

STUPID GIRLS OF MARKETING

The gendered discourses building the reputation of the marketing major in
Aalto University School of Business

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to understand why there is a gender imbalance in the marketing major in the Aalto University School of Business. The purpose is to use discourse analysis to explore what kind of gendered meanings are built around the marketing major, and to see whether those will explain the gender imbalance. In addition, this research examines the reputation of the marketing major, how gender affects the perception of the reputation and how the reputation affects applying intentions.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on three main concepts: reputation, gender, and discourse. From previous research, it is evident that while there is a lot of reputation research, only few of them focus on university reputation or especially other reputation building factors than utilitarian factors. Therefore, this research contributes to the research by combining reputation building with discourse analysis as well as gender studies.

This qualitative and constructionist study is based on ten semi-structured interviews with first-year business students and bachelor level students in the marketing major, online conversations from the anonymous platform Jodel and marketing materials of the Aalto University School of Business.

Through a discourse analysis of the data, four main discourses that describe the reputation of the marketing major were found. These discourses are 1) broadness and variety, 2) wage and employment, 3) qualitative and soft skills, and 4) ease and noncompetitiveness.

The discourses were investigated from the perspective of two different realities: a world of femininity (traditionally linked to women) and a world of masculinity (traditionally linked to men). From these perspectives, it was clear that most of the discourses surrounding the marketing major act as attractive discourses in the world of femininity and as rejecting discourses in the world of masculinity. The findings show that the reputation of the marketing major has different kinds of meanings for women and men. The discourses can affect students' choices when applying to majors, and therefore are building the gender imbalance in the marketing major. In a broader context, universities and study programmes can utilize the findings of this thesis to manage and build their reputation.

Keywords gender, reputation, marketing, discourse analysis

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Tiivistelmä

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus on ymmärtää, miksi Aalto-yliopiston Kauppakorkeakoulun markkinoinnin pääaineeseen hakeutuu huomattavasti vähemmän miehiä. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää diskurssianalyysin keinoin, millaisia sukupuolittuneita merkityksiä rakentuu markkinoinnin pääaineen ympärille ja nähdä selittävätkö ne sukupuolijakaumaa. Lisäksi tämä tutkimus tutkii markkinoinnin pääaineen mainetta, sukupuolen vaikutusta sen tulkintaan sekä sen vaikutuksia kauppatieteen opiskelijoiden haluun hakeutua opiskelemaan markkinointia.

Tutkimuksen viitekehys perustuu kolmeen pääkäsitteeseen: maineeseen, sukupuoleen sekä diskurssiin. Aiemmasta tieteellisestä tutkimuksesta käy ilmi, että yliopistojen mainetta on tutkittu suhteellisen vähän, ja että olemassa oleva tutkimus rajoittuu pitkälti utilitaristisiin tekijöihin. Näin ollen tämä tutkimus edistää akateemista kirjallisuutta yhdistämällä maineen rakentamisen diskurssianalyysiin sekä sukupuolentutkimukseen.

Tämä laadullinen ja sosiaalisen konstruktionismin näkökulman omaava tutkimus perustuu kymmeneen puolistrukturoituun haastatteluun ensimmäisen vuoden kauppatieteen opiskelijoiden sekä kandidaattivaiheen markkinoinnin opiskelijoiden kanssa. Lisäksi tutkimuksessa on hyödynnetty anonyymien keskustelufoorumi Jodelin keskusteluja sekä Aalto-yliopiston Kauppakorkeakoulun markkinointimateriaaleja.

Diskurssianalyysiä käyttämällä löytyi neljä päädiskurssia, jotka kuvailevat markkinoinnin pääaineen mainetta. Nämä diskurssit ovat 1) laajuus ja monipuolisuus, 2) palkka ja työllisyys, 3) laadulliset ja pehmeät taidot ja 4) helppous ja kilpailemattomuus.

Löytyneitä diskursseja tarkasteltiin kahden eri todellisuuden, feminiinisuuden maailman (perinteisesti yhdistetty naisiin) sekä maskuliinisuuden maailman (perinteisesti yhdistetty miehiin), kautta. Näiden todellisuuksien näkökulmasta tarkasteltuna oli selvää, että suurin osa markkinoinnin pääaineeseen liitetystä diskursseista toimivat feminiinisuuden maailmassa houkuttelevina ja maskuliinisuuden maailmassa torjuvina diskursseina. Löydökset osoittavat, että markkinoinnin pääaineen maine saa erilaisia merkityksiä naisten ja miesten maailmoissa. Diskurssit voivat vaikuttaa opiskelijoiden valintoihin pääaineen suhteen, ja näin ollen ovat osasyynä sukupuolijakauman epätasapainoon markkinoinnin pääaineessa. Tutkimuksen tuloksia voi laajemmin hyödyntää yliopistojen sekä tutkinto-ohjelmien maineen hallinnassa sekä rakentamisessa.

Avainsanat sukupuoli, maine, markkinointi, diskurssianalyysi

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1. INTRODUCTION

I joined an online meeting, which gathered more than thirty employees working with communications and marketing. Based purely on first names, there was only one presumably man amongst us. I was working in the financial sector, which is a male-dominated industry, and it was interesting to see how the marketing and communications departments still seem to employ much more women. However, looking around me in a marketing lecture of my university, it is no wonder that the gender imbalance exists in the corporate world as well.

Business schools have been and still are overall male-dominated. In 2018, 56.5 percent of those who enrolled to study business for the first time in Finnish universities were men (Hyvönen, 2019). In Aalto University, about 60 percent of the accepted students were men in 2018-2020 (vipunen.fi). However, the statistics change radically when you take a closer look at specific majors. For example, only 35 percent of the primary applicants for the marketing major in the Aalto University School of Business were men in 2019 (ibid). Based on the statistics of the major application process that year, women are 2.5 times more likely to end up studying marketing compared to men (ibid). Since there are less women studying business overall, what can be the reason behind the gender imbalance in majors like marketing?

Jokes about how ‘marketing chicks’ study in the major only to ‘graduate as unemployed’ are something the marketing students are used to. These comments can be seen on different social media channels and platforms, especially on the popular anonymous conversation platform Jodel and its channel called @ky. KY is the association of business students in Aalto University, and while the Jodel channel gathers students of KY, it is also public for every Jodel user to see and join. To date, more than 17 000 Jodel users have joined the channel. Although the comments about the ‘stupid girls of marketing’ seem to be posted as jokes, it makes me wonder could the conversation culture – that Jodel to some extent represents – contribute to the gender (im)balance of the marketing major?

To explore this phenomenon, this thesis investigates the reputation of the marketing major in the Aalto University School of Business and examines if the discourses are building any gendered meanings that would explain why the gender imbalance within the marketing

major exists. Next, the research gap and objectives as well as main terms used in this thesis are presented.

1.1 Research gap

The term ‘marketing chicks’ or (originally ‘markkinointimimmit’ in Finnish) is fairly familiar to most of the business students. Marketing is stereotypically considered as a feminine subject, while majors like finance and accounting are considered masculine. There has been plenty of discussion within the business school about the stereotypes of different majors and how they possibly have effects on students’ choices.

A lot of research has been done on reputation and image building, but some of it in the context of education. In addition, most of the research focusing on how reputation affects the choices are made between broad industries (e.g. Rudman & Phelan, 2010; Cheryan et al., 2017), are often done in North America (e.g. Corley & Gioia, 2000; Vidaver-Cohen, 2007) or focus on students that are applying in a university (e.g. Soutar & Turner, 2002; Dunnet et al., 2012). Previous research has not really addressed choices between majors or programmes that lead to a same degree.

In addition, the few studies done related to university choices consider only rather utilitarian factors as the ones contributing to the image of a university or the choices of students (e.g. Arpan et al., 2003; Dunnett et al., 2012,). These utilitarian factors include, for example, tuition fees, university ranking or wage and employment rate after graduation. However, sociocultural factors and social context might have bigger effects on the choice of university than has been previously thought. For example, when considering the education choice, we have to take notice of the surrounding society in which there are still plenty of gender roles and stereotypes. These factors need to be given more attention than the current research has paid this far. Therefore, this thesis is using gender studies and discourse analysis to focus more on the gender roles and stereotypes existing in the society. As this thesis is focusing on reputations inside a business school, where the previously researched utilitarian factors such as tuition fees and ranking are irrelevant, the research objective is rather unique.

1.1 Research objectives

The purpose of this study is to understand what kind of discourses are built around the major of marketing in Aalto University School of Business. Through qualitative research methods, this thesis aims to understand the reputation of the major of marketing and how it is perceived by business students in Aalto University. In addition, this thesis tries to shed light on the perceptions of the reputation between genders to find out whether there is a reason for the lack of men that choose to study marketing.

The objective of this thesis is to find an answer to the main research question:

- What kind of gendered meanings are built around the marketing major in Aalto University School of Business?

To answer the main research question, the following sub-questions will be used to guide the thesis:

- Through what kind of discourses is the reputation of the marketing major built in Aalto University School of Business?
- How gender affects the perception of the marketing major's reputation and the determinants used when choosing a major?
- How major reputation is formed and how do the major reputation and its factors affect applying intentions?

With these research questions this thesis tries to understand how and why the discourses building the reputation of the marketing major in Aalto University School of Business seem to attract more female business students than male business students. Through the analysis the aim is also to give information and recommendations for the School of Business of how to potentially change and manage the reputations of different majors and make changes that would put less emphasis on gender in the major selection process.

By answering these research questions, this thesis contributes to the field of reputation research that is lacking. As most of the research focuses on reputations of universities and broad study fields or affecting utilitarian factors, this thesis focuses on the discourses building a reputation inside a community – the business school – and how perceptions of the reputation vary between female and male students. The students interviewed for this thesis

have already chosen to study business and are a part of the community. They are therefore looking at the reputation from inside the business school. This research also takes into account the different perceptions of reputation. It considers gender as one of the factors contributing to the choice of major. Finally, as this thesis addresses how reputations form, change and are managed, it gives universities insights on how to change the gender imbalance in different majors and study programmes.

The empirical part of this thesis focuses on the Bachelor's programme in Aalto University School of Business. To understand the reputation of the marketing major, interviews are conducted with students who were either a) first year students in Aalto University School of business and have not applied for a major yet, or b) bachelor's students who are studying in the marketing major. In addition, conversations from the anonymous conversation channel Jodel as well as marketing materials offered by the university are included in the data.

1.2 Defining the main terms of the thesis

This thesis follows the principles of a constructionist approach. This means that the concepts are considered as building through meanings that differ based on the perception of an individual (Burr, 1995). The main terms used in this thesis – reputation and gender – are considered as socially constructed through meanings and cannot be separated from their context (Fairclough, 2005). Fitting to the constructionist approach, discourse analysis was chosen as the appropriate research method for the thesis. The main principle is therefore seeing reality as build through discourses. Critical discourse analysis is not only the method used for the empirical research, but also considered as the main theoretical view used. This approach, with its ontologist and epistemologist principles, is present throughout the thesis from the theoretical background to the analysis.

There are many key terms that this thesis uses, and therefore it is important to give an overview of their definitions in this section. The following terms are discussed further in the literature review section.

Social constructionism is a widely used theory that states that the world is socially constructed. This means that the realities are constructed in people's meanings and are

always subjective. Once constructed they can be seen as realities that have effects and limitations for the discursive construction of social. (Burr, 1995; Fairclough, 2003)

Image is perceptual and subjective, and each person builds their own image of an organization from their perspective. It is including all the beliefs, attitudes, and impressions that people have. Depending on the context, image is usually discussed as corporate image, brand image or organization image. (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Barich & Kotler, 1991; Alwi & Kitchen, 2014)

Brand includes names, symbols, logos, designs, and combinations of them that are used by the organization to differentiate themselves from their competitors. While brand focuses more on the organization itself, *brand image* is considered as the consumer's view of the organization. Brand image is driven by both cognitive and affective attributes, and it is a term used in marketing research with a focus on the product and consumer's perspective of it. (Barich & Kotler 1991; Keller 2003; Alwi & Kitchen, 2014)

Reputation is often mistaken with image. In this thesis, the meaning of reputation can be explained as the perception an individual has of an organization. Reputation is considered to be socially constructive, and it is continuously built and rebuilt through narratives and discourses. (Aula & Mantere, 2013)

Gender is created through social practices, including daily conversations, and what each culture considers as masculine or feminine. It is not defined by natural attributes. Instead, it can be done and redone as a routine in everyday interactions. (West & Zimmerman, 1987)

Sex category means the presumption made based on identificatory displays that are associated with certain sex. People are usually expected to have certain kind of attributes and behaviour based on their sex category. (West & Zimmerman, 1987)

Doing gender is a view on gender that states that gender is *done* and *redone* in societies, when genders are assigned to every person we meet, and the same categorization is made of ourselves. The focus of doing gender is on how and why gender is done in social situations. (West & Zimmerman, 1987)

Masculinity and *femininity* are considered as qualities that are *done* in social contexts, for example, to fit a certain job or role. The terms are separate from sexes but are still often linked with actual bodies. Masculinity is described as valuing independence, rationality, intellectuality and aggressivity. Femininity is often associated with more communal qualities – these being nurturing, caring, gentle, kind, and tactful. Being an exception from these traditional roles can have consequences, including inequality. (Katila & Meriläinen, 1999; Powell et al., 2002; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007)

Discourse means the use of language in social contexts. Discourses are built through meanings that differ between individuals, and they can contain spoken language, body language and even pictures and symbols. Discourses are based on social constructionism. (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 2005)

Critical discourse analysis (or CDA) is a method that sees discourses as socially constructed and conditioned. The main assumption in CDA is that used language cannot be separated from other elements of social life, and the focus is on the role of discursive activity that is constituting and sustaining unequal power relations. (Fairclough, 1992; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008)

1.3 Structure of the thesis

In the first section of the thesis the topic has been introduced and the research gap and questions have been presented. The next section focuses on the existing literature of three main topics – reputation research, doing gender, and discourse analysis. Relevant literature of the main themes is discussed and built into a theoretical framework, which is then used to address the research questions.

In the third part of the thesis, the methodology is presented. Before diving into the actual methods of the study, the case university is shortly discussed to give an understanding of the context. The collection of the empirical data as well as the methods of analysis are discussed.

After the methodology and analysis have been explained, the findings are discussed. This section analyses the data and divides the findings into categories that aim to answer the

research questions. In the analysis, the discourses that are associated with the reputation of marketing major are discussed. In addition, the analysis tries to understand and explain the different perceptions about the reputation.

Finally, the discussion section elaborates on the findings of the thesis and explains their importance. The contributions and main findings are discussed further to give an understanding of what the findings of the thesis mean. To conclude, the practical implications and limitations of the thesis are presented and suggestions for future research are given.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the relevant literature to this study is presented. The literature review is divided into three main themes, all of which are divided into smaller sub-headings. First, the concepts of image, brand and reputation are discussed. Then, the definitions and relevant concepts of gender are presented. In the third section, the choice of discourse analysis, both as a method and as a theoretical standpoint, is reasoned by going through critical discourse analysis as a method and the effects that these discourses might have to organization's image. Finally, the theoretical framework built by using existing theory is presented.

2.1 Building a reputation

Regardless of the field, organizations want to know what individuals think about them and how they can affect the way an individual sees them. In these situations, terms like *image*, *brand*, *brand image* and *reputation* are often used as synonyms (Brown et al., 2006). Different fields have often different definitions and focus points for these concepts, which makes it hard to understand what actually is meant with these terms. This section discusses how these terms are defined and built through meanings. In addition, reputation research in the university context is examined.

2.1.1 *Image, brand and reputation as concepts*

Although there are multiple different definitions for image in different fields, there are two basic assumptions that are widely accepted in literature. First, it is perceptual and subjective, and exist only in stakeholders' mind (e.g., Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Secondly, it can be divided into two dimensions; cognitive (or functional) and affective (or emotional) (e.g., Alwi & Kitchen, 2014). *Corporate image* includes the beliefs, attitudes and impressions that people have of a company (Barich & Kotler, 1991). Image plays a big role in decisions that consumers make and how they behave, also when considering choices about universities and study programs.

Markwick and Fill (1997) define corporate image as a perception that stakeholders have of an organization. They state that corporate image '*can be said to be the totality of a stakeholder's perceptions of the way an organization presents itself, either deliberately or accidentally*' (ibid; p. 398). They develop a model that describes the relationship of corporate image, identity, and personality. *Corporate identity* refers to how an organization

presents itself to its stakeholders and how it distinguishes itself from other organizations, while *corporate personality* is simply put ‘what the organization actually is’ (ibid; p. 399). These two concepts are components that build corporate image. Therefore, by managing them, corporate image and reputation can be altered as well (ibid). Visual representation of this can be seen in Figure 1. However, it is important to notice that images are always also dependent on receiver’s perception and exist in stakeholder’s mind. Therefore, they cannot be managed directly.

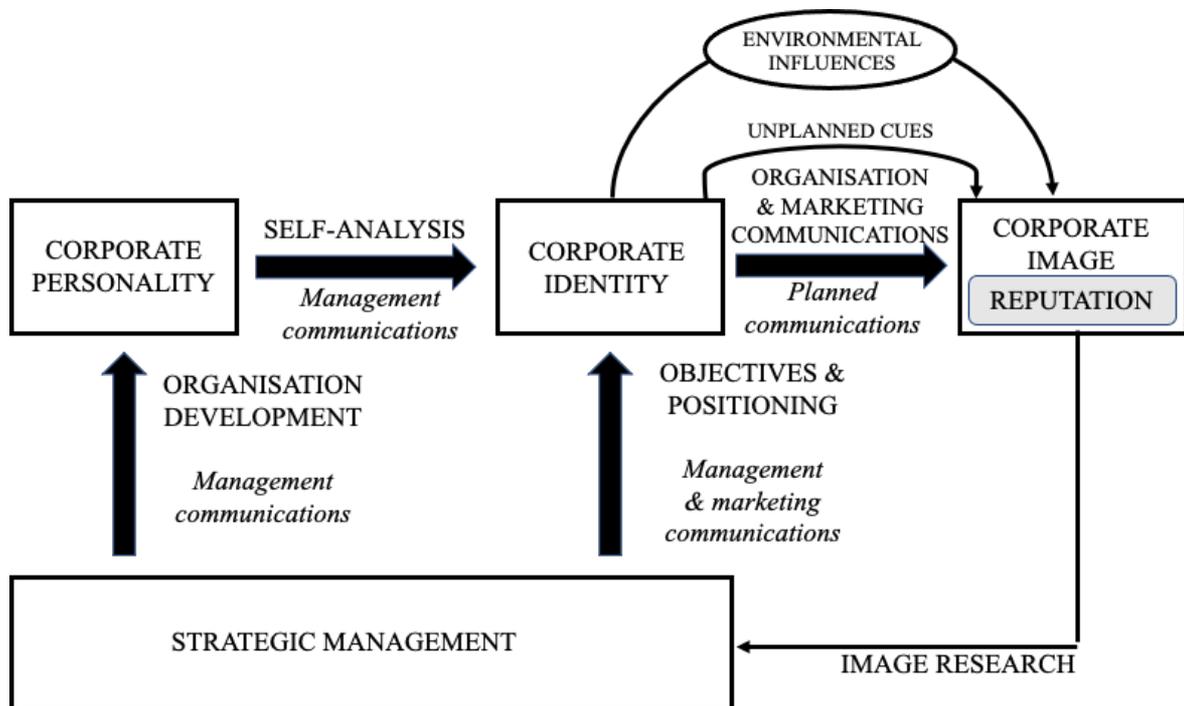


Figure 1 The main components of corporate identity management process (Markwick & Fill, 1997; p. 400)

Corporate image might be hard to understand because the terms vary and are used inconsistently throughout literature (Alwi & Kitchen, 2014). Alwi and Kitchen describe that ‘for example brand, image, association, attributes and personality that, while different conceptually, have been used to describe the same thing’ (ibid, p. 2325). Discussing about corporate or organization image, the term *brand image* come up. Brand image, like the term *image*, has many definitions. Alwi and Kitchen (2014) state that brand and image can actually be defined similarly: they are seen as overall attitudes towards a brand, and they are ‘driven by both cognitive and affective brand attributes’ (p. 2326). However, they have

different focuses. While brand image is focused more on the product and consumers' perspective, corporate image sees corporation as a brand and focuses on all of its stakeholders, including consumers (Stern et al., 2001; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Alwi & Kitchen, 2014). Stern et al. (2001) state that stakeholders in corporate image research include *'not only consumers, but also competitors, suppliers, corporate buyers, media, employees, stockholders, local communities, financial institutions, the government, and the general public'* (p. 203).

Although image can be, to some extent, managed by the organization or company to some extent (Markwich & Fill, 1997), it is also affected by other factors that cannot be directly controlled (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Image can be changed or manipulated from the outside of the company, sometimes even radically and quickly. Many stakeholders and factors are affecting the perception of an organization, both negatively and positively, and the organization might not have the means or tools to interfere with that. Often, when the focus is on external factors, the research uses the term *reputation* (Gioia et al., 2000).

Organizations, like universities, are often concerned about their *reputation*. Similar to image, reputation also has varied definitions depending on the area of research (e.g. strategy, sociology, marketing and organizational studies) (Aula, 2015). Reputation is often mixed with image, but the main difference is that reputation is mainly considering external views of an organization (Gioia et al., 2000). Brown et al. (2006) conclude that image *'concerns what an organizational member wants others to know (or believes others know) about the organization, while reputation is a perception of the organization actually held by an external stakeholder'* (p. 104). Mahon (2002) discusses that because of this, it is hard to point out exactly what corporate reputation means. Markwich and Fill (1997) describe that reputations last longer than images. They define reputation as follows:

In our opinion, reputation is a reflection of the historical, accumulated impacts of previously observed identity cues and possible transactional experiences. Consequently, reputations are more durable than images and may represent a relatively consistent store of goodwill and support in favourable cases (positive reputations) or distrust and avoidance in adverse situations (negative reputations). Images may be altered relatively quickly as a result of organizational changes or communication programmes, whereas reputation requires nurturing through time and image consistency. (Markwich & Fill, 1997; p. 398)

Lange et al. (2011) synthesise organizational reputation research and develops a three-dimensional model to describe it, as seen in Figure 2. Their view is that organizational reputation consists of familiarity with the organization (being known), beliefs about what to expect from them (being known for something), and the organization's generalized favourability. Reputation can also be seen as a 'constantly evolving process in which the organization is constituted and reconstituted, and in which the organization itself as well as its all relevant stakeholders take part' (Aula, 2015; p. 49).

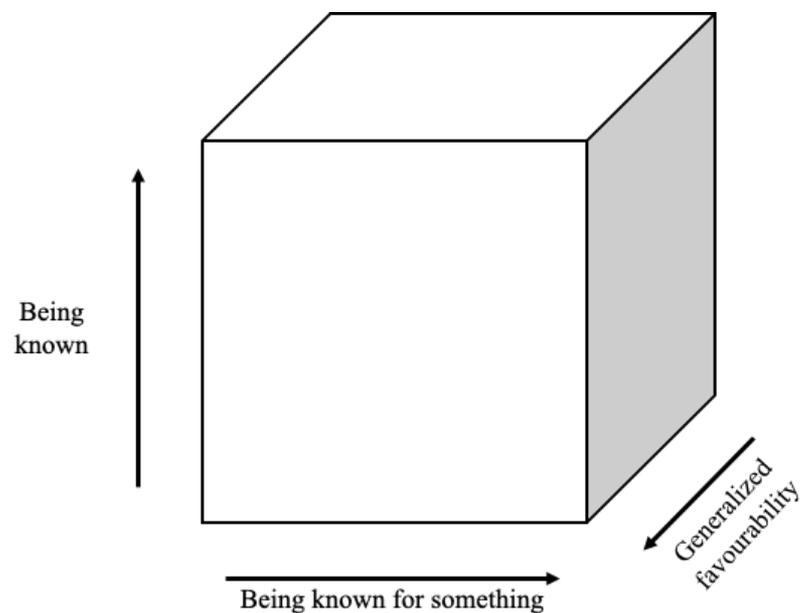


Figure 2 Three Dimensions of Organizational Reputation (Lange et al., 2011; p.163)

Why studying reputation is important then? Stern et al. (2001) describe that 'Image power springs from the human need to simplify buying decisions by creating symbolic representations to represent a network of salient meanings' (p. 201). This thesis aims to understand why so few men choose to study marketing in Aalto University School of Business. As reputation is affecting the choices they make, it is important to discuss how these images are constructed and reconstructed. Therefore, reputation building through meanings is discussed next.

2.1.2 Reputation building through meanings

Image and reputation research has mainly focused on corporate success and how meaningful it is for companies to know their what their reputation is like (Aula & Mantere, 2013). However, fairly little research has been made on how images and reputation are being formed.

This thesis follows the principles of socially constructed reality, which means that there are no objective truths, but each individual has their own perceptions about reality (Burr, 1995). From this standpoint, reputation can also be seen as socially constructed: objective reputation does not exist (ibid). Aula and Mantere (2013) describe this view on reputation:

Following the central idea of social constructivism, we define reputation as a continuously developing set of evaluative narratives, beliefs, and expectations, built and modified in dialogical communication between the target organization and its publics over time. The notion of evaluation is crucial here; reputational narratives do not merely describe their targets, they attach value and effect on them. (Aula & Mantere, 2013; p. 341)

Similarly in this thesis reputation is seen as constructive and reconstructive and it cannot be separated from its context. Reputation is developing continuously and should be defined as an unfinished process, in which both the organization itself and all of its stakeholders participate in (Aula & Mantere, 2013). This approach is also supported by the use of discourses and critical discourse analysis, which are presented in the next section.

As mentioned in the previous section, it is widely accepted that image and reputation are all in an individual's mind. Reputation is highly symbolic, and it is present in narratives and discourses (Aula & Mantere, 2013). However, it can also include physical factors (Love & Kraatz, 2009). Reputation building includes physical products, places, logos or marketing materials, for example. Regardless of the presence of physical factors, it is important to highlight that reputation, as mentioned, is always just in an individual's mind – it is a perception of all the factors associated with an organization (Love & Kraatz, 2009).

Because reputation is up to an individual's own interpretation of an organization, reputation can vary a lot (Stern et al., 2001). For example, an investor of a company may consider an

organization's reputation good as they are profitable and that affects the investor positively. On the other hand, if an individual has bad experiences of customer service of the same company, they might have a very different view of the organization's reputation.

2.1.3 Reputation in university context

Although the focus of reputation research is usually more on the corporate side, university reputations have also gained some attention in literature. Universities are more and more concerned about their reputation as the number of high education providers has become bigger (Aula, 2015). Building and managing a good university reputation is the key to attracting new students, future employees as well as sponsors.

As universities have realized the importance of image and reputation, the topic has also gained more attention in academia during the recent years. An increasing amount of reputation research has had its focus on universities or similar service-oriented organizations, as the topic was still relatively unresearched before 2010s (Sung & Yang, 2008; Aula, 2015). The rise of the interest in university reputation is no wonder, as reputation is one of the main factors contributing to the choice of a university (Soutar & Turner, 2002). The more competition there is between universities, the more importance is put on reputation. Academic education has been growing for decades – both in the number of institutions but also in terms of the size of the existing institutions (Engwall, 2007). Especially one study subject has been growing noticeably: business (ibid).

Alongside with reputation research, some image research has been done in university context. Arpan et al. (2003) find that university students' image of a university consists of three main factors: academic attributes, athletic attributes, and news coverage of the university. In addition, rankings are a way to measure their competence in comparison with other universities. In a conjoint analysis of Australian tertiary education, Soutar and Turner (2002) explain that the four main contributing determinants of the choice of university are '*course suitability, academic reputation, job prospects, and teaching quality*' (p. 40). Especially in North America, university rankings have received some interest in academia, (e.g. Corley & Gioia, 2000; Vidaver-Cohen; 2007). However, the researched contributing factors relating to the students' choices are rather limited to more utilitarian factors, and there is a gap in considering sociocultural factors.

Reputation research is lacking also in cases where students are already a part of the community and choosing topics to expertise in. When students who are already in business schools are choosing majors, the situation of reputation building is a bit different. As evaluating teaching quality and other academic attributes is hard, since it is based on second-hand knowledge, the choice can be highly affected by reputation (Engwall, 2007). Suomi and Järvinen (2013) research reputational risks in higher-education and find that '*the most significant risks in the higher-education context turned out to be internal, specifically related to the content of the programme and the quality of the teaching*' (p. 213). Without personal experience of the content and quality of the programme, students make choices based on what they are told about the subjects or majors.

In this section one of the main concepts of this study, reputation, has been discussed. Reputation is considered from a constructionist viewpoint; it is created and recreated in an individual's mind, and it is dependent on the social context and the meanings each person creates from their own perspective. As this thesis tries to understand what kinds of meanings are building the reputation of the major of marketing in the School of Business and whether those give explanation to gender imbalance, it is important to discuss the concept of gender.

2.2 Gender

To study whether the image is perceived differently between genders or if any gendered cues are being picked up, it is important to discuss the topic of gender. Gender is present in our everyday life, in our society and a lot of our thoughts and actions are gendered. People, even unborn babies, are gendered, even though the concept of gender is created through practices of social interaction. In this section, the concept of doing gender, gender stereotypes and gender in the context of education are being discussed.

2.2.1 *Doing gender*

There have been many different theoretical traditions to explain sex and gender during the past decades (Risman, 2004; Andersen, 2005). Most of the theories include a social aspect to explain how people and things are being gendered (Risman, 2004; Andersen, 2005). Andersen (2005) describes research on gender as follows:

Whereas early on, gender was conceptualized as a social role, there is now a more complex understanding of gender as a social reality. What is gender? There is no single answer to this question. Some posit gender as an institution, others as performance, others as structure – – From the beginning, even within the sex roles framework, feminist scholars have recognized the fundamentally social character of gender. The newer social constructionist approach not only sees gender as socially created but interprets gender itself as constructing other forms of social relations. (p. 441-442)

From these many theoretical orientations, this thesis will emphasise the role of social interaction in *doing gender*. The ground-breaking concept of *doing gender* was first presented by West and Zimmerman (1987). Their research provided a clear distinction between the terms sex, sex category and gender:

Sex is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males. – – Placement in a sex category is achieved through application of the sex criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category. – – Gender, in contrast, is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. (West & Zimmerman, 1987; p. 127)

Doing gender highlights how us humans in a society *do* gender when we assign a gender to every person we meet, and the same categorization is done to ourselves (Tienari & Nentwich, 2012). Gender is created through social practices, like discussions and traits a culture associates with a gender; as masculine or feminine (ibid). Gender is not defined by natural attributes of people – it is '*produced and reproduced through cultural and symbolic practices*' (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001; p. 245). Especially in Finnish language these terms are often mixed in everyday language, which is understandable as both *sex* and *gender* translate into one word: *sukupuoli*.

Doing gender is highly associated with the gender roles that still exists in our societies. Certain kinds of expectations fall on people based on their sex category – the presumption made based on identificatory displays that are associated with certain sex (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). People are expected to perform according to

the gender norms of their assumed gender (e.g. Tienari & Nentwich, 2012; Shin et al., 2019). These gender norms are invisible and therefore we often disregard them in our everyday life. Paying attention to how we do gender in society is important in locating inequalities and biases in our thoughts and actions; expression of difference that we use daily might appear natural but are actually socially constructed beliefs (Deutsch, 2007; Tienari & Nentwich, 2012).

If gender is *done*, then can it be *undone*? Many researchers have turned to discuss how gender can be undone in organizations (e.g. Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2009; Powell et al., 2009; Kelan, 2010; Connell, 2010). Deutsch (2007) argues that *doing gender* ‘has become a theory of gender persistence and the inevitability of inequality’ (p. 106), and the actions on how to undo gender should be addressed more in order to move forward to a more diverse and equal society. The author suggests a new approach to the theory:

I propose that we adopt a new convention, namely, that we reserve the phrase “doing gender” to refer to social interactions that reproduce gender difference and use the phrase “undoing gender” to refer to social interactions that reduce gender difference. – – “Doing” is an excellent word to emphasize that gender is created continually in ubiquitous ongoing social interactions. However, if “do” refers to something that is accomplished, or brought about, then “doing gender” will bring to mind the accomplishment of gender difference rather than the dismantling of difference.
(Deutsch, 2007; p. 122)

Similarly, Risman (2009) discusses that although it is useful to think gender as a structure, the structure is not static. Both Deutsch (2007) and Risman (2009) highlight that the gender binary can also be subverted into interaction and argue that *doing gender* refers to gender inequality being maintained in a society. To address the criticism, West and Zimmerman (2009) clarify their view on *doing gender*, and state that gender can be *redone* to take into account the changes in both persons’ orientation to these norms as well as in social relations.

The concepts of masculinity and femininity are highly linked to doing gender. Tienari and Nentwich (2012) describe how the *doing* perspective emphasizes that ‘an individual’s gender identity is developed through the mundane interactions required for carrying out jobs and tasks’ (p.7). As a good example of this is early childhood education. Jobs in childhood education require *doing femininity*; being nurturing and caring, which are traits often

considered as feminine (ibid; Wingfield, 2009). Therefore, femininity and masculinity can be *done* to fit a certain job or role. However, often these terms are highly linked with actual bodies: masculinity is for men and femininity is for women. Being an exception from this ‘tradition’ can have consequences, including inequality, discrimination, biases and lack of fit (Tienari and Nentwich, 2012; Heilman & Caleo, 2018).

2.2.2 Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are affecting how we see other people based on their sex category or gender. They affect our expectations on how people should behave in certain situations, jobs, tasks or roles (e.g. Gupta et al., 2008; Cheryan et al., 2009; Tienari & Nentwich, 2012). Stereotypes can also make things easier to understand and simpler (Powell et al., 2002), but they also create difficulties, for example in the school and the workplace (e.g., Steele, 1997; Cheryan et al., 2017; Heilman & Caleo, 2018).

Stereotypes can be divided into two main categories: prescriptive stereotypes and descriptive stereotypes (e.g. Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). *Descriptive* gender stereotypes are ‘beliefs about how women and men differ’ (Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007; p. 48). They describe what men and women are stereotypically like (e.g. men are decisive), and they might concern the attributes, roles and behaviours that men and women have (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). *Prescriptive* gender stereotypes, however, are what men and women are expected to be like (Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). They are rules, roles, norms and attributes that genders are expected to follow, and might induce disapproval and social penalties if not followed (ibid).

Stereotypes can maintain the same for long periods of time. Stereotypes about men and women have remained very similar over time in different cultures regardless of the social progress (e.g. Powell et al., 2002; Heilman & Caleo, 2018). Femininity is often associated with values and traits like nurturing, intuitive, emotional, and passive (Katila & Meriläinen, 1999). Overall, people consider women to have more communal qualities – for example, are gentler, kind, expressive and tactful (e.g. Powell et al., 2002; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). Masculinity, which is considered as opposite to femininity, values independence, rationality, intellectuality as well as aggressivity (Katila & Meriläinen, 1999). Men are expected to have more agentic qualities – e.g., they are more assertive, competitive, daring,

and courageous (e.g. Powell et al., 2002; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). These stereotypes are in many cases harmful, and also research on gender differences has shown that males and females are similar on at least most of the psychological variables (Hyde, 2005).

Societal stereotypes about groups can have effects on ‘*intellectual functioning and identity development of individual group members*’ (Steele, 1997; p. 613). Research has found associations with negative gender stereotypes about women being poor at math and their underperformance when exposed to these stereotypes (Spencer et al., 1999). The results are explained through *stereotype threat*; a theory that was originally applied with stereotypes against African Americans. Steele (1997) describes stereotype threat as follows:

It is the social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype. Called stereotype threat, it is a situational threat – a threat in the air – that, in general form, can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists (e.g., skateboarders, older adults, White men, gang members). Where bad stereotypes about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype. And for those who identify with the domain to which the stereotype is relevant, this predicament can be self-threatening. (Steele, 1997; p. 614)

As mentioned, gender stereotypes are affecting how we see other people, and therefore they have effects on people’s actions as well. It has been researched that people tend to stick to the stereotype and pursue tasks and roles that are positively associated with their gender, and at the same time avoiding tasks and roles that are not associated with their gender (Heilman, 1983; Gupta et al, 2008). Many studies have shown how stereotypes are a disadvantage for women in a work setting, for example in management positions (e.g., Hyde, 2005; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007; Gupta et al., 2008). For example, expectations based on gender stereotypes can affect hiring processes (Heilman & Caleo, 2018). A recruiter might have a bias regarding a woman’s competence if the job is considered as ‘masculine’ (ibid). One of the ways to look at the issue is through the lack of fit model that is commonly used with gender stereotypes. The lack of fit model was presented by Heilman (1983) and since then it has been widely used to describe the situations where there is ‘*a mismatch between the*

attributes that women are thought to possess and the attributes seen as necessary for success in male-typed positions and fields' (Heilman & Caleo, 2018: p. 726). For example, Burgess and Borgida (1999) discuss how descriptive stereotypes can create situations, where women experience a 'lack of fit' in occupations and fields that are male-dominated or traditionally considered for men. However, there is a lack of research about how these stereotypes affect men in different industries.

Although gender stereotypes have remained stable for a long time, it is possible that stereotypes can change (Powell et al., 2002). To change a stereotype, there is a need for information that is against the stereotype (ibid). Rothbart (1981) cited in Powell et al. (2002: 179) divides stereotype change in two models. Bookkeeping model sees stereotypes as always changing as new pieces of information come up: whether it is confirming or disconfirming the stereotype. In the other model, conversion model, stereotypes can change quickly when critical pieces of disconfirming information are being presented (ibid). Powell et al. (2002) describe also a third model that has its focus on the subtyping of group members. Members of a group, or gender in this case, that would not conform the stereotype would be divided into a subgroup by the observer.

2.2.3 Gender stereotypes in education

There is a lot of research about how gender is affecting education: liking school subjects, the choice of education and succeeding in studies, for example. However, most of the research is focusing on women and the stereotypes that affect their aspirations and choices. There is a lack in studies discussing how gender stereotypes affect men's career choices and liking or succeeding in subjects that are considered feminine.

Cejka and Eagly (1999) found that in occupations that are female dominated, feminine personality and physical attributes were seen as required in order to succeed. Similar phenomenon was found in male dominated occupations (ibid). Kessels (2005) uses this assumption to study whether similar findings could be found in the school environment. Their findings indicate that interest in certain school subjects is linked to societal demands of fitting in, which tend to emphasize gender roles. Kessels (2005: 320) concludes that 'the results can add to explanations why girls tend to be less interested in science and will less

likely choose science as a subject major. If they did, they would risk being seen as less feminine’.

Cheryan et al. (2009: 1045) research the male-dominated field of computer science and found that *‘the gender difference in interest in computer science is influenced by exposure to environments associated with computer scientists’*. The study discusses how stereotypical cues, even from classrooms, can impact ambient belonging and affect whether people want to study a topic or not. Cheryan et al. (2009: 1049) find that *‘a student’s choice of classes or a major can be shaped by simply the appearance of classrooms, hallways, and offices—therefore, providing compelling evidence for the power of environments in signalling who belongs’*. One of the explanations for this is that perhaps the presence of objects, which can be considered stereotypical, remind women that computer science is a male-dominated industry (ibid).

Similarly, Powell et al. (2009) examines the field of engineering and how women engineers do and undo gender in a male-dominated industry. They explain that women students *‘performed their gender in a particular way in order to gain male acceptance’* (Powell et al., 2009; p. 411), supporting the *‘undoing gender’* perspective presented by Butler (2004). Women do and undo gender in order to fit in into a male-dominated industry and to cope with a male-dominated environment (Powell et al., 2009). The coping strategies they found were acting like one of the boys, accepting gender discrimination, achieving a reputation, seeing the advantages over the disadvantages, and adopting an “anti-woman” approach (ibid: p. 418-421).

The field of business, leadership and management is associated with masculinity as many of the discourses built around business are similar to the traits that are considered masculine (Powell et al., 2002). Although research is lacking in the discourses built around the study programmes, there are some studies that have researched the masculinity of MBA. Simpson (2006) discusses how masculine values are linked to MBA programmes. The findings are also supported by Sinclair (1995), who describes how the culture in business schools is perceived as competitive, independent, and intense and therefore is more masculine than feminine.

2.3 Discourse

Discourse analysis is one of the qualitative research methods that has become an important methodology during the past decades (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Discourse analysis is seen as both a method and a theory, and there are many different views on it. The main presumption linked into the concepts of discourse and discourse analysis is that the language practices that are constructed in social world are relevant (ibid). This means that there are many different realities that are constantly build and rebuild in social contexts. Regardless of the common presumption, the approaches differ in one crucial thing: some researchers find that there is another reality ‘behind’ language and discourses and actions should be considerate separate and some think of discourse as building the one reality where no distinction is needed (ibid, Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

Fairclough (2005) describes discourses from an ontological perspective: discourse can be seen including both linguistic and semiotic elements of the social reality. Since discourses are considered as socially constructed, they are therefore in line with social constructionism approach (ibid). Discourses are often seen as consisting of ‘*the things that make up the social world – including our very identities*’ (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; p. 3). Katila and Meriläinen (1999) describe discourses as follows:

Society can be understood as a field of competing social discourses. From this perspective, language cannot be seen as a mere conveyor of social life but an essential constructive feature of it. It is not a medium which neutrally transmits and reflects processes taking place elsewhere. (p. 165)

Studying discourse is recognizing the important role of language that is present in our everyday life. Phillips and Hardy (2002) summarize their view on discourse: ‘*without discourse there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves*’ (p. 3).

2.3.1 Many approaches to discourse analysis

Multiple different approaches to discourse analysis have been formed as the method has gained popularity in academia. A common understanding of discourse analysis is that it is studying meanings that are ‘*mediated through language practices*’ as well as their

consequences (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008: p. 228). It can be described as analysis of text, in which texts can mean written or spoken texts as well as interaction of people (Fairclough, 2005). Therefore, it does not mean studying the actual language, such as in linguistics, but is more focused on the social context in which the language is used in (ibid). Discourse analysis also differs from conversation analysis, which has its focus on the talk produced in interaction (ibid).

With discourses, context is key. Discourse analysis is a way to research how social realities are constructed in different social contexts, and therefore discourses can vary in different environments (Fairclough, 2005). Based on the emphasis on social context, discourse analysis can be divided into macro-level and micro-level discourse analyses (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Some analyses link discourses to their societal and historical contexts while also describing the '*discursive worlds that people inhabit*' (macro-level), and some focus on analysing the social interactions in detail (micro-level) (ibid; p. 230).

One way to distinguish the different approaches to discourse analysis is to separate them based on how much detail of micro-level linguistic elements they put value on (Fairclough, 2005; Laine & Vaara, 2007). Sometimes the analysis is based on just the present discourses in a text, and sometimes the analysis can be an in-depth view on the text, including grammar, vocabulary, metaphors and so forth (Fairclough, 2005). For example, Phillips and Hardy (2002) highlight the linkage of discourse use to organizational actions. On the other hand, Fairclough (2005) combines analyzing discourse of the linguistic or semiotic point of view to the elements of social practices. Phillips and Hardy (2002) present a framework in which discourse analysis is divided into two dimensions: '*the degree to which the emphasis is on individual texts or on the surrounding context and the degree to which the research focuses on power and ideology as opposed to processes of social construction*' (p.18). Their framework showing different approaches to discourse analysis is shown in Figure 3.

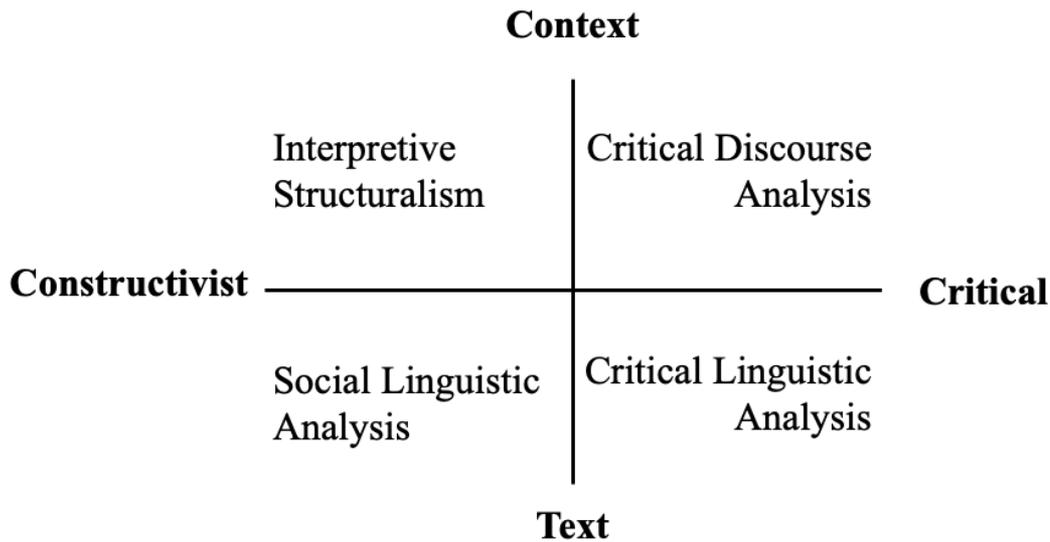


Figure 3 Different Approaches to Discourse Analysis (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; p. 19)

To understand realities constructed around us, discourses surrounding us must be studied. In this thesis, where the marketing major is under a microscope, previously presented concepts of reputation and gender are important. As the different approaches of discourse analysis put their emphasis on different factors, it is important to discuss further the chosen approach to discourse analysis. Therefore, the next section focuses on critical discourse analysis.

2.3.2 Critical discourse analysis

Four different approaches to discourse analysis are presented in Figure 3. The chosen approach, critical discourse analysis, is considered a critical approach that focuses more on the context. This means that critical discourse analysis approach has its focus on ‘the dynamics of power, knowledge, and ideology that surround discursive processes’ (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). As one of the key concepts of this study is gender, which is linked to dynamics of power, critical discourse analysis was considered as an appropriate method in this context. A more in-depth explanation of the choice is presented in the Methodology, while this section has its focus on critical discourse analysis as a theory.

Critical discourse analysis, or CDA for short, has a few different versions, but the version that is used the most in business research is developed by Norman Fairclough (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The version is built on the assumption that ‘*language is an irreducible*

part of social life' meaning that it interconnects with all the elements of social life (Fairclough, 2003: p. 2). Therefore, language should always be taken into account when doing social research or analysis (ibid). Phillips and Hardy describe CDA as follows:

Drawing particularly on the work of Fairclough, this perspective focuses on how discursive activity structures the social space within which actors act, through the constitution of concepts, objects, and subject positions. Critical discourse analysis focuses on the distal context—how it privileges some actors at the expense of others and how broad changes in the discourse result in different constellations of advantage and disadvantage, particularly within the Foucauldian tradition. (p. 25)

As mentioned, CDA has its focus on the ways that domination or power is reproduced in both written and spoken texts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This social power can refer to inequalities involving things like gender, politics, culture, class, or race, and it can be held by individuals or groups (e.g., political parties, certain institutions) (ibid). CDA is used to describe and explain power abuse that is produced and reproduced in language of groups and institutions (van Dijk, 1995).

By focusing on the power aspect, CDA can through analysis critique existing social structures in which the discourses are produced as well as uncover power relations and ideologies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Through the theory of CDA, light can be shed to common and often used discourses that surround us in our everyday lives (Tienari & Meriläinen, 2009). It is important to understand that the language that we use can create and detain invisible social structures that produce inequalities (Mumby, 2004).

The purpose of this thesis is to find out what kind of gendered meanings are built around the marketing major and see whether that would explain the gender imbalance in the major. This thesis examines what kind of discourses are building the reputation of the marketing major, how gender affects the perception of the reputation and how the reputation affects applying intentions. These research questions are addressed by using the theoretical lens presented in the next section.

2.4 Theoretical framework

As the existing literature of reputation research does not address the concepts of gender and the built discourses within a community, this thesis puts its focus on these concepts. Therefore, the concepts of gender, reputation and discourse are important in creating a theoretical framework for this thesis. The relationship of these factors as well as underlying elements and their contribution to the gender representation in the major create the theoretical lens that will be used with the empirical data.

This thesis considers the concept of reputation as socially constructed. It is assumed that discourses surrounding the major of marketing are contributing to its reputation. Therefore, it can be assumed that the language used when discussing the major can either be supporting the existing reputation of the major or changing it. Reputation is not constant, and it can be changed, although the change in reputation might take time. In addition, each one of us has their own perception of the reputation. For example, the discourses can be considered as encouraging or discouraging based on one's personal attributes, experiences, and performance as well as society's expectations of an individual.

As one of the aims of this thesis is to find out whether the reputation of the marketing major is contributing to the gender imbalance, the gender aspect should be considered in the theoretical framework. Gender, like reputation, is also seen as a socially constructed concept that places expectations on people's attributes and behaviour. This can contribute to perceptions that people have on different discourses and reputation.

There are underlying factors that are affecting the discourses – and the discourses are affecting them. The social context in discourse analysis plays an important role. The theoretical framework of this study is adapted from Cheryan et al. (2017). Cheryan et al. (ibid) presented a framework that shows how the variability in micro- and macro-level factors has effects on choices to study in STEM fields and therefore affects the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields. Their view divides the factors into individual and societal levels that exist in the contexts of gender system in the U.S. and explains the variability in the representation of women in STEM fields.

From the social constructionist point of view used in this thesis, realities are created and recreated in social contexts and our perceptions of those realities have effects on our behaviour. Therefore, the concepts of reputation and discourses building the reputation need to be added to the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework presented in Figure 4 shows how realities are built within multiple factors: micro-level factors (e.g., individual beliefs, experiences), macro-level factors (e.g., gender stereotypes, social worlds), discourses surrounding the major as well as the reputation (and each person's perception of it) built through these discourses. All of these factors affect the choices, preferences and interests of individuals and therefore they contribute to the gender representation of the major of marketing. Regarding context, it is important to remember that the whole process is affected by the gender system in Finland: the beliefs, gender roles and prescriptions that exist and are, often unconsciously, affecting our perceptions on things.

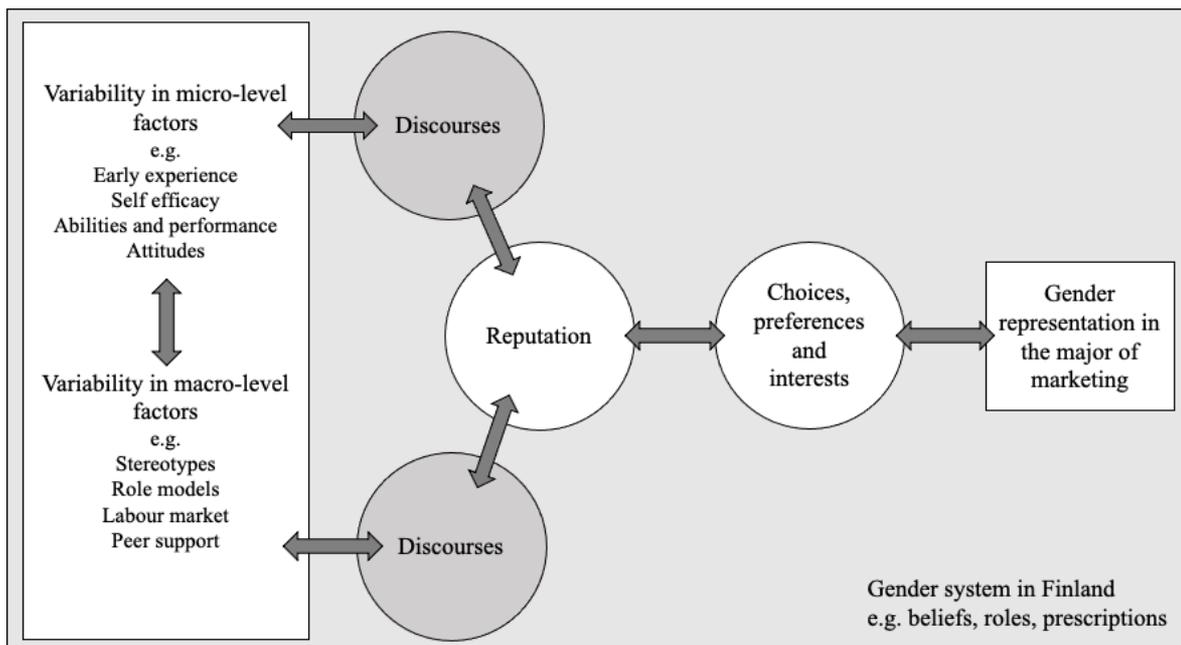


Figure 4 Theoretical framework used in this study. Adapted from Cheryan et al. (2017).

3. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the methodology used in this study as well as clarifies the reasons behind these choices. First, the context of the study is presented. Next, the data collection methods are explained in detail. Finally, the data analysis methods used in the thesis are discussed.

3.1 Case university

The study was implemented as an empirical qualitative study analysing the reputation of the marketing major inside Aalto University School of Business. Although the main focus of the thesis, including the interviewees, is on the Bachelor's degree in Marketing, the results can concern also the Master's degree.

Aalto University was formed in 2010, when the Helsinki School of Economics, Helsinki University of Technology and the University of Art and Design Helsinki merged (Aalto University, 2021a). The idea of the new university was to create a new innovative university that combines science and technology, design and art, and business and economics. However, the history of the School of Business dates all the way back to 1911. The Bachelor's degree in economics was established nine years later in 1920. Helsinki School of Economics (HSE) was the leading business school in Finland, and after merging to Aalto University it has also had success in business school rankings. For example, Aalto University placed 37th in the Financial Times European Business Schools ranking in 2020 (Aalto University, 2021b). In the ranking, Aalto University was the best business school in Finland and third-best in the Nordics (ibid).

Business is a popular choice of study in Finland overall. In fact, business has been one of the most popular fields to study in Finnish universities for many years. In 2021, it was the most applied field of study (Kainulainen, 2021). Aalto University School of Business receives the most applications from Finnish business schools, and the percentage of accepted students is also the lowest. In 2020, 6% of the applicants were accepted for the Bachelor's programme (vipunen.fi).

Most of the students in the Aalto University School of Business have traditionally been men. Only about 40 percent of both those who applied and those who got accepted into Aalto

University School of Business in 2020 were women (vipunen.fi). The percentage of women starting studies in the School of Business peaked in 2010s (47% in 2015) but has been decreasing since. The gender imbalance is quite different when you take a closer look at specific majors. For example, women accounted for about 65 percent of the primary applicants for the marketing major in 2019 (ibid).

3.2 Data collection

Reputation of an organization is built within stories, which are impacted by both personal experiences and public image (Aula & Mantere, 2013). In this thesis, the focus is on the discourses used by the students and the programme itself, which means that both of these impacts are addressed.

It is important to notice all possible types of data and evidence in order to choose the most relevant ones. Especially with qualitative research, the relevance of empirical material is of high importance (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Therefore, this thesis gathers data from three different sources: interviews, online conversations, and marketing materials.

3.2.1 *Semi-structured interviews*

There are three types of interview studies: positivist, emotionalist, and constructionist (Silverman, 2001). This study is done with a constructionist approach, and therefore it also determines the nature of the interviews. For a constructionist interview it is typical to notice that part of the meanings is built between interviewer and interviewee (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Interviews can be divided into three basic groups based on how much in detail they are planned. These three groups are structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and open interviews. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The type of the interview should be chosen based on the research questions and the approach of the study.

For this thesis, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the appropriate interview method. In semi-structured interviews the themes and topics of the interview are decided beforehand, but the questions asked can vary in form and order (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This

supported the research topic and questions, as the questions left room for the interviewees' opinions and thoughts.

The interviews were conducted between December 2020 and March 2021 in an online video meeting due to the safety instructions relating to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were recorded on a video and were transcribed afterwards. Altogether 10 interviews were conducted: six with bachelor's students in marketing and four with first year business students, who have not yet applied for a major. The interviewed students were between 20 to 24 years old and were all Finnish. The interviews' length varied from 18 to 36 minutes. Altogether the ten conducted interviews transcribed into 46 pages.

Regarding the quantity of the interviews, this thesis followed the saturation principle. This means that the data must be collected until the material starts to repeat and no new points of view are found (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). In this thesis, this principle meant that six interviews from the bachelor's students in marketing and four interviews from first year business students were enough to create an understanding of the research topic.

3.2.2 Other sources of data

In addition to the interviews, two other sources of data are included in the analysis. These include screenshots of online conversations about the marketing major and online marketing materials from Aalto University.

The interviewees were shown screenshots of discussions relating to the major of marketing in Aalto University's business students' Jodel channel @ky. These screenshots of the discussion threads were collected in the fall and winter of 2020 and were all concerning the marketing major.

During the interviews many of the participants mentioned different kind of marketing materials as an important factor in their major apply process. Based on the interviews, it was clear that these certain mentioned marketing materials should be included in this study. The commonly mentioned source of information that the interviewees mentioned were the Into Aalto (into.aalto.fi) pages of the majors. Therefore, this thesis includes that page in the data used to analyse the discourses. The used research data is summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1 Research data sources

| Name | Source | Dataset | Purpose |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Recorded interviews | Interviews between 18 to 36 minutes. | 6 interviews from marketing students. 4 interviews with first year business students. | To gain an understanding of the reputation of the major of marketing as well as the discourses building it. |
| Conversations in an online community | Aalto University Business Students' Jodel channel | 7 discussion threads as screenshots | To evoke conversations in the interviewees and to unveil the discourses in a highly used online channel. |
| Marketing materials | Aalto University's marketing major's websites | 2 web pages from into.aalto.fi and aalto.fi | To see how the image the university tries to promote matches with the built discourses. |

3.3 Data analysis

After the collection of the data, the interviews were transcribed into text. In the analysis, critical discourse analysis was used to understand the meanings created in the interview. As critical discourse analysis is also part of the theory base for the thesis, and was already presented in literature review, this section will shortly go through the method in data analysis and focus on its application in this thesis.

3.3.1 Critical discourse analysis as a method

Discourse analysis is one of the qualitative research methods that has become an important methodology during the past decades (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Discourse analysis, as presented in section 2.3, has many versions and definitions. In this thesis, however, the focus is on critical discourse analysis, or CDA for short. CDA has two main orientations: postmodernism and critical realist ontology. In current business research, more emphasis is put on the ontology orientation (Fairclough, 2005; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

CDA sees discourses as representation of social life: they are socially constitutive and socially conditioned (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This means that the assumption in

CDA is that used language cannot be separated from other elements of social life (Fairclough, 1992). The focus in this type of discourse analysis is more on the role of discursive activity that is constituting and sustaining unequal power relations (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). CDA takes into account more than just the linguistic form; the social context is highlighted (ibid).

Discourse analysis was chosen as a method for this thesis based on the interest in how the image and reputation of the major of marketing is built – especially focusing on used language, conversation culture and socially constructed discourses. Critical discourse analysis presented by Fairclough fits in the nature of this thesis well, as Fairclough views discourse as ‘an element of relatively durable social practices, though neither are reducible to discourse’ (Fairclough, 2005, p. 924). The topic and research questions also support the choice of critical discourse analysis as they address the relational aspect of discourse and power. CDA highlights power-relations and how power is reinforced in discourses (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008), which helps to address any social inequalities derived from, for example, social power by institutions and groups involving gender inequality (van Dijk, 1995). Important factor to note in critical discourse analysis is that often social and cultural changes are highly linked to discourses (Fairclough, 1995). This means that changes in discourses can have a significant impact on culture and social context (ibid).

Fairclough (1992) presents a three-dimensional framework for analysing discourse. The framework connects texts to discourses and addresses that the discourses cannot be separated from the surrounding historical and social context (ibid). According to Fairclough (1992), discourses have three interdependent levels they can be interpreted: micro, meso and macro level. The discourses have different types of forms on different levels. Micro level discourse appears as text (spoken or written), meso level as production of texts and macro level as sociocultural practices. The analysis of discourse can be divided on these three levels as well.

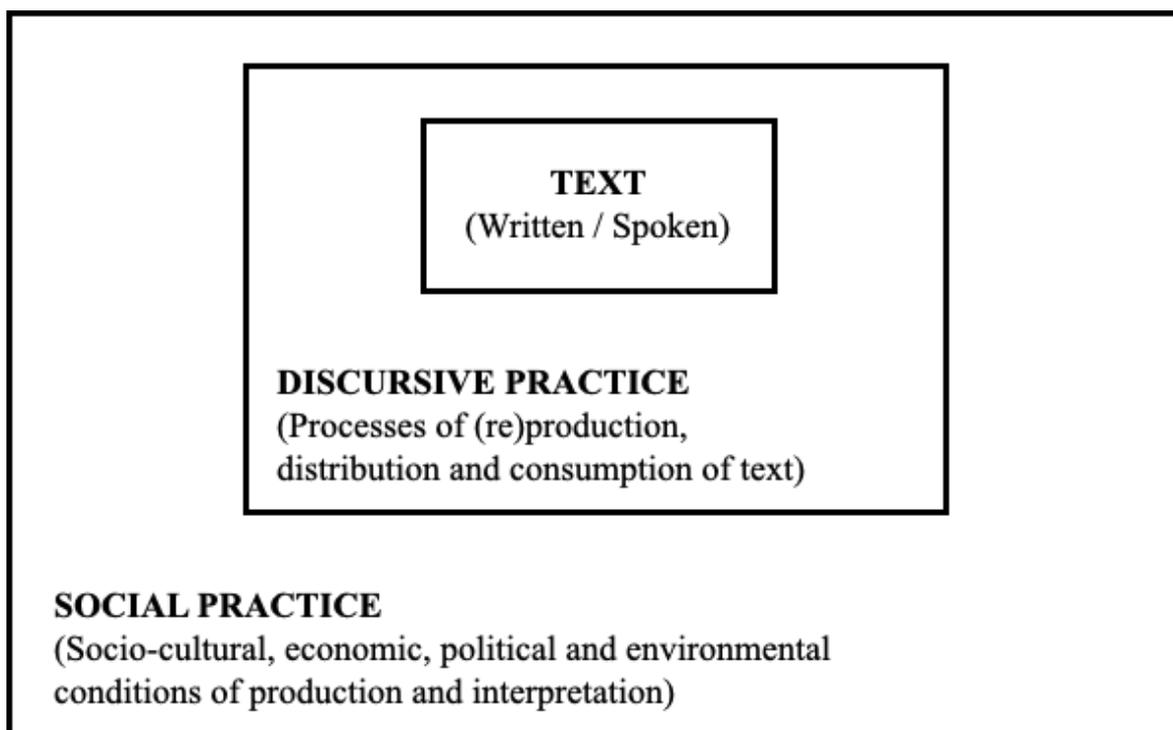


Figure 5 Three-dimensional Framework for CDA (Fairclough, 1992)

The three dimensions of discourses can be analysed in these three levels, which can be seen in Fairclough's framework in Figure 5. The first dimension of critical discourse analysis is text, which aims to analyse the linguistic factors of discourse; word choices, grammar, and patterns in use of vocabulary are things to consider (Fairclough, 1995; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The 'text' in this context can refer to either written or spoken words (ibid). The second dimension is discursive practice, which refers to the processes in which texts are being produced, reproduced, distributed, or consumed in a society (Fairclough, 1992). Context in critical discourse analysis is of high importance, and this dimension focuses on speech acts, coherence as well as intertextuality in its context (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The third dimension is social practice, and it consists of ideological effects and hegemonic processes, in which discourses appear (Fairclough, 1992).

3.3.2 Analysis in this thesis

The analysis of the data is based on Fairclough's view on critical discourse analysis. The focus of the analysis is to find the use of dominant and critical discourses, through which the reputation and image of the major of marketing is constructed in Aalto University. In addition, the differences between the perceptions of the discourses between the interviewed

men and women were analysed. This section will explain further how the analysis in this thesis was executed.

As there are a lot of differences between the detail of transcription in the interviews, the first thing to do with the interview material was to decide how it will be transcribed. Based on similar studies I used as a reference as well as studying the method of critical discourse, I decided that the choices of words are essential to address the research questions. Therefore, most of the transcribing was done word-for-word. In addition, I included long pauses, laughs and other signs of emotional reactions into the material. As the interviews were done as online interviews, the nonverbal meanings are harder to grasp and therefore they are not included in the analysis.

When I have included quotations from the data to this thesis, I have done it with quotation marks and in cursive “*like this*”. Some longer quotations marked with “– –” in between mean that text has been cut off from the middle. Sometimes there is a need to specify what is meant with a word, and there I have used brackets “[]” to do so. Pauses have been marked with three dots (...).

One of the issues of the analysis process in this thesis was language. As the language of most of the first-year studies of the bachelor’s programme in business is Finnish, it was important to execute the interviews in Finnish to understand the exact word choices that are part of the discourses. However, as this thesis is written in English, all of the interview quotations as well as words describing the discourse had to be translated into English. As the interviews were all transcribed in Finnish, the analysis was also done in Finnish. In the translations I have tried my best to portray the original meaning of the words. In cases where there really is no translation to a term, I have explained the issue in the Findings section.

When the interviews were transcribed, the first round of analysis began. In the first round, I was looking for clear discourses that were found from the interviews and coded them into broad categories. I was also looking for patterns that would be helpful in building a theoretical base for the thesis. At this point, I went back to specifying the research questions as well as reading relevant literature to understand better the principles of discourse analysis and building my theoretical lens I could use in the analysis.

After gone through the theoretical lens, the analysis of the interviews was continued. In the second round of analysis, I coded the transcribed interviews by the most common themes again. There was a lot of material and different themes, and I had to choose the themes that were repeated the most and provided input into my research questions. This process took time, and as a result I got four main discourses that this thesis would focus on. As I saw that the interviewees mentioned Aalto websites as one of the few official channels that they had used when looking at information about the different majors, I decided to include them into the dataset. In addition, the online conversations from the Jodel channel were included in this part of the analysis.

Finally, in the third round of my analysis, I examined the context of the found discourse in the interviews. The main point was to understand what kind of different gendered realities are present in the data. I looked at the interviews as a whole: what is present in them and what is left unsaid? As the interviews cannot be separated from the context of our society, I was not surprised to find that there are different perceptions of the reputation of the marketing major between the interviewed men and women.

4. FINDINGS

This section will go through discourses that can be found from the data by using the critical discourse analysis. Then it will discuss the different perceptions people can have of the reputation and how differently the reputation can be seen in different, gendered realities.

It is important to note that although the empirical data used in this thesis consists of three different sources – interviews, online conversations, and marketing materials – these four discourses were mostly present in the interviews and online conversations. This is because the official channels, like the websites mentioned by the students and used in the analysis, have very limited relevant content in them. The more the official sources of information about the majors lack information or relevant content, the more room is given to the discourses created in the conversation culture of students within the community.

4.1 Discourses building the reputation of marketing

Based on the analysis of the interviews, online conversation threads and marketing materials, four main discourses can be found from the data. These found discourses are 1) broadness and variety, 2) wage and employment, 3) qualitative and soft skills, and 4) ease and noncompetitiveness. Next, the discourses are described in detail.

4.1.1 *Broadness and variety*

The first discourse identified was the broadness and variety of the marketing major. Most of the interviewees described the major as broad or versatile. When asked to describe different majors of the School of Business, the interviewees often linked broadness to marketing and management majors, while describing majors like finance and accounting as ‘narrower’.

“I felt that the more mathematical majors were quite narrow overall. For example, with finance I got the image that it closely educates to certain kind of tasks... even though you can become employed in many ways from that major. But I got the feeling that it is quite narrow, and the employers might also see it as narrow. – – With marketing I got the image that you can do a variety of things. You can be an entrepreneur or be in a variety of different things in a company, and it is not tied to a certain investment bank, for example.”

The interviewees highlight that marketing does not educate students into certain roles or tasks. Rather, there is a large variety of roles that the major of marketing can be useful in. There are several options of courses the students can take based on their personal interests. The current marketing students feel that they can pick and choose their courses and therefore build a combo of courses that they like.

Most of the marketing students mention that either they did not know what kind of work they would like to do in the future when they applied to study marketing, or they still are not sure what jobs would interest them. Therefore, the broadness of the degree can be seen as a positive attribute: *“When choosing the major, marketing felt like it would open even more doors [than business degree]. You can work in many different fields”*.

Interestingly, similar types of terms are used when describing the business degree overall: *“Business school sounded good if you didn’t know a specific job. Business is kind of a broad degree, and you can end up in a variety of roles”*. It is said that the business degree “opens up many doors” and the same is said about the marketing degree. The interviewees explained how the degree in marketing can be useful in many different fields and roles, as there are many positions that would be suitable for a graduate from marketing.

However, some of the interviewees see the broadness of the major as a challenge, as it can be unclear to understand what exactly is studied in the degree and what kind of jobs you can do afterwards. Almost all of the interviewees, both marketing students and especially first year business students, struggled with describing the marketing degree and its employment opportunities: *“Maybe the image of the programme is too broad for some. Possibly the study unit isn’t defined enough”*. Overall, the marketing degree with its current content seems to be hard to grasp for the interviewees.

When looking at the marketing materials of the marketing programme, similar points about the major being broad can be seen. For example, it is described that the programme in marketing *“prepares you for a wide range of career opportunities from marketing-related specialist roles to more general positions as well as leadership, expert, and management positions”* (Aalto University, 2021c).

4.1.2 Wage and employment

The second discourse, wage and employment, is linked to the first discourse of broadness. As mentioned previously, marketing is seen as a broad topic, which opens a lot of doors. When asked about the employment of marketing students, similar story continues. The interviewees described the employment possibilities very broadly. “*You can work in a bunch of different fields*”, was a phrase that came up in every interview. The students described that marketing is needed in every industry, and so the degree is useful in a variety of industries.

Although the degree is seen as useful for many fields, the employment seems unsure and low-paid compared to other majors in the business school. “*I often hear people say that you graduate from marketing degree to become unemployed or that you get paid very little*”. Getting a low wage, or none at all, is a common joke that is associated with the marketing degree. The interviewed marketing students describe that the jokes about them not getting a job are common to hear. Examples of these jokes can be found from the Jodel channel:

“Is it true that from marketing you most likely are employed through OnlyFans?”

“Why are there so few guys in marketing?”
- *“Because guys want to get paid.”*

“*I feel like marketing is rather theoretic, and does not really match the job market*”, describes one interviewee. They felt that there is a mismatch between the theories taught in the university, and the job market in marketing demanding knowledge of different tools such as analytics from the applicants, “*that are not taught in the degree at all*”. With the broadness of the marketing degree, it can be hard to see the relativity to study marketing:

“My sense said that I should choose something like accounting, which is a safe choice. At least from accounting you get employed, because there is a lack of accountants, and they overall get paid well. – But marketing is more unsure as a field, and there is more competition. When there’s a marketing job open, they might be looking for communications students, for example. I saw one job opening where they were looking for some forestry students, because it was a forestry company. Then I thought like does

it make sense to study marketing or does the current business world think that everyone knows marketing?"

When it comes to employment, some of the students highlighted that hearing career stories from marketing alumni encouraged them to apply: *"Aalto marketing alumni that had great jobs were speaking there, and it inspired me so much. I was like wow you can succeed from marketing equally as from other programmes."* For many of the interviewees these alumni stories are one of the key factors that they mention that affected their choice of major.

The marketing materials of the School of Business list a variety of different employment opportunities from the marketing major. For example, it is mentioned that graduates from the marketing major are often employed to *"industrial and service companies as (1) manager or coordinator positions in charge of a product or product segment, (2) leader or specialist positions in product or business development, (3) leader or specialist positions in marketing communications, or (4) sales managers. Many of the programme graduates are also employed as consultants, researchers or specialist in those areas"* (into.aalto.fi).

4.1.3 Qualitative and soft skills

The marketing degree is described as one focusing on qualitative skills. Students described that they feel that the marketing degree, alongside with management, are the two majors that apply the least of quantitative methods and skills: *"Management and marketing are more 'humanist' and focuses more on soft values in the studies, rather than numbers and things like that"*.

The students describe marketing being on the qualitative side, with only a little mathematics in the studies. The current marketing students feel that their studies contain a lot of theory and thus also plenty of reflecting and writing. There seem to be some course offerings that are more on the quantitative side, but the focus is on qualitative methods and theories.

Also, the first-year business students have gotten the image that marketing does not contain any mathematics. They describe hearing that not a lot of quantitative skills are needed in the studies, and the focus is on the soft skills like working in a group. Similarly, the conversations in the Jodel channel discuss the lack of quantitative skills in the major:

“Which major requires math the least?”

- *“Probably marketing quite a little.”*
- *“I doubt that in marketing math could be in a big role unless you wanted it to be. And the math needed cannot be that complicated.”*

In addition to the lack of quantitative course content, the students highlight the importance of knowing how to apply the taught theories. Marketing is seen as fitting to a person who *“has interest to apply their own skills that are taught in university”*. Rather than teaching exact formulas or tools, the teaching prepares marketing students with *“frameworks that you can start to utilize when you enter work life”*.

All but one of the interviewees describe the reputation of the major of marketing with the Finnish term *käsien heiluttelu*, which literally translates to moving hands. It can be broadly translated to English sayings *paper shuffling* or *faffing about*. It is often used to depict situations, roles, or tasks which either are not important or are done just to look busy doing something, and therefore *moving hands*. One of the interviewees describes the term as follows:

“I think that paper shuffling [käsien heiluttelu] means that someone is just vaguely saying stuff without backing it up with facts. – It is ‘käsien heiluttelu’, when there’s no data, formula or numbers behind it.”

Another interviewee sees it as *“tasks that require soft skills and are not analytical”* and *“majors that have nothing concrete to study”*. The discourse of *käsien heiluttelu* is associated with the majors that are considered soft and require people skills or are more on the *humanist* side of the spectrum of business majors, like marketing and management.

“Before I applied it [the reputation of marketing major] was kind of easy, and the term ‘käsien heiluttelu’ was used a lot... It is kind of like... not necessarily superficial but if you don’t orientate towards the analytical side, then it is quite... well reading and writing stuff and presentations... the image is that it is easier than other majors.”

The marketing materials of the major do not address the issue of whether the programme includes a lot of quantitative tasks and skills or not. However, the websites mention that one

of the key takeaways of the programme is learning how to do and utilize market research. For example, they mention that “*the major’s core courses are about consumer and market research*” (into.aalto.fi) and that marketing graduates have “*a strong research skills set*” (Aalto University, 2021c).

The current marketing students mention that the courses in marketing often involve group work, and therefore it is important to have social skills. “*I’ve noticed that many of the marketing students are quite outgoing and have good social skills*”, describes one interviewee. In addition, the sense of a community seems to be important for the students, as many of them highlight the good atmosphere there exists within the marketing major: “*I strongly associate the sense of community with the marketing major. Of course it affects when there’s a group of students studying the same topic all are interested in*”.

When asked who the interviewees would see as fit for the major of marketing, the answers emphasized creativity and being innovative. However, it is also mentioned that there are multiple different paths within the major, and creativity is not a must: “*I was afraid that marketing requires a lot of creativity. – – You get to choose the courses based on your interests and I have chosen a lot of those based on data.*” Some of the interviewees also mention that the topic of marketing is often *trendy*, and the students studying marketing are often keeping up with trends.

Traditionally soft skills are associated to females. The interviewees also describe that the major is associated with female stereotypes and the reputation “*is more feminine*” compared to other majors. On the other side, the majors involving *hard skills*, like for example finance, are seen as masculine. Some of the interviewees described that marketing is ‘*a lot closer to people*’ than many other major. One of the first-year interviewees explains: “*I get the vibe from it [marketing major] that it has not that much to do with numbers. – – It is more about reading and probably combines more psychology since things are marketed to people.*”

4.1.4 Ease and noncompetitiveness

The interviewees agree that marketing has a reputation of being “an easy major” and studying it is, to some extent, “*lighter*” than in other majors. The major is seen as non-challenging and since (at least in the past years) everyone that has applied have been

accepted into the major, there is no competition in getting in. One of the interviewed first-year students describes that *“apparently for many years the reputation of the marketing major has been that nothing is taught there”*.

Partly based on the perceived easiness of the major, it is also seen as non-competitive. The students describe that *“there is no endeavour”* for the major and *“it was obvious from the first weeks in the business programme”*. There is a common belief that people who choose marketing are making it because studying it is easy: *“You could see it so that people choose that [the marketing major] to easily graduate from business school. So that they could ‘freeride’ with the school’s reputation in work life.”*

One of the interviewees compares applying into Aalto University overall to the major selection. *“Aalto was the most popular of business schools and therefore I wanted to show both myself and others that I could get in. – – Like wanting to go to Aalto, because it is the best, many might have the same thought process with finance.”* The business school is overall seen as a competitive and ambitious environment, and that might be a reason why the discourse of marketing being an easy major is being formed: *“Those who are not interested in marketing want to speak ill of marketing – – they say that it is only for the girls, have no interest in the topic, and say that there are no possibilities for success.”*

Based on the interviews, many students associate hard topics to containing a lot of mathematics. For example, one person describes that they appreciate the major of economics because *“it is based on facts, and it is the most difficult major”*. However, some of them see that the difficultness of a major is subjective:

“When I think about that easiness, I feel that it [marketing] is not based on math. Compared to other majors there is less math in the courses and therefore someone can think that it’s easy. – – Easiness is kind of... what each of us personally feels that is easy for them. I don’t see writing as easy, and basically all more quantitative assignments are easier, because you can think about and do them together. I feel that all the writing you must do in marketing is more time-consuming.”

As marketing is considered by many as an easy subject, a common thought associated, at least on some level, to marketing students is that they are stupid: *“The reputation of marketing, at least to my knowledge, is worse than some majors. At least in our university, the students there are just stupid marketing bimbos. Of course at least some of these comments are jokes in anonymous platforms”*. The *“easiness”* of the major is brought to the first-year students’ attention right from the beginning. New students hear that *“you don’t have to know anything to become a marketing director”* and that there’s *“those stupid women of marketing who got into Aalto but cannot manage any other major”*. Some interviewees perceive it so that the students of marketing are more motivated, as they do not choose the major based on reputation or prestige, but rather based on actual interest.

Naturally, the discourse of ease and noncompetitiveness is not present in the marketing materials. Therefore, it can be seen that this discourse is only produced in other parts of the community. The discourse can often be seen in the discussions on the Jodel channel:

“What would be your ranking if you would have to rank majors from hardest to the easiest?”

– *“1. Finance 715517. Marketing”*

4.1.6 Discourses building the reputation of Marketing

The four main discourses found from the data as well as examples of them are summarized below in Table 2. But do these discourses explain the gender imbalance in the major of marketing? In the next section, these discourses are being examined in the context of our gendered world.

Table 2 Discourses building the reputation of the Marketing major

| Discourse | Interviews | Jodel | Marketing materials |
|--------------------------|--|-------|---|
| 1) Broadness and variety | <i>“When choosing the major, marketing felt like it would open even more doors [than business degree]. You</i> | - | <i>“Thus, the Master’s Programme in Marketing prepares you for a wide range of career opportunities from marketing-related specialist roles to more</i> |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|
| | <i>can work in many different fields.”</i> | | general positions as well as leadership, expert, and management positions.” (Aalto University, 2021c) |
| 2) Wage and employment | <i>“ – – Marketing is more unsure as a field, and there is more competition. When there’s a marketing job open, they might be looking for communications students, for example”</i> | “Why are there so few guys in marketing?” - “Because guys want to get paid” | “Marketing graduates are located in roles that are leading or coordinating products or product segments, consulting, product development or marketing communications.” (into.aalto.fi) |
| 3) Qualitative and soft skills | <i>“Before I applied it [the reputation of marketing major] was kind of easy, and the term käsiien heiluttelu was used a lot.”</i> | “Which major requires math the least?” - “Probably also marketing quite little” | “The broad teaching objective of the marketing major is to give the student the basic professional and theoretical knowledge of how business is created, developed, lead and done in a market and customer orientated manner.” (into.aalto.fi) |
| 4) Ease and noncompetitiveness | <i>“You could see it so that people choose that [the marketing major] to easily graduate from business school. So that they could ‘freeride’ with the school’s reputation in work life.”</i> | “What is required to get into Aalto’s master’s program in marketing?” - “You have to be a dumb girl” | Discourse not in line with the marketing materials |

4.2 Reputation in a gendered world

Based on the interviews, these discourses surrounding the marketing major in Aalto University seem to be quite similar between female and male interviewees. Therefore, the explanation for the gender imbalance in the major can possibly be explained through differences in perception of these discourses as well as the reputation they are building.

As discourses cannot be separated from the context, it is important that we investigate these findings in the realities that they exist in. There are multiple different factors that affect the difference in image perception between people. In this context, the difference between how attractive the marketing major is seen by men and women could be explained by the gender stereotypes and roles that exist in our culture. In this section, these found four discourses are put into the societal contexts of worlds of traditional femininity, which highlights meaningfulness, and traditional masculinity, which highlights status.

4.2.1 Reputation in a world of femininity

“I gave a lot of thought to whether I should choose marketing or not. Do I choose a major by following my heart or my head? My head said that choose accounting or something that is safe. – It felt kind of right in my heart to choose marketing even though it isn’t necessarily the safest choice of our majors if you think about employment. – But then again, I think that because this is Aalto, it affected a lot, since often you hear say that you definitely find a job if you have studied marketing in Aalto.”

When looking at the four discourses found from the data in a context of a world that is a traditionally considered feminine, the quote above describes well the thoughts of the interviewed women, who had chosen marketing as their major. The interviewed women describe how the most important thing when choosing a major is that they are interested in the topic and could see themselves working in that field in the future.

“After studies I’d like that kind of job that I really like. That I would actually enjoy the job and it would be great to leave for work and it wouldn’t matter if there were long days at work.”

Some of them felt that although it would be possible to study a topic that is not interesting to them at all but has a better employment rate or wage after graduation, it would not feel good. *“The understanding of the topic should come quite naturally. I can force myself to learn a topic for five years, but if it doesn’t interest there’s no sense in that”*, mentioned one of the interviewees.

Societal change is important for the interviewed women. When asked about their plans for future regarding work, most of the interviewees mention that the work must feel meaningful and be in line with their personal values. Many of them also mentioned about their dreams about how to combine having a family or free time activities with their career.

The interviewees also highlighted creativity, and how in their future jobs they want to be innovative. *“I think that it [future job] cannot be too monotone. And that you can yourself affect what you do – – Creativity and innovativeness in the tasks interests me.”* Creativity is also one of the factors that was mentioned often in the interviews when asked *‘who do you think the marketing programme is suitable for?’*. However, it is interesting that the interviewed marketing students that were men did not describe themselves as creative.

Another factor the women studying marketing mentioned being one of the reasons they chose marketing was the community. *“The group spirit in marketing seemed... or the major seemed like a nice choice because of the group spirit”*. Overall, they spoke about how important the community in the major is. Few of them also mentioned that they had the feeling the community in some of the majors was not that encouraging, and they did not want to apply in those majors based on the atmosphere.

There is only a little presence of wage and status in the interviews with women. They did not mention anything about wage when asked about their hopes for their future jobs or reasons behind their choice of major. However, each of them mentioned that they chose to apply to Aalto University based on it being *‘the hardest school of business to get into’* or *‘the best business school in Finland’*.

Broadness and variety in a world of femininity

The broadness and variety discourse could be seen as a neutral or attractive discourse by the women interviewees. The students who were already studying marketing thought that the

variety has its pros and cons: it has something for everybody, but it is sometimes a bit ‘all over the place’. However, the interviewees all were in a situation where they were unsure of what they exactly want to do in the future. As marketing is seen as a major that “opens a lot of doors, and there’s a lot you can do with the programme”, the discourse was seen as positive.

Wage and employment in a world of femininity

A part of critical discourse analysis is to see what is left unsaid (Fairclough, 2005). Therefore, it was interesting to see that the topic of wage did not come up at all in the interviews with women when discussing about what is important for them. Only times when it did come up was when they were asked to describe the reputation of the marketing major. One of the interviewees, however, mentioned that choosing marketing was ‘not a safe choice’ as the employment options can be worse in comparison to some other majors. They pointed out that marketing positions can be directed to many other educational backgrounds than business school graduates.

From the interviews, it was clear that the most important factor when choosing a major is that the topic itself is interesting for the student. “*The most important thing is definitely interest for the topic, and everything else is secondary*”, said one of the interviewees. It seems that meaningfulness, values, employers as well as the tasks are what the interviewed women are focusing on when thinking about future employment opportunities instead of wage and employment rates.

Qualitative and soft skills in a world of femininity

In the world of femininity, qualitative and soft skills can be seen as an attractive discourse. As traditionally soft skills are more acceptable for females – or even expected from females – and it seems to be the case also in the marketing major. The students described how in marketing there is a lot of group work and people skills are needed. People skills are often linked with femininity.

Most of the women interviewees discussed how they want to use their own creativeness and innovativeness in their work. Unlike in many more quantitative tasks, qualitative assignments give room for the students’ own thinking and creativity. A common stereotype

the interviewees seem to face inside the business school community is that women are not that great with quantitative skills. Although many of the interviewees say that they are annoyed by this stereotype and have great quantitative skills, the discourse of marketing focusing on qualitative and soft skills can be seen as an attractive discourse to women.

Ease and noncompetitiveness in a world of femininity

“If you think about finance for example, there might be a lot of women that are interested in it – – it can be so that some do not dare to apply to it. I had the feeling as well: even though I would have wanted to study in that major, I got the feeling that the environment is not that nice because of the competitiveness.”

The discourse of ease and noncompetitiveness can be seen as an attractive discourse. The interviewees described how they see competitiveness of some other majors as a rejecting factor and a more supportive community is better. For example, one marketing student describes: *“I have a negative image of the finance major because you can see some students thinking that they are better than anybody else”*.

Although the interviewees do not describe the topic as easy, they recognize that the major is often said to be easier than most of the other majors. They describe how marketing studies include less mathematics and therefore is seen as an easy major. However, as one interviewee describes: *“Whenever a course doesn’t include math, it is seen as easy. But then again, some other tasks, like writing essays, are more difficult to others than math. It’s all about the perspective.”* One of the interviewees described how they had been told not to choose economics as their major as *‘it is so hard it will kill you’*.

Overall, the four discourses building the reputation of the marketing major seem to be more on the attracting side in the world of femininity. The mentioned values, wishes and goals linked to the reality that the interviewed women described are more accepted for women. Therefore, it can be seen that the choice of the marketing major is also more accepted for women, as the discourses surrounding marketing are combined to femininity. The summary of the discourses and their meaning in the world of femininity can be seen below in Table 3.

Table 3 Summary of the discourses in a world of femininity

| Discourse | Example | Meaning in a world of femininity |
|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Broadness and variety | <i>" I had no strong feelings about in which major to apply, and I felt like marketing opens a lot of doors."</i> | Neutral or Attracting discourse |
| 2. Wage and employment | <i>"Do I choose a major by following my heart or my head? My head said that choose accounting or something that is safe."</i> | Neutral or Attracting discourse |
| 3. Qualitative and soft skills | <i>"With marketing you can be a lot closer to people."</i> | Attracting discourse |
| 4. Ease and noncompetitiveness | <i>"If you think about finance for example, there might be a lot of women that are interested in it -- it can be so that some do not dare to apply to it. I had the feeling as well: even though I would have wanted to study in that major, I got the feeling that the environment is not that nice because of the competitiveness"</i> | Attracting discourse |

4.2.2 Reputation in a world of masculinity

" When I started studying in the school of business and had no idea of which major to choose, finance was sold to me from all directions, because I'm a basic guy who likes math and so on."

The answers of the men interviewees are seeming to become quite from a different perspective. The discourses can be seen in quite a different light when looking at them from a traditionally masculine perspective. Interestingly, as seen above, men contrasted marketing and finance more than women did. *"I feel that finance and marketing are kind of against each other and often I hear my friends, who are mostly studying in finance, diss marketing and focusing on talking bad about it"*, one interviewee described.

One key theme that was present in the interviews with men is competitiveness. From the men interviewees, it became clear that from the beginning of their studies they all have been exposed to a lot of stereotypes and expectations of the majors they should choose. Comparing and contrasting the majors is common, and some the interviewees even seem to be worried about their effects on students' choices.

"I got the feeling from marketing, that you could be there as an entrepreneur and be in a variety of different roles in different companies. It isn't tied with some kind of investment bank, which is a stereotype of finance."

"I'm worried about those jokes and memes relating to marketing, because they can actually affect how people see marketing students. -- Some people can think that they don't want to be associated with that stereotype, or they don't want to be seen as stupid, and in the worst-case scenario they don't apply to marketing even though they are interested in the topic."

Compared to the interviews with women, the interviewed men, who studied marketing already, were interested in entrepreneurship. They felt that the marketing major gives a good base for entrepreneurship and therefore considered it as a good choice. The variety of the major was therefore in this case seen as a positive thing, as it gives a broad view of business that will be beneficial as an entrepreneur.

Another interesting factor the men interviewees associated with marketing was trendiness. They described both the topic itself involving trends and the people studying the topic being trendy or catching up with the newest trends. Some of them also mention that the major is also associated with branding and especially brands that are often considered feminine, like fashion and beauty.

Broadness and variety in a world of masculinity

The discourse of broadness and variety was described by the men interviewees quite similarly to women. The broadness can be seen as a negative side as the contents of the studies might be hard to understand. However, as mentioned, some of the interviewees interested in entrepreneurship considered the variety that the major gives as a positive thing.

As in the marketing major, there are not specific paths for the studies or clear positions the students will be working in, the discourse is seen more as a neutral or rejecting discourse. The interviewed men were more certain of what they would like their job to be like, and therefore the broadness does not necessarily come across as a benefit.

Wage and employment in a world of masculinity

The discourse of wage and employment can be seen as a rejecting discourse in the world of masculinity. The old and common stereotype of “*men need to have money*” came up in almost all of the interviews. The interviewees describe how some men “want to have a nice job title and lots of money” and how they “*choose a major that gives them the most prestige*”. Although these might be stereotypes and exaggerations, they make the discourse rejecting in the world of masculinity.

The interviewed men seemed to all be quite clear of what they wanted to do in the future, at least when compared to the interviewed women. The interviewees described how they wanted ‘*some kind of managerial position*’, mentioning specific companies or roles they want to be in. Therefore, the employment opportunities seem to be a priority for them. Again, they were comparing marketing and finance majors: “*Maybe the picture for a lot of people is that finance is all about making money and it is associated with characteristics that are more typical for men.*”

Qualitative and soft skills in a world of masculinity

”When I started my studies, during the first week I got the picture that women go to marketing and men go to either finance or accounting. So of course that affects in the background. And maybe also that people think that marketing is only branding and all about, for example, Louis Vuitton bags and makeup... Creating ads and that sort of creative stuff that a basic Finnish guy couldn’t handle. So maybe from this kind of view the gender imbalance exists... “

Qualitative and soft skills are often considered as feminine and therefore act as a rejecting discourse in the world of masculinity. Interviewees describe how “*men might want more focus more on [quantitative] data in their major*” than the marketing major seems to be able

to provide – at least based on its reputation. Most of the interviewees also described themselves as people who enjoy technology, data and quantitative tasks.

”The most important thing for me is that the major has math in it, cause I’m interested in it. And then employment. Of course wage is also important, but I’m not that keen on finance because... well, people matter.”

Ease and noncompetitiveness in a world of masculinity

“If you think about the conversations we had in our tutor group, it was all about finance, finance, finance. It came clearly through especially in conversations among boys. Right in the beginning the superiority of finance was brought up. – – If you would say that you would be applying to marketing, it can make people think that you are... kind of stupid. Or they would think that you don’t want to benefit from the studies as much as you would from other more math-based subjects.”

Ease and noncompetitiveness is a rejecting discourse in a world of masculinity. In fact, competitiveness is highlighted in the interviews with men. All of the interviewees describe how there is a stereotype that marketing students are only female and that the major is considered easy. *“Men might think that they would be seen as more stupid or not as masculine if they would apply to marketing”*, describes one interviewee.

”I think that there are men who do not want to differ from the mainstream. And if the assumption is that marketing is only for the girls or for the gays or something, some do not dare to be against it and instead they adapt that understanding and even try to gain acceptance through that.”

The marketing major can even be seen as a joke. The interviewed men, who study marketing, described that they were questioned about their choice of major and other majors were held as obvious choices for men. *“When I applied [to marketing], and I said to my friends about it, they laughed and asked, ‘Which are you applying into for real?’”*, explained one interviewee. The lack of men in the major makes the barrier of choosing marketing as a major bigger than it is for women: *“Straight away I get a feeling that I cannot apply there, if the only people in the major are marketing chicks”*

The men reasoned their choice of applying to Aalto University with its status. *”Of course Aalto is the best business school on paper so of course you want to be in the best school possible”*, said one interviewee. This is interesting because the same reasoning came up with the interviews with women. However, the world of status is still more present in the interviews with men, as otherwise their answers compared to women are quite different.

The discourses building the reputation of the marketing major are less acceptable in a world of masculinity. Therefore, they can be seen as rejecting discourses that could be a part of the explanation why men prefer to choose another major instead of marketing. The discourses and their meanings in the world of masculinity can be seen summarized below in Table 4.

Table 4 Summary of the discourses in a world of masculinity

| Discourse | Example | Meaning in a world of masculinity |
|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Broadness and variety | <i>”I got the feeling from marketing, that you could be there as an entrepreneur and be in a variety of different roles in different companies.”</i> | Rejecting or neutral discourse |
| 2. Wage and employment | <i>”They want a nice job title and lots of money.”</i> | Rejecting discourse |
| 3. Qualitative and soft skills | <i>”Men want more focus on data from their major.”</i> | Rejecting discourse |
| 4. Ease and noncompetitiveness | <i>”If you would say that you would be applying to marketing, it can make people think that you are... kind of stupid. Or they would think that you don’t want to benefit from the studies as much as you would from other more math-based subjects”</i> | Rejecting discourse |

5. DISCUSSION

One of the questions I got, when I started doing this research, was that “*why is it a problem if girls want to study different subjects than boys?*”. Of course, there is no problem with that. The issue is that these decisions are not made in a vacuum. There are plenty of factors that affect the choices people make daily, whether those are to do with grocery shopping or course selection. And therefore, it is important to try to understand which factors are affecting those choices so that people can be aware of the reasons they end up studying or working in a particular field. Based on this thesis, the education choices are affected by a variety of factors that are not only utilitarian but are linked with the patriarchal society we live in.

From previous research it can be seen that the reputation or image is affected by variability in both micro-level factors (like attitudes, early experiences) and macro-level factors (like stereotypes, rolemodels) (e.g. Cheryan et al., 2017; Stern et al., 2001, Baric & Kotler, 1991). Reputation has effects on the choices, preferences and interest that people make (e.g. Cheryan et al., 2017; Soutar & Turner, 2002). However, reputation is depending on how a person perceives the reputation (e.g. Burr, 1995; Aula & Mantere, 2013). This is again influenced by the variability in micro and macro level factors, but also the context in question. By following the principles of discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 1995 & Fairclough, 2005), this thesis has shed light to the context, and how the perceptions of reputation differ when considering the expectations, roles and stereotypes that exist in a society.

Going back to the main research question, there are gendered meaning being built around the marketing major in Aalto University. The identified four discourses linked to broadness and variety, wage and employment, qualitative and soft skills, as well as ease and noncompetiveness, seem to get different meanings in different realities. These different discourses act either as rejecting or attracting factors when choosing a major. Most of the discourses are attracting in a world of femininity (reality traditionally linked to women), and mostly rejecting in a world of masculinity (reality traditionally linked to men).

What could be then done to this issue? The practical implications for study programmes are given in the next section, but overall, more attention needs to be paid on ways how the

different programmes are talked about. There are many factors that affect students' choices of what to study – factors that have been neglected before. Gender, gender roles and sociocultural factors have effects on how students end up applying in certain programmes, and those effects need to be examined in more detail.

The study programmes, universities as well as other organizations will have to participate in the discourses that are building their reputation. As mentioned in the previous section, the marketing materials of the majors are very limited. The interviewed students mentioned that the official sources of information they look for when choosing for majors are websites (into.aalto.fi), info evenings held by different departments or student organizations as well as the introduction courses they have in their first year of studies. The problem with this is that most of the students had made their choice of a major before the application period even started, which is when at least most of the info evenings are held. Therefore, the information available during the first months of the studies – or even before the beginning of the academic year – is crucial to make sure that the students have an official source of information, and they can make an informed choice.

To put it simply, the discourse should be managed or otherwise it will manage the organization. Poor management of a discourse will lead to a point where the discourses start to live their own lives. Although the marketing materials that currently exist try to tell a different story, they are unable to influence the discourses, because they are insufficient. These discourses have effects and in order to influence the effects, the organizations have to participate in the discourses.

The stereotypes and expectations that live in universities are surprisingly strong. Each programme or major has its own stereotypes that live in discourses in the community, and although they can be seen as jokes by some, they also change and maintain views that people have. In the worst case, they will make people decide not to study a topic they are interested in just because they do not fit the stereotype.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This section will summarize the research, give practical implications for study programmes, evaluate the limitations of the study as well as give suggestions for future research.

6.1 Research summary

The aim of this thesis was to understand why there is a gender imbalance in the marketing major in the Aalto University School of Business. The purpose was to use discourse analysis to examine what kind of gendered meanings are built around the marketing major, and to see whether those would explain the existence of the gender imbalance, at least to some extent. In addition, this research examined what kind of discourses are building the reputation of the marketing major, how gender affects the perception of the reputation and how the reputation affects applying intentions.

Through a literature review that focused on three main concepts – reputation, gender, and discourse – a research gap was built. From previous research, it was evident that while there is a lot of reputation research, only few of them have focused on university reputation. The ones that had addressed university reputation building or its effects often focused only on the utilitarian factors, such as tuition fees or employment rates. Therefore, this research contributed to the lacking research that combines reputation building with discourse analysis and gender studies and examines the factors that are building a reputation inside a community – a business school.

To address the research questions, interviews with first-year business students and bachelor level students in marketing were conducted. To broaden the data to understand the discourses building the reputation, online conversations from the anonymous platform Jodel and marketing materials from the Aalto University School of Business were included. Through a discourse analysis of the data, four main discourses were found. These discourses are 1) broadness and variety, 2) wage and employment, 3) qualitative and soft skills, and 4) ease and noncompetitiveness.

These discourses that are building the reputation of marketing were then put into context. They were investigated from the perspective of two different realities that exist in a society, where there are gender norms, roles, and stereotypes: a world of femininity (traditionally

linked to women) and a world of masculinity (traditionally linked to men). From these perspectives, it was clear that most of the discourses that surround the marketing major act as attractive discourses in the world of femininity and as rejecting discourses in the world of masculinity. Therefore, the discourses building the reputation can be considered as factors that affect students' choices when applying to majors, and that are building the gender imbalance in the marketing major.

6.2 Practical implications

Based on the findings of this thesis, there are a few practical suggestions. These suggestions are not only useful for the Aalto University School of Business, but also for other universities and study programmes that want to address the gender imbalance as well as manage their reputation.

Firstly, students want study programmes to be specific. This does not mean that the programmes should only focus on one topic, but the different options need to be specified a bit more. For example, the majors could include a few different tracks that would consist of a coherent set of courses. These tracks would not only make it easier for the students to choose courses, but it would also make the programmes easier to understand for the students that are considering applying into them.

Secondly, the programmes should match the job market more. For example, the marketing programme could include more data marketing and quantitative skills. Both women and men in the interviews mentioned that the programme could have also courses about data marketing. Some of them felt that these skills in data marketing are important or even expected in the work life and therefore should be included more in the studies to provide a set of skills that match with the requirements of the job market. In addition, a possibility to focus more on the quantitative aspects of marketing could possibly make more men to apply in the major.

Thirdly, in cases which students have introductory courses of the possible future majors, the courses should match the major programme well. The mandatory marketing course was often mentioned in the interviews as one that is '*not describing the actual studies well*'. Many of the interviewees told that when they were first-year students, marketing students often

told them that the introduction course to marketing does not describe the marketing major well and they should not make any decisions based on the course. Although it must be hard to compress the concepts of full majors and put them into short courses, the findings indicate that the courses should be made to match the majors. The students described how big role these first courses play in their decision process when choosing the majors to apply into.

Finally, and probably most importantly, it would be beneficial for universities and study programmes to understand what kind of discourses are building their reputation. The discourses need to be managed at least to some extent, or the discourses can start to live their own lives. To make it more fair for the students choosing where to apply as well as to students who are studying in them, it would be important to focus on the actual contents of the programmes instead of comparing them. The universities and study programmes should actively participate in the conversation about them to manage the discourses. For example, in the case of the Aalto University School of Business, only little information can be found about the majors from official sources. This leaves more room to the discourses building in other sources, such as in conversations between students. As many of the students choose their major before the actual application period, or even before their introductory course of the topic, more information about the content of the majors should be available for the students. Otherwise, the discourses are easily not in line with the reality.

6.3 Evaluation and limitations of the thesis

Throughout the thesis, I have reasoned my choices and how the research process has progressed. This section will evaluate this thesis further and present the limitations that exist in this thesis.

In a qualitative study the focus is not on the amount of the data used in the analysis, but in the quality of the material (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The material should be gathered until it starts to repeat itself, but it is still up to the researcher to decide how much material is gathered (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). I consider the data used in this research relevant and sufficient, and it supported the research objectives. The interviews were done until the data began to repeat itself, and the point of data saturation was reached. The process of transcribing the interviews, and therefore knowing the existing material, right away after

interviews helped to make the decision of the number of included interviews. However, the number of the interviews can still be considered as a limitation.

One of the limitations is regarding the circumstances of the interviews. The first-year students were interviewed before the introduction to marketing course, and their answers could be different after they had finished the mandatory course. In addition, the interviewed first year students began their studies in 2020, and therefore had quite a different start to their studies as they normally would have. They had none or only a few live events and contact teaching, which of course could have effects in their perception of different majors.

The interviewees were told before the interviews that the thesis was about the marketing major's reputation and that their answers would remain anonymous. Therefore, they had no prior knowledge that the study would include, for example, gender studies. In the end of the interview, they were explained more in detail what the research was about. As the interviewer and the researcher, I have also in the analysis focused on the interaction between me and the interviewees, as those interactions affect the results (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). To explain my thought process and to let the reader interpret the data as well, I have included a lot of direct citations from the interviews.

As the purpose of this thesis was to try to explain the lack of men in the marketing major, the analysis focused on discourses that can be considered traditionally feminine and therefore act as rejecting discourses. As there were a lot of discourses that could have been found from the data, the decision was made to focus on the discourses that were the most repeated throughout the interviews. In this case, the most obvious discourses were feminine, and including all the other discourses would have made the research too broad.

Discourse analysis is a form of qualitative analysis where a lot is depending on the researcher and their interpretation (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Therefore, it is important to note that besides being the researcher, I am a woman studying marketing and thus have been surrounded by some of these discourses during my studies as well. I have paid attention to my own biases during the analysis and tried to explain the reasoning behind the findings and interpretations.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

As the context of this empirical study is limited to Aalto University, it would be interesting to see results of a similar study in other universities. In addition, other majors within business schools could be researched: especially majors that have gender imbalance like in marketing. Similarly, the context could focus on the perceptions of students in master's programmes. In master's programmes it would also be possibly to include international students in the scope as most of them are taught in English.

As mentioned, the interviewed first-year students had not finished the mandatory marketing course at the time of the interviews. Therefore, it would be interesting to hear the thoughts of students at the end of their first-year studies, after they have made their choice of major. It would also be interesting to see analyses from the interactions the students have during the mandatory marketing course.

Only the few Aalto University websites, which were mentioned in the interviews, were included in the analysis of this thesis. Therefore, future research could focus more on the existing marketing materials of the majors and business school overall. Comparing the discourses found in the official sources and discourses present in the community could offer interesting opportunities for further explorations. In addition, these discourses could be challenged in focus groups that would include students from different majors or first-year students. As discourses are always linked to the context and are built in interactions of people, these focus group conversations could be a great way to approach the reputations that exist in the business school.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Interview questions for first-year students

Background

- Tell me about yourself
- (Age, class, gender, educational background)

Interests

- What kind of things are you interested in?
- What would you like to do after you finish your degree?
- What plans do you have for future?
- What kind of profession are you dreaming of? What is important in your future job?

Choices in the School of Business

- Why did you choose to apply to study business? Why did you choose Aalto University School of Business?
- Tell me about the majors in Aalto University School of Business
- What is important for you when choosing a major?
- What major do you think you will choose?

Gathering Information

- Where do you get information about the different majors?

- What channels of information are the most important for you? What channels affect or will affect your choices the most in your opinion?

The Reputation of the Marketing Major inside the School of Business

- What comes to mind when you think about the marketing major in Aalto University School of Business?
- What kind of reputation does the marketing major have?
- Who fits into the marketing major?
- What can you study in the marketing major and where do marketing graduates work?
- Would you apply into the marketing major? Why or why not?

Marketing Major in an Online Conversation Channel

- What thoughts come to mind when looking at these conversations?
- Do you feel like you could apply into the marketing major? Why or why not?

Closing thoughts

- Why do some majors have a gender imbalance in the School of Business?

Appendix 2

Interview questions for current marketing students

Background

- Tell me about yourself
- (Age, class, gender, educational background, major)

Interests

- What kind of things are you interested in?
- What would you like to do after you finish your degree?
- What plans do you have for future?
- What kind of profession are you dreaming of? What is important in your future job?

Choices in the School of Business

- Why did you choose to apply to study business? Why did you choose Aalto University School of Business?
- Tell me about the majors in Aalto University School of Business
- What was important for you when choosing a major?
- At which point did you choose marketing as your major? Can you describe how you made your decision?

Gathering Information

- Where did you get information about the different majors?
- What channels of information were the most important for you? What channels affected your choices the most in your opinion?

The Reputation of the Marketing Major inside the School of Business

- What comes to mind when you think about the marketing major in Aalto University School of Business?
- How would you describe the reputation that the marketing major had before you applied to study in it?
- Did the major fit your expectations of it?
- Who fits into the marketing major?
- What can you study in the marketing major and where do marketing graduates work?

Marketing Major in an Online Conversation Channel

- What thoughts come to mind when looking at these conversations?
- Have you encountered these stereotypes and comments?

Closing thoughts

- Why do some majors have a gender imbalance in the School of Business?