corporate personality (instead of focusing on human personality traits). Following on from this, corporate personality is viewed here as the starting point for the development of corporate image and reputation, rather than as a tool for measuring corporate image. From this perspective, corporate personality is presented through corporate identity (Bernstein, 1984, pp. 24-25; Otubanjo 2011, p. 265), and this is discussed further below.

1.4.2 Corporate identity

Originally corporate identity was seen as synonymous with an organisation’s visual identity, such as demonstrated in the use of corporate logos (Balmer, Fukukawa, & Gray, 2007, p. 8), and was associated with a focus on graphic design. However, it is now defined more broadly as how an organisation expresses itself to stakeholders (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1051; Money, Rose, & Hillenbrand, 2010, p. 200).
Corporate identity is also referred to as an assembly of cues that express corporate personality, and which an audience uses to recognise and distinguish an organisation from others (Abratt, 1989, pp. 67-68; Money et al., 2010, p. 200; Otubanjo, 2011, p. 265). Corporate identity can be anchored on different organisational aspects, including an organisation’s vision, mission, values, beliefs, business scope, and ownership structure, as proposed by He (2012, p. 615). These are all elements of corporate personality and this illustrates how corporate identity expresses corporate personality.

Differences arise in the literature, however, where some authors use the term “corporate identity” when referring to what is more commonly agreed to be corporate personality (as defined in the previous discussion). This is evident in earlier studies, for example Ackerman (1983, p. 38) refers to corporate identity as the “essence of the corporation”, and Gray and Balmer (1998, p. 695) refer to corporate identity as the “reality of the corporation”, comprising the “distinct characteristics of an organisation”. More recently though, Hawabhay, Abratt, and Peters (2009, p. 11) also refer to the “reality of the identity, that is, the values, vision, mission, objectives”. Abratt and Kleyn (2012, p. 1052) propose that “corporate identity consists of an organisation's strategic choices and how it elects to express these”, when the first part of this statement again reflects corporate personality.

Conversely, other authors use “corporate identity” when actually referring to what is more widely accepted to be corporate image. For example, Cornelissen, Christensen, and Kinuthia (2012, p. 1099) propose that “collective sense making about the organisation and its identity is...situational and emerges from the interactions of individuals”. Similarly, He (2012, p. 612) claims that corporate identity “resides in the minds of the beholders/stakeholders”, and that subsequently organisations can have multiple corporate identities. The conceptualisation of corporate image as residing in the minds of stakeholders, based on their interpretations of corporate identity cues, is discussed later in this chapter. Although the studies by the authors noted here, and in the preceding
paragraph, are still referred to in this thesis, the differences in their approaches are taken into account when considering the relevance of their work for this study.

Corporate identity is arguably a critical concern for organisations, as it can be “a powerful source of competitive advantage” (Melewar & Akel, 2005, p. 41). This is due to the role of corporate identity in influencing stakeholders’ perceptions of an organisation, which then becomes corporate image (Bernstein, 1984, pp. 24-25), and subsequently corporate reputation. Corporate identity needs to adapt according to changes in corporate strategy, and in the external business environment (He & Balmer, 2013, pp. 421, 424). This is important to support the formation of the desired corporate image in the minds of stakeholders. Corporate identity management is subsequently suggested be a key factor in organisational success (Suvatjis, de Chernatony, & Halikias, 2012, p. 153). Corporate identity can be at least partly controlled by organisations by managing corporate identity cues, which are discussed below.

Corporate identity cues can be planned or unplanned, formal or informal, and used consciously or unconsciously (Bernstein, 1984, pp. 24-25; Otubanjo, Amujo, & Cornelius, 2010, p. 157). Corporate identity therefore includes managers’ deliberate attempts to influence the way an organisation is perceived, as well as non-deliberate influences, such as the behaviour of organisation members. The various cues are referred to together as the corporate identity mix. The principal cues that configure the corporate identity mix are symbolism, communication, and behaviour (originally proposed by Birkigt and Stadler (1986, as cited in Cornelissen, 2008, p. 66), and subsequently referred to by authors including Cornelissen and Elving (2003, p. 116), Money et al. (2010, p. 200), van Riel (1995, p. 33), and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 68)).

The symbolism element of the corporate identity mix traditionally includes all the visual elements that communicate corporate identity, and focuses on an organisation’s visual identity (Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007, p. 420). Corporate visual identity can include an organisation’s name, slogan, symbol/logo, colour
(Bartholme’ & Melewar, 2011, p. 54), house style, and graphics (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1053). These cues can appear on an organisation’s buildings, vehicles, stationery, corporate clothing (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1053), and other visual communication materials. However, visual cues can be seen as just one aspect of “corporate sensory identity”, which also includes cues using the other sensory dimensions of sound, smell, touch, and taste (Bartholme’ & Melewar, 2011, pp. 54, 59). An organisation’s name and slogan, for example, can also be audible cues (Bartholme’ & Melewar, 2011, p. 54). Some cues can encompass multiple senses, for example an organisation’s buildings can provide a three-dimensional experience of an organisation (Bartholme’ & Melewar, 2011, p. 57). The symbolic element includes predominantly planned cues, which are expressed consciously by an organisation, meaning that this element can generally be controlled by an organisation. There has been little academic research, however, into non-visual corporate identity cues, such as the use of scent, acoustic environments, and audio logos, as noted by Bartholme’ and Melewar (2011, pp. 54, 57). Researchers have therefore been called to investigate how these can be used by organisations to contribute to corporate image formation.

The communication element of the corporate identity mix encompasses all communication by an organisation and its members, with both internal and external stakeholders, as noted by Hawabhay et al. (2009, p. 10). This includes planned and controllable communication, which is driven by an organisation (such as advertising, sponsorship, and public relations), as well as unplanned and uncontrollable communication (such as performance of products, communication from the media and competitors, and discourse of organisation members) (Balmer, 2001, p. 17; Karaosmanoglu & Melewar, 2006, p. 197; Melewar, 2003, p. 20; Melewar, Karaosmanoglu, & Paterson, 2005, p. 62). As would be expected, unplanned and uncontrollable corporate communication is difficult for organisations to understand and manage (Hawabhay et al., 2009, p. 17), yet could have a significant influence on audiences, and their perceptions of an organisation. This suggests that research on unplanned communication could be particularly valuable for organisations. Stories are proposed to be a form of communication by
authors including Barker and Gower (2010, p. 308), Boyce (1995, p. 107), Burmann and Zeplin (2005, p. 291), Herskovitz and Crystal (2010, p. 21), and Otubanjo (2013, p. 59), and can therefore be viewed as part of the communication element of the corporate identity mix. This is discussed further later in the chapter.

The behaviour element of the corporate identity mix relates to corporate behaviour (including an organisation’s actions regarding environmental, ethical, and recruitment issues), and the behaviour of managers and other organisation members (including their activities, actions, and mannerisms) (Karaosmanoglu & Melewar, 2006, p. 201; Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007, pp. 420-421). The behaviour element therefore includes some planned cues, such as deliberate actions by an organisation. However, it predominantly comprises unplanned and uncontrollable cues, as organisation members interact with stakeholders. Given the emphasis on the behaviour of organisation members, they are subsequently a key stakeholder group in corporate identity management. Managing corporate identity requires managers to motivate employees to behave in a way that is consistent with other corporate identity cues, and with the desired corporate image (Otubanjo et al., 2010, p. 157). Melewar and Storrie (2001, p. 23) give the example of Toni & Guy, whose desired corporate image requires organisation members to be professional, creative, and fashionable, with an interest in hairstyling, fashion, and trends.

Organisation members can also be impacted by other corporate identity cues, including external and internal communication (both planned and unplanned) (Stuart, 2002, p. 33). As a result, previous studies on corporate identity have frequently conducted research with managers and employees in organisations, including He (2012, p. 609), He and Balmer (2013, p. 407), Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006, p. 847), and Simões, Dibb, and Fisk (2005, p. 159), in order to gain an understanding of internal perceptions of corporate identity.

However, managing the behaviour element of the corporate identity mix can be problematic for organisations. Employee motivation and behaviour is traditionally the responsibility of the Human Resources department, and there can be a lack of
contact and coordination between an organisation’s Human Resources and Marketing departments, due to structural and cultural barriers (Aurand, Gorchels, & Bishop, 2005, p. 167; Hatch & Schultz, 2009, p. 117). Functional specialisation (where Human Resources departments communicate with organisation members, and Marketing departments communicate with consumers) can lead to confusion amongst stakeholders if there are conflicting messages (Hatch & Schultz, 2009, p. 117). This issue has been largely neglected in the corporate identity literature, but has been addressed in corporate branding research, discussed below.

Internal marketing is proposed to be essential to create an organisational culture that enables the development of a strong corporate brand (Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006, p. 37). Internal marketing can encompass human resources issues such as recruitment, training, performance evaluations, motivation (Aurand et al., 2005, p. 169), quality standards, and rewards systems (Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006, p. 37). Involving the Human Resources department in internal branding has been found to positively affect organisation members’ attitude toward the brand, and make them more likely to behave consistently with the desired brand image (Aurand et al., 2005, p. 163). This is also relevant in the context of corporate identity management, and indicates the need for Human Resources departments to be involved with internal marketing programmes to enhance the management of corporate identity.

Corporate identity cues are interpreted and assigned meaning by stakeholders (Cornelissen et al., 2012, pp. 1096, 1099; Iglesias & Bonet, 2012, p. 253; Otubanjo, 2012, p. 70). Meanings are mental constructs, which Iglesias and Bonet (2012, p. 256) define as “the feelings we project on (objects), and the properties, values, and uses that we attribute to them”. It is proposed in the literature that individuals “can give many different meanings to the same object and that different people can give different meanings to the same object or brand...meanings can change and evolve over time, accordingly to the interests, expectations, and experiences of people” (Iglesias & Bonet, 2012, p. 256). This is relevant for corporate identity management, as the interpretation of corporate identity cues is likely to be shaped
by the values, beliefs, and assumptions of stakeholders. It is the interpretation and assignment of meaning to corporate identity cues that leads to the formation of corporate image and reputation, as noted by Otubanjo (2012, p. 70). The interpretation process can subsequently lead to the development of multiple corporate images and reputations, as discussed previously in this chapter.

However, it is recognised that the reception of corporate messages by audiences (internal and external), cannot be controlled by senders, and audiences may not interpret and assign meanings to corporate messages in the way that managers intended (Cornelissen et al., 2012, p. 1098). It is subsequently claimed to be critical for both managers and academics to understand how stakeholders interpret and assign meaning to corporate identity cues (Iglesias & Bonet, 2012, p. 253). The studies by Cornelissen et al. (2012, pp. 1096, 1099), Iglesias and Bonet (2012, p. 256), and Otubanjo (2012, p. 70) are all conceptual though, and there is a lack of empirical research in this area to bring insight into how stakeholders interpret corporate identity cues.

Overall, it is important for organisations to manage the various corporate identity cues, to ensure that they are aligned and that their influence on stakeholders is positive (Balmer, 2001, p. 276; Karaosmanoglu & Melewar, 2006, p. 204). This is crucial, as lack of alignment can cause dissonance between an organisation and its stakeholders, and potentially develop into a crisis for the organisation (Balmer, 2001, p. 276). However, the presence of both controllable and uncontrollable cues in the corporate identity mix means that managers cannot wholly control corporate identity, as noted by Handelman (2006, p. 107). This indicates a key challenge for organisations, and a significant area of future research for academics, to explore the extent to which corporate identity cues can be managed, and the relative impact of controllable and uncontrollable cues on audiences.
1.4.3 Organisational identity

It is necessary here to draw a brief distinction between corporate identity and organisational identity. The organisational identity literature has an internal orientation, focusing on the perspective of organisation members (Balmer, 2008, p. 881). Organisational identity is seen as a construct held in organisation members’ minds (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991, p. 543) and is defined as “what (an organisation’s) members believe to be its character” (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991, p. 547). This has similarities to the concept of corporate image, which focuses on broader stakeholders’ perceptions of an organisation (discussed later in this chapter).

Organisational identity is proposed to stem from organisation members’ perceptions of the defining traits of an organisation (Balmer, 2009, p. 555), referred to as “the central and enduring attributes of an organization that distinguish it from other organizations” (Whetten, 2006, p. 220). This echoes the conceptualisation of corporate personality, and the link between corporate personality and corporate image (mediated by corporate identity), but focusing specifically on the perceptions of organisation members. It should be noted though that some authors use the terms “corporate identity” and “organisational identity” interchangeably, or do not differentiate between different types of identity. For example, van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 151) refer to “a company’s identity” as “internal beliefs about what employees know to be distinctive, continuous and central “truths” about the company”. However, it can be seen from the authors referred to above that this is closer to the definition of organisational identity, rather than corporate identity. The lack of distinction between concepts adversely affects the clarity of the literature in these areas.

Part of organisation members’ perception of organisational identity is based on their beliefs about what third parties think about an organisation (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994, p. 239), and this can be affected by scrutiny from the media and other external stakeholders (Bridwell-Mitchell & Mezias, 2012, p. 201).
The literature on organisational identity predominantly focuses on how organisational identity affects members’ organisational identification, defined as “the degree to which people come to the see the organisation as part of themselves” (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 242). This is of interest to academics and organisations, as if organisation members identify strongly with an organisation, this can then lead to positive outcomes for the organisation. This includes a greater likelihood of organisation members behaving consistently with the organisational identity, and displaying organisational citizenship behaviours (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 240; Stuart, 2002, p. 30).

Organisational identity has links to the concepts of corporate personality and corporate image, but the differing use of terminology and internal orientation mean that it is generally considered as a separate literature stream. Organisational identity has not been strongly connected to corporate reputation in the literature, although its similarities to the other building blocks indicate that it is likely to play a role in the development of reputation with organisation members. The literature on organisational identity is less well developed than on corporate identity, and the associated concepts of corporate personality, image, and reputation. This thesis subsequently focuses on corporate identity in the development of corporate reputation, and does not further consider organisational identity.

1.4.4 Corporate brand

Corporate branding plays a significant role in corporate reputation management, as it can be undertaken by organisations to build, maintain, and protect a strong positive reputation with both internal and external stakeholders (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1052; Cornelissen, 2008, p. 64; van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 107). Corporate brands have their roots in corporate identity (Balmer & Thomson, 2009, p. 15), and are initially shaped by corporate identity (Balmer, 2012b, p, 1067). At the same time, a corporate brand can contribute to stakeholders’ perceptions of corporate identity (Suvatjis et al., 2012, p. 161), indicating a two-way relationship
between corporate identity and brand. Organisations are increasingly realising the strategic importance of corporate branding, and corporate brands are seen as “unique, portable, divestible, and highly valuable corporate assets”, and a “means of creating both shareholder and stakeholder value” (Balmer, 2012a, p. 6). Corporate brands are conceptualised as the promise an organisation makes to its stakeholders (Melewar, Gotsi, & Andriopoulos, 2012, p. 601). Stakeholders are likely to evaluate a corporate brand by considering the extent to which the brand has met their expectations and requirements and fulfilled its promise (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1051). This indicates a need for organisations to manage the delivery of a corporate brand, so that the reality of the brand experience lives up to the brand communication, and meets stakeholders’ expectations.

There are parallels in the corporate branding and corporate identity literature regarding the control of corporate brand/identity by managers, and the key role of stakeholders in creating meaning. Managers can have a high level of control over some sources of brand meaning, such as products, pricing, and retail environments. However, they have much less control over other sources, such as the behaviour of organisation members, and actions of external brand communities (Iglesias & Bonet, 2012, p. 259). This is similar to the ability of managers to control different corporate identity cues to a greater or lesser extent. As a result, corporate brands cannot be solely formed or controlled by managers. Instead, they are created and acquire meaning through ongoing interactions between a brand and its stakeholders, and stakeholders’ interpretations of these interactions (Hulberg, 2006, p. 67; Iglesias & Bonet, 2012, p. 258; Melewar et al., 2012, p. 606; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013, pp. 1506, 1513).

An increasingly important issue acknowledged in the literature is the role of digital and social media in supporting the co-creation of brand meaning with stakeholders (Iglesias & Bonet, 2012, p. 259; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013, p. 1505). Stakeholders’ perceptions and interpretations of brands can be influenced by the opinions and experiences of other stakeholders, shared via social media (Iglesias & Bonet, 2012, p. 253). The study by Vallaster and von Wallpach (2013, pp. 1505,
investigated the process by which stakeholders of the UK company Gate Gourmet co-created brand meaning in an online environment during a brand crisis. Based on their findings, Vallaster and von Wallpach (2013, pp. 1505, 1513) propose that brand managers need to recognise that they no longer have sole control of brand meaning, and that brand meaning is actually shaped by multiple actors. Aside from this study, however, there is a lack of research on brand meaning creation in online environments. Future research is subsequently called for, to investigate how brand meaning is affected by online communication between multiple stakeholders (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013, p. 1514).

There can be difficulties in corporate brand management, however, due to stakeholders assigning multiple and conflicting meanings to brands. This reiterates the issues noted from the corporate identity literature. A corporate brand may be assigned different meanings by different groups or individuals. Although some of these brand meanings could co-exist (Merrilees & Miller, 2009, p. 1129), some meanings may be damaging (Leitch & Motion, 2007, p. 73). It is therefore important for managers to understand the meanings that stakeholders assign to a brand (including to brand signs, texts, and actions), and how these affect their perceptions of and feelings about the brand (Iglesias & Bonet, 2012, pp. 255, 260).

Overall, corporate brand management can be viewed as involving “both managing and influencing the expression of the brand as well as understanding and responding to the images that these expressions create in the minds of stakeholders” (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, pp. 1054-1055). This comment captures the current and generally accepted view in the literature that corporate branding is a two-way process between an organisation and its stakeholders. This also indicates that corporate brand management involves a similar approach to that required in corporate identity management, where it is critical to manage corporate identity cues and understand their interpretation by stakeholders (as discussed previously).

Parallels are also evident between the corporate branding and corporate identity literature in terms of the emphasis placed on the role of organisation members. Organisation members’ commitment, attitudes, and behaviour are some of the
most important factors in expressing and delivering corporate brands (Abratt &
Kleyn, 2012, pp. 1054, 1056; Hawabhay et al., 2009, p. 11; Schultz & de
with its stakeholders, including customers (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, pp. 1054, 1056),
and customer brand experience often depends on frontline employees’ behaviour
(Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009, pp. 122, 126). Following on from this, a key
element of corporate brand management is to build understanding and support
for the brand with organisation members, and ensure that their behaviour is
aligned with desired brand meaning (Iglesias & Bonet, 2012, p. 259). This requires
internal communication and training programmes to ensure that organisation
members understand the brand promise (de Chernatony, 2002, p. 129), and are
ready to deliver on the promise, both attitudinally and behaviourally (Abratt &
Kleyn, 2012, p. 1054; Punjaisri, Wilson, & Evanschitzky, 2008, pp. 408, 418). This
reinforces the importance of internal branding, discussed previously.

Organisations can adopt different corporate branding strategies, which are likely
to affect the extent to which a corporate brand impacts corporate image, and
ultimately corporate reputation. The literature on corporate branding strategies
has considered how organisations can manage and structure the relationship
between a corporate brand and an organisation’s products, with varying forms of
this relationship proposed by multiple authors. The strategies suggested are
outlined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Corporate branding strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s:</th>
<th>Corporate branding strategies:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olins (1989, p. 78)</td>
<td>Branded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muzellec and Lambkin (2009, p. 39)</td>
<td>Trade name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>van Riel and van Bruggen (2002, p. 242)</td>
<td>Weak endorsement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
van Riel and Fombrun (2007, pp. 121-122) discuss the corporate branding strategies previously proposed by Olins (1989, p. 78): monolithic (where a whole organisation uses one name and visual style), endorsed (where an organisation has a group of brands which it endorses with the group name and identity), and branded (where an organisation operates through a series of brands which may be unrelated to each other or the organisation). These definitions are similar to those by Rao, Agarwal, and Dahlhof (2004, pp. 126-127), who identify the corporate, mixed, and house of brands strategies, and Muzellec and Lambkin (2009, p. 39), who identify the trade name (aimed primarily at internal audiences), business brand (aimed at stakeholders other than customers), and holistic corporate brand (used across all stakeholder groups).

The strategies can be positioned along the continuum of corporate branding endorsement levels proposed by van Riel and van Bruggen (2002, p. 242): no endorsement, weak endorsement (branded/house of brands/trade name), medium endorsement (endorsed/mixed/business brand), and strong endorsement (monolithic/holistic corporate brand). The most effective strategy for an organisation depends on a number of factors, including for example whether it targets its products at the same or different segments, and whether it is expanding into different markets or product categories (Rao et al., 2004, pp. 128-129). The different strategies are likely to affect the impact that a corporate brand has on corporate image and reputation, as the corporate brand may be more or less visible to different stakeholder groups.

This means that the significance of corporate branding in corporate reputation management is likely to be variable. In contrast, corporate identity can be seen to have a key role in reputation management, regardless of the corporate branding strategy adopted by an organisation. This is due to the planned and unplanned nature of different corporate identity cues, which means that cues will contribute to the formation of corporate image even when not deliberately controlled by managers.
1.4.5 Corporate image

Corporate image evolves from stakeholders’ interpretation of and assignment of meaning to corporate identity cues (Cornelissen, 2000, p. 120; Otubanjo, 2012, p. 70). Corporate image is therefore stakeholders’ overall impressions of an organisation (Abratt, 1989, p. 67; Dowling & Moran, 2012, p. 40; Suvatjis et al., 2012, p. 159). This results from all their experiences with an organisation, and their impressions, beliefs, feelings, and knowledge about the organisation (Bernstein, 1984, p. 125). The process by which audiences interpret corporate identity cues and form an impression of an organisation can be influenced by environmental, social, and personal factors (Williams & Moffitt, 1997, pp. 239, 241). This indicates that corporate image is likely to vary between different stakeholder groups, and individuals. The formation of corporate image has parallels to the development of a corporate brand, as both depend on the creation of meaning by stakeholders. Corporate brands can also impact the formation of corporate image, as they will contribute to stakeholders’ overall impressions of an organisation. However, there is less research into corporate image formation than there is corporate brand development. In particular, there is little evidence regarding the relative influence of the elements of the corporate identity mix on the formation of corporate image.

The lack of attention given to corporate image in the literature is surprising, given the importance of corporate image in corporate reputation management. Corporate image is significant for organisations, as it can influence a variety of stakeholders, whose views and behaviours can impact the performance of an organisation (Schultz & Kitchen, 2004, p. 351). It can also form and shape stakeholders’ expectations of an organisation (Melewar & Storrie, 2001, p. 24). Over time, a consistent corporate image evolves into corporate reputation (Markwick & Fill, 1997, p. 398). Therefore, it is crucial that a corporate image held by stakeholders is aligned with the image desired by an organisation. It is important to note that organisations are not able to manage corporate image directly, however managing corporate identity cues can influence corporate
image. It may be necessary for an organisation to adjust corporate identity, either to properly represent corporate personality, or after re-examining corporate personality, in order to alter corporate image (Abratt, 1989, p. 69; Bernstein, 1984, p. 241; Markwick & Fill, 1997, p. 398). This emphasises the need for managers to understand how audiences interpret corporate identity cues, in order to manage corporate identity as part of the corporate image and reputation formation process.

This overview of the building blocks of corporate reputation indicates that as organisations cannot directly change their corporate image, corporate brand and corporate identity are of key importance in reputation management. However, the different corporate branding strategies adopted by organisations can result in corporate brands having a greater or lesser impact on corporate reputation. This means that corporate branding will not be equally important for every organisation. In contrast, all organisations have corporate personality, which is expressed through elements of the corporate identity mix, which act as corporate identity cues. Based on this, corporate identity is emphasised in this thesis as a critical concern for organisations, and for researchers.

1.5 Role and significance of stories in corporate reputation management

This chapter has introduced the notion of corporate stories as part of the communication element of the corporate identity mix. A minority of studies acknowledge the potential role of corporate stories in corporate identity and corporate reputation management. However, these studies are predominantly conceptual (such as Dowling (2006, p. 96), Marzec (2007, p. 29), Mossberg (2008, p. 207), and Otubanjo (2013, p. 60)). There are few empirical studies on the role of corporate stories in driving corporate reputation (with the exception of Janssen, van Dalsen, van Hoof, and van Vuuren (2012, p. 32)). This means that the role of stories as a corporate identity cue cannot be determined from the existing literature. The significance of corporate reputation indicates that further research
on the role of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue would be valuable for academics and organisations. Corporate stories are proposed to be increasingly important by practitioners, as they can enable organisations to explain themselves more effectively, following intensifying media and public scrutiny (Bacon, 2013; Mighall, 2013). Stories in corporate communication are gradually gaining attention from academics and practitioners, although appreciation for stories at a corporate level lags behind that for stories in communication at a product level.

Stories are well established in marketing communication, particularly in advertising. This is evident from a brief review of the literature in this area. Studies by Adaval and Wyer (1998, p. 207), Escalas (2004, pp. 172, 176), Herskovitz and Crystal (2010, p. 21), Merchant, Ford, and Sargeant (2010, p. 754), and Woodside (2010, p. 532) indicate that stories can help engage with audiences, and can encourage an emotional connection between an audience and a brand. The use of stories can be seen in recent communication campaigns for product brands. For example, a campaign for Mercedes-Benz A-Class included a television advert which told a story about a music superstar trying to get to a secret gig, and also utilised social media to enable audiences to contribute to the story by voting for what happened next (Gilmore & Edwards, 2013, p. 8). Waitrose told stories behind recipes created by celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal, shown in television adverts. The campaign also invited audiences to share their own stories behind food and recipes, predominantly through social media, which were then incorporated into the campaign (Baker, 2013). These can be regarded as examples of effective storytelling, as practitioners have suggested that using social media to enable interactive storytelling between an organisation and its stakeholders can enhance stakeholders’ engagement with an organisation (Mighall, 2013; Morning, 2012).

However, some organisations are using stories in corporate communication, although they are still in the minority. For example, in the non-profit sector, Bupa Care Homes ran a campaign in 2011 called “Bupa’s Storytelling Week”, which involved the care homes hosting storytelling events where residents, schools, and local communities were invited to share both classic and personal stories (Magee,
An evaluation of the campaign indicated that residents at the care homes enjoyed the storytelling activities, and the care homes benefited from the surrounding media interest (Magee, 2011). This supports the notion of stakeholder engagement through storytelling. The campaign could, however, have also used social media to reach a wider audience and to record the stories shared, which indicates the current under-utilisation of social media for corporate storytelling.

Corporate communication can be planned or unplanned, and the difficulties in managing unplanned communication have implications for the role of stories in corporate reputation management. In the academic literature, studies on corporate stories have been limited by their tendency to focus separately on stories in planned or unplanned communication. Similarly, studies have tended to focus on stories aimed at either internal or external audiences. This can be evidenced from a brief review of the literature. Most of the studies on stories in planned communication are conceptual (such as Brunetti (2007, p. 114), Marzec (2007, p. 29), Mossberg (2008, pp. 195, 207), and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 144)), and have predominantly focused on stories aimed at external audiences.

Studies by other authors have focused on stories in unplanned communication amongst organisation members, and there are a greater number of empirical studies in this area (such as Coopman and Meidlinger (2000, pp. 567, 615) and Rhodes, Pullen, and Clegg (2010, p. 537)). However, these studies neglect stories in planned communication and to external audiences. A small number of recent empirical studies have illustrated overlaps between stories in planned and unplanned communication, and stories aimed at internal and external audiences (such as Chen (2012, pp. 318-319) and Volker, Philips, and Anderson (2011, p. 104)). This indicates the need for a more holistic approach to investigating corporate stories. In particular, empirical research is necessary to bring insight into the role of stories in both planned and unplanned communication as part of corporate reputation management.
The significance of stories in corporate reputation management lies in the potential for corporate stories to influence audiences. In particular, organisation members are discussed in this chapter as a key stakeholder group in corporate reputation management. A brief review of the corporate story literature indicates the potential for stories to influence organisation members, as noted by authors including Boyce (1995, p. 107), Chen (2012, p. 322), Collins (2013, p. 49), Cunliffe, Luhman, and Boje (2004, p. 262), Dolan and Bao (2012, p. 11), and Rhodes et al. (2010, p. 457). This influence can be beneficial or detrimental for an organisation, depending on whether stories encourage positive or negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of organisation members. The influence of stories on organisation members can depend on how effectively stories are used by managers (as observed by Auvinen, Lämsä, Sintonen, and Takala (2013, p. 429), and Dolan and Bao (2012, p. 12)), and by organisation members themselves (as noted by Dailey and Browning (2014, pp. 28-29), Dowling (2006, p. 96), and Gabriel (2000, p. 120)). The influence of stories on audiences is discussed further in chapter two.

It is important to note though that there are potential barriers to the use of stories as part of corporate reputation management. This is evidenced in the academic literature and in practitioner sources. It has been suggested that many leaders find stories “unfamiliar” or “uncomfortable”, and may find it difficult to express themselves through stories (Marshall & Adamic, 2010, p. 22). Stories can be viewed as too personal and subjective for use in the workplace (Yang, 2013, p. 133). Subsequently, stories are frequently not part of mainstream communication in organisations (Barker & Gower, 2010, pp. 301, 308). However, it can be observed that these studies are conceptual, and researchers have been called to investigate to what extent stories are utilised effectively by managers (for example, by Dolan and Bao (2012, p. 10)). Based on this, there is a practical need for research into corporate stories, in order to provide guidance for managers regarding how stories can be used as part of corporate reputation management. This leads to a key area of focus in this study, discussed below.
1.6 Contribution of this study

Corporate reputation is widely accepted to be a critical concern for organisations. Corporate identity is a key building block of corporate reputation, as it expresses corporate personality and leads to the formation of corporate image. Corporate stories are suggested to be part of the communication element of the corporate identity mix, and could therefore influence the development of corporate reputation. The potential role of stories in driving corporate reputation has begun to be acknowledged by a limited number of authors. This thesis argues that corporate stories can play a role in corporate reputation management by acting as corporate identity cues. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the use of corporate stories as such a cue. Stories in both planned and unplanned communication could act as a corporate identity cue, yet there is little research on the likely overlaps between these areas, and the links between stories in external and internal communication.

Corporate stories could be significant as part of corporate reputation management due to the potential influence of stories on audiences. In particular, stories could have a key influence on organisation members, who are identified as a key stakeholder group in corporate reputation management. However, there is little empirical research focused on how stories influence audiences, and how this influence can be managed. Both practitioners and academics have raised concerns that managers often have little knowledge and understanding of corporate stories. This is likely to restrict the use and potential benefits of stories in organisations, and stories could even negatively impact organisations if used and managed poorly. Overall, it can be seen that the literature is inadequate in providing guidance for organisations on the use of corporate stories as part of corporate reputation management.

This study is developed based on these gaps in the literature, in order to contribute to knowledge and understanding of corporate stories. An empirical study is conducted to investigate the role and significance of corporate stories in
corporate reputation management, focusing on how corporate stories can act as a corporate identity cue, and the influence of stories on audiences. In particular, this study centres on organisation members as both tellers and audiences of corporate stories. The intended outcomes of this research are a framework demonstrating how corporate stories can act as a corporate identity cue and influence audiences, together with guidance for managers regarding the use of stories as part of corporate reputation management. These outcomes are intended to have practical benefits for organisations and managers, in order to enhance the use of stories as part of corporate reputation management.

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

The remainder of this thesis is organised into six chapters.

Chapter two investigates corporate stories in more depth, beginning by defining corporate stories, and considering differences between official and unofficial corporate stories. The role of corporate stories in corporate reputation management is discussed in terms of how stories could act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms. The significance of corporate stories is then considered based on how stories could influence audiences, in light of sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives of corporate stories. Chapter two also reviews theoretical approaches to corporate identity, reputation, communication, and stories, in order to identify an appropriate theoretical perspective for examining corporate stories. The chapter ends by identifying issues and gaps in the literature, and developing research questions based on these gaps.

Chapter three outlines and justifies the research methodology adopted for the empirical study in this thesis, which was used to investigate the research questions posed in chapter two. The philosophical approach, research design, and research methods are discussed, as well as the sampling strategy. The data collection and
analysis procedures are presented, and the credibility of the findings is considered, along with a discussion of the ethical issues in conducting the study.

Chapter four presents the findings from the first stage of empirical research, which investigated corporate history stories on organisations’ websites. The reputation platforms conveyed through the stories are identified, in order to investigate how the stories act as a corporate identity cue, and how they could influence audiences.

Chapter five presents the findings from the second stage of empirical research, which explored corporate stories within two case study organisations. The findings focus on the use of stories in the organisations, reputation platforms conveyed through the stories, and the influence of stories on organisation members.

Chapter six brings together the first and second stages of research, and discusses the key findings in light of the research questions and with reference to the literature. A framework is presented illustrating how corporate stories can act as a corporate identity cue and influence audiences.

Chapter seven draws conclusions from the study in order to address the fundamental problem of this thesis. The chapter highlights how the thesis contributes to knowledge and to business practice, and provides guidance to managers regarding the use of corporate stories as part of corporate reputation management. The limitations of the thesis are also identified, and suggestions are made for future research.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review: Corporate Stories

2.1 Introduction and overview of corporate stories

Corporate reputation is a critical concern for organisations, and stories could play a role in corporate reputation management by acting as a corporate identity cue. The significance of stories as an identity cue is based on the potential influence of stories on audiences, particularly organisation members. This influence could be beneficial or detrimental for an organisation, depending on how managers and other organisation members use stories, as discussed in this chapter. This indicates that it is important for managers to be aware of stories in an organisation, and to understand how to use stories to influence audiences. Yet managers often lack awareness of the existence and implications of corporate stories, and how they can be used and managed. The literature provides little guidance for managers in the use of stories, and there is a lack of empirical research into the role of corporate stories as part of corporate reputation management. As a result, corporate stories should be a key concern for both researchers and practitioners. This chapter reviews the literature on corporate stories in order to establish the current state of knowledge in this area, and to identify key issues and gaps in the literature. An outline of the key topics reviewed in this chapter is illustrated in Figure 2.1 and discussed below.

Figure 2.1: Exploring corporate stories – key areas of focus
There is a growing body of literature in the area of corporate stories. From this, studies can be identified which make a significant contribution to the literature. An overview of the key studies reviewed in this chapter is shown in appendix one, highlighting whether the studies are conceptual or empirical, and the methodology adopted in the empirical studies. These studies illustrate the evolution of the literature over time, common approaches to researching corporate stories, and the key concerns in this area. Two key perspectives on corporate stories can be seen in the literature; a marketing perspective and an organisation studies perspective. The marketing perspective focuses predominantly on the use of stories aimed at external stakeholders, whereas the organisation studies perspective focuses mainly on stories within organisations. The following discussion identifies where these perspectives are adopted in different sections of the literature review, and how they have influenced the approach to corporate stories in this study.

One of the major issues facing researchers in the area of corporate stories is that there is no consensus regarding what constitutes a corporate story. The literature review subsequently begins by defining the approach to corporate stories taken in this thesis, considering conflicting perspectives on stories and narratives in the literature, and the difference between story and storytelling. This section also discusses whether a plot is a defining feature of a corporate story, which leads to the notion of whole stories and story fragments. It is argued that researchers and managers should acknowledge the role of both of these forms of story in corporate reputation management.

Chapter one introduces the notion of corporate stories as part of the communication element of the corporate identity mix. This chapter develops this further by considering stories in both planned and unplanned communication, drawing upon marketing and organisation studies perspectives of stories. As a result, this thesis divides corporate stories into official and unofficial stories. However, this chapter also acknowledges that there are likely to be overlaps between the two types of story. The basis for this approach to corporate stories
stems from the organisation studies literature and particularly the work of Boje in the 1990s. Boje (1991, p. 111; 1995, p. 1000) brings to the fore the key role of stories in organisations, and champions the approach to viewing organisations as comprising multiple stories. Boje differentiates between official stories originating from the CEO and corporate communication department, and unofficial stories originating from organisation members and other third parties. The studies by Boje are significant in the literature as they influenced subsequent authors’ conceptualisations of and approaches to researching corporate stories.

Boje advocates a qualitative case study strategy to gain an in-depth understanding of stories within a particular organisation, and authors including Boyce (1995, pp. 108-109), Brown (1998, pp. 35, 39), Coopman and Meidlinger (2000, pp. 567, 587-588), and Jameson (2001, p. 477) have all adopted this approach to researching corporate stories in the organisation studies literature. Case studies were also used in recent research by Chen (2013, p. 311), Ohara and Cherniss (2010, p. 31), and Volker et al. (2011, pp. 105-106) (as outlined in appendix one). These authors, amongst others, investigate multiple stories within organisations, both official and unofficial. The studies by Boyce (1995, pp. 108-109), Brown (1998, pp. 35, 39) and Coopman and Meidlinger (2000, pp. 567, 587-588) further the work of Boje by investigating stories in non-profit organisations. Their research is significant in demonstrating that ideas about corporate stories are relevant in the non-profit as well as for-profit sector. The study by Chen (2012, pp. 314, 316) is key in the literature, as it illustrates how the use of stories in organisations has developed in recent years, with the increasing importance of using digital and social media to facilitate interactive storytelling.

Based on these studies, this chapter argues that both official and unofficial stories are important in organisations, due to their potential influence on audiences. However, issues in the use of official and unofficial stories as part of corporate reputation management are acknowledged, drawing upon the propaganda and rumour management literature. The literature review also indicates that corporate history stories are a particular type of official corporate story that could play a key
role in corporate reputation management. Despite this though, there are a limited number of empirical studies investigating corporate history stories, and these do not focus specifically on the role of this type of story in corporate reputation management. The literature review subsequently discusses the need for further research in this area.

This chapter discusses the potential for corporate stories to act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms. The platforms suggested by van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 137) are activities, benefits, and emotional, and it is proposed in this chapter that a strategy platform is also relevant in corporate stories. The section on reputation platforms in corporate stories predominantly adopts a consumer marketing perspective in discussing how each of the platforms could be represented through particular elements in the content of stories. This includes studies on stories in advertising (such as Dens and De Pelsmacker (2010, p. 170), Leonidou and Leonidou (2009, p. 522), and Stafford and Day (1995, p. 60)), and on corporate websites (Janssen et al., 2012, p. 38). However, there is a lack of empirical research on the use of reputation platforms in corporate communication, and particularly in corporate stories. This indicates a need for empirical research to investigate the extent to which platforms are conveyed through corporate stories, and how platforms could be used in order to positively influence audiences.

As previously noted in this chapter, the significance of corporate stories lies in their potential to influence audiences. In particular, this thesis focuses on the influence of stories on organisation members. It is argued that stories could influence organisation members’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour. The influence of stories is discussed in terms of sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives, which are evident in the organisation studies literature. From a sensemaking perspective, the studies by Boje (1991, p. 111), Boyce (1995, p. 133), and Jameson (2001, pp. 477-478), and more recently by Chen (2012, pp. 314, 316), contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence of how stories influence
organisation members’ thinking, by enabling them to create meaning and understanding from events and experiences.

From a sensegiving perspective, stories are claimed to influence organisation members’ thinking, by enhancing their understanding of corporate strategy. The studies by Brunninge (2009, p. 21) and Ohara and Cherniss (2010, p. 31) contribute to the literature by providing evidence of this influence on organisation members, although overall there is a lack of empirical research in this area. Stories told by leaders and managers can also influence the feelings and behaviour of organisation members. Key empirical studies by Auvinen et al. (2013, pp. 415-416, 420) and Dolan and Bao (2012, p. 17) bring insight to the literature in this area. From both sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives, the influence of stories on organisation members’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour can be significant in either supporting or resisting organisational change, as evidenced in the study by Rhodes et al. (2010, pp. 537, 541-542).

The majority of existing studies on corporate stories lack a clear theoretical framework. Therefore, in order to bring greater insight into corporate stories as part of corporate reputation management, it is important to identify an appropriate theoretical perspective for examining corporate stories in this thesis. Theoretical approaches to corporate identity, reputation, communication, and stories are identified and reviewed in this chapter. Specifically, the resource-based view, narrative theory, stakeholder theory, signalling theory, social identity theory, and impression management theory are all discussed. The review determines the most appropriate theoretical perspective for examining corporate stories, based on which perspective could bring insight into understanding and managing stories. The chapter concludes by highlighting where there are gaps in the literature, and identifying the research problem and research questions investigated in this thesis. Finally, a framework is developed to guide the investigation of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue, and the influence of stories on audiences, in the empirical research in this thesis.
2.2 Defining corporate stories

2.2.1 Conflicting perspectives – narrative, story, and storytelling

There is no agreed definition of corporate stories in the literature, as there is debate over what constitutes a story, and conflict regarding the difference between “stories” and “narratives” (Spear & Roper, 2013, p. 492). Therefore, it is important to define the approach taken in this thesis by identifying the most relevant perspective for investigating corporate stories. Authors use the terms “organisational stories” (Collins, 2013, p. 50), “organisational narratives” (Meyer, 1995, p. 214), and “corporate narratives” (Dowling, 2006, p. 83), as well as “corporate stories” (Gill, 2011, p. 17; Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010, p. 21; Janssen et al., 2012, p. 33; van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 131). Authors such as Barry and Elmes (1997, p. 431), and Dailey and Browning (2014, p. 23) use “story” and “narrative” interchangeably, and Gill (2011, p. 24) further claims that “corporate storytelling”, “organisational storytelling”, and “corporate narration” are all interchangeable terms. However, a greater number of authors argue that stories and narratives are different (such as Boje (2008, p. 8), Cunliffe et al. (2004, p. 262), and Maclean, Harvey, and Chia (2012, p. 19)), although there is no consensus regarding how stories and narratives can be defined and differentiated.

One view of narratives is that they are a thematically and temporally related sequence of events (Bruner, 1990, p. 77), where events are chronologically and causally linked, so those that occur before others are assumed to cause those that follow (Sturgess, 1992, p. 52). Likewise, Meyer (1995, p. 214) discusses organisational narratives as a sequence of events together in time or causally related, involving organisation-related characters, and taking place in a setting related to the organisation. Stories are defined similarly to narratives by some authors. For example, Tomashevsky (1965, p. 67) argues that a story requires indications of time and cause, and Forster (1963, p. 45) proposes that a “story is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner”, and that “a fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by
actors”. The similarities between the approaches indicate that both stories and narratives are composed of a sequence of linked events, and that they involve characters. In corporate stories, these events and characters are related to an organisation.

However, an alternative perspective is that stories have “an internal temporality and coherence” (Cunliffe et al., 2004, p. 263) which is not found in narratives. This can “link the component events into a unified whole with a point that is more than the sum of the parts” (Jameson, 2001, p. 478). This is similar to the proposition by Feldman, Sköldberg, Brown, and Horner (2004, pp. 149-150) that stories have a distinct arc from beginning to end, which takes the audience “from one specific place to another”. Another view is that stories are a distinct narrative form, with an emotional appeal that distinguishes them from factual narratives (Collins, 2013, p. 50). This view is shared by Baker and Boyle (2009, p. 81), who suggest that stories go beyond facts and information, and Gabriel (2000, pp. 10, 29), who contends that entertainment and emotion distinguish stories from other narratives, and that objective factual or descriptive accounts of events must not be treated as stories.

From the latter perspectives, stories are viewed as more cohesive than narratives, with a greater emotional appeal. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support this narrower view of corporate stories. This could be partly due to the practical difficulties of taking this approach in empirical research. For example, it is unclear from the literature what would constitute a “unified whole” or “more than the sum of the parts”, as suggested in the definitions of stories by Cunliffe et al. (2004, p. 263) and Jameson (2001, pp. 477-478). There is also a lack of evidence to verify whether corporate stories always contain emotion, or seek to entertain audiences.

For these reasons, a broader perspective of corporate stories is taken in this thesis, drawing upon the defining features of both narratives and stories. Corporate stories are subsequently defined as a series of logically or chronologically related
events that are caused or experienced by organisation-related characters, which take place in a setting related to the organisation (based upon Forster (1963, p. 45) and Meyer (1995, p. 214)) (as defined in appendix two). This definition distinguishes corporate stories from other forms of communication but maintains a broad perspective on corporate stories, which is appropriate given the exploratory nature of this study. This also leaves scope for further investigation into key elements in the content of corporate stories (including emotion). Studies in the literature review are considered relevant whether they refer to either “corporate” or “organisational” “story” or “narrative”, due to the interchangeable and overlapping nature of these terms.

Following on from this, it is also necessary to differentiate between “story” and “storytelling”, in order to clarify the focus of this thesis. The difference between the two is evident from the literature. Coopman and Meidlinger (2000, pp. 587-588) distinguish between stories as content, and storytelling as the process by which storytellers construct a story. This concurs with the definition of corporate stories above, as events, characters, and settings are content which comprise a corporate story. In contrast, storytelling is the delivery of content, referred to as the “practice whereby storytellers bring events to life through some combination of words, sounds or images” (Land, 2007, pp. 378-379), or the expression of “ideas, emotions and knowledge” (Küpers, 2013, p. 504). Storytelling can be carried out through written and verbal communication (Driscoll & McKee, 2007, p. 213). Based upon these studies, this thesis views a story as content that is communicated to an audience, whereas storytelling is the way in which content is delivered to an audience. This thesis is predominantly concerned with stories rather than storytelling, as it is content that means a story could act as a corporate identity cue. There is some limited consideration of storytelling when discussing the channels through which a story can be delivered, such as verbal, print, or digital.
2.2.2 Significance of plots in stories – whole stories and story fragments

Another key issue for researchers investigating corporate stories is that there is controversy in the literature as to whether a plot is a defining feature of a corporate story. It is important to address this in a study, in order to determine what will be considered as a story. A plot is argued to be key in corporate stories by authors such as Barnes (2003, p. 3), Collins (2013, p. 50), Feldman et al. (2004, p. 153), Gabriel (2000, p. 24), and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 146). A plot is “a set of events related by causation” (Keen, 2003, p. 73), and “an event is the transition from one state to another” (Bal, 1997, p. 5). Subsequently, a plot can be seen to connect events and make them into a story (Ricoeur, 1980, p. 257). Plots are generally believed to follow a beginning-middle-end sequence (Booker, 2004, p. 218; Keen, 2003, p. 3), as originally proposed by Aristotle (350 B.C.) (Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, & Saylors, 2013, p. 575). This means that there are three main sections to a plot, and events in the middle and end sections can be seen to result from events in the previous section. Corporate stories are proposed to have a beginning, middle, and end by authors including Dailey and Browning (2014, p. 23) and Maclean et al. (2012, p. 17), which also implies a plot.

However, the contrasting view is that many corporate stories do not include a plot. Boje (1991, p. 106; 1995, pp. 1000-1001, 1005-1008; 2008, p. 63) is influential in arguing that stories do not require beginnings, middles, and ends, and that stories with this plot sequence are rare in organisations. This is based on empirical studies in an office supply company and Walt Disney Enterprises. Subsequent empirical research by other authors in the organisation studies literature are also significant in confirming the existence of stories with and without plots in organisations. For example, Barry (1997, p. 43) discovered “bits and pieces” of stories in his case study of stories in an osteopathy clinic. In contrast, the empirical research by Boyce (1995, pp. 133-134) focused on formal stories in a religious non-profit organisation, and the stories told here followed the beginning, middle, end plot structure. More recently, the study by Volker et al. (2011, p. 105), in a Fortune 500
company, found that stories in the organisation ranged from “whole stories” to “short fragments”. These studies are discussed further later in this chapter.

The weight of evidence suggests that corporate stories may include a plot, but that a plot is not an essential feature of a corporate story. This thesis subsequently considers that corporate stories can take the form of whole stories (stories that have a beginning, middle, end plot structure) or story fragments (stories without this structure), based particularly on the work by Boje (1991, p. 106; 1995, pp. 1000-1001, 1005-1008; 2008, p. 63) and Volker et al. (2011, p. 105). This widens the scope of what is considered to be a story, and has implications for managers and researchers, as story fragments as well as whole stories could play a role in corporate reputation management.

Overall, this section highlights the importance of clarifying the approach taken to corporate stories in any particular study, due to the lack of consistency and agreement in the existing literature. Corporate stories are defined here based on the literature, and the researcher also notes that corporate stories can be in the form of whole stories or story fragments. These definitions enable a more focused review of the literature on corporate stories, and are also critical to facilitate the identification of corporate stories in the empirical research in this study.

2.3 Corporate stories as part of the corporate identity mix

Chapter one introduces the potential role of corporate stories in corporate reputation management, in that corporate stories could be used as part of the communication element of the corporate identity mix. This is discussed further in this section, considering stories in planned and unplanned communication, the role of corporate history stories as a particular type of corporate story, and channels for corporate storytelling.
2.3.1 Corporate stories as part of planned and unplanned communication – official and unofficial stories

The distinction between planned and unplanned communication is noted in chapter one, and both of these are part of the communication element of the corporate identity mix. It is clear from research in the organisation studies literature that multiple corporate stories can be found in many organisations, and that stories are used in planned and unplanned communication. In order to bring greater clarity into the role of corporate stories as part of corporate reputation management, this thesis divides corporate stories into official and unofficial stories. Official corporate stories are defined in this thesis as corporate stories in planned communication, which are controlled by the organisation, and originate from senior managers or the corporate communication department. Unofficial corporate stories are defined as corporate stories in unplanned communication, which are not controlled by an organisation, and originate from organisation members (based upon Boje (1995, pp. 997, 1008), Boje and Baskin (2011, p. 418), and Karaosmanoglu and Melewar (2006, p. 197), as in appendix two).

These definitions arise from previous studies of stories in organisations, as well as the distinction between planned and unplanned communication in the marketing literature. Boje (1995, pp. 997, 1008) differentiates between “official” stories (originating from CEOs or officially sanctioned by an organisation) and “nonofficial” stories (originating from non-CEO employees and other sources). Similarly, Boje and Baskin (2011, p. 418) distinguish between “dominant” narratives that are “told from the top of the hierarchy” and “antenarratives” that are told by organisation members, as “people most often make sense of events by fitting their antenarratives in the context of their dominant narratives”. Gabriel, (1995, p. 496) employs a comparable distinction between “managed” and “unmanaged” narratives in organisations. This view also links to the sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives of stories, discussed later in this chapter.
It is important to note that there are likely to be overlaps between official and unofficial corporate stories. Marshall and Adamic (2010, pp. 18-19) observe that stories told by leaders can spread beyond their original audience through word of mouth. This indicates that stories could originate as official stories, but could also be repeated by organisation members as unofficial stories. However, a story may be contested and changed as it is repeated, based on the storyteller’s goals, the audience, and the context. As stories are repeated, audiences may also interpret them in different ways, which can lead to the meaning of stories shifting over time (Dailey & Browning, 2014, pp. 22-23). This could lead to a story influencing audiences in ways not intended by the original storyteller, as discussed later in this chapter. This is significant for organisations, as it emphasises the need for managers to understand how to use official stories, but also to be aware of unofficial stories and how these support or contradict official stories. Issues in the use of official and unofficial stories in organisations are discussed in the following sections.

2.3.2 Issues with official stories in corporate reputation management

The persuasive power of stories (Hamby et al., 2012, p. 191) means that official corporate stories are sometimes viewed as a PR strategy (Gill, 2011, p. 17), or more negatively as corporate propaganda (Neuhauser, 1993, p. 57; Snowden, 2000, p. 148; Tyler, 2006, p. 116). Practitioners note that stories can be used for malign purposes (Denning, 2008, p. 131), and can have deceptive intentions and outcomes (Gargiulo, 2005, p. 22). This is a key issue for the use of stories in reputation management, as stories can be harmful to an organisation when they are perceived as propaganda (Neuhauser, 1993, p. 57). Audiences’ perceptions of a story will determine whether or not it is seen as propaganda (Neuhauser, 1993, p. 57). However “the atmosphere of cynicism and distrust that prevails in today’s marketplace” (Denning, 2008, p. 122) encourages the perception of stories as propaganda.
Jowett and O’Donnell (2014, p. 4) define propaganda as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist”. This is usually linked to an organisation’s ideology and objectives. Propaganda is often seen as a distortion of truth (Collison, 2003, p. 854). This stems from the press agentry model of public relations, whereby practitioners “spread the faith of the organization involved, often through incomplete, distorted, or half-true information” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 21). This may be as a response to particular threats (Collison, 2003, p. 868). Corporate communication can be viewed as propaganda, if it is seen to manipulate the interests of some stakeholders (Campbell & Beck, 2004, p. 102). Propaganda is often associated with the promotion of an organisation’s corporate social responsibility activity (Collison, 2003, p. 857; Hanlon & Fleming, 2009, p. 1). For example, Hanlon & Fleming (2009, pp. 1-2) argue that the actions of large companies such as British America Tobacco, Shell, and Easyjet do not align with their CSR policies and their claimed commitment to the environment and consumer health.

The view of stories as propaganda can be seen in Mumby’s (1987, p. 114) definition of storytelling as a “politically motivated production of a certain way of perceiving the world which privileges certain interests over others”. As such, corporate stories express dominant organisational ideology and power structures, and restrict alternative interpretations and meanings (Mumby, 1987, p. 113). This aligns with Gabriel (1995, p. 484), who proposes that organisations spend large amounts of time and money creating “corporate fantasies”, and that these stories are used as tools to manage culture and meaning, and should not be trusted. Similarly, Kaufman (2003, p. 11) and Tyler (2007, p. 559) propose that practitioners often view stories from an instrumental perspective, as a tool to “sell” the organisation’s goals to organisation members and other stakeholders. Tyler (2007, p. 584) notes that managers tend to focus on “performed” stories, rather than stories that develop organically in organisations. This echoes the practitioner literature, where Denning (2011, p. 11) refers to stories as a “performance art”.
Stories can become a tool for propaganda when managers only encourage positive stories that align with the goals of the organization, whilst filtering out negative stories. This can lead to organisation members viewing stories as a managerial attempt to gloss over problems in the organisation (Tyler, 2006, p. 116; 2007, p. 581). Also, if stories do not match audiences’ experiences and other available information then they are likely to be dismissed as propaganda (Martin & Powers, 1983, p. 103; Neuhauser, 1993, p. 58). Martin and Powers (1983, p. 95) and Neuhauser (1993, p. 58) give the example of stories told by Tom Watson Jr., who became CEO of IBM after his father, which were aimed at encouraging more dissent and less conformity in the organisation. However, these stories were contradicted by other statements from Watson Jr. which still emphasised conformity in IBM. As a result, organisation members were skeptical of the stories and did not change their behaviour. Perceptions of propaganda can also result from “pathological optimism” in stories, where the desired future state of the organisation conveyed in the story appears too far removed from the current reality. Tolerating poor performance in an organisation can result in leaders’ stories about beliefs and values appearing as propaganda, as it will be perceived that these stories do not make a difference at the organisational level (Neuhauser, 1993, pp. 62-63).

The potential for official stories to be perceived as propaganda indicates the need for managers to be aware of the risks and how these can be addressed. Stories need to be supported by human resource systems and by the day-to-day behaviour of managers (Wilkins, 1984, pp. 42, 53). In the practitioner literature, Denning (2008, pp. 46, 110) argues that leaders need to tell true stories, which will withstand being checked by audiences. This will avoid criticisms of manipulation or deception, and makes stories less vulnerable to being satirized or undermined. Encouraging and acting on feedback about stories from organisation members at all levels is important to find out whether stories are credible or are perceived as propaganda, and to improve the effectiveness of stories (Neuhauser, 1993, pp. 63-64). Similarly, Neuhauser (1993, p. 122) recommends gathering stories from customers, in order to learn from and respond to these stories. Rather than trying
to use stories to directly persuade audiences, managers’ stories should serve as a “springboard” for new stories from audiences, where they can draw upon their own experiences and problems (Denning, 2008, p. 109). It is also important for managers to acknowledge and tell stories that challenge the dominant assumptions and stories in organisations. These stories often come from organisation members, and sharing these stories can remove the power that they have as unofficial stories and bring their issues into open discourse (Tyler, 2006, p. 116). Negativity in unofficial stories is discussed further in the following section.

2.3.3 Issues with unofficial stories in corporate reputation management

Unofficial stories originate from organisation members and are not controlled by the organisation. These stories may alter, subvert, and challenge official stories (Boje, 2006, p. 218; Gabriel, 1995, p. 484). In this way, unofficial stories have parallels with organisational rumours, and the literature on rumour management in organisations brings insight into key issues in managing unofficial stories.

Rumours are characterised as unverified or unsubstantiated information (Bordia et al., 2014, p. 365; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002, pp. 2-3; Mouly, 2000, p. 339). Rumours tend to change as they are repeated in an organisation, and often the source or origin of the rumour is unclear (Mouly, 2000, p. 339). Similarly, unofficial stories are repeated and reinterpreted, and may lack evidence to support their message.

Rumours are proposed to be an inevitable and unavoidable part of organisations (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2004, p. 127; Michelson & Mouly, 2004, p. 198). Similarly, multiple unofficial stories exist in organisations (Boje, 1991, p. 111; 1995, p. 1000), regardless of whether stories are used in planned communication. Rumours can support or challenge organisational goals, and positive rumours indicate desirable outcomes for the organisation and its members, whereas negative rumours describe undesirable outcomes (Bordia et al., 2006, pp. 607, 616). Rumours are generally perceived to be harmful for an organisation though (Michelson & Mouly,
2004, p. 197). Rumours can have a detrimental impact on organisation members’ attitudes and behaviors, such as lowered morale and productivity, and increased stress and absenteeism. They can also lead to negative external consequences for an organisation, such as bad press and decreases in trust, reputation, and share prices (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000, pp. 173, 179, 188). However, rumours could also have intended or unintended benefits, such as reinforcing group cohesion, and can be used by managers to rapidly communicate information to organisation members and gauge reactions to new initiatives (Michelson & Mouly, 2004, p. 198; Mouly, 2000, p. 344). Similarly, stories can either support or undermine organisational norms and meaning, and the positive and negative influence of stories on audiences is discussed further later in the chapter.

Previous studies have identified ways in which organisations can manage rumours, which have implications for the management of unofficial stories. Trying to ban rumours in organisations is unlikely to work, and may cause resentment from organisation members. However, it is important for managers to address harmful rumours (Bordia et al., 2006, p. 617). Similarly, managers should not try and prevent the circulation of unofficial stories, but should identify and address potentially damaging stories. DiFonzo and Bordia (2000, p. 183) propose that the most effective strategies for addressing rumours about change include confirming rumours (if they are true), stating the procedures and values which will guide the upcoming changes, explaining how decisions will be made, and increasing trust in the organisation. Communication should be “timely, consistent, brief, regular, and coherent” and come from “appropriate company officials or trusted outside sources”. It is critical though that communication aligns with what actually happens in the organisation (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000, p. 188), in order to maintain credibility and trust with organisation members.

This approach is also relevant for addressing negative unofficial stories, by formally responding to issues in a timely manner, and ensuring that communications are supported by the organisation’s actions. This is supported in the story literature, as Wilkins (1984, p. 51) argues that rather than trying to “stamp out” negative
stories, managers need to understand the underlying problems reflected in the story, and then manage the situation which is causing the difficulties. Similarly, in the practitioner literature, Denning (2011, p. 30) argues that denying or ignoring a rumor can give it credibility and encourage its spread. Instead, managers should use a story to convey the reality of the situation and show audiences that the rumour is untrue or unreasonable.

Crucially, an organisation’s culture is likely to affect the propensity for organisation members to spread rumours. Listeners tend to place greater credence on rumours which supports their existing attitudes and beliefs. If the listener mistrusts the organisation then they are more likely to believe negative rumours about the organisation (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002, p. 5 & 15). Insecure and threatening environments are prone to higher levels of rumour (Michelson & Mouly, 2004, pp. 194, 195). Reducing uncertainty in the organisation through effective formal communications can subsequently minimise and reduce belief in rumours (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000, pp. 173, 188). This indicates that a strong, positive organisational culture is important to encourage supportive unofficial stories. Rumours themselves can serve a valuable purpose in organisations, by providing insights into the organisational climate, including the concerns and anxieties of organisation members. Managers can then plan communications to address these concerns (Bordia et al., 2006, pp. 605, 616-617). Unofficial stories can serve a similar purpose, as stories shared by organisation members can reveal the culture of an organisation and the underlying values, rules, and belief systems (Snowden, 2000, p. 153). This emphasises that managers should not aim to control unofficial stories, but should instead acknowledge them as an important reflection of corporate culture, and the concerns and issues of organisation members.

2.3.4 Corporate history stories

The literature indicates that corporate history stories are a particular type of official story that could play a key role in corporate reputation management. A
corporate history story presents the evolution of an organisation from its origins to the present day, including significant events and people, and successes and failures (Brunetti, 2007, p. 114; Rumer, 1984, p. 19). Corporate history stories often parallel national histories, by including key events and themes, such as “pre-and inter-war years, the World Wars, the oil crisis, women in the workforce, globalisation” (Delahaye, Booth, Clarke, Procter, & Rowlinson, 2009, pp. 36-37). They often have an open ending, where the last section presents current achievements, and sometimes predicts successes in the future (Delahaye et al., 2009, pp. 36-37).

There is arguably an expectation for large organisations to present their history on their corporate website, as out of nearly 100 organisations’ websites in the study by Delahaye et al. (2009, p. 31), only around six had no discernible history. The organisations in the study were mainly British and US companies sampled from the Fortune Global 500, therefore the findings are mainly relevant for this cultural context. However, Delahaye et al. (2009, p. 31) also note that many organisations do not convey a story of their history, but instead just present a chronological timeline. These timelines are often “technically sophisticated but difficult to navigate”, and stories may be a more engaging way of expressing corporate history.

Stories can be distinguished from timelines as being a structured text rather than a list (based upon Feldman et al. (2004, p. 153) and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 144)). Drawing upon these previous studies, corporate history stories are defined in this thesis as an official corporate story about the origins and history of the organisation, presented as a structured text (based upon Brunetti (2007, p. 114), Feldman et al. (2004, p. 153), and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 144)) (as in appendix two). This definition distinguishes corporate history stories as a particular type of official corporate story, by emphasising the historical content of the story, and also differentiates stories from other presentations of corporate history (in the format of brief timelines/lists).
There are contrasting perspectives regarding the development of corporate history stories, and how they express an organisation’s history. One perspective is that a corporate history story is an objective, factual account of events as they actually happened. An alternative perspective is that it is not possible to provide a purely objective account of historical events, as a storyteller will have a particular agenda (whether they are aware of it or not) that will influence how they tell a corporate history story (Leblebici & Shah, 2004, pp. 354-355). However, these conflicting perspectives are not irreconcilable. Corporate history stories can be considered to embrace two levels, as proposed by Brunetti (2007, p. 111). The first level is an objective account of the facts and actions that occurred, and the second level is a more subjective reconstruction of the thoughts, perceptions, and reasons behind the facts and actions (Brunetti, 2007, p. 111). The second level indicates that the creation of a corporate history story involves a storyteller interpreting the events in an organisation’s history. The audience will also interpret the story and assign meaning to the events it presents.

The interpretation of corporate history stories can lead to links between official and unofficial corporate stories, as an official corporate history story may be repeated and revised by organisation members as an unofficial story. Boje (1991, p. 107) observes that stakeholders might tell stories that assign different motives and implications to the same historical event, and this perspective is furthered in the empirical research by Gaggiotti (2010, p. 164). Gaggiotti (2010, pp. 157, 164) conducted a qualitative ethnographic study in Tenaris, a multinational company that produced steel pipes. Data was collected from organisation members in Italy, Brazil, and Argentina over a period of five years. The study investigated the similarities and differences between official stories (referred to as “corporate chronicles”) and individual employees’ stories. Official stories were found to present events in a consistent manner, providing a technical name and a detailed description for each event. In contrast, stories by organisation members were not presented consistently, and the storyteller expanded or contracted events according to what they wanted to tell in the story (Gaggiotti, 2010, pp. 163-164).
The study found that official stories were important to “officialize” events, and influence what was remembered in an organisation. Equally, unofficial stories were important, as they enabled organisation members to “justify frustrations, success, wishes, dreams and anxiety about work, families and organizational present and future” (Gaggiotti, 2010, p. 164). Gaggiotti (2010, p. 164) found that organisation members alternatively kept and removed memories from corporate history stories as part of unofficial stories. In this way, organisation members could also influence which organisational events would be remembered. Organisation members sometimes referred to official stories when telling stories of their own experiences (Gaggiotti, 2010, pp. 163-164). The study focused on one organisation, and it would be beneficial to investigate whether corporate history stories are similarly repeated and revised in other organisations, in different industry and geographical contexts. This would increase the generalisability of the findings. The study has implications for organisations, however, as the interpretation and revision of corporate history stories is likely to affect how they influence audiences. This indicates a need for managers to understand how organisation members interpret a corporate history story, and how it is repeated in unofficial stories.

Corporate history stories can arguably play a key role in corporate reputation management, as an organisation’s history is proposed to drive corporate reputation (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 136). The story of an organisation’s origins and growth, including the challenges it has faced, and its future prospects, is proposed to be key to an organisation’s relationships with its stakeholders (Barnes, 2003, p. 3). Communicating history in the form of a story is thought to be effective, as it can “capture stakeholders’ imagination and interest” (Otubanjo, 2013, p. 60). Corporate history can be seen as part of corporate personality, as it is a defining characteristic of an organisation, and a “source of uniqueness” (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 136), and can differentiate the organisation from competitors. Corporate history stories can therefore act as a corporate identity cue, by deliberately presenting this aspect of corporate personality in order to influence the formation of corporate image. There is a lack of empirical research,
however, on the content of corporate history stories, and how they are used by organisations in internal and external communication. Based on this, there is a need for further research to establish how corporate history stories should be used as part of corporate reputation management, in order to provide guidance for managers. The significance of corporate history stories in reputation management is discussed later in this chapter, in terms of how they could influence audiences.

2.3.5 Channels for corporate storytelling

Corporate stories can be delivered through a variety of channels. The marketing literature has mainly focused on the delivery of official corporate stories. These stories can be in long formats (such as websites, annual reports, books, briefings, and advertorials) and short formats (such as corporate advertising) (Dowling, 2006, p. 98). From a practitioner perspective, Hodge (2011) proposes that corporate stories can be anything from a 140-character tweet to a 90-minute film. Within organisations though, it is argued that official stories should not just be delivered in written formats, but also in verbal communication with organisation members (Driscoll & McKee, 2007, p. 213). Verbal storytelling may be more memorable, as audiences will often already be overloaded with email and other written documents (Barry & Elmes, 1997, p. 443), which could lessen the influence of stories. Leaders could improve their use of stories by telling stories in their own style and with their own interpretations (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 159).

Studies on unofficial stories in organisations have generally focused on verbal storytelling (such as Boyce (1995, pp. 107-109), Coopman and Meidlinger (2000, p. 567), and Jameson (2001, p. 481)), and it makes sense that this is the most common way for stories to be shared amongst organisation members.

More recently, however, there has been growing recognition of the importance of storytelling in a digital and social media context, as noted in chapter one. The recent research by Janssen et al. (2012, pp. 32, 34) contributes to the literature by
investigating official stories on corporate websites. This work is significant, as it is one of the few empirical studies on the use of official corporate stories by organisations, and in particular on official stories delivered through online channels. The study involved content analysis of the official corporate stories on the websites of 45 Dutch companies. The findings indicate that a corporate story should balance an organisation’s uniqueness with similarities to other organisations (Janssen et al., 2012, p. 32). This is echoed in the corporate branding literature, as corporate brand management is proposed to involve “managing contradictions, such as attempting to have companies "stand out" as superior to their competitors while conveying corporate acquiescence, or "blending in," with normative expectations” (Handelman, 2006, p. 107). This study has important implications for organisations, as it indicates that they should consider communicating general characteristics of their industry sector through official corporate stories, as well as the unique aspects of the organisation. The contents of corporate stories are discussed further in the next section.

Practitioners have called for managers to use digital and social media to enable interactive storytelling with audiences (Clifton, 2013; Hodge, 2011; Mighall, 2013; Morning, 2012). This is supported in the academic literature, as involving stakeholders in the creation of corporate stories is suggested to be important to increase the relevance and authenticity of a story, and encourage internal and external audiences to relate to the story (van Riel, 2000, pp. 157, 176; van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 149). The empirical study by Chen (2012, pp. 318-319) investigates written stories told by organisation members and other stakeholders (including stories shared via blogs, social networking sites, emails, electronic newsletters, and the organisation’s website), as well as verbal stories (shared face-to-face during meetings and other interactions). The study found that developments in communication technology, such as blogging and social networking sites, offer opportunities for interactive storytelling. These channels can also preserve and disseminate stories from lower level organisation members that might otherwise disappear (Chen, 2012, p. 328). This is noteworthy, as it indicates that digital and social media are likely to be increasingly important for
delivering official stories, and enabling unofficial stories to be shared amongst organisation members.

Overall, rather than viewing corporate stories as solely controlled by an organisation, it should be acknowledged that both organisation members and external stakeholders have a key role in shaping corporate stories. Enabling a story to grow and change with an organisation and its environment, and as a result of input from stakeholders, is argued to improve a story’s appeal to audiences (Marzec, 2007, pp. 32, 34). Digital and social media can facilitate the co-creation of stories between an organisation and its stakeholders, and enable stakeholders to share their own stories. Therefore, these channels are likely to become increasingly important in the future. However, there is lack of academic studies investigating digital and social media channels in corporate storytelling, which indicates a need for empirical research in this area to establish how they can be used effectively by organisations.

2.4 Reputation platforms in corporate stories

The literature indicates that corporate stories can be used to build corporate reputation (Dowling, 2006, p. 96; Gill, 2011, pp. 17, 23; Janssen et al., 2012, p. 32), yet there is a lack of evidence regarding the role of corporate stories in corporate reputation management. In the broader corporate communication literature, however, it is proposed that organisations can drive corporate reputation by anchoring communication around a core reputation platform. Reputation platforms are also suggested as the starting points for corporate stories (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, pp. 136-137). van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 137) state that there are three key reputation platforms:
1. activities – “key activities or businesses (the organisation is) involved in”
2. benefits – “the attractive outcomes or benefits that stakeholders should expect from the company’s activities”
3. emotional – “try to establish an emotional bond with stakeholders, to elicit a personal connection”.

The essential nature of reputation platforms is that they communicate key aspects of an organisation, and this means that they could express corporate personality. In particular, the activities platform presents what an organisation does, and the benefits platform presents what an organisation offers stakeholders. This indicates that corporate stories could act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms.

van Riel and Fombrun’s (2007, pp. 136-137) identification of the reputation platforms is based on descriptive accounts of the corporate communication activity of several large companies, rather than a full empirical study. For example, they propose that e-Bay and Shell focus on the activities platform (online trading and energy). In terms of the benefits platform, they give the examples of “Sony entertains. Dell cuts your costs. Disney makes you happy”; for the emotional platform “Volvo’s focus on “safety”, Pfizer’s on “life”, J&J on “motherhood”” (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, pp. 136-137). However, the platforms resemble some of the underlying dimensions of corporate reputation identified by practitioners (discussed in chapter one), such as products and services, innovation, performance (activities platform), workplace environment, social responsibility/citizenship (benefits platform), and emotional appeal (emotional platform) (“The Harris Poll Reputation Quotient® (RQ®)”, 2014; “The RepTrak® Framework”, 2014). This gives some indication of the validity of the platforms from a practical perspective.

Also, despite the lack of empirical evidence in the corporate communication literature, the reputation platforms have similarities to message appeals identified in the marketing communication literature. Specifically, the platforms parallel the distinction between informational/rational and emotional appeals (Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010, p. 170; Kotler, Wong, Saunders, & Armstrong, 2005, pp. 732-733; Leonidou & Leonidou, 2009, p. 522; Stafford & Day, 1995, p. 60). Informational/ rational appeals attempt to show how a product will produce particular benefits by focusing on functional product characteristics (such as
quality, economy, value, or performance). Emotional appeals attempt to evoke negative or positive emotions, such as fear, guilt, shame, love, humour, pride, and joy (Kotler et al., 2005, pp. 732-733; Leonidou & Leonidou, 2009, p. 524). The latter appeal has a clear link to the emotional platform, and the informational/rational appeal has aspects of both the activities platform (although focusing on what an organisation does, rather than what a product does) and the benefits platform. This lends support to the potential for building corporate reputation through conveying reputation platforms in stories.

Developing stories based on activities, benefits, or emotional platforms links to claims by other authors that corporate stories can take different forms. Some authors have drawn upon genres from the narrative literature and attempted to apply these to corporate stories. For example, Gabriel (2000, pp. 59, 84) claims that organisational stories can be classed as either comic, tragic, epic, or romantic, and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 145) similarly propose that corporate stories can take the form of folk tales, fairy tales, epic journeys, or romantic sagas. However, there is a lack of evidence for the existence of these as forms of corporate story. In fact, the recent study by Janssen et al. (2012, pp. 35, 37) (discussed previously) found that corporate stories do not fit within particular genres. The fairy tale, myth, epic, and tragic forms of story were not evident in the stories analysed from the 45 Dutch companies’ websites, and instead a more general approach was taken in creating corporate stories. Using reputation platforms as the starting points of corporate stories is subsequently less prescriptive than developing stories according to genre conventions.

The next section further considers the activities, benefits, and emotional platforms identified by van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 137). Strategy is also identified here as another platform, based on the literature. It is evident from the literature that corporate stories often, or should, include key elements of content. This section considers how reputation platforms could be represented by particular elements of stories, as proposed by Spear and Roper (2013, p. 495). The links between reputation platforms and elements of stories are illustrated in Figure 2.2, and
Table 2.1 shows the literature source for each of the elements. The reputation platforms and elements are discussed further below.

**Figure 2.2: Reputation platforms and elements of stories**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reputation platform:</th>
<th>Element in stories:</th>
<th>Literature source:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>1. Activities</td>
<td>Janssen, van Dalfsen, van Hoof, and van Vuuren (2012, p. 38); Larsen (2000, p. 197); van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 154); Wilkins and Thompson (1991, p. 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Accomplishments</td>
<td>Otubanjo (2013, p. 60); van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>7. Vision</td>
<td>Baker and Boyle (2009, pp. 80-81); Dowling (2006, p. 84); Driscoll and McKee (2007, p. 211); Larsen (2000, p. 197); Marshall and Adamic (2010, p. 18); Marzec (2007, p. 28); Ohara and Cherniss (2010, p. 31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4.1 Conveying the activities platform through corporate stories

The activities platform involves conveying the key activities or businesses an organisation is involved in (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 137). This platform could be represented by activities and accomplishments in corporate stories (elements one and two in Table 2.1). These are identified as key elements of stories by multiple authors, including Janssen et al. (2012, p. 38), Larsen (2000, p. 197), Otubanjo (2013, p. 60), and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 154). Corporate stories are proposed to describe an organisation’s core activities and accomplishments (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 154), and similarly to include the “landmark achievements of an organization” (Otubanjo, 2013, p. 60), and its competences (Larsen, 2000, p. 197). There is empirical evidence for activities as an element of corporate stories, as Janssen et al. (2012, p. 38) identified activities in nearly all of the stories analysed in their study (from the websites of 45 Dutch companies). As a practical example, 3M tell “stories about how we invented masking tape and Wetordry sandpaper” (activities element) and “at employee award ceremonies, we tell stories about the programs and people being recognized to explain what happened and why it’s significant” (accomplishments element) (Shaw, Brown, & Bromiley, 1998).

Conveying the activities platform in corporate stories can express corporate personality, as corporate personality includes what an organisation does (Otubanjo, 2011, p. 265), including its business scope and strategic performance (based on He (2012, p. 615)). This platform could be particularly important in stories aimed at internal audiences, as He (2012, p. 617) found that recalling positive past performance reinforces the self-esteem of organisation members. This is based on a study investigating corporate identity anchors, which involved 48 semi-structured interviews with senior managers within three organisations in the British financial services sector (He, 2012, pp. 613-614). Presenting activities in internal corporate stories is also key, as stories are suggested to be a way for members of an organisation to find out what occurs in an organisation, and how things work (Wilkins & Thompson, 1991, p. 20). However, the study by Wilkins and
Thompson (1991, p. 20) is conceptual and is also relatively dated. Although the study by He (2012, p. 617) is empirical, it does not focus specifically on corporate stories. This indicates a need for research to investigate the extent to which the activities platform is conveyed through corporate stories, and how it expresses corporate personality.

2.4.2 Conveying the benefits platform through corporate stories

The benefits platform involves conveying the “attractive outcomes” that stakeholders can gain from an organisation’s activities (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 137). This platform could be represented by internal and external benefits in corporate stories (elements three and four in Table 2.1). Dowling (2006, p. 86) indicates the importance of including benefits in corporate stories, as he suggests that “if the corporate story resonates with the values, intuition, and self-interest of key stakeholders, they will reaffirm and update their beliefs”. Similarly, Ogilvy (1983, p. 123) proposes that effective communication should consider the target audience’s self interest.

When conveying the benefits platform through corporate stories it is important to consider which benefits will appeal to a particular audience. Dowling (2006, p. 93) notes that different stakeholders will expect both common and unique benefits from an organisation, and organisations have to consider how a corporate story can be tailored to address this. Dowling (2006, p. 92) proposes that some organisations, such as Apple and Dell, have developed a strong story that is based mainly on their customer promise. Benefits for customers are also emphasised in stories at 3M: “we train our sales representatives to paint stories...so that customers will see how using a 3M product can help them succeed” (Shaw et al., 1998). Other organisations consider the benefits provided to wider stakeholder groups as well, as can be seen in Ben & Jerry’s corporate history story on their website: “We’re in the process of converting our ingredients to Fair Trade globally where we feel we can have the greatest impact on improving the lives of farmers,
strengthening their communities and protecting the environment” (“Our History”, n.d.).

Previous studies have predominantly investigated stories aimed at internal and external audiences separately, and there appears to be differences in storytelling aimed at internal and external audiences. Stories aimed at external audiences are often delivered in visual formats, such as websites, annual reports, books, briefings, and advertising (Dowling, 2006, p. 98), as considered mainly in the marketing literature. Whereas stories aimed at organisation members are frequently delivered verbally (as noted in the organisation studies literature by authors such as Boyce (1995, pp. 107-109), Coopman and Meidlinger (2000, p. 567), and Jameson (2001, p. 481)). Benefits aimed at internal and external stakeholders are subsequently considered here as separate elements of corporate stories, as they are likely to be used differently in stories, depending on the intended audience.

Conveying the benefits platform can arguably express corporate personality. Corporate personality comprises the characteristics that distinguish one organisation from another (Abratt, 1989, p. 67; Bromley, 1993, p. 160), and benefits can distinguish an organisation from its competitors in terms of what it offers stakeholders, both internal and external. However, the discussion of benefits in corporate stories in the literature is limited, and the study by Dowling (2006, p. 92) is anecdotal, rather than empirical. This means that there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the extent to which benefits are perceived in corporate stories by audiences, and how conveying benefits impacts the development of corporate reputation.

2.4.3 Conveying the emotional platform through corporate stories

The emotional platform aims to “establish an emotional bond with stakeholders” (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 137). This platform could be represented by
emotion and conflict (elements five and six in Table 2.1). Multiple authors note the importance of an emotional appeal in stories aimed at internal and external audiences, including Baker and Boyle (2009, p. 83), Dowling (2006, pp. 83, 85), Gabriel (2000, pp. 10, 29), Marshall and Adamic (2010, p. 18), and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 154). Baker and Boyle (2009, p. 83) suggest that “great” stories “tap into emotion” and “make people feel”. Gabriel (2000, pp. 84, 433, 440) proposes that corporate stories can aim to generate emotions including pride, admiration, envy, grief, pain, and guilt, as well as mirth and laughter. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the extent to which different emotions are used in or evoked by corporate stories.

Emotion in corporate stories is significant, as emotion could increase audiences’ engagement with a story and with the organisation itself. The creation of an emotional bond is believed to attract customers, keep organisation members motivated, and encourage trust and support from other key stakeholders (Dowling, 2006, pp. 83, 85). Stories are suggested to be more likely to impact corporate culture and organisation members’ behaviour if they contain an emotional appeal (Marshall & Adamic, 2010, p. 18). The empirical study by Jameson (2001, pp. 477, 499) found that managers use emotion in stories to convey the magnitude of a situation. However, the studies by Baker and Boyle (2009, p. 83), Dowling (2006, pp. 83, 85), and Marshall and Adamic (2010, p. 18) are conceptual. Empirical research would subsequently be valuable to investigate the extent to which different emotions are used in corporate stories, and also how stories evoke emotion in audiences.

The conflict element is proposed here to represent the emotional theme too, as conveying problems and the steps taken to overcome them is suggested to increase an audience’s “emotion and involvement in a story” (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008, p. 101). Similarly, James and Minnis (2004, p. 31) claim that drama in a story keeps the audience interested in the story. Conflict is identified as a key element of corporate stories by authors including Adamson, Pine, van Steenhoven, and Kroupa, (2006, p. 37), Dowling (2006, p. 90), Gabriel (2000, p. 21), and McKee
(2003, pp. 52-53). Rather than simply presenting an organisation’s successes, corporate stories should convey an organisation’s problems and struggles, and show how the organisation has triumphed over antagonists (for example competitors, regulators, banks, the economic environment, a natural disaster, or a merger) (Dowling, 2006, p. 90; McKee, 2003, pp. 52-53). This aims to make a story more interesting and appealing to audiences.

From a practitioner perspective, Rich (2014) argues that a story must include something to resolve, and notes that memorable business stories often involve an opponent. For example, Virgin versus BA, or Apple versus a complacent technology industry. Conflict is often evident in corporate history stories, as most organisations have encountered problems over the years. An organisation’s founder may be portrayed as a hero who overcame obstacles (Baruch, 2009, p. 21). For example, the corporate history story on Innocent’s website includes the difficulties that the founders had in gaining investment for their business: “Every bank, venture capitalist and business angel in London turns them down” (“hello, we’re innocent”, 2014).

The conflict element can express corporate personality, in terms of who an organisation is (Otubanjo, 2011, p. 265), by showing how the problems an organisation has faced in its past have affected its development into its current form. Changing strategic problems may be part of the continuing development of a corporate story (Barry & Elmes, 1997, p. 439). In addition to this, organisations could potentially use stories to address current issues they are facing, and express their response to negative situations reported in the media. However, there is again little empirical evidence of the extent to which conflict is presented in corporate stories. This indicates a need for future research in this area to investigate how the emotional platform can be used to drive corporate reputation.
2.4.4 Conveying the strategy platform through corporate stories

Strategy is proposed here as an additional platform to those identified by van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 137). This is based on the literature, as corporate stories are suggested to articulate corporate strategy by incorporating corporate vision, mission, and values (Dowling, 2006, p. 84; Larsen, 2000, p. 197; Marzec, 2007, p. 28). Vision, mission, and values could therefore represent the strategy platform in corporate stories (elements seven, eight, and nine in Table 2.1). Conveying the strategy platform can express corporate personality, as an organisation’s vision, mission, and values are all aspects of corporate personality (Otubanjo, 2012, p. 70; Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007, p. 422; Stuart, 1999, p. 205; Suvatjis & de Chernatony, 2005, p. 819).

The importance of communicating an organisation’s values through stories is emphasised in the marketing and organisation studies literature, by authors including Barnes (2003, p. 4), Bréda, Delattre, and Ocler (2008, p. 83), Coopman and Meidlinger (2000, p. 581), de Chernatony, Cottam, and Segal-Horn (2006, p. 823), Dolan and Bao (2012, p. 16), Dowling (2006, p. 84), Driscoll and McKee (2007, p. 211), Larsen (2000, p. 197), Marshall and Adamic (2010, p. 21), and van Rekom (1997, p. 412). An organisation’s values can inspire corporate stories (van Rekom, 1997, p. 412). For example, Barnes (2003, p. 4) notes that John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems, tells stories about having a learning disability when he was growing up and the difficulties he faced. The stories convey how this experience formed the values he brings to the organisation, namely a “focus on diversity and an appreciation for using everyone’s talents”. This also indicates how an organisation’s values can express corporate personality, by communicating what an organisation stands for (Otubanjo, 2011, p. 265).

However, in the study by Janssen et al. (2012, p. 35), values were mentioned in just under half of the corporate stories analysed, which indicates that many organisations are not using official corporate stories effectively to communicate their values. It is also unknown to what extent stories are used to convey mission
and vision, as the studies by Dowling (2006, p. 84), Larsen (2000, p. 197), and Marzec (2007, p. 28) are conceptual. This indicates an area for future research, to verify the validity of a strategy platform in corporate stories.

Overall, this section illustrates how each of the reputation platforms can express corporate personality, and could be represented by particular elements in the content of corporate stories. However, it is important to note that the studies highlighted in Table 2.1 and discussed in this section are predominantly conceptual. As discussed previously, there is a need for empirical research to investigate the extent to which each of the reputation platforms are conveyed through corporate stories, and are represented by particular elements of stories. This would be valuable in order to provide guidance to managers regarding how corporate stories can be used as a corporate identity cue.

2.5 Influence of corporate stories on audiences – sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives

The chapter so far indicates in general terms that corporate stories, and particular elements in stories, can influence audiences. This section draws upon the sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives of stories in the organisation studies literature to bring greater insight into the potential influence of stories on audiences, specifically organisation members.

From a sensemaking perspective, stories are “resources that organisation members use to bring shape and meaning to their own lives” (Collins, 2013, pp. 48-49). Stories are used by organisation members to understand events and experiences, and can influence both the storyteller and the audience (other organisation members). In contrast, from a sensegiving perspective, stories are “resources that managers use on others” (Collins, 2013, pp. 48-49). Managers can use stories to deliberately influence an audience (other managers and organisation members). The distinction between stories for sensemaking and sensegiving aligns
with Boje and Baskin’s (2011, p. 418) differentiation between dominant narratives and antenarratives. Dominant narratives come from the “top” of an organisation (namely senior managers or the corporate communication department), and antenarratives come from people within an organisation. This is noted previously in the context of official and unofficial stories, and the sensegiving perspective broadly links to official stories, and the sensemaking perspective to unofficial stories. It should be acknowledged that the sensegiving perspective can also be associated with corporate propaganda, and the issues discussed previously in terms of managing official stories will affect the influence of stories on audiences.

The literature indicates that stories could influence audiences, and particularly organisation members, in different ways. These can be summarised as influence on thinking, feelings, and behaviour. This distinction is made based on the ability of stories to appeal to intellect or emotions (thereby influencing thinking and feelings), as well as “motivate, modify and control behavior”, as noted by James and Minnis (2004, p. 26). The influence on behaviour refers specifically to organisation members’ behaviour at work, such as when interacting with customers or other stakeholders. This also echoes the division between informational/rational and emotional appeals in marketing communication, as discussed in terms of the reputation platforms (Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010, p. 170; Kotler et al., 2005, pp. 732-733; Leonidou & Leonidou, 2009, p. 522; Stafford & Day, 1995, p. 60). It is important to note that each of these influences could be positive or negative concerning an organisation, and this is considered below.

2.5.1 Influence on thinking – understanding corporate strategy (sensegiving perspective)

From a sensegiving perspective, stories can influence organisation members’ thinking, by enhancing their understanding of corporate strategy, including vision, goals, and values (Auvinen et al., 2013, p. 416; Baker & Boyle, 2009, p. 81; Dolan & Bao, 2012, p. 10; Chen, 2012, p. 316; Driscoll & McKee, 2007, p. 211; Gabriel, 1991,
However, when managed effectively, communicating vision and values in corporate stories can give organisation members a sense of purpose (Baker & Boyle, 2009, pp. 80-81; Boyce, 1995, p. 134; de Chernatony et al., 2006, p. 823; Heugens, 2002, p. 68), and help them to understand their role in achieving the business strategy (Marzec, 2007, p. 26).

The research by Ohara and Cherniss (2010, p. 31) contributes to the literature as one of the few empirical studies on the sensegiving role of stories in influencing organisation members’ understanding of company values. Ohara and Cherniss (2010, p. 31) present a case study of the use of stories in Juniper Networks, a network solutions provider. When the organisation was formed, its values were shaped through the personal presence of the founders, but these began to drift as the organisation grew. To refocus the organisation, leaders were asked to share examples of how the values had helped them to work through specific business problems, and these stories were filmed and shared on the organisation’s intranet (Ohara & Cherniss, 2010, p. 37). The study found that this use of official stories enabled the organisation to “build alignment around its core values”, and was able to “foster a deeper understanding of the company culture”, and “unite employees across the organization” (Ohara & Cherniss, 2010, pp. 31, 38).

It should be noted though that the study’s authors were the senior director of internal communications at Juniper Networks and a consultant partner, and had a vested interest in presenting the positive outcomes of the story project. The stories shared in the organisation also all originated from leaders, whereas other studies have emphasised the importance of stories told by organisation members in creating meaning (discussed later in this section). This indicates that enabling organisation members to participate in the creation of stories could be more effective in creating meaning around values. This study does still have important implications for organisations, however, by indicating the potential benefits of using real life stories to express an organisation’s values.
Empirical research by Brunninge (2009, p. 21) indicates the significance of corporate history stories in influencing organisation members’ understanding of corporate strategy. The research involved case studies of two Swedish organisations: Scania (a truck manufacturer) and Handelsbanke (a bank). Data was collected using 79 semi-structured interviews with current and former organisation members (predominantly senior and middle managers) and key business partners, as well as participant observation of meetings, training sessions, and events, and documentary data (including strategy documents and company newspapers) (Brunninge, 2009, pp. 14-15). This approach was appropriate, as Brunninge (2009, p. 14) argues that “historical processes in organizations are by definition unique”, and therefore the in-depth case study method was necessary to understand that uniqueness.

Although the study is concerned with the use of history in general in organisations, rather than specifically corporate history stories, it is evident that there were multiple occasions when managers used stories to convey the organisation’s history. For example, when managers in Scania “told the story of Iveco’s historical failures with an M&A strategy and Scania’s successful strategy of organic growth, the message was of course, that M&As should be avoided by Scania” (Brunninge, 2009, p. 21). Stories were also told to new employees about the modular system of product development which “emphasized its importance and created an officially authorized interpretation of modularization that was taught to organizational members in order to be preserved over time” (Brunninge, 2009, p. 19). The research found that corporate history stories can help decision-making by reinforcing what is perceived as important or typical for an organisation (Brunninge, 2009, p. 14). The study provides important evidence to support the influence that corporate history stories can have on organisation members, both new and existing. This indicates that corporate history stories are significant in corporate reputation management, due to their potential influence on organisation members.
2.5.2 Influence on thinking – creating meaning (sensemaking perspective)

Stories can also be seen to influence organisation members’ thinking from a sensemaking perspective. Stories can enable organisation members to make sense of their environment and create meaning from events and experiences, and also share that meaning and understanding with others. A key issue to note in accordance with the sensemaking perspective is that stories influence the storyteller as well as the audience.

The sensemaking influence of stories on organisation members’ thinking is evident in the study by Boje (1991, p. 106), based on a case study of an office supply company. The methodological approach enhances the contribution of the study to the literature, by enabling an in-depth understanding of unofficial stories in the organisation and their influence on audiences. Data was collected over eight months, from participants in various roles across the organisation, and in different situations. The researcher took the role of a participant-observer, and this enabled them to collect stories told in conversations amongst organisation members (from secretaries and sales people to executives), as well as customers and suppliers (Boje, 1991, p. 111). This increased the realistic nature of the data, and subsequently the reliability and validity of the findings.

The study found that participants told stories to “make sense of their setting...and manage their struggles with the environment” (Boje, 1991, p. 124). Stories were also frequently challenged, reinterpreted, and revised by audiences (Boje, 1991, p. 106). This emphasises the interactive nature of storytelling in organisations and the importance of interpretations of stories by audiences. The study has limitations, however, in that the case study strategy means that the findings are not necessarily generalisable to other organisational or industry contexts.

Following on from this, Boyce (1995, p. 133) contributes to the literature by extending understanding of the sensemaking influence of stories into the non-profit sector. The research involved a case study of a religious non-profit
organisation of over 300 members, and investigated stories told at formal events (one quarterly conference and one annual conference). Participants in the study reflected on the stories told at these events and then agreed on the stories that expressed the collective sense of the organisation members (Boyce, 1995, pp. 107-109). The study findings support those of Boje (1991, p. 124), as they show that stories help organisation members to create meaning from their experiences, and also to express their experiences. The study also found that stories assist organisation members in decision-making and in implementing plans (Boyce, 1995, p. 134). The study by Boyce (1995, p. 133) is significant in demonstrating the practical importance of stories for non-profit organisations, due to their influence on organisation members. This indicates that managers in non-profit organisations need to be aware of and understand how organisation members use stories. This is supported by subsequent studies on stories in the non-profit sector, such as Brown (1998, pp. 35, 39) (in a hospital ward), and Coopman and Meidlinger (2000, pp. 567, 587-588) (in a Roman Catholic parish) (as outlined in appendix one).

The studies discussed previously do not differentiate though between the use of stories by managers and other organisation members. The study by Jameson (2001, p. 477) subsequently contributes to the literature by focusing on stories told by middle managers, aimed at other managers. The qualitative case study approach taken in the study follows on from that of authors such as Boje (1991, p. 111; 1995, pp. 1005-1008, 1030) and Boyce (1995, p. 109). Data was collected from 16 managers in the US regional leadership team of an international chain restaurant company, during four monthly team meetings. Although the study is limited in that it focused on only this one management team, the issues addressed in the meetings are proposed to be typical for this industry context (Jameson, 2001, p. 481). The study found that stories influenced the managers’ thinking, as by turning experiences, problems, and requests into stories they could see cause and effect and gain insight from events and issues (Jameson, 2001, pp. 477-478). This study is noteworthy as it brings insight into the importance of stories in sensemaking at a managerial level.
The recent study by Chen (2012, pp. 314, 316) confirms the influence of stories on audiences’ thinking, as organisation members were found to use stories to make sense of experiences and activities. The research involved a qualitative, ethnographic study of the organisation behind the annual Burning Man event in the US (where the organisation and around 50,000 attendees create a temporary city in the Nevada Desert). The methodological approach adopted makes the study particularly key in the literature. Data was collected through observations and participant-observations of activities (such as meetings, volunteer training, and mixers), and through stories shared via emails, electronic newsletters, and the Burning Man website. 81 interviews were also conducted with organisers and members, including active and former volunteers, and employees from various departments. Interviewees shared stories about their experiences with the event, and recalled stories shared during meetings and other interactions (Chen, 2012, p. 318).

These data collection methods captured both recorded and spontaneously recounted stories intended for fellow participants (Chen, 2012, p. 319), and therefore encompassed both official and unofficial corporate stories. This enabled a comprehensive understanding of stories in the organisation. Participants used stories to share experiences that illustrated the organisation’s principles of community, participation, and self-reliance, and to provide examples of guidelines and rules in practice. These stories helped people to create meaning from experiences and activities, and gained volunteers’ commitment to the organisation’s principles (Chen, 2012, pp. 311, 314, 322). This study is key in that it supports the influence of sensemaking stories on the storyteller as well as the audience.

The studies discussed above predominantly illustrate influences on organisation members that are beneficial for an organisation. However, this may not always be the case. Although there is a growing body of evidence supporting the use of corporate stories in creating meaning, there are also a smaller number of studies that underline the contrasting role of corporate stories in undermining meaning
and promoting resistance in organisations. Stories can promote organisational resistance by challenging management power and existing organisational norms (Dailey & Browning, 2014, pp. 28-29; Gabriel, 2000, p. 120). Individuals may repeat stories that an organisation does not want retold, circulate untruthful information in stories, or oppose stories through cynicism, irony, or ridicule (Dailey & Browning, 2014, p. 28). This was noted previously in the section on issues in managing unofficial stories, acknowledging the similarities between unofficial stories and organisational rumours. These stories can influence organisation members’ thinking, as Dailey and Browning (2014, p. 28) claim that “hearing stories of how others resisted (or would resist) the organization or its policies may give employees inspiration for opposition”.

As a result, organisations should not underestimate resistance through stories (Dowling, 2006, p. 96), and it is important for managers to understand the extent to which organisation members use stories in this way. However, stories that promote resistance are often risky for the storyteller, and may only be repeated for certain audiences (Dailey & Browning, 2014, pp. 28-29, 36). Researchers may therefore find it difficult to access resistance stories within organisations, which could explain the limited consideration of resistance stories in the literature, as noted by Dailey and Browning (2014, pp. 28, 36). There is a lack of recent empirical evidence regarding resistance stories though, as the study by Dailey and Browning is not based on primary data collection within an organisation, and the work by Dowling (2006, p. 96) and Gabriel (2000, p. 120) is conceptual. The literature in this area is subsequently inadequate in explaining how organisation members use resistance stories, and their influence on audiences. The potentially negative impact of resistance stories on organisations indicates a need for future studies to bring greater understanding to this use of corporate stories, despite the difficulties of researching this area.

The sensemaking perspective indicates that the influence of stories on audiences’ thinking can play a particularly important role during organisational change. This is evident in the study by Boje (1991, p. 124), discussed previously, which also found
that participants told stories to “predict, empower, and even fashion change”.
Rhodes et al. (2010, p. 537) conducted a significant study in this area, in the context of a restructuring in a high technology manufacturer in Australia. The study involved observations, analysis of internal documentation, and semi-structured interviews with 32 organisation members. The credibility and validity of the study was enhanced by the use of data triangulation, and by the researchers working independently and then collectively to analyse the findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 396; Rhodes et al., 2010, pp. 538-539). This ensured that the conclusions drawn from the data accurately reflected the understanding and concerns of the study participants.

In the case study organisation, a story of “inevitable decline” or “fall from grace” was found to be dominant, and multiple stories told by organisation members all broadly supported this story. These stories influenced organisation members’ thinking by reinforcing a “general acceptance of both the financial misfortunes of the company and its practice of laying off staff” (Rhodes et al., 2010, pp. 537, 541-542). In this way, stories helped organisation members to make sense of changes, and explain uncertainty and insecurity in the organisation. However, this dominant story also had a potentially detrimental influence on the thoughts and feelings of organisation members. It diminished feelings of responsibility for downsizing in the organisation, and “protected people from the burden of either accepting responsibility of ascribing blame”, as the organisation could not be blamed for something that was “inevitable” (Rhodes et al., 2010, pp. 537, 541-542). This led to a lack of engagement with the ethical issues around downsizing and the consequences for organisation members. Rhodes et al. (2010, p. 457) conclude that stories can “shelter organizations from moral responsibility for their actions”.

From this study, it can be seen that stories can negatively influence organisation members’ thinking, by limiting possible interpretations and meanings assigned to events.

These findings echo the assertions in an older study by Zaleznik (1989, pp. 272, 276-277) that corporate stories can lead to a single, dominant view in an
organisation, which can encourage a false sense of security and lead to complacency and diminished awareness of threats. Stories can encourage stereotypical thinking, so that when an organisation faces threats, organisation members may find it difficult to break out of this thinking in order to deal with problems (Zaleznik, 1989, pp. 272, 276-277). Zaleznik (1989, p. 269) gives the example of corporate stories in GM that reinforced an “image of GM’s invincibility” and contributed to their failure to respond to Japanese competitors in the 1970s. As this study is relatively dated, there is a need for further research on the potential negative influence of stories on organisation members’ thinking. However, the potential for stories to inhibit organisational change again reinforces the need for managers to be aware of stories in an organisation, and their influence on audiences.

2.5.3 Influence on feelings (sensegiving perspective)

The sensegiving perspective indicates that leaders and managers can use stories to influence organisation members’ feelings. However, this is generally associated with a negative view of stories in the literature, whereby stories are seen as a means of controlling or manipulating organisation members. This again has similarities to the criticism of stories as corporate propaganda. Auvinen et al. (2013, pp. 415-416, 420) conducted a key study in this area, investigating manipulative stories. The research by Auvinen et al. (2013, pp. 415-416, 420) is significant as one of the few recent empirical studies focusing on stories in management communication. The study makes a theoretical contribution to the literature by bringing insight into the complexity of manipulative stories, and different types of manipulation. It also indicates the potential influence of manipulative stories on organisation members.

Auvinen et al. (2013, pp. 415-416, 420) conducted a qualitative empirical study with managers in Finland, examining stories told by managers which aimed to influence employees. Thematic analysis was applied to the stories recounted by
interviewees, and the findings indicate four types of manipulation by managers: humorous, pseudo-participative, pseudo-empathetic, and seductive (Auvinen et al., 2013, pp. 415, 424-427). Humorous manipulation involves exaggerating irrelevant issues and using black humour. One story recounted in the study used humorous manipulation to evoke feelings of guilt and shame in employees for complaining about working conditions (Auvinen et al., 2013, pp. 424-425). Pseudo-participative manipulation involves encouraging employees to falsely feel that a manager is engaged in their feelings and problems. An example in the study is from a bank CEO who told a story which implied organisation members were being given the opportunity to determine corporate strategy, when actually the board had already set the strategy. This aimed to give employees the “feeling of being empowered” (Auvinen et al., 2013, pp. 422, 424-425).

Similarly, pseudo-empathetic manipulation involves a manager pretending to share the feelings and emotions of employees. In the study, one manager used stories to “influence the emotions of employees in a dismissal situation”, in order “to preserve workers’ self-respect” (Auvinen et al., 2013, p. 427). Seductive manipulation involves misleading employees by over-emphasising the positive aspects of an organisation whilst neglecting the negative aspects, in order to make the organisation appear more appealing. For example, one manager told a story that aimed to influence organisation members’ emotions by promising an attractive interior for the organisation’s new premises, when there were actually still problems with the construction of the building (Auvinen et al., 2013, pp. 426-428).

Manipulative stories are generally perceived negatively, as “manipulation is usually considered an unethical approach to leadership” (Auvinen et al., 2013, p. 415). However, the study found that the issue of manipulation in stories is not clear cut. Auvinen et al. (2013, p. 429) argue that “the line between manipulation and inspiration as well as politeness can sometimes be hazy”. Manipulation in stories may not be entirely unethical, depending on the purpose for which it is being used. For example, manipulative stories could be used to “avoid annoyance or grief and
maintain a good atmosphere in an organization” (Auvinen et al., 2013, p. 429), which could be viewed as acceptable by both managers and organisation members.

However, manipulative stories involve a risk for a manager, as they can potentially have a detrimental influence on organisation members’ feelings, and subsequently their behaviour at work. If organisation members perceive that they are being manipulated by managers then this can lead to “a cynical attitude among employees, irresponsibility in employees’ work behaviour and even alienation from the workplace”, and can also harm the manager’s own image (Auvinen et al., 2013, p. 429). Managers therefore need to understand the right context and situation in which to use particular stories (Auvinen et al., 2013, p. 429), in order to avoid negatively influencing organisation members. Interestingly though, Auvinen et al. (2013, p. 429) also argue though that employees may in fact be more likely to manipulate managers through stories than vice versa, as they are more reliant on indirect means of influence due to their less powerful position. However, the study has some limitations. The types of manipulation identified are not exhaustive, and different types of manipulation could be evident in other contexts, such as threatening stories (Auvinen et al., 2013, p. 428). The focus on a particular country also means that there is a need for research to investigate whether the use of manipulative stories by managers is the same in other country and social contexts.

The manipulative view of stories can also be critiqued, as it implies a passive audience who are influenced by the storyteller possibly against their will or without their knowledge. In contrast, it is generally accepted that audiences interpret and assign meaning to stories, which will determine the influence of a story. Audiences may not interpret stories in the way intended by the storyteller, which could mean that stories influence organisation members in ways not desired by managers. This reinforces the need to train managers in using stories, as mentioned previously. Marshall and Adamic (2010, p. 22) support this claim, arguing that “while storytelling is a skill that everyone practices in family and social settings, many find it difficult to employ this skill in the workplace”. Therefore,
training and practice is required in order for leaders and managers to use stories to influence the feelings of organisation members.

2.5.4 Influence on behaviour (sensegiving and sensemaking perspective)

The potential influence of stories on behaviour is acknowledged from both sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives in the literature. Chen (2012, p. 316), Dolan and Bao (2012, p. 13) and Rhodes et al. (2010, p. 457) all claim that the meanings that organisation members assign to stories can influence their actions. The study by Rhodes et al. (2010, p. 357) (discussed previously) focuses on stories shared by organisation members, whereas Dolan and Bao (2012, p.17) discuss the influence of stories told by leaders and managers (considered further below). The study by Chen (2012, p. 319), again discussed previously, encompasses official and unofficial stories. These studies, amongst others, indicate that organisation members’ behaviour can be influenced by official stories told by leaders and managers, as well as unofficial stories shared amongst organisation members.

Authors note that stories can celebrate and reinforce desired behaviour and activities by organisation members (Chen, 2012, pp. 314, 316; Driscoll & McKee, 2007, pp. 209, 214; Marshall & Adamic, 2010, p. 18). For example, Marshall and Adamic (2010, p. 19) present a “legendary” story told by Herb Kelleher, former CEO of Southwest Airlines, which recounts an incident when a gate agent accompanied an elderly passenger on a flight to ensure he reached his destination. This story aims to illustrate the company’s dedication to customer service, and reinforce expectations about organisation members’ behaviour in delivering exceptional customer service. As suggested by this example, stories can express a message that encourages organisation members to behave in accordance with an organisation’s values (Gill, 2011, pp. 19, 23). Boyce (1995, p. 134) also notes that stories can assist organisation members in implementing plans in line with the organisation’s purpose. In this way, stories can influence organisation members’ behaviour at work to support corporate strategy. Alternatively, stories can warn or

Stories can be used by leaders and managers to influence the behaviour of organisation members as part of a change management process. Dolan and Bao (2012, p. 17) describe how stories were used to drive change in German manufacturing company Continental. A story was told by Continental’s CEO that referred to the organisation’s “proud heritage”, but also noted that this prevented the organisation from “identifying partners that could strengthen Continental’s competitiveness”. The key message underlying the story was that “adhering to the behaviours and mindset of the past might be the biggest obstacle to the company’s transformation” (Dolan & Bao, 2012, p. 19). Dolan and Bao (2012, pp. 19-20) report that the CEO believed the story was critical in driving changes that led to Continental successfully expanding from a tyre manufacturer to one of the top five automotive suppliers in the world. Similarly, the former CEO of Intel, Andy Grove, tells the story of how he and his co-founder decided to abandon Intel’s biggest business – memory chips – in order to design and build microprocessors. This is portrayed as a hard and expensive decision at the time, but one that ultimately saved the company, and is used to emphasise the company’s determination to make bold decisions and stay at the cutting edge of technology (Barnes, 2003, p. 4).

The study by Boje (1995, pp. 997, 1008) contributes to the literature by bringing insight into the influence of stories on organisation members from sensegiving and sensemaking perspectives. Boje (1995, pp. 1005-1008, 1030) investigated stories in Walt Disney Enterprises, and collected stories in archival recordings, company documentation, and texts from other authors, which were both positive and negative about Disney. The study found that there can be advantages for organisations in promoting an official “version of reality” through stories, as this can socialise organisation members and give them a clear guide to how they should behave (Boje, 1995, pp. 1030-1031).
However, the study also found that stories can lead to problems for an organisation if they become too dominant, which echoes the potential problems of stories noted previously from a sensemaking perspective. A dominant story can oppress organisation members and prevent change in an organisation (Boje, 1995, pp. 1000, 1030). For example, members of Walt Disney Enterprises often found it difficult to challenge Walt Disney’s “dominant interpretation of meaning”, even when he was no longer CEO. Unofficial stories subsequently play an important role in challenging official stories in an organisation. Boje (1995, pp. 997, 1008, 1031) found that unofficial stories often struggled with the official stories about Disney, and that the stories frequently contained some of the same elements but were assigned different meanings by storytellers. Based on this, Boje (1995, pp. 1029-1030) proposes that “rebels” within an organisation may seek to alter an official story in order to change the corporate culture. As a result, revising stories can be important to encourage organisational change. The study by Boje is significant in the literature, as it has implications for organisations regarding the benefits of encouraging organisation members to share stories, as well as the importance of official stories told by leaders and managers.

Overall, the literature indicates that stories can influence organisation members’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour, when viewed from both sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives. However, the potential influence of stories is better established in some areas than others. There are a number of empirical studies on the use of stories in creating meaning from the perspective of organisation members. Conversely, there is a lack of empirical research from the perspective of organisation members regarding how they are influenced by stories from leaders and managers. Often studies on stories from a sensegiving perspective are predominantly anecdotal regarding their influence on organisation members, such as Barnes (2003, p. 4) and Dolan and Bao (2012, pp. 19-20). There is subsequently little empirical evidence to indicate how leaders and managers should use stories to influence organisation members. This is concerning, as studies illustrate the potentially detrimental influence of stories on organisation members if used
poorly by managers. As a result, there is a need for greater focus on the use of stories for sensegiving by managers, in both research and practice.

2.5.5 Managing corporate stories as a corporate identity cue

There are several issues for organisations in managing corporate stories as a corporate identity cue, which are important to increase the likelihood that the influence of stories on audiences will be positive for an organisation. This relates to managing official corporate stories, but also considers the links between official stories and unofficial stories told by organisation members.

The first issue for organisations is that there is often a lack of awareness of and appreciation for stories in organisations, both official and unofficial. Managers often focus on rational arguments, and overlook more emotional means of persuasion, including stories (James & Minnis, 2004, p. 25). Yang (2013, p. 147) provides anecdotal evidence regarding how stories are often undervalued in organisations, based on the views of students in his MBA class. The majority of the students had a “low opinion of storytelling in business”, and were “rarely aware of how story shapes their work lives in spite of its omnipresence in their workplaces” (Yang, 2013, p. 147). At the end of a project requiring the students to collect stories from within their organisations though, the students realised they had “underrated important functions of storytelling in their workplaces” (Yang, 2013, p. 147). As a result, Yang (2013, p. 149) calls for more emphasis on the significance of stories in organisations, as part of business education.

Similarly, Barker and Gower (2010, p. 308) argue that stories are not used consistently in corporate communication, and that there is a need for increased training in using stories in organisations. The studies by Barker and Gower (2010, p. 308) and Yang (2013, p. 147) are relatively recent, indicating that this is a current issue facing organisations. However, both studies lack a solid empirical basis for their claims. This indicates that further research is necessary to determine
the extent to which stories are advocated and understood in organisations, particularly by managers. This is important for organisations, as poor use of stories by managers can have a negative influence on audiences, which can lead to a detrimental impact on an organisation. Conversely, the effective use of stories can have a positive impact, as discussed in the previous sections.

Chapter one introduces the elements of the corporate identity mix as symbolism, communication, and behaviour, and notes that stories are part of the communication element. The chapter also argues that an organisation’s various corporate identity cues should be aligned, in order to contribute to the development of a positive corporate image (based on Balmer (2001, p. 276), Cornelissen (2000, p. 120), Karaosmanoglu and Melewar (2006, p. 204), and Otubanjo (2012, p. 70)). It is therefore important for stories to be aligned with other elements of the corporate identity mix, particularly the behaviour of an organisation and its members. Otherwise gaps between an organisation’s claims in corporate stories and its actions, as well as the actions of organisation members, could negatively impact an organisation’s relationships with its stakeholders. This could lead to a lack of trust and respect for an organisation (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, pp. 59, 182). This is noted previously in this chapter, in order to avoid stories being perceived as propaganda. Neuhauser (1993, p. 59) argues that stories must be aligned with behaviour in the organisation in order for stories to have credibility with audiences. Involving organisation members in creating official corporate stories is also proposed to be important to ensure they understand and accept a story. This will increase the likelihood of organisation members behaving consistently with the story in their interactions with stakeholders (Dowling, 2006, p. 96; Stuart, 2011, p. 144).

However, stories may be told about organisations that do not align with the stories they tell about themselves (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 136). This is evident in the empirical study by Heugens (2002, p. 57), which investigates stories about genetically modified crops by representatives of the global foods industry and by
environmental activist groups. The study found that the organisations told competing versions of the same story in an attempt to influence regulators and the public (Heugens, 2002, p. 57). Competing stories from third parties can harm corporate image, as noted by Dowling (2006, p. 89). Although an organisation cannot control stories told by third parties, consistency between the elements of the corporate identity mix can help align official corporate stories with stories told by third parties. For example, Dowling (2006, p. 96) proposes that providing a good customer experience (through the behaviour of organisation members) is important to keep word-of-mouth consistent with a corporate story. This reinforces the importance of minimising gaps between corporate stories and other corporate identity cues.

Truth in stories and the credibility of stories with audiences are key issues that could impact the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue. Rosile et al. (2013, p. 575) note that corporate stories can be factual or fictional, and the study by Volker et al. (2011, p. 107) found that corporate stories may be real or imagined. Real stories reflect an experience or event that actually occurred, whereas imagined stories convey crafted events that did not occur. Imagined stories may be told when there are no real occurrences that would serve the purpose of the storyteller. Gad (2003, p. 191) gives the example of stories told about Ingvar Kamprad, the founder of IKEA, that are proposed to drive the brand worldwide. For example, one story illustrates his “extreme cost-consciousness”: “when inaugurating a statue of himself...he wouldn’t cut the ribbon, but instead untied it and gave it back to the mayor, saying ‘You can use it again’” (Gad, 2003, p. 191). Gad (2003, p. 191) notes that some of the stories are probably true and some are apocryphal, but proposes that this does not matter, as they are still an “excellent way of communicating company values”.

This view is not generally accepted, however, as it is suggested that “managers that try to stretch the boundaries of the corporate story too far will fail to gain credibility in the eyes of influential third parties” (Heugens, 2002, p. 68). It is likely that the perceived credibility of imagined stories will be lower than real stories.
Jameson (2001, p. 504) supports this perspective, claiming that the appeal of a story relies on it being believable and convincing. Similarly, Barker and Gower (2010, p. 307) argue that truth in stories is critical in effectively conveying a message. Subsequently, stories are less likely to have a positive influence on audiences if audiences do not believe that the events they are based on are real.

Stories are also thought to be less credible when the storyteller is perceived as having an agenda in telling the story (Volker et al., 2011, p. 108), such as when stories are used as propaganda. This has implications for the use of official stories in organisations, as using stories for sensegiving implies that the storyteller has a particular purpose in telling the story. James and Minnis (2004, p. 30) propose though that managers can increase their credibility by telling stories that show their fallibility, and that organisation members are more likely to learn from stories of personal experiences and mistakes made by managers. This can also help managers to appear more “human, approachable, and likeable” (James & Minnis, 2004, p. 30). Managers need to be aware of this issue, as it means that official stories may be less influential than unofficial stories. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the degree to which the perceived credibility of corporate stories affects their influence on audiences. Future research would be valuable to explore this issue, to provide guidance for organisations on managing official and unofficial stories.

2.6 Theoretical perspectives for examining corporate stories

The literature reviewed in this chapter indicates that corporate stories can act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms which express corporate personality. The literature also suggests that corporate stories can influence audiences, particularly organisation members. However, many previous studies on corporate stories lack a theoretical underpinning. This limits the generalisability of their findings, and the insight that they bring to understanding the use and
management of corporate stories. In order for this thesis to contribute to the literature on corporate stories, it is important to identify an appropriate theoretical approach to investigating those stories. This section evaluates potential theoretical perspectives that could be used to examine corporate stories as a corporate identity cue and how they can influence audiences.

Much of the literature on corporate identity also lacks an explicit theoretical framework, such as Cornelissen et al. (2012, p. 1096), Melewar and Akel (2005, p. 41), Money et al. (2012, p. 197), Suvatjis and de Chernatony (2005, p. 818), and Suvatjis et al. (2012, p. 153). Therefore, this section briefly considers key theoretical approaches that have been used in studies on corporate reputation and communication, as well as corporate identity and stories, in order to identify an appropriate theoretical perspective for use in this thesis. The theoretical approaches used in previous studies are summarised in Table 2.2, and discussed further below.

Table 2.2: Theoretical approaches to corporate identity, reputation, communication, and stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory:</th>
<th>Area:</th>
<th>Author/s:</th>
<th>Methodology:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive attribution theory</td>
<td>Corporate communication</td>
<td>Sjovall and Talk (2004, p. 270)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impression management theory</td>
<td>Corporate communication</td>
<td>Brennan, Guillamon-Saorin, and Pierce (2009, pp. 779-780)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2007, pp. 343-344)</td>
<td>Empirical, content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>George (2000, pp. 19, 22)</td>
<td>Empirical, qualitative, case study</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Heinze and Hu (2006, p. 315)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hooghiemstra (2000, p. 60)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Merkl-Davies and Brennan (2011, p. 415)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Merkl-Davies, Brennan, and McLeay (2011, pp. 316, 320)</td>
<td>Empirical, content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Institutional theory</td>
<td>Mass communication theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Empirical, content analysis</td>
<td>Empirical, qualitative</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Some theoretical perspectives are only evident in a small number of studies, namely cognitive attribution theory (Sjovall & Talk, 2004, p. 270), institutional theory (Rao, 1994, p. 41; Staw & Epstein, 2000, p. 547), and mass communication theory (Deephouse, 2000, p. 1096). These are not considered further in this section, as there is not sufficient evidence to judge their appropriateness for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Perspective</th>
<th>Corporate Reputation</th>
<th>Research Source</th>
<th>Evidence Type</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Bergh, Ketchen, Boyd, and Bergh (2010, p. 625)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Delgado-García, de Quevedo-Puente, and de la Fuente-Sabaté (2010, p. 540)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Fombrun and Shanley (1990, pp. 233-237)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Herbig and Milewicz (1995, p. 35)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Ponzi, Fombrun, and Gardberg (2011, pp. 15, 30)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Srivoravilai et al. (2011, p. 244)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Turban and Greening (1997, p. 669)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, and Beatty (2009, p. 188)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social identity theory</td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Cable and Graham (2000, pp. 930, 944)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Turban and Greening (1997, p. 660)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder theory</td>
<td>Corporate identity</td>
<td>Balmer, Fukukawa, and Gray (2007, p. 10)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>Dickinson-Delaporte, Beverland, and Lindgreen (2010, p. 1871)</td>
<td>Empirical, qualitative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walsh et al. (2009, p. 189)</td>
<td>Empirical, quantitative</td>
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</table>
examining corporate stories. This section instead focuses on the resource-based view, and narrative, stakeholder, signalling, social identity, and impression management theory. Each theory is briefly introduced, and then the discussion focuses on how the theoretical approach has been used in empirical studies in the corporate identity, reputation, communication, and story literature.

2.6.1 Resource-based view

From a resource-based view, corporate reputation is seen as a strategic resource and a source of competitive advantage for an organisation (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1049; Flanagan & O'Shaughnessy, 2005, p. 445). In order to provide a competitive advantage, a resource must be valuable, rare, durable, inappropriable, imperfectly imitable, and imperfectly substitutable (Srivastava, Fahey, & Christensen, 2001, p. 790). Roberts and Dowling (2002, pp. 1077, 1084) take a resource-based view in their empirical study, which compares firm profitability with corporate reputation, as reported in Fortune magazine from 1984 to 1998. Their findings suggest that a positive corporate reputation is an intangible asset, which has the potential for value creation and is difficult to replicate by competitors.

However, Walker (2010, p. 376) observes that a resource-based view is applied at a “post-action” stage, in order to examine how reputation is a resource that can lead to a competitive advantage. This means that it focuses on corporate reputation that is already formed. In contrast, this thesis is concerned with the role of corporate stories in the development of corporate reputation. Therefore, the resource-based view is not appropriate as a theoretical approach for examining corporate stories in this thesis, as it focuses on the outcomes of the corporate reputation formation process rather than the development of corporate reputation.
2.6.2 Narrative theory

Narrative theory has developed from the field of literary studies and literary criticism (Onega & Landa, 1996, p. vii; Stanzel, 1979/1984, p. 2). It has also been applied in other fields, including law, medicine, history, politics, and ethics (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2005, p. 2). There are numerous sub-disciplines of narrative theory, such as the psychoanalytic narrative approach, feminist narratology, and cultural studies-oriented narratology (Fludernik, 2005, p. 37). Narrative theory investigates the role of stories in peoples’ psychological and social lives (Grayson, 1997, p. 67).

According to narrative theory, people can better understand and manage experiences by telling a story about them (Garland, De Souza, & Neill, 2012, p. 6). Narratology is one aspect of narrative theory, and involves the study of texts and other cultural artefacts that “tell a story” in order to analyse and evaluate the nature, form, structure, and function of narrative (Bal, 1997, pp. 3, 75; McQuillan, 2000, p. 324; Stanzel, 1979/1984, p. 63).

Narrative theory is relevant for exploring corporate stories because it involves examining and understanding the characteristics of stories (Woodside, 2010, p. 534). Narrative theory is used as a theoretical perspective in empirical studies investigating stories within organisations, including Boje (1991, p. 106) and Smith and Keyton (2001, p. 150). Similarly, Heugens (2002, p. 57) takes a narrative approach to exploring public affairs. These studies are discussed previously in this chapter. The empirical study by O’Connor (2002, pp. 36, 39) also takes a narrative perspective in researching the stories told in a high technology start-up. The study indicates that the use of stories is a key activity for entrepreneurs, as they “plot” themselves and their organisation. In this way, stories can help entrepreneurs to justify the existence of their organisation, make short-term decisions, and convince others to supply resources to the organisation.

Narratology is suggested to be an umbrella term which covers multiple approaches to narrative (Onega & Landa, 1996, pp. 1, 35). Narrative theory subsequently provides a general approach to stories, which is relevant for earlier sections of this
chapter in defining types of corporate story. This influences the approach to investigating corporate stories in this thesis, including defining corporate stories, acknowledging whole stories and story fragments, and distinguishing between official and unofficial stories. However, there is no evidence in the literature regarding how narrative theory and narratology could be used to analyse the influence of stories on audiences. Overall, these perspectives are too broad to use in examining the use and influence of corporate stories. Narrative theory is therefore inadequate as a theoretical approach for the empirical research in this thesis.

2.6.3 Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory originates with Freeman (1984, p. vi), who proposes that a stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of a corporation’s purpose. Stakeholders include employees, customers, suppliers, stockholders, banks, environmentalists, government and other groups who can help or hurt the corporation”. Several studies in the corporate identity literature take a stakeholder perspective, for example Abratt and Kleyn (2012, p. 1060), He (2012, p. 612), and He and Balmer (2013, p. 404). In the corporate reputation literature, empirical studies by Dickinson-Delaporte, Beverland, and Lindgreen (2010, p. 1871), Mahon (2002, p. 423), and Walsh et al. (2009, p. 189) adopt a stakeholder perspective. Mahon (2002, pp. 423, 430) illustrates this approach, in proposing that corporate reputation is formed “over time as a function of complex interrelationships and exchanges between and among stakeholders and the organization in different contexts”. He also argues that corporate reputation management should focus on stakeholders that are critical to an organisation’s survival.

Some studies take a multiple stakeholder perspective in exploring corporate reputation, which has the advantage of providing a more holistic view of corporate reputation formation. Dickinson-Delaporte et al. (2010, p. 1856) investigate
reputation management in hybrid firms (commercial organisations that pursue social agendas). The study involved 25 in-depth interviews with marketers, owners, channel buyers, industry representatives, and consumers in the Trappist beer market. The findings indicate that marketers need to understand the cues that multiple stakeholders use to make judgements about an organisation, in order to enhance corporate reputation management (Dickinson-Delaporte et al., 2010, p. 1871). Other studies concentrate on one stakeholder group, which enables a more in-depth understanding of the perceptions of this group. For example, the study by Walsh et al. (2009, pp. 194, 199) focuses on customers as key stakeholders. A survey was sent to 2000 customers of a German energy supply company to investigate the drivers and impact of corporate reputation. The study found that customer-based reputation is an important outcome of customer satisfaction and trust, and at the same time can also influence customer loyalty and word of mouth.

A stakeholder perspective is implicit in many studies on corporate stories, and corporate stories are acknowledged as part of corporate communication with multiple stakeholder groups. For example, Dowling (2006, pp. 83, 93) proposes that corporate stories can be used to build an emotional bond with stakeholders. Similarly, van Riel (2000, p. 157) and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 149) suggest that stakeholders should be involved in the creation of a corporate story. A stakeholder perspective highlights the importance of stakeholders’ interpretations of corporate stories. This indicates that stakeholder theory is appropriate as a general approach to corporate stories, similar to narrative theory, by emphasising multiple stakeholder groups as audiences of stories. However, stakeholder theory does not explain the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue or their influence on audiences. As there is a lack of evidence regarding how it could be used to examine corporate stories, it does not appear to be an effective perspective for approaching the empirical research in this thesis.
2.6.4 Signalling theory

Signalling theory is derived from information economics (Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela, 2006, p. 34), and considers the imperfect and asymmetrical information structure of a market (Erdem & Swait, 1998, p. 131). It is proposed that signals carry information from those with more to those with less information, for example from buyers to sellers (Spence, 2002, p. 434). A market signal is any activity by an organisation that provides information about its intentions and motives. Audiences can use signals to interpret the future behaviour of an organisation (Herbig & Millewicz, 1995, p. 5). In the context of corporate reputation, signals can be sent from an organisation to multiple stakeholder groups. It is critical for an organisation to behave in accordance with the signals it sends, as otherwise this could lead to damage to its reputation (Herbig & Milewicz, 1995, p. 5).

Studies by Basdeo et al. (2006, p. 1205), Delgado-Garcia et al. (2010, p. 540), Fombrun and Shanley (1990, p. 233), and Walsh et al. (2009, p. 188) all use a signalling perspective to explore corporate reputation. The study by Delgado-Garcia et al. (2010, p. 540) uses signalling theory in examining the influence of ownership structure on corporate reputation, focusing on companies in the Spanish Monitor of Corporate Reputation (which ranks the 100 top reputed firms in Spain), for 2000–2007. Basdeo et al. (2006, p. 1216) investigate the impact of market signals on corporate reputation. The findings from the quantitative empirical study indicate that the number and complexity of an organisation’s actions, competitors’ responses to its actions, and the similarity of its actions to those of competitors, all affect corporate reputation. This supports a signalling perspective of reputation formation by providing evidence that reputations are influenced by an organisation’s strategic intent, skills, capabilities, competencies, market position, and industry and competitive context. The study also shows that an organisation’s reputation is shaped by competitors’ actions as well as its own (Basdeo et al., 2006, pp. 1205-1207).
Signalling theory is also used to explain how third parties react to an organisation’s reputation (Bergh, Ketchen, Jr., Boyd, & Bergh, 2010, p. 625). Fombrun and Shanley (1990, p. 234) propose that reputations are themselves signals that influence the actions of an organisation’s stakeholders. Reputations are suggested to signal the quality of an organisation’s products and services (Herbig & Millewicz, 1995, p. 5; Roberts & Dowling, 2002, p. 1079), and how an organisation compares to competitors, including in terms of its products, strategies, prospects, and jobs (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990, p. 233). Signalling theory predicts that an organisation’s reputation will impact word of mouth. A good reputation can stimulate positive word of mouth, whilst a poor reputation can stimulate negative word of mouth (Walsh et al., 2009, pp. 189, 197).

Turban and Greening (1996, p. 658) draw on propositions from signalling theory (as well as social identity theory, discussed later) in hypothesising that an organisation’s reputation and attractiveness as an employer are related to its corporate social performance. An organisation’s attributes are suggested to act as signals which indicate to potential applicants what it would be like to be a member of the organisation. The study by Turban and Greening (1996, p. 669) compared student rankings of organisations’ reputations and attractiveness as employers to the organisations’ corporate social performance. The findings indicate that signalling that an organisation offers a work environment conducive to socially responsible activities can lead to a competitive advantage for the organisation (Turban & Greening, 1996, p. 669).

Signalling theory can be applied at an “action” stage of corporate reputation formation. In this way, it can be used to examine the signals sent by organisations, and stakeholders’ interpretations of these signals (Walker, 2010, p. 377), and how this affects the development of corporate reputation. From a signalling theory perspective, corporate identity cues, including corporate stories, can be seen as signals of corporate personality. This indicates that signalling theory could be used in this thesis to investigate corporate stories. However, the literature on signalling theory lacks detail on how different types of signals impact audiences, which limits
the potential of signalling theory to examine the different ways that corporate stories influence audiences. This section therefore considers social identity theory and impression management theory as well, to evaluate which has the greater potential for bringing insight into corporate stories.

2.6.5 Social identity theory

The central tenets of social identity theory are that “people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories” and “the individual defines him- or her-self partly in terms of salient group membership” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, pp. 20, 34). This includes an individual’s connections with social groups and organisations (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010, p. 130). Subsequently, organisation members’ own social identities and self-esteem are connected to the reputation of their organisation. This indicates that organisation members will care about how their organisation is described and how it compares with other organisations (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996, p. 468). It is posited in social identity theory that identification with an organisation can lead to an individual feeling loyal and committed to the organisation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 29). Individuals often identify with groups that are considered distinctive and prestigious (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 34), and therefore communicating these aspects of corporate personality may increase stakeholder identification with an organisation.

Social identity theory is used in several empirical studies on corporate reputation. For example, Cable and Graham (2000, pp. 930, 944) investigate organisations’ reputations from the perspective of job seekers. They suggest that social identity theory provides a perspective for understanding the criteria job seekers use to evaluate an organisation’s reputation, which are likely to be attributes related to their personal identity and needs. Turban and Greening (1996, pp. 658, 660) also hypothesise that an organisation’s corporate social performance is positively related to its attractiveness as an employer. They propose that social identity
theory indicates that organisation members will have an “enhanced self-concept” from being employed by a socially responsible firm.

These studies indicate that social identity theory could be used to analyse how corporate communication (including corporate stories) can encourage member identification with an organisation by expressing particular aspects of corporate personality. This could include desirable traits or corporate social responsibility activity. However, social identity theory is more closely associated with organisational identity rather than corporate identity, due to its focus on organisation members rather than multiple stakeholder groups. Therefore, although social identity theory could be used to analyse how corporate stories encourage member identification with an organisation, it has limited applicability for examining other influences of stories, and on wider audiences.

2.6.6 Impression management theory

Impression management theory is used to bring insight to areas including communication, sociology, social psychology, political science, management, and organisational behaviour (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995, p. 6). Impression management is defined as “the attempts to control the impressions that others form” (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 17). Impression management theory originates in the work of Goffman (1959). Goffman introduced a dramaturgical perspective of social interaction which illustrates that social and organisational life can have similarities to a theatrical production. People are seen as “actors” engaging in “performances” in various “settings” before “audiences”, and can play different roles for different audiences (Branaman, 1997, p. xlvii; Goffman, 1990, p. 9; Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 8; Smith, 2006, p. 44). Goffman makes three central arguments: firstly that individuals can generally control expressions of themselves, secondly that individuals can manage their expressions to influence how audiences will respond to them, and thirdly that an individual’s expressions will be audited by audiences (Smith, 2006, pp. 45-46). This means that impression management is
based on how individuals would (and would not) like to be seen. Individuals attempt to control the information that audiences receive, in order to influence audiences’ perceptions and behaviour (Dubrin, 2011, pp. 1, 10; Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 7).

A cynical view of impression management, however, is that it involves individuals presenting themselves in a false or manipulative fashion, in order to deceive others (Giddens, 1988, p. 253; Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 9). Similarly, a narrow view is that impression management focuses on superficial means of expression, such as clothing and physical appearance (Dubrin, 2011, p. 1). However, impression management can alternatively be seen as a broader phenomenon, concerned with deeper aspects of behaviour, and involving verbal and non-verbal activity (Goffman, 1990, p. 14). This broad view acknowledges that whilst impression management may sometimes be conscious and deliberate, at other times it may be “unconscious, automatic, and habitual” (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, pp. 6-7). The latter perspective is more widely accepted in the literature, and is a more accurate interpretation of impression management. Subsequently the broad view of impression management is taken in this thesis.

Although individuals can adapt their expressions according to particular circumstances and audiences, Goffman proposes that audiences are good at seeing through calculative and manipulative conduct (Smith, 2006, pp. 46, 107). This opposes the cynical view of impression management, as individuals’ impression management activity is constrained by their existing status, roles, and relationships (Branaman, 1997, p. xlvii). Consistency in impression management is important, as inconsistency can lead an audience to question the accuracy of all communication from a particular source (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 22). The observation by Rosenfeld et al. (1995, p. 20) aptly summarises the use of impression management activity in influencing audiences: “impression management is neither inherently good nor bad, but rather is a fundamental part of our social and work lives. Whether impression management is good or bad...really depends on why it is used and what it does”.

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Although impression management theory originally focused on individuals, it is also relevant for organisations (Hooghiemstra, 2000, p. 60). Both individuals and organisations are thought to engage in impression management in order to gain cooperation and support from others, and increase the likelihood of meeting their goals (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, p. 343). Using the same dramaturgical metaphor as Goffman (1959), Allen and Caillouet (1994, p. 44) refer to “corporate actors” who engage in “strategic communication”. Organisations are perceived to use “self-presentational devices” (otherwise referred to as impression management strategies and behaviours), to try and influence audiences’ impressions of the organisation (Hooghiemstra, 2000, p. 60). Impression management by organisations involves managers and other organisation members, as well as corporate communication specialists (Dubrin, 2011, p. 177).

It is important to note that impression management can be beneficial or detrimental to an organisation, as observed by Rosenfeld et al. (1995, p. 133). Beneficial impression management can positively portray an organisation (including particular individuals, events, or products) to internal or external audiences, as well as encourage positive interpersonal relationships and facilitate decision-making. In contrast, dysfunctional impression management can portray an organisation negatively or incorrectly, can inhibit interpersonal relationships, and can lead audiences to erroneous conclusions (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 133). This highlights the significance for managers in understanding impression management activity by organisation members, and the impact it can have on an organisation, either positive or negative.

The literature indicates the relevance of impression management theory for studies on corporate reputation management, as it can bring insight into the development of corporate reputation. Impression management activity can create a positive impression of an organisation, which enhances corporate image and helps build a good reputation (Dubrin, 2011, pp. 63, 200; Schniederjans, Cao, & Schniederjans, 2013, p. 912). Reputation has been defined as “a collective of
individual impressions”, and audiences form an individual impression of an organisation which then aggregates with other people’s impressions to constitute an overall corporate reputation (Highhouse, Brooks, & Gregarus, 2009, pp. 1483, 1485).

The qualitative empirical study by Carter (2006, p. 1145) found that impression management activity, guided by senior managers, can be used to manage an organisation’s reputation. Mishina et al. (2012, pp. 460, 469) use impression management theory in exploring the socio-cognitive processes involved in the development of corporate reputation. Based on their findings, they suggest that impression management activity can amplify positive cues and minimise negative cues about an organisation (Mishina et al., 2012, p. 469). Srivoravilai, Melewar, Liu, and Yannopoulou (2011, p. 261) conducted a study investigating corporate reputation management in private hospitals. The study found that organisations often engage in impression management activity in an attempt to influence stakeholders’ perceptions and evaluations of the organisation. The findings also indicate that corporate reputation is built via verbal and non-verbal impression management activities.

2.6.7 Using impression management as a theoretical perspective

Previous studies on individual and organisational communication use impression management theory in different ways. For instance, impression management is used to investigate interactions between an organisation and its stakeholders. The study by Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen (2014, pp. 12, 18) analyses the use of impression management to uphold social acceptability and promote credibility in online conversations between corporate representatives and consumers. They found that impression management activity includes conventional politeness (such as greeting, thanking, apologising, using emoticons, and signing posts), diversion (attempting to avoid further attention to negative issues), and ridiculing the other party. Heinze and Hu (2006, p. 316) investigate how individuals can form
impressions of an organisation based on their interaction with its website. They use impression management theory to analyse the design of corporate websites, with a longitudinal study of the S&P 500 companies from 2000-2006. The study indicates that corporate websites should incorporate more information, interactivity, and service-enhancing features over time, in order to increase user acceptance and usage of the websites (Heinze & Hu, 2006, pp. 317, 323).

Previous studies also use impression management to investigate image discrepancies. This is an important aspect of impression management theory, as Goffman (1959, p. 210; 1990, p. 66) claims that discrepancies between the impression that an individual presents and reality can result in a loss of reputation for an individual. Impression management is proposed to involve two stages: impression motivation (the desire to create a particular perception), and impression construction (the strategy that originates once the desire is recognised) (Young, Gardner, & Gilbert, 1994, pp. 32, 34). Roberts (2005, pp. 685-686) uses social identity theory and impression management theory to analyse how individuals can address gaps between their desired professional image ("how individuals wish to be seen") and perceived professional image ("how individuals think they are currently seen").

Building upon Young et al. (1994, pp. 32, 34), Roberts (2005, pp. 695-696) notes three components of impression management: impression monitoring (identifying image consistencies and discrepancies), impression motivation (employing impression management to reduce discrepancies), and impression construction (enacting personal and social identities to create a desired image). Roberts (2005, p. 686) discusses impression construction through social-identity-based impression management. This can involve “social decategorization” (attempting to change the social category to which an individual is assigned) and “positive distinctiveness” (attempting to create a positive social meaning for an existing social identity).

Similar to analysing image discrepancies, impression management is also used to investigate the accuracy and truthfulness of communication. The studies by Merkl-

Merkl-Davies et al. (2011, pp. 318-320, 426) propose that managers can engage in impression management in an attempt to shape shareholders’, and other stakeholders’, perceptions of organisational outcomes and events. They note that impression management can involve enhancing positive organisational outcomes or concealing negative outcomes. It could also involve providing misleading information or an inaccurate view of organisational outcomes. This is particularly key where an organisation faces threats, such as in the case of corporate scandals and environmental disasters, in order to gain or restore organisational legitimacy. Merkl-Davies et al. (2011, pp. 318-320) and Schleicher (2012, p. 554) both conduct content analysis on the Chairman’s Statement in annual reports of stock market listed companies, to investigate the content of this communication from an impression management perspective. Merkl-Davies et al. (2011, p. 325) found that impression management in the statements generally involves presenting an accurate, albeit favourable, view of the organisation. This is qualified by Schleicher (2012, p. 566), however, as his study found that although impression management in the statements did not generally involve misrepresentations, it did involve selectivity and vagueness.

Another use of impression management theory in the literature is to examine the strategies and behaviours used by individuals and organisations in communication.
Young et al. (1994, pp. 32, 34) suggest that the construction stage of impression formation involves deciding which strategies and behaviours are best suited for building or maintaining a desired image. Previous studies identify particular impression management strategies and behaviours which can be used by organisations and individuals in order to achieve certain aims. The strategies and behaviours that have been identified and investigated most frequently in the literature are outlined in Table 2.3 and discussed further below.

Table 2.3: Impression management strategies and behaviours identified in the literature reviewed

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategies/behaviours identified:</td>
<td>Proactive</td>
<td>Acquisitive</td>
<td>Proactive</td>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Ingratiation**</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-promotion**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exemplification**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intimidation**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supplication**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>Control-protective</td>
<td>Defensive</td>
<td>Apologies</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Excuses</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Justifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Illustrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

* Bolino and Turnley (2003, p. 143); Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap (2008, p. 1081); Dubrin (2011, p. 60), Rosenfeld, Giacalone, and Riordan (1995, pp. 29, 49, 52, 68), Schlenker and Weigold (1992, pp. 159-162), Schniederjans, Cao, and Schniederjans (2013, p. 913)

** Jones and Pittman (1982, as cited in Bolino and Turnley (1999, pp. 187, 190))

As can be seen in Table 2.3, there are four broad impression management strategies identified in the literature: assertive, defensive, demonstrative, and illustrative. There are also eight specific behaviours which can be used as part of the assertive and defensive strategies. The assertive strategy involves actors proactively managing impressions about themselves, whereas the defensive strategy is reactive (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985, p. 61; Young et al., 1994, p. 32).
Assertive impression management is aimed at creating favourable impressions of an organisation, and improving its image. Defensive impression management, in contrast, is aimed at protecting an organisation’s image against perceived threats (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985, p. 61). A demonstrative strategy involves providing facts or details about an organisation’s specific activities, and an illustrative strategy involves making broad generalisations about an organisation (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008, p. 1081).

The assertive and defensive strategies are similar to the acquisitive/proactive and protective/reactive/control-protective impression management strategies identified by Schlenker and Weigold (1992, p. 147), Stanton et al. (2004, pp. 58-59), and Hooghiemstra (2000, p. 60), as outlined in Table 2.3. The acquisitive style focuses on “gaining valued outcomes and regard”, by presenting “distinctive and self-flattering qualities”. In contrast, the protective style focuses on “avoiding dreaded outcomes and regard” by using defensive behaviours (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992, p. 147). Proactive impression management is aimed at enhancing an organisation’s image, whereas control-protective impression management is used to protect an image which is under threat. This may include admitting fault or denying responsibility for a situation (Stanton et al., 2004, pp. 58-59). These definitions illustrate that the key characteristics of these approaches echo those of the assertive and defensive strategies. The assertive and defensives strategies are referred to more widely by authors, however, as they are also associated with particular impression management behaviours (discussed below). Therefore, this thesis focuses on the assertive and defensive strategies.

where necessary, and then conducted exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. They also assessed the scale’s reliability and validity. Overall, their results support the taxonomy presented by Jones and Pittman. Bolino and Turnley (2003, p. 143) note three defensive impression management behaviours too: excuses, justifications, and apologies. The use of these behaviours in impression management by individuals and organisations is supported in studies by other authors, as detailed in Table 2.4 along with the definitions of each of the strategies and behaviours.

Table 2.4: Definitions of impression management strategies and behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM strategy:</th>
<th>IM behaviour:</th>
<th>Definition:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive strategy – the organisation proactively manages impressions about themselves to create a desired image (Tetlock &amp; Manstead, 1985, p. 61)</td>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>Seeking to be likeable, showing that the organisation offers benefits to others (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982, cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143; Ogden &amp; Clarke, 2005, p. 329)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-promotion</td>
<td>Showing the organisation’s abilities and accomplishments (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982, cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exemplification</td>
<td>Showing the organisation as doing more or better than is necessary, going beyond the call of duty (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982, cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supplication</td>
<td>Showing the organisation’s weaknesses or limitations (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982, cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intimidation</td>
<td>Threatening or bullying others (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982, cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive strategy – the organisation reactively manages impressions about themselves in order to protect their established image (Tetlock &amp; Manstead, 1985, p. 61)</td>
<td>Apologies</td>
<td>Admitting that an act the organisation is involved in is wrong and expressing the organisation’s regret (Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excuses</td>
<td>Attempting to minimise the organisation’s linkage to or responsibility for a bad act (Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justifications</td>
<td>Attempting to transform audiences’ perceptions of an act the organisation is involved in from bad to good or minimise the amount of harm done (Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrative strategy – providing facts or details about the current activities undertaken by the organisation (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1081)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrative strategy – making broad generalisations about the organisation, and its purpose or aims (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1081)</td>
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</table>
The study by Ogden and Clarke (2005, p. 313) investigates impression management in the annual reports of ten UK water companies, particularly focusing on statements concerning customer service. The authors independently checked each others’ coding, to ensure that it was consistent (Ogden & Clarke, 2005, p. 319), which enhanced the reliability of the findings. The study found that the organisations used assertive behaviours to develop their legitimacy as customer-focused organisations. Self-promotion was evident in the promotion of new investments and improvements in waste water quality and drinking water standards (Ogden & Clarke, 2005, p. 323). The organisations used exemplification in statements about their concern for the environment, and in portraying research and development activities as being undertaken for the public good (Ogden & Clarke, 2005, pp. 325-326). Ingratiation was evident where the organisations demonstrated that they delivered benefits to customers, such as rebates and lower bills (Ogden & Clarke, 2005, p. 329). The organisations also used defensive behaviours in an attempt to avoid audiences attributing undesirable qualities to the organisation. For example, excuses were evident in claims that performance shortfalls were not the organisation’s fault (Ogden & Clarke, 2005, pp. 332, 335).

Similarly, organisations were found to use assertive and defensive behaviours in print advertisements in the study by Perks, Farache, Shukla, and Berry (2013, pp. 1881, 1886). The organisations in the study engaged in exemplification behaviour by using examples of their corporate social responsibility activity to communicate an impression of commitment to corporate social responsibility. They also used defensive behaviours to deny their responsibility for transgressions of social responsibility (Perks et al., 2013, pp. 1883, 1886). These studies are significant as they provide empirical evidence regarding how organisations can use impression management to build and protect corporate reputation.

There is some limited consideration of impression management in an online context. For example, Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2007, pp. 343-344) investigate impression management through corporate websites. The study used quantitative content analysis to assess the use of assertive behaviours on the
corporate websites of 110 companies from Fortune magazine’s list of the top 500 leading businesses (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344). The findings indicate that organisations predominantly engage in competence (which the authors define similarly to self-promotion) and exemplification through their corporate websites. Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2007, pp. 343, 345) propose that these behaviours are related to corporate expertise and trustworthiness, and are key aspects of corporate credibility. The use of these behaviours could be beneficial for organisations by positively influencing stakeholders’ impressions of an organisation.

Communication between an organisation and its stakeholders is changing due to the impact of social media. The study by Schniederjans et al. (2013, p. 911) contributes to the literature by investigating impression management in a social media context. Schniederjans et al. (2013, p. 911) assessed, by analysing text from blogs, forums, and corporate websites, whether engaging in assertive behaviours through social media can impact an organisation's financial performance. The findings indicate that organisations can engage in impression management through social media, and that the use of assertive behaviours can lead to stakeholders (both internal and external) forming positive impressions of an organisation. This can have a positive impact on an organisation's financial performance (Schniederjans et al., 2013, pp. 911, 913, 916).

However, the effectiveness of particular behaviours is variable. Schniederjans et al. (2013, p. 916) propose that organisations can financially benefit from portraying themselves as either powerful or weak (and in need of assistance). They also note that intimidation is often viewed negatively as a harmful behaviour, but that it can be effective when used to promote a powerful impression of an organisation. Interestingly, the study indicates that self-promotion does not necessarily lead to any financial benefit for an organisation. As a result, Schniederjans et al. (2013, p. 916) recommend that organisations avoid unnecessary effort involving this behaviour. Overall, Schniederjans et al. (2013, p. 913) propose that social media can enhance the speed of impression management and reduce costs, and that this
can impact an organisation’s financial performance. This study has implications for organisations, as it emphasises the importance of engaging in impression management through social media.

A review of the literature illustrates that impression management can be used in different ways to explore individual and organisational communication. The previous sections discuss the use of impression management theory to investigate interactions between an organisation and its stakeholders, discrepancies between desired and perceived images, and the accuracy and truthfulness of communication. These approaches have some relevance for corporate stories, as storytelling is acknowledged to be an interactive process between an organisation and its stakeholders. Impression management theory could therefore be used to investigate how stories are created in interactions between stakeholders. This chapter also discusses that there may be differences between official and unofficial stories in an organisation. This could potentially affect the development of corporate image, and lead to discrepancies between the desired and perceived image. A potential problem with this approach, however, could be in determining to what extent a story portrays an accurate version of events. Stakeholders are likely to interpret and assign meaning to events in different ways, which could affect stories told about events. Different groups of stakeholders may perceive stories to be more or less accurate representations of events. Based on this, using impression management to focus primarily on the veracity of corporate stories is not suitable for this study.

This chapter particularly focuses on reputation platforms in corporate stories, in order to investigate the role of stories in corporate reputation management. As a result, this thesis is predominantly concerned with the content of corporate stories and how this could influence audiences. This has parallels with studies in the impression management literature that examine the strategies and behaviours used by individuals and organisations, and how these could influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation. A wealth of previous studies investigate assertive and defensive impression management strategies, and associated behaviours, in
corporate communication. This use of impression management theory is a valid approach to conducting research in corporate communication, and could also be used to examine corporate stories. Therefore, using impression management strategies and behaviours to investigate corporate stories appears to offer the most insight into the role and significance of stories in corporate reputation management. This is discussed further below.

2.6.8 Identifying an appropriate theoretical perspective for examining corporate stories

Based on the review of theoretical approaches, impression management theory is determined to be the most appropriate perspective for examining corporate stories. There are several areas where an impression management perspective can bring insight into corporate stories.

Impression management by organisations is acknowledged to involve corporate communication specialists, managers, and other organisation members, and can be conscious or unconscious (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, pp. 6-7). Impression management theory is subsequently relevant for examining official and unofficial corporate stories, which may or may not be used intentionally to influence audiences. It would be valuable to investigate whether there are differences in impression management activity between official and unofficial corporate stories, as this could impact their use as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences.

Individuals and organisations engage in impression management activity in order to influence the perceptions, evaluations, and behaviour of audiences (Dubrin, 2011, p. 1; Hooghiemstra, 2000, p. 60; Mishina et al., 2012, p. 469; Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 7). Similarly the literature on corporate stories indicates that stories can influence audiences’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour. Impression management can be beneficial or detrimental to an organisation (Rosenfeld et al.,
1995, p. 133). In the corporate story literature, the sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives indicate that the influence of stories on audiences can be positive or negative for an organisation. Based on this, impression management theory could be used to examine whether particular uses of stories can be beneficial or detrimental to an organisation. Impression management theory warns of the dangers of manipulative impression management activity, as Goffman proposes that audiences are good at seeing through manipulative impression management (Smith, 2006, pp. 46, 107). This echoes studies in the literature on propaganda and corporate stories that stress the potential risks of manipulation through stories. This also underlines the importance of training managers in using stories.

It is also proposed in the impression management literature that consistency in impression management activity is important. Audiences will audit an actor’s impression management activity (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 22; Smith, 2006, pp. 45-46), and discrepancies between the impression that an actor presents and reality can result in a loss of reputation (Goffman, 1959, p. 210; 1990, p. 66). This stresses the need for organisations to align corporate stories with other corporate identity cues, particularly the behaviour of the organisation and its members. Again, this is supported by the warnings in the literature on corporate propaganda that stories must match behaviour in an organisations in order to avoid being dismissed as propaganda (Neuhauser, 1993, pp. 58, 59).

Reviewing the corporate story and impression management literature indicates that the use of particular elements in corporate stories could involve particular impression management strategies and behaviours, as proposed by Spear and Roper (2013, p. 494). These strategies and behaviours are suggested to influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation (Young et al., 1994, pp. 32, 34). Impression management theory can subsequently bring insight into how the reputation platforms conveyed through corporate stories can influence audiences. This adds to the influences on audiences’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour noted from the storytelling literature. The impression management strategies and behaviours which could be involved in conveying reputation platforms, and the
potential influence on audiences’ impressions of an organisation, are illustrated in Table 2.5 and discussed further below.

Table 2.5: Impression management perspective on reputation platforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impression management strategy:</th>
<th>Impression management behaviour:</th>
<th>Linked to reputation platform and element/s in stories:*</th>
<th>Influence of impression management strategy/behaviour on audiences’ impressions of an organisation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive strategy</td>
<td>Ingratiation behaviour</td>
<td>Benefits (internal and external benefits elements) Strategy (values element)</td>
<td>Organisation appears attractive (Young, Gardner, &amp; Gilbert, p. 32) and likeable (Connolly-Ahern &amp; Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activities (accomplishments element)</td>
<td>Organisation appears intelligent, expert (Connolly-Ahern &amp; Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344) and competent (Young et al., 1994, p. 32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-promotion behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td>Activities (accomplishments element) Benefits (external benefits elements)</td>
<td>Organisation appears virtuous, trustworthy (Connolly-Ahern &amp; Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344), morally worthy (Young et al., 1994, p. 32), and committed to corporate social responsibility (Perks, Farache, Shukla, &amp; Berry, 2013, p. 1883)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplification behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional (conflict element)</td>
<td>Organisation appears weak (Connolly-Ahern &amp; Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplication behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional (conflict element)</td>
<td>Organisation appears threatening (Connolly-Ahern &amp; Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344), dangerous, and able to inflict harm on those who impede the achievement of its objectives (Schniederjans, Cao, &amp; Schniederjans 2013, p. 913)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimidation behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional (conflict element)</td>
<td>Organisation appears to be legitimate and the audience does not attribute negative or undesirable qualities to the organisation (Ogden &amp; Clarke, 2005, pp. 332, 335)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive strategy</td>
<td>Justifications, excuses, and apologies behaviours</td>
<td>Emotional (conflict element)</td>
<td>Organisation appears to be legitimate and the audience does not attribute negative or undesirable qualities to the organisation (Ogden &amp; Clarke, 2005, pp. 332, 335)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrative strategy</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>Activities (activities element)</td>
<td>Unspecified in the impression management literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrative strategy</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>Strategy (vision and mission elements)</td>
<td>Unspecified in the impression management literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Emotion element is not linked to particular strategies and behaviours as it could be used across the strategies and behaviours.
Assertive behaviours could be involved in conveying several of the reputation platforms. The use of the internal and external benefits elements could involve ingratiating, as in the study of annual reports by Ogden and Clarke (2005, p. 329) ingratiating is identified as “sharing benefits with customers”. The use of the values element could also involve ingratiating, as values are suggested to express an organisation’s beliefs and principles (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003, p. 1098; Hall, 1989, p. 124; Quigley, 1984, p. 39), and convey what an organisation stands for (Verma, 2009-2010, p. 153). This should be appealing to an organisation’s key stakeholders. Ingratiating aims to make an organisation appear attractive and likeable (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, p. 344; Young et al., 1994, p. 32), which indicates how the benefits and strategy platforms could influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation.

The use of the accomplishments element could involve self-promotion, as this behaviour promotes an organisation’s achievements (Spear & Roper, 2013, p. 494). Self-promotion could influence audiences by showing that an organisation is competent and intelligent. This is suggested to be related to corporate credibility and expertise (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, pp. 343, 345), and could help an organisation gain respect from audiences (Young et al., 1994, p. 32). The use of the accomplishments element could alternately involve exemplification, by referring to an organisation’s achievements in their corporate social responsibility activity (Perks et al., 2013, p. 1886). The use of the external benefits element could also involve exemplification, by showing how an organisation has provided benefits for the public good (Ogden & Clarke, 2005, pp. 325-326). This behaviour could influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation by making the organisation appear virtuous, trustworthy, and morally worthy, as suggested by Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2007, p. 344) and Young et al. (1994, p. 32). This indicates how the activities and benefits platforms could influence audiences.

There is a lack of evidence in the literature to indicate that the emotion element could involve a particular impression management strategy or behaviour (Spear & Roper, 2013, p. 495). However, based on the intended outcomes of the
behaviours, different emotions (positive and negative) could be associated with different impression management behaviours. For example, Gabriel (2000, pp. 84, 433, 440) notes that corporate stories could evoke pride, admiration, envy, grief, pain, guilt, mirth, and laughter. Pride could be portrayed when engaging in self-promotion, and this behaviour could also evoke admiration in audiences. Fear could be portrayed when engaging in supplication behaviour, and could also be evoked by intimidation behaviour. Apologies could portray guilt. There is a need though for empirical research to verify the extent to which different emotions can be associated with the strategies and behaviours.

The use of the conflict element could involve supplication or intimidation. This element presents the problems an organisation has faced, which could make an organisation appear weak to audiences. It also shows how problems have been overcome, and this could make an organisation appear threatening and able to inflict harm on those organisations or individuals who impede the achievement of the organisation’s objectives (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344; Dowling, 2006, p. 90; McKee, 2003, pp. 52-53; Schniederjans et al., 2013, p. 916; Woodside et al., 2008, p. 101). The use of the conflict element could also involve defensive behaviours (justifications, excuses, and apologies), as this strategy involves an organisation reacting to problems that have occurred (Spear & Roper, 2013, p. 495). A defensive strategy could influence audiences by leading them to perceive an organisation to be legitimate, and also avoid audiences attributing negative or undesirable qualities to an organisation (Ogden & Clarke, 2005, p. 332). This means that the emotional platform could influence audiences in multiple ways.

The use of the activities element is likely to involve a demonstrative strategy, as this strategy involves communicating the activities undertaken by an organisation (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1081). However, there is a lack of evidence in the impression management literature regarding how a demonstrative strategy could influence audiences. The use of the vision and mission elements could involve an illustrative strategy, as this strategy focuses on an organisation’s wider purpose.
and aims, and these are encapsulated in an organisation’s vision and mission (Hirota, Kubo, Miyajima, Hong, & Park, 2010, pp. 1135-1136; Verma, 2009-2010, p. 160). However, it is again not specified in the impression management literature how an illustrative strategy could influence audiences. As these strategies have not been explored in previous studies to the same extent as the assertive and defensive strategies, there is a need for further research to investigate how the activities and strategy platforms could influence audiences.

The findings from previous studies which have investigated impression management strategies and behaviours illustrate that these could influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation. The potential involvement of the strategies and behaviours in elements of stories indicates that impression management theory could be used to interpret how reputation platforms conveyed through stories could influence audiences. However, there is a need to verify this with empirical research, particularly where the existing literature is inadequate in indicating the potential influence of impression management strategies on audiences. In addition to this, the broader impression management literature suggests that impression management activity can have a wider influence on audiences, by influencing their perceptions, evaluations, and behaviour (Dubrin, 2011, p. 1; Hooghiemstra, 2000, p. 60; Mishina et al., 2012, p. 469; Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 7). This echoes the potential influence of stories on audiences’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour, discussed previously in this chapter. As a result, research into corporate stories from an impression management perspective could also be valuable to broaden understanding of the influence on impression management activity on audiences.

The above discussion indicates that the central arguments of impression management theory highlight key issues in understanding and managing corporate stories. Impression management theory has been used in studies on corporate reputation and communication, particularly in examining organisations’ annual reports (such as Merkl-Davies and Brennan (2011, p. 415), Merkl-Davies et al. (2011, pp. 316, 320), Rahman (2012, p. 2), and Schleicher (2012, p. 554)).
However, there is a lack of empirical research on corporate stories from an impression management perspective. Therefore, this thesis can contribute to the literature by investigating the efficacy of impression management theory for examining corporate stories as a corporate identity cue.

2.7 Conclusion – issues and gaps in the literature and research problem identification

Having reviewed the literature on corporate stories, and discussed theoretical perspectives for examining corporate stories, this conclusion considers the issues and gaps in the literature. These issues and gaps are used to identify the research problems addressed in this thesis.

2.7.1 Issues and gaps in the literature

A key issue for researchers investigating corporate stories is that there is no agreed definition of corporate stories in the literature, and authors often use differing terminology. It is therefore important to clarify how corporate stories are being approached in any particular study. Corporate stories are defined here as a series of logically or chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by organisation-related characters, which take place in a setting related to the organisation (based upon Forster (1963, p. 45) and Meyer (1995, p. 214)). This definition enables corporate stories to be identified as a form of corporate communication, but maintains a broad perspective on corporate stories, which is appropriate for an exploratory study.

There is also conflict in the literature regarding the necessity of a plot in stories. It is important to address this in a study, in order to determine what will be considered as a story. On balance, empirical evidence indicates that corporate stories may include a plot, but that a plot is not an essential feature of a corporate
story. This thesis subsequently investigates corporate stories as including both whole stories (stories with a beginning, middle, end plot structure) and story fragments (stories without such a structure) (Boje, 1991, p. 106; 1995, pp. 1000-1001, 1005-1008; 2008, p. 63; Volker et al., 2011, p. 105). This widens the scope of what is considered to be a story, and has implications for organisations, as it means that managers need to be aware of story fragments as well as whole stories in organisations.

It is clear from previous research that multiple corporate stories can be found in many organisations, and that stories are used in planned and unplanned communication. In order to bring greater clarity to the role of corporate stories in corporate reputation management, this thesis divides corporate stories into official and unofficial stories. Official corporate stories are defined in this thesis as corporate stories in planned communication, which are controlled by the organisation, and originate from senior managers or the corporate communication department. Unofficial corporate stories are defined as corporate stories in unplanned communication, which are not controlled by the organisation, and originate from organisation members (based upon Boje (1995, pp. 997, 1008), Boje and Baskin (2011, p. 418), and Karaosmanoglu and Melewar (2006, p. 197)). There are overlaps between these two types of story, however, as official stories are often repeated and reinterpreted by organisation members as unofficial stories. Unofficial stories may support or contradict official stories, and can influence the interpretation of official stories by audiences. This is significant for organisations, as it emphasises the need for managers to acknowledge and understand both official and unofficial stories in an organisation.

Corporate history stories are identified in this chapter as a particular type of corporate story that could play a key role in corporate reputation management. A corporate history story is defined as an official corporate story about the origins and history of the organisation, presented as a structured text (based upon Brunetti (2007, p. 114), Feldman et al. (2004, p. 153), and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 144)). Corporate history stories could act as a corporate identity cue, as
an organisation’s history is part of corporate personality. However, there is a lack of empirical research on the content of corporate history stories, and how they are used by organisations in internal and external communication. Based on this, there is a need for further research to establish how corporate history stories are used as a corporate identity cue, in order to provide guidance for managers.

Corporate stories can be expressed in a variety of formats, both written and verbal. In particular, there is growing recognition of the importance of storytelling in a digital and social media context. Digital and social media channels are important due to their ability to facilitate interactive storytelling between an organisation and its stakeholders. This is suggested to enhance the effectiveness of corporate stories. Digital and social media channels can be used to involve stakeholders in the co-creation of official stories, and also to share unofficial stories. Despite this, there is a lack of academic studies investigating the use of digital and social media channels in corporate storytelling. Further research in this area would therefore be valuable to guide managers in using these channels effectively.

A central issue discussed in this chapter is how corporate stories can play a role in corporate reputation management by acting as a corporate identity cue. It is proposed that corporate stories could act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms which express corporate personality. Reputation platforms can be represented through particular elements in the content of stories. However, most of the studies which discuss reputation platforms and elements of stories are conceptual. There is subsequently a need for empirical research to investigate whether platforms are represented by particular elements, and the extent to which platforms are conveyed through corporate stories.

The significance of stories in corporate reputation management is based on the potential influence of stories on audiences. In particular, this thesis focuses on the influence of stories on organisation members, as organisation members are a key stakeholder group in corporate reputation management. The sensemaking and
sensegiving perspectives of stories bring insight into the potential influence of stories on organisation members. From a sensemaking perspective, stories are used by organisation members to create and share meaning, and can influence both the storyteller and the audience (other organisation members). From a sensegiving perspective, managers use stories to deliberately influence an audience (which could include other managers as well as lower level organisation members). The sensegiving perspective is broadly linked to official stories, and the sensemaking perspective to unofficial stories. The literature indicates that stories could influence organisation members in different ways. These are summarised in this chapter as influence on thinking, feelings, and behaviour at work. It is important to note that each of these influences could be positive or negative concerning an organisation.

The sensemaking perspective indicates that stories can influence organisation members’ thinking by enabling them to create and share meaning from events and experiences. This is supported with empirical evidence from the perspective of managers and organisation members. In general, sensemaking stories can have a positive influence on the thinking of organisation members. However, some stories can have a negative influence by promoting organisational resistance. There is little empirical evidence regarding resistance stories in organisations though, and the potentially detrimental impact of these stories on organisations makes this a key area for future research.

The sensegiving perspective indicates that stories told by leaders and managers can influence organisation members’ thinking by enhancing their understanding of corporate strategy, particularly around the organisation’s vision and values. Managers could also use stories to influence the feelings of organisation members. This is controversial, however, and there is a need for more research on this use of stories from the perspective of audiences. It is important to note as well that audiences may not interpret stories in the way intended by a storyteller. The different meanings assigned to stories by audiences may mean that stories influence audiences in ways not desired by managers.
Both the sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives indicate that stories could influence the behaviour of organisation members, by reinforcing acceptable behaviour, warning against unacceptable behaviour, or attempting to change behaviour. Although there is anecdotal evidence for the influence of stories on organisations members’ behaviour at work, this has largely been neglected in empirical research. In particular there is a lack of research from the perspective of story audiences.

It is evident from the literature that there are several key issues for organisations in managing corporate stories as a corporate identity cue. Managerial use and understanding of stories can have a significant impact on organisations, and it is therefore concerning that the literature indicates a lack of awareness of and appreciation for stories in organisations. This reinforces the need to train managers in the use of stories, in order to increase the positive influence of stories on organisation members. Stories should be aligned with other elements of the corporate identity mix, particularly the behaviour of an organisation and its members. Otherwise an organisation risks damage to its corporate reputation if there are discrepancies between the impressions that the organisation presents to audiences and the reality of its actions (as indicated by Goffman (1959, p. 210; 1990, p. 66)). There can also be issues with the credibility of corporate stories, particularly when stories do not reflect real events, or the storyteller is perceived to have an agenda. This has implications for organisations, as audiences are likely to be less influenced by stories that have lower credibility. This could impact the influence of official stories compared to unofficial stories shared amongst organisation members. There is a need then for research to explore the perceived credibility of official and unofficial stories, and how this affects the influence of stories on audiences.

The majority of previous studies on corporate stories lack a theoretical underpinning, which limits the insight that they bring into the use and management of corporate stories. In order for this thesis to contribute to the
literature on corporate stories, impression management theory is adopted as a theoretical perspective for examining corporate stories. Impression management theory is proposed to be an effective perspective for use in this study, as the central arguments of impression management theory indicate key issues for understanding and managing corporate stories. In particular, impression management theory could be used to investigate the strategies and behaviours used in stories. The findings from previous studies which have investigated impression management strategies and behaviours indicate that conveying reputation platforms in stories could influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation. The broader impression management literature also suggests that impression management activity can have a wider influence on audiences, by influencing their perceptions, evaluations, and behaviour (Dubrin, 2011, p. 1; Hooghiemstra, 2000, p. 60; Mishina et al., 2012, p. 469; Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 7). This has similarities to the potential influence of stories on audiences’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour, as identified from the corporate story literature. There is subsequently scope for further research into impression management activity in corporate stories, and the influence on audiences, in order to contribute to the literature on impression management theory as well as corporate stories.

2.7.2 Research problem identification

Based on the discussion of the issues and gaps in the corporate story literature, this section identifies the research questions and overall research problem addressed in this thesis.

The benefits of a positive corporate reputation for organisations, and the role of corporate identity in building and managing corporate reputation, are established in chapter one. Corporate identity can be at least partly controlled by organisations by managing corporate identity cues within the corporate identity mix. The corporate identity mix expresses corporate personality, in order to form corporate image in the minds of stakeholders, and ultimately corporate reputation
This thesis argues that corporate stories are part of the communication element of the corporate identity mix, and can play a role in corporate reputation management, by acting as a corporate identity cue.

The literature review indicates that leaders, managers, and organisation members may tell stories as part of planned communication (official stories) as well as unplanned communication (unofficial stories). Corporate history stories are a type of official corporate story, which could play a particularly important role in corporate reputation management. However, it is questionable to what extent stories are understood and utilised in organisations. Managers are perceived to often lack awareness of the importance and use of stories in organisations, and this is likely to limit the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue, and could even lead to stories damaging an organisation.

It is proposed in this thesis that corporate stories could act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms which express corporate personality. It is suggested that reputation platforms are represented by particular elements in the content of stories. However, previous studies which discuss reputation platforms and elements in stories are predominantly conceptual. It makes sense therefore to undertake empirical research to investigate the extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories, and are represented by particular elements. This can then bring insight into how stories are used as a corporate identity cue. Based on these issues, the researcher poses the following question:

Q1. How are corporate stories used as a corporate identity cue?

This thesis proposes that corporate stories are significant in corporate reputation management due to their potential influence on audiences. The influence of stories on organisation members is particularly important, as organisation members play a key role in projecting corporate identity to other stakeholders. The behaviour of organisation members will impact the formation of corporate
image in the minds of other stakeholders, and subsequently affect the development of corporate reputation. This means that organisation members are a key stakeholder group in corporate reputation management. However, although corporate stories can positively influence audiences, there are also potentially negative influences of stories, which can have a detrimental impact on organisations. This reinforces the need for managers to understand how both official and unofficial corporate stories influence audiences, in order to encourage beneficial uses of storytelling and minimise any negative impact of stories on organisations.

The review of the literature in this chapter illustrates that most of the literature on corporate stories lacks a theoretical underpinning. This limits the contribution of previous studies to the literature, as their findings often lack generalisability and wider insight into the use of corporate stories and their influence on audiences. The broader review of theoretical approaches to corporate reputation, identity, communication, as well as stories, indicates that impression management theory is an appropriate perspective for examining corporate stories and their influence on audiences. The central arguments of impression management theory highlight key issues in understanding and managing corporate stories. In particular, using impression management strategies and behaviours to analyse corporate stories indicates that these could be involved in the use of particular elements. Impression management theory could therefore be used to interpret how conveying reputation platforms through corporate stories influences audiences. Yet there is a lack of empirical research on corporate stories from an impression management perspective. As a result, this study can contribute to the literature by using impression management theory to examine corporate stories and bring insight into their influence on audiences. The researcher subsequently poses the question:

Q2. How do corporate stories influence audiences, particularly organisation members?
Investigating these questions enables the researcher to address the fundamental problem of this thesis, which simply stated is, what is the role and significance of corporate stories in corporate reputation management? In order to address this problem, the research focuses on two main issues: how are stories used as a corporate identity cue, and how do stories influence audiences, particularly organisation members?

A theoretical framework is necessary to guide the research around these key issues. The framework developed by the researcher, based on the literature, is outlined in Figure 2.3.

**Figure 2.3: Theoretical framework – impression management perspective of corporate stories**

The theoretical framework firstly shows that corporate personality is a source of corporate stories, as it is important to acknowledge that corporate stories act as a corporate identity cue by expressing corporate personality. The research in this thesis does not explore how stories arise from corporate personality, however, but rather focuses on the subsequent stages of the framework. The framework indicates that corporate stories can act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms, which are represented by particular elements in stories. Impression management theory is used to examine how corporate stories could influence audiences, using the impression management strategies and behaviours to interpret the influence of reputation platforms on audiences. Using this framework to guide the research enables the empirical study to investigate the research questions and address the overall research problem.
The next chapter details the research methodology for the empirical study, including the philosophical approach, research design, research methods, and sampling strategy. The data collection and analysis procedures are also discussed, as well as issues of credibility and ethics.
Chapter 3 – Methodology

Having established the theoretical basis of the thesis in chapters one and two, this chapter focuses on how the empirical study was undertaken. The chapter discusses the research approach and methods adopted in the study, in order to address the research questions posed in chapter two. These are:

Q1. How are corporate stories used as a corporate identity cue?
Q2. How do corporate stories influence audiences, particularly organisation members?

The study was conducted in two stages. The first stage focused on official stories in external communication, specifically corporate history stories. Corporate history stories could play a key role in corporate reputation management, however, it is noted in chapter two that there is a lack of research on how they are used by organisations. Corporate history stories are commonly presented on organisations’ websites, which means that this type of story can be easily collected from multiple organisations. This allowed stories to be investigated across a range of organisations, in order to gain a broad insight into how corporate stories are used in external communication by organisations across different sectors and industries. Corporate websites are a key channel for reputation management as stakeholders “from potential employees and creditors to students and lobbying organisations” may have reason to examine the content of an organisation’s website, and so websites are a medium for reaching a range of audiences (Campbell & Beck, 2004, p. 102). This includes both internal and external stakeholders, as organisation members may also access their organisation’s website. Investigating this type of story enabled a broad insight into how corporate stories can be used as a corporate identity cue, and can influence a wide audience, including organisation members.

The second stage of the study followed on from this by focusing on stories in internal communication. This enabled a more in-depth insight into the influence of stories on organisation members. Organisation members are a key stakeholder
group in corporate reputation management, due to the impact that their attitudes and behaviours will have on an organisation’s reputation with external stakeholders. Previous studies indicate that leaders, managers, and organisation members may tell stories as part of planned communication (official stories) as well as unplanned communication (unofficial stories). This stage therefore investigated how official and unofficial stories are used as a corporate identity cue, and how they could influence organisation members.

The use of impression management theory to analyse strategies and behaviours in communication is discussed in chapter two, in terms of the potential insight this could bring to the influence of stories on audiences. Impression management theory was used to analyse the data from both stages of the research, which brings cohesion to the overall study. An analytical framework guided the analysis, and this is discussed further later in the chapter. Bringing the findings of both stages of the research together enabled a holistic understanding of the use of official and unofficial corporate stories as a corporate identity cue, in external and internal communication, and also how stories could influence audiences.

This chapter firstly considers the philosophical approach to the research, including the ontological and epistemological stance adopted, and the approach to theory generation. The research design and data collection methods are then discussed in light of how they enabled the investigation of the research questions. The chapter then outlines the sampling strategy for each stage of the study, and the data analysis techniques and procedures that were used. Finally, the issues of research credibility and ethics are discussed.
3.1 Philosophical approach

3.1.1 Ontology and epistemology

Identifying an appropriate ontological and epistemological stance in a study is important to determine the approach to understanding the social phenomena under investigation. Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality; two distinct ontological positions are objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism holds that social phenomena exist independently of social actors, whereas subjectivism posits that social phenomena are created through the perceptions and actions of social actors (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012, p. 130). Linked to ontology is epistemology, which is concerned with what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a study (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15). Positivism, realism, and interpretivism are common epistemological approaches to conducting research. This section briefly discusses these ontological and epistemological approaches, and considers which are the most suitable for investigating corporate stories.

Positivism is associated with the natural sciences, and focuses on testing hypotheses and generating laws. A positivist approach assumes that science can be conducted objectively, and emphasises observable facts in research (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15). Positivism is generally associated with an objectivist ontology, and these approaches are often linked to quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. A positivist approach focuses on observable data, and does not allow for the collection of unobservable data (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 15, 27). However, this approach would not sufficiently address the research questions in this study. Understanding the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences requires data on audiences’ perceptions of stories, which is not observable data.

Positivism also emphasises that research should be conducted in a value-free way (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 135). However, it is widely accepted that a researcher’s values will often influence business research, as noted by Bryman and Bell (2007,
In this study, the researcher’s values have influenced the choice of corporate reputation and stories as a research topic, based on the practical and academic significance of these areas. This is contrary to the demands of positivism. As a result of these issues, researchers have been encouraged to use approaches other than positivism in exploring corporate identity (Otubanjo, 2012, p. 73). Positivism is also claimed to be a poor approach for research into corporate stories (Driscoll & McKee, 2007, p. 212). Overall, there is a lack of support in the literature for the use of positivism and objectivism in conducting research on corporate stories. This indicates that these approaches were not appropriate for this study.

An alternative philosophical approach to conducting research is realism. Realism shares similarities with positivism, in that it focuses on using the same approach to data collection and analysis in the social sciences as in the natural sciences (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 17). The central aspect of realism is that there is a reality independent of the human mind (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 136). There are two types of realism: direct and critical. Direct realism is concerned only with things that can be experienced through the senses (as in the positivist approach), however, a critical realist perspective acknowledges that not all data is observable (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 17; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 136). This indicates that critical realism was more appropriate than positivism and direct realism for this study, as unobservable data was required to answer the research questions. Critical realism also recognises the importance of studying an individual, group, and organisation in order to gain understanding of phenomena (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 137). This was again appropriate for this study, as the literature review indicates that official and unofficial corporate stories can be shared across a whole organisation, within teams, and between individuals. It was therefore necessary to consider stories at these different levels when investigating the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences.

However, a critical realist approach is not apparent in previous studies on corporate reputation and stories. This means that there is a lack of evidence regarding its suitability for empirical research in this area. The underlying
similarities to positivism indicate that critical realism prioritises a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. However, qualitative approaches are more common in research on corporate stories (discussed later in this chapter), as they offer more in-depth insight. Based on this, critical realism was not an ideal stance for this study. Therefore, interpretivism was considered as an alternative approach.

An interpretivist approach views the subject matter of the social sciences (people and organisations) as fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. From an interpretivist perspective, “the social world of business and management is far too complex to lend itself to theorising by definite ‘laws’” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 137). This subsequently requires a different approach to conducting research, as noted by Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 16). An interpretive paradigm acknowledges multiple voices, meanings, and understandings within organisations, and prioritises understanding how individuals interpret and assign meaning to phenomena (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 13; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 132). This echoes the discussion of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue in the previous chapters. Corporate stories are interpreted and assigned meaning by audiences, which affects how they impact the development of corporate image and reputation. This indicates that interpretivism is aligned with the approach to corporate stories in this thesis.

The use of impression management theory in this study also aligns with an interpretivist approach. From an interpretivist perspective, people are viewed as “social actors” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 137). This has similarities to the dramaturgical perspective evident in impression management theory. Boyce (1996, p. 8) proposes that interpretivism is a beneficial paradigm through which to approach the theatrical metaphor of individuals and organisations as “actors” engaging in “performances”. This can be attributed to the flexibility of interpretivism in accounting for the multiple roles that an individual can play, and acknowledging the role of audiences in interpreting these performances. This again indicates the relevance of interpretivism for this study.

Interpretivism is associated with a subjectivist ontological position and social constructivist perspective. A subjectivist position acknowledges that social actors may place different interpretations on the situations in which they find themselves. A researcher should therefore aim to understand the subjective meanings motivating the actions of social actors (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 132). Social constructivism views organisations as a socially constructed product, where social reality is created by the interaction between actors (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 24; Dolan & Bao, 2012, p. 12). The subjectivist and social constructivist approaches have parallels with the interpretivist approach discussed previously, by emphasising the importance of the interpretations and understandings of individuals. These perspectives are also linked in the story literature, as an interpretivist approach views narratives as being socially constructed (Rosile et al., 2013, pp. 561, 563-564) between the storyteller and audience.

A subjectivist ontology and social constructivist perspective have been adopted in previous studies in the areas of corporate reputation and stories. Otubanjo (2012, p. 70) investigated corporate reputation from a social constructivist perspective, focusing on how corporate image and reputation evolve from stakeholders’ interactions and interpretations of corporate identity. Boyce (1996, p. 12) argues that interpretivism and subjectivism are both suitable for examining corporate stories. Dolan and Bao (2012, p. 10) apply a social constructivist view to corporate
stories. They claim that from this perspective, storytelling can be seen as a value-laden interaction process. This again emphasises the role of both the storyteller and audience in creating and interpreting corporate stories. This indicates that empirical research in this area should investigate the perceptions of both parties.

Based on the literature and evidence from previous studies, interpretivism was the most appropriate epistemological stance to adopt for this study, in order to address the research questions. This is reinforced by the links between interpretivism and the subjectivist ontology and social constructivist perspective, which are also adopted in previous studies on corporate stories. Interpretivism can bring insight into the use of stories as a corporate identity cue and the influence of stories on audiences. This perspective acknowledges multiple stories and story interpretations within organisations, and emphasises the perceptions and understandings of audiences.

In contrast to positivism, interpretivism acknowledges that research cannot be value free, but encourages the researcher to be self-reflective about the influence of their values on the research. This section already acknowledges the role of values in the choice of corporate reputation and stories as a research topic, due to its significance for both academics and practitioners. However, the impact of a researcher’s values on the collection, analysis, and reporting of data should be minimised, to avoid issues of bias (discussed later in this chapter). To achieve this, comprehensive procedures were established to guide each stage of the study, which are detailed in this chapter.

3.1.2 Theory generation

The study in this thesis was exploratory, as there is limited research investigating corporate stories as a corporate identity cue, and in particular a lack of empirical studies. The purpose of the research was to generate middle-range theory in the areas of corporate reputation and stories. Middle-range theory represents an
attempt to understand and explain a limited aspect of social life (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 8). This was appropriate for the study in order to generate practical insight into the use of corporate stories for organisations, as well as contributing to the academic literature. By addressing the research questions stated in chapter two, the study aimed to produce a framework demonstrating how corporate stories can act as a corporate identity cue and influence audiences. The study also aimed to provide guidance for managers regarding the use of stories as part of corporate reputation management.

Theory was formulated through a deductive approach. Although a deductive approach is often associated with a positivist epistemology, it may also be used when taking an interpretivist stance (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 145). A deductive approach was appropriate in this study as there is literature in the areas of corporate stories and impression management theory from which a theoretical framework was defined. This is outlined in chapter two. Similarly, Janssen et al. (2012, p. 35) took a deductive approach in their analysis of corporate stories on organisations’ websites, using a deductively developed coding scheme. It should be noted, however, that a deductive approach is a general orientation to the link between theory and research, rather than a linear progression between the two. This means that a researcher’s view of theory may still change as a result of data analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 13). This was relevant for investigating corporate stories, in order to interpret stories in light of both theoretical claims and the data, as recommended by Smith and Keyton (2001, p. 177). This study therefore used the theoretical framework presented in chapter two as a starting point for conducting the empirical research and analysing the data collected. However, the researcher also remained open to issues arising from the data itself.

3.2 Research design

In order to address the research questions, a mixed methods study was conducted. The research was undertaken in two stages and used both qualitative
and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. The first stage of research focused on official corporate stories in external communication. Specifically, the research explored corporate history stories on organisations’ websites, using content analysis to investigate how they are used as a corporate identity cue and how they could influence audiences. The second stage built on this by focusing on official and unofficial stories in internal communication, from the perspective of organisation members. This enabled a more in-depth investigation of how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences. Both stages of the research involved a cross-sectional design, and the second stage also used a case study design. The mixed methods, cross-sectional, and case study designs are considered further below, and the industry context for the case study research is also discussed.

3.2.1 Mixed methods research

The study involved a predominantly qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. However, there was also some use of quantitative data collection and analysis techniques, hence this being a mixed methods study. The first stage of the study combined qualitative and quantitative approaches in conducting content analysis of the data (although using only simple quantitative methods such as frequencies). The second stage also involved qualitative and quantitative approaches, by using semi-structured interviews that contained both open and closed questions. The open questions were analysed qualitatively, whilst the closed questions were analysed using quantitative techniques.

The advantage of using multiple methods in the same study is that different methods can be used for different purposes (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 165). Combining different methods enabled the researcher to better address the research questions. Typically, quantitative research is focused on the researcher’s perspective, whilst qualitative research is concerned with the participant’s perspective, so a combined study can take into account both sides (Robson, 2002,
p. 372). This was appropriate here to initially investigate corporate history stories using variables determined by the researcher (based on the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two). The second stage of the study also used these variables to investigate corporate stories within the case study organisations, so the findings from both stages could be synthesised. The second stage of research was focused on the perspectives of organisation members though, and the qualitative approach enabled the researcher to remain open to additional issues arising throughout the data collection process.

Undertaking both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis required multiple data collection methods in the study, and the collection of data from different sources. This subsequently allowed for data triangulation, which improves the credibility of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 397) (discussed later in the chapter). The disadvantage of a mixed methods study is the additional time and resources required in using more than one method (Robson, 2002, p. 373). This was dealt with as part of the research planning process.

Previous studies in the area of corporate stories have predominantly taken a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, including Auvinen et al. (2013, p. 415), Chen (2012, p. 311), and Maclean et al. (2012, pp. 17, 22). In the area of corporate identity, a limited number of studies have adopted a mixed methods approach. For example, the study by Simões et al. (2005, p. 159) used both qualitative and quantitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of corporate identity management in the hotel industry. This included in-depth interviews with experts and the collection of published documents. The qualitative and quantitative approaches that were taken in this study are discussed further below.

Qualitative data was appropriate for the study, as this type of data has been advocated for exploring new areas (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). This was relevant for investigating the under-researched area of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue. Although often associated with an inductive approach to
theory generation, qualitative research can also be employed for testing theories (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 27). This was appropriate for the deductive approach in this study, to investigate the issues outlined in the theoretical framework. Advantages of qualitative data are its richness and holism, and ability to address complexity. This leads to greater potential in understanding issues (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Qualitative studies are flexible, as data collection times and methods can be varied as a study proceeds. This can enhance the researcher’s understanding of the issues under investigation (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Flexibility was particularly important in the second stage of research, to adapt data collection and analysis methods depending on the nature of the case study organisations, and as a result of the data collected as the study progressed. However, there are problems associated with qualitative research, including that it can be seen as subjective and difficult to replicate, and lacking transparency and generalisability (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 408-409). These issues are considered further in the section on research credibility.

Quantitative data collection and analysis was also appropriate for this study. A quantitative research strategy is generally linked to a deductive approach to theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 27), which was adopted in this study. Quantitative research is associated with standardised methods of data collection and analysis. Quantitative researchers tend to emphasise the need for research to be reliable and generalisable to the population from which the sample was selected (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 86). Replicability is also regarded as an important quality of quantitative research, so the methods taken in generating a set of findings need to be made explicit (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 165). Standardised methods were important in conducting content analysis of the corporate history stories collected from organisations’ websites. The methods used were therefore prescribed in a data collection and coding manual developed by the researcher (see appendix three). This enabled the data collection and coding to be carried out by more than one coder, and would also allow the study to be repeated by future researchers. However, there are potential problems with quantitative research. The focus on procedures can hinder the connection between the research and the real world,
therefore threatening the ecological validity of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 168). These issues are again considered further in the section on research credibility.

3.2.2 Cross-sectional design

The key importance of corporate reputation for both for-profit and non-profit organisations is discussed in chapter one. Investigating corporate stories in both sectors can bring greater insight to the use of official stories in external communication, and enable comparison between the two sectors. A cross-sectional design entails the collection of data on more than one case, in order to investigate variation in key variables at a particular point in time (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 54; David & Sutton, 2011, p. 207; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 190). This was appropriate in the first stage of the study to investigate stories in multiple organisations in the for-profit and non-profit sectors, in order to gain a broad understanding of the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue. The variables of interest in the cases were determined deductively from the review of the literature, discussed further in the section on data analysis.

The second stage of the study also utilised a cross-sectional design, as data was again collected at a particular point in time. However, this stage focused on two cases, and therefore the key aspect of the research design was a case study approach, discussed below.

3.2.3 Case study design

A case study design was utilised in the second stage of the study, in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the use of corporate stories in internal communication and the influence of stories on audiences. Saunders et al. (2012, p. 179) note that the deep understanding that can be gained from case studies
means they are often used in exploratory research. This indicates the suitability of this research design for exploring corporate stories. Conducting more than one case study can allow a researcher to compare and contrast the findings from each of the cases (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 63). This was appropriate in the study so that the findings from one case could be checked against the findings from the following case. This strengthens the findings regarding the use and influence of corporate stories. When utilising a case study design, the choice of cases is usually made on conceptual rather than representative grounds, and the theoretical framework of the study should guide the sampling of cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29). The theoretical framework outlined in chapter two subsequently guided the selection of cases in this study, and this is discussed further in the sampling section.

The case studies in this research focused on investigating corporate stories from the perspective of organisation members. The case studies enabled the researcher to gain access to organisation members in different roles, from front line employees to senior managers, and in different areas of the business. Organisation members were discussed in chapter one as a key stakeholder group in corporate reputation management, as they are impacted by various corporate identity cues and also project corporate identity to other stakeholders (Otubanjo et al., 2010, p. 157; Stuart, 2002, p. 29). The literature review suggests that corporate stories can influence organisation members, and that this influence could be positive or negative for an organisation. Investigating how managers and organisation members use and perceive corporate stories was therefore important to understand how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue and how they influence audiences. The selection of organisation members for participation in the study is discussed further as part of the section on the sampling strategy.

The use of case studies for researching corporate stories is supported in the literature. In general terms, case studies are advocated in business research to achieve a “deep understanding of the actors, interactions, sentiments, and behaviors occurring for a specific process” (Woodside & Wilson, 2003, pp. 497-
Similarly, case study research is recommended in marketing, in order to highlight the complexity and context of a particular situation (Balmer, 2001, p. 268; Gummesson & Polese, 2009, pp. 347-348). More specifically, case studies have been used in research on corporate stories in organisations, as discussed in chapter two and outlined in appendix one. For example, Ohara and Cherniss (2010, p. 31) investigated stories in a for-profit organisation, from start-up through its development into a global organisation. Rhodes et al. (2010, p. 537) investigated stories in the context of a restructuring in a high technology manufacturer in Australia. Chen (2012, p. 311) conducted a qualitative, ethnographic study to investigate stories in the organisation behind the annual Burning Man event in the US. These studies demonstrate the validity and acceptability of a case study approach in the research areas under investigation. The following section discusses the research context for the case studies.

3.2.4 Case study research context – UK energy industry

It was appropriate to focus on one sector in the second stage of research, to enable a deeper understanding of stories within a specific context. For this reason, two case studies were conducted within one industry in the for-profit sector. This also enabled the researcher to compare the findings from both cases, in order to enhance the quality of the conclusions drawn from this stage of research. The specific research context selected was the UK energy industry, and this section introduces this industry and discusses its suitability for investigating corporate stories.

Energy is a significant industry in the UK; the energy sector contributed £20.6 billion to the UK economy in 2011, and supports around 655,000 jobs (from both direct and indirect employment) (“Powering the UK”, 2012, pp. 3, 9). There are six vertically integrated electricity and gas suppliers in Great Britain with a market share each of more than 5% (SSE plc, 2013, p. 5). These are known as the “big six” – British Gas (owned by Centrica), EDF Energy, RWE npower, SSE, EON, and
Scottish Power – and they generate electricity and tend to sell most of it to their retail businesses (Chazan, 2013). Alongside the big six suppliers, there are seven distribution network operators (DNOs) in the UK: Electricity North West, Northern Ireland Electricity, Northern Powergrid, UK Power Networks, Western Power Distribution, SSE Power Distribution, and SP Energy Networks. They own and operate the network of towers and cables that bring electricity to homes and businesses, and are each responsible for distributing electricity in a certain geographical area (“Distribution Network Operator…”, n.d.; “Electricity distribution”, 2007). Two of the DNOs are part of the same groups as the gas and electric suppliers (SP Energy Networks is part of Scottish Power, and SSE Power Distribution is part of SSE).

The sector is split between regulated activities (energy transmission and distribution networks) and market-based activities (energy production and retailing). The DNOs mainly operate in the regulated part of the sector and the suppliers in the market-based part. Most of the organisations have some business activity in the other part of the sector though, to varying extents. The companies must, however, maintain legal separation and confidentiality between each part (SSE plc, 2013, p. 4). Ofgem is the government regulator for the gas and energy markets. The energy distribution businesses are natural monopolies, and for this reason Ofgem regulates the companies through five-year price control periods (“Networks”, n.d.). There is significant political, as well as regulatory, interest in the energy market, due to the fact that energy and gas are essential products for consumers (SSE, 2012, p. 12).

There are similarities between the organisations in the industry. All of the organisations emphasise customer service or a customer focus on their corporate websites, generally as part of sections on their values, strategic priorities, or similar. Most of the organisations also emphasise safety. This is due to the inherent risks in many of the activities associated with generating and supplying electricity and gas (for example, maintaining power lines). To a lesser extent, the
organisations also stress environmental and social responsibility and sustainability, which often links into their activity in the area of renewable energy.

There are currently issues within the industry. Ofgem claims that structural features, including high barriers to entry and a lack of transparency, are likely to have the cumulative effect of weakening competition. Regional markets are also highly concentrated, with the former gas and electricity incumbent suppliers (from before privatisation in the 1980s and 1990s) typically still supplying around two-thirds of customers in each region (Ofgem, 2011, p. 5). A supplier’s price relative to its competitors can trigger consumers’ decisions to switch suppliers. There is evidence of companies pursuing similar pricing strategies, with the timing and size of price adjustments by one company often based on the price adjustments of its competitors (Ofgem, 2011, p. 40). Ofgem reports that a significant proportion of consumers are disengaged from the energy market, and that complex pricing structures are contributing to the lack of engagement (Ofgem, 2011, p. 4).

The energy industry has received criticism in the media for its pricing strategies, profit margins, and sales tactics. For example: “the big six energy suppliers have been accused of "cold-blooded profiteering" after official figures showed they had more than doubled their retail profit margins over the last 18 months” (Macalister, 2013): “consumers will be bitterly disappointed to see profits soaring so shortly after being asked to swallow a price hike,” said Ann Robinson, director of consumer policy at uSwitch.com, the price comparison website” (Kavanagh, 2012). It is reported that there is “mounting consumer frustration with the established energy companies amid rising household heating bills and scandals over mis-selling” (Chazan, 2013). An article in PRWeek claims that there is deep public mistrust in the industry, as “a PRWeek/OnePoll survey of 2,000 members of the public revealed that 80% did not trust the big six energy firms to sell them the cheapest deal, while 62% said that pricing plans were no clearer than a year ago” (Owens, 2013). It is claimed that in response to consumer mistrust, “energy companies are boosting their investment in customer-focused brand building initiatives over the next 12 months as they look to make people and service key
differentiators in the face of impending regulation around simplified tariffs” (Joseph, 2013). Pressure from Ofgem around pricing issues has recently led the organisations in the industry to run a joint nationwide campaign about smart metering “to tackle the trust issues engulfing the sector” (Joseph, 2014).

The energy industry is likely to receive increasing interest from governments, regulators, the media, and consumers, due to rising geopolitical risks to energy security, potentially higher energy prices, and a need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (“Sustainability”, n.d.). Companies in the industry will be affected by the UK government’s energy policy, which aims to achieve secure, affordable, and low-carbon energy (SSE plc, 2013, p. 4). Ofgem has criticised the current structure of the energy industry and has developed proposals aimed at reforming the industry. These are specifically targeted at increasing competition, creating a more level playing field for independent suppliers, and increasing price transparency for consumers (Chazan, 2013).

This indicates that corporate reputation is a key issue in the energy industry, and is likely to be increasingly important in the future. The articles referred to above show that the energy industry has a poor reputation with many stakeholders, including customers, governments, regulators, and the media. Individual companies within the industry are also perceived negatively. There is a need then for energy companies to manage corporate identity, in order to develop more favourable reputations. Exploring corporate stories from the perspective of members of organisations in the energy industry can provide valuable guidance for managers in using corporate stories as a corporate identity cue and to influence audiences. Case studies in the energy industry also contribute to the academic literature, by providing empirical evidence and a deeper understanding of the use and influence of corporate stories within a particular industry context.
3.2.5 Overview of the case study organisations

The sampling strategy for the case studies is discussed later in this chapter, but this section introduces the organisations selected. The case study organisations are referred to in this thesis as Energy One and PowerOn.

Energy One (case study one):
Energy One is one of the big six gas and electric suppliers and one of the biggest energy retailers in Great Britain and Ireland. The organisation follows an endorsed corporate branding strategy, as identified by Olins (1989, p. 78), or a business branding strategy, in the terminology of Muzellec and Lambkin (2009, p. 39). Regional brands, which became part of Energy One through mergers and acquisitions in the 1990s and 2000s, are still used in consumer markets, but are endorsed with the corporate name. A consistent visual communication style is used across the regional and corporate brands. The corporate name is used in communication with stakeholders other than consumers, and also in internal communication.

In terms of corporate strategy, Energy One has specific goals and values that are intended to guide the organisation’s activities and the behaviour of organisation members. The organisation does not have a vision or mission statement. In common with other organisations in the industry, Energy One’s goals and values include safety and service. Energy One’s external communication activity is currently focused on building trust with the public, and differentiating Energy One from the other major energy retailers, through its focus on customer service. This communication strategy is partly a response to the negative corporate image of energy companies with the public, including Energy One. This emphasises the importance of corporate reputation management for Energy One, in order to improve corporate image and reputation. In turn, this supports the need for this research to investigate how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue and how they influence organisation members.
PowerOn (case study two):
PowerOn is one of the seven DNOs, and is one of the UK’s largest electricity distribution businesses. Much of the organisation operates in a monopoly environment and is regulated by Ofgem. PowerOn follows a monolithic (Olins, 1989, p. 78) or holistic (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009, p. 39) corporate branding strategy, as the PowerOn name and visual style are used throughout the business and across all target audiences (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009, p. 39; Olins, 1989, p. 78). PowerOn has a vision statement and a set of values. Safety is part of one of the values, and the organisation states that safety and service are top priorities in achieving the organisation’s vision. The organisation has had several changes of ownership in recent years, as a result of mergers, acquisitions, and divestitures. Changes in ownership can potentially cause gaps between corporate personality, identity, and image. This can confuse stakeholders and lead to a lack of support for an organisation (Balmer & Gray, 2000, p. 259). This again indicates the importance of corporate reputation management for the organisation, particularly focusing on organisation members, in order to develop a clear corporate image and strengthen corporate reputation.

3.3 Data collection methods

3.3.1 Data collection methods – stage one

The first stage of research involved identifying and analysing corporate history stories on organisations’ websites. This enabled the researcher to investigate how corporate stories in external communication are used as a corporate identity cue. The research focused on corporate history stories due to their suggested importance in corporate reputation management. This is evidenced from the literature, as an organisation’s history is claimed to drive corporate reputation (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 136), and there is arguably an expectation for large organisations to communicate their history (Delahaye et al., 2009, p. 39). A corporate history story is proposed to be important in communicating with
external audiences (Otubanjo, 2013, p. 60), as well as organisation members (based upon Baruch (2009, p. 17), Brunninge (2009, p. 14), and Gaggiotti (2010, pp. 157, 164)).

Corporate history can be distinguished from other content on an organisation’s website by the focus on events in an organisation’s past. However, it was necessary to differentiate between corporate history stories and other presentations of corporate history, such as brief timelines or lists of events. The study therefore followed the definition of corporate history stories proposed in this thesis (see appendix two) by only considering the presentation of corporate history in a structured text (using full sentences and paragraphs) to be a story. This enabled clear identification of corporate history stories on organisations’ websites.

Organisations’ websites were a relevant source of data for this stage of research, as it has been proposed in the literature that a corporate story may be shared on an organisation’s website (Dowling, 2006, p. 94). Specifically, corporate history stories have been identified as a common type of story presented through organisations’ websites (Delahaye et al., 2009, p. 39). In general, the internet is of key importance in an organisation’s corporate communication activity, and for presenting corporate identity (Suvačij et al., 2012, p. 160). A corporate website in particular is important for impression management by organisations, and for building corporate image, because it is a constantly available source of information for an organisation’s stakeholders (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, p. 343). The procedures for collecting data in the first stage of the study are detailed in the data collection and coding manual (appendix three).

A limitation of using websites as a source of data, however, is that websites are changeable, and subsequent visitors to a website may find a different environment than the one encountered by a researcher (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, p. 345). Data from organisations’ websites can show how organisations present themselves, but cannot provide insight into how stakeholders perceive an organisation. This is noted by Opoku, Abratt, and Pitt (2006, p. 20) and Opoku,
Hultman, and Saheli-Sangari (2008, p. 124) in their studies on business schools. This stage of research began investigating how corporate history stories are used as a corporate identity cue. The analysis involved identifying the reputation platforms conveyed through the stories and using impression management theory to interpret how these could influence audiences. However, the second stage of research was needed to investigate stories in internal communication (official and unofficial) and gain audiences’ perspectives on the influence of stories.

3.3.2 Multiple data collection methods – stage two

The second stage of the research used a case study approach to gain insight into corporate stories from the perspective of organisation members. The study investigated different types of corporate story within the organisations (official and unofficial, including corporate history stories). This provided a broader insight into the use of stories as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences. Data was collected in the case studies using multiple methods, namely semi-structured interviews, documentary research, and observation research (of physical premises and artefacts). These data collection methods were selected based on their ability to address the research questions posed in this thesis, and their validity in research on corporate reputation and stories.

Multiple data collection methods are common in studies investigating corporate identity and stories. The qualitative, ethnographic study by Chen (2012, p. 311) collected data through multiple methods to investigate stories in the organisation behind the Burning Man event. 81 interviews were conducted with organisers and members, including active and former volunteers, and employees from various departments (Chen, 2012, p. 318). Data was also collected through observations and participant-observations of activities (such as meetings, volunteer training, and mixers), and by collecting stories shared via emails, electronic newsletters, and the Burning Man website. These data collection methods captured both
recorded and spontaneously recounted stories intended for fellow participants (Chen, 2012, p. 319). This study indicates that semi-structured interviews, observation research, and documentary research were appropriate to investigate official and unofficial corporate stories, and to gain organisation members’ perspectives of stories.

In the area of corporate identity, He and Balmer (2013, pp. 401, 409, 411) conducted three in depth case studies of building societies in the British financial services industry, to investigate corporate identity anchors. The case studies included semi-structured interviews with senior managers, including three CEOs, as well as non-participant observation within the three organisations over several months. Documentary data was also collected, including internal memoranda, recommendations of outside consultants, annual reports, leaflets, brochures, internal magazines, media coverage, video and audio tapes, and archives. The study by Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006, p. 847) investigated corporate identity across a number of different industries, by conducting 32 in-depth interviews with managers, directors, and graduate trainees in several companies. The study also used documentary data, including company literature, information from corporate websites, and press releases (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006, pp. 849-850). These studies indicate that the selected data collection methods were appropriate for investigating how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue. Each of the data collection methods are considered in more detail below, including the procedures that were followed in using each method.

3.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the main method of data collection in the second stage of the study, as they could bring insight into corporate stories from the perspective of organisation members. An interview guide was used in the interviews, which included introductory comments, key questions, prompts, and closing comments, as recommended by Robson (2002, p. 278). The interview guide
is shown in the case study protocol developed by the researcher, presented in appendix four. The guide ensured that the interviews addressed the key issues in the study, as the questions were derived from the theoretical framework illustrated in chapter two. Mainly open-ended questions were used in the interviews, as these allowed deeper, and even unexpected, answers, and also encouraged cooperation and rapport between the interviewer and interviewee (Robson, 2002, p. 276). However, there are potential problems with open-ended questions, in that they can result in a loss of control by the interviewer, and they are more difficult to analyse than closed questions (Robson, 2002, p. 276). Therefore, the interview guide also included a section of closed questions, using a five-point Likert-type scale, which summarised the open questions. This helped clarify interviewees’ perspectives of corporate stories, and aided the data analysis.

Alongside using the interview guide, interviewers also had the flexibility to vary, omit, or add questions, and to probe answers, and allow interviewees to explain, or build on, their responses (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 205; Saunders et al., 2012, pp. 374-375). Modifying the interviews to fit the case study organisations and individual participants elicited more relevant and trustworthy data (as noted by He (2012, p. 614)). This also led to the discussion of relevant issues around corporate stories which had not been previously considered by the researcher. The native category approach influenced the design of the interview guide and the questioning style. This meant that the interview questions aimed to avoid imposing the researcher’s prior understanding on the research process, and instead focused on the understanding of the interview participants (Buckley & Chapman, 1997, p. 290; Harris, 2000, pp. 757-761). This approach was important in order to gain organisation members’ perspectives of corporate stories, and is discussed further in the section on data analysis procedures.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, or via telephone where face-to-face interviews were not feasible. Interviews were conducted with members of the corporate/internal communication departments, as well as managers and front line employees in various areas and roles within the organisations. This is
discussed in more detail in the sampling section. The interviewer made notes after each interview about where the interview took place, how it went, and their feelings about the interview. This provided contextual information, which aided analysis of the interviews, as recommended by Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 476). Participants were asked prior to the start of each interview whether they consented to the interview being recorded. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and then analysed using the NVivo software package. Procedures for the data analysis are discussed further later in the chapter.

3.3.4 Documentary research

Documentary research was also undertaken as part of the case studies, in order to investigate the use of corporate stories through print and digital channels. The purpose of the documentary research was primarily to support the interview data, in keeping with the proposition that the most important use of documents in case studies is to “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (Yin, 2009, p. 102). Internal and external organisational documentation was collected from the case study organisations, including company reports, corporate advertising, corporate website material, and internal newspapers and magazines. Some of these documents were in the public domain, while others were only available within the organisation. Advantages of documentary research are that it is relatively unobtrusive, and can cover a broad range of events and settings (Yin, 2009, p. 102). This enabled the investigation of corporate storytelling through print and digital channels aimed at a broad audience, as well as those that were specific to particular business areas. However, it is important to note that the documents were each written for a particular purpose and audience, and could have been biased towards a particular view of events (as noted by Yin (2009, p, 105)). They may not have accurately represented how different organisation members perceived situations (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 550). The documents were therefore analysed alongside the data from the interviews in order to consider the perspective of organisation members.
3.3.5 Observation research

Observation research was used in the study, in order to provide contextual information from within the case study organisations (Yin, 2009, p. 109), and supplement the interviews and documentary research. Organisational artefacts are a medium of internal and external communication, which can present corporate values, and help develop corporate identity, as noted by George, Owoyemi, and Onakala (2012, p. 37). Gathering data using observation research was relevant to investigate whether corporate stories are reflected in the physical premises and artefacts of the organisations. Observations were briefly recorded in note or audio format by the researcher at the time of the observation. Full notes were then written up at the end of the day, with additional contextual information, as recommended by Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 444). A weakness of observation research, however, is that it is time-consuming and therefore selective, as only a limited amount of observations can be made by one researcher (Yin, 2009, p. 102). In order to bring consistency to the observation process, observations were made alongside other fieldwork, as suggested by Yin (2009, p. 102), namely at each location that interviews took place.

The case study protocol (appendix four) details the procedures for collecting data in the second stage of the study. A case study protocol is essential when conducting more than one case study (Yin, 2009, p. 45), as it provides a standardised procedure to guide the researcher. This enhanced consistency between the case studies, and would also enable replication of the case studies by other researchers. The protocol lists the activities involved in the data collection, namely semi-structured interviews, observation research, and documentary research, and specifies how these should be undertaken (as discussed in this chapter). It also provides the resources required for the fieldwork, specifically the interview guides, participant information sheets, and organisational and individual consent forms (discussed in the section on ethical issues). All the data collected in the case studies was compiled into a case study database. This is recommended by Yin (2009, pp. 118-119) as a way of organising and documenting all the raw data,
so that other researchers can review the evidence directly if required. The use of a case study database is discussed further in the section on reliability.

3.4 Sampling strategy

Cases needed to be selected from populations for both stages of research, in accordance with the cross-sectional and case study research designs discussed previously. The cases were sampled separately for the first and second stages of the study.

3.4.1 Sampling strategy – stage one

The sampling strategy for the first stage of research is illustrated in Figure 3.1, and discussed below.

Figure 3.1: Sampling strategy – stage one

![Diagram of sampling strategy for stage one]

- FTSE 100 Index (100 cases)
  - Census
  - 100 cases
- Charities in England & Wales with an income range of £10,000,001 + (398 cases)
  - Systematic sample
  - 100 cases
The cases in the first stage of the study were selected from two populations, in order to investigate the use of corporate history stories by for-profit and non-profit organisations. The FTSE 100 Index was selected as the population to explore stories in the for-profit sector. A list of the FTSE 100 constituents was obtained from the London Stock Exchange website (“FTSE 100”, 2011). The FTSE 100 Index has been used as a sampling frame in previous studies investigating corporate communication, although not specifically corporate stories. For example, Walmsley and Bond (2003, p. 149) used two industry groups listed on the UK FTSE 100 to explore the relationship between corporate environmental reporting and share price performance. Cummins and Bawden (2010, p. 284) analysed the annual reports of FTSE 100 companies in terms of their presentation of information and knowledge. This demonstrates the validity of using the FTSE 100 Index as a population in this study. The FTSE 100 Index was also suitable because it includes organisations from a range of industries. This was important in this stage of research, as there could be differences in how corporate history stories are used according to the industry/industries an organisation operates in.

The size of this population was 100 companies. In order to gather data from a sufficient range of organisations, it was desirable that a census of the population should be undertaken. However, as this stage of research focused on corporate history stories on organisations’ websites, it was necessary to firstly check that each organisation had a website before data collection began. If not, then the organisation would be excluded from the sample. However, all the organisations in the population had a corporate website, and were therefore included in the study.

The non-profit population was from the charity sector, as chapter one discusses that corporate reputation is becoming increasingly important for charities (“Reputation Institute’s UK RepTrack™ Pulse 2011”, 2011, p. 1). It was therefore beneficial to investigate the use of corporate history stories as a corporate identity cue by charities. The population was decided with reference to the Charity Commission website (a UK government website). This website holds details of all the organisations that are recognised as charitable in law in England and Wales in
The Register of Charities. The population selected was charities with an income range of £10,000,001 and over (the highest income bracket on the website), a total of 398 charities. There are a large number of registered charities in the UK (over 161,000 at the time of sampling (“Facts and figures”, 2011)). The highest income charities were selected as the population, as these are the most likely to have a website and engage in communication with external stakeholders.

The sampling frame was obtained through conducting a search within The Register of Charities for charities operating in England and Wales with an income range of £10,000,001 and over. This produced an alphabetical list of the 398 companies in the population. The charities on the list were numbered alphabetically from one to 398 and a systematic sampling method was used to obtain a random sample of charities representative of the population. The researcher used a random number generator to pick a random number as the starting point for selection, then selected every fourth charity on the list. Each charity selected was checked to determine whether it had a website. If the charity did not meet this requirement then the next charity on the list was selected, and so on until a charity that met this requirement was identified. This continued until 100 charities with a website were selected, so that the sample size was comparable to that of the for-profit sector sample. As it is not possible to generalise the findings of a study beyond the sampling frame (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 264), the findings from this stage of research are only directly applicable to these populations.

3.4.2 Sampling strategy – stage two

The populations selected for the second stage of research were two companies in the UK energy industry, as discussed previously in this chapter. The number of case studies needed in a study depends on the feasibility, depth of analysis of each case, and theoretical saturation (He, 2012, p. 613). For this study, time and resource constraints meant it was feasible to conduct two case studies, in order to collect sufficient amounts of data from each organisation to conduct an in-depth
analysis of each case. The sampling strategy is illustrated in Figure 3.2 and discussed below.

**Figure 3.2: Sampling strategy – stage two**
The case study organisations were selected from the key players in the UK energy industry: the gas and electric suppliers with a market share of over 5% each (the big six suppliers) and the seven DNOs. However, two of the DNOs are part of the same groups as two of the suppliers, as noted previously. Each of the six gas and electric suppliers were initially approached to take part in the study. The suppliers are the most diverse organisations in the industry, as most of them are involved in gas and electricity generation, storage, and or transmission, as well as supply, and therefore would provide the greatest insight into the industry. The corporate websites of these organisations were used to gain the email address of an employee in a relevant job role (such as a corporate or internal communication manager), and an email was sent to the identified individual. The email provided information about the research, and invited the organisation to take part in the study. One of the six organisations agreed to participate, referred to in this thesis as Energy One. As it had been determined that cases should be conducted on two organisations though, a DNO was subsequently approached and invited to take part as well.

The DNO was selected using a non-probability judgement sample. A judgement sample was appropriate, as this was an exploratory study, and this method enabled the researcher to select a case based on the insight it could provide into the research issues (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 232; Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2002, p. 114). In this instance, the DNO was selected based on its group owner, and geographical distribution area. This was in order to gain a broader understanding of the use of corporate stories in the UK energy industry by conducting case studies on organisations that were part of different groups, and operating in different areas. He (2012, pp. 613-614) took a similar approach in his study on corporate identity, using a judgement sample to select case study organisations based on factors including geographic location. The same process was used to identify and approach an individual in the organisation as in the selection of the gas and electric supplier. As the first DNO selected agreed to participate in the study, no further organisations were approached to take part in the research.
Once the organisations had agreed to take part in the research, a sample for the semi-structured interviews was selected. A chart of each organisation’s structure, and lists of employees in each area, were used as the sampling frames. A judgement sample of the business areas to be included in the study, and the individual organisation members to be interviewed, was selected in consultation with the internal communication manager in each organisation. This technique was appropriate, as it enabled the selection of organisation members in both customer service and operational areas of the business, and in front line, middle manager, and senior manager roles. This enabled the study to gain a range of perspectives on corporate stories, as recommended by Chen (2012, p. 328).

Previous studies investigating corporate identity and stories have taken a similar approach. Suvatjis et al. (2012, p. 157) used judgement sampling in their study on corporate identity, in order to select corporate identity consultants and business managers for semi-structured interviews. Judgement sampling was also used in corporate story research by Auvinen et al. (2013, pp. 416, 420) to select managers in Finland, in order to investigate manipulation in stories. This indicates that judgement sampling was a valid approach in this study. Participants were recruited through an email sent to their work address, providing information about the study and inviting them to take part, followed up with a telephone call if necessary.

The internal communication managers were key informants and gatekeepers in the research. Key informants are interviewees who can direct a researcher to situations, events, and people that can assist the progress of an investigation (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 436), and are critical to the success of a case study (Yin, 2009, p. 107). The internal communication managers were key informants, as they had insider knowledge of the business areas and roles within the organisations, and were able to suggest areas and individuals to take part in the study. In this respect they were also gatekeepers, as access to other parts of the organisations, and individuals, was dependent on the internal communication managers. However, the support for this study from the internal communication managers meant that they facilitated access for the researcher to different areas of the
organisation and to particular individuals, and therefore their role as gatekeepers did not negatively impact the study.

Conducting a small number of interviews was appropriate for the qualitative approach taken in the study, as qualitative researchers usually study a small sample of people in a particular context (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27). The total number of interviews conducted in each organisation depended partly on the size and structure of the organisation, as this affected the number needed to gain an understanding of the use of stories across different business areas. Interviews were carried out until data saturation point was reached. This was determined by observing when interviews had ceased to bring new insights into the research questions addressed in the study. An estimate of the number of interviews required was provided to the case study organisations when they were approached to take part in the study, however, in order to indicate the time commitment of the research project. It was estimated that around 50 interviews would be sufficient within the gas and electric supplier, and around 20 interviews within the DNO (as they are a smaller and less diverse organisation). The researcher had the flexibility though to conduct more or less interviews in each organisation, depending on the needs of the study.

3.5 Data analysis

Having discussed the data collection procedures and sampling strategy, this section focuses on how the data was analysed. The section firstly presents the analytical framework that was used to guide the analysis of data collected in the study. The section then considers the techniques and procedures that were used to analyse the data.
3.5.1 Framework for data analysis

To ensure coherence between the two stages of the study, an analytical framework was developed to guide the analysis of the data. This is based on the theoretical framework developed in chapter two. Using this framework enabled the findings from both stages of research to be synthesised in order to address the research questions posed in this thesis. The framework is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: Framework for data analysis
As shown in Figure 3.3, the analysis of official and unofficial corporate stories involved investigating how reputation platforms were conveyed through stories, represented by particular elements of stories. Chapter two discusses that analysing impression management strategies and behaviours in communication can bring insight into how communication could affect audiences’ impressions of an organisation. This use of impression management was therefore appropriate for investigating how corporate stories could influence audiences. The strategies and behaviours established from previous studies (including Bolino and Turnley (2003, p. 143); Bolino et al. (2008, p. 1081); Dubrin (2011, p. 60), Jones and Pittman (1982, as cited in Bolino and Turnley (1999, pp. 187, 190), Rosenfeld et al. (1995, pp. 29, 49, 52, 68), Schlenker and Weigold (1992, pp. 159-162), Schniederjans et al. (2013, p. 913), as discussed in chapter two) were identified in the use of the reputation platforms. This was used to interpret how the platforms could influence audiences.

Although the analytical framework was the same for both stages of the study, the data analysis techniques and procedures were different, due to the nature of the data collected in each stage. The first stage of the study involved content analysis. The second stage of the study used thematic analysis and a native category approach to analyse the qualitative data (predominantly from the open interview questions, supported by the documentary and observation research). Exploratory factor analysis and regression analysis were used to analyse the quantitative data (from the closed interview questions). These techniques are discussed further below.

### 3.5.2 Stage one data analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse the corporate history stories collected from the organisations’ websites. Content analysis is an approach to the analysis of texts, which involves systematically analysing their characteristics (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 291; Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1). Advantages of content analysis are that it is
unobtrusive and can cope with large volumes of data (Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 18, 40-42). In this study, it enabled analysis of the use of corporate history stories by a range of organisations in different industries and markets in the for-profit and non-profit sectors. Content analysis can provide new insights and increase a researcher’s understanding of particular phenomena (Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 18, 40-42). In this instance, it brought insight into how this type of corporate story is used as a corporate identity cue.

Content analysis is arguably effective in corporate story research, as it can enable a deeper understanding of communication between organisations and their stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2000, p. 123). Several authors have used content analysis to investigate corporate communication via corporate websites. Janssen et al. (2012, pp. 33-34) used content analysis to investigate corporate stories on the websites of 45 Dutch companies. Chapleo, Carillo Duran, and Diaz (2011, pp. 25, 27) used it to explore the extent to which UK universities effectively transmit their brands’ promises online. Content analysis was also used by Opoku et al. (2006, p. 20) to investigate the websites of South African business schools, and by Opoku et al. (2008, p. 124), in a similar study analysing the websites of 17 Swedish universities. Content analysis has been used in investigating offline corporate communication too. For example, a qualitative study by Leuthesser and Kohli (1997, p. 60) analysed the mission statements in company annual reports. Knox and Bickerton (2003, pp. 1009-1010) used quantitative content analysis to measure the consistency of formal corporate communication.

Content analysis has been used to explore impression management in corporate communication, by authors such as Brennan et al. (2009, pp. 789, 799), Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2007, pp. 343-344), Merkl-Davies et al. (2011, p. 316), Ogden and Clarke (2005, p. 313), and Schleicher (2012, p. 554). Content analysis was used by Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2007, pp. 343-344) to assess the use of impression management behaviours on the corporate websites of 110 companies from Fortune magazine’s list of the leading 500 US companies. The study by Brennan et al. (2009, p. 799) used content analysis to examine annual
results press releases from 21 UK companies. The study found that these involved multiple impression management behaviours. Merkl-Davies et al. (2011, p. 316) applied content analysis to analyse impression management in 93 UK listed companies’ Chairman’s Statements. Similarly, Schleicher (2012, p. 554) used content analysis to examine the underlying messages in the Chairman’s Statement in annual reports of listed companies from 1996-2002. Ogden and Clarke (2005, p. 313) conducted content analysis to investigate the use of assertive and defensive impression management strategies in statements about customer service in the annual reports of 10 water companies. These studies indicate the validity of using content analysis to investigate impression management in corporate stories, as well as the presence of story elements.

Content analysis was conducted in this study using human coding, which involved individuals coding the corporate history stories using a coding manual. The purpose of a coding manual is to give coders instructions on coding statements from texts, based on pre-established variables (Brennan et al. 2009, p. 801; Neuendorf, 2002, p. 52). The data collection and coding manual developed by the researcher for the study is presented in appendix three. The manual firstly provides instructions for collecting corporate history stories from organisations’ websites. It then gives instructions for coding the stories according to specified variables, based on the analytical framework. The stories were firstly coded for elements, and then the data identified as elements were coded for impression management strategies and behaviours. The coding involved identifying these variables in statements in the corporate history stories. Statements ranged from single words to multiple sentences, and one code was assigned per statement in each stage of the coding.

Content analysis is generally rooted in a quantitative research strategy, as it aims to quantify content in terms of predetermined variables or categories (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 290). This was appropriate for identifying elements in the stories, in order to investigate how stories are used as a corporate identity cue. The elements were defined based on the literature review in chapter two. However, it is
suggested by Krippendorff (2004, p. 16) that all reading of texts is initially qualitative, even when converting characteristics of a text to numbers. This is particularly true when using human coding (rather than a computer programme), as the coder has to interpret the data based on the coding manual. Human coding enables detailed and sophisticated analysis of texts. (Brennan et al. (2009, pp. 801-802) propose that this mean human coding is appropriate for exploring impression management techniques, due to their subtlety and complexity. A qualitative approach was therefore suitable for interpreting the impression management strategies and behaviours evident in the elements in stories. Subsequently, the content analysis in the study involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Content analysis of corporate history stories on organisations’ websites was appropriate to investigate how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms. It was also used to begin exploring how stories could influence audiences, by investigating impression management activity involved in conveying the platforms. However, a limitation of content analysis is that it focuses on the content of communication, and does not consider audience perspectives, as noted by Brennan et al. (2009, p. 823). Therefore, the second stage of research was required to gain audiences’ perspectives of corporate stories, focusing on the perceptions of organisation members. As noted previously, this was important to gain a broader understanding of how stories are used as a corporate identity cue and in particular the influence of stories on audiences.

3.5.3 Stage two data analysis

The data collected in the case studies was analysed using thematic analysis and a native category approach. The process followed in the study by Feldman et al. (2004, pp. 149, 165), as well as the basic system of thematic analysis presented by King and Horrocks (2010, p. 153), was used to develop the data analysis
procedures for this study (detailed in the case study protocol in appendix four). Themes are defined as “recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question” (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 150). This technique was used in analysing interviews by King and Horrocks (2010, p. 150), and was also used in analysing data collected from documentary and observation research in this study. Thematic analysis requires the researcher to produce a list of pre-defined categories, and these were based on the analytical framework. The framework illustrates key themes in terms of the reputation platforms, impression management strategies and behaviours, and influence of stories on audiences. Using these as categories for the thematic analysis ensured that the data analysis would address the research questions. The pre-determined categories are listed in the case study protocol in appendix four.

The native category approach involved also coding the data based on themes that emerged from the data itself, to understand how participants perceive their own world (Buckley & Chapman, 1997, p. 290; Harris, 2000, p. 755). This ensured that the analysis focused on participants’ concerns rather than just the researcher’s concerns (Harris, 2000, pp. 757-761). Themes derived from the native category approach were then compared with those deductively derived from the analytical framework, as in the study by Harris (2000, p. 763). This approach was appropriate to investigate corporate stories in terms of the issues identified in the literature, as well as from the perspective of organisation members.

Thematic analysis has been applied in previous studies investigating corporate stories. For example, the study by Feldman et al. (2004, pp. 149, 165) used this approach to analyse stories told by employees in city administrations, to understand their perspectives of change. Feldman et al. (2004, pp. 149, 165) began with a list of descriptive categories focusing on specific content and then added more categories through multiple rounds of analysis. This allowed theory to emerge from the data. Similarly, Auvinen et al. (2013, p. 420) used thematic analysis to analyse the stories told by managers in Finland, by categorising the
stories and then producing a typology of manipulation in managers’ stories. Thematic analysis has also been used in research on corporate communication. Brennan et al. (2009, p. 802) used this approach in their study of annual results press releases, and Ogden and Clarke (2005, p. 319) used thematic analysis in their investigation of customer service statements in annual reports. These studies support the validity of content analysis in this research area.

In addition to thematic analysis of the qualitative data, statistical analysis was conducted on the quantitative data collected from the closed interview questions in the case studies. As the questions used a Likert-type scale, the mean value of the responses to the questions was calculated to gain a broad understanding of interviewees’ perceptions of stories in the organisations, including reputation platforms conveyed through stories. Exploratory factor analysis was then used to reduce the data collected into its underlying themes (Malhotra, 2010, p. 636), represented by factors. This was necessary, as several questions were asked about how corporate stories act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms, and the influence of stories on audiences. Factor analysis was appropriate to check whether the questions actually represented these underlying themes. Principal component analysis was used as the method of factor analysis, as this considered the total variance in the data, and is recommended to establish the minimum number of factors that will account for the maximum variance (Malhotra, 2010, p. 643). In order to determine the number of factors to extract, only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were retained. Malhotra (2010, p. 643) recommends this approach where the number of variables is less than 20 in order to obtain a conservative number of factors. This meant it was appropriate in this study, as there were 17 closed questions asked in the interviews (which are the variables).

Orthogonal rotation, using the varimax method, was used to calculate the loading of variables on each factor. Orthogonal rotation keeps the factors unrelated while they are rotated, in the expectation that most of the underlying variables may not be related (Field, 2009, p. 643). The varimax method attempts to maximise the
dispersion of loadings within factors, by loading a smaller number of variables onto each factor. This is recommended as a good general approach that simplifies the interpretation of factors (Field, 2009, p. 644), hence its use in this study. The factors were interpreted by identifying common themes in the questions that have high loadings on the same factor (Field, 2009, pp. 666, 668; Malhotra, 2010, p. 645).

The anti-image correlation matrix was checked when the initial factor analysis was run. It is proposed that this should be above 0.5 for all variables, and any variable that has a value below 0.5 should be removed from the analysis and the analysis run again (Field, 2009, p. 659). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) was used to test the appropriateness of factor analysis. The KMO statistic varies between zero and one; zero indicates that patterns of correlation are diffused (which negatively impacts the reliability of factor analysis), whereas one indicates that patterns of correlation are compact (meaning that factor analysis should produce distinct and reliable factors) (Field, 2009, p. 647). Values below 0.5 therefore imply that factor analysis is inappropriate (Malhotra, 2010, p. 638). For this study, the KMO statistic was required to be at least 0.7, as 0.7 and above is viewed as “good” (Field, 2009, p. 647).

Bartlett’s test of sphericity examines the hypothesis that the variables are uncorrelated (Malhotra, 2010, p. 638). This was used to check that there were some relationships between variables, which is necessary for factor analysis to be appropriate (Field, 2009, p. 660). This was required to be significant at the 95% confidence level for this study, as this is the commonly accepted level. The reliability of each factor was tested using Cronbach’s alpha. The alpha value was required to be at least 0.5, as this is suggested to be a sufficient reliability score by Nunnally (1967 as cited in Churchill, 1979 p. 68). However, 0.7 and above is the generally acceptable value (Field, 2009, p. 675), and therefore scores of 0.7 and above were preferable to indicate a greater level of reliability.
Once the factors had been determined, further statistical analysis was carried out on the factors rather than the original data. The factors were identified as either dependent or independent variables, based on the underlying theme they represented. Bivariate regression analysis was then used to test the relationships between the factors, as this can predict a dependent variable from an independent variable (Field, 2009, p. 198). In this study it was used to predict whether conveying reputation platforms in corporate stories influences audiences. When conducting regression analysis, the beta coefficient ($\beta$), significance, and $R^2$ values are important. $\beta$ is used to denote the standardised regression coefficient, and indicates the number of standard deviations that the outcome will change as a result of one standard deviation change in the independent variable (Field, 2009, p. 239; Malhotra, 2010, p. 573). The $\beta$ values are measured in standard deviation units and are directly comparable, therefore they indicate the importance of an independent variable in predicting the dependent variable (Field, 2009, p. 239).

The significance value indicates whether an independent variable makes a significant contribution to predicting the dependent variable. The value was required to be less than 0.05 in this study, as recommended by Field (2009, p. 241). $R^2$ (the coefficient of multiple determination) measures the strength of association in regression analysis. It varies between zero and one, and signifies the proportion of the total variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable (Malhotra, 2010, p. 578). These values are all considered when presenting the findings from this part of the research in chapter five.

3.6 Pilot testing

3.6.1 Pilot testing – data collection procedures

A pilot test of the data collection procedures and content analysis of corporate history stories on organisations’ websites was conducted prior to the first stage of the study. The purpose of the pilot test for the data collection was to find out if the
data the study aimed to collect could be found on organisations’ websites, and which sections of the websites contained the required data. As this stage of research collected data from organisations’ websites, without any contact with organisation members, it was acceptable to include cases in the pilot test that would also be part of the final study. Subsequently the populations for the pilot test of the data collection procedures were the FTSE 100 Index of companies, and the 100 charities sampled from the population of 398 charities with an income range of £10,000,001 and over. A random sample of 20 organisations (10% of each population) was selected from the sampling frames of the list of FTSE 100 constituents and list of charities, by numbering each of the organisations in the list and using a random number generator to select the number of each case to be included in the sample.

The researcher developed initial data collection procedures, as part of the data collection and coding manual. These defined the data the study aimed to collect, using the definition of corporate history stories proposed in chapter two. The researcher then looked at each website’s homepage and the subsequent levels down in the hierarchy, as well as using the website’s search engine (if available), to find which sections contained corporate history stories. The pilot test found that corporate history stories were often in the History section of the website, which itself was often under the hierarchy of the About Us or Our Company section (or similar). Instructions were subsequently given in the final data collection procedures to look for corporate history stories in these sections of organisations’ websites. The terms “history”, “story”, “milestones”, and “heritage” were all used in referring to corporate history stories on websites in the pilot test, and so instructions were also given to use these as search terms in the final study. Appendix three presents the final data collection procedures in the data collection and coding manual used in the study.

Regarding the second stage of the study, piloting is difficult in case study research but is also less important, as the flexibility of case studies means that piloting can be incorporated within the study itself (Robson, 2002, pp. 185, 383). In practice,
this meant that the data collection procedures could be amended throughout the data collection process in the case studies. The interview guide was adjusted after the initial interviews with members of the internal communication department in the first case study, in order to better address the research questions. Additional questions were also incorporated into later interviews in both case studies, based on issues raised in earlier interviews that had not previously been considered. The case study protocol (appendix four) details the data collection procedures for the case studies, along with the interview guide.

3.6.2 Pilot testing – content analysis procedures

The coding procedures developed by the researcher for content analysis of the corporate history stories were pilot tested for reliability and validity prior to the first stage of research. Reliability was tested based on agreement between two coders when coding the data according to the measures in the coding manual, as recommended by Neuendorf (2002, p. 144). The level of agreement between the coders is known as the inter-coder reliability. The inter-coder reliability test was conducted based on the procedure used in the study by Brennan et al. (2009, p. 802). Accordingly, data from a randomly selected sub-sample of 10% of the sample in the final study was independently coded by two coders. The results were then compared with recommended reliability levels. The populations and sampling strategy were the same as for the pilot test of the data collection procedures. Reliability coefficients of 80% or greater are acceptable in content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002, pp. 142-143), and this was subsequently the minimum reliability level accepted for the study. The first coder was the lead researcher, who provided the second coder with the coding manual and the sample data. The second coder was not otherwise involved with the study, but had prior research experience.

The results of the pilot test for the coding procedures are shown in appendix five. The pilot test resulted in inter-coder reliability scores of above 80%. This meant
that the coding manual produced an acceptable level of reliability for use in the final study, and could be used by other researchers to replicate the study. The coders discussed the coding procedures following the pilot test, as recommended by Brennan et al. (2009, p. 803), in terms of their measurement and face validity. This included the clarity of instructions and definitions and ease of use. Minor issues with the initial coding procedures were identified, namely the need for more specific definitions of some impression management strategies and behaviours. These issues were addressed in the coding procedures for the final study, in order to enhance the validity of the coding manual. The final data collection and coding manual is shown in appendix three.

3.7 Credibility of research findings

The credibility of the research findings is an important issue, and is a result of the validity and reliability of the study. Validity refers to the closeness of fit between data and reality (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 20), and is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 42). Several types of validity are highlighted in research design, namely ecological validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 43), face validity (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 314), internal validity, external validity (generalisability), and construct validity (also referred to as measurement validity). Reliability is concerned with whether the results of a study are repeatable and consistent (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 41). The validity and reliability of the study are considered below, as well as the associated issue of bias.

3.7.1 Ecological validity

Ecological validity is concerned with whether findings are applicable to natural social settings. Case studies have high ecological validity, as they focus on the unique context of the case (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 43, 63). In this instance, the
findings of the study are directly applicable to the case study organisations. Recommendations can then be made which have practical relevance for the organisations, which indicates high ecological validity. In addition, the findings also have implications for other companies in the UK energy industry, and for organisations in industries with similar issues and challenges to the energy industry.

The study used qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. Qualitative research is associated with higher ecological validity than quantitative research, as qualitative data is collected in close proximity to a specific situation, and the influences of the local context are taken into account (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). On the other hand, the focus on procedures in quantitative research can hinder the connection between the research and the real world (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 168). Collecting data through semi-structured interviews in this study enhanced ecological validity, as the ability to probe answers adds significance and depth to the data obtained. Similarly, observation research is high on ecological validity too, as phenomena are studied in their natural context (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 352). The use of the case study strategy, and qualitative data collection and analysis methods, means that one of the key strengths of this study is its ecological validity.

3.7.2 Face validity

Face validity refers to whether measures used in a study are suitable measures of the concept under investigation (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 268). Face validity was an important concern for conducting the content analysis in the first stage of the study, as the reading of texts is rooted in common sense (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 314). This means that the instructions in the data collection and coding manual need to make sense to the coders, in light of the data to be coded. The pilot test of the coding manual established the face validity of the instructions, categories, and definitions, as part of the process of testing for inter-coder reliability and
subsequent discussion between coders. The face validity of the interview guide was established by obtaining feedback on the suggested questions from academics and other experts in the area of corporate identity and stories, as recommended by David and Sutton (2011, p. 268). The guide was amended based on the feedback before interviews were undertaken.

3.7.3 Internal validity

Internal validity is concerned with whether the data actually expresses the reality of the lives and beliefs of the participants (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 20). This was addressed primarily in the second stage of the study, by investigating corporate stories from the perspective of organisation members (who are both tellers and audiences of corporate stories). The sampling strategy enhanced the internal validity of the study, by ensuring that views were gained from participants at multiple hierarchical levels and in different business areas. The use of semi-structured interviews also led to high internal validity, as these gave the interviewer the flexibility to ask multiple questions on a particular theme, clarify answers, and gain in-depth understanding of issues. Internal validity was furthered enhanced by providing participants with the interview guide before the interview, as recommended by Saunders et al. (2012, p. 385). This gave participants the opportunity to consider the questions in advance and subsequently provide more thoughtful answers, and also gather any supporting documentation.

Internal validity can also refer to whether there is a good match between researchers’ observations and the theoretical ideas they develop (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 395). Data triangulation enhanced this aspect of internal validity, as using multiple data collection methods and sources of evidence provided more than one measure of the same phenomena. This minimised any chance of misperceptions. Conducting the study in two stages, and using content analysis, semi-structured interviews, documentary research, and observation research to gather and analyse multiple sources of data achieved triangulation. The native category approach
adopted in collecting and analysing data from the case studies also meant that the study considered issues raised by participants alongside the theoretical framework developed from the literature review. Overall, these approaches meant that the findings and conclusions drawn from the study were more accurate and convincing (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 273; Stake, 1995, p. 134; Yin, 2009, pp. 116-117).

3.7.4 External validity (generalisability)

External validity refers to whether the data shows the reality of the population from which the sample was selected (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 20), and whether the results of the study can be generalised beyond the specific research context (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 43). In the first stage of the study, a census was taken of the for-profit population, and a probability sampling technique was used to select the sample of the non-profit population. This means that the findings can be generalised to the populations. A non-probability judgement sampling technique was used in the second stage of the study. This was appropriate for the case study strategy adopted, but lacks the generalisability of probability sampling. However, with non-probability sampling, and particularly in case study research, generalisations can be made to theory rather than a population. It is the quality of theoretical inferences that can be made from the data collected that is used to assess the extent to which generalisations can be made (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 283; Yin, 2009, p. 38). Subsequently, the issue of generalisability was addressed in the second stage of the study by using data triangulation to enhance the quality of theoretical inferences in the study, as discussed in the section on internal validity.

External validity could have been threatened by non-response during the sampling. This occurred when selected organisations from the big six energy suppliers in the energy industry and potential interviewees within the case study organisations did not respond to invitations to participate in the study, or when they declined to participate, as noted by Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 176). This issue was addressed by selecting an alternative organisation from the population of
DNOS in the UK energy industry that would provide further insight into corporate stories, based on their group owner and geographic location. In terms of the interviews, alternative participants were selected from organisation members in similar job roles and business areas. Therefore, the researcher does not perceive that non-response caused a problem for the validity of the study.

3.7.5 Construct (measurement) validity

Construct or measurement validity is concerned with whether the measure that is devised of a concept really does reflect the concept (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 42), and the extent to which measurement questions actually measure the presence of the constructs they are intended to measure (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 429). This means that the definitions and categories for coding variables in the content analysis stage of the study needed to accurately reflect the concepts the researcher intended to investigate. This was achieved by using the literature on stories and impression management to develop the definitions and categories, and then pilot testing the coding manual to check their validity, as discussed previously.

Similarly, the interview guide for the case studies was also based on the literature, and was verified by experts in the area. Multiple sources of evidence were used to triangulate data in the case studies. Chains of evidence were established, by following the procedures for data collection and analysis in the case study protocol (appendix four), and recording all the data collected in a case study database. In this way, construct validity was achieved in the case study research, as recommended by Yin (2009, pp. 42, 116-117).

3.7.6 Reliability

Using a coding manual was important to enhance the reliability of the content
Otherwise there can be issues of reliability in human coding, due to the subjectivity involved in coding (Brennan et al., 2009, pp. 801-802). The coding manual enabled content to be coded in an objective, consistent manner by multiple coders (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 300), by providing explicit and comprehensive definitions and instructions for the coding. This would also allow the study to be replicated, and means that if other researchers repeated the process they should arrive at the same results, as advocated by Gunter (2000, pp. 56-57). The previous section on pilot testing discusses the inter-coder reliability tests of the coding manual before the final study. This produced inter-coder reliability scores above 80% (as can be seen in appendix five), which is proposed as acceptable by Neuendorf (2002, pp. 142-143). The reliability of the coding manual was tested again during the final study, with a randomly selected sub-sample of 10% of each sample in the study (using a random number generator to select the cases). This again resulted in inter-coder reliability scores above 80% (shown in appendix five). This indicated that the coding manual produced an acceptable level of reliability and could be used by other researchers to replicate the study.

Reliability was also addressed in the second stage of the study. A qualitative approach to data collection, as was used in the case studies, can sometimes lack transparency, and therefore be seen as subjective and difficult to replicate (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 408-409). However, reliability was ensured in this study by using a case study protocol and developing a case study database, as recommended by Yin (2009, p. 45). The case study protocol developed for the study (shown in appendix four) details the data collection and analysis procedures for conducting the case studies, and includes the documents required for fieldwork. This would enable the replication of the research. A case study database was used to organise and document all the raw data collected (both electronic and hard copies of evidence), so that other researchers could review the evidence directly if required (Yin, 2009, pp. 118-119). The electronic database includes the interview audio files and transcripts, the researcher’s typed up notes, and soft copies of documents. Hard copies of documents were kept as part of the physical database. Maintaining a chain of evidence also involves showing the basis for the
conclusions of the study, by referring to specific pieces of evidence in the case study database (Yin, 2009, p. 122). This is addressed in the findings and discussion chapters, by supporting the findings with reference to the data collected in the case studies.

3.7.7 Bias

It was important for the researcher to address potential issues of bias that could affect the validity and reliability of the study. Researcher bias refers to a researcher’s assumptions and preconceptions, which may affect the way in which they conduct research, and record, analyse, and report data (Robson, 2002, p. 172; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 192). The study minimised potential researcher bias through the use of a coding manual (appendix three), and case study protocol (appendix four), as well as the development of a case study database. These prescribed the processes for data collection and analysis, and ensured that all the data collected in the study was recorded. This minimised any subjectivity in the collection and analysis of data.

When conducting the semi-structured interviews, there were three types of potential bias to consider: interviewer bias, interviewee or response bias, and participation bias (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 381). Interviewer bias is where the interviewer’s comments, tone, or non-verbal behaviour creates bias in the way interviewees respond to the questions, or where the interviewer is biased in the way they interpret responses. Linked to this is interviewee or response bias, which can involve interviewees providing misleading or inaccurate information, withholding information, or being obstructive (Robson, 2002, p. 172). This may be caused by perceived interviewer bias, or when interviewees aim to present themselves or their organisation in a particular light (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 381). Participation bias in organisational research can occur from the nature of the organisation members who agree to be interviewed (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 381),
where the views of the selected participants may not reflect those of other organisation members.

These types of bias were partly addressed by preparation prior to the interviews, to ensure that the researcher was knowledgeable about the organisational context. This helped to build trust and credibility with interviewees, as recommended by Saunders et al. (2012, pp. 381, 385). This increased the likelihood of interviewees providing full and honest answers. Other factors that were considered in order to improve the quality of responses included selecting a private location for interviews wherever possible, using a mix of open and closed questions, phrasing questions clearly and neutrally, avoiding leading questions or jargon, and demonstrating attentive listening skills (Saunders et al., 2012, pp. 381, 385, 389). Participation bias was addressed as part of the sampling in the study, to ensure that participants were selected from a range of business areas and levels in the hierarchy, in order to gain multiple perspectives on corporate stories.

### 3.8 Ethical issues

Ethics in research refers to “the standards of behaviour that guide your conduct in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 226). A deontological view was taken in this study, in that the ends served by the research cannot justify the use of unethical research (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 227). The conduct of the research was guided by the University of Portsmouth’s code of ethics, and the researcher completed an Ethical Review Checklist, which was approved by the Portsmouth Business School ethics committee (see appendix six). Key ethical principles in conducting research include that harm to researchers and participants should be avoided in all instances, research participants should take part voluntarily and without coercion, and confidentiality of information and anonymity of individuals should be maintained (Economic and Social Research Council, 2012, p. 3). As the first stage of the study involved only the publicly available data from organisations’
websites, ethical issues were primarily of concern in the second stage of the study. Informed consent is important when securing the voluntary participation of interviewees, and the storage, analysis, and reporting of data is central to ensuring confidentiality and anonymity for both individuals and organisations. These issues are considered further below.

3.8.1 Informed consent

Obtaining informed consent from research participants is critical when conducting research with individuals (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 43). Informed consent involves giving sufficient information about the research, and ensuring that there is no coercion (either explicit or implicit), so that prospective participants can make an informed and free decision on whether to participate in a study (Economic and Social Research Council, 2012, p. 28). Research participants should be made aware of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish (British Sociological Association, 2002, p. 3). In this study, informed consent was obtained by providing a participant information sheet and a copy of the interview guide to all potential participants in the study. This gave them information about the research, and also introduced the themes of the research prior to the start of the data collection, as recommended by David and Sutton (2011, p. 49) and Saunders et al. (2012, p. 238). Both documents are included as part of the case study protocol in appendix four.

Individuals were asked if they were happy to take part in the study, having received the information sheet, and were requested to sign a consent form (or give verbal consent if the interview was conducted via telephone), to confirm their willingness to participate. A signed consent form was also obtained from each of the case study organisations (signed by a member of the organisation with the necessary authority), to confirm that the organisation was willing to take part in the study. Both the individual and organisational consent forms are included in the case study protocol in appendix four. However, the organisational consent form
was adapted based on the particular requirements of each organisation in terms of access, confidentiality, and anonymity.

3.8.2 Data storage, analysis, and reporting

The processing of any information relating to an identifiable living individual constitutes “personal data processing” and is subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. This included the data obtained from individuals in the case study organisations. To meet the requirements of the Act, the personal data collected from the interviews had to be obtained for specified, explicit purposes (as outlined in the participant information sheet), and had to be accurate, relevant, and not excessive in relation to its purpose. The data collected had to be kept securely (Economic and Social Research Council, 2012, p. 22), and stored and used in a way that protected the privacy of individuals (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 47). This could be by means of anonymity or confidentiality. Anonymity is possible where the researcher does not know or record the personal details of participants. Alternatively, confidentiality is where personal information is known and recorded by the researcher but not revealed (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 47).

When conducting the semi-structured interviews, it was necessary to record details about each individual, particularly the business area in which they worked, and their job role, in order to contextualise the interview data. Therefore, anonymity was not possible, and confidentiality was subsequently paramount. Each participant was assigned a code name, and personal details and contextual information that could identify an individual were stored separately from the other data collected (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 47). Electronic documents, audio recordings, and interview transcripts were stored electronically in password protected files and assigned identifying codes, which were recorded in the case study database. Hard copies of documents were stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office, and recorded in the same way. No third parties were allowed access to the data, except for other academics involved with the research. All data
will be kept for five years, to allow sufficient time for completion of the thesis and publication of the research in journal articles, and then destroyed.

It is vital to maintain confidentiality during the reporting of research (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 241). Therefore, code names are used in discussing the data from individuals in subsequent chapters of this thesis, and care is taken to prevent data being reported in a form that could potentially allow the identification of the participants (British Sociological Association, 2002, p. 5). The case study organisations have also been assigned code names. No confidential data gained during the data collection process, or data that could be used to identify the organisations, is reported in the thesis or other publications.

3.9 Conclusion – overview of methodology

To summarise this chapter, an overview of the methodology is outlined in Figure 3.4 below.
Figure 3.4: Overview of methodology

1. Research questions and theoretical framework
2. Interpretivist epistemology and subjectivist ontology
3. Sampling for stage 1: FTSE 100 Index and charities in England and Wales with an income range of £10,000,001+
4. Pilot test-data collection and coding procedures
5. Data collection - corporate history stories on websites
6. Analytical framework
7. Data analysis - content analysis
8. Present findings

9. Sampling for stage 2: 2 case studies in the UK energy industry
10. Develop interview guide and check validity
11. Data collection - semi-structured interviews, documentary, and observation research
12. Data analysis - thematic analysis, native category approach, regression analysis
13. Present findings

Discussion and conclusions
The framework illustrates that the methodology was guided by the research questions and theoretical framework developed in chapter two. An interpretivist epistemology and subjectivist ontology were adopted for the study, as these approaches are most appropriate for investigating corporate stories as a corporate identity cue. The populations for the first stage of the study were the FTSE 100 Index and charities in England and Wales with an income range of £10,000 and over. These were selected in order to investigate the use of official stories in external communication by for-profit and non-profit organisations. The populations in the second stage of the study were two organisations in the UK energy industry. This stage focused on investigating official and unofficial stories in internal communication and the influence of stories on organisation members. The sampling strategies for each stage of the study are discussed in detail previously in this chapter.

A pilot test was conducted to test the data collection and coding procedures for the first stage of the study. An interview guide was developed and checked for validity for use in the second stage. A mixed methods approach was adopted in the research design, using qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. The first stage of the study involved collecting corporate history stories from organisations’ websites and analysing them using content analysis. The second stage of the study involved collecting data using semi-structured interviews, documentary research, and observation research. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis and a native category approach. The quantitative data was analysed predominantly using regression analysis. The data analysis for both stages of the study was guided by the analytical framework presented in this chapter, which was developed from the theoretical framework for the study. This enables the findings from both stages to be synthesised in order to address the research questions. Having discussed the methodology, the next two chapters present the findings from each stage of the study.
Chapter 4 – Findings: Stage One

This chapter presents the findings from the first stage of the empirical study conducted to address the research questions posed in chapter two:

Q1. How are corporate stories used as a corporate identity cue?
Q2. How do corporate stories influence audiences, particularly organisation members?

The chapter begins with an overview of the data collection and analysis for the first stage of the research and recaps the framework used to guide the analysis. The findings from the research are then presented.

4.1 Overview of data collection in stage one

The first stage of research focused on corporate history stories, due to the suggested importance of this type of story in corporate reputation management. Corporate history stories were collected from the websites of organisations in the for-profit and non-profit sectors. As discussed in chapter three, the population for the for-profit sector was the FTSE 100 Index companies. The population for the non-profit sector was UK charities with an income range of £10,000,001 and over in The Register of Charities (a total population of 398 charities). All of the FTSE 100 Index companies were included in the sample, as each company had a website, which was required for them to be included in the study. 100 charities were randomly sampled from the non-profit population, having been checked to ensure they had a website.

Corporate history stories were identified from organisations’ websites, using the definition of corporate history stories as an official corporate story about the origins and history of the organisation, presented as a structured text (based upon Brunetti (2007, p. 114), Feldman et al. (2004, p. 153), and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 144)). Corporate history stories were found on the websites of around
half of both FTSE 100 companies and charities in the study, 47% and 52% respectively. The corporate history stories from the FTSE 100 companies’ websites were on average slightly longer than those from the charities’ websites (2134 words compared to 1991 words).

4.2 Overview of data analysis in stage one

Chapter three presents the framework used to guide the analysis of data collected in both stages of the study. This is recapped in Figure 4.1 below

**Figure 4.1: Framework for data analysis**
Using this framework enabled a cohesive approach to the analysis, despite the use of different analytical techniques according to the nature of the data collected from each stage of the study. The first stage of the study used content analysis to analyse the corporate history stories collected from organisations’ websites. The analysis investigated how reputation platforms are conveyed through stories, represented by elements of stories. Impression management theory was then used to analyse the strategies and behaviours involved in the platforms. The coding procedures are detailed in the data collection and coding manual (appendix three). The content analysis primarily involved a qualitative approach, but also used simple quantitative techniques, namely frequencies and percentages, to analyse the coded data. The next section begins to present the findings from the first stage of the study.

4.3 Reputation platforms conveyed through corporate history stories on websites

The first stage of the content analysis involved coding for elements in the corporate history stories, in order to identify how reputation platforms are conveyed through the stories. A summary of the elements identified is presented in Table 4.1, which represents each of the platforms.

Table 4.1: Reputation platforms conveyed through corporate history stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reputation platform:</th>
<th>Element in stories:</th>
<th>FTSE 100 company stories:</th>
<th>Charity stories:</th>
<th>All stories:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. with element:</td>
<td>Avg. per story:</td>
<td>No. with element:</td>
<td>Avg. per story:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(percentage)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(percentage)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>1. Activities</td>
<td>17 (36.2%)</td>
<td>27 (51.9%)</td>
<td>44 (44.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Accomplishments</td>
<td>40 (85.1%)</td>
<td>39 (75%)</td>
<td>79 (79.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.50</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>7.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>3. Internal</td>
<td>5 (10.6%)</td>
<td>5 (9.6%)</td>
<td>10 (10.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.1 Accomplishments element

The element identified in the highest number of stories is accomplishments (which represents the activities platform). This is evident in 79.8% of the stories overall (in 85.1% of the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and 75% of the charities’ stories). Within the 85.1% and 75% of stories, accomplishments occur on average 8.5 times per story in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and 7.18 times per story in the charities’ stories. For example, accomplishments are included in BT Group’s story: “we are twice winners of the Queen's Award for Enterprise for Sustainable Development”.

4.3.2 Internal and external benefits elements

The external benefits element (which represents the benefits platform) is also evident in 75% of the charities’ stories (the same percentage as accomplishments). However, it is only in 40.4% of the FTSE 100 companies’ stories. Within the 40.4% of FTSE 100 companies’ stories, the external benefits element occurs on average 6.47 times per story. Whereas within the 75% of charities’ stories, the element occurs on average 7.36 times per story. For example, external benefits are included in G4S’ story: “The work we do helps to ensure the safety and welfare of
millions of people”. The internal benefits element is less apparent, in 10.6% and 9.6% of the FTSE 100 companies’ and charities’ stories. The average number of times the element occurs in each of the stories is also lower (1.4 times per story in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and 1.8 times per story in the charities’ stories).

4.3.3 Conflict and emotion elements

Regarding the emotional platform, conflict is the third highest element identified overall (in 48.5% of the stories). A higher percentage of the charities’ stories include emotion and conflict compared to the FTSE 100 companies’ stories (61.5% compared to 23.4% for emotion and 51.9% compared to 44.7% for conflict). As well as occurring in a lower number of stories, the average number of times that the element occurs per story is lower for emotion than conflict. Emotion occurs on average 5.64 times per story in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories, and 4.94 times per story in the charities’ stories. Whereas, conflict occurs on average 11.43 times per story in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories, and 5.78 times per story in the charities’ stories. As examples, conflict is evident in BP’s story: “Gaddafi nationalized BP’s share of an oil production operation in Libya”, and in Royal Dutch Shell’s story: “Shell was criticised over the Brent Spar episode”. M&S’ story includes emotion: “Forget Mini Skirts and The Beatles. It was chickens that mattered”, in this instance using humour.

4.3.4 Activities element

The activities element (which represents the activities platform) is evident in a higher percentage of the charities’ stories than the FTSE 100 companies’ stories (51.9% of charities’ stories, compared to 36.2% of FTSE 100 companies’ stories). However, within the 51.9% and 36.2% of stories, the activities element occurs more times per story in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories than the charities’ stories. On average, it occurs 2.94 times per story in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories, and
1.48 times per story in the charities’ stories. For example, NCFE’s story includes activities: “NCFE today is a national awarding organisation, offering over 400 qualifications at different levels and in a wide range of subject areas. NCFE recognise the skills, knowledge and understanding achieved by a learner at a particular level and in a particular subject”.

4.3.5 *Vision, mission, and values elements*

Only a small number of stories include the vision element (5.1% overall – one of the charities’ stories and four of the FTSE 100 companies’ stories). This includes Unilever: “Unilever announces its new corporate vision – working to create a better future every day with brands that help people look good, feel good and get more out of life”. Within each of these stories, the vision element occurs only once. The mission element is evident in 8.1% of stories overall, in two of the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and six of the charities’ stories. This includes St Dunstan’s: “mission to help blind ex-Service men and women lead independent and fulfilling lives”. The mission element occurs once in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories, and on average 1.17 times in the charities’ stories.

The values element is evident in 13.1% of stories overall, mainly in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories (ten of the FTSE 100 companies’ stories, compared to three of the charities’ stories). Within these stories, the values element occurs on average 1.5 times per story in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories, and 1.33 times per story in the charities’ stories. For example, in BT’s corporate story: “The values of Trustworthy and Helpful are long-standing BT service values and are supported by forward-looking values of Inspiring, Straightforward and Heart”. Also, in HSBC’s story: “core values of financial strength and stability”. These three elements represent the strategy platform, and as a result this platform is conveyed through stories the least.
4.4 Impression management activity involved in conveying reputation platforms

The second stage of coding used impression management theory to analyse the stories. Each statement identified from the stories as an element in the first stage of coding was coded for impression management strategies and behaviours. Chapter two suggests links between the strategies and behaviours and elements in stories, and these were incorporated into the analytical framework for the study (see Figure 4.1). These links are supported by the findings from the content analysis. A summary of the impression management strategies and behaviours involved in the elements is presented in Table 4.2. These findings indicate that conveying reputation platforms through stories can involve different impression management activity, and this is discussed below.

Table 4.2: Impression management activity involved in conveying reputation platforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element and FTSE 100 company/charity:</th>
<th>Assertive strategy:</th>
<th>Defensive strategy:</th>
<th>Demonstrative strategy:</th>
<th>Illustrative strategy:</th>
<th>No IM:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>Self-promotion</td>
<td>Exemplification</td>
<td>Supplementation</td>
<td>Excuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities (FTSE 100)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities (charity)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishments (FTSE 100)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>323 (95%)</td>
<td>17 (5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishments (charity)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>266 (95%)</td>
<td>14 (5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal benefits (FTSE 100)</td>
<td>7 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal benefits (charity)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External benefits</td>
<td>82 (66.67)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41 (33.33)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(FTSE 100)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(charity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External benefits</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(99.30%)</td>
<td>(0.70%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(16.13%)</td>
<td>(12.90%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion (FTSE 100)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(8.06%)</td>
<td>(17.74%)</td>
<td>(16.13%)</td>
<td>(12.90%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion (charity)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(31.01%)</td>
<td>(10.13%)</td>
<td>(3.80%)</td>
<td>(4.43%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict (FTSE 100)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>170</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(70.83%)</td>
<td>(3.33%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.75%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict (charity)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(64.10%)</td>
<td>(0.64%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2.56%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision (FTSE 100)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(75%)</td>
<td>(25%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision (charity)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(75%)</td>
<td>(25%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission (FTSE 100)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission (charity)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(85.71%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(14.29%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values (FTSE 100)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values (charity)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)(75%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.1 Impression management activity involved in conveying the activities platform

Demonstrative and assertive strategies are involved in conveying the activities platform, and specifically self-promotion and exemplification behaviours. Nearly all of the activities element statements in the FTSE 100 companies’ and charities’ stories (92% and 100%) involve a demonstrative strategy. For example, in AMEC’s story: “supplying consultancy, engineering, and project management services to its
customers in the world’s oil and gas, minerals and metals, clean energy, environment and infrastructure markets in around 40 countries around the globe”.

A small percentage of the activities statements in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories (8%) involve exemplification. These statements communicate the activities undertaken as part of the companies’ corporate social responsibility programmes, rather than being part of their usual business activities. For example, in Prudential’s story: “Each Prudential business now undertakes its own localised sponsorship and community activities, such as Jackson National Life’s support of Michigan State University”.

The accomplishments statements mainly involve self-promotion (95% of statements). For example, in Amnesty International’s story: “we have become the biggest and most trusted voluntary organisation in the world”. A small percentage of the accomplishments statements (5% from both sectors) involve exemplification. This is when the statements portray an organisation’s achievements in terms of their broader social responsibility. For example, in Business in the Community’s story: “We’re now the UK’s largest business membership organisation committed to corporate responsibility”.

4.4.2 Impression management activity involved in conveying the benefits platform

An assertive strategy is involved in conveying the benefits platform, and specifically ingratiatiion and exemplification behaviours. All of the internal benefits statements involve ingratiatiion (seven statements in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and nine statements in the charities’ stories). For example, in Unilever’s story: “Unilever still believes that success means acting with the highest standards of corporate behaviour towards our employees”. The majority of the external benefits statements also involve ingratiatiion (66.67% in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and 99.3% in the charities’ stories). For example, in British Heart Foundation’s story: “to save lives by advancing prevention, diagnosis, treatment
and care of heart disease”. The remaining external benefits statements involve exemplification (33.33% in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and 0.7% in the charities’ stories). These statements portray benefits that are offered to an organisation’s wider stakeholders, such as local communities or charities (rather than their customers). For example, in GlaxoSmithKline’s story: “GSK contributes $1.4 million of medicines to support victims of the Haiti earthquake”.

4.4.3 Impression management activity involved in conveying the emotional platform

Multiple impression management strategies and behaviours are involved in conveying the emotional platform. Emotion statements in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories involve an assertive strategy (specifically ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication behaviours). Emotion statements in the charities’ stories involve these behaviours as well as demonstrative and illustrative strategies. Supplication is often involved in statements portraying negative emotion, as these show an organisation’s weaknesses. For example, in GKN’s story: “They began the agonising process of running down the works”. The other impression management strategies and behaviours tend to be associated with positive emotions. For example, in M&S’ story, self-promotion is evident in a positive emotion statement showing pride and humour: “When the impossible was achieved. The melting middle chocolate pudding”. Just under half of the emotion statements, however, do not show evidence of any impression management strategies or behaviours (45.16% in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and 48.1% in the charities’ stories). This is where the statement does not refer to the organisation itself. For example, a statement in ARM Holding’s story: “Definitely a tsunami of good news”, shows positive emotion, but does not relate to the organisation.

The conflict statements mainly involve supplication (70.83% in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and 64.1% in the charities’ stories). For example, in Samaritans’
story: “Samaritans also soon became aware that the face to face and telephone service did not meet everyone's needs and that many people who needed help were not getting in touch”. Two of the defensive strategy behaviours (excuses and justifications) are also involved in conflict statements, to a much lesser extent. Excuses behaviour is involved in 3.33% of the conflict statements in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and in 0.64% of the conflict statements in the charities’ stories. Justifications behaviour is evident in 3.75% of the conflict statements in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and in 2.56% of the conflict statements in the charities’ stories.

For example, excuses behaviour is evident in Rolls Royce’s story, to minimise the organisation's responsibility for the poor performance of one of their engines: “One very important lesson emerged from the early problems with this engine: the fact that major, new, advanced engine programmes can only be successful if they are well-founded on previously demonstrated technologies. That, sadly, was far from the case at the start of the RB211”. Justifications behaviour is used to turn a bad action into a good one, or minimise audiences’ perceptions of the amount of harm done. For example, in Rio Tinto’s story: “A major disaster in which ten employees died in an underground mine in Austria intensifies Rio Tinto's journey to achieve zero harm...helping to create today's strong safety ethos and achievements”. Some conflict statements do not involve any impression management strategies or behaviours (22.08% in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and 32.69% in the charities’ stories), again where statements do not actually refer to the organisation.

4.4.4 Impression management activity involved in conveying the strategy platform

Illustrative and assertive strategies are involved in conveying the strategy platform, and specifically ingratiation behaviour. Three out of four of the vision statements and all four of the mission statements in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories involve an illustrative strategy, as do 85.71% (six out of seven) of the
mission statements in the charities’ stories. For example, in Rio Tinto’s story: “Rio Tinto unveils its vision of the mine of the future, aiming to be the leader in integrated and automated mining and transport”. Also, in the Royal Academy of Engineering’s story: “mission “to move engineering to the centre of society””. These statements refer to the broader aims and purpose of an organisation, which defines the illustrative strategy according to Bolino et al. (2008, p. 1081). The remaining statements do not involve any impression management strategies or behaviours.

All 15 of the values statements in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories and three out of four of the values statements in the charities’ stories involve ingratiation. These statements present the beliefs and characteristics of an organisation. For example, in Sage Group’s story: “Sage is fresh-thinking, dynamic, friendly and professional”. The vision, mission, and values statements that do not involve any impression management strategies or behaviours either do not refer to the organisation itself, or refer to past visions, missions, or values. For example, in Carnival’s story: “The entrepreneurial spirit and pioneering vision of Carnival’s founder, the late Ted Arison, provided a solid foundation for the company’s future”.

4.5 Summary of stage one findings

The first stage of the study focused on the use of official stories in external communication, specifically corporate history stories presented on organisations’ websites. The key findings from this stage of research are summarised below.

1. Corporate history stories are presented on the websites of around half of the FTSE 100 companies and charities in the samples.
2. All the elements of stories suggested from the literature are evident in both the FTSE 100 companies’ and charities’ corporate history stories.
3. However, the use of elements in the stories varies widely. Overall, accomplishments are evident in the highest percentage of stories. Internal
benefits, vision, mission, and values are evident in the lowest percentage of stories.

4. There are differences in the use of the elements between the sectors. In particular, the charities’ stories include greater use of the activities, external benefits, emotion, and conflict elements than the FTSE 100 companies’ stories.

5. The links between impression management strategies and behaviours and elements of stories suggested from the literature are supported by the content analysis of corporate history stories. Conveying reputation platforms through stories therefore involves different impression management activity.

The next chapter presents the findings from the second stage of empirical research.
Chapter 5 – Findings: Stage Two

This chapter presents the findings from the second stage of the empirical study conducted to address the research questions, recapped below:

Q1. How are corporate stories used as a corporate identity cue?
Q2. How do corporate stories influence audiences, particularly organisation members?

The chapter provides an overview of the data collection and analysis for the second stage of the research, including the analytical framework, and then presents the research findings.

5.1 Overview of data collection in stage two

The second stage of empirical research focused on one industry in the for-profit sector. Specifically, the research involved case studies of two organisations in the UK energy industry, referred to here as Energy One and PowerOn. This was in order to gain a deep understanding of stories in a particular industry context, as discussed in chapter three. Data was collected in each of the case study organisations using three methods: semi-structured interviews, documentary research, and observation research (of physical premises and artefacts). A summary of the data collected within each organisation is presented in Table 5.1 below. The semi-structured interviews conducted are shown by business area and level in the organisational hierarchy in Table 5.2.
Table 5.1: Data collected in the case study organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection method</th>
<th>No. of sources of data from Energy One (Case study 1):</th>
<th>No. of sources of data from PowerOn (Case study 2):</th>
<th>Total no. of sources of data:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation occasions (physical premises and artefacts)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Semi-structured interviews by business area and level in hierarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semi-structured interviews:</th>
<th>No. conducted in Energy One (Case study 1)</th>
<th>No. conducted in PowerOn (Case study 2)</th>
<th>Total no.:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level in hierarchy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front line employees</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle managers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior managers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviewees were selected in consultation between the researcher and the internal communication manager in each organisation. Interviewees were selected from different levels in the organisational hierarchy, in order to obtain the perspectives of front line employees, middle managers, and senior managers. In PowerOn, availability of senior managers limited the number of interviewees at this level, but across both organisations there were a range of interviewees from each level.

Interviewees were selected from customer service, operational, and corporate business areas, in order to gain the perspectives of organisation members in both office and field based roles, and in customer facing as well as technical roles. The
corporate areas include the corporate affairs and internal communication teams. Organisation members were interviewed from these areas particularly to gain perspectives on the use of official stories in internal communication. In both organisations, the customer service areas are call centres, and interviewees from these areas work either on the phones, or in support or managerial roles. Interviewees from the operational area of PowerOn are in technical roles associated with the electricity networks. The operational areas of Energy One are more diverse, as these include networks (similar to PowerOn), but also energy generation and contracting (such as providing street lighting services). This necessitated a greater number of interviews with organisation members from the operational areas of Energy One, in order to gain the perspectives of organisation members in a wider range of roles.

Overall, there was a greater amount of data collected from the first case study organisation (Energy One) than from the second (PowerOn). The majority of the interviews in the first case study were conducted before the interviews were started in the second case study. It became apparent that the interview data collected from PowerOn generally supported that from Energy One. Therefore, it was not necessary to conduct further interviews in PowerOn, as data collection reached saturation point. PowerOn is also a smaller organisation than Energy One, with around 5500 employees compared to around 19500 employees in Energy One, and the business is less diverse. Therefore, fewer interviews were required in PowerOn to gain an understanding of the use of stories as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences across different parts of the organisation.

The interviews consisted mostly of open questions, but there was also a section of closed questions at the end of each interview (as shown in appendix four). These summarised the open questions. In accordance with the native category approach, the researcher avoided providing a definition of stories to interview participants in order to gain their perception of stories within the organisations. However, where interviewees asked for clarification of what was meant by stories, the interviewer described stories as a series of events related to the organisation, or people within
the organisation (based upon Forster (1963, p. 45) and Meyer (1995, p. 214)), in order to assist the discussion.

The documents collected in each case study included company newspapers and magazines, internal communication booklets, reports, and briefings, external reports and booklets, pages from the intranets and corporate websites, and corporate DVDs. Some documents were publicly available and others were internal documents, which were provided at the discretion of the internal communication managers and other interviewees. Documents were in both electronic and hard copy formats. Observations were recorded at each location that interviews took place (totalling 16 locations). Observations were made of both the buildings and artefacts within the buildings, predominantly of internal communication materials such as posters on walls.

Throughout this chapter, interviewees from Energy One are identified using a codename beginning with E (E1, E2, and so on), and interviewees from PowerOn are identified using a codename beginning with P (P1, P2, and so on). The codenames of interviewees cited in this chapter are listed in appendix eight with details of their level in the hierarchy and business area. Documents and observation occasions are referred to by organisation and by their recorded number in the case study database. As the findings from the second case study generally support those in the first case study, the findings from both organisations are predominantly discussed together in this chapter. It is noted, however, where any differences are apparent.

5.2 Overview of data analysis in stage two

Chapter three presents the framework used to guide the analysis of data collected in both stages of the study. This is recapped in Figure 5.1 below.
The second stage of the study used qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques to analyse the data collected in the case studies. The quantitative data from the closed interview questions was analysed by calculating the mean values of responses to the questions (as these used a Likert-type scale). This enabled comparison between the responses of interviewees from the two case study organisations, and between different areas of the organisations. The analysis
showed organisation members’ perceptions of reputation platforms conveyed through stories. Following on from this, exploratory factor analysis and regression analysis were also used to analyse the relationship between perceptions of reputation platforms in stories and the influence of stories on organisation members.

Thematic analysis and a native category approach were used to analyse the qualitative data obtained through the open interview questions, documentary research, and observation research. The analysis of the data in this stage of the study also drew upon the findings from the first stage. The first stage identified impression management strategies and behaviours involved in the story elements in the corporate history stories. The links found between the strategies and behaviours and the story elements were used when analysing how stories influence organisation members, based on the interview data. The complete list of categories that were used in the analysis is presented in appendix seven, including both pre-defined categories and categories derived from the data. The next section begins presenting the findings from the second stage of the study.

### 5.3 Use of corporate stories within the organisations

This stage of the study investigated official and unofficial corporate stories in internal communication. The research focused on how stories within the case study organisations are used as a corporate identity cue and how stories influence organisation members. The data from the interviews included stories recounted by interviewees, and also interviewees’ perceptions of the use of stories in the organisations. This section provides an overview of the use of stories in the case study organisations. Figure 5.2 presents a framework of corporate stories in the organisations, based on the data collected in the case studies. This framework illustrates how stories are used in the organisations and the links between the different types and forms of story. This is discussed further below.
5.3.1 Official and unofficial stories in the organisations

Both official and unofficial corporate stories are evident within the case study organisations. These take the form of whole stories and story fragments (discussed further in the next section). There is not a single, dominant, story in either organisation. The data shows that official stories originate from corporate communication teams and senior managers. Unofficial stories are also told by senior managers, as well as by middle managers and other organisation members.

Official stories are delivered through verbal, print, and digital channels. This includes speakers at conferences and events, company newspapers and magazines, internal communication booklets, briefings and reports, external reports and booklets, press releases, corporate advertising, posters in buildings, the company intranet, the corporate website, and corporate films. These channels were identified by interviewees, as well as by the researcher in the documentary and observation research. For example, there are stories on Energy One’s website about excellent customer service provided by the organisation (Document 21,
Interviewees reported that unofficial stories are often delivered verbally, and that stories are shared in meetings, training sessions, and in conversations amongst organisation members and with third parties. Face to face storytelling within teams is often interactive: “a story will often trigger another story and trigger a dialogue, and then you can get more people involved in it” (E27). Print and digital communication channels also enable organisation members to share stories. Organisation members can post (unofficial) stories to forums on the intranet. The internal communication teams include stories from organisation members in the company newspapers/magazines and on the intranet (which then become official stories).

This indicates that there are overlaps between official and unofficial stories in the organisations. Interviewees discussed how unofficial stories from managers and other organisation members could become official stories. For example, official stories are often told about good customer service, which originated as unofficial stories from organisation members. These were referred to by interviewees: “they were telling what they called heart stories and that was where advisors had gone the extra mile for customers...they’re usually written in that person’s own words as well” (E37). Official stories are often recounted as unofficial stories, in particular stories about customer service and safety incidents. For example, one interviewee recounted a safety incident, which originated as an official story: “I can’t remember the story in its whole, but basically the guy was on this overhead and there was like an extension bar and it fell off and hit him on the head and basically actually crushed his skull” (E13).

Corporate history stories are evident in both organisations. Neither organisation has a single corporate history story that is consistently communicated to either internal or external audiences, though. Instead, corporate history stories often relate to the origins of the regional brands or events in their history, or celebrate significant anniversaries. For example, in Energy One: “there was a 70th anniversary story around (regional brand) and where that came from” (E11);
“marking the ten years of (Energy One), that was told as a story, about some of the key things that have happened” (E7).

In PowerOn, corporate history stories about changes in ownership of the organisation are told to new organisation members. For example: “we include a little bit of the history of the company, how we’ve come together to be (PowerOn) so from our founding as individual companies...and also history of the network as well, how we got the network that we’ve got” (P19). However, in general interviewees perceive that there is limited use of corporate history stories in PowerOn. This is attributed to the organisation having only existed in its current form for a relatively short period of time. As a result, internal communication has been focused more on establishing the organisation in its new form rather than looking back to the past. For example: “that has been really important for us the first couple of years just separating from the previous company...we kind of very deliberately didn’t really talk about...the old company” (P11).

Corporate history stories in both organisations are delivered through various channels, including the intranet and company newspaper in Energy One (Documents 7-10, 27, Energy One), and corporate films, the company newspaper and magazine, and verbally in PowerOn (Documents 7-9, 11, PowerOn). Some of the corporate history stories are reflected in artefacts in the organisations’ buildings. This was noted in the observation research (Observation occasion 6, Energy One) and by interviewees: “you see plaques and pictures of them up and lots of historic pictures of things during construction” (E30). However, no stories from either organisation were included in the data for the first stage of the study. PowerOn was not part of the for-profit population in the first stage of the study, and although Energy One was part of the population, neither company presents a corporate history story on their website.

In both organisations, there are also unofficial stories about events in the organisation’s history: “epic adventures and key things in the history of (Energy One) which you hear about, like the great storm in ’78 and the stories that people
tell when everybody was sent to different parts of the country to help put wires up and working 24 hours a day” (E6). Unofficial stories relating to the organisations’ histories frequently compare the current situation in the organisation to the past, as either better or worse: “you always hear the stories of the good old days, and whether they were good old days or not, I don’t know” (P9).

5.3.2 Whole stories and story fragments in the organisations

In order to gain understanding of the use of stories in the organisations, interviewees were asked to recount stories told within or about the organisation. This included stories that they had either told themselves, or that they had heard. A total of 271 stories are evident in the interview data. The stories were classed as either whole stories or story fragments, depending on whether they have a beginning, middle, end plot structure or not (based on Boje (1991, p. 106; 1995, pp. 1000-1001, 1005-1008; 2008, p. 63) and Volker et al. (2011, p. 105)). Out of the 271 stories, 108 are story fragments, and 163 are whole stories. Overall, the whole stories are longer than the story fragments, although even some shorter stories have the beginning, middle, end structure required to be a whole story. For example: “someone spilled hot water on themselves (beginning) and they had to go to the walk-in centre, (middle) so now to stop that happening in future you have to carry the tray with only one drink at a time (end)” (E10). Story fragments are generally brief, for example: “a meter reader being attacked by a dog at a customer’s property” (E11).

Based on interviewees’ discussion of stories, the previous section notes that official stories are sometimes repeated throughout the organisations as unofficial stories. Repetition of stories throughout the organisations is also evident from the stories in the interview data, as several interviewees repeat the same stories. In total, nine stories are evident in the interview data that are recounted by at least two interviewees. These are reproduced in appendix nine. Some of the repeated stories originated as official stories, such as the story of an apprentice who fell
from height (story eight), which was shared as a corporate film. Others originated as unofficial stories, for example, a story about the Chief Executive buying his own sandwiches (story three).

5.3.3 Types of story in the organisations

The stories identified in the interview data were analysed thematically, to draw out different types of story that are told in the organisations. As well as corporate history stories (which have been discussed previously), another seven types of story emerged from the data, which are evident in both organisations. These are safety, service, cost-cutting/efficiency, performance, community/charity, management, and team stories. Out of the 271 stories identified in the interviews data, safety stories are most common (101 stories), and are told most frequently by front line employees as well as senior and middle managers. This is followed by performance stories (45 stories), service stories (40 stories), team and history stories (20 of each), community/charity stories (17 stories), and management stories (eight stories). Five stories did not fit into a particular category. The types of story were evident in the documentary research too, particularly in the company newspapers and magazines, and also in the observation research. For example, there was a noticeboard in the open plan office at Energy One’s headquarters with “Good news stories”, which were performance stories about successes from around the business. Examples of each type of story are provided in Table 5.3 below.
### Table 5.3: Types of story in the case study organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of story:</th>
<th>Example from the interview data:</th>
<th>Example from the documentary research – headlines from company magazines/newspapers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>“one of the stories I tell to operational staff...I give them a story of when I touched a piece of equipment many years ago and it was earthed but we had a switch open so although we had earthed it, it wasn’t earthed, if that makes sense. And obviously the result of that was I got a little bit of a shock off it” (P8)</td>
<td>“Right at home with safety” (Document 8, Energy One)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“In safe hands” (Document 11, PowerOn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>“we had someone who organised hotel rooms for 18 people during a particularly long fault just before Christmas, and she went out of her way, stayed extra, really helped those customers, phoned them to make sure they were in their rooms okay, made sure that dinner was ordered for them all and things like that, we shared that”(P3)</td>
<td>“Treating customers like family” (Document 25, Energy One)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Our experts get 10/10 for customer service” (Document 11, PowerOn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>“they had a really major incident there about a year and a half ago ...the stories that have come from that are really the process that we went through to explain to customers, how we followed it up, what lessons we’ve learnt from that, and how we’ve used it to shape the way that we respond to emergency situations in the future” (P3)</td>
<td>“Networks and supply boost interim results” (Document 9, Energy One)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Conductors make light work of overhead line” (Document 8, PowerOn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost cutting/</td>
<td>“there was a story going round that although we won awards, our chief exec, or whoever it was from management that was going along to receive the presentation, didn’t actually hire a table from that organisation; we bobbed in on somebody else’s” (E4)</td>
<td>“Recruitment halted as part of efficiency drive” (Document 8, Energy One)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Fit for the front line” (Document 7, PowerOn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/</td>
<td>“we did a story about...a little boy and the staff was trying to raise money for him to go to America for an operation on his leg” (E18)</td>
<td>“Green-fingered friends restore school garden” (Document 7, Energy One)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>charity</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Matching kits for rugby squad” (Document 11, PowerOn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>“the history of it is very much part of what people are telling you when you arrive...it was the post-war attempt to bring”</td>
<td>“Lessons learned from exceptional conditions” (Document 8, Energy One)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The different types of story are discussed further in this chapter in relation to the reputation platforms conveyed through stories.

5.3.4 Awareness of stories in the organisations

The interviews investigated whether organisation members are aware of stories in their organisation and whether they tell stories themselves. This is important, as it is likely to affect the use of stories as a corporate identity cue. Out of 70 interviewees, 39 perceive the use of stories in their organisation. However, awareness of stories varies between the organisations, as only 37% of interviewees in PowerOn perceive the use of stories, compared to 64% in Energy One. Some senior managers discussed the use of stories: “that’s a style that I do use when I’m trying to get a very, very powerful message across to people”; “this is the sort of style and behaviour which we’re trying to get down to with our more junior managers” (E23).

However, overall there are large differences in the perceived use of stories at different levels of the hierarchy. 71% of interviewees in front line roles perceive the use of stories in their organisation, compared to 57% of middle managers and
only 40% of senior managers. In addition to this, 90% of interviewees from the corporate areas perceive the use of stories, compared to 51% of interviewees from the operational areas and 46% from the customer service areas. The interviews themselves led some interviewees to recognise the use of stories in the organisations, when they had not previously considered this: “when you say stories, I think of it in my head as best practice” (P2); “I suppose when you actually stop and think about it…a great deal more storytelling goes on than you actually realise” (E36); “Now I think they’re really important. I hadn’t thought about it before” (E40).

Organisation members in Energy One are encouraged to share safety stories at the start of meetings, referred to as “safety moments”: “the first thing in any agenda in every meeting’s a safety moment…a story that helps people learn” (E42). A booklet issued to managers at a safety conference encouraged them to use stories to deliver safety messages: “Storytelling is a powerful influencing tool...Whilst the safety statistics are important, storytelling brings the messages to life and makes it feel more personal. Stories are far more likely to create a change in behavior than a safety policy document ever will” (Document 30, Energy One). In contrast, there is no apparent encouragement for organisation members to share stories in PowerOn.

Having discussed interviewees’ perceptions of the use of stories in the organisations, the next section focuses on how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms.

5.4 Reputation platforms conveyed through corporate stories in the organisations

The findings presented so far illustrate overlaps between official and unofficial stories in the case study organisations. Interviewees did not differentiate between official and unofficial stories when discussing the elements of stories, and how
they and other organisation members are influenced by stories. There was no evidence from the case study data that the influence of stories on organisation members was perceived to differ according to whether a story was official or unofficial. Following from this, the subsequent analysis of the case study data considered official and unofficial stories together when investigating the use of stories as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences. This section presents the findings regarding organisation members’ perceptions of reputation platforms conveyed through corporate stories. This issue was investigated using both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. This section firstly presents the quantitative analysis of data collected using closed questions in the interviews, then the qualitative analysis of the data collected from the open questions.

5.4.1 Perceptions of reputation platforms conveyed through corporate stories – quantitative data analysis

The closed questions in the interviews required interviewees to rate on a scale the extent to which they perceived elements in corporate stories, with one being “not at all” and five being “a lot”. Interviewees were asked about corporate vision or goals rather than a corporate mission, as Energy One has a set of goals that guide the organisation, rather than a vision or mission statement, and PowerOn has a vision statement, but no mission statement. Interviewees were not questioned directly about their perceptions of emotion in stories, as the qualitative data collected from the interviews suggests that stories aim to evoke emotion in audiences, rather than emotion being perceived in a story. Interviewees were, however, questioned about their perceptions of conflict in stories, in order to investigate the extent to which the emotional platform is conveyed through stories.

Interviewees’ perceptions of elements in corporate stories were compared between the two organisations, and between different areas of the organisations.
Figure 5.3 shows the mean value for each element, comparing Energy One and PowerOn, and Figure 5.4 shows the mean value for each element, comparing the customer service and operational areas of the organisations.

**Figure 5.3: Mean values for perceptions of elements in stories – Energy One versus PowerOn**

![Bar chart comparing Energy One and PowerOn for various elements.]

**Figure 5.4: Mean values for perceptions of elements in stories – customer service versus operational areas**

![Bar chart comparing customer service and operational areas for various elements.]


It can be seen in Figure 5.3 that interviewees in the two organisations generally have similar perceptions of the elements present in corporate stories. Interviewees in PowerOn perceive that corporate stories include more of some elements than the interviewees in Energy One though, particularly accomplishments and vision/goals. However, they perceive less of the external benefits and conflict elements. Figure 5.4 shows that interviewees from the customer service areas of both organisations perceive more of all the elements in stories than interviewees in the operational areas. In both organisations, external benefits are perceived least in stories, particularly by interviewees in the operational areas.

5.4.2 Perceptions of reputation platforms conveyed through corporate stories – qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data from the open interview questions also illustrates how reputation platforms are conveyed in official and unofficial stories in internal communication. In terms of activities, interviewees perceive that official stories conveying activities are common in the company newspapers and magazines, and on the intranet: “we have a magazine that comes out monthly and that is basically full of stories about everything from the sports side of things right up to what is happening in other parts of the business; the wind farms; the solar power” (E14); “the website is a good one for that. They will tell you the sort of things we are involved in” (E16). Activities are also evident in unofficial stories shared amongst organisation members: “it tends to be because I happen to know someone who works in that other bit of the company…we’re having a chat about what are you doing…they’ll tell you the whole story” (E25).

Accomplishments in official and unofficial stories in the organisations refer to the achievements of the organisation (generally in performance stories), as well as those of organisation members (often in team stories). In particular, interviewees perceive that the company newspapers promote the organisation’s successes: “in
the newspaper; a certain part of the business has won this” (E17). Stories about successes are also shared within teams, often focusing on the achievements of individuals: “there are some real success stories within our own department on what someone did really well” (P5).

A minority of interviewees noted stories about internal benefits in the company newspapers and magazines: “there are a number of schemes, either launched or being launched... we have those sorts of stories” (P14). Similarly, a small number of interviewees discussed unofficial team stories about internal benefits shared between team members. For example: “I had somebody who used to work for me... didn’t want to join it (employee share scheme) because she didn’t have spare money. I said to her, you must join; you must be mad if you don’t join... now, three years later, she can start taking money out of the scheme. So every year she has an exotic foreign holiday with the money she invests” (E44).

Interviewees observed that there are stories about benefits offered to stakeholders, including customers and the broader community. These are evident as service or community/charity stories: “if we do anything where we help customers or we go out and do charity events... giving back to the community... we certainly talk about good news stories” (P12). Official service stories about benefits provided to customers are often used in training sessions: “…ones that we would have seen in training. Like there was a woman... she’d called up because she couldn’t get any money for her key meter. And the person who took the call was calling around to lots of different departments to see what they could do to help her” (E12). In Energy One, unofficial service stories about how organisation members have helped customers are frequently shared through the intranet: “there is a good service page within the hub and the service stories go in there and that comes from all parts of the business” (E36).

Regarding emotion, interviewees noted that unofficial stories are sometimes humorous. These are often history or team stories; “there’s lots of stories, old characters and things that we used to do... it’s just a funny story” (E25). Official
service stories sometimes evoke positive emotion: “a lady whose electricity had gone off...you could literally hear her losing consciousness. He gets in his car and drives 35 miles to her house, to find her, to try and sort out the problem with her, make sure she was warm...it really does touch you” (E7). However, official stories can evoke negative emotion, particularly safety stories: “two of these apprentices woke up in the middle of the night to find somebody was in their room. And obviously that’s really quite frightening” (E7).

Conflict is evident in official and unofficial safety stories, and in performance stories that recount problems that have been faced in the organisations. For example: “in the briefs they have incidents and you get maybe a photograph or a little story of what happened” (E30) (official stories); “I’m hearing about through the course of business, problems with the transmission side of it” (E24) (unofficial stories). Service stories often illustrate how an employee has resolved a conflict. For example: “there was a power cut and there was an old lady living by herself so one of the engineers went round and took her a generator” (E12).

Safety and service are part of Energy One’s goals and values, as discussed in chapter three. Safety is also part of one of PowerOn’s values, and safety and service are key to achieving the organisation’s vision. The organisation states that “safety and service are our top priority” (Document four, PowerOn). Therefore, the organisations’ vision/goals and values are evident in the safety and service stories. There are official safety and service stories in both organisations, which are shared by corporate communication teams and senior managers. For example: “safety stories are absolutely a number one priority so absolutely clear...we do have service stories as well. So two of the values are probably very obvious” (E42). Unofficial safety and service stories can also reinforce these aspects of the organisation’s goals and values, even if this is not explicitly intended by the storyteller. However, organisation members perceive that there is little communication of other goals and values, aside from safety and service, through stories: “A lot of the goals, it tends to be instructions. I don’t think they use too much symbolism or storytelling behind it” (E21).
5.5 Influence of corporate stories on organisation members

This section focuses on the perceived influence of stories on organisation members, again based on both quantitative and qualitative data from the interviews. The qualitative analysis draws upon the findings from the first stage of the study. The first stage identified impression management strategies and behaviours involved in the story elements in the corporate history stories, as discussed previously. The links found between the strategies and behaviours and the story elements were used in the second stage of research as a starting point for analysing how stories influence organisation members, based on the interview data. However, this section begins by considering the findings from the quantitative analysis of the closed interview questions.

5.5.1 Influence of corporate stories on organisation members by conveying reputation platforms – quantitative data analysis

The closed questions investigated interviewees’ perceptions of the influence of stories, based on the sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives of stories, as discussed in chapter two. This enabled statistical testing of the relationship between perceptions of reputation platforms conveyed through corporate stories and the perceived influence of stories on organisation members’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour. Principal component analysis was conducted on the 17 closed questions, with orthogonal rotation (varimax). An initial analysis was run and the anti-image correlation matrix checked. This resulted in the removal of questions five and 15 due to a low value (below 0.5), as recommended by Field (2009, p. 659). A second analysis was then run with the 15 questions. There was sufficient data for factor analysis, as there needed to be at least four times as many answers as there were questions (based on Malhotra (2010, p. 639)). The study met this criteria, as there were 15 questions and 69 answers per question (as one of the 70 interviewees did not answer the closed questions).
The KMO measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis. The KMO value was 0.736, which is viewed as good, according to Field (2009, p. 671). Bartlett’s test of sphericity established that principal component analysis was appropriate, as there were relationships between questions significant at the 100% confidence level (as \( p = 0.000 \)). The questions that loaded onto the same factor were examined in order to identify common themes in the questions. Four factors were retained, as these best represented the underlying themes. Table 5.4 shows the factor loadings after rotation. The questions that loaded on the same factors suggested that factor one represents perceptions of the extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through corporate stories. Factor two represents the perceived influence of stories on interviewees’ thinking (understanding of corporate strategy). Factor three represents the perceived influence of stories on interviewees’ feelings and behaviour. Factor four represents the perceived importance of stories in communication.

Table 5.4: Factors identified from factor analysis

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q7. How important do you think print communications are in telling stories?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.759</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8. How important do you think stories are as part of communication to external stakeholders?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.677</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. How important do you think stories are as part of internal communication within the organisation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.667</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q16. To what extent do</td>
<td>0.474*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Factor Loadings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>stories tell you about the vision/goals of the organisation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q6. How important do you think electronic communications are in telling stories?</td>
<td>0.561</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q11. To what extent do stories tell you about the organisation’s achievements?</td>
<td>0.462*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13. To what extent do stories tell you about the benefits offered to members of the organisation?</td>
<td>0.763</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. How effective do you think internal communication is in the organisation?</td>
<td>0.618 0.456*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12. To what extent do stories tell you about benefits the organisation offers its external stakeholders?</td>
<td>0.56 0.478*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17. To what extent do stories tell you about the values of the organisation?</td>
<td>0.557 0.412* 0.428*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10. To what extent do stories tell you about the organisation’s activities?</td>
<td>0.517 0.471*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2. Do you believe you understand the organisation’s values?</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1. Do you believe you understand the organisation’s vision/goals?</td>
<td>0.859</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14. To what extent do stories affect the way you feel about the organisation?</td>
<td>0.764</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9. How important do you think stories are in affecting the way you do your job?</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraction Method: Principal component analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
  a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

*Question not included in factor due to low factor loading scores (below 0.5)
Factor four was not used in further analysis, as it does not help to address the research questions. The reliability of the remaining three factors was tested using Cronbach’s alpha. Reliability scores need to be at least 0.5 to be sufficient, as suggested by Nunnally (1967 as cited in Churchill, 1979, p. 68). All the factors met this requirement, as shown in Table 5.5 below. Factor three was only just acceptable, whereas factors one and two were above 0.7, which demonstrated a greater level of reliability. However, as this study was exploratory, all three factors were deemed acceptable for inclusion in further analysis.

Table 5.5: Reliability of factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor:</th>
<th>Chronbach’s alpha:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories (IV)</td>
<td>0.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Influence of stories on thinking (understanding of corporate strategy) (DV)</td>
<td>0.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Influence of stories on feelings and behaviour (DV)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The factors were used to investigate how corporate stories influence organisation members. For this purpose, the factors were divided into independent and dependent variables. Factor one was identified as an independent variable, and factors two and three as dependent variables. This enabled the researcher to analyse whether the perceived influence of stories is correlated to interviewees’ perceptions of the extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories. The relationship between the dependent (DV) and independent (IV) variables was tested using linear regression analysis, for all the cases together and for each organisation, business area, and level in the hierarchy. A summary of the regression statistics is presented in Table 5.6.
Table 5.6: Summary of regression statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected cases:</th>
<th>IV:</th>
<th>DV:</th>
<th>β:</th>
<th>Sig:</th>
<th>R²:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All cases</td>
<td>Extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories</td>
<td>Influence of stories on thinking (understanding of corporate strategy)</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of stories on feelings and behaviour</td>
<td>0.417</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy One</td>
<td>Extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories</td>
<td>Influence of stories on thinking (understanding of corporate strategy)</td>
<td>0.435</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of stories on feelings and behaviour</td>
<td>No discernible linear relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PowerOn</td>
<td>Extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories</td>
<td>Influence of stories on thinking (understanding of corporate strategy)</td>
<td>0.594</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of stories on feelings and behaviour</td>
<td>No discernible linear relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service areas</td>
<td>Extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories</td>
<td>Influence of stories on thinking (understanding of corporate strategy)</td>
<td>0.723</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of stories on feelings and behaviour</td>
<td>No discernible linear relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational areas</td>
<td>Extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories</td>
<td>Influence of stories on thinking (understanding of corporate strategy)</td>
<td>0.432</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of stories on feelings and behaviour</td>
<td>No discernible linear relationship</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior managers</td>
<td>Extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories</td>
<td>Influence of stories on thinking (understanding of corporate strategy)</td>
<td>No discernible linear relationship</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of stories on feelings and behaviour</td>
<td>No discernible linear relationship</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle managers</td>
<td>Extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories</td>
<td>Influence of stories on thinking (understanding of corporate strategy)</td>
<td>0.462</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of stories on feelings and behaviour</td>
<td>No discernible linear relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front line employees</td>
<td>Extent to which reputation platforms are conveyed through stories</td>
<td>Influence of stories on thinking (understanding of corporate strategy)</td>
<td>0.421</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of stories on feelings and behaviour</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.266</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, regression analysis identified two key relationships between the factors:

1. Interviewees who perceive that reputation platforms are conveyed through corporate stories to a greater extent believe they have a greater understanding of corporate strategy.
2. Interviewees who perceive that reputation platforms are conveyed through corporate stories to a greater extent believe that stories have a greater influence on their feelings and behaviour.

These relationships are evident when analysing all the cases together, as well as when analysing the cases by organisation, business area, and level in the hierarchy. The relationships identified in Table 5.6 are all significant at the 95% confidence level (as shown in the significance (sig.) column). There are some exceptions where there is no relationship between the variables for a particular group of cases, and these are noted in Table 5.6 as “No discernible linear relationship”. There were fewer interviews with senior managers than with organisation members at other levels in the hierarchy, therefore the lack of data prevented any relationships being identified using regression analysis for this group. There are also no relationships between the perceptions of reputation platforms and the influence of stories on interviewees’ feelings and behaviour when the cases from PowerOn, the operational business areas, and middle managers are analysed separately.

$\beta$ values indicate the importance of an independent variable in predicting the dependent variable, and therefore higher $\beta$ values illustrate where the relationships are strongest. In particular, there is a strong relationship between perceptions of reputation platforms and the influence of stories on interviewees’ feelings and behaviour for interviewees in the customer service areas ($\beta$ value of 0.723). $R^2$ values indicate how much variance a model explains, compared to how much variance there is to explain in the first place. The $R^2$ values are highest in the relationship between perceptions of reputation platforms and the influence of stories on interviewees’ feelings and behaviour ($R^2$ value of 0.522), for interviewees in the customer service areas.
Influence of corporate stories on organisation members by conveying reputation platforms – qualitative data analysis

This section brings together the sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives of stories with impression management theory, to interpret how conveying reputation platforms could influence organisation members. The analysis focuses on the data from the open interview questions, as this provides insight into interviewees’ perceptions of how they and other organisation members are influenced by stories. The analysis draws upon the findings from the first stage of the study, in terms of the impression management strategies and behaviours involved in elements of stories, and then investigates how these influence organisation members. Table 5.7 shows examples of the impression management strategies and behaviours involved in the elements, from the case study data. The table then illustrates links between the impression management activity in the elements and the influence of stories on organisation members, again with examples from the case study data.

Table 5.7: Influence of reputation platforms conveyed through corporate stories on organisation members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reputation platform, element, and impression management activity involved in element:</th>
<th>Examples of impression management activity involved in element, from case study data:</th>
<th>Influence of impression management activity in element on organisation members, proposed from case study data:</th>
<th>Examples of influence on organisation members, from case study data:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities platform (activities element) – demonstrative strategy</td>
<td>“we have a magazine that comes out monthly and that is basically full of stories about everything from the sports side of things right up to what is happening in other parts of the business; the wind</td>
<td>Influences impressions of the organisation – gain awareness of the organisation’s broader activities</td>
<td>“I think one thing that the stories do is actually tells you how diverse it is as a company” (E7)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influences thinking – create meaning from activities in the</td>
<td>“you do hear stories about what’s going on. So at the end of the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities platform (activities element) – exemplification behaviour (assertive strategy)</td>
<td>organisation</td>
<td>it does help your understanding of some of the challenges they face” (E42)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We used the story about how many hectares of trees we've replaced as part of our renewables energy scheme” (E28)</td>
<td>Influences feelings – feel more involved with the organisation</td>
<td>“(telling stories) is making people feel involved and making them know what is going on in our business ...really feel like you are part of not just being in a team but part of a bigger team” (P16)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“we work in partnership with Suffolk Wildlife...there’s always lots of stories about that” (P18)</td>
<td>Influences behaviour – learn from experiences of colleagues to improve performance</td>
<td>“I'll be telling stories about what has happened in other parts of the organisation, because they latch on to those really quickly and say, oh yeah, I can do that” (E44)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“stories of past experience could really help going forward” (E24)</td>
<td>Influences impressions of the organisation – perceive that the organisation cares about the community</td>
<td>“they do show the company in a good light...when you then hear stories about what we’ve done...it does make you feel good to be part of a company that cares about the community” (E12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“it does give you a good feeling when you see (stories about) the good work that we’ve done ...just giving somebody a day off work but still paying you to go out and fix a fence somewhere or plant some trees or stuff</td>
<td>Influences feelings – feel good about an organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities platform (accomplishments element) – self-promotion behaviour (assertive strategy)</td>
<td>“they have a fantastic safety record and they have just won I think it was the ESSO Tiger Award. So we did quite a big piece on that” (E18)</td>
<td>“big contract wins are definitely something we focus on (in stories)…” (P12)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“big contract wins are definitely something we focus on (in stories)” (P12)</td>
<td>“hear the good things…it gives you that sense of pride…and you think the company’s taken enough pride to share that story with you” (E40)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“in the newspaper; a (story about a) certain part of the business has won this” (E17)</td>
<td>“it’s good to hear about the success stories and stuff, so it makes you feel part of the business” (E32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“there are some real success stories within our own department on what someone did really well” (P5)</td>
<td>“depending on who tells the story it can really make an impact on the way you work…it makes the biggest difference, because you think, oh, recognition; fantastic” (P5)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influences impressions of the organisation – perceive the organisation to be competent and successful</td>
<td>“we share our Call of the Week…it’s created definitely a sense of pride around what each and every person’s doing, but it’s also created that little sense of competition…” “I want to be the person whose story’s shared with the rest of the team”…our quality of calls has skipped forward massively” (P3)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Influences feelings – feel proud to work for the organisation</td>
<td>“big contract wins are definitely something we focus on (in stories)…it’s important they feel they’re part of a progressive, forward-thinking company that’s winning business and is a leader” (P12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influences behaviour – understand what behaviour is desired, motivated to improve service delivery</td>
<td>“it’s good to hear about the success stories and stuff, so it makes you feel part of the business” (E32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities platform (accomplishments element) – exemplification behaviour (assertive strategy)</td>
<td>“(stories about) the community days again it’s about what we’ve achieved as a company” (E12)</td>
<td>Not evident in case study data</td>
<td>Not evident in case study data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits platform (internal benefits element) – ingratiation behaviour (assertive strategy)</td>
<td>“One of the key stories at the moment is about trip to Hong Kong that they are offering to everyone in the business...that is a really, really good story” (P16)</td>
<td>Not evident in case study data</td>
<td>Not evident in case study data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits platform (external benefits element) – ingratiation behaviour (assertive strategy)</td>
<td>“stories are sometimes very explicitly used for that kind of thing, telling how we deal with people” (E30)</td>
<td>Influences impressions of the organisation – perceive the organisation to be caring</td>
<td>“some of the stories can be quite dramatic...I think that as a company they do try to do their best for the customer. You then think it is a caring organisation” (E35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“there was a power cut and there was an old lady living by herself so one of the engineers went round and took her a generator” (E12)</td>
<td>Influences feelings – feel that job is worthwhile</td>
<td>“you’re hearing good things about what people are doing with people and sharing those stories around, it just makes everyone feel better, makes everyone feel like they’re doing a job that’s well doing...it feels good” (E11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“we had someone who organised hotel rooms for 18 people during a particularly long fault just before Christmas, and she went out of her way...we shared that”(P3)</td>
<td>Influences behaviour – understand what behaviour is desired</td>
<td>“if...you celebrate that exemplar behaviour (through stories), then people know how they are supposed to behave” (E44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits platform (external benefits element) – exemplification behaviour (assertive strategy)</td>
<td>“we did a story about...a little boy and the staff was trying to raise money for him to go to America for an operation on his leg” (E18)</td>
<td>Influences feelings – feel good about the organisation</td>
<td>“there are positive (stories) where we’ve affected the local communities...all of those sort of things make you feel good about the company”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional platform (emotion element)</td>
<td>Emotion influences audiences, rather than a particular impression management strategy</td>
<td>“a lady whose electricity had gone off...you could literally hear her losing consciousness. He gets in his car and drives 35 miles to her house, to find her, to try and sort out the problem with her, make sure she was warm...it really does touch you” (E7)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The first one (story in a corporate film)...is quite a shocking one in that it’s somebody’s died on the network” (P13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional platform (conflict element) – supplication behaviour (assertive strategy)</td>
<td>“a lot of the stories where you hear about customers wrong bills and that sort of thing, bad customer experiences” (E16)</td>
<td>“a lot of the stories...it does tell you a bit about our systems, our procedures and whether we’ve got things right” (E16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“there is the stories about, “we need to make these improvements because this is happening and this is what our customers are saying about us. So this is why we need to change”” (P13)</td>
<td>“we always have a safety moment where someone will tell what’s happened to them safety wise and what they’ve done and what they did to make it better, and then we’ll have a little discussion about it. So, we do get stories told like that” (E12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                                     | Influences impressions of the organisation – become aware of weaknesses in the organisation | “if I hear...a negative story, I am actually very
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Emotional platform (conflict element) – apologies, justifications and excuses behaviour (defensive strategy)</th>
<th>“We’ve apologised to the press. We are sorry that we did that...there have been stories around that” (E44 – apologies behaviour)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“you’re telling the customer a story about the fault...you’re explaining how difficult it can be to get them on” (P4 – excuses behaviour)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“business related stories so to speak are given out regularly to the press to justify things that we might have done, things that we might do in the future” (E11 –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“problems in the organisation”</td>
<td>disappointed because I feel it is somebody letting down the company” (E18)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“with the safety stories you can get to feel a little bit frustrated sometimes” (E7)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>“the stories that you hear about incidents from a safety point-of-view, that will change your behaviour” (E31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“if you hear a bad case...if they’re doing something that’s an unsafe practice at the moment then they change it” (E21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not evident in case study data – behaviour used in external stories</td>
<td>Not evident in case study data – behaviour used in external stories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Strategy platform (vision/mission/goals element) – illustrative strategy | “The safety goal is the strongest one, and that’s probably where stories are used most and most routinely at all levels” (E29)  
“our story, which was from 2010... it talked about moving forward; it talked about the people; it talked about vision” (P11) | Influences thinking – understand corporate strategy | “when we are talking about safety and we are talking about service stories...it’s pushing towards I think where we want to be as a company” (E9)  
“they’re the only (goals) I ever remember as well because there is more of an emphasis on those ones and those are the stories that you hear about” (E12)  
“I’m quite proud about being involved with a company that is so in touch with safety” (E9)  
“stories that reinforce that seriousness of purpose...I think make people feel good about coming to work” (E2) |
| Strategy platform (values element) – ingratiation behaviour (assertive strategy) | “Safety stories are absolutely a number one priority so absolutely clear. I suppose we do have service stories as well. So two of the values are probably very obvious” (E42)  
what we hear about people going the extra mile, I suppose that, in a way, is a story and it is to do with our values” (P19) | Influences feelings – feel good about working for an organisation  
Influences behaviour – change behaviour in accordance with an organisation’s values | “stories that reinforce...those values I think make people feel good about coming to work” (E2)  
“if you actually do take those values on board and believe what you are told then I think you will change your behaviour” (E16) |
Table 5.7 illustrates that impression management activity in elements of stories influences organisation members’ impressions of an organisation, as indicated from the impression management literature. Impression management activity also influences organisation members’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour, as suggested from the sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives of stories. However, there is a lack of evidence to indicate the influence of some elements on organisation members when involving particular impression management strategies and behaviours (noted in Table 5.7). This includes exemplification behaviour when conveying accomplishments, ingratiation behaviour when conveying internal benefits, and defensive strategy behaviours when conveying conflict. The findings presented below subsequently focus on how conveying reputation platforms in stories influences organisation members where there is evidence from the case study data.

5.5.3 Influence of corporate stories on organisation members by conveying the activities platform (activities element)

The activities element predominantly involves a demonstrative strategy. The interview data shows that this influences organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, by making them aware of the organisation’s activities outside their own business area: “I think one thing that the stories do is actually tell you how diverse it is as a company. We’re so much more than an energy supplier” (E7). A demonstrative strategy also influences organisation members’ thinking, by helping them to create meaning from activities in the organisation: “when you read through it, oh I can see why they were using that part of machinery. So, you learn about other parts that way: how they carry out their work; what machinery they use; and what visits they do out on site” (E13).

In addition to this, a demonstrative strategy influences organisation members’ feelings, by making them feel more involved with the organisation: “it is making people feel involved and making them know what is going on in our business,
which I think is key...really feel like you are part of not just being in a team but part of a bigger team and knowing how much of an impact you have” (P16). Finally, a demonstrative strategy influences organisation members’ behaviour, by enabling them to learn from the experiences of colleagues. This could help them to improve performance in the future: “stories of past experience could really help going forward” (E24); “I’ll be telling stories about what has happened in other parts of the organisation, because they latch on to those really quickly and say, oh yeah, I can do that” (E44).

The activities element can also involve exemplification, when expressing how an organisation goes beyond its usual business activities. This is generally as part of its corporate social responsibility activity. The interview data shows that this influences organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, by leading them to perceive that the organisation cares about the community: “they do show the company in a good light...when you then hear stories about what we’ve done...it does make you feel good to be part of a company that cares about the community” (E12). Exemplification influences organisation members’ feelings, by making them feel good about the organisation, and that their job is worthwhile. For example: “it does give you a good feeling when you see the good work that we’ve done...just giving somebody a day off work but still paying you to go out and fix a fence somewhere or plant some trees or stuff like that” (E12); “it kind of feels like you’re actually doing something worthwhile” (E35).

5.5.4 Influence of corporate stories on organisation members by conveying the activities platform (accomplishments element)

The accomplishments element mainly involves self-promotion. Evidence from the interviews shows that self-promotion influences organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, by making the organisation appear successful and competent: “they feel they’re part of a progressive, forward-thinking company that’s winning business and is a leader” (P12). This behaviour influences
organisation members’ feelings too, by making them feel proud to work for the organisation: “when you hear good stuff it makes you want to work for them” (E10); “it gives you that sense of pride” (E40). Self-promotion also influences organisation members’ behaviour, particularly those in the customer service areas. Sharing service stories about achievements in service delivery can show organisation members what behaviour is desired in the organisation: “we share our Call of the Week...our quality of calls has skipped forward massively” (P3). This can motivate organisation members to improve their service delivery: “it can really make an impact on the way you work” (P5).

5.5.5 Influence of corporate stories on organisation members by conveying the benefits platform (internal and external benefits elements)

Internal and external benefits elements involve exemplification or ingratiation. However, the lack of stories conveying internal benefits in the organisations means there is insufficient evidence regarding how the internal benefits element influences organisation members, and so this is not discussed further. Ingratiation behaviour is involved in the external benefits element, where the benefits expressed are part of the organisation’s usual business activities: “stories are sometimes very explicitly used for that kind of thing, telling how we deal with people” (E30). This is associated with service stories. Exemplification is evident where the benefits expressed go beyond those the organisation would provide as part of its usual business activities (to either customers or other stakeholders). For example, in community/charity stories: “there are positive (stories) where we’ve affected the local communities in certain ways” (E16). The interview data shows that ingratiation and exemplification behaviour both influence organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, by making the organisation appear caring: “I think that as a company they do try to do their best for the customer. You then think it is a caring organisation” (E35).
Ingratiation and exemplification also influence organisation members’ feelings. Ingratiation in service stories can make them feel that their job is worthwhile, because they are helping customers: “it makes it all worthwhile. It makes it worth coming to work because you know you’re making a difference to people” (P1). Exemplification in community/charity stories can make them feel good about the organisation: “it does make you feel good to be part of a company that cares about the community” (E12). Ingratiation also influences the behaviour of organisation members, by providing examples of desired behaviour: “it’s a way of sharing an example of what we do and how we respond to someone and we want everyone to take the best practice from” (P3). Again, this is evident in service stories, which show how organisation members should behave when interacting with customers.

5.5.6 Influence of corporate stories on organisation members by conveying the emotional platform (emotion and conflict elements)

The emotion element is associated with multiple impression management strategies and behaviours. However, the interview data indicates that emotion itself influences audiences, rather than impression management activity involved in the element. Emotion influences organisation members’ feelings by evoking positive or negative emotions. For example, safety stories can evoke fear: “two of these apprentices woke up in the middle of the night to find somebody was in their room. And obviously that’s really quite frightening” (E7). In contrast, safety stories can also evoke humour: “somebody’s...walked into a brick wall...there’s some humour in some of the incidents” (E21). Service stories can also influence organisation members’ feelings. For example: “a lady whose electricity had gone off...you could literally hear her losing consciousness. He gets in his car and drives 35 miles to her house, to find her, to try and sort out the problem with her, make sure she was warm... it really does touch you” (E7).
The conflict element predominantly involves supplication. The interview data indicates that supplication influences audiences’ impressions of an organisation, by making them aware of weaknesses in the organisation, for example in performance stories: “it does tell you a bit about our systems, our procedures and whether we’ve got things right” (E16). Supplication also influences organisation members’ thinking, particularly in safety stories. These stories are often shared amongst organisation members in order to understand why issues occurred. For example: “we always have a safety moment where someone will tell what’s happened to them safety wise and what they’ve done and what they did to make it better, and then we’ll have a little discussion about it. So, we do get stories told like that” (E12).

Supplication influences organisation members’ feelings too, by leading them to feel negative about problems in the organisation: “with the safety stories you can get to feel a little bit frustrated sometimes” (E7). In addition, supplication influences organisation members’ behaviour, by encouraging them to change their behaviour to avoid risks. This is again particularly evident in safety stories. For example: “the stories that we get given tend to be based around safety alerts…you might be doing something that you’ve got away with for years and thought it was the right practice, and all of a sudden something’s happened and you need to change it” (E21).

The defensive strategy behaviours (justifications, excuses, and apologies) are involved in the conflict element. However, they were mentioned infrequently in the interviews, and predominantly regarding service stories in external communication. For example, excuses behaviour was evident when a fault had occurred: “you’re telling the customer a story about the fault as well, because you explain to them what’s going on in their area, and what the engineers are doing. And sometimes you’re explaining how difficult it can be to get them on” (P4). Justifications behaviour was evident where there was conflict in stories told to the press: “if we have a price change then there’s normally a story behind why… business related stories so to speak are given out regularly to the press to justify
things that we might have done, things that we might do in the future” (E11).
Apologies behaviour was discussed once in Energy One, as a response to a particular negative incident that was reported in the press: “We knew we were wrong. We’ve apologised to the press. We are sorry that we did that...there have been stories around that” (E44). As these stories were aimed at external audiences though, there is no evidence regarding how these behaviours influence organisation members.

5.5.7 Influence of corporate stories on organisation members by conveying the strategy platform (vision/goals and values elements)

Safety and service stories are often told in the case study organisations, as noted previously. These stories relate to the organisations’ vision/goals and values. The vision element can involve an illustrative strategy, which is evident where stories refer to the overall purpose of the organisation in terms of safety and service. The values element can involve ingratiation behaviour, which is evident where stories refer to safety and service as characteristics of the organisation.

The interview data indicates that an illustrative strategy influences organisation members’ thinking, in terms of their understanding of corporate strategy. Some interviewees perceive that they remember safety and service as aspects of the organisations’ vision and goals due to stories. For example: “they’re the only ones I ever remember as well because there is more of an emphasis on those ones and those are the stories that you hear about” (E12).

Both an illustrative strategy and ingratiation influence organisation members’ feelings, by making them feel proud to work for the organisation: “I’m quite proud about being involved with a company that is so in touch with safety” (E9), or feel good about working for the organisation: “stories that reinforce...those values I think make people feel good about coming to work” (E2). Ingratiation also influences organisation members’ behaviour, by encouraging them to act in
accordance with the organisation’s values: “if you actually do take those values on board and believe what you are told then I think you will change your behaviour” (E16).

5.6 Issues affecting the influence of corporate stories on organisation members

The sections above present the findings regarding the influence of stories on organisation members by conveying reputation platforms. However, the findings also indicate limitations of impression management activity in corporate stories. Not all interviewees perceive that they are influenced by stories. Ten interviewees (in both front line and managerial roles in the customer service and operational areas of both organisations) believe that stories do not affect their thinking or feelings: “it doesn’t make much difference to me to be honest” (P7).

In addition to this, stories are often perceived to reinforce rather than change organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, and their thinking and feelings: “the stories might just reinforce some of the ideas you have, but I don’t think they sort of sway you” (E22). This was mentioned particularly regarding negative stories not affecting positive feelings about the organisations: “I feel good about (Energy One) anyway. A negative story...I would probably think there was more behind that, it was probably not true” (E15).

The interview data also indicates issues that are perceived to affect the influence of stories on organisation members, specifically the credibility and relevance of stories. These findings are presented below.

5.6.1 Credibility in corporate stories

The interview data indicates that the influence of stories on organisation members is affected by the perceived credibility of stories. The perceived credibility of
stories in the organisations is related to the extent to which stories recount real events. Interviewees noted that stories in the organisations are predominantly based on real events. This is also evident from the official stories in the documentary data collected (such as stories in the company newspapers and magazines, and on the internet and intranet). However, nine interviewees (eight from Energy One and one from PowerOn) noted that unofficial stories within the organisations are sometimes based on real events but are then exaggerated or changed. Two interviewees said that they had exaggerated stories themselves: “you sometimes feel obliged to maybe not make stuff up but to exaggerate maybe or to try and make it into something worth telling” (E30).

Interviewees are less likely to be influenced by stories which they perceive have been exaggerated or changed though: “if you exaggerate the story too much then obviously they’ll see straight through it and just take no notice of it’ (P8). This could affect the credibility of the storyteller as well as the story: “I think if you make the story up, or you adjust the story too much, then if you’re not careful you can lose the credibility of a story. And if you lose the credibility or you lose that yourself...then whatever else I tell them they’re not going to believe” (P8).

Exaggerating or changing stories is not always perceived negatively, however, by organisation members. Altering a story could help make a particular point: “you’ll exaggerate the story slightly, or change the story slightly, really just to make it fit the point that you’re trying to get across” (P8).

Imagined stories are used to a much lesser extent in the organisations than real stories. Interviewees in PowerOn referred to two official stories presented in corporate films that recounted imagined events. However, these imagined stories were still based on similar events that had happened in the organisation, or that could happen. One was a safety story, which portrayed an accident resulting in the death of an employee, in order to raise awareness of safety risks: “the video was like a real life scenario...he got injured at work and didn’t come home that night” (P17). The other story was used in communication with external as well as internal audiences, as it appeared on the corporate website. This story expressed the
organisation’s activities and how it helped customers: “it was just showing the importance of what (PowerOn) does” (P2). Imagined unofficial stories are also used in training sessions to build understanding around how to react in particular situations: “it’s a story but it’s a scenario...which we can change and chop around” (E20).

5.6.2 Relevance of corporate stories

The interview data indicates that the perceived relevance of corporate stories can also affect their influence on organisation members. Stories need to be perceived as relevant in order to gain the interest of organisation members. This was discussed by 16 interviewees, including managers and front line employees across the business areas in both organisations: “I think stories...need to be relevant to your business area, because otherwise you’re never going to listen” (E12); “it’s more about the story linking to something that matters to me” (P14). Relevant stories for interviewees in the customer service areas tend to be those that focus on customer service, whereas in the operational areas, relevant stories are focused on experiences in the field. Managers in particular perceive that the influence of stories on the behaviour of organisation members depends on the relevance of a story: “I think some stories would perhaps affect their behaviour and some wouldn’t. I think it would depend on where the story resonated from and if the part of the business where that story came from had a direct impact on them” (E17).

5.7 Summary of stage two findings

The second stage of the study investigated official and unofficial corporate stories in internal communication. The key findings from this stage of research are summarised below.
1. Both official and unofficial corporate stories are evident within the case study organisations, including corporate history stories. There are overlaps between official and unofficial stories, and stories are often repeated by organisation members throughout the organisations.

2. Official and unofficial stories can take the form of whole stories or story fragments.

3. Official stories originate from corporate communication teams and senior managers. Unofficial stories are also told by senior managers, as well as by middle managers and other organisation members.

4. Official stories are delivered through verbal, print, and digital channels. Unofficial stories are often delivered verbally, but digital channels can also enable organisation members to share unofficial stories.

5. Awareness of stories varies between the organisations, and between different levels of the hierarchy and business areas. A higher percentage of front line employees perceive the use of stories in their organisations compared to middle and senior managers. A higher percentage of interviewees from the corporate areas perceive the use of stories, compared to interviewees from the operational and customer service areas.

6. Organisation members in Energy One are encouraged to share stories, whereas there is no apparent encouragement for organisation members to share stories in PowerOn.

7. Interviewees perceive that all the elements suggested from the literature are present in stories, although to varying extents. Overall, the internal and external benefits elements are perceived least by interviewees. The organisations’ safety and service vision/goals and values are frequently expressed in stories, but the organisations’ other goals and values are infrequently expressed.

8. Interviewees from the customer service areas of both organisations perceive more of all the elements in stories than interviewees in the operational areas.
9. Overall, interviewees who perceive that reputation platforms are conveyed through corporate stories to a greater extent believe they have a greater understanding of corporate strategy, and that stories have a greater influence on their feelings and behaviour. Corporate stories are particularly influential on organisation members in the customer services area of the organisations.

10. Impression management activity in elements of stories influences organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, and their thinking, feelings, and behaviour.

11. There are limitations of impression management activity in corporate stories though, as not all interviewees perceive that they are influenced by stories, and stories are often perceived to reinforce rather than change organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, and their thinking and feelings.

12. The influence of stories on organisation members is affected by the perceived credibility and relevance of stories.

The next chapter discusses the findings from both stages of the study in light of the literature, in order to answer the research questions posed in this thesis and address the overall research problem.
Chapter 6 – Discussion

This chapter brings together the findings from both stages of the study, in order to address the research questions posed in this thesis, namely:
Q1. How are corporate stories used as a corporate identity cue?
Q2. How do corporate stories influence audiences, particularly organisation members?

A framework is presented which demonstrates how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue and influence audiences. This framework is developed from the theoretical and analytical frameworks presented earlier in this thesis and the study findings. The study findings are discussed in light of the research questions, elaborating on the links established in the framework.

A central aspect of case study research is that it aims to generalise findings to theory rather than just to the research population (Woodside & Wilson, 2003, p. 500), as discussed in chapter three. The study findings are discussed in this chapter with reference to the corporate story and impression management literature. This means in particular that the findings from the second stage of the study could apply beyond the boundaries of the case study organisations (Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006, p. 40; Yin, 2009, p. 45). There are similarities between the case study organisations and other organisations in the UK energy industry, in terms of their strategic focus and business activities (again discussed in chapter three). Based on this, the chapter considers where the findings are likely to be typical for other organisations in the energy industry. In addition, this chapter also reflects upon the wider implications of the findings, for industries that have similar issues and challenges to the energy industry.
6.1 Framework for how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue and influence audiences

The key findings in the study are brought together in Figure 6.1 in order to illustrate how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue and influence audiences.

Figure 6.1: Framework for how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue and influence audiences
Overall, the study findings support the theoretical framework developed from the literature review in chapter two. This illustrates that corporate personality is a source of corporate stories, and that corporate stories can act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms. Impression management activity involved in the elements that represent platforms influences audiences. The analytical framework used to guide the data analysis (presented in chapter three) extends the theoretical framework, by detailing links between elements in stories and impression management strategies and behaviours (again based on the literature). These links are also supported by the study findings.

In addition, the findings provide further insight into the influence of impression management strategies and behaviours on organisation members. The findings also show issues that are likely to affect the use of stories as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences. The study findings are incorporated into the framework in Figure 6.1, to provide a detailed understanding of the influence of impression management activity on audiences’ impressions of an organisation, and organisation members’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour. The next sections refer back to this framework in answering the research questions, and discuss the links proposed in the framework in more depth. It is important to note that the framework predominantly shows the use of stories as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences as a linear process, with stories originating from corporate personality. However, the stories told in an organisation could themselves impact corporate personality, due to their influence on organisation members. This two-way influence is illustrated by the double headed arrows between official and unofficial stories and corporate personality. The use of stories as a corporate identity cue can therefore be seen as part of an ongoing cycle of corporate reputation development and management in organisations.
6.2 How are corporate stories used as a corporate identity cue?

This section discusses issues that are likely to affect the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue, namely organisation members’ awareness of stories and the use and repetition of official and unofficial stories in communication. These issues are noted in the framework in Figure 6.1. The section then discusses how stories act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms, also illustrated in Figure 6.1.

6.2.1 Organisation members’ awareness of stories

Awareness of stories in the case study organisations varies widely. Overall, frontline employees perceive greater use of stories in the organisations than middle and senior managers. This supports the proposition by Marshall and Adamic (2010, p. 22) that leaders often find stories “unfamiliar”. There is also less awareness of stories in the customer service and operational areas of the organisations than in the corporate areas. This is unsurprising considering that most of the interviewees from the corporate areas are part of the corporate/internal communication teams. However, it does mean that corporate stories are less likely to be used as a corporate identity cue by leaders and managers in the customer service and operational areas of the businesses.

The findings suggest, though, that encouragement in using stories from senior managers and corporate communication teams increases the use of stories as a corporate identity cue. This is based on greater perceptions of stories in Energy One, where storytelling is encouraged (albeit only safety stories), compared to PowerOn, where storytelling is not encouraged. Despite this, there is no training provided in either organisation to guide managers in using stories, or in encouraging team members to share stories. The use of stories in the organisations therefore depends predominantly on an individual’s own
communication style. This could explain the differences in interviewees’ perceptions of the use of stories between the organisations, at different levels in the hierarchy, and in different business areas.

The lack of widespread appreciation for stories in the organisations means that stories do not appear to be part of mainstream internal communication, as suggested in the studies by Barker and Gower (2010, pp. 301, 308) and Yang (2013, p. 133). This is likely to limit the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue within the organisations. Barker and Gower (2010, p. 308) claim that there is a need for increased training in using stories in organisations, and the findings indicate that this is true for the case study organisations. Training senior and middle managers in the use of stories could increase the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue in internal communication.

6.2.2 Use and repetition of corporate stories in communication

The findings show that corporate stories are used in organisations’ external and internal communication. Corporate history stories are commonly presented on organisations’ websites, as part of external communication. The case study findings show that other official stories are also presented on organisations’ websites; in the case study organisations, these are predominantly service stories. However, there is potential for organisations to increase their use of stories in external communication. Corporate history stories are presented on the websites of around only half of the organisations sampled in the first stage of the study, and neither of the case study organisations present a corporate history story on their website. This indicates that many organisations are missing opportunities to use this type of official story as a corporate identity cue.

Stories are used in internal communication, by corporate communication departments, and by organisation members at all levels of the hierarchy. There is not a single, dominant, story in either of the case study organisations, but instead
there are multiple stories, both official and unofficial. Official and unofficial stories can take the form of whole stories or story fragments. This supports the propositions by Boje (1995, p. 1001) and Volker et al. (2011, p. 105) that organisations cannot be registered as one story, and that there are both whole stories and story fragments within organisations. The different types and forms of story can all act as corporate identity cues by conveying reputation platforms (discussed later in the chapter).

Within the case study organisations, there are often overlaps between official and unofficial stories. Both types of story are frequently repeated beyond their original audience, and official stories can be repeated as unofficial stories or vice versa. The repetition of stories throughout an organisation means that using corporate stories as a corporate identity cue can express corporate personality to the original story audience, but also to wider audiences as a story is repeated. Examples of repeated stories in the organisations are presented in appendix nine. These stories retain their central theme in each repetition. Six out of the nine stories are safety stories, two are service stories, and one is a management story. The prevalence of safety stories illustrates the emphasis on safety in the case study organisations. This is due to the inherent safety risks in the organisations’ activities, as discussed in chapter one, which mean that safe working practices are a priority. For example, three interviewees repeated a story about an engineer who was burnt in a flashover (story four). This story is also evident in artefacts in the organisation, as mannequins in the depot display what happened in the flashover. Visually displaying the damage caused to the engineer’s protective equipment adds to the verbal story shared by managers and organisation members, and makes the story more powerful.

However, organisations in the energy industry are keen to improve their corporate image by focusing on customer service. The central theme of the service stories repeated in the organisations is how organisation members have gone above their normal duties to provide excellent customer service. For example, five interviewees repeated a story about an engineer who replaced a part in a
customer’s boiler with one from his own boiler (story one). Encouraging organisation members to share service stories, in the same way they are encouraged to share safety stories in Energy One, would reinforce the organisation’s commitment to customer service with organisation members. This can then improve service delivery, as discussed further in the section on the influence of stories on organisation members.

However, it is important to note that there are some differences between the repeated stories. For example, the safety story about the electrocution of a linesman (story five) was told in more detail by a senior manager in the operational area (E23) than a middle manager in the same area (E17). The senior manager also recounted the story from the perspective of a participant in the events, whereas the middle manager repeated the story having heard it from another source. This echoes the study of narrative repetition by Dailey and Browning (2014, p. 23), who found that when stories are repeated they generally change based on the storyteller’s goals, the audience, and the context. This means that the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue is likely to be affected by how they are repeated by organisation members. If a story is changed significantly then this could also change how the story expresses corporate personality.

6.2.3 Conveying reputation platforms through corporate stories

The findings from the first stage of the study show that all the elements in stories proposed from the literature review are evident within corporate history stories. Similarly, the findings from the qualitative and quantitative analysis in the second stage of the study show that the elements are evident in official and unofficial stories in the organisations as well. This illustrates that corporate stories in external and internal communication can act as a corporate identity cue by conveying reputation platforms. The elements that represent each of the platforms are outlined in Figure 6.1.
However, the extent to which each reputation platform is conveyed through stories varies. This means that the aspects of corporate personality expressed through stories also vary. Organisations place greater importance on conveying some reputation platforms through corporate history stories than others. There are also differences in the reputation platforms conveyed through corporate history stories between the two sectors. This indicates that the charities use stories as a corporate identity cue differently to the FTSE 100 companies.

In particular, the FTSE 100 companies’ and charities’ stories most frequently express the organisation’s performance, through conveying the activities platform (accomplishments element). Organisational performance is suggested to be part of corporate personality by He (2012, p. 615). Activities are used less frequently than accomplishments, and are more common in the charities’ stories than the FTSE 100 companies’ stories. This element expresses corporate personality in terms of what the organisation does (Otubanjo, 2011, p. 265). Charities may focus more on informing audiences about their activities because they have less awareness with audiences than the companies in the FTSE 100 Index.

The charities’ stories include greater use of the benefits and emotional platforms. This means that the charities’ stories express corporate personality in terms of who the organisation is (Otubanjo, 2011, p. 265) and the characteristics that distinguish it from other organisations (Abratt, 1989, p. 67; Bromley, 1993, p. 160) to a greater extent than the FTSE 100 companies’ stories. However, stories from both sectors infrequently convey vision, mission, and values elements, which are strategic aspects of corporate personality (Otubanjo, 2012, p. 70; Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007, p. 422; Stuart, 1999, p. 205; Suvatjis & de Chernatony, 2005, p. 819). Overall, both the FTSE 100 companies and charities overly focus on the activities platform in their corporate history stories. They tend to neglect the benefits and emotional platforms, and particularly the strategy platform. Dowling (2006, p. 85) proposes that organisations should not focus too much on one theme in their corporate stories. This is discussed further in the next section, when
considering the influence of reputation platforms on audiences. In general, a more balanced use of reputation platforms in corporate history stories would express corporate personality more holistically.

Interviewees’ perceptions of elements in stories vary between the business areas. Elements are perceived less by interviewees in the operational areas of the organisations than in the customer service areas. This again suggests that there are inconsistencies in the use of stories as a corporate identity cue across the organisations, as discussed previously. In general, interviewees perceive that some elements are expressed more through stories than others. Activities, emotional, and strategy platforms are perceived more than the benefits platform. Regarding the strategy platform, safety and service are part of Energy One’s and PowerOn’s vision/goals and values. Safety and service stories are common in both organisations, and interviewees believe that stories help them to remember these aspects of the organisation’s vision/goals and values.

However, there are other aspects of both organisations’ strategies that are not expressed through stories. Communicating the organisation’s vision/goals and values more comprehensively through stories could enhance organisation members’ understanding of corporate strategy. In particular, managers could make greater use of stories to convey internal benefits and to promote vision/goals and values other than safety and service. For example, sustainability is a key issue in the energy industry, including the need to reduce carbon emissions (“Sustainability”, n.d.), as noted in chapter one. Both of the case study organisations stress environmental and social responsibility and sustainability on their websites. Energy One in particular has activities in renewable energy, and sustainability is one of their values. Despite this, there are a lack of stories around sustainability in the organisations. Stories can be used to engage organisation members with sustainability, in the same way they are used around safety. This includes encouraging organisation members to share their own stories around sustainability issues, as well as using official stories to promote the organisation’s activities and achievements in sustainability. Overall, the findings indicate that
there are opportunities for managers to enhance the use of stories in external and internal communication as a corporate identity cue.

6.3 How do corporate stories influence audiences, particularly organisation members?

The study uses impression management theory to interpret the influence of corporate stories on audiences, as well as drawing upon the sensemaking and sensegiving perspectives of stories in the corporate story literature. The findings from the first stage of the study show that elements in stories involve different impression management strategies and behaviours. The findings from the second stage of the study extend this further, by illustrating how impression management activity in the elements influences organisation members. Based on this, conveying reputation platforms through stories can have four key influences on audiences, particularly organisation members, namely:

1. Audiences’ impressions of an organisation
2. Organisation members’ feelings
3. Organisation members’ thinking
4. Organisation members’ behaviour

The impression management literature indicates how assertive and defensive impression management strategies (and the specific behaviours that are part of these strategies) can influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation. This is supported by the findings from the case studies. As well as supporting the existing literature, though, the study also brings new insight into the influence of impression management activity on audiences. The findings bring additional insight into the influence of an assertive strategy on organisation members, specifically in influencing their feelings and behaviour. There is a lack of evidence in the literature regarding the influence of illustrative and demonstrative impression management strategies on audiences. The study findings indicate that these strategies could influence organisation members’ thinking and feelings (both
strategies), as well as their impressions of an organisation and their behaviour (demonstrative strategy). The links between impression management activity and the influence on audiences are outlined in Figure 6.1.

Interviewees who perceive that reputation platforms are conveyed through corporate stories to a greater extent believe they have a greater understanding of corporate strategy, and that stories have a greater influence on their feelings and behaviour. In particular, interviewees in the customer service areas appear to be influenced by reputation platforms conveyed through stories. In contrast, the influence of reputation platforms in stories is less apparent for middle managers and interviewees in the operational areas. This indicates that there are differences regarding the extent to which conveying reputation platforms through stories influences organisation members, depending on their business area and level in the hierarchy. However, this could be due to some interviewees’ lack of awareness of stories in the organisations, as discussed previously. The influence of each platform on organisation members is considered in more detail below.

6.3.1 Influence of corporate stories on audiences by conveying the activities platform (accomplishments element)

The findings from the first stage of the study indicate that the accomplishments element predominantly involves the use of self-promotion behaviour. Evidence from the interviews shows that self-promotion influences organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, by making the organisation appear successful and competent. The impression management literature supports this influence on audiences, as self-promotion is proposed to make an organisation appear intelligent, expert (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344), and competent (Young et al., 1994, p. 32). Competence is related to expertise, which is proposed to be one of the most important aspects of corporate credibility (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, pp. 343, 345). This could subsequently lead to an organisation gaining respect from audiences (Young et al., 1994, p. 32).
The interview data also indicates that self-promotion influences organisation members’ feelings, by making them feel proud to work for the organisation. This influence is supported in the corporate identity literature, as it is suggested that recalling positive past performance can reinforce the self-esteem of organisation members (He, 2012, p. 617). In addition, self-promotion influences organisation members’ behaviour, particularly those in the customer service areas. Sharing stories about achievements in service delivery shows organisation members what behaviour is desired in the organisation. This can motivate organisation members to improve their service delivery. These influences are not previously noted in the impression management literature, and subsequently bring new insight into the influence of self-promotion on organisation members.

However, organisations should be careful not to over-use the accomplishments element in their corporate stories, in both external and internal communication. Focusing on an organisation’s past performance involves looking backwards (He, 2012, p. 617), and over-emphasising past achievements may suggest that an organisation is “past its prime” (Dowling, 2006, p. 85). This could negatively influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation. This is particularly an issue regarding the use of corporate history stories by organisations, as accomplishments are used most frequently out of all the elements in the stories from both populations. Managers should balance the use of accomplishments alongside elements that focus on the current and future state of the organisation (such as the elements that represent the benefits and strategy platforms).

6.3.2 Influence of corporate stories on audiences by conveying the activities platform (activities element)

Nearly all of the activities statements in the FTSE 100 companies’ and charities’ history stories involve a demonstrative strategy. This is unsurprising, as a demonstrative strategy involves providing facts or details about an organisation’s
activities (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1081), meaning there is a clear link between the strategy and element. The interviews show that a demonstrative strategy influences organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, by helping them find out what is occurring in the organisation. This is supported in the literature, as it is proposed that providing information helps stakeholders to evaluate an organisation (Dowling & Moran, 2012, p. 28). A demonstrative strategy also influences organisation members’ thinking by helping them to create meaning from activities in the organisation. Similarly, it is noted in the literature that stories can be a way for organisation members to find out what occurs in an organisation and how things work (Wilkins & Thompson, 1991, p. 20).

The demonstrative strategy also influences organisation members’ feelings, by making them feel more involved with the organisation. This supports the findings in the study by Ohara and Cherniss (2010, pp. 31-32) that stories unite organisation members by helping them find a stronger connection to each other and the organisation. Similarly, Marzec (2007, p. 26) claims that stories can help organisation members appreciate their role within an organisation. Finally, the findings indicate that this strategy influences organisation members’ behaviour, as they can learn from the experiences of colleagues.

As noted previously, the impression management literature lacks evidence regarding how a demonstrative strategy influences audiences. This study therefore contributes to the literature by bringing insight into the influence of a demonstrative strategy on organisation members’ impressions of an organisation, as well as their thinking, feelings, and behaviour.

The findings also show that the activities element can involve exemplification behaviour. This behaviour is evident when the activities expressed go beyond an organisation’s usual business activities, as part of its corporate social responsibility. Exemplification behaviour in the activities element influences organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, by leading them to perceive that the organisation cares about the community. This is supported in the
impression management literature. Previous studies propose that exemplification can make an organisation appear virtuous, trustworthy (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344), morally worthy (Young et al., 1994, p. 32), and committed to corporate social responsibility (Perks et al., 2013, p. 1883). The findings also indicate that exemplification influences organisation members’ feelings, by making them feel good about the organisation, and that their job is worthwhile. These findings again contribute to the impression management literature, by illustrating that exemplification influences organisation members’ feelings, as well as their impressions of an organisation.

However, managers should not just focus on the organisation’s current activities in corporate stories. Focusing too much on an organisation’s current situation may result in a corporate story resembling a “report card” (Dowling, 2006, p. 85). Activities (and also accomplishments, discussed previously) are internally focused facts and information about an organisation (Spear & Roper, 2013, p. 496). It is suggested in the communication literature, however, that emotional appeals are more effective than factual appeals in communicating with stakeholders (such as Leonidou and Leonidou (2009, p. 527)). Similarly, the literature on corporate stories emphasises the importance of emotion in stories (such as Herskovitz and Crystal (2010, p. 21), and Woodside (2010, p. 532)). This suggests that conveying the activities platform through corporate stories may not have as much influence on audiences as the emotional platform (discussed later). Despite this, many organisations’ corporate history stories focus on conveying the activities platform, to the neglect of the other platforms. This indicates an opportunity for managers to enhance corporate history stories, by placing less emphasis on the activities platform and more emphasis on the emotional platform.
6.3.3 Influence of corporate stories on audiences by conveying the benefits platform (internal and external benefits elements)

Internal and external benefits statements often involve ingratiation behaviour. In particular, ingratiation behaviour is evident in stories about customer service, which portray the benefits offered to customers. External benefits statements can also involve exemplification behaviour. This behaviour is evident when the statements portray benefits offered to an organisation’s wider stakeholders, such as local communities or charities (rather than their customers). There is a lack of stories expressing internal benefits in the case study organisations, however, so the findings only show how impression management activity in external benefits influences organisation members.

Ingratiation and exemplification in the external benefits element can influence organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, by making the organisation appear caring. The impression management literature supports the positive influence of these behaviours on organisation members’ impressions of an organisation. Ingratiation is proposed to make an organisation appear attractive (Young et al., 1994, p. 32) and likeable (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344). Exemplification can make an organisation appear morally worthy (Young et al., 1994, p. 32), and committed to corporate social responsibility (Perks et al., 2013, p. 1883).

Ingratiation and exemplification can also influence organisation members’ feelings. Ingratiation can make organisation members feel that their job is worthwhile, because they are helping customers. Similarly, exemplification can make them feel good about the organisation. Ingratiation can also influence the behaviour of organisation members, by providing examples of desired behaviour when interacting with customers. This echoes the study by Volker et al. (2011, p. 107), which found that stories can provide organisation members with expectations of behaviour.
The importance of service stories for Energy One and PowerOn has already been discussed in this chapter. Customer service is a common focus across the organisations in the energy industry, as the industry aims to change its negative image and build trust with customers. Nearly all of the suppliers and DNOs emphasise service as part of their values/strategic priorities (or similar), as discussed in chapter three. This indicates that the findings from this study are likely to be typical for other organisations in the energy industry. This means that service stories would also be important for other organisations in the industry, in order to improve customer service delivery by influencing organisation members’ behaviour.

These findings also have implications for organisations facing similar reputational issues. For example, there is a lack of public trust in the financial services industry, as a result of scandals and crises in recent years (Shearman, 2013). Organisations in the industry are trying to regain consumer trust (Bacon, 2013), as in the energy industry. Rumpler (2012) encourages financial services organisation to share stories with customers in order to build authenticity and trust. Conveying the benefits platform in service stories could make financial services organisations appear more likeable, by showing the benefits they offer customers and emphasising their commitment to customer service.

There are similarities in customer service processes between the energy industry and the financial services industry. Organisations in both industries use call centres to handle the large number of customer queries that they receive. The findings in this study show that stories have the greatest influence on organisation members in the customer service areas of the case study organisations. This study indicates then that stories could influence organisation members’ behaviour and potentially help to improve customer service in the financial services industry.

However, internal benefits are infrequently used in corporate history stories, as well as in stories in the organisations. External benefits are used less in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories than in the charities’ stories. In general, the FTSE 100
companies’ stories focus more on what an organisation has achieved than what it offers stakeholders. This is surprising, as stakeholders will expect benefits from an organisation (Dowling, 2006, p. 93). It makes sense then that communication should consider an audience’s self interest in order to be effective, as suggested by Ogilvy (1983, p. 123). Using stories to communicate how beneficiaries are helped is proposed to help a non-profit organisation to differentiate itself (Merchant et al., 2010, p. 754), and this is also likely to hold true in the case of for-profit organisations. Overall, both the FTSE 100 companies and charities could make greater use of the benefits platform in their corporate history stories. This could enhance the positive influence of these stories on audiences’ impressions of an organisation. Managers in the case study organisations are also missing opportunities to use corporate stories to communicate the benefits offered to organisation members. This supports the need for training in using stories within organisations, as discussed previously. However, further research is needed to understand how conveying internal benefits in stories influences organisation members.

6.3.4 Influence of corporate stories on audiences by conveying the emotional platform (emotion element)

The findings focus on how emotion influences organisation members, rather than impression management activity involved in the use of the element. This element influences organisation members’ feelings by evoking positive or negative emotions. This is particularly evident in safety and service stories, and stories that evoke emotion are perceived to be more powerful than those that are more factual. The influence of emotion on organisation members’ feelings is supported in the corporate story literature. It is proposed that emotion could influence audiences’ feelings towards an organisation, by creating an emotional bond with audiences (Dowling, 2006, p. 85).
Emotion is evident in over half of the charities’ corporate history stories. Using this element is important for charities, as Sargeant, Hudson, and West (2008, pp. 625-626) claim that emotional traits offer scope for differentiation between charities. However, emotion is evident in fewer of the FTSE 100 companies’ stories than the charities’ stories (around only a quarter of the stories). The lack of emotion in the FTSE 100 companies’ stories is surprising, as the corporate story literature emphasises the importance of emotion in stories (such as Herskovitz and Crystal (2010, p. 21) and Woodside (2010, p. 532)). Emotion is suggested to attract customers and keep organisation members motivated, by creating an emotional bond (Dowling, 2006, p. 85). This indicates that the charities are using corporate history stories more effectively than the FTSE 100 companies to influence audiences.

6.3.5 Influence of corporate stories on audiences by conveying the emotional platform (conflict element)

The conflict element predominantly involves supplication behaviour. Supplication influences organisation members’ impressions of an organisation, by making them aware of weaknesses in the organisation. This echoes the impression management literature, where it is proposed that supplication can influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation by making the organisation appear weak (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, pp. 343-344). Supplication can also influence organisation members’ thinking, particularly in safety stories. Organisation members can be seen to extract a particular “lesson” from safety stories, as noted in the study by Maclean et al. (2012, p. 22), regarding why an incident occurred and what should be done in the future to address the issue. This also supports the proposition by Volker et al. (2011, p. 107) that stories can be used to “pass on situational problem solving knowledge”.

Supplication behaviour can influence organisation members’ feelings, by leading them to feel negative about problems in the organisation. In addition, supplication
can influence organisation members’ behaviour, by encouraging them to change their behaviour to avoid risks. This is again particularly evident with safety stories. This influence is supported in the corporate story literature, as it is suggested that stories can be used to warn or alarm organisation members, and reinforce acceptable activities and behaviour (Chen, 2012, pp. 314, 316; Dailey & Browning, 2014, p. 26).

The findings show that safety stories can influence organisation members’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour, by making them aware of safety risks and subsequently changing their behaviour to avoid risks. Other organisations in the energy industry face similar risks to the case study organisations in their business activities. As a result, there is a general, industry-wide, commitment to safety, as discussed in chapter three. The study findings are therefore likely to be typical for other organisations in the energy industry. This means that other organisations in the industry could also benefit from using safety stories to positively influence organisation members around safety issues.

The findings also have implications for other industries where safety is paramount. Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and construction are the riskiest industry sectors in the UK, with the highest rates of fatalities and injuries (“Agriculture health and safety”, 2014; “Construction industry”, 2014). There have been several campaigns run by the Health and Safety Executive aimed at reducing deaths, injuries, and ill health in these industries (“Double-award win…”, 2010; “National clampdown…”, 2014). This study indicates that safety stories could make people working in these industries more aware of safety risks, and encourage them to change their behaviour at work in order to avoid risks.

The conflict element occasionally involves excuses and justifications behaviours (which are part of a defensive strategy). However, these behaviours are only evident in stories aimed at external audiences in the case study organisations, therefore the findings do not indicate how these behaviours influence organisation members. The impression management literature suggests though that these
behaviours could help avoid audiences forming negative impressions of an organisation or attributing undesirable qualities to it (Ogden & Clarke, 2005, pp. 332, 335).

Conflict is particularly evident in the corporate history stories of organisations in controversial industries, such as banking, oil, and tobacco (for example, RBS Group, HSBC, BP, Rio Tinto, Royal Dutch Shell, and British American Tobacco). These organisations use supplication and defensive strategy behaviours to admit problems and defend their actions. However, many organisations do not acknowledge corporate failures in their corporate history stories. For example, M&S do not mention their failed venture in Europe during the early 2000s in their corporate history story. None of the conflict statements in the charities’ stories involve a defensive strategy. This could mean that the for-profit companies are more likely than charities to commit bad acts, for which they need to defend themselves. Alternatively, attention from the media and calls for greater transparency may have made the FTSE 100 companies more open about problems than the charities. Managers should be aware that using supplication behaviour or a defensive strategy to show an organisation’s vulnerabilities and defend bad behaviour can help avoid audiences forming negative impressions of an organisation. However, there is a need for further research on the influence of a defensive strategy from the perspective of audiences, as this is not evident from the study findings.

6.3.6 Influence of corporate stories on audiences by conveying the strategy platform (vision/goals, mission, and values elements)

Vision/goals and mission elements predominantly involve an illustrative strategy. An illustrative strategy influences organisation members’ thinking, in terms of their understanding of corporate strategy. This influence is supported in the corporate story literature, as it is claimed that corporate vision can give organisation members a sense of purpose (Baker & Boyle, 2009, pp. 80-81; de Chernatony et
An illustrative strategy also influences organisation members’ feelings by making them feel proud to work for the organisation. There is a lack of evidence in the existing impression management literature regarding the influence of the illustrative strategy on audiences. These findings subsequently contribute to the literature by showing that an illustrative strategy can influence organisation members’ thinking and feelings.

The values element predominantly involves ingratiation behaviour. Ingratiation influences organisation members’ feelings, by making them feel good about working for the organisation. Ingratiation can also influence organisation members’ behaviour, by encouraging them to act in accordance with the organisation’s values. This is supported in the corporate story literature. Gill (2011, p. 19) claims that stories can influence employees’ behaviour to support corporate strategy, by expressing a message that encourages employees’ to behave in accordance with an organisation’s values. These findings contribute to the impression management literature regarding the influence of ingratiation on organisation members.

However, the strategy platform is neglected in most of the corporate history stories. Vision, mission, and values statements generally appear separately on organisations’ websites, rather than in the corporate history stories. This is unexpected, as the corporate story literature emphasises that stories are an effective way to communicate corporate strategy (de Chernatony et al., 2006, p. 823; Marzec, 2007, pp. 26, 28). By not including these elements in corporate history stories, both the FTSE 100 companies and charities are missing the opportunity to use stories to express corporate strategy as part of their external communication. In the case study organisations, stories around safety and service reinforce these aspects of the organisations’ vision/goals and values. However, there are opportunities for managers to use stories to express goals and values other than safety and service, as noted previously. This could broaden organisation members’ understanding of corporate strategy.
6.3.7 Issues affecting the influence of corporate stories on organisation members

The findings indicate that there are limitations regarding the influence of corporate stories on organisation members. The influence of impression management strategies and behaviours does not appear to be consistent across all organisation members, as not all interviewees perceive that they are influenced by stories. In addition to this, stories are often perceived to reinforce rather than change organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, and their thinking and feelings. This was mentioned particularly regarding negative stories not affecting positive feelings about the organisations. This is supported in the rumour management literature, where it is claimed listeners tend to place greater credence on rumours that support their existing attitudes and beliefs (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002, p. 5 & 15). This has implications for the use of corporate stories by managers, as it indicates that stories have more influence in reinforcing current thinking and positive feelings towards an organisation, rather than changing organisation members’ thinking and feelings.

The influence of stories on organisation members is affected by the perceived credibility of stories. The perceived credibility of stories is related to the extent to which stories recount real events. This echoes the distinction between real stories (recollections of a real event) and imagined stories, proposed by Volker et al. (2011, p. 108). This is also supported in the propaganda literature, where credibility is seen to be crucial in avoiding stories being rejected by audiences as propaganda (Martin & Powers, 1983, p. 103; Neuhauser, 1993, p. 58, 59). Stories in the case study organisations are predominantly based on real events, but are sometimes altered in order to make a particular point. This aligns with the perspective in the literature that stories are reconstructions of events, and that the needs and desires of a storyteller may lead them to exaggerate or manipulate stories, thereby reducing their accuracy (Baruch, 2009, p. 17; Gabriel, 1991, p. 428). There is some use of imagined stories, as part of training sessions, in order to demonstrate particular situations that may be faced by organisation members.
This supports the use of imagined stories to serve a particular agenda, as proposed by Volker et al. (2011, pp. 107-108), in this case “to pass on situational problem solving knowledge”.

However, exaggerating or changing stories too much can diminish the influence of stories on organisation members, as well as damage the credibility of the storyteller. These findings echo the corporate story literature, where it is suggested that “managers that try to stretch the boundaries of the corporate story too far will fail to gain credibility in the eyes of influential third parties” (Heugens, 2002, p. 68). Truth in stories is claimed to be key to effectively conveying a message (Barker & Gower, 2010, p. 307). This is supported from an impression management perspective, as Gardner and Martinko (1988, p. 333) propose that “if the audience knows that the image claimed is false, the actor may be discredited”. Similarly, it is claimed in impression management theory that inconsistency in communication can lead an audience to question the accuracy of all communication from an individual/organisation (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, p. 22).

Overall, the findings indicate that the link to real events is important to give corporate stories credibility with audiences. However, the extent to which stories should be based on real events depends on the purpose of a story. This echoes the study on manipulative stories by Auvinen et al. (2013, p.429), which suggests that manipulation could be acceptable depending on whether it serves a purpose that is beneficial for organisation members. In the case study organisations, exaggerating a story about a potential safety risk could be seen as acceptable for example, as this aims to prevent harm to organisation members. The perceived credibility of stories is important, as stories that are perceived to lack credibility are less likely to influence audiences. Managers therefore need to balance reality in their stories with the need to make a particular point to audiences, in order for stories to be perceived as credible and have the desired influence on audiences.

The perceived relevance of corporate stories can also affect their influence on organisation members. Stories need to be perceived as relevant in order to gain
the interest of organisation members. These findings support propositions in the corporate story literature that “great stories are relevant” (Baker & Boyle, 2009, p. 83), and that stories “must be compelling to the audience and appropriate for the purpose and context” (Jameson, 2001, p. 504). As would be expected, the relevance of stories varies between different business areas within the organisations. The structure of the case study organisations is similar to other organisations in the energy industry, in that they include both customer service and operational business areas. The operational areas are particularly diverse in the supplier organisations, as these often involve gas and electric generation, storage, and transmission, as well as supply (as discussed in chapter three). The study findings are subsequently likely to be typical for other organisations in the energy industry, in that the relevance of stories will vary across the organisations. This emphasises the need for managers in the industry to tailor stories according to the intended audience and emphasise their relevance, in order for stories to influence organisation members.

6.4 Summary of discussion

This chapter discusses the study findings in light of the research questions, and presents a framework that demonstrates how corporate stories are used as a corporate identity cue and influence audiences. The discussion brings insight into the use and repetition of stories in organisations, including organisation members’ awareness of stories and the importance of encouraging organisation members to use stories. Four key influences of stories are considered, namely the influence on audiences’ impressions of an organisation, and organisation members’ feelings, thinking, and behaviour. The chapter draws attention to issues that are likely to affect the influence of corporate stories on organisation members, particularly the relevance and credibility of stories. The discussion shows that the study findings have implications for the case study organisations as well as other organisations in the UK energy industry, and also for organisations in industries that have similar issues and challenges.
Having discussed the study findings, the final chapter concludes the thesis by considering how the research addresses the overall problem in this thesis and contributes to the academic literature and to business practice.
Chapter 7 - Conclusion

This chapter draws conclusions in terms of how the research addresses the fundamental problem of this thesis: what is the role and significance of corporate stories in corporate reputation management? The contributions of the research to the academic literature and to business practice are then presented. The final sections of the chapter identify the limitations of this thesis and suggest areas for future research.

7.1 Role and significance of corporate stories in corporate reputation management

The study shows that corporate stories can play a role in corporate reputation management by acting as a corporate identity cue. Stories can convey reputation platforms which express aspects of corporate personality. Platforms are represented by elements in stories, specifically activities, accomplishments, internal and external benefits, emotion, conflict, vision/goals, mission, and values. Reputation platforms are evident in unofficial and official corporate stories (including corporate history stories), and in stories used in internal and external communication. Stories can take the form of whole stories and narrative fragments. This emphasises the need for managers to acknowledge and understand official and unofficial stories in an organisation, as both types of story could act as a corporate identity cue. The role of stories in corporate reputation management can vary between organisations, however, and also between different areas of an organisation. The use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue is affected by awareness of stories within an organisation, and also by how stories are used and repeated within the organisation.

Stories are significant as a corporate identity cue due to their influence on audiences. The study found that corporate stories can influence organisation members’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour, as well as audiences’ impressions of
an organisation. However, the perceived credibility and relevance of stories is likely to affect how they influence audiences. In general, managers should base stories on real events and avoid exaggerating or changing stories too much, in order for stories to be perceived as credible. Managers should also emphasise the relevance of a story for the audience, in order to gain the interest of organisation members.

7.2 Academic contribution of the study

Chapter two discusses gaps in the existing literature on corporate stories. Based on these gaps, there are several ways in which this study contributes to the academic literature.

Previous research on corporate stories in the organisation studies literature has questioned the extent to which stories are understood and utilised in organisations (such as Barker and Gower (2010, pp. 301, 308), Dolan and Bao (2012, p. 10), Marshall and Adamic (2010, p. 22), and Yang (2013, p. 133)). Managers are perceived to often lack awareness of the importance and use of stories, both official and unofficial. The findings in this study shows a lack of appreciation for stories in organisations, particularly by middle and senior managers. Following on from this, there is potential for organisations to increase the use of stories in external and internal communication. Encouragement from corporate communication teams and senior managers in sharing stories is key in increasing the use of stories within an organisation.

In the corporate communication literature, van Riel and Fombrun (2007, pp. 136-137) propose that anchoring communication around reputation platforms can help drive corporate reputation. However, there is a lack of empirical research on the use of platforms in corporate communication and particularly in corporate stories. This study shows how platforms are conveyed through corporate stories and how they are represented by story elements.
The majority of previous studies in the corporate identity and corporate story literature lack a theoretical underpinning (including the studies by Auvinen et al. (2013, pp. 415-416, 420), Chen (2012, pp. 314, 316), and Ohara and Cherniss (2010, p. 31), discussed in the literature review). This limits the insight that they bring into the use and management of corporate stories. This study uses impression management theory to interpret corporate stories. Impression management theory shows that conveying reputation platforms through corporate stories influences organisation members’ thinking, feelings, and behaviour, as well as audiences’ impressions of an organisation.

The study also contributes to the impression management literature, by extending knowledge of how impression management activity can influence audiences. The existing literature suggests that an assertive impression management strategy could influence audiences’ impressions of an organisation (such as Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2007, pp. 343, 345), Ogden and Clarke (2005, pp. 323, 325-326, 329), Perks et al. (2013, pp. 1883, 1886), and Schniederjans et al. (2013, pp. 911, 913, 916)), and this is supported by the case study data. The findings also show that exemplification behaviour can influence organisation members’ feelings, and self-promotion, ingratiation, and supplication behaviours can influence organisation members’ feelings and behaviour. The existing literature lacks evidence regarding how demonstrative and illustrative strategies influence audiences. The findings contribute to the literature by providing evidence regarding how these strategies can influence organisation members. Specifically, both strategies can influence organisation members’ thinking and feelings, and the demonstrative strategy can influence their impressions of an organisation and their behaviour.

As well as contributing to the academic literature, the findings also have implications for business practice. Subsequently, the next section considers the practical significance of the study.
7.3 Practical significance of the study

This study has identified a number of issues regarding the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences. Based on these issues, this section makes recommendations for the use of official stories in reputation management, and for training managers in using stories in reputation management. The value of using stories in training and development is also acknowledged. The guidance in this section is specifically applicable for the case study organisations and organisations in the commercial and charity populations in the first stage of the study. However, chapter six discusses that the findings from the second stage of research have implications for other organisations in the UK energy industry, and also industries with similar issues and challenges. Following this, the practical significance of the study is proposed to be more broadly relevant for managers in industries in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors.

7.3.1 Use of official stories in corporate reputation management

Official stories in external communication can be used in reputation management to influence audiences’ impressions of the organisation, by expressing aspects of corporate personality through conveying reputation platforms. This will affect corporate image and ultimately corporate reputation. This study focused on the use of corporate history stories in reputation management, and found that many organisations in the for-profit and non-profit sectors do not present a corporate history story on their website. This is despite claims that stakeholders expect to see corporate history on an organisation’s website, and that stories are an effective way of presenting corporate history. It is subsequently recommended that organisations in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors should present a corporate history story on their website. Organisations should ensure that a corporate history story expresses aspects of corporate personality that will contribute to desired corporate reputation, through the use of reputation platforms. Corporate history stories on organisations’ websites tend to convey the
activities platform, but neglect the benefits, emotional, and strategy platforms. Balancing the reputation platforms conveyed through stories would express corporate personality more holistically.

This is also true for official stories in internal communication, as the extent to which platforms are conveyed through stories within organisations is variable. In particular, there could be greater use of stories to express the benefits an organisation offers to both external stakeholders and organisation members, and to communicate corporate strategy. This is relevant for stories in organisations’ newspapers and magazines and on the intranet, as well as in verbal communication. Organisations could also present other stories on their websites. For example, official stories around an organisation’s achievements, or excellent customer service, can act as a corporate identity cue. Organisations could also use their websites and social media to enable audiences to participate in the creation of corporate stories or contribute their own stories. However, this would need to be carefully managed by corporate communication teams, to ensure that stories support desired corporate reputation.

7.3.2 Use of stories in training and development

Stories can be used for training and development in organisations. Real stories can make trainees aware of situations they might encounter, enable them to learn from past experiences, and help them to determine appropriate responses to situations. Stories can also establish the credibility of the trainer, by showing that the trainer has relevant knowledge and experience. However, imagined stories can also be effective if there is not a real life situation that is suitable for the purpose of the training. This is supported by Beigi (2014, p. 494), who claims that fictional stories can introduce new perspectives and stimulate different ways of thinking. Stories from outside the organisational context are also suggested to be more appropriate for dealing with difficult or sensitive topics, such as sexual harassment. It should be recognised though that the use of stories in training and
development is not the same as reputation management, which is considered further below.

7.3.3 Training managers in the use of stories in reputation management

It is important that managers know how stories can be used in reputation management, but the lack of awareness of stories by managers indicates a need for training in this area. Training should make both senior and middle managers aware of how reputation platforms can be used in stories to promote the desired corporate image, and how stories can be used to influence organisation members’ impressions of the organisation, and their thinking, feelings, and behaviour. This can include increasing their understanding of corporate strategy and engendering pride and positive feelings about their work. Encouragement from managers for organisation members to share their own stories can increase engagement with the organisation’s values, for example around safety and service. This will affect the corporate image and reputation, as held by organisation members. Stories can influence organisation members to behave in accordance with the desired corporate image, by celebrating particular behaviours by organisation members, and showing that they are supported and rewarded by the organisation. At the same time, stories can warn against undesirable behaviour by showing negative consequences for the individual and the organisation. Organisation members’ attitudes and behaviour will impact external stakeholders’ interactions with the organisation, and therefore also influence the corporate image and reputation held by other stakeholders.

Training should make managers aware of issues that affect the influence of stories on organisation members, specifically the perceived relevance and credibility of stories. Stories that are perceived as irrelevant are more likely to be ignored by audiences. Managers should therefore emphasise the relevance of stories for the intended audience, in order to gain the attention of organisation members. The perceived relevance of stories is likely to vary across an organisation, depending
on roles and activities in different business areas. One story may not be suitable to use in communication across a whole organisation, and stories may need to be adapted for the audience in order to be perceived as relevant. In order to enhance the perceived credibility of stories, it is recommended that stories should be based on real events where possible. Managers may alter stories in order to make a particular point. However, they should avoid over-exaggerating or changing stories too much, as this can negatively impact the credibility of stories, and storytellers themselves.

Crucially, training should also emphasise that it is not possible for managers to control stories in organisations. Unofficial stories are repeated amongst organisation members, whether or not managers are aware of or encourage storytelling in an organisation. Official stories are also repeated as unofficial stories. Repetition of stories means that their influence can extend beyond their original audience, but stories are likely to change as they are repeated, which can affect how a story acts as a corporate identity cue and its influence on audiences. Training for managers should instead highlight that monitoring the stories shared in the organisation can provide valuable insight into the organisational culture and indicate problems and issues in the organisation. For example, the stories shared in an organisation can indicate how organisation members view managers, and whether they support or resist the organisation’s values. Addressing the problems behind negative stories, as well as encouraging the circulation of positive stories, are therefore key aspects of the use of stories in reputation management.

7.4 Limitations of the study

Despite the contributions of this study, there are several limitations of the research that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the populations selected for the study mean that corporate stories are only investigated in particular industry and organisational contexts. This limits the generalisability of the findings. The populations in the first stage of research are companies in the FTSE 100 Index and
charities in England and Wales with an income range of £10,000, 001 and over. This means that although corporate history stories are explored in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors, the organisations themselves are all relatively large and well-established. However, the literature indicates that corporate stories are also important for smaller, less visible organisations (such as O'Connor (2002, pp. 36, 39) and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 139)). There are also other types of non-profit organisation that this study does not consider, such as universities and museums. There may be differences in the use of corporate history stories by small and medium-sized organisations compared to large organisations, and also by other types of non-profit organisation.

The case study approach in the second stage of the study brings insight into the use of corporate stories within two organisations in the UK energy industry. This approach means that the findings can only be generalised to the case study organisations. However, the implications of the findings are likely to be relevant for other organisations, both in the UK energy industry and in other industries. This is considered in the previous chapter.

This study considers stories in external and internal communication. However, the study only investigates corporate history stories as a particular type of corporate story in external communication. The study does not consider other official corporate stories in external communication, or unofficial stories shared with external audiences. Further to this, the study also focuses on corporate history stories presented on organisations’ websites. It does not consider stories delivered through other channels or in other corporate communication formats (such as annual reports or press releases, for example). This limits the insight that the study brings into the use of corporate stories in external communication. Corporate websites provide information for all of an organisation’s stakeholders (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007, p. 343), whereas other corporate communication formats are often targeted at specific stakeholder groups. Corporate stories in other formats may subsequently be used differently as a corporate identity cue, depending on the target audience. The study also does not investigate external
audiences’ perspectives of corporate stories. This means that the study lacks insight into how stories influence external audiences.

The study does investigate organisation members’ perspectives of corporate stories and how they are influenced by stories in internal communication. The study focuses on stories told by organisation members and the corporate communication department. However, stories from third parties (such as partner organisations and the media) are also shared internally within organisations. It would be interesting to investigate how these stories influence organisation members compared to stories originating from within an organisation. The study investigates the influence of stories on organisation members based on how interviewees perceive that they, and other organisation members, are influenced by stories. This approach has disadvantages, though, in that it relies on organisation members being aware of how they and others are influenced by stories. In reality, organisation members may be unconsciously influenced by stories. This is particularly likely when considering that some interviewees lack awareness of stories in their organisation. This potentially limits understanding of how stories influence organisation members. Also, although this study focuses on stories, it is important to acknowledge that other corporate identity cues could influence audiences and play a significant role in corporate reputation management.

This study brings insight into the influence of impression management activity on audiences, however, it is unable to investigate some impression management strategies and behaviours. Intimidation behaviour is proposed to be effective to achieve a “perception of power of one firm over another” (Schniederjans et al., 2013, p. 916), which indicates that intimidation in corporate stories could influence audiences. However, there is no evidence of this behaviour in the stories investigated in the study. Similarly, there is a lack of evidence regarding the influence of a defensive strategy on audiences. This strategy could avoid stakeholders forming negative impressions of an organisation, and therefore could be important in corporate stories.
The limitations of the current study are used as a basis for identifying areas for future research, discussed below.

7.5 Areas for future research

It would be valuable to extend this research by exploring corporate stories in other contexts. Within the for-profit sector, this should include the use of stories as a corporate identity cue by small and medium-sized organisations. This study focuses on the energy industry, and future research could explore stories in other industry contexts. Studies could also investigate the use of stories by other types of organisation in the non-profit sector. This would broaden understanding of corporate stories by comparing the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue and their influence on audiences in other industry and organisational contexts.

Future research should also build on the findings from this study with a more comprehensive investigation of the use of corporate stories in external communication, both official and unofficial. This should include stories delivered through multiple communication channels and in different formats. In particular, the growing importance of social media in storytelling is noted in the literature and warrants further research. This would enable greater understanding of the use of corporate stories as a corporate identity cue when presented through different channels and aimed at different stakeholder groups.

As corporate reputation management requires a multiple stakeholder focus, there is a need for further research to investigate corporate stories from the perspective of a wider range of stakeholder groups. Research should also extend this study by considering how stories from third parties influence organisation members. Utilising other methodological approaches, such as experimental and observation research, could bring deeper understanding into the influence of stories on audiences (including organisation members), rather than relying solely on the
perceptions of audiences themselves. Using impression management theory to interpret stories in future studies could bring insight into the influence of corporate stories on audiences other than organisation members. This would also be valuable to extend understanding of the influence of impression management activity on audiences, particularly where there is a lack of evidence in the current study.

Finally, the link between corporate identity and corporate brand is discussed in chapter one, as corporate brands are rooted in corporate identity (Balmer & Thomson, 2009, p. 15). This thesis has not focused on corporate branding, however, it is proposed in the literature that corporate stories can differentiate a corporate brand (Janssen et al., 2012, p. 33). This means that the use of stories as a corporate identity cue could also impact corporate brand management. Organisation members play a key role in corporate branding (Balmer & Gray, 2003, p. 972; Hatch & Schultz, 2003, p. 1041; Morhart et al., 2009, p. 122; Simões et al., 2005, pp. 157, 163), as discussed in this thesis. The influence of stories on organisation members subsequently has implications for the delivery of a corporate brand. Based on this, the role of stories in corporate branding is a significant area for future research.
References


*Powering the UK: Investing for the future of the Energy Sector and the UK*. (2012). London: Ernst & Young LLP.


http://www.reputationdividend.com/recent-studies/


http://www.reputationinstitute.com/thought-leadership/white-papers


http://www.reputationinstitute.com/thought-leadership/complimentary-reports-2011

*Reputation Survey: British Airways – Public clips BA’s wings.* (2010, March 24). Retrieved February 2, 2012 from the PR Week website:


APPENDICES
# Appendix 1 – Key Corporate Story Literature in Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area: Defining corporate stories</th>
<th>Author/s:*</th>
<th>Conceptual/empirical:</th>
<th>Methodology:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baker and Boyle (2009)</td>
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<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnes (2003)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry and Elmes (1997)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boje (1991)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, longitudinal case study of an office supply company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boje (1995)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, case study of Walt Disney enterprises</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boje (2008)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coopman and Meidlinger (2000)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, case study of a Roman Catholic parish staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cunliffe, Luhman, and Boje (2004)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dailey and Browning (2014)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowling (2006)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driscoll and McKee (2007)</td>
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<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel (2000)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gill (2011)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herskovitz and Crystal (2010)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janssen, Van Dalfsen, Van Hoof, and Van Vuuren (2012)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Quantitative, 45 Dutch companies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Küpers (2013)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land (2007)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maclean, Harvey, and Chia (2012)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, interviews with 16 business leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, and Saylors, (2013)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>van Riel and Fombrun (2007)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volker, Philips, and Anderson (2011)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, case study of a Fortune 500 company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate stories as part of the corporate identity mix</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boje (2006)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boje and Baskin (2011)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunetti (2007)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen (2012)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, ethnographic case study of the organisation behind the US Burning Man event</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delahaye, Booth, Clarke, Procter, and Rowlinson (2009)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel (1995)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaggiotti (2010)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, ethnographic case study of Tenaris, a multinational company that produces steel pipes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamby et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaufman (2003)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marzec (2007)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall and Adamic (2010)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumby (1987)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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<td>Neuhauser (1993)</td>
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<td>Rumer (1984)</td>
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<td>Snowden (2000)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tyler (2006)</td>
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<td>N/a</td>
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303
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reputation platforms in corporate stories</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baruch (2009)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bréda, Delattre, and Oclic (2008)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolan and Bao (2012)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, case studies of three organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James and Minnis (2004)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larsen (2000)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKee (2003)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mossberg (2008)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilkins and Thompson (1991)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of stories on audiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auvinen, Lämsä, Sintonen, and Takala (2013)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, interviews with managers in Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barker and Gower (2010)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunninge (2009)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, case studies of two Swedish organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heugens (2002)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, case studies of organisations in the global foods industry and environmental activist groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhodes, Pullen, and Clegg (2010)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Qualitative, case study of a high technology manufacturer in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang (2013)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaleznik (1989)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Authors are only included in the table in the first section in which they are a key source, although they may also be referenced in subsequent sections in chapter two*
Appendix 2 – Key Corporate Story Terms in Thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term:</th>
<th>Definition:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate story</td>
<td>A series of logically or chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by organisation-related characters, which take place in a setting related to the organisation (based upon Forster (1963, p. 45) and Meyer (1995, p. 214)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official corporate story</td>
<td>A corporate story in planned communication that is controlled by the organisation, and originates from senior managers or the corporate communication department (based upon Boje (1995, pp. 997, 1008), Boje and Baskin (2011, p. 418) and Karaosmanoglu and Melewar (2006, p. 197)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unofficial corporate story</td>
<td>A corporate story in unplanned communication that is not controlled by the organisation, and originates from organisation members (based upon Boje (1995, pp. 997, 1008), Boje and Baskin (2011, p. 418) and Karaosmanoglu and Melewar (2006, p. 197)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate history story</td>
<td>An official corporate story about the origins and history of the organisation, presented as a structured text (based upon Brunetti (2007, p. 114), Feldman, Sköldberg, Brown, and Horner (2004, p. 153), and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 144)).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 – Content Analysis Data Collection and Coding Manual

This study explores corporate history stories on organisations’ websites, and this manual provides instructions for collecting the required data from the websites and then coding this data.

Section A of the manual provides instructions for collecting data from organisations’ websites.

The coding will take place in two stages.

Section B provides instructions for the first stage, which involves coding the data collected for elements.

Section C provides instructions for the second stage, which involves coding the elements identified in the first stage for impression management strategies and behaviours.

Please code the documents based on the instructions provided. You may have previous experience of coding, but because each study is different please code only according to these instructions.
Section A: Data collection instructions

- You will be given a list of organisations and should use the Google search engine to find each organisation’s website.
- You need to identify whether the website includes a corporate history story; if so, then copy and paste this into a Word document.
- Corporate history stories are defined as an official corporate story about the development of the organisation and events in its history, presented as a structured text.
- A structured text is comprised of full sentences and paragraphs. You should not include other presentations of corporate history, for example, brief timelines or lists of events.
- You should look for corporate history stories in the About Us (or similar) section of the website, and the subsequent levels of the hierarchy.
- You should also use the ‘search’ tool on the website (if available) to search for these relevant terms: “history”, “story”, “milestones”, and “heritage”. You should look at links on the most relevant page of results only.

Additional instructions:

- Note the pathway to each web page and the relevant search term (if applicable) before copying the text e.g. About Us/Company Story, or Search “story” – Home/About Us/Careers/Our Story.
- Do not copy pictures or diagrams.
- Only copy links to other web pages if they form part of a larger textual section.
- Do not copy from out-of-date documents, for example Annual Reports prior to 2011.
- If a web page is in a format that means it is unable to be copied, write UNABLE TO COPY in the Word document.
Section B: Coding instructions for stage 1 – coding for elements in corporate history stories

• You will receive a Word document containing the corporate history stories identified from organisations’ websites.

• You need to code the documents for elements, as defined in Table 1 below, by highlighting relevant statements in the text with the specified colour codes.

• It is not expected that you will underline all the text in the documents with a colour code, unless you find that this is appropriate.

• Each statement coded should refer to a separate topic.

• If there are consecutive statements with the same colour code then leave a space of one or two words between the statements without a colour code, in order that these can be seen as separate statements.

• Please only assign one code to a statement, according to which definition is most applicable.
Table 1: Coding for elements in corporate stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reputation platform:</th>
<th>Element:</th>
<th>Definition:</th>
<th>Code:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>1. Activities</td>
<td>Describes the organisation’s (current) activities/abilities/core competences</td>
<td>Light green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Accomplishments</td>
<td>Describes the organisation’s accomplishments/achievements/successes (both current and past)</td>
<td>Dark blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>3. Internal benefits</td>
<td>Describes what the organisation offers its internal stakeholders</td>
<td>Gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. External benefits</td>
<td>Describes what the organisation offers its external stakeholders</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>5. Emotion</td>
<td>Displays emotion or attempts to evoke an emotional response in the audience</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Conflict</td>
<td>Displays the organisation’s struggles/problems</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>7. Vision</td>
<td>Describes the purpose/goals of the organisation, referred to as the organisation’s vision</td>
<td>Dark green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Mission</td>
<td>Describes the purpose/goals of the organisation, referred to as the organisation’s mission</td>
<td>Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Values</td>
<td>Describes the organisation’s beliefs or mindsets rooted within the organisation, referred to as the organisation’s values</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section C: Coding instructions for stage 2 – coding for impression management strategies and behaviours

- You will receive a spreadsheet listing the statements identified as elements in the first stage of coding.
- You need to code the statements for impression management strategies and behaviours, as defined in Table 2 below, by noting next to each statement which impression management strategy or behaviour is evident.
- Each element will have specified impression management strategies and behaviours which are likely to be used, but if a statement does not match the definition of the strategies or behaviours listed, then note which other strategy or behaviour is evident, or mark the statement as “No IM”
- Please note only one strategy or behaviour for each statement.
Table 2: Coding for impression management strategies and behaviours (based on Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, and Gilstrap (2008, p. 1081), and Bolino and Turnley (2003, p. 43))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM strategy:</th>
<th>IM behaviour:</th>
<th>Definition:</th>
<th>Colour code:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>Seeking to be likeable, showing that the organisation offers benefits to others (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982 as cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143; Ogden &amp; Clarke, 2005, p. 329)</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-promotion</td>
<td>Showing the organisation’s abilities and accomplishments (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982 as cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td>Dark blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exemplification</td>
<td>Showing the organisation as doing more or better than is necessary, going beyond the call of duty (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982 as cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td>Light pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supplication</td>
<td>Showing the organisation’s weaknesses or limitations (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982 as cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intimidation</td>
<td>Threatening or bullying others (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982 as cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td>Dark pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive</td>
<td>Apologies</td>
<td>Admitting that an act the organisation is involved in is wrong and expressing the organisation’s regret (Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td>Dark green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excuses</td>
<td>Attempting to minimise the organisation’s linkage to or responsibility for a bad act (Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td>Dark grey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justifications</td>
<td>Attempting to transform audiences’ perceptions of an act the organisation is involved in from bad to good or minimise the amount of harm done (Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td>Light grey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrative</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>Providing facts or details about the current activities undertaken by the organisation (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1081)</td>
<td>Light green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrative</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>Making broad generalisations about the organisation, and its purpose or aims (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1081)</td>
<td>Light blue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4 – Case Study Protocol

The case study protocol provides a standardised procedure to guide the case study researcher and enable replication of the case study by other researchers. Section A specifies the research questions investigated through the case study research and the analytical framework that guides the research. Sections B and C detail the data collection and analysis procedures that are followed in the fieldwork. Section D outlines the definitions for classifying stories and pre-defined categories used in coding the data. Section E provides the documentary resources required for the fieldwork.

Section A – Research questions and theoretical framework

Q1. How are corporate stories used as a corporate identity cue?
Q2. How do corporate stories influence audiences, particularly organisation members?

Figure 1: Framework for analysis of case study data
Section B – Data collection procedures

Data collection methods

- Semi-structured interviews
- Documentary research
- Observation research (of physical premises and artefacts)

Resources required for fieldwork

- Notebook
- Pens
- Audio recorder
- Organisational consent forms (provided in Section E)
- Individual consent forms (provided in Section E)
- Participant information sheets (provided in Section E)
- Interview guides (provided in Section E)

Procedures for obtaining informed consent

- Informed consent is obtained from the case study organisation and from individual participants.
- Informed consent is obtained from the organisation by providing a representative of the organisation (with the necessary authority) with a participant information sheet and asking them to sign an organisational consent form before any data is collected from the organisation.
- Informed consent is obtained from individuals by providing interview participants with a participant information sheet and asking them to sign an individual consent form before they participate in the research.

Data collection activities

Data collection is undertaken in three stages. The stages may be undertaken consequently or simultaneously, depending on access granted within the organisation and availability of informants.
Stage 1 – Interviews with members of the internal communication department and organisation members in various business areas and roles within the organisation.

• Purpose of interviews is to understand stories from the perspective of organisation members.
• Business areas and individuals to be interviewed are selected through consultation with the internal communication manager using a judgement sampling technique.
• Interviews last approximately 30-45 minutes and are conducted at a time and place convenient for the participant.
• Interviews are semi-structured and use an interview guide to ensure key areas relevant to answering the research questions are covered.
• The interview guide is provided to participants before the interview.

Stage 2 – Observation research

• Purpose of observation research is to understand how stories are used in the physical premises and artefacts of the organisation.
• Premises and artefacts to be observed are those where interviews are conducted.
• Observations are recorded in note or audio format by the researcher.

Stage 3 – Access to internal and external documents/communication materials that are relevant to the research.

• Purpose of collecting documents is to understand how stories are used in communication.
• Access to documents is at the discretion of the organisation.

All data collected is recorded in a case study database.
Section C – Data analysis procedures

The data collected in the case studies is analysed using thematic analysis and a native category approach. Themes are defined as “recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question” (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 150). Pre-defined categories and definitions (where necessary) for the thematic analysis are determined from the research questions and the analytical framework for the study, and are listed in section D. The native category approach involves also using themes that emerge from the data itself, in order to understand how participants perceive their own world (Buckley & Chapman, 1997, p. 290).

The coding procedure is based on King and Horrocks’ (2010, p. 153) basic system of thematic analysis, and the coding procedure used in the study by Feldman et al. (2004, pp. 149, 165), involving multiple rounds of analysis, and is outlined below:

• Stage 1 – Descriptive coding for pre-defined categories (highlight relevant material in each transcript, and other documents, based on the pre-defined categories and definitions listed in section D).
• Stage 2 – Descriptive coding using the native category approach (highlight relevant material in each transcript, and other documents, using the native category approach to identify categories from the data).
• Stage 3 – Interpreting categories (interpreting the meaning of data in each category by considering pre-defined categories in relation to categories derived from the data).
• Stage 4 – Deriving key themes (derive key themes for the data set as a whole by considering the meaning of data in light of the research questions and the analytical framework in the study).
### Section D – Pre-defined categories and definitions for coding

Table 1: Pre-defined categories and definitions for coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category folder:</th>
<th>Category:</th>
<th>Definition:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational data</td>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td>“A stakeholder’s overall evaluation of an organisation over time” (Abratt &amp; Kleyn, 2012, pp. 1049, 1058).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate stories</td>
<td>Corporate story</td>
<td>A series of logically or chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by organisation-related characters, which take place in a setting related to the organisation (based upon Forster (1963, p. 45) and Meyer (1995, p. 214)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Official corporate story</td>
<td>A corporate story in planned communication that is controlled by the organisation, and originates from senior managers or the corporate communication department (based upon Boje (1995, pp. 997, 1008), Boje and Baskin (2011, p. 418) and Karaosmanoglu and Melewar (2006, p. 197)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unofficial corporate story</td>
<td>A corporate story in unplanned communication that is not controlled by the organisation, and originates from organisation members (based upon Boje (1995, pp. 997, 1008), Boje and Baskin (2011, p. 418) and Karaosmanoglu and Melewar (2006, p. 197)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate history story</td>
<td>An official corporate story about the origins and history of the organisation, presented as a structured text (based upon Brunetti (2007, p. 114), Feldman, Sköldberg, Brown, and Horner (2004, p. 153), and van Riel and Fombrun (2007, p. 144)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impression management</td>
<td>Ingratiation behaviour</td>
<td>Seeking to be likeable, showing that the organisation offers benefits to others (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982 as cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143; Ogden &amp; Clarke, 2005, p. 329)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-promotion</td>
<td>Showing the organisation’s abilities and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplification behaviour</td>
<td>Showing the organisation as doing more or better than is necessary, going beyond the call of duty (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982 as cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplication behaviour</td>
<td>Showing the organisation’s weaknesses or limitations (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982 as cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimidation behaviour</td>
<td>Threatening or bullying others (Jones &amp; Pittman, 1982 as cited in Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apologies behaviour</td>
<td>Admitting that an act the organisation is involved in is wrong and expressing the organisation’s regret (Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuses behaviour</td>
<td>Attempting to minimise the organisation’s linkage to or responsibility for a bad act (Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justifications behaviour</td>
<td>Attempting to transform audiences’ perceptions of an act the organisation is involved in from bad to good or minimise the amount of harm done (Bolino &amp; Turnley, 2003, p. 143)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrative strategy</td>
<td>Providing facts or details about the current activities undertaken by the organisation (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1081)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrative strategy</td>
<td>Making broad generalisations about the organisation, and its purpose or aims (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1081)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities element</td>
<td>Describes the organisation’s (current) activities/abilities/core competences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishments element</td>
<td>Describes the organisation’s accomplishments/achievements/successes (both current and past)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal benefits element</td>
<td>Describes what the organisation offers its internal stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External benefits element</td>
<td>Describes what the organisation offers its external stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion element</td>
<td>Displays emotion or attempts to evoke an emotional response in the audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict element</td>
<td>Displays the organisation’s struggles/problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision element</td>
<td>Describes the purpose/goals of the organisation, referred to as the organisation’s vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission element</td>
<td>Describes the purpose/goals of the organisation, referred to as the organisation’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories</td>
<td>Influence of stories on audiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories by</td>
<td>Influence on impressions of an organisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mission</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values element</td>
<td>Influence on thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes the organisation’s beliefs or mindsets rooted within the organisation, referred to as the organisation’s values</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories by</td>
<td>Influence on feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>senior managers</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories by</td>
<td>Influence on behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle managers</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories by</td>
<td>Credibility of stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employees</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References:


Section E – Resources required for fieldwork

Organisational Consent Form

Project: Investigating Corporate Storytelling
Name of researcher: Sara Spear, University of Portsmouth

(Name of organisation) gives permission for Sara Spear to undertake research within the organisation as part of her PhD in Marketing at the University of Portsmouth, the purpose of which is to investigate the use of corporate storytelling.

The research will involve interviews with members of the organisation, the use of organisational documents, and observations of premises and artefacts in the organisation.

Data collected will be used in the PhD thesis, and in external publications of the research, such as academic journals. A summary of the key findings will also be provided to the organisation in a report.

The organisation will remain anonymous in all publications of the research, unless otherwise agreed with the organisation, and any information that could threaten the anonymity of the organisation will not be included in publications. Any sensitive information collected as part of the study will not be included in any publications.

Data collected from the organisation will be kept in password protected electronic files, or in a locked cupboard in a secure office (if hard copies). Data will only be accessed by the researcher and colleagues involved in the research project, and no third parties will be given access to data. Data will be kept for 5 years to allow completion of the thesis and publications, and then destroyed.

Any concerns regarding the research will be addressed by the researcher, contact details: email sara.spear@port.ac.uk tel: 02392 844234 address: Marketing department, Richmond Building, Portland Street, Portsmouth, PO1 3DE

We agree to the above terms of the research, and regard all the research to be ethically acceptable.

Signed on behalf of (Name of organisation)

Name .................................
Date .................
Individual Consent Form

Project: Investigating Corporate Storytelling

Name of Researcher: Sara Spear

Please initial boxes:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions, and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, and understand that data already collected may remain part of the study.

3. I agree to the audio recording of all interviews to ensure accuracy and allow the use of verbatim quotes.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant ....................................

Date ......................

Signature ..................................................

Name of person taking consent ..........................

Date .....................

Signature ..................................................

When completed: 1 for participant; 1 for researcher file
Participant Information Sheet – Interviews

We would like to invite you to take part in our research study. Before you decide if you would like to take part, we would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Once you have read through this information sheet, the researcher will be happy to answer any questions you have.

Project: Investigating Corporate Storytelling

The purpose of this study is to investigate corporate storytelling. You have been invited to take part in this study because we believe your role gives you a valuable insight into storytelling in your organisation. We hope that the results of this research will provide valuable information and guidance regarding corporate storytelling.

It is your decision whether to join the study. Please read through this information sheet, and raise any questions or issues you have with the researcher. If you agree to take part in the study, we will ask you to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. However, if you withdraw from the study once we have collected any data from you, this data may still remain part of the study.

The study will involve an interview lasting approximately 30-45 minutes, where we will ask you questions related to storytelling in your organisation. A guide to the questions will be provided to you before the interview, so you will be able to consider them in advance. We will audio record all interviews to ensure accuracy and allow the use of verbatim quotes. Interviews will be conducted at your convenience, at a time and location agreed with the researcher. Your data will be collected and analysed by the researcher (Sara Spear, Senior Lecturer in Marketing and doctoral candidate at the University of Portsmouth Business School).
All data collected will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely, either password protected (if computer files) or in a locked location (if paper or audio files). Codes will be given to protect individual and organisational identities and ensure anonymity for individuals and organisations. Data that can be identified to individuals or organisations will only be accessed by the researcher and those closely associated with the research (such as the research supervisor).

The data collected will be used for a doctoral thesis, and in publications of the doctoral thesis research. Data will be kept for 5 years to allow completion of the thesis and publications, and then destroyed. We are unable to offer payment or expenses for taking part in this study, but we will provide the organisation with a summary of our results once the study is completed.

We hope that you are now able to consider whether you would like to take part in the study. If you have any questions or concerns about any part of this study, please speak to the researcher (Sara Spear, tel: 02392 844234; email: sara.spear@port.ac.uk).
Interview Guide

Interview number:

Date:

Time:

Location:

This interview will look at internal communication and storytelling within your organisation. Please answer in your own words and ask me to explain anything that is unclear.

Section A – I’d like to find out a bit more about your organisation before we begin looking at storytelling

Q1. Please tell me about your organisation
For example, what do you know about your organisation’s mission, vision, and values?

Q2. Please tell me about how internal communication is used within your organisation (Managers – consider internal communication at managerial level, and internal communication to/from your team/s)

Q3. Are there any ways in which you think internal communication could be improved in your organisation? (Managers – consider both communications at managerial level, and internal communication to/from your team/s)

Section B – This section looks at storytelling within the organisation

Q4. Please tell me about any stories that are told within or about your organisation
For example any stories about how the organisation was founded/key people within the organisation/how the organisation operates?
What are the key messages in these stories?

Q5. Please tell me about how stories are used as part of internal communication (Managers – consider both communications at managerial level, and internal communication to/from your team/s)
For example who tells stories in your organisation (for example, chief executive, directors, managers, employees, volunteers)?
How were these stories developed?
Who are the audiences of these stories?
What communication methods are used in telling stories?
Q6. Please tell me about how stories are used as part of external communication
For example, are stories told to customers?
Other stakeholders?
What are the key messages in these stories?
What communication methods are used in telling stories?

Q7. Please tell me about any links between the stories that are communicated internally and externally
For example, do any of the stories told within the organisation support the stories that are used as part of external communication?
Do the stories that are communicated internally or externally affect the way you or other organisational members behave?

Section C – This section looks at the influence of stories in the organisation

Q8. Please tell me how stories about your organisation affect you as a member of the organisation (Managers – also consider how stories affect members of your team/s)
To what extent do stories tell you about the organisation’s activities?
To what extent do stories tell you about the organisation’s achievements?
To what extent do stories tell you about problems that the organisation has faced?
To what extent do stories tell you about benefits the organisation offers its external stakeholders?
To what extent do stories tell you anything about the benefits offered to members of the organisation?
To what extent do stories affect the way you feel about the organisation?
To what extent do stories tell you about the organisation’s vision or mission?
To what extent do stories tell you about the organisation’s values?

Section D – This section summarises the questions from the previous sections

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, and 5 being a lot), please rate the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Do you believe you understand the organisation’s vision and mission?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you believe you understand the organisation’s values?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How effective do you think internal communication is in the organisation?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How important do you think stories are as part of internal communication within the organisation?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How important do you think face-to-face communication is in telling stories?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How important do you think electronic communications are in telling stories?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>How important do you think print communications are in telling stories?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>How important do you think stories are as part of communication to external stakeholders?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>How important do you think stories are in affecting the way you do your job?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>To what extent do stories tell you about the organisation’s activities?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>To what extent do stories tell you about the organisation’s achievements?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>To what extent do stories tell you about benefits the organisation offers its external stakeholders?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>To what extent do stories tell you about the benefits offered to members of the organisation?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>To what extent do stories affect the way you feel about the organisation?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>To what extent do stories tell you about problems that the organisation has faced?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>To what extent do stories tell you about the vision and mission of the organisation?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>To what extent do stories tell you about the values of the organisation?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for taking part in the interview, is there anything you’d like to add based on our discussion?
## Appendix 5 – Coding Manual Reliability Test Results

Table 1: Inter-coder reliability for pilot study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilot test or final study:</th>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>Coder 1 (no. of variables identified):</th>
<th>Coder 2 (no. of variables identified):</th>
<th>Matches:</th>
<th>Inter-coder reliability:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot test</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>91.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>88.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final study</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>90.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>90.48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 6 – Ethical Review Checklist

Ethical Review Checklist – Staff and Doctoral Students

This checklist should be completed by the researcher (PhD students to have DoS check) and sent to Sharman Rogers who will coordinate Ethics Committee scrutiny.

**No primary data collection can be undertaken before the supervisor and/or Ethics Committee has given approval.**

If, following review of this checklist, amendments to the proposals are agreed to be necessary, the researcher must provide Sharman with an amended version for scrutiny.

1. What are the objectives of the research project?
   The objectives of the research are:

   1. To examine how organisations use corporate storytelling
   2. To determine the effectiveness of corporate storytelling in building the corporate brand with employees
   3. To investigate the efficacy of impression management theory as a perspective on exploring corporate storytelling

2. Does the research involve *NHS patients, resources or staff?* **YES** *NO* (please circle).
   If YES, it is likely that full ethical review must be obtained from the NHS process before the research can start.

3. Do you intend to collect *primary data* from human subjects or data that are identifiable with individuals? (This includes, for example, questionnaires and interviews.) **YES** *NO* (please circle)
   If you do not intend to collect such primary data then please go to question 14.
   If you do intend to collect such primary data then please respond to ALL the questions 4 through 13. If you feel a question does not apply then please respond with n/a (for not applicable).
4. **What is the purpose of the primary data in the dissertation / research project?**

Primary data will be collected in the second stage of research in the project (the first stage involves content analysis of organisations’ websites). The purpose of the primary data is to explore the use of corporate storytelling by organisations, by conducting case studies on a small number of organisations. The primary data will provide an in-depth understanding of corporate storytelling from an internal organisational perspective, drawing on the views of organisational employees in the case study organisations, to supplement the data collected in the first stage of research.

5. **What is/are the survey population(s)?**

The populations are two companies in the UK energy industry.

6. **How big is the sample for each of the survey populations and how was this sample arrived at?**

The sample will be internal communications managers in the companies, and employees in selected departments within the companies. The departments and individual employees to be sampled will be selected through a purposive sampling technique in consultation with the internal communications managers, who will be key informants and gatekeepers in the research.

The departments in the sample will include customer service and operational departments, and employees will be in front line roles (either customer facing or in the field), as well as managerial roles. Between 20 and 60 interviews will be conducted in each company, depending on the size of the company and when data collection reaches a saturation point.

7. **How will respondents be selected and recruited?**

Potential case study organisations will be approached by emailing an employee in a relevant job role (corporate/internal communications) using publicly available contact information provided on the corporate website, providing information about the study and inviting the organisation to take part. This will be followed up with a telephone call if necessary.

Once an organisation has agreed to take part in the research, the researcher will work with the internal communications managers to select departments and individual employees that can potentially provide different perspectives on internal communication and storytelling, based on the internal communications managers’ insider knowledge.

Employees will be recruited through an email sent to their work address, again providing information about the study and inviting them to take part.

8. **What steps are proposed to ensure that the requirements of informed consent will be met for those taking part in the research? If an Information Sheet for participants is to be used, please attach it to this form. If not, please explain how you will be able to demonstrate that informed consent has been gained from participants.**
A participant information sheet will be provided to all interview participants (please see attached). Participants will then be asked to sign an individual consent form (also attached).

9. How will *data* be *collected* from each of the sample groups?
Data from employees will be collected through semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or via telephone where face-to-face interviews are not feasible. Interviews will be audio recorded, subject to agreement by the participant.

10. How will *data* be *stored* and what will happen to the data at the end of the research?
Audio recordings and written notes will be stored by the researcher and labelled with a code that enables the researcher to identify the data files. These hard copies of data will be kept in a locked cupboard in a secure office. Typed transcripts and coded data will be stored electronically in password protected files, and labelled in the same way.
All data will be kept for five years, to allow sufficient time for completion of the thesis and publication of the research in journal articles, and then destroyed.

11. How will *confidentiality* be assured for respondents?
The data will be kept only by the researcher, in a secure location (a locked cupboard in a secure office) if paper files, and in coded and password protected files if electronic. No third party will be allowed access to the raw data collected, except for colleagues of the researcher who are involved with the research.

12. What steps are proposed to safeguard the *anonymity* of the respondents?
Any personal details or contextual information that could identify an individual will be kept separately from other data collected, by assigning research participants an identifying code which is used to file data, with the code reference list kept separate. Nothing will be included in publications of the study that could identify an individual.

13. Are there any *risks* (physical or other, including reputational) to *respondents* that may result from taking part in this research? YES / NO (please circle).
If YES, please specify and state what measures are proposed to deal with these risks.
N/A
14. Are there any risks (physical or other, including reputational) to the researcher or to the University that may result from conducting this research? YES / NO (please circle).

If YES, please specify and state what measures are proposed to manage these risks.¹

N/A

15. Will any data be obtained from a company or other organisation? YES / NO (please circle) For example, information provided by an employer or its employees.

If NO, then please go to question 18.

Documentary research will be conducted within the case study organisations, alongside interviews with employees, with documents provided at the discretion of the organisation. Observation research will be carried out of physical premises and artefacts in the organisations only, again at the discretion of the organisation.

16. What steps are proposed to ensure that the requirements of informed consent will be met for that organisation? How will confidentiality be assured for the organisation?

Informed consent will be ensured through the provision of a participant information sheet and an organisational consent form, which will be signed by a representative of the organisation on behalf of the management of the organisation, to ensure their agreement to the study. A signed copy of the organisational consent form will be retained by the researcher.

Confidentiality will be assured by keeping the data in a secure location (a locked cupboard in a secure office) if paper files, and in coded and password protected files if electronic. No third party will be allowed access to the raw data collected, except for colleagues of the researcher who are involved with the research (this will be agreed with the organisation as part of the consent form). Care will be taken upon publication of any part of the thesis that it is not possible to identify organisations from the information provided, unless prior written agreement is obtained from the organisation, and no sensitive commercial data will be included in publications.

17. Does the organisation have its own ethics procedure relating to the research you intend to carry out? YES / NO (please circle).

¹ Risk evaluation should take account of the broad liberty of expression provided by the principle of academic freedom. The university’s conduct with respect to academic freedom is set out in section 9.2 of the Articles of Government and its commitment to academic freedom is in section 1.2 of the Strategic Plan 2004-2008.
If YES, the University will require written evidence from the organisation that they have approved the research.

Unknown at this time, but if this is the case then a copy of the company’s ethics procedure will be supplied to the ethics committee, alongside written consent for the research from the organisation.

18. Will the proposed research involve any of the following (please put a √ next to ‘yes’ or ‘no’; consult your supervisor if you are unsure):

- Vulnerable groups (e.g. children)? YES ☑ NO
- Particularly sensitive topics? YES ☑ NO
- Access to respondents via ‘gatekeepers’? YES ☑ NO
- Use of deception? YES ☑ NO
- Access to confidential personal data? YES ☑ NO
- Psychological stress, anxiety etc? YES ☑ NO
- Intrusive interventions? YES ☑ NO

19. Are there any other ethical issues that may arise from the proposed research?

N/A

Details of applicant

The member of staff undertaking the research should sign and date the application, and submit it directly to the Ethics Committee. However, where the researcher is a supervised PhD candidate, the signature of the Director of Studies is also required prior to this form being submitted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Sara Spear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Studies</td>
<td>Colin Wheeler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>10/1/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14/1/13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Approval by Ethics Committee

I/We grant Ethical Approval

FREC Valerie Anderson

Date
____24/5/13

AMENDMENTS

If you need to make changes please ensure you have permission before the primary data collection. If there are major changes, fill in a new form if that will make it easier for everyone. If there are minor changes then fill in the amendments (next page) and get them signed before the primary data collection begins.
### FORM UPR16
Research Ethics Review Checklist

Please complete and return the form to Research Section, Quality Management Division, Academic Registry, University House, with your thesis, prior to examination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information</th>
<th>Student ID: 346524</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Name: Sara Spear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department: PBS, Mktg &amp; Sales</td>
<td>First Supervisor: Dr Lillian Clark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start Date: October 2009</td>
<td>(or progression date for Prof Doc students)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Study Mode and Route:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>MPhil</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>PhD</th>
<th>Integrated Doctorate (NewRoute)</th>
<th>Prof Doc (PD)</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Title of Thesis:
Investigating the Role and Significance of Corporate Stories in Corporate Reputation Management

#### Thesis Word Count:
(excluding ancillary data) 78445

If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University’s Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study.

Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).

### UKRIO Finished Research Checklist:
(If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?</th>
<th>YES/NO*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?</td>
<td>YES/NO*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?</td>
<td>YES/NO*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?</td>
<td>YES/NO*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?</td>
<td>YES/NO*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Delete as appropriate
**Candidate Statement:**

I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):</th>
<th>E246</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signed: (Student)</td>
<td>Date: 24/11/14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have *not* submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered ‘No’ to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain why this is so:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signed: (Student)</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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## Appendix 7 – Case Study Coding Classifications and Categories

### Table 1: Source classifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification:</th>
<th>Attributes:</th>
<th>Attribute values:</th>
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<td>Customer service</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hierarchical level</td>
<td>Level 1 – Front line employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2 – Middle managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 3 – Senior managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PowerOn interviews</td>
<td>Business area</td>
<td>Customer service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hierarchical level</td>
<td>Level 1 – Front line employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2 – Middle managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 3 – Senior managers</td>
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### Table 2: Categories for coding*

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<th>Category folder:</th>
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<td>Industry reputation</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Corporate vision/goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate stories</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Official corporate story</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unofficial corporate story</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate history story</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole story</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Story fragment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impression management</td>
<td>Ingratiation behaviour</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-promotion behaviour</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Exemplification behaviour</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Supplication behaviour</td>
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<td>Intimidation behaviour</td>
<td>N/a</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apologies behaviour</td>
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<td>Excuses behaviour</td>
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<td>Justifications behaviour</td>
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<td>Activities element</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accomplishments element</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No perceived use of element</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal benefits element</td>
<td>Perceived use of element</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No perceived use of element</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External benefits element</td>
<td>Perceived use of element</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No perceived use of element</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion element</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgust</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
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<td>Sadness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Mission element</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values element</td>
<td>Perceived use of element</td>
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<tr>
<td>No perceived use of element</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of stories</th>
<th>Channels for storytelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories by corporate communication departments</td>
<td>Face to face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories by senior managers</td>
<td>Film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories by middle managers</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories by employees</td>
<td>Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories from third parties</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual information versus stories</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories in external communication</td>
<td>Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories in external communication</td>
<td>Customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of stories in external communication</td>
<td>Family and friends</td>
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<td>Use of stories in external communication</td>
<td>Government or councils</td>
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<td>Use of stories in external communication</td>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
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<td>Partners</td>
</tr>
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<td>Regulators</td>
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<td>Shareholders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Links between stories in internal and external</td>
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<td>communication</td>
<td>Influence on impressions of an organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<td>Influence of stories on audiences</td>
<td>Influence on thinking</td>
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<td>Influence on feelings</td>
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<td>Influence on behaviour</td>
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<td>Credibility of stories</td>
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<td>Relevance of stories</td>
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* Pre-defined categories from the literature and research issues are in normal font
Categories derived from the data are itallicised
Appendix 8 – Interviewees Cited in Findings and Discussion

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Codename*:</th>
<th>Level in hierarchy:</th>
<th>Business area:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>senior manager</td>
<td>corporate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>senior manager</td>
<td>operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6</td>
<td>middle manager</td>
<td>corporate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7</td>
<td>senior manager</td>
<td>operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E9</td>
<td>front line employee</td>
<td>customer service</td>
</tr>
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<td>E10</td>
<td>middle manager</td>
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<td>E13</td>
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<td>operational</td>
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<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>front line employee</td>
<td>operational</td>
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<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>front line employee</td>
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<td>P11</td>
<td>middle manager</td>
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<td>P12</td>
<td>middle manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>P13</td>
<td>senior manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>P14</td>
<td>middle manager</td>
<td>customer service</td>
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<td>P16</td>
<td>middle manager</td>
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<td>P17</td>
<td>middle manager</td>
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<td>P18</td>
<td>middle manager</td>
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<td>P19</td>
<td>middle manager</td>
<td>operational</td>
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*Interviewees with codenames beginning with “E” are from Energy One, and interviewees with codenames beginning with “P” are from PowerOn*
### Appendix 9 – Repeated Corporate Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story number, theme, no. of repetitions, and organisation:</th>
<th>Interviewee:</th>
<th>Story:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Engineer replacing part in boiler – service story (5 repetitions in Energy One)</td>
<td>E2 (senior manager, corporate area)</td>
<td>“I heard one earlier on in the week where we’ve got a boiler repair business, and one of our customers, I think is a lady who is unfortunately terminally ill but well enough to be at home, and one Friday her boiler broke down. The engineer who went knew what the problem was, needed a replacement part, but wasn’t going to be able to get that part until over the weekend. Cold weather forecast at this time of year. But he had an identical boiler, so he went home, took the part out his own boiler, took it to the lady’s house, made sure she was warm over the weekend. And he and his fiancée I think shivered in one room with a fire...Now, what’s that story telling you? Human nature at its best is a wonderful thing. But that’s actually a service ethos. So, that’s illustrating a value”</td>
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<td>E35 (senior manager, customer service area)</td>
<td>“a Shield engineer who went out to fix this old lady’s boiler and he couldn’t get a part for it and she would have no hot water or heating so he went home and took the part out of his own boiler and put it in hers. So he didn’t have heating or hot water but he just felt that he couldn’t leave her without this”</td>
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<td>E42 (senior manager, customer service area)</td>
<td>“probably the best story I ever heard was, it actually won the service award for (Energy One) last year and that was one of the gas engineers went to a customer’s premises who had basically terminal cancer and when they went to fix the boiler they realised that the part they needed to fix it was going to take five days to source from the manufacturer for a woman who was very ill who was going to be left in a cold home and the engineer, using his initiative to say, “Right how am I going to help that customer and go beyond the normal level of service you might expect?” So what did he do? He had the same boiler in his own house. He went home, took the part out of his own boiler and went back to the customer’s house and did it on his own accord and he fitted that part and went without heating and hot water himself for five days. It puts a tingle up my spine every time I tell that story, it’s great, it’s nice to hear”</td>
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|                                                             | E44 (middle manager, corporate area) | “there are big stories there about – what is service as a value? There was a story there about a guy – you probably heard this – he had gone out to service somebody’s boiler, and when he got there it was an old lady who was suffering from cancer, and she was without heat. He realised that he had the same boiler as her, so he went home, took a part out of his boiler and, therefore, became without heat and gave her heat. So
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Story Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>E1 (middle manager, corporate area)</td>
<td>“we had an example where one of our field guys had come back and said…”</td>
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<td>E6 (middle manager, corporate area)</td>
<td>“there’s a great story that’s around quite a lot about a guy who works in Home Services, so these are the guys that go out and fix boilers and service the heating, and he went to an old lady’s house, whose heating wasn’t working, and he identified that there was a component in her boiler that was broken, and she just so happened to have the same boiler as he had. So he went back to his house, took the bit out of his boiler, and went and put it in the old lady’s boiler so she could get her heating working. So that story is quite a common one, and I don’t know whether we go out externally and talk about that, but internally it’s a great story, and it’s stories like that that probably underpin that message about being supportive to our customers and giving a quality service”</td>
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<td>2. Customer Service Adviser helping elderly customer – service story (3 repetitions in Energy One)</td>
<td>E24 (middle manager, operational area)</td>
<td>“there’d be heart stories where someone’s really gone out of their way, they’ve travelled in their own car to help an old lady…they work very well, they were good stories to tell which could set values”</td>
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<td>E26 (front line employee, operational area)</td>
<td>“we’d had a customer on the phone who’d maybe said oh, my electricity’s been cut off and it’s an old lady who’s called or whatever and the person’s actually taken the time to go and drive and find the old lady and make sure she’s safe kind of thing. And somebody’s coming in and got her a backup generator and they try and promote those stories throughout the company to try and give you a feel good factor”</td>
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<td>E30 (front line employee, operational area)</td>
<td>“stories such as somebody rang up the call centre and their heating was off, it was a really old woman whose heating had been off, and whoever was in the call centre kept them on the phone and got an engineer out even though it was overtime. It’s that whole thing of treating customers like family”</td>
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<td>3. Chief Executive buying own sandwiches – management story (2 repetitions in Energy One)</td>
<td>E44 (middle manager, corporate area)</td>
<td>“head office have stories about the chief exec goes across the road to get the sandwiches”</td>
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<td>E2 (senior manager, corporate area)</td>
<td>“if you go into (Chief Executive’s) office there’s a headline from The Sun: Boss Buys his own Sarnies. Because actually you wouldn’t believe how frequently chief executives and indeed other senior people get their PAs or their assistants or whatever to get their lunch for them as part of their daily duty. Now, it doesn’t happen in this company. Now, occasionally if someone is going across the road to the M&amp;S outlet, can you get me a sandwich, I’ll say yeah, great – but you would do that for anybody. But actually his daily routine used to be he would walk across the road to the garage and buy his own sandwich and come back. Now, you might not think that’s that big a deal; but actually what’s that telling you: it’s about openness, it’s about informality, it’s about everybody’s in the same boat”</td>
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<td>E17 (middle manager, operational area)</td>
<td>“I had a colleague who was electrocuted 10 years ago...I was out in the car, how I got the call, by the time I got to the substation they told me he’d been taken to hospital, then unfortunately I heard that he was dead on arrival. And the big powerful message I get over is telling them at the very end when I had to kick into sort of automatic mode, deal with the police and everything, and that was fine, but at the end of the time I thought his car was there, I need to get his car recovered, and when I went into the back of the car to look for any personal effects, he had a baby seat in the back of the car and I had a child that was about the same age as him, and it just suddenly brought the whole thing into context, this wasn’t about, and this is what I tell people, it’s not about having to do an investigation, it’s not about talking to police, it’s not about anything else, it’s about the fact that this child had a...”</td>
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<td>E14 (middle manager, operational area)</td>
<td>“outside that door there are two dummies and that was what we referred to as the Knowlesley incident where someone got flash burns from hitting a live main and there is a dummy out there of a person dressed in full PPE, personal protection equipment, that we wear all the gear and then there’s the remains of one next to it, the remains of the guy who was in the flash over and that tells a story in itself. That is a visual story. People are quite interested in it and they ask me about it regularly, the guys do. &quot;What happened there?&quot;”</td>
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<td>E5 (middle manager, operational area)</td>
<td>“we had a big incident in Knowlsley, and we’ve got a couple of dummies out there that have been put together, but I’ve been burnt by cable striker as well, personally, so it’s a personal story that I will tell: ‘This is what happens,’ and how it affects you, and build on that”</td>
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<td>5. Electrocution of a linesman - safety story (2 repetitions in Energy One)</td>
<td>“he was on a job down in Kent nine years ago and was free climbing up a pole, got electrocuted and fell back, broke his neck and died. Just sharing that...that resonates quite highly with the guys and there’s a bond between all of them now just because of that true story”</td>
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<td>burnt in flashover – safety story (3 repetitions in Energy One)</td>
<td>manager, corporate area</td>
<td>into the depot; he was late, he was in a rush; had jumped into – got his brief, missed his actual setting to work brief so he ended up getting a quick brief in his work instructions: this is where you’re going, this is what you need; he gets to an area that he’s going to have to work and he actually ended up having a flash over and getting badly burned. And partly the reason for that was because the handover was rushed because he was late, and the plans that he’d got had been amended but he’d never got the right set of plans. And the reason he was late was because he couldn’t find his car keys. Then when he gets to the depot he spent an hour and a half trying to get into his van – this whole thing. If the guy hadn’t stopped to think about, I’m going to think out why did this happen; why did the guy get to this spot and actually cut that cable that caused the flash over when he had plans. He just took him back in the morning and his lead up to coming to work”</td>
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<td>6. Pole snapped whilst working at height – safety story (2 repetitions in Energy One)</td>
<td>E21 (middle manager, operational area)</td>
<td>“there was recently a colleague of mine had a pole snap on him and it’s not the first time it’s happened within the company, so you can relate to what’s actually happened, you explain the situation, the scenario, and they all picture it in their head, and they’ll understand”</td>
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<td>E19 (middle manager, operational area)</td>
<td>“we had a pole that actually snapped at ground level whilst guys were working on an adjacent pole. So, yes, we used the example of what had happened in that instance...to remind the staff that when you’re doing this the procedure is there to keep everyone safe”</td>
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<td>7. Holding the hand rail – safety story (2 repetitions in Energy One)</td>
<td>E8 (middle manager, customer service area)</td>
<td>“a lot of our golden rules around the business, holding the hand-rail and that kind of thing, the stories you hear behind them is when someone’s had an accident, and that’s when the golden rule has been implemented because of that. So someone falling down the stairs and nearly killing someone is the story that you hear, so that you remember to hold the hand-rail”</td>
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<td>E16 (middle manager, operational area)</td>
<td>“I think (Chief Executive) had a friend who fell down the stairs and badly injured himself so holding the handrail is quite important to him”</td>
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<td>8. Apprentice fell from height – safety story (3 repetitions in PowerOn)</td>
<td>P7 (front line employee, operational area)</td>
<td>“a safety DVD about, but it was using a real life example from one of our colleagues who had an incident where he fell from height and it was using his story as kind of, not as an example, but just to relay the fact that this does happen and this is how it happened and this could happen. But it happened to him so it kind of gave it a bit more authenticity and kind of brought it home a bit more”</td>
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<td>P13 (senior manager, corporate area)</td>
<td>“so it’s two more films coming up later in the year but that’s the focus for the second one. There was a young apprentice or he’s just out of apprenticeship, but he’s quite young, 24. Was climbing a pole and it broke – so he broke his leg, but it could have been much worse. So it’s him and his father works for us as well, so it’s him and his father talking about that”</td>
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<td>P18 (middle manager, operational area)</td>
<td>“what we did on the working at height film was we actually had a guy who was an apprentice at the time who fell from height, thankfully he lived to tell the tale and all he sustained was a broken leg, but what we had was we interviewed him. But we also interviewed his father who works for the company. So, we got them both in and they talked about how it impacted them and their family and what he actually went through at the time”</td>
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<td>9. Engineer died leaving pregnant wife – safety story (2 repetitions in PowerOn)</td>
<td>P9 (front line employee, operational area)</td>
<td>“there was a safety video...it just went through all the things that built up towards the accident, and obviously then the accident and the fact that his wife at the time was just finding out that she was pregnant. It just put across to the blokes out there all the things that can lead to the big bang, and the fact that it’s not just you that’s going to get hurt, it’s other people as well...Whether it was actually based on a true story or not, I’m not too sure, but it was good”</td>
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“the video was like a real life scenario; the engineer had gone out to work and left his wife at home as he does every day and his wife had just found out that she was pregnant and he didn’t know that yet and he got injured at work and didn’t come home that night. That made a real impact with something that only a video can really do but it does really highlight that small mistakes and things like that when we don’t think about the consequences and think about the person as a real person and not just an employee and not just someone doing their job”