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**A POSTSTRUCTURAL APPROACH TO ORGANISATIONAL  
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE UK MAGAZINE PUBLISHING  
INDUSTRY, 2004-13**

By

Alastair Scott Milne

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of  
Doctor of Philosophy of Birkbeck, University of London  
June 2019

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis adopts a poststructural approach to the study of organisational identity (OI) arguing that, by destabilising the status of both object and subject, poststructuralism places identity at the centre of organisational life, where a poststructural identity is fragmented, dynamic, decentred, relational and contested. However, the essential indeterminacy of poststructural meaning puts pressure on organisational actors to present identity as coherent, stable and agreed-upon in an attempt to fix meanings, avoid uncertainty, and secure legitimacy. The thesis proposes that poststructuralism helps to provide a convincing account of the tension between the centripetal efforts of organisational actors and the centrifugal empirical evidence found in organisational texts and discourses.

The thesis further proposes a categorisation of the organisational identity literature into 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' approaches to OI, where centripetal approaches present OI in terms of agreed-upon and largely stable attributes of an organisation, and centrifugal approaches consider OI to be fragmented, dynamic and contested. It assesses the theoretical validity of a poststructural approach to the study of OI, explores the feasibility of a robust and valid poststructural methodology, and considers whether a poststructural approach can provide additional explanatory power over existing approaches. The thesis incorporates intertextual analysis, discourse analysis, multimodality, and argumentation as methodological approaches to the study of identity.

The thesis is based on an empirical study of three firms operating in the UK magazine publishing industry in the period 2004-13. As its principal data source, the study uses a set of corporate annual reports for the three firms, supplemented by contemporary industry blogs, industry reports, press articles, and interviews with industry figures.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My reason is now free and clear, rid of the dark shadows of ignorance that my unhappy constant study of those detestable books of chivalry cast over it. Now I see through their absurdities and deceptions, and it only grieves me that this destruction of my illusions has come so late that it leaves me no time to make some amends by reading other books that might be a light to my soul.

— Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*

At the end of his long series of adventures, Cervantes' unfortunate hero Don Quixote finally realises that his efforts to define himself in terms of his library of books on chivalry had been mistaken. However, now his reason is 'free and clear,' his realisation is not that he was wrong to construct his life based on texts, but that he simply chose the wrong ones with which to do so.

A central theme of the novel *Don Quixote* is how best to construct identity in an ambiguous and changing world, where questions of identity are at the centre of individual and social life. One element that makes *Don Quixote* stand out from previous literature is its exploration of the construction of identity based on other texts. It is for this reason that Foucault describes *Don Quixote* as the first modern novel, its hero 'made up of interwoven words' (Foucault, 1974: 51). For Foucault, *Don Quixote* signifies the break between the medieval and the modern, where language is no longer assumed to directly represent the world, the 'written word and things no longer resemble one another' and where, between the two, 'Don Quixote wanders off on his own' (Ibid., 53).

In this thesis, I argue that, like *Don Quixote*, contemporary organisations attempt to assemble their identities from previous texts, constructing themselves from 'interwoven words'. I explore how, despite the endeavours of organisational leaders to construct coherent and enduring identities, the empirical evidence from organisational texts reveals identity to be much less coherent and enduring than it is presented. I propose that a poststructural theoretical approach can help to account for this gap. Questioning the status of both object and subject, poststructuralism places the quest for identity at the heart of individual, social, and organisational life. I present a poststructural

identity that is empirically complex, dynamic, decentred, relational and contested, yet its essential instability requires that organisational actors present it as coherent, stable, and agreed-upon in an attempt to fix meanings for themselves and for their organisation's stakeholders.

My overall objective in this thesis is to investigate how firms in the UK B2B and professional magazine publishing industry in the period 2004-2013 attempted to construct and reconstruct their identities. In addressing this, I have reviewed the existing OI literature and identified key theoretical and empirical problems with to the concept as currently theorised. In this thesis, I present an alternative, poststructural, conception of OI. I investigate key elements and critiques of poststructuralism as a theoretical approach, together with an assessment of the feasibility of a robust and valid poststructural methodology. Finally, I assess whether an empirical study using a poststructural theoretical approach and commensurate methods can provide a deeper understanding of the processes of OI construction than existing approaches to the concept.

I have based my study on four broad methodological approaches: intertextual analysis, discourse analysis, multimodality, and argumentation. Drawing from these approaches, I have developed a set of methods that investigate the key elements of a poststructural OI within organisational texts, and I argue that it is possible to present a robust and valid poststructural analysis using such methods. I contend that my study makes a significant contribution to the OI literature, both in its application of a poststructural theoretical approach to OI, and in the methodological approach that I have taken. Moreover, I consider that both elements of my analysis have potential relevance to the organisational literature more broadly.

My analysis focuses on a set of corporate annual reports published by three firms operating within the UK magazine publishing industry in the period from 2004-13. I propose that annual reports are a rich source for the study of the construction of organisational identity. However, recognising that reports are visual as well as textual documents, I argue that both of these modes of communication are involved in identity construction in reports. I have therefore

attempted to incorporate into my methodology a multimodal approach that both highlights the different means by which visual and verbal textual elements communicate meaning and acknowledges that meaning is created by them in combination, rather than separately.

Albert and Whetten proposed the concept of organisational identity in 1985, as an organisation's answer to the question 'who are we?' Their original article has spawned a growing and complex literature, where OI has been presented as a central construct in the study of organisations (Ravasi and Canato, 2013).

Albert and Whetten presented OI as largely stable and agreed-upon, coming to the fore in times of crisis. Subsequent empirical studies have questioned both the stability and the agreed-upon nature of OI in practice. I propose that, with organisations increasingly complex and decentralised, questions of identity have become a pervasive organisational concern.

Despite a growing body of theoretical and empirical research on OI, the answers to central definitional questions remain elusive. The majority of the literature conceptualises OI as, more-or-less, a social construction, but rarely acknowledges that social construction is a term that can be interpreted in multiple ways. In this thesis, I argue that the OI literature is largely rooted in one or other of two main strands of social constructionist thinking, a 'sociological' and a 'psychological' approach, where the development of the literature has been shaped by these distinct approaches. I propose that the OI literature can be characterised along an axis of 'centripetal' or 'centrifugal' approaches towards the concept, with the former presenting OI in terms of agreed-upon and largely stable attributes of an organisation, and the centrifugal approach, generally based upon empirical studies, presenting OI as more dynamic and less agreed-upon.

In this thesis, I propose a poststructural approach to OI that both situates identity at the centre of organisational life and addresses the gap between how organisational actors understand and seek to present identity and how it is constructed discursively in organisational texts. I argue that a poststructural approach to identity and to social construction enables a coherent presentation

of OI as a social construction, but also challenges those social constructionist approaches that conceptualise identity primarily in terms of collective cognitive beliefs.

An initial wave of enthusiasm for postmodern and poststructuralist approaches evident in the organisational literature in the 1990s had largely dissipated by the turn of the millennium. These approaches have been largely absent from the OI literature, although poststructuralist approaches have been notable in literature on individual identity (e.g. Butler, 1990). Poststructuralism has been criticised for failing to present coherent and consistent theoretical positions, for its perceived relativism and determinism, and for being antithetical to method. In this thesis, I attempt to address these criticisms, arguing that poststructuralism potentially provides a powerful and constructive theoretical framework for analysis, and that a poststructural method can support robust and valid empirical study.

I address my research objective through an empirical study of three firms operating in the UK magazine publishing industry in the period 2004-13, basing my analysis on organisational texts and discourses. The magazine publishing industry in the UK underwent substantial transformational change during this period, bringing questions of identity to the fore. For my principal data source, I have used sets of corporate annual reports. I have supplemented these with contemporary industry reports, online blogs, press articles, and interviews with industry figures.

I argue that my thesis makes significant theoretical and methodological contributions. On the theoretical level, my approach helps to account for the gap between a centripetal perspective of OI as understood and presented by organisational actors, and the centrifugal empirical 'realities' of OI as constructed in organisational texts. On the methodological level, I have presented a novel intertextual approach to the analysis of identity within a set of organisational texts that I propose contributes to the development of methodology in that area more broadly. I have also presented a multimodal

approach to the study of identity construction in annual reports that contributes to this important and burgeoning area of organisational research.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

My central research questions in this thesis are two-fold, focusing on both theory and methodology:

1. How can we explain the tension between understandings of organisational identity as a generally agreed-upon and stable attribute of organisations and empirical research that frequently reveals OI as fragmented, dynamic and contested?
2. What kinds of empirical data do organisations draw on to create an organisational identity and how do these forms of data help us to understand organisational identity as a post-structural concept?

## **DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

In this thesis, I have sought to apply a poststructural theoretical and methodological approach to an empirical study of organisational identity. I acknowledge that poststructuralism is a problematic concept, where multiple definitions have been proposed. I have adopted an interpretation of poststructuralism based primarily on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Hansen (2006), drawing on Derrida's (1967/1978) conceptualisation of language and Foucault's (1972, 1977) ideas on discourse and power. In this section, I set out my definition of the ontological and epistemological bases of poststructuralism. I then go on to provide definitions for my use of the terms discourse, social construction and poststructural identity in this thesis.

### **The ontological and epistemological basis of my poststructural position**

The ontology of poststructuralism focuses on language as the basis of meaning, where it is not a transparent medium, but rather a field of social and political practice, with no objective 'true' meaning beyond linguistic representations (Shapiro, 1981: 218). Language is *social* in that it consists of a series of

collective codes and conventions, and is *political* in that it is a site for the production and reproduction of particular subjectivities, while others are simultaneously excluded (Hansen, 2006: 18). My poststructural conception of language is based upon Derrida (1967/1978), who presents language as a series of differential signs where meaning is established through a series of juxtapositions, where privileged and devalued meanings are constantly compared (Hansen, 2006: 19). For Foucault (1977), this inherent instability of language highlights the importance of political agency and the political production and reproduction of discourse (Hansen, 2006: 22).

I view language as constitutive for what is brought into being, with 'reality' constructed through discursive practice (Hansen, 2006: 17). However, I adopt the ontological position of Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 108), where 'the fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition...What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence.' A focus on language therefore does not deny the existence of material facts, with Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 108) affirming 'the material character of every discursive structure.' Fundamentally, however, it is 'only through the construction in language that 'things' – objects, subjects, states, living beings, and material structures – are given meaning' (Hansen, 2006: 18).

This insistence that meaning only exists through language leads to a focus on understanding the role of language in the construction of meaning, where I question the ability of language to do this in a coherent and definitive manner, where 'the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences' and where the 'absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely' Derrida (1967/1978: 354), where meanings are therefore fundamentally relational, temporal, and unfixable.

A key contribution of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) is to translate Derrida's focus on the indeterminacy of language into a concern for its broader social implications. They argue that the 'incomplete character of every totality necessarily leads us to abandon, as a terrain of analysis, the premise of "society" as a sutured and self-defined totality' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111). However, they also maintain that the 'impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations – otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible,' where any discourse 'is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112). It is this focus on discourse as an attempt to fix meanings amidst the indeterminacy of language that is at the centre of my approach to the study of identity construction in annual reports.

### **Social construction**

Burr (1995) highlights a range of approaches to social construction, emphasising different theoretical traditions. In Chapter 2, I address how two different approaches specifically underpin much of the writing on organisational identity, focusing on the 'sociological', institutional perspective of Berger and Luckmann (1966) and the 'psychological' perspective characterised by Gergen (1985). In this thesis, I propose a poststructural approach as a radical perspective on social construction. Where 'mainstream' social constructionists privilege individual and collective cognitive processes, downplaying the 'mediated' knowledge presented in texts, poststructuralists effectively reverse the situation.

Rather than approaching social reality as a largely agreed-upon position by individuals acting through collective processes, with the construction of meaning emerging as a form of centripetal process, for poststructuralists, although meaning can be *presented* and *understood* as agreed upon, in reality it is always fragmented, contested, and fleeting – an essential centrifugal process. A poststructural position on social construction regards social reality as never finalised, unstable in space and time, and always contestable (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111).

## **Discourse**

I have followed Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Hansen (2006) in according discourse an all-embracing role, locating it broadly 'at the level of explicit articulations' (Hansen, 2006: 41), where a poststructural discourse analysis necessarily encompasses the analysis of both individual texts and broader 'systems' of articulations. Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 105) define discourse as the 'structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice,' where their concept of discourse is characterised by relationality, with any changes reciprocally conditioning each another in a 'system which is always being threatened, always being restored,' and, reflecting Derrida, where all values 'are values of opposition defined only by their difference' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 106). Although discourses strive to fix meaning around a closed structure, there are always slips and instabilities, where 'neither absolute fixity nor absolute non-fixity is possible' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111).

In contrast to Foucault, who maintains a distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices, Laclau and Mouffe reject this distinction, arguing that 'every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside of the discursive condition of emergence; and that any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social practice, is an incorrect distinction' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 107).

Neither Foucault nor Laclau and Mouffe were overly concerned with setting out a methodology for discourse analysis. Hansen (2006) seeks to present such a methodology, one that moves between the study of individual texts and broader discourses, and I have sought to follow her approach in addressing discourse at both levels. Hansen identifies intertextuality as a key link between the text and discourse, where every individual text 'is always located within a shared textual space; all texts make references, explicitly or implicitly, to previous ones, and in doing so they both established readings and become mediations on the meaning and status of others.' The meaning of the text, reflecting a poststructural emphasis on the relationality of meaning, is therefore never fully given by the text itself but is always a product of other readings and



interpretations (Hansen, 2006: 55). Hansen also emphasises that discourses are analytical constructions, not empirical objects and that in from a poststructural perspective emphasising the uniqueness each text, there are as many discourses as there are texts (Hansen, 2006: 51). My approach to discourse analysis in this thesis follows that of Hansen (2006), and is closer to that of Laclau and Mouffe than to the critical discourse analysis of Fairclough (1995) where poststructuralism fundamentally privileges text and is sceptical of cognition, and emphasises the impossibility of 'uncovering' 'real' meaning.

Although poststructuralism focuses on language as the means for articulating meaning, Hansen (2006: 23) notes that although meaning needs to be articulated in language to have political and analytical presence, in principle it need not be verbal. In this thesis, I have argued that other modalities, specifically the visual, can be used to express meanings, and that these can be compatible with a poststructural approach.

In my empirical approach, I have addressed the concept of discourse in two quite specific ways, both focused on supporting my methodological approach. The first, based on Wood and Kroger (2000), approaches individual texts as discourses, where any analysis does not focus solely on the context of the text, but also on its construction, its authors, potential audiences, and purpose. Alongside this framework, I have adopted Gee's (1999) approach to texts as 'identity discourses', where he highlights the role of the text in constructing identity. For Gee, authors focus on framing a text for its intended audience and constructing language around how they want that audience to 'be, think, feel and behave' – to position them to certain identities.

My second, broader, approach to discourse is closer to that presented by Foucault (1972) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985), where discourses are conceptualised as representations of the world that are constituted through and within a collective terrain that is not stable but constantly reconstituted through texts, where meanings within those texts necessarily remain unique, but converge towards common themes (Hansen, 2006: 51). At this level, I consider

key industry discourses that emerge from a variety of industry texts and online blogs.

### **Poststructural identity**

I have adopted an approach to poststructuralism that places identity at its ontological and epistemological heart (Hansen, 2006: 37), where poststructural identities are 'continuously restated, negotiated, and reshaped subjects and objects' (Hansen, 2006: xvi), constructed through processes of differentiation and linkage (Hansen, 2006: 24), where this 'provides a theoretical and methodological account of the way in which discourses seek to establish stability, and also how this stability can always be deconstructed' (Hansen, 2006: 37). Poststructuralism's relational conception of identity implies that 'identity is always given through reference to something it is not,' where there are no universal identities (Hansen, 2006: 48). From a poststructural perspective, 'to conceptualise identity as social is to understand it as established through a set of collectively articulated codes, not as a private property of the individual or a psychological condition' (Hansen, 2006: 6). Finally, the emphasis on the political in poststructuralism's concept of identity sets it aside from a conceptualisation of identity as culture. For poststructuralists, identity only comes about through discursive enactment, 'where identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results' Butler (1990: 25). Identities are therefore simultaneously discursive foundation and product. (Hansen, 2006: 21).

In terms of the study of identity, Hansen (2006: 42) argues that 'analytically, the construction of identity should...be situated inside a careful investigation of which signs are articulated by a particular discourse of text, how they are coupled to achieve discursive stability, where instabilities and slips between these constructions might occur, and how competing discourses construct the same sign two different effects.' Furthermore, discourse analysis needs to establish, 'how discourses seek to construct stability, where they become unstable, how they can be deconstructed, and the processes through which they change' (Hansen, 2006: 44-45). The discursive construction of identity is

both temporal and spatial, where 'to understand identity as *spatially* constructed is to reiterate identity is relationally constituted and always involves the construction of boundaries and thereby the delineation of space' (Hansen, 2006: 47), and where the temporal construction of the Self is framed in relation to the temporal Other of its own past (Hansen, 2006: 49).

## **THE CONTEXT OF MY RESEARCH**

The publishing company had recently celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of its flagship publication. Following its recent purchase by a private equity firm, it was in the final stages of a move from a run-down set of offices in London's East End to a new headquarters in a smart garden square. The senior management team brought by the private equity owners presented the office move as an important symbol of the firm's transformation from a traditional print publisher to a cutting-edge digital information provider. Many of the firm's long-term employees were not convinced about either move. Some argued that the previous owners would soon buy the company back and life would return to normal. Six months' later, most of those sceptics would no longer be working for the firm.

Recently hired as a digital project manager, my boss had asked me to help clear out the old offices. Anything we left would be thrown out, and other employees had already had their pick of any serviceable office furniture. I began to go through cupboards and drawers to see if there was anything worth rescuing. I was surprised to find them stuffed full of documents: visual designs, detailed technical specifications, and complex project plans. These appeared to form the basis of an ambitious, and clearly unrealised, digital strategy. The bulk of the documents were only 3-4 years old, and it was clear that dozens of employees and contractors had been involved in their creation. I only recognised one or two of the names on the documents. I knew that the corresponding electronic records were also marked for deletion, so it was clear that this recent history of the firm would soon be lost. It struck me as strange that a firm proudly celebrating its centenary would so readily discard the evidence of its recent past.

My thesis began with my interest in the transformational change that the UK magazine publishing industry was undergoing in the period following the turn of the century, where I was a small part of that change. I wanted to explore how firms and individuals whose expertise lay in the production of print magazines could survive in a world where their core product was becoming obsolete. Was it possible for firms to completely reinvent themselves? I identified organisational identity as a relevant concept in organisational theory.

After some reading around the OI literature, I arranged some initial interviews with colleagues in the company where I was working. Although my interviewees appeared to understand what I meant when I talked about the organisation's identity, they each approached the subject from a very different perspective. One interviewee tied the firm's identity to their own professional identity, another focused on their immediate team, and another took a broader view, equating organisational identity with the firm's strategic direction and its place within the wider publishing industry. It seemed clear that factors such as how long an individual had worked in the organisation, what department and role they worked in, and their level of engagement with senior management, all played an important part in their conception of the organisation's identity.

It was impossible to discern any 'underlying' sense of organisational identity shared between my interviewees. I also worried that my approach might itself be performative – encouraging my colleagues to actively construct a concept of organisational identity, where they may not have really thought about it before. I began to think that organisational identity might be more complex, subjective, and contingent than the literature I had read suggested. I returned to my reading to try to find studies that reflected my concerns. I started to discover a range of works rooted in empirical research that questioned the view of OI as a stable and agreed-upon attribute of an organisation – work suggesting that it is neither stable nor necessarily agreed-upon. These approaches suggested a move away from 'organisational identity' as an attribute of an organisation, towards 'organisational identity work', with an emphasis on the processes of identity construction.

I then started to think about how best to investigate processes of organisational identity construction and change in the UK publishing industry. I realised that in order to understand identity change, I would need data sources that were available longitudinally. I uncovered a large number of press articles, some industry reports and a handful of published interviews with senior managers of the firms. However, the press articles did not really address identity, and the latter two sources did not appear to be sufficiently substantial for any rigorous analysis. I then discovered a number of online industry blogs contemporary to the period. These proved to be a very rich resource, although they tended to focus more on the industry in general than on individual firms.

I also started to look at the annual reports of publishing firms. Although clearly intended by senior managers to project a positive view of the firm, they nevertheless proved to be a rich source of identity work. Published each year, with a roughly consistent format across firms and longitudinally, they allowed for the comparative study of firms. I initially envisaged that my analysis of annual reports would just form a starting point for my research, followed by interviews with managers and other industry figures. However, the analysis of annual reports has become central to my research. This has been primarily the result of my adoption of a poststructural theoretical approach, one which places texts and discourses at the centre of empirical analysis.

My decision to adopt a poststructural approach to my research came quite late. My analysis of annual reports increasingly convinced me that the construction of identity is a central purpose of organisational texts. I also noted that the annual reports in my analysis contained a wide range of identity claims about firms, and that these claims very often did not span more than one report, with both of these characteristics suggesting that identity is much less stable and coherent than suggested in much of the OI literature. In seeking a methodological approach that would enable me to explore the fragmented nature of identity construction, I began to investigate intertextual approaches to the analysis of texts. However, it was only when I came across Hansen's 2006 analysis of intertextuality and discourse analysis in the context of the Bosnian War (Hansen, 2006), that I started to become convinced that a poststructural

approach to identity could potentially provide both a theoretical basis that could account for my empirical observations and a rigorous methodological framework for my analysis.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

In Chapter 2, I present a critical review of the OI literature. I discuss the introduction of the concept of OI in Albert and Whetten's 1985 article, and review the antecedent literature that Albert and Whetten and subsequent authors in this field have drawn upon. I propose that the OI literature has predominantly conceptualised the concept in terms of a social construction, and I outline the sociological and psychological interpretations of social construction that I argue have shaped the development of the literature. I provide an overview of the key perspectives on the literature, and review some proposed categorisations. I present my own six-fold categorisation of the OI literature, and further categorise it along an axis of 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' approaches. I consider the very limited impact of poststructural and postmodern thinking on the development of the literature, I review the methodological approaches taken to the study of OI, and I discuss the ways in which OI scholars have sought to validate their research.

In Chapter 3, I outline a poststructural theoretical framework for the study of OI. I first address the origins of poststructural ideas, before setting out the key elements of poststructural theory. I then consider the key critiques directed towards postmodernism and poststructuralism. I present responses to these criticisms and I consider approaches to postmodernism and poststructuralism in the organisational literature. To conclude Chapter 3, I set out the theoretical elements of a poststructural theoretical approach to OI.

In Chapter 4, I set out my poststructural approach to the empirical study of OI. I outline the key elements of such an approach, address the criticisms of a poststructural method and review previous postmodern and poststructural empirical approaches within the organisational literature. I then introduce the four methodological approaches that I have used in my study: intertextual analysis, discourse analysis, multimodality, and argumentation.

In Chapter 5, I introduce my selected research context of the UK magazine publishing industry in the period 2004-13, and my data sources. I present a brief overview of the industry during that period, and review previous literature on

identity and OI set in publishing and related industries. I introduce the data sources that I have selected for my study: corporate annual reports, online industry blogs, industry reports, press articles, and interviews with industry figures, and I critically review previous literature on corporate annual reports and online blogs as data sources. Finally, I consider the ethical dimensions of my research.

In Chapter 6, I present in detail the methods that I have used for my analysis. I begin with a justification for focusing my analysis at the level of the identity claim, followed by an explanation of how I went about identifying identity claims and utterances in annual reports. I then describe my methods for the analysis of intertextual patterns across sets of reports and for the identification of the intertextual sources of identity claims, followed by an explanation of my methods for the relational analysis of identity claims. Next, I discuss my approach to incorporating multimodality in my analysis. I then present my methods for the analysis of the use of argumentation and presentation in identity construction in annual reports. I describe my approaches to studying reports as texts and discourses and to identifying key industry discourses within online blogs and industry reports. Finally, I discuss the measures that I have taken to ensure validity and robustness in my methods.

In Chapters 7-9, I present the findings of my analysis, where I focus on demonstrating the key elements of a poststructural approach to OI. In Chapter 7, I focus on identity at the level of individual claims and utterances. I summarise the identity claims and utterances that I identified within the reports and follow this with an analysis of the intertextual patterns of identity claims across the set of reports for three firms and an analysis of the intertextual sources of identity claims. I then present my analysis of the relational nature of identity construction in annual reports. In Chapter 8, I consider annual reports as identity discourses, exploring their purposes, audiences, and authors, together with the intertextual resources that are used in their construction. I also review the numerous sub discourses that make up the annual report, for example, the chairman's statement and the CEO review. Next, I examine visual elements of identity work in the reports. I then consider the use of



argumentation and presentation in identity construction within reports, noting the multimodal nature of this identity work. Next, I turn to industry discourses, examining how authors of industry texts seek to define and quantify the publishing industry, and identifying a number of key industry discourses from the period. To conclude my findings, in Chapter 9 I present case studies of the three firms in my analysis, examining in detail the identity work undertaken in their annual reports.

In Chapter 10, I present a discussion of the implications and significance of my approach and of my empirical findings. Firstly, I reflect upon my reappraisal of the OI literature. I then consider the validity and appropriateness of the overarching methodological approaches I have used in my study, namely intertextual analysis, discourse analysis, multimodality, and argumentation, and of the detailed methods that I have used to investigate a poststructural approach to organisational identity. I assess the extent to which I believe that my empirical analysis has demonstrated the value of a poststructural approach to the study of OI at a theoretical level, addressing those elements that I have identified as key to a poststructural identity: identity as constructed intertextually, as decentred, as pervasive, as multiple, as dynamic, as relational, and as contested. I then consider identity construction in annual reports as a multimodal accomplishment. I summarise my contributions, consider the potential application of my findings to other research contexts, and assess the wider applicability of my theoretical and methodological approach to the study of OI, and to organisation theory more broadly. Finally, in Chapter 11, I conclude the thesis.

At the outset of his adventures, Don Quixote was filled with a great enthusiasm, 'for there were evils to undo, wrongs to right, injustices to correct, abuses to ameliorate, and offenses to rectify.' And so, one morning 'before dawn on a hot day in July, without informing a single person of his intentions, and without anyone seeing him, he armed himself with all his armor, and mounted Rocinante, wearing his poorly constructed helmet, and he grasped his shield and took up his lance and through the side door of a corral he rode out into the countryside with great joy and delight at seeing how easily he had given a

beginning to his virtuous desire' (Cervantes, 2004: 24). Little did Don Quixote realise then the length and difficulty of the journey upon which he was embarking.

## CHAPTER 2: A REAPPRAISAL OF THE ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY LITERATURE

In their review of organisational identity, Pratt et al. (2016b: 2) note the ‘proliferation’ of academic work on the concept since Albert and Whetten’s pioneering 1985 article, reflected in ‘a dizzying array of how OI is conceptualized, how it is managed, how it forms and changes, and what the implications of its existence (real or metaphorical) are’ (Ibid., p2.). In this thesis, I argue that much of the OI literature has lost touch with its ontological roots, with contemporary work in this area often basing itself on a loose set of ontological and methodological assumptions that it generally does not make explicit. I argue that it is important both to uncover, and to question, these assumptions. In order to do so, I propose that it is necessary to go beyond Albert and Whetten and to investigate the broader roots of OI, as it is only with reference to this wider literature that the subsequent development and core assumptions of the OI literature are understandable. I argue that the central tensions and problems at the heart of OI are in large part a legacy of this wider heritage. However, I also argue that Albert and Whetten themselves contributed to what could be alternatively characterised as the conceptual richness or the fundamental ambiguity of OI, with their 1985 article leaving the concept open to a number of ontological interpretations.

I argue here that the OI literature is based, in large part, on a (generally implicit) assumption that OI is a social construction. Although the various categorisations proposed for the OI literature (as I discuss shortly) are valuable tools in delineating this literature, I propose that the conceptualisation of OI specifically as a social construction should be central to any categorisation, and I frame my literature review, and my own categorisation of the literature, on that basis. Furthermore, I argue that the literature assuming OI to be a social construct is based (again largely implicitly) upon either a sociological or a psychological approach to social construction. From this, I propose that the literature can be further divided into ‘centripetal’ and ‘centrifugal’ social constructionist approaches, where centripetal approaches tend to view OI as a more-or less stable, unitary, and agreed-upon attribute of organisations, and more centrifugal

approaches, generally based upon empirical research, present OI in terms of a dynamic, fragmented, and contested concept. I argue that categorising the literature across these two dimensions provides a useful framework for highlighting the critical issues and debates central to the conceptualisation of OI.

In this chapter, I first assess the importance of OI within the organisational literature, before examining its initial conceptualisation by Albert and Whetten and presenting an overview of its subsequent development, together with some key findings. Next, I consider various attempts to categorise the OI literature, and review the other literatures that have contributed to understandings of OI, proposing that much of the key OI literature is based upon sociological or psychological interpretations of social construction. I then present my own proposed categorisation of the literature and position the different existing approaches to OI in relation to this categorisation. Next, I review the key elements and debates in the OI literature, starting with a discussion of the ontological basis of OI, then considering OI as a central and unifying feature of organisations, the extent to which it can be considered to be stable, relational approaches to OI, OI as contested, and, finally, the mechanisms of OI construction.

In the second part of this chapter, I review methodological approaches to the study of OI, categorising them according to my centripetal and centrifugal typology. I note that empirical work on OI taking an ontologically social constructionist approach often adopts essentially positivist methodologies. I review the types of data source that have been used for the study of OI, noting that interviews and observation are the most commonly adopted strategies, with texts and discourses used as a principal data source only in a minority of studies, although very commonly used for corroboration and triangulation. Finally, I assess the efforts made by OI scholars to ensure validity and robustness in their empirical research on this subject.

## **WHY IS ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY IMPORTANT?**

Scholars have proposed a range of arguments to justify OI as an important organisational concept. Corley and Gioia (2004) contend that identity becomes important in the context of an increasingly fragmented modern world, and Corley et al. (2006) argue that under conditions of uncertainty or ambiguity OI can function as a critical organisational resource. Livengood and Reger (2010) present OI as a means of increasing firms' awareness, motivation, and capability to respond to competitors' actions, and Harquail and King (2010) view it as vital to members' efforts to make sense of organisations in ways that facilitate effective action. Altman and Tripsas (2014) propose that where members have a shared understanding of 'who we are', there is also an implied agreement about 'what we do'. Indeed, Ashforth and Mael (1996) argue that organisations lacking a strong OI, at least at the level of senior management, are viewed as essentially rudderless.

Scholars also propose OI as a useful concept for the wider study of organisations. Ashforth and Mael (1996) argue that identity is compelling because it gets to the core of what fundamentally defines an entity. OI has been presented as a fundamental bridging concept between the individual and society (Ybema et al., 2009), as a concept that enables scholars to traverse multiple levels of analysis (Albert et al., 2000), and a potential bridge for micro and macro level structures and processes (Ashforth and Mael, 1996). Gioia et al. (2002) argue for OI as simultaneously a first-order concept (one that individuals in organisations readily understand) and a second-order concept (adequate at the level of conceptual abstraction).

## **THE CONCEPT OF ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

Introducing the concept of organisational identity in 1985, Albert and Whetten had been prompted by the observation that when organisations face a crisis, questions such as 'who are we?', 'what kind of business are we in?', and 'what do we want to be?' can become critical issues. They present OI as the answer to these collective questions, where organisational actors identify and agree upon what is *central*, *enduring* and *distinctive* about their organisation.

However, they are not entirely clear on the precise nature of OI. They do not explicitly situate it as a social construct, and refer to the concept alternatively as a set of claims made by organisational actors about an organisation and as a useful metaphor for analysis. They do not present OI as having any existence outside of cognition, but contend that it consists of 'features that are somehow seen as the essence' of the organisation (p. 265).

Albert and Whetten relate the concept of OI to social psychological and social interactionist perspectives on individual identity, referencing James (1890), Mead (1934), Erikson (1968, 1980), and Goffman (1959). However, at the same time they seek to present and to analyse the concept through a rationalist, scientific lens, as 'scientifically tractable' and capable of supporting provable hypotheses (Albert and Whetten, 1985: 264). This central tension in their conception of OI is captured in their aim to both contribute to 'the development of identity as a scientific concept, and to examine how organizational members use the concept of self-identity' (Albert and Whetten, 1985: 265). Further problematising their pursuit of scientific objectivity, they admit that 'the formulation of a statement of identity is more of a political-strategic act than an intentional construction of a scientific taxonomy' (Albert and Whetten, 1985: 268), and that 'It is not possible to define central character as a definitive set of measurable properties...one must judge what is or is not central,' where 'alternative statements of identity may be compatible, complementary, unrelated, or even contradictory' (Albert and Whetten, 1985: 266-267).

In addition to acknowledging the legitimacy of multiple identity claims, Albert and Whetten also admit the contingent nature of identity, which '...may well depend on the perceived purpose to which the resulting statement of identity will be put. In this sense, there is no one best statement of identity, but rather, multiple equally valid statements relative to different audiences' (Albert and Whetten, 1985: 268). I argue that Albert and Whetten's attempt to analyse a 'political' and 'contingent' concept using positivist methods has characterised much of the subsequent OI literature.

The OI literature has both built upon and challenged Albert and Whetten’s original conception of OI. Most (although not all) works purporting to address the concept of OI still reference this foundational text, although the various presentations of the concept in the original article tend to be replaced by shorthand references emphasising one or other aspect of their argument. Direct engagement with Albert and Whetten’s article has tended to focus on one or more of three elements: OI as an expression of ‘who we are’ as an organisation; OI as statements of claims about an organisation; and OI as representing central, enduring, and distinctive attributes of an organisation. Although the OI literature has drawn from a broader range of sources, ideas and traditions than is presented in Albert and Whetten’s article, these three elements still serve to shape the issues, debates, and contradictions of this literature.

## **THE ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY LITERATURE SINCE ALBERT AND WHETTEN**

Ravasi and Canato (2013), although focusing on methodological approaches, present the OI literature in terms of a chronological development, identifying three separate waves of empirical research, which I summarise in Table 1.

**Table 1: Ravasi and Canato’s classification of empirical research on organisational identity**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples</b>
An unexpected explanation for an observed phenomenon	1991-2000	Inductive qualitative research not initially aimed at investigating OI itself but with broader research questions in mind	Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Gioia and Thomas, 1996
An individual-level variable to be correlated with organisational behaviour	2000-02	OI as an antecedent of organisational behaviour, with analysis carried out at the individual level	Dukerich et al., 2002; Foreman and Whetten, 2002
An organisational construct to be studied in its own right	2002-11	An explicit research object in its own right	Gioia et al., 2010; Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006; Ybema, 2010

*Source: Ravasi and Canato (2013: 187, 188)*

Pratt et al. (2016b: 2) note that the number of articles referring to OI increased from 2000, with the publication of a special issue on 'Organizational Identity and Identification' in the *Academy of Management Review*. Although some early works, such as Dutton and Dukerich's (1991) investigation of the New York Port Authority, were empirical studies of OI, much of the earlier work on the concept approached it primarily from a theoretical perspective, with several of these featuring in the 2000 *AMR* special issue (Brown and Starkey, 2000, Gioia et al., 2000, Pratt and Foreman, 2000, Scott and Lane, 2000). After 2000, however, the proportion of empirical work on OI increased. This growth in the literature was accompanied by OI's expansion (or co-option) into other theoretical traditions, such as population ecology (Porac et al., 1989, Porac et al., 1995) and institutional theory (Glynn and Abzug, 2002, Glynn, 2008, Navis and Glynn, 2010), and an overlap with other literatures such as corporate communications and corporate identity (Cheney et al., 2001, Cornelissen et al., 2007, Christensen and Cornelissen, 2011).

The perceived centrality of OI within organisational theory, together with its flexibility as a construct has encouraged scholars to link it to other key organisational concepts. Ashforth and Mael (1996) have investigated the relationship between identity and strategy, with Nag et al. (2007) finding that an intersection of OI, knowledge, and practice hindered strategic change. Hatch and Schultz (1997) explore the parallels between OI and culture, and Corley (2004) finds that senior managers tend to view identity in light of the organisation's strategy, whereas employees see it in relation to its culture. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) explore the role of culture in providing organizational leaders with cues with which to construct identity claims.

Recent work on OI has addressed the *temporal* nature of the concept, exploring how past, present, and future identities are intertwined (Schultz and Hernes, 2013, Anteby and Molnár, 2012), and its *spatial* dimension, investigating different levels of analysis (Ashforth et al., 2011), the exploration of the links between OI and institutional dynamics (Glynn, 2008, He and Baruch, 2009, Kodeih and Greenwood, 2014, Golant et al., 2014, Besharov and Brickson, 2015, Phillips et al., 2016, Dejordy and Creed, 2016), and the relationship



between OI and organisational members and other stakeholders (Ashforth and Mael, 1996, Brickson, 2000, Bartel et al., 2016, Ashforth, 2016).

In addition to its explanatory power as a concept, a key claim for OI has been its usefulness for organisational leaders and members, for example in making sense of, and responding to, a variety of organisational threats and opportunities. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) show how managers used OI as a means of responding to threats from the external environment. Anthony and Tripsas (2016) argue for the importance of OI in innovation, and other studies have investigated the relationship between OI and technology (Tripsas, 2009, Ravasi and Canato, 2010, Raffaelli, 2013c). There is a substantial literature investigating the importance of OI at the point of organisational formation (Gioia et al., 2010, Kroezen and Heugens, 2012, Gioia et al., 2013), for emerging industries (Clegg et al., 2007), and in particular in relation to organisational, industry, and institutional change (Gioia and Thomas, 1996, Corley and Gioia, 2004, Elstak and Van Riel, 2005, Nag et al., 2007, He and Baruch, 2009, Ybema, 2010, Ravasi and Phillips, 2011, Patvardhan, 2012, Gioia et al., 2013, Raffaelli, 2013c, Hatch et al., 2015). OI has also been linked to conflict, power and politics at the individual and group level, and questions of how to manage that conflict (Kenny et al., 2016, Pratt and Rafaeli, 1997, Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997, Glynn, 2000).

## **CATEGORISING THE ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY LITERATURE**

The sheer volume and breadth of the OI literature, coupled with its co-option into a number of research traditions, has understandably resulted in a number of reviews of the literature (Oliver and Roos, 2003, Corley et al., 2006, Albert et al., 2000, Ravasi and Van Rekom, 2003, Van Rekom et al., 2008, Gioia et al., 2013, Cornelissen, 2006, He and Brown, 2013). Some of these reviews have proposed categorisations of the literature (Oliver and Roos, 2003, Cornelissen, 2006, Gioia et al., 2013, He and Brown, 2013, Ravasi and Canato, 2013). In this section, I focus on the three categorisations presented by Cornelissen (2006), He and Brown (2013) and Gioia et al. (2013), on the basis that these were produced by prominent scholars in the OI literature and focus on the theoretical

foundations of OI. Oliver and Roos (2003) do not sit within the mainstream of the OI debate, and Ravasi and Canato (2013), as I noted earlier, focus primarily on methodological approaches to OI. I argue that these three prominent categorisations are useful for navigating the OI literature, but that each of them also has certain deficiencies. Based on my critique of these categorisations, I propose a recategorisation of the OI literature.

Cornelissen (2006) conceptualises OI in terms of a metaphor interpreted differently by different 'research traditions'. He creates a categorisation based on what he describes as the different 'image-schema' that each research tradition uses to interpret the metaphor of organisational identity, as I have summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Cornelissen's 'image-schematic' categorisation of organisational identity**

Research tradition	Image-schema	No. articles	Selected references
Organisational communication	Organisation and identity constructed through language	5	Cheney, 1991
Organisational behaviour	Organisation as physical system, identity as character traits of individuals	21	Albert and Whetten, 1985; Kogut and Zander, 1996
Cognitive framing	Organisations and individuals as a cognitive lens – sensemaking	28	Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach and Kramer, 1996; Gioia and Thomas, 1996
Discursive psychology	Organisation and identity discursively constructed in language	10	Humphreys and Brown, 2002
Institutional theory	Organisation as actor, identity as symbolically enacted and constituted within social context	11	Czarniawska and Wolff, 1998; Hatch and Schultz, 2002; Fiol, 2001; Glynn, 2000
Social identity	Organisation as collective product of group cognitions, sensemaking and behaviour, identity established through categorisation of individuals in groups and social comparison	6	Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Haslam et al., 2003

*Source: Cornelissen (2006: 695)*

He and Brown (2013) identify four categories in the OI literature: functionalist, social constructionist, psychodynamic, and postmodern and 'nonstandard'. I have summarised these approaches in Table 3.

**Table 3: He and Brown's 'major approaches' to organisational identity**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Functionalist	Identities are composed of essential, objective, and often tangible features. The 'mainstream' approach to the study of OI	Corley and Gioia, 2004; Cornelissen et al., 2007; Whetten and Mackay, 2002; Whetten, 2006
Social constructionist (also interpretive, social cognition)	OI as the socially constructed product of relationships between collectively held, and socially structured individual cognitions. Relatively shared understandings concerning what is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organisation. Generally depicted as less stable and more malleable, more open to political influence at different levels, less clearly defined and more ambiguous than functionalist perspectives	Corley et al., 2006; Dutton et al., 1994, Kjaergaard and Ravasi, 2011; Glynn, 2000; Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Pratt and Rafaeli, 1997; Anteby and Molnar, 2012; Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Ran and Duimering, 2007; Harquail and King, 2010
Psychodynamic	Complement realist and rationalist approaches by drawing attention to otherwise unacknowledged unconscious processes in organisations that shape collective identities	Diamond, 1993; Brown, 1997; Brown and Starkey, 2000
Postmodern and 'nonstandard' perspectives	'Postmodern' perspectives on OI have come to be associated with discursive (linguistic) and imagistic theorisations and analyses of identity phenomena. The largest body of non-mainstream research has theorised organisational identities as texts constituted through discourse, most usually narratives.	Gioia et al., 2000; Coupland and Brown, 2004; Brown and Humphreys, 2006 Chreim, 2005; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994; Humphreys and Brown, 2002

*Source: He and Brown (2013)*

Finally, Gioia et al. (2013) present what they characterise as the four prevalent ‘views’ or perspectives on OI: social construction, social actor, institutionalist, and population ecologist. I have summarised these in Table 4.

**Table 4: Gioia et al.’s ‘prevalent views’ on organisational identity**

<b>View</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Example</b>
Social construction	OI as a self-referential concept defined by the members of an organisation to articulate who they are as an organisation to themselves as well as outsiders	Primarily on the labels and meanings that members use to describe themselves and their core attributes	Gioia et al., 2000
Social actor	OI as self-referential, but emphasises a view of organisations as entities making assertions about who they are as actors in society	On the overt claims made in articulating the features of OI	Whetten and Mackey, 2002
Institutionalist	Treats identity as an internally defined notion, but regards organisations as highly socialised entities, subject to the strong influence of institutional forces	Emphasis on institutional processes	Glynn and Abzug, 2002
Population ecologist	Externally defined view of OI. Identity as a concept held by outsiders about organisations.	Category (industry) membership and the attributes associated with that category by outside parties	Hannan and Freeman, 1977; Polos et al., 2002

*Source: derived from Gioia et al. (2013: 125-126)*

Cornelissen’s categorisation is somewhat broader in its scope than the two latter attempts, extending to articles covering organisational communication and social identity. I consider these as separate literatures that should not be categorised as OI, although I acknowledge that the relationship between them and the OI literature is important. I find that Cornelissen’s categories of organisational behaviour, cognitive framing and discursive psychology are rather confusingly named, as they imply that the OI literature is fundamentally rooted in psychology, which is perhaps only justified for his cognitive framing category, corresponding broadly to He and Brown’s social constructionist, and Gioia et al.’s social construction category, works taking a social constructionist approach to OI as a concept. Cornelissen’s organisational behaviour category loosely corresponds to He and Brown’s functionalist category and Gioia et al.’s social actor category, with OI regarded more as a reified attribute of an

organisation. Cornelissen's discursive psychology categorisation, presenting OI as a discursive construct, corresponds to works that sit within He and Brown's postmodern and 'nonstandard' perspectives, and to Gioia et al.'s social construction category. I consider that a separation of discursively constructed and 'socially' constructed works is warranted, and constitutes the main advantage of Cornelissen's categorisation over the other two. Finally, Cornelissen acknowledges institutional theory as a separate category, where this corresponds to Gioia et al.'s institutionalist perspective, but this category is absent from He and Brown, although Cornelissen includes Hatch and Schultz (2002) in his institutional theory category, where neither of those authors has written from an institutionalist perspective.

I have noted that He and Brown's functionalist category corresponds to Gioia et al.'s social actor category. He and Brown present this category as the 'mainstream' tradition in OI, yet their key references are to Whetten (2002, 2006), whose social actor perspective is very much a minority position in the literature. They also include Corley and Gioia (2004) in this category, which I argue should belong in their social constructionist category. I propose that He and Brown's social constructionist category corresponds to the mainstream of the OI literature, and the number of references that they provide in this category appears to support this. He and Brown's psychodynamic category does not equate to a substantive or enduring literature, with work from Brown himself most prominent in that category. Finally, I contend that He and Brown's categorisation of postmodern and 'nonstandard' perspectives is misleading, as there are not really any examples of postmodern studies of OI, except perhaps for Gioia et al. (2014), and their examples of 'nonstandard' works could be more usefully labelled as 'discursive' or 'narrative' approaches.

As one of the main scholars writing on OI from early in the development of the literature (e.g. Gioia and Thomas, 1996), any categorisation associated with Gioia is likely to gain broad acceptance. The categorisation presented in Gioia et al. (2013) has the advantages that, unlike Cornelissen, its categories are limited to the OI literature, and, unlike He and Brown, all of the categories relate to a substantive literature on OI. I therefore argue that Gioia et al. (2013)

provide the most useful of the three categorisations of OI. However, I propose that a distinct 'narrative/discursive' category, as captured in Cornelissen's 'discursive psychology' and, partially, in He and Brown's postmodern and 'nonstandard' category, should be included in any categorisation, as this reflects an important strand of the literature. In addition, although I have noted that poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches are virtually absent from the current OI literature, I argue that this should be included as a category. My central criticism of Gioia et al.'s categorisation, however, is that their 'social construction' category is misleading in that it implies that the institutionalist and population ecology approaches to OI are not based upon assumptions of OI as a social construct. Before I propose my recategorisation of the OI literature based upon my critique of existing categorisations, I address what I argue to be the central social constructionist underpinning of the literature, arguing that it consists of two central strands of work, neither of which are directly referenced in Albert and Whetten's 1985 article.

## **THE SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ANTECEDENTS OF ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

Interest in the identity of the organisation within the management and organisational literature predates Albert and Whetten, with some of these works continuing to be influential in the OI literature. Selznick (1957: 40) proposed that organisations grow to possess a distinct identity that is resistant to change, and that a vital task of leadership is to shape the character of the organisation to maintain both its values and its distinctive identity. Other classic works covering organisational behaviour and culture, although without a specific focus on identity, such as March and Simon (1958) and Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) are also frequently cited in the OI literature.

The two literatures that have most influenced the development of OI theory, however, are sociology and psychology, specifically their contrasting approaches to social construction. I have already noted in my Introduction that Burr (1995) highlights a range of approaches to social construction, emphasising different theoretical traditions. The sociological approach, focusing

on the organisation and on wider social structures, informs the institutionalist and population ecologist perspectives on OI. The psychological approach, focusing on the individual and on groups, underpins what Gioia characterises as the 'social constructionist' approach to OI.

The sociological and psychological approaches to social construction differ in their foundational literature, assumptions and methods. However, they also generally share a focus on cultural meanings within organisations. Works in the OI literature, generally those from the institutionalist and population ecology perspectives, frequently reference sociologists such as Weber, Parsons and Giddens. The key reference, however, is to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the originators of the concept of social construction. Berger and Luckmann's overarching concern was with how bodies of knowledge come to be socially established as 'reality', and how common meanings come to be established in a social context. For Berger and Luckmann, institutionalisation, the 'reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors' (p. 72), plays a central role in these processes, with institutions coming to be regarded as realities with a coercive power over the individual. Social construction therefore becomes an instrument for the domination of society over the individual, a domination initially and powerfully established through childhood socialisation, and subsequently continually re-established through social processes, although under constant challenge from external, alternative constructed realities. Berger and Luckmann's identity is, therefore, effectively a designated social location, a specific place in the world that the individual is assigned to by social forces. However, this is not purely a one way process, as identities produced by the 'interplay of organism, individual consciousness and social structure' themselves react upon the given social structure, 'maintaining it, modifying it, or even reshaping it' (p. 194).

Knoblauch and Wilke (2016) note how the powerful initial impact of Berger and Luckmann's work has subsequently faded, partly because both authors distanced themselves from social construction. Early neo-institutionalist works directly reference *The Social Construction of Reality*, for example Scott (1987), yet few works in the OI literature from an institutionalist perspective directly

reference Berger and Luckmann, with explicit references to OI as a social construct in this literature generally uncommon, despite scholars recognising that central institutional concepts, such as categories, are social constructions (e.g. Glynn and Navis, 2013). References to social construction in the institutionalist OI literature are generally indirect, for example citing Meyer and Rowan (1977) or Scott (1987, 1995).

Works on OI from a population ecology perspective also tend to fail to address the socially constructed nature of OI directly, with references to Berger and Luckmann similarly indirect, for example through references to Porac et al. (1989), although that work clearly acknowledges the importance of social construction for population ecology theory, associating the central concept of mental models with socially constructed meanings.

All strands of the OI literature, most frequently works falling in Gioia et al.'s social constructionist category, draw heavily on a variety of psychological theories. The development of social psychology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced a focus on the individual within society, and challenges to the Cartesian division of Self and Other increasingly led to presentations of identity as a social construction rather than a cognitive self-creation, with the Other viewed as essential to the construction of the Self (James, 1890, Cooley, 1902). Mead (1934) argued that identity is only understandable in a social context, necessarily mediated through language, and Goffman (1959) presented identity in terms of an ongoing social performance, with actors constantly striving to leave a good impression on their audiences. Finally, Erikson (1968) introduced the concept of identity crisis, where individuals question who they are and seek out new role identities.

A more recent wave of work on social psychology, such as Tajfel and Turner's (1985) social identity theory (SIT), further developed the social-psychological perspective on identity, with SIT proposing that individuals tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories using cognitive tactics to maintain positive perceptions of their social identities. Self-categorization theory, proposed by Turner et al. (1987), suggests that individuals construct



their social identities by selecting those social categories that contribute most to a positive identity in a given situation, and Brewer (2003) developed the principle of optimal distinctiveness, highlighting the tension between individuals' equally compelling needs for assimilation and uniqueness.

Psychological approaches to individual identity also underpin a significant literature on the identity of the individual and collectives *within* organisations, a literature which often overlaps with work on OI. Works encompass individuals as employees (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), managers (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, Watson, 2009), professionals (Deuze, 2005, Pratt et al., 2006) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Other writers have focused on the relationship of the individual *to* the organisation, or organisational identification. For example, Hogg and Terry (2000) argue that, to varying degrees, individuals derive part of their identity and sense of self from the organisations or workgroups to which they belong. Brewer and Gardner (1996: 83), argue that collective identity is not merely an extension of individual identity, but that, by defining themselves as part of a collective, individuals develop a particular sense of belonging to a community. Ashforth and Mael (1989) apply (SIT) at the organisational level, focusing on organisational identification.

Works in what Gioia et al. categorise as the social constructionist strand of the OI literature generally make no more than passing reference to social constructionism, if at all. Gergen, largely responsible for introducing social constructionist ideas into psychology (Gergen, 1985), is rarely directly referenced in the OI literature. Knoblauch and Wilke (2016) associate the emergence of the specific term 'social constructionism' with Gergen's 1985 article *The social constructionist movement in modern psychology*. As with Berger and Luckmann, Gergen (1985) situates knowledge within a process of social interchange, but his social constructionism is primarily focused on individuals, 'principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live' (p. 266).

For Gergen, 'the process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship' (p. 267). With scepticism towards empirical truths, forms of *negotiated* understanding become of critical significance to social life, where descriptions and explanations of the world themselves constitute forms of social action (p. 268). In contrast to Berger and Luckmann, Gergen does not consider the influence of institutions, presenting social construction more in terms of enabling of individuals in a social context than of social domination. Gergen's form of social constructionism has come to be more characteristic of the commonly understood view of social constructionism than has Berger and Luckmann's deterministic view. Gergen's psychological approach is reflected in what Gioia et al. characterise as the 'social constructionist' perspective on OI, whereas Berger and Luckmann's sociological perspective underpins institutionalist and population ecologist perspectives.

## **A PROPOSED RECATEGORISATION OF THE ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY LITERATURE**

Building upon the existing categorisations of the OI literature that I have discussed above and reflecting the sociological and psychological strands of social constructionist thought that I argue underpin much of the literature, I propose a recategorisation of the OI literature across two dimensions. The first of these translates my critique of existing categorisations to six categories. The second, focusing on OI as a social construct, presents the literature across two 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' axes.

### **Categorising approaches to organisational identity**

The first of my six categories covers 'essentialist/functionalist' approaches, assuming identity to have some form of existence outside of cognition or discourse. The next four categories, representing the bulk of the OI literature, are based on assumptions of OI as a social construct. I divide this group into 'cognitive', 'narrative/discursive', 'institutionalist' and 'population ecologist' categories. My final category, 'postmodern/poststructural' covers the approach that I take in this thesis, rather than reflecting an existing body of literature.

However, this final category also assumes OI to be a social construct. I present my proposed categorisation in Table 5, mapping it against the categorisations of Cornelissen, He and Brown, and Gioia et al. that I have discussed earlier in this chapter.

**Table 5: Proposed categorisation of the organisational identity literature**

<b>Cornelissen (2006)</b>	<b>He and Brown (2013)</b>	<b>Gioia et al. (2013)</b>	<b>Proposed category</b>	<b>Articles</b>
N/A	Functionalist	Social actor	Essentialist/functionalist	Whetten and Mackey, 2002; Whetten, 2006
Organisational behaviour, cognitive framing	Social constructionist	Social construction	Cognitive	Gioia and Thomas, 1996; Gioia et al., 2000; Corley and Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2010; Gioia et al., 2013; Hatch and Schultz, 2002; Schultz, 2012; Schultz and Hernes, 2013
Discursive psychology	'Nonstandard' perspectives	N/A	Narrative/discursive	Brown, 2006; Chreim, 2005; Chreim, 2007; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994; Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Brown and Humphreys, 2006; Wagner and Pedersen, 2014; Coupland and Brown, 2004; Ran and Duimering, 2007
Institutional theory	N/A	Institutionalist	Institutionalist	Besharov and Brickson, 2015; Glynn, 2008; Glynn and Abzug, 2002
N/A	N/A	Population ecologist	Population ecologist	Hsu and Hannan, 2005; Hannan and Freeman, 1977
N/A	Poststructuralism		Postmodern/poststructural	Gioia et al., 2014

I consider that the only significant literature within the *essentialist/functionalist* category, where identities are composed of 'essential, objective, and often tangible features' (He and Brown, 2013: 6), is Whetten's social actor perspective (Whetten and Mackey, 2002, Whetten, 2006). Although influential within the OI literature, Whetten's work constitutes a minority view. In Whetten's presentation of the organisation as a reified social actor, organisations are effectively discrete and self-conscious entities, with the ability to make claims about who they are as actors in society. Such claims tend to relate to membership of concrete categories, such as 'engineering firm'. According to the social actor view, organisations are ontologically more significant than simple

social collectives partly because society treats them in many respects *as if* they were individual entities.

Although the majority of the OI literature rejects Whetten's essentialist/functionalist ontological perspective, He and Brown (2013: 7) point out that many OI scholars 'still devote much attention to specifying notional identity criteria, dimensions, operationalization and means of assessment,' suggesting that, from an empirical perspective OI, is often treated as if it were an essentialist phenomenon, open to functionalist methodologies. Ravasi and Canato (2010) also acknowledge that, although few OI researchers openly subscribe to essentialist perspectives, many construct their methodological approaches *as if* identity had an independent existence external to cognition and discourse. I consider such approaches below, in my section covering methodological approaches to OI.

The first of my five categories presenting OI as a socially constructed phenomenon, and the one containing the largest literature, treats the concept in terms of a cognitive construct held in the minds of organisational members, where OI is an expression of agreed-upon cognitive beliefs, constructed through collective social processes (Gioia and Thomas, 1996, Gioia et al., 2000, Corley and Gioia, 2004, Gioia et al., 2010, Gioia et al., 2013, Hatch and Schultz, 2002, Schultz, 2012, Schultz and Hernes, 2013). The cognitive approach most closely reflects Albert and Whetten's (1985) conception of OI as the answer to the question 'what kind of organisation are we?', and is captured by Gioia and Thomas' (1996: 372) definition that, 'organizational identity concerns those features of the organization that members perceive as ostensibly central, enduring, and distinctive in character that contribute to how they define the organization and their identification with it.' This category equates to the 'social constructionist' category proposed by Gioia et al. (2013). The emphasis in the cognitive approach is on the perceptions of organisational members (and sometimes outsiders), and on the processes that translate these perceptions into agreed-upon identities attributable to the organisation, where there is an assumption that agreement is, to a greater or lesser extent, achievable. The cognitive view reflects Gergen's psychological approach to social construction,

where human beings are seen to together create and sustain social phenomena through social practices (Burr, 1995: 15).

Works taking a narrative and discursive approach to OI (Brown, 2006, Chreim, 2005, Chreim, 2007, Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994, Humphreys and Brown, 2002, Brown and Humphreys, 2006, Wagner and Pedersen, 2014, Coupland and Brown, 2004, Ran and Duimering, 2007) are likewise based on social constructionist assumptions. However, rather than focusing on social practices and interpersonal interactions as the source of identity construction, these works emphasise the importance of narratives, texts and discourses in the construction of identity. In the case of narratives, some works emphasise that these can exist as part of social practices as well as within texts and written discourses (Czarniawska, 1998, Boje, 2008), so there is some overlap with cognitive approaches. However, whereas cognitive approaches tend to emphasise social processes that result in a largely agreed-upon view of OI, narrative and discursive approaches often highlight OI as composed of multiple claims made within texts and discourses, where these may also be contested (Coupland and Brown, 2004). I also include in this category approaches to OI that highlight the role of rhetoric and argumentation (Sillince and Brown, 2009, Golant et al., 2014, Moufahim et al., 2014), where these works also acknowledge multiple perspectives and the potential tension between them.

Whereas my cognitive and narrative and discursive categories focus on the organisation from the inside-out, writers from an institutionalist perspective (Besharov and Brickson, 2015, Glynn, 2008, Glynn and Abzug, 2002) tend to also view organisations from the outside-in, with identities constructed within a framework of meanings established by external stakeholders and institutional forces. Institutional theorists emphasise the influence of structural forces of institutional rules and codes over the agency of the organisation, with identity claims presented primarily in terms of membership of institutional categories, where the role of internal organisational actors is largely relegated to selecting from pre-existing categories (although this may itself allow for a degree of agency, as argued by Glynn (2008) and Kroezen and Heugens (2012)). Despite the limited references to social construction in this literature, institutional theory

has firm roots in Berger and Luckmann's (1966) approach to social construction, where, although largely unacknowledged, this literature assumes OI to be a socially constructed concept.

Population ecologist approaches, presenting organisations as nodes within larger populations, and focusing on the behaviour of the population as a whole rather than on individual organisations, similarly emphasise external agency in the construction of OI. Here, identity is characterised as the view held by outsiders about organisations, consisting of a set of social codes or rules specifying the features that an organisation is expected to possess (Hsu and Hannan, 2005, Hannan and Freeman, 1977). As with institutionalist approaches, the roots of population ecology theory in social construction are not generally acknowledged in the OI literature in this area, despite Porac et al. (1989) emphasising the socially constructed nature of the social codes that are central to this literature. Some writers on OI from a cognitive perspective are sceptical of including the population ecologist perspective within the OI literature at all, regarding it as 'a mis-labeling of the concept of image,' and highlighting that it takes little account of the views of organisational insiders (Gioia et al., 2013: 127).

Finally, here I propose a postmodern/poststructural category for OI, reflecting my position in this thesis, although I have noted a lack of previous work on OI taking this approach. Supporting such an approach, although He and Brown (2013: 10) note a general 'distaste for, distrust of, and disinclination to engage with,' postmodern approaches in management and organisation studies, they concede that the radical implications of a postmodern approach to identity makes it hard to entirely ignore. They highlight approaches that question whether identity is not merely myth or illusion (Gioia et al., 2000), and discursive approaches concerned with the influence of power on identity construction (Coupland and Brown, 2004). Referencing Baudrillard (1994), Gioia et al. (2000) question whether OI might become transformed into pure image, thus losing any substantive basis. However, they conclude that, although identity's interaction with image is important, and contributes to its inherent instability, image does not entirely come to replace it. Similarly, Hatch and Schultz (2002:

1012-3) argue that 'access and exposure mitigate against organizational identity as pure simulacra by re-uniting culture and image,' where stakeholders will eventually reject identities that are purely image in favour of something more substantive. Gioia et al. (2014: 6-7) revisit postmodernism, on this occasion apparently more open to the perspective, proposing that image may not merely influence sensemaking, but that it ultimately comes to govern and even take over perception, where the assumption that identity drives image is exactly backwards, with image 'increasingly ascendant in the organizational world'. Poststructuralist approaches to identity have featured in the organisational literature at the level of individual rather than organisational identity, an example being the feminist approaches of Linstead and Thomas (2002).

I have presented a revised categorisation of the OI literature, as I argue that it is a useful framework for the consideration of the key debates on this concept. In doing so, I have highlighted that most of this literature assumes OI to be a social construct. I propose that it is this ontological basis in social construction, and differing interpretations of social construction, that is central to an understanding of the OI literature. I also propose that the concept of OI is rooted in a broader literature than Albert and Whetten's 1985 article, and, therefore, that any review of the OI literature needs to address this wider antecedence in order to be able to fully capture the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions underpinning OI.

### **Categorising the organisational identity literature along a centripetal and centrifugal axis**

I have argued that, with the exception of the social actor perspective, the various theoretical approaches in the OI literature all rest on assumptions that OI is socially constructed. Given this largely common foundation, I propose a further categorisation of the OI literature centring on the differing approaches taken by works towards social construction, where I categorise works along an axis of 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' approaches. I believe that this categorisation is a key contribution of this thesis.

I have shown that the sociological and psychological interpretations of social construction, although clearly sharing some common assumptions, are quite distinct, with the sociological approach, based on Berger and Luckmann (1966), conceptualising social construction in terms of the construction of the individual by social forces, and the psychological approach, characterised by Gergen (1985), presenting social construction in terms of mutually understood meanings constructed by social collectives. In Table 6, I map my proposed six-fold categorisation of the OI literature to these two approaches, although, as the essentialist/functionalist category does not consider OI to be a social construct, no mapping to this category is possible.

Narrative and discursive approaches to OI have broadly adopted what I have defined as the psychological approach to social construction. However, this is not always clear-cut, with Czarniawska (1997) for example, accommodating Gergen, Berger and Luckmann, and Lyotard within her narrative conception of organisations. Brown (2006: 232), in asserting that 'organizations are socially constructed through acts of languaging' recognises that language provides both generative resources, conforming to Gergen's conception, but also, following (Gadamer, 1975), that language is a medium that both makes possible and limits understanding, with identity constructed within the confines of Foucauldian 'discursive regimes' (Brown, 2006: 233). With Lyotard writing from a postmodern, and Foucault a poststructural perspective, I consider that the narrative/discursive approach to social construction encompasses a poststructural, as well as sociological and psychological approaches to social construction. I set out the poststructural approach to social construction in detail in the next chapter.



**Table 6: Mapping organisational identity categorisations to approaches to social construction**

<b>Proposed category</b>	<b>Approach to social construction</b>
Essentialist/functionalist	N/A
Cognitive	Psychological
Narrative/discursive	Psychological
Institutionalist	Sociological
Population ecologist	Sociological
Postmodern/poststructural	Poststructural

I characterise a centripetal approach as one focused on OI as a socially constructed concept that tends towards the singular, stable, and agreed-upon, constructed through an interplay between individual cognition and collective social practices. Despite assumptions of OI as a social construction, empirical studies by scholars towards the centripetal end of the axis tend to present OI as a more-or-less measurable attribute of organisations, and as a variable that can be tested and validated via hypotheses, reflecting an objectification of OI by organisational stakeholders. The centripetal position reflects Albert and Whetten's (1985) characterisation of OI as central, enduring, and distinctive, and has been adopted to a greater or lesser extent by authors across all approaches to OI, particularly institutionalist (Glynn, 2008, Glynn and Abzug, 2002), and population ecologist (Rao et al., 2003, Hsu and Hannan, 2005), but also in cognitive studies (Gioia and Thomas, 1996, Gioia et al., 2000).

What I characterise as the centrifugal social constructionist approach embraces a range of positions on OI, generally based on empirical research. Such works challenge one or more of the core positions of the centripetal view. For example, OI may be presented as fragmented and unstable, marked less by agreement than by political conflict, where it can be viewed as plurivocal (Brown, 2006), multi-level (Kozica et al., 2015, Patvardhan et al., 2014, Ashforth et al., 2011, Raffaelli, 2013b) or dynamic (Brown and Humphreys, 2006, Clegg et al., 2007, Hatch and Schultz, 2002). Positions often situate OI discursively, primarily within claims made in texts, rather than viewing it as constructed through collective social practices. Rather than an attribute of an organisation, OI may be conceptualised more as an ongoing process or practice (Gioia and Patvardhan, 2012, Carlsen, 2006), as 'organisational identity work', reflecting

process views of the organisation (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002, Hernes, 2002). For such approaches, OI is not amenable to study as an attribute, or as a variable within hypotheses, but needs to be analysed using methods appropriate for the study of discourse, process, or practice. As I have already noted, the roots of this centrifugal approach can be found in Albert and Whetten's (1985: 268) acknowledgement that 'the formulation of a statement of identity is more of a political-strategic act than an intentional construction of a scientific taxonomy,' and in their presentation of OI in terms of the making of claims.

In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the key theoretical elements and debates in the OI literature, addressing them within the framework of the categorisations that I have proposed. I follow this with a review of the various empirical approaches taken to the study of OI, highlighting a bias towards positivist, essentialist, and functionalist assumptions and approaches, and I identify approaches that I propose are more consistent with a social constructionist, and particularly with a centrifugal social constructionist, perspective.

## **THE KEY ELEMENTS AND DEBATES OF ORGANISATION IDENTITY**

In this section, I present the key elements and debates of OI, framing these within the categorisations that I have set out, although I also refer to essentialist and functionalist perspectives on OI. I have structured this section under the following headings: the ontological basis of OI; the centrality and unity of OI; the stability of OI; OI as a relational concept; OI as a contested concept; and the mechanisms of OI construction. In Table 7, I map positions taken in the OI literature against key elements along the axis of centripetal and centrifugal social constructionist perspectives, including essentialist positions for comparison.

**Table 7: A comparison of ‘centripetal’ and ‘centrifugal’ approaches to organisational identity**

Area	Essentialist	Social constructionist	
		Centripetal	Centrifugal
What is OI?	Identity exists in the world as a social fact	Socially constructed but treated as a ‘thing’ ‘Me’ as culture ‘Me’ as metaphor	Process and practice Organisational identity work
Who creates?	Inherent in the organisation	Collective beliefs and values Senior management	Power struggles Dialogue and negotiation between insiders and outsiders
Where and how defined?	Inherent in the organisation	Rooted in belief Social practices Daily interaction	Rooted in texts Multiple claims
Singular or multiple?	Singular	Potentially multiple, but limited	Management make claims, employees implement Pluralistic, polyphonic Claims at all levels
Stable or unstable?	Stable	Resistant to change	Possible to change Dynamic Unstable Continually (re)constructed
Temporal context	Largely unchanging	Past and future both important resources	Dynamic dialogue between the present and the past and the future
Relational context	Focus on the organisation	Focus on the organisation	Multiple identities, mutually constituted Organisation within an organisational field

### The ontological basis of organisational identity

Social psychologists, such as Mead (1934) define identity at the level of the individual in terms of the relationship between the Self and its social context. A key definitional problem faced by OI theorists is how to account for the apparent absence of an organisational Self. This problem is most pertinent for writers from a cognitive perspective and less so from institutionalist and population ecologist perspectives, which present OI as constructed largely through the assignment of organisations to membership of pre-existing categories.

From a cognitive perspective, scholars have proposed a range of solutions to the problem of the Self. Hatch and Schultz (2002) offer organisational analogues for Mead's 'I' and 'me', where the organisational 'me' emerges when organisational members assume the images that the organisation's Others (e.g. its external stakeholders) form of the organisation, and internal 'culture' is the organisational analogy to Mead's 'I', with identity an expression of agreed-upon collective beliefs. Gioia et al. (2002) instead propose that notions of 'selfhood' can be transferred to the organisational level if OI is viewed as a *metaphor* directed at understanding, rather than as directly analogous to individual identity.

More centrifugal social constructionist positions move towards a complete rejection of the facticity of OI and ideas of a collective 'we', embracing instead discursive, practice, and process approaches to identity. Chreim (2005) presents OI as a narrative construction, and Brown and Humphreys (2006: 231) consider identities to be 'social constructions constituted through acts of languaging.' Nag et al. (2007: 842) argue that, in addition to the cognitive dimension of identity, researchers should also account for 'what we *do* as a collective.' Carlsen (2014) contends that it is not possible to grasp identity without taking into account its practices. Clegg et al. (2007: 509) embrace the view of identity as performance, as a process of 'becoming', where identity emerges from the process of organising, and where it is enacted, performed and (re)negotiated in an ongoing fashion. Carlsen (2006) argues that a processual view of reality allows for the rejection of the facticity of 'organisational identities', where the key identity question is not 'who *are* we?' but rather 'what are we *doing*?' and 'what do we want to do' (Carlsen, 2006: 146). A process view suggests a move away from 'organisational identity' and towards 'organisational identity work', where Carlsen (2014: 9) argues that there are no 'identities' that undergo change or are worked upon, only identity work.

Another key ontological debate concerning the nature of OI as a social construction relates to the *purposes* accorded to it by organisational actors. Is OI primarily concerned with establishing *distinctiveness* in order for an organisation to stand out from its peers, or with securing *legitimacy* so that an

organisation can fit into its institutional environment? Writers from a cognitive, centripetal, perspective, such as Gioia et al. (2013), present OI as consisting of those attributes of an organisation that render it distinctive from other similar organisations. From an institutionalist perspective, Glynn (2008) argues that organisations seek to place themselves into categories that emphasise their similarity to other organisations, therefore privileging sameness and isomorphism. Several authors, however, have argued for approaches that can accommodate both perspectives, with Navis and Glynn (2011), for example, arguing that legitimacy can coexist with distinctiveness, proposing that identities will more likely be judged as plausible when they are *legitimately distinctive* – consisting of claims that align with expectations arising from institutionalised conventions *and* those that distance them from such institutionalised conventions. Deephouse (1999) notes that by being the same a firm may gain legitimacy, whereas by being different it can face less competition. For writers assuming a centrifugal OI, however, embracing plurivocity and multiple identities, such questions may become irrelevant, with the acceptance that organisations may make multiple claims in different contexts in order to present themselves both distinctive from their peers *and* fitting in (Brown, 2006, Sillince and Brown, 2009).

### **The centrality and unity of organisational identity**

Although theorists favouring a centripetal approach to OI privilege cohesive, agreed-upon presentations of the concept – Albert and Whetten's (1985) *central* requirement – they also generally accept the potential for multiple identities, with Albert and Whetten themselves proposing that organisations can have single, dual or multiple identities. This reflects social identity theories, where individuals may have multiple identities (James, 1890, Mead, 1934), or multiple *role* identities (Stryker and Serpe, 1982). Empirical research in OI has found evidence of multiple identities in practice (Corley and Gioia, 2004, Glynn, 2000, Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997). It has also been proposed that identities can themselves comprise of multiple elements, even where these may be contradictory, although this raises the ontological question of how to distinguish a distinct identity and an element of an identity (Glynn, 2000). Hsu and Hannan

(2005) point out that organisations also generally face multiple *audiences*, from both inside and outside of the organisation, and that these audiences may hold various, perhaps conflicting, views on an organisation.

However, despite this acceptance of multiple identities, centripetal approaches to OI assume a generally unitary view of identity, where organisational insiders and outsiders coalesce towards a common, collective agreement on an identity for an organisation, even where this may consist of multiple elements. This assumption is reflected in the operationalisation of OI in empirical studies, where criteria such as the frequency of claims (He and Baruch, 2010, Kjærgaard et al., 2011), or the power of the claimant (Pratt and Foreman, 2000), are used to privilege some claims over others in order to identify an agreed-upon, or *central*, view of an organisation's identity.

In contrast to approaches to OI that privilege cohesive and agreed-upon identities, views presenting OI in more centrifugal terms argue for pluralistic conceptions that embrace multiple identities without seeking to privilege some over others. Humphreys and Brown (2002: 422) argue that organisations are not 'discursively monolithic, but pluralistic and polyphonic, involving multiple dialogical practices that occur simultaneously and sequentially.' Brown (2006: 746) adopts the term 'plurivocity' to emphasise that 'in any organisation there will generally be multiple versions of its identity,' and Chreim (2005: 570) contends that multiple authors and stakeholders may produce 'several and different' identity narratives at any point in time. Therefore, although each organisational actor may consider their own claims to be definitive and central, empirically the overall identity picture may be much more fragmented, with centripetal forces weak or even non-existent.

### **The stability of organisational identity**

Centripetal approaches tend to assume that OI remains largely stable, but empirical work has increasingly demonstrated that identity can and does change (Corley and Gioia, 2004). Albert and Whetten (1985) present OI as a relatively stable phenomenon, proposing 'enduring' to be one of their three definitional criteria for the concept. Population ecologist and institutionalist approaches

characterise OI as relatively unchanging, constrained by structural inertia (Hannan and Freeman, 1977) and institutional pressures to conform (Porac et al., 1999).

However, Altman and Tripsas (2014) have noted a growing tension between OI as a static and essential attribute and as a dynamic and intangible process, with scholars taking a generally centripetal position exploring the mechanisms of identity change. Fiol (1991) argues that organisational change requires the incorporation of new identities, and involves the decoupling of new behaviour patterns and identities from existing values. Chreim (2005) proposes that managers managed long-term identity shifts by retaining old labels and adding or subtracting meanings from those labels. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) contend that managers, in imbuing old labels with new meanings or new interpretations, were able to revise identity claims and present them as a rediscovery of values and attitudes that were already part of the heritage of the organisation. Altman and Tripsas (2014) argue that organisations are able to adapt their identity by broadening the meaning of existing identity labels, and Tripsas et al. (2013) found that a firm did not change identity as much as it expanded it, enabling even radical changes to be positioned as incremental additions.

A centrifugal approach to social construction, however, conceptualises OI as not just capable of change but rather as an inherently dynamic and even fundamentally unstable phenomenon. Hatch and Schultz (2002: 1004) present the concept in terms of a continuous and dynamic set of processes constructed from the interchange between internal and external definitions of the organisation. Brown and Humphreys (2006: 233) define OI in terms of 'extremely fluid discursive constructions' constantly being made and re-made via a wide range of media, and exchanged between insiders and between insiders and outsiders. Clegg et al. (2007) argue that identity is enacted, performed and (re)negotiated in an ongoing fashion. Carlsen (2006: 133) conceptualises identity construction in terms of 'becoming', taking a strong process perspective, with change considered ontologically prior to social structure and primacy given to movement, flux, emergence, and process over that of end-states, entities and stability. Finally, Kozica et al. (2015) present a

view of an organisation in a constant state of instability, subject to powerful conflicting views of its identity.

### **Organisational identity as relational**

In this section, I consider works seeking to situate OI within a broader temporal and spatial relational context, where temporal relationality concerns the construction of identity in relation to the past and the future in addition to the present, and spatial relationality involves the construction of an identity in relation to other entities and identities.

Pratt and Foreman (2000) propose that identity in organisations is not just rooted in the present, but can also refer to past or future identity. Czarniawska (1997) contends that organisations construct narratives that draw coherence from the past, and Ravasi and Schultz (2006) explore how past cultures can be reinterpreted during periods of identity reconstruction. Gioia et al. (2000: 71) argue that organisational members engage in a process of revising their current perceptions of the meanings placed upon the past, so that all organisational identity work by members is effectively a sort of revisionist history, modifying previous identity to conform to some image of a current or a desired future state. Ybema (2010: 486) reports organisational members enacting old and new identities by invoking clear contrasts between a 'bad past' and a 'great future'. Ashforth and Mael (1996) note that OI claims can also relate to *possible* identities, as a means to mobilise others towards a desired future state. Gioia and Thomas (1996) highlight organisations' intense focus on the projection of a desired future image as a means of changing current identity. Indeed, Alvesson and Empson (2008) query whether OI can ever be grounded in realistic or credible statements about the organisation or whether claims essentially reflect an idealised fantasy about what the organisation *should* be. Kodeih and Greenwood (2014) agree that what matters is not how an organisation sees itself in the present but how it wants to see itself in the future.

Centrifugal approaches to OI emphasise the dialogical and dynamic aspects of temporality. For example, Carlsen (2006: 146) writes of an 'imagination of practice', a dialogue between the 'present of the past' and the 'present of the



future', where identity construction may be more about maintaining hope for the future than achieving retrospective coherence, less about recounting the past than inviting stories of what could be. Golant et al. (2014: 18) argue that managing the tension between demonstrating coherence with the past and responsiveness in the present relies on active discursive intervention. They view the dynamics of retrospection as less a nostalgic longing for the certainties of past than as an ongoing challenge to uncover the meaning, relevance and responsibilities of past commitments for current and future organisational action.

Although OI by definition focuses on the organisation as the primary unit of analysis, different approaches consider the concept from different perspectives: from the inside-out, as an expression of the collective beliefs of organisational insiders; from the perspective of the organisation as a social actor in its own right; and from the outside-in, with the organisation situated within a broader institutional context, or part of a larger organisational population. In order to bridge these different levels of analysis, some authors have proposed a multi-level approach to the study of OI, where the focus is not exclusively on a single level. Ashforth et al. (2011) consider how identities at one level of analysis can enable and constrain identities at other levels, where, for example, intrasubjective understanding ('I think') fosters intersubjective understanding ('we think'), in turn fostering generic understanding of a collective transcending the level of the individual ('it is').

In addition to calls for multi-level approaches to OI, some recent work has begun to move beyond exclusively organisation-focused approaches towards a more relational approach that begins to consider identity construction at the organisational level as a process involving both the organisation itself and multiple Others. Ravasi and Canato (2010: 55) argue that the technological features of a product can become cognitive anchors that provide meaning to and reinforce individual and organisational identities, so that product identities are able to constitute a physical manifestation of OI, with the result that the entrenchment of a product identity within an organisation can inhibit its ability to develop a new identity without that product. In his research on the Swiss watchmaking industry, Raffaelli (2013b: 8) proposes a multi-level approach to

the analysis of identity, finding that product, organisational, and community level identities all interacted within an organisational field where technology precipitated change not only at the industry level, but also at the levels of the product identity of the watch, the organisational identity of the watchmaking firms, and the collective identity of the craftsmen who designed and assembled the watches. Raffaelli argues that these multiple identities were both 'intertwined and mutually constituted.'

### **Organisational identity as contested**

Socially constructed approaches necessarily acknowledge that OI is constructed by multiple individuals and groups, although, as I have noted, approaches differ as to whether these individuals and groups are primarily situated inside or outside of the organisation, with cognitive and narrative/discursive perspectives presenting OI as largely socially constructed from within organisations, and institutional and population ecology theorists viewing it as primarily socially constructed from institutionalised meanings and by external stakeholders.

Writers taking a centripetal approach, presenting OI in terms of the collective beliefs of organisational insiders, often imply a fairly democratic process, with Hatch and Schultz (1997) conceptualising OI as a collective, commonly-shared understanding of the organisation's distinctive values and characteristics, embedded in organisational culture. Others, from Albert and Whetten (1985) onwards, have noted that it is organisational leaders who generally both have power over, and the greatest interest in, the construction of OI. Scott and Lane (2000) contend that OI is likely to occupy a more central and important place in the self-definition of managers than it does for other organisational actors, and Corley (2004) found that senior managers in an organisation positioned themselves also as 'identity managers'.

A centrifugal approach highlights the contested nature of OI, and the role of power in identity construction. Kozica et al. (2015) argue that OI is characterised by power positions and the interests and preferences of organisational actors. Some authors argue that power may lead to hegemonic

positions, with Chreim (2005) proposing that dominant identity narratives may be an indication of an organisation's oppression by subordinating everyone and collapsing everything to one 'grand narrative', yet Kozica et al. (2015: 5) support Boje's (1995) view that dominant stories can never entirely suppress the plurality and multiplicity that exists in identity narratives, with organisational members always able to resist dominant narratives to some extent. Ashforth and Mael (1996) contend that employees are not passive recipients of managerial claims but actively negotiate and validate them, and Hatch et al. (2015) argue that senior managers are not able on their own to translate identity claims into identity *beliefs*, as this process also relies on the goodwill and participation of employees.

### **The mechanisms of organisational identity construction**

Central questions for OI as a social construction concern *how* and *from what* it is constructed. Cognitive approaches taking a centripetal social constructionist approach, following Gergen's (1985) psychological approach, present OI as constructed through the social interactions of organisational members and then internalised back into their beliefs and values. Hatch and Schultz (1997: 357-358) contend that OI 'refers broadly to what members perceive, feel and think about their organizations...a collective, commonly-shared understanding of the organization's distinctive values and characteristics' that 'emerges from the ongoing interactions between organizational members.' Gioia and Thomas (1996: 372), emphasising processes of sensemaking, present OI as concerning 'those features of the organization that members perceive as ostensibly central, enduring, and distinctive in character that contribute to how they define the organization and their identification with it'. Identity construction is therefore rooted in the cognition of organisational members, their values and beliefs, and emerges from their ongoing social practices, where such practices tend to promote and reinforce collective, agreed-upon understandings.

Institutional perspectives on OI, on the other hand, following Berger and Luckmann (1966), regard identity construction as based upon socially agreed rules and categories, or 'culturally patterned practices' (Glynn and Abzug, 2002:

267). Glynn (2008: 413) proposes that institutions enable OI construction by supplying a set of possible legitimate identity elements with which organisations are able to construct and legitimise their identities, where OI becomes a form of *institutional bricolage*. Identity elements consist of meanings and symbols, typically in the form of claims to social categories, such as industry groupings. Kroezen and Heugens (2012) examine the mechanisms by which firms construct their identities by selecting and combining from an institutional 'reservoir' of 'proto-identity attributes' drawn from the identities of authoritative insiders, the preferences and social judgements of audiences, and the identities of organisational peers, in a process of 'virtual' negotiation between insiders and outsiders, but where the firms themselves have considerable agency in constructing their own identities. OI is therefore constructed from processes both internal and external to the organisation.

In the population ecology approach to OI, Porac et al. (1999) present identity construction as an explicit claim that an organisation is of a particular *type*, where categorisations consist of collectively understood organisational taxonomies and classifications. Pólos et al. (2002) contend that OI construction involves social codes, or sets of rules that specify the features that an audience expects an organisation to possess, default expectations held by those audiences concerning organisational properties. Identity, therefore, 'inheres in the expectations, assumptions, and beliefs held by agents, both external and internal to an organization' (Hsu and Hannan, 2005: 476), with the focus largely on external actors.

Centrifugal approaches tend to conceptualise OI construction in terms of identity *claims* constructed through language, texts and discourses. Coupland and Brown (2004: 1328) regard organisations as 'linguistic social constructions,' and organisation 'a processual and emergent phenomenon,' and, following Boden (1994), argue that 'organizational identities, together with their images and reputations, are best regarded as continually constituted and reconstituted through dialogical processes.' For Coupland and Brown, OI is constructed through social practices between individuals, '...constituted through conversations centred on identity issues...through the interplay of narratives

embedded in conversations between insiders and between insiders and outsiders' (Coupland and Brown, 2004: 1341).

Humphreys and Brown (2002: 421-422) focus on the narrative aspects of identity construction, suggesting that identity is 'constituted in the personal and shared narratives that people author in their efforts to make sense of their world and read meaning into their lives,' where organisations are 'socially constructed from networks of conversations or dialogues, the intertextuality, continuities and consistencies of which serve to maintain and objectify reality for participants.' For Brown (2006: 732), a narrative approach enables an 'understanding of collective identities as multi-voiced, quasi-fictional, plurivocal and reflexive constructions that unfold over time and are embedded in broader discursive (cultural) practices.' Although explicitly not claiming that identity is nothing *but* talk and text, Ybema et al. (2009) argue that a focus on language enables researchers to explore the processes of identity formation and construction, where identities are constituted and reconstituted in everyday talk and texts.

Other scholars have focused on the use of rhetoric and argumentation by organisational actors to construct identity claims in texts and discourses in order to persuade audiences. Sillince and Brown (2009) maintain that organisations are socially and symbolically constructed using rhetoric, and argue that the construction of organisational identities through rhetoric enables organisational actors to enhance their claims for organisational legitimacy. Suddaby et al. (2010: 167) propose rhetoric as a means whereby organisational actors reconstruct labels inherited from the past in such a way that 'connotes both a sense of identity and integrity of core values and a sense of progress.'

Some authors propose that OI is not only constructed through language. Brown and Humphreys (2006) argue that understandings of place can be a discursive resource from which groups can draw in their efforts to author versions of their organisation's identity. Alvesson et al. (2008: 19) propose that identities can be constructed using various resources and mechanisms, including embodied practices, material, and institutional arrangements. Harquail and King (2010: 1630) argue that it is through individuals' embodied interactions with the

abstracted ideas, physical artefacts, and instantiated bodies that they associate with their organisation that they produce, form and enact their beliefs about an organisation's identity. I have noted that Nag et al. (2007) and Carlsen (2006, 2014) emphasise that identity is rooted in 'what we do' as much as in 'what we say', where, for example, Carlsen (2014: 9) contends that it is not possible to grasp identity construction in a football club or a restaurant kitchen without also taking into account the practices of training and playing, or menu development and cooking.

## **SYNTHESIS – TOWARDS A POSTSTRUCTURAL THEORETICAL APPROACH TO ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

I have presented the key issues and debates of organisational identity primarily within a framework of OI as a social construction, where I have argued that two approaches to social construction – a sociological and a psychological one – have helped to shape this literature. I have presented a six-fold recategorisation of approaches to OI, and I have further categorised the literature along an axis of centripetal and centrifugal approaches, where I propose that only such a multidimensional categorisation can adequately map the various strands of this literature.

In this thesis, I propose that a poststructural approach to OI, one that situates it firmly as a socially construction but which also challenges some assumptions underlying OI as a social construct, enables an account that can explain both the need for organisational actors to understand and to present OI as a unitary, stable, enduring and agreed-upon phenomenon, and the empirical 'reality', revealed discursively, of OI as fragmented, unstable, dynamic, and contested. In my Introduction, I have provided definitions of my approach to poststructuralism and to my poststructural interpretation of social construction where language is constitutive for what is brought into being. Rather than privileging individual and collective cognitive processes, downplaying the 'mediated' knowledge presented in texts, this poststructural position effectively reverses the situation, privileging the performative role of texts in constituting meaning (Hansen (2006: 17-18). In a poststructural approach to social

construction, although meaning can be *presented* and *understood* by actors as agreed upon, in reality it is always fragmented, contested, and fleeting. A poststructural position on social construction therefore regards social reality as never finalised, unstable in space and time, and always contestable.

I argue that contemporary trends in organisational life, where fragmentation, and instability are prevalent, and where texts, rather than face-to-face contact, are often the main avenue of communication, mean that a poststructural approach to organisational identity becomes more relevant. For example, Colbert et al. (2016: 736) highlight the increasingly pervasive impact of technology, where 'The kinds of fully present, face-to-face interactions that foster empathy have become less common in a world of digital communication.'

I also contend that OI is becoming an increasingly central concern of senior managers in organisations. For companies, this can be associated with their financial valuations, with an increasing proportion of firms' values attributed to intangible assets. For example, Cañibano (2018) notes an estimate that in 2015 intangible assets such as brand image, intellectual property, and reputation constituted 87% of the stock market value of companies in the S&P 500 Index. Bhattacharya et al. (2008) find evidence that a positive OI can also benefit the recruitment and retention of key staff.

Concerns raised in the recent literature on OI provide additional support for a poststructural approach that emphasises decentred, unstable and contested identities. Pratt et al. (2016a) question how OI can respond to such centripetal trends such as organisations becoming more distributed, with functions being outsourced, careers becoming increasingly turbulent, and employees identifying less with one long-term employer. Alvesson and Robertson (2016: 174) wonder whether employees *ever* have fixed beliefs about OI, speculating that they may always take temporary positions on attributes. They suggest that OI researchers, rather than assuming that there are shared and clear beliefs about OI, 'should perhaps consider the possibility of beliefs and perceptions being fluid, varying, processual, contingent on issue or theme, open and often poorly expressed.' They also note that 'OI as a field appears to be characterized by a

tension between objectivist ideas about the fundamental nature of organizations and the strong possibility that organizational life today is far more complex, characterized by varied and contested identity claims.’ Kenny et al. (2016) highlight the contested nature of identity, noting that, although it may be in the interest of firms to have a coherent and agreed-upon OI, this requires the support of stakeholders from both within and outside of the firm, where in many situations agreement may at best be partial, conditional, or instrumental. They emphasise the role of power in identity construction.

In the next section, I turn from the theoretical debates surrounding OI to address the methods used to study it. I argue that empirical research on OI too often does not clearly set out the methodological assumptions upon which it is based. Moreover, despite ontological assumptions of OI as socially constructed, the methods that empirical research on OI adopts are often based on fundamentally positivist assumptions. Although, in Chapter 4, I discuss a range of concerns around the validity of a poststructural approach to methodology, I propose that poststructuralism is able to provide a robust and rigorous framework for the empirical analysis of OI that both supports a social constructionist ontological approach and avoids positivist assumptions.

## **EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

I noted earlier in this chapter that early works on OI focused on the theoretical basis of the concept. However, the early literature also included important empirical studies, such as Dutton and Dukerich’s 1991 study of the New York Port Authority. Subsequent scholars have increasingly explored OI through empirical research, with many studies focusing on single cases (Carlsen, 2006, Hatch et al., 2015), a number on comparative case studies (Elsbach and Kramer, 1996, He and Baruch, 2010), and others on multiple organisations across an industry or field (King et al., 2011, Kroezen and Heugens, 2012). Empirical works on OI have covered a number of settings, with many studies focused on education, generally universities (Brown and Humphreys, 2006, Gioia et al., 2010), and some on non-profits (Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997), but with the majority set in the private sector (Corley and Gioia, 2004, Coupland



and Brown, 2004). Finally, empirical studies on OI cover a wide range of geographical locations, with many having a North American setting (Gioia and Thomas, 1996, Nag et al., 2007), and others European, particularly Scandinavian (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006, Carlsen, 2014), but with relatively few studies set outside of these regions.

Some writers have raised concerns regarding the methodological approaches taken to the study of OI. Corley et al. (2006: 86) highlight contradictions between the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying OI, which they claim results in a 'cacophony of conceptualizations.' Alvesson and Empson (2008: 2) point to a lack of work on the 'substantive themes or key dimensions around which identity is constructed,' with little examination of, for example, the qualities required to satisfy the key criteria of distinctiveness, coherence and endurance. Ravasi and Canato (2013: 185) argue that writing on the concept 'still lacks clearly established methodological guidelines defining how researchers should address central issues such as "What counts as legitimate evidence of OI?"' They also complain that writers on OI do not always make clear their ontological and epistemological assumptions, for example formally subscribing to an interpretive perspective whilst applying methodological tools and language that reflect positivistic concerns for validity, replicability and generalisability.

I argue in this thesis that, although the major part of the OI literature assumes that OI is socially constructed, much of the empirical work based on this ontological assumption nevertheless effectively reifies OI, adopting positivist methodological approaches that treat the concept as a variable suitable for the testing of hypotheses. This dichotomy can be traced back to Albert and Whetten's original 1985 article, where they propose OI as a 'scientific' and measurable concept at the same time as recognising its subjective and political basis, although I note that the application of positivist approaches to the empirical study of socially constructed phenomena is a broader issue within organisation theory. Furthermore, many of those empirical studies on OI that avoid positivist methodological approaches nevertheless avoid any problematisation of those identity claims that are made by organisational actors

and found in texts, where I argue that the content of claims cannot be considered independently of their broader context.

In this section, I review methodological approaches taken by empirical studies of OI, revealing a broad range of approaches, with identity variously studied in terms of beliefs expressed in interviews, claims made in texts, and in observations of practice. Although I note some recent work that has explored the role of the visual in OI, the focus of most research has been on identity as expressed in verbal language. I show how methodological approaches reflect theoretical positions by mapping empirical studies to the categorisations that I have proposed earlier in this chapter.

Centripetal approaches, assuming OI to be a largely stable and agreed-upon attribute of organisations, present the concept as residing primarily in the beliefs of individuals and collectives. Empirical studies from cognitive, institutionalist, and population ecology approaches to OI tend to focus on ways of accessing these beliefs, with interviews generally the preferred approach. Such studies typically regard organisational texts as supporting sources, helpful for triangulating data from interviews. For example, Corley (2004: 1151) notes that, 'I relied on...interviews as the main source of data concerning the identity change process, with...observation and documentation data serving as important triangulation and supplementary sources for understanding discrepancies among informants and gaining additional perspectives on key events and issues.'

Centripetal approaches, corresponding to my cognitive category, attempt to identify those attributes of the organisation that make it distinctive from its peers. For example Elsbach and Kramer (1996: 449-50) report that they 'first asked respondents a series of questions concerning their perception of their school's identity, its unique attributes, and how it compared with other top-20 business schools.' Proof that such attributes are agreed upon by members is often taken from the number of times they are mentioned by organisational members in interviews or within texts. For example, He and Baruch (2010: 50) only considered 'those OI claims that had multiple sources,' and Kjærgaard et

al. (2011: 521) ensured that 'codes that were not supported strongly by evidence collected across multiple informants were dropped.'

Cognitive approaches assume OI to be rooted in collective beliefs, so that any member of the organisation can be a valid source for OI claims, although senior managers are often acknowledged to have more power, and more interest, in making claims than employees. For example, He and Baruch (2010: 49) note that their approach 'focused on the top management team statements due to their role of organizational representative agents.' As cognitive approaches emphasise the essentially agreed-upon nature of OI, works tend not to be concerned with contestation and counter claims, although they are open to the existence of multiple identities for an organisation.

Although interviews have been the preferred method for investigating OI from a cognitive approach, some authors have raised concerns around the efficacy of directly asking questions about identity, with Alvesson et al. (2008: 21) highlighting the risk of interviews provoking identity construction rather than enabling the accessing of previously held views. Ravasi and Canato (2013: 192), referencing Goffman's idea of identity as an ongoing performance, also raise concerns about the potential performativity of interviews.

Institutional theorists focus on the category memberships of organisations rather than approaching identity in terms of distinctive attributes. For these scholars, key methodological questions are how organisations select such category memberships and how institutional stakeholders validate them. I have noted that Glynn (2008: 414) presents a resource-focused view, where the institutional environment supplies possible candidates that constitute the 'raw materials' from which organisations assemble their identities. Empirical studies of OI taking an institutional approach have used both interviews and organisational documents as data sources, with their outside-in perspective meaning that documents used are often at the industry rather than the organisational level. For example, Glynn and Abzug (2002) used an industry directory for their analysis of company names, and King et al. (2011) used schools' annual report cards for their study of the identity of charter schools.

For population ecology theorists any analysis of OI needs first to identify salient audiences and then to ascertain their beliefs about the organisation in terms of the relevant social codes that they as audiences expect it to possess. Hsu and Hannan (2005: 484) suggest that researchers may access such codes indirectly by examining the actions of external actors pertaining to organisations, or by focusing directly on the perceptions and beliefs of actors through the analysis of archival documents.

Centripetal approaches assuming a generally stable OI are generally unconcerned with the adoption of longitudinal methods. However, for those studies exploring identity change, methods need to be able to capture changing beliefs. For example, Corley and Gioia (2004), investigating identity change following a corporate spin-off, conducted a set of interviews before, during and after the spin-off.

It is those empirical studies adopting a centripetal approach, assuming OI to be largely stable and agreed-upon, that are most likely to study the concept in positivist terms. Whetten (2006: 229) argues for a strengthened concept of OI which 'lends itself to model building, hypothesis testing, and empirical measurement.' Even writers noting the dangers of positivist approaches, such as Corley et al. (2006: 94), nevertheless focus on questions concerned with 'operationalizing, assessing, and measuring organizational identity.' In a recent example of a positivist approach to OI research, Boehm et al. (2014) identify the *strength* of OI beliefs held by organisational members as a measurable variable that can be quantitatively modelled against other elements of an organisation (in their case CEO charisma, leadership and firm performance) as part of testable hypotheses. However, Boehm et al. explicitly acknowledge that the *content* of OI is resistant to measurement, effectively admitting that the direct study of OI is not amenable to positivist methodological approaches.

Those empirical studies of OI adopting a centrifugal approach require methodologies that are able to accommodate conceptions of OI as a fragmented, unstable, dynamic or contested phenomenon, therefore rejecting methods that are based on the identification of a stable list of attributes or a set

of category memberships. Works taking a centrifugal approach to OI encompass a range of theoretical positions, and this is reflected in a variety of methodological approaches.

A number of empirical works on OI have taken an explicitly narrative approach, based on written texts, interviews or observation. In their study of identity narratives in a higher education college, Humphreys and Brown (2002) produced an ethnographic account based primarily on interviews and observation. Ran and Duimering (2007) explore the use of language in the texts of corporate mission statements, focusing on the cognitive linguistic processes used to construct identity. Analysing web-based texts, Kozica et al. (2015: 7-8) chose narratives, stories, and story fragments as their units of analysis, searching for 'fundamental principles or other identity-related phenomena,' using network analysis to cluster and link identity themes. All of these accounts acknowledge multiple identities and multiple identity claims by organisational actors. Other writers taking a narrative approach seek to account for the dynamic nature of OI using longitudinal sources. For example, Chreim (2005) explores discursive strategies of identity construction using a longitudinal set of messages to shareholders from Canadian banks.

Other works taking a narrative approach have sought to situate organisational texts within their wider contexts using discourse analysis. Focusing on email exchanges between organisational insiders and outsiders on an oil company's website, Coupland and Brown (2004: 1331) investigate the construction of organisational identities in terms of discursive achievements constructed by rhetors in ongoing debates. From an institutionalist perspective, and adopting a critical discourse analysis methodology, Wagner and Pedersen (2014) analyse the discursive practices that contributed to the construction of the identity of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), specifically around the subject of doping, through an analysis of the organisation's publications.

With an emphasis on the contested, or contestable, nature of OI, other writers have approached the study of texts by exploring rhetorical processes. Sillince and Brown (2009) investigate the rhetorical construction of multiple

organisational identities on police websites. Drawing from an archive of speeches by Proctor and Gamble executives, Golant et al. (2014) examine organisational texts' use of rhetorical devices. In an analysis of a range of documents relating to a Belgian political party, Moufahim et al. (2014) use discourse analysis to focus on identifying and analysing the rhetorical frames and strategies used by that organisation to construct its identity.

Works taking a centrifugal approach that emphasise the dynamic nature of identity have favoured methodologies based on process and practice perspectives. These approaches generally require the use of longitudinal methods. Based on a set of action research projects in a technology company, Carlsen (2006: 135) presents a process approach that focuses on a holistic understanding of texts and the embodied emotional reactions of individuals, using both real-time and retrospective methods involving interviews, discussions, and observations. Exploring the tacit side of identity, Carlsen (2014: 28-29) again bases his findings on an action research project, this time using a combination of archive records, observations, interviews and conversations, and 'facilitated sensemaking'. In an ethnographic study of a newspaper, Ybema (2010) complemented interviews with the observation of everyday discussions in situated practices of talking and writing. In exploring a temporal perspective on identity, Schultz and Hernes (2013) based their longitudinal research on participant observation, non-participant observation, active engagement and interviews, as well as internal and external documents.

From the limited empirical literature adopting a relational and spatial perspective on OI, Raffaelli (2013a) used multiple data sources for his analysis of identity construction at industry, organisation, product and professional levels, with sources including advertisements, industry journals, annual reports, press releases and interviews. Although Raffaelli did use a range of longitudinal sources, his focus was to ensure that sources adequately covered the range of identities included in his analysis.

Centrifugal approaches present a socially constructed OI, constituted discursively or through process or practice, that is not amenable to quantitative

measurement or to totalising narratives, where identities tend to be provisional, contestable, and local. For such approaches, validity is obtainable through depth of explanation and methodological rigour, rather than through statistical significance. In a recent example of a centrifugal approach to the empirical study of OI, Kreiner et al. (2014) seek to reconcile conceptions of OI as an attribute and as a process of organisational identity work. Using multiple data sources, including texts, observations and interviews, covering a period of ten years, they explicitly address OI as a social construction produced by organisational actors, their analysis focused on identifying recurring themes and providing an explanatory account of OI. However, although works such as Kreiner et al.'s eschew positivist assumptions of OI as possessing an external 'reality', and embrace multiple data sources, many of them nevertheless do not tend to problematise the identity claims found in their data, whereas I argue that the content of claims should not be taken at face value, but that they need to be understood in terms of their wider context.

Although research on OI has tended to focus on the articulation of identity in verbal language, I have noted that some authors have argued that OI is not only constructed through language, with Brown and Humphreys (2006) highlighting the importance of understandings of place, and Harquail and King (2010: 1630) proposing that individuals' embodied interactions with abstracted ideas, physical artefacts, and instantiated bodies produce, form and enact their beliefs about an organisation's identity. Other writers have focused on visual elements in the construction of organisational identity, with Vaara et al. (2007) exploring the role of visuals in advertisements in identity-building, and Höllerer et al. (2018a) addressing the use of logos in post-merger identity construction in a university.

Within both centripetal and centrifugal approaches to the study of OI, there is a lack of consensus on valid and appropriate criteria for those attributes and categories that constitute the concept. In addition to the criteria of central, enduring and distinctive, Albert and Whetten (1985: 268) suggest that dimensions of identity could embrace statements of ideology, management philosophy, culture, and ritual. Ashforth and Mael (1996: 23) consider OI to be necessarily 'inclusive and fuzzy', encompassing aspects of 'mission, values,

ideology and beliefs, norms, competencies, and customary ways of doing things.’ Scott and Lane (2000: 45) consider ‘goals, missions, practices, values, and action (as well as lack of action)’ all potentially valid elements of OI. Corley et al. (2006) point out that, although many authors invoke Albert and Whetten’s (1985) tripartite criteria, few specify the actual criteria they would use to determine whether an attribute should be considered part of an organisation’s identity, and Alvesson and Empson (2008: 5) concede that it is sometimes unclear which organisational features are unambiguously identity-related. I argue that this ongoing uncertainty surrounding the criteria of OI demonstrates the futility of efforts to operationalise the concept as a measurable variable, with authors adopting various definitions for valid claims, and frequently not clearly setting out their criteria.

In addition to defining criteria for valid identity claims, centripetal approaches to OI are also required to filter those claims that they consider to be central. Ravasi and Canato (2013: 195-6), although admitting that, from a social constructionist perspective, any self-referential statement could be considered as a legitimate claim of identity, argue that it is possible to distinguish pertinent claims by ‘careful analysis of the context within which textual data are produced and used.’ Other authors, such as He and Baruch (2010) and Kjærgaard et al. (2011) privilege claims that have multiple sources or informants, and Ravasi and Phillips (2011: 8) determine validity through the triangulation of sources. Again, it is clear that scholars adopt a variety of approaches for determining those elements of identity that they consider to be central.

In practice, OI scholars seldom provide detailed explanations of how they have identified and validated identity claims in their research. He and Baruch (2010: 50) are more informative than most, explaining that, in the case of interviews, they asked informants to state their perception of ‘what the organisation is’ or ‘what/who we are as an organisation,’ whereas within corporate annual reports they sought out certain key words, such as ‘we are’, ‘is’ and ‘as’. Tripsas et al. (2013: 10) looked for statements in organisational documents ‘describing the company or what management viewed as the company’s primary business.’ Elsbach and Kramer (1996: 451) searched documents for statements about



'unique and defining characteristics,' focusing on those roughly fitting the prototypes 'our school is an X type of school,' 'our school is different from most schools on dimension X,' 'a central dimension of our school is X,' or 'we have always been a type X school.'

Given the focus of most OI theorists on presenting unitary, agreed-upon accounts of identity, it is not surprising that few authors have attempted to create typologies of identity attributes or claims. Gustafson and Reger (1995) classify attributes into *substantive* – 'what we do' (for example based on products or core competences) and *intangible* – 'why we do it' (based on such aspects as organisational culture or values). Margolis and Hansen (2002) present a more granular typology, identifying *core attributes*, comprised of two sub-categories: purpose and philosophy, and *application attributes*. They divide the latter into three sub-categories: priorities, practices and projections. The first group encapsulate the mission and values of the organisation, and Margolis and Hansen consider them to be legitimate elements of OI, whereas they argue that the others, relating to strategy and operational aspects, are not sufficiently 'central' to be considered legitimate identity elements.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY – TOWARDS A POSTSTRUCTURAL THEORY OF ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

In this chapter, I have presented a critical reappraisal of the organisational identity literature. I have argued that, although Albert and Whetten introduced the concept in their 1985 article, OI has broader roots spanning a number of literatures, and I have emphasised the social constructionist assumptions underpinning the major part of the OI literature. I have reviewed existing categorisations of the OI literature, and presented my own synthesis of these, as I show in Table 5, on page 54. I have set out the sociological and psychological approaches to social constructionism that underpin the OI literature, and I have mapped these to my six-fold categorisation. I have further categorised the OI literature along a 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' axis, where I argue that positions taken by OI scholars in key debates on the concept can be positioned along that axis, as I show in Table 7 on page 62. I have argued that

many empirical works on OI taking a centripetal approach, despite conceptualising OI as a social construction, adopt positivist methodologies, and that centrifugal approaches, although generally eschewing positivist notions of validity, nevertheless generally fail to sufficiently problematise the identity claims of organisational members, by accepting them at face value with little regard for their broader context.

I argue that the tensions and contradictions between the sociological and psychological approaches to social construction, and the centripetal and centrifugal approaches to OI, are at the heart of the key debates around this concept. Despite the clear tensions between centripetal and centrifugal approaches, however, I argue that they simply reflect different perspectives on identity. In this thesis, I propose that poststructuralism is able to provide a coherent theoretical account that is able to reconcile the contrasting approaches, where poststructuralism's destabilisation of meaning and of identity means that organisational actors attempt to fix meanings and identities at the same time that those meanings and identities are, empirically, necessarily dynamic and fragmented. Although poststructuralism challenges some of the key assumptions underpinning both sociological and psychological strands of social constructionist ideas, I propose that it presents a coherent and rigorous conception of social construction. Finally, a poststructural approach to methodology rejects both positivist concerns for validity, and the uncritical acceptance of identity claims.

In this chapter, I have shown that poststructural and postmodern ideas have rarely surfaced within the OI literature, although aspects of works taking a centrifugal approach do support elements of a poststructural view on identity. In the next chapter, I set out a poststructural theory of organisational identity. In order to do this, I need to provide a detailed justification for taking such an approach, and I argue that this has to be based upon an understanding of the contextual development of poststructural thought. I start by presenting a review of the history of postmodernism and poststructuralism within the organisational literature, seeking to explain the rise and decline in their popularity. I then examine the origins of poststructuralism, set out the key elements of

poststructural thinking, and review the most important critiques of these approaches. One central criticism is that poststructuralism is anti-method; I start to address this here, before considering it in more detail in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 3: A POSTSTRUCTURAL THEORY OF ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold

— William Butler Yeats, *The Second Coming*

In this thesis, I argue for a poststructural approach to organisational identity, where I have provided a definition of my approach to poststructuralism in my Introduction. I propose that poststructuralism is suitable for this exercise because it both elevates identity as a central concern of organisations and emphasises its problematic nature. I argue that this enables poststructuralism to account for the gap between the need for organisational actors to understand and to present OI as a unitary, stable and enduring concept, and its fragmented, unstable, and dynamic empirical ‘reality’.

It is clear, however, that poststructural thinking has been much criticised by organisational theorists, these critiques including scepticism towards the feasibility of a poststructural method. In order to set criticisms within an appropriate context, in this chapter I first review the rise and fall of postmodernism and poststructuralism in the organisational literature. I then present a detailed analysis of the origins and key elements of poststructural theory, before addressing the main criticisms directed towards it. I conclude this chapter by outlining a poststructural theory of identity and of organisational identity, based upon the approach to poststructuralism that I have adopted. Recognising that a central criticism of poststructuralism concerns its apparent incompatibility with method, in the next chapter, I present a detailed consideration of the feasibility and validity of a poststructural methodology.

Poststructuralism destabilises identity, and by increasing uncertainty around questions of ‘who are we?’, and ‘what is that?’, it elevates identity to a central position in organisational life, as actors seek to fix meanings in order to enable and to justify actions. I propose that this focus on identity in the face of

centrifugal contemporary social and organisational forces makes poststructuralism relevant for the study of organisational identity. I argue that a poststructural approach addresses recent concerns raised in the recent OI literature around how OI can meet the challenge of these centrifugal trends (Alvesson and Robertson, 2016, Pratt et al., 2016a). Despite the apparently conflicting theoretical positions taken by writers in the poststructural tradition, I propose that it is possible both to identify a number of elements that together make up a distinctly poststructural conception of identity, and to apply this conception empirically to the study of identity at the organisational level.

## **POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND POSTMODERNISM IN ORGANISATION THEORY**

In proposing a poststructural approach to organisational identity, I am aware that the influence of poststructural and postmodern ideas has become somewhat marginal in the organisational literature, at least when compared to the late 1990s. In this section, I explore why this might be the case, and evaluate the current position of research in this area. I review key works in the organisational literature that both promote and critique postmodernist and poststructuralist ideas. In doing so, I trace the key debates and the rise and subsequent decline of these perspectives in the literature. I highlight debates concerning the 'postmodern organisation', determinism and agency, emancipation and relativism, and the validity of method; debates mirroring the general critiques of poststructuralism that I address later in this chapter. I demonstrate the continuing influence of poststructuralism in contemporary organisation theory, including work in the area of individual identity.

Although my focus in this thesis is on poststructuralism, which I present here as distinct from postmodernism, the organisational literature has tended to either conflate the two, or not make any clear distinction between them. It is for this reason that I cover both in this chapter. However, in attempting to distinguish the terms, I acknowledge that the boundary between them is not clear. For the purposes of this thesis, I consider that poststructuralism originates in the work of Derrida and Foucault in the 1960s and 1970s, initially from Derrida's (1967)

focus on the problematisation of language, meaning, and the subject, whereas postmodernism originated at a later date, specifically with the 1979 publication of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, distinguished by a 'macro' focus on periodisation (i.e. postmodernism following modernism) and a critique of grand narratives.

In three articles published in 1988 and 1989 (Burrell, 1988, Cooper and Burrell, 1988, Cooper, 1989) Cooper and Burrell brought postmodernist and poststructuralist thinking to the attention of organisation theorists. The first of these papers presents an overview of 'postmodernism' focusing on the work of Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari. Cooper and Burrell highlight postmodernism's focus on paradox and indeterminacy and its rejection of the human agent as the centre of rational control and understanding, and they argue for the idea of organisation itself as a defensive reaction to forces seeking to destabilise it. A central theme is one of opposition, with the postmodern pitted against the modern, the informal organisation against the formal, and process against structure.

Cooper's subsequent (1989) article on Derrida focuses on postmodernism's privileging of process over structure, where 'organization always harbours within itself that which transgresses it, namely, disorganization' (p. 480). Cooper also equates Derrida's attack on logocentrism (the idea that language represents reality) and his privileging of language and texts over cognition with a critique of organisations as stable and centripetal. He highlights the central importance that Derrida places on writing as an attempt to fix meanings and assert control, where it is 'the control aspect of writing that makes it central to organizational analysis' (p. 483). Burrell (1988) takes from Foucault the idea that organisations are all-powerful sites, able to use mechanisms of power to construct the individuals within them as subjects.

Following Cooper and Burrell's initial articles, two distinct understandings of postmodernism become apparent in organisation theory: the idea of the rise of the postmodern organisation within a postmodern era, and postmodernism as an alternative approach to the empirical study of organisations. Clegg (1990)

focuses on the former, exploring a shift to a postmodern world and towards the postmodern organisation, seeking to equate postmodernism with contemporary trends in organisations. Although Clegg doubts that the postmodern organisation could entirely 'transcend, overcome or annihilate previous forms' he argues that it does 'seem to index some human possibilities' (p. 22). Parker (1992) notes how Heydebrand (1989) heralded the birth of the flexible, post-bureaucratic organisational form, and Cooke (1990) the decentred postmodern corporation. However, within these conceptions of the postmodern organisation Parker detects some distinctly realist assumptions about the world.

Addressing the second understanding, of postmodernism as a distinct empirical approach, Parker notes Gergen's (1992) positioning of the postmodern as a new epistemological broom, one focusing on representation and language, rather than reality and 'truth', and highlighting collectivity, reflexivity and self-criticism. Chia (1995) follows Gergen in arguing for an epistemological, and largely liberating, interpretation of postmodernism, presenting it in terms of a critique of the modern focus on social entities and attributes such as 'organizations', 'individuals', 'environment', 'structure', and 'culture'. For Chia, postmodern thinking emphasises a transient, ephemeral and emergent reality, with reality continuously in flux and transformation, and hence unrepresentable in any static sense, where organising practices are privileged over and above their stabilised 'effects' (i.e. individuals, organisations and society). Chia (2003) returns to a focus on postmodernism, somewhat tenuously tracing its origins back to Henri Bergson and linking it to process theory, where, in place of the modernist emphasis on the 'ontological primacy of substance, stability, identity, order, regularity and form', postmodern analyses seek to emphasise 'process, indeterminacy, flux, interpenetration, formlessness and incessant change' (p. 131).

The high-water mark of postmodernism within organisation theory can perhaps be associated with two texts: David Boje's 1995 *Stories of the storytelling organization: A postmodern analysis of Disney as 'Tamara-Land'*, an analysis of multiple discourses revealing 'the marginalized voices and excluded stories of a darker side of the Disney legend'; and Gibson Burrell's 1997 *Pandemonium*, a

provocative 'retro-organization theory', breaking conventions in both content and style. These two texts highlight the liberating and disruptive possibilities of postmodern analysis, but for some they also revealed it as a self-indulgent, relativistic dead-end, and perhaps even an existential threat to scholarship itself. In an otherwise sympathetic review of *Pandemonium*, Jones (1997) notes that the text embraces the collapse of almost all standards of 'reason', to the point that all discourses are logically and normatively equal in value, a form of relativism that holds that 'anything goes'.

Reflecting on an outpouring of literature in the previous decade from both a postmodern and a critical perspective, Alvesson and Deetz (1999) associate the rise of both of these approaches with the decline of and disillusionment with modernist assumptions by organisational theorists and practitioners, with the attack on the modernist tradition central to both approaches, questioning modernist theories of control whilst shifting the focus towards culture and human factors. For Alvesson and Deetz, however, there is little evidence for the rise of the sort of postmodern organisation described Clegg (1990), instead arguing that the focus of research in this area should be on what postmodern theoretical approaches could offer for the empirical study of organisations.

From the early 1990s, critical theorists highlighted what they saw as problematic elements of postmodernism and poststructuralism, at the same time as co-opting some of the most compelling ideas of these approaches. Reed (1993) argues that postmodernism's underlying relativism is essentially a way of avoiding responsibility for the implications of its analysis, where although postmodern theories of organisation may be philosophically defensible they are not useful in practice. For Reed, theorists need to make it clear what they want to change, with postmodern critique potentially inadvertently supporting authoritarian and imperialistic ideas. Reed (2005: 1637) further insists that explanation 'cannot be reduced to rhetorical or linguistic constructions that have no reference to or anchoring in an independently existing world.' Curtis (2014: 5), on the other hand, highlights numerous 'bold' attempts to align Foucault with critical realism, and studies that have sought to emphasise the common ground between critical realism and poststructuralist approaches by making a case for



the provisional, immanent (i.e. locating contradictions in social rules and systems) nature of critical realist philosophical and epistemological claims (e.g. O'Mahoney, 2012; Al-Amoudi and Willmott, 2011).

For Alvesson and Deetz (1999: 206), perhaps the most telling criticism of postmodernism is the lack of clear empirical studies that it has produced, with its 'emphasis on data as constructions open to a multitude of interpretations.' Calás and Smircich (1999), however, highlight a range of contributions made by postmodern approaches, although they question whether the 'postmodern turn' is a movement that has perhaps served its purpose (p. 649). They present potential heirs to postmodernism and poststructuralism in feminist poststructuralist theorising, postcolonial analyses, actor-network theory, and narrative approaches to knowledge, noting that, rather than rooted in late 1960s Paris, these approaches instead look to more recent poststructural interpretations, such as Butler (2004, 2009) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 1987).

In light of such complaints concerning postmodernism's perceived relativism and nihilism, and its collapse of all analysis into discourse and text, Willmott (2005) argues that Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 1987) present a compelling theoretical position that counters what critical scholars view as the central problems with postmodernism, their theory both containing a commitment to emancipation and presenting a bridge between discourse and reality, with the acceptance that there is a difference between the mere existence of objects and their 'articulation within discursive totalities.' MacKillop (2017) also draws on Laclau and Mouffe's theories, noting their adoption in critical leadership studies of organisational change (e.g. Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Kelly, 2014).

Hassard and Wolfram Cox (2013) attempt to counter the trend towards the marginalisation of poststructural ideas within organisation theory by elevating them to a central position in a framework of organisation theory paradigms, where they argue for the main recent approaches to organisation theory as 'structural', 'anti-structural' and 'post-structural'. In Table 8, I list the key elements of each of their proposed categorisations.

**Table 8: Meta-theories for organisation theory paradigms**

	Structural paradigm	Anti-structural paradigm	Post-structural paradigm
<b>Ontology</b>	Realist	Nominalist	Relativist
<b>Epistemology</b>	Positivist	Constructionist	Relationist
<b>Human nature</b>	Determinist	Voluntarist	Deconstructionist
<b>Methodology</b>	Deductive	Interpretive	Reflexive

*Source: Hassard and Wolfram Cox (2013: 1710)*

Hassard and Wolfram Cox further break down their categorisation into 'normative post-structural' and 'critical post-structural' domains, which they map against organisational theories and influential theorists, as I show in Table 9. Within the normative post-structural domain, they locate contributions that do not take 'explicit recourse to a traditional politics of the radical Left', where Habermas and various Marxist critiques single out Foucault for particular criticism (p. 1716). In contrast, their critical post-structural domain is characterised by a radical Leftist agenda, where they identify writing on feminism, patriarchy, and the body (p. 1717).

**Table 9: Typology of OT research domains: Examples of theories and theorists**

Paradigm	Research domain	OT theories (e.g.)	Influential theorists and writers (e.g.)
<b>Structural</b>	<b>Normative structural</b>	Contingency theory Institutional theory Population ecology	Alfred Chandler Philip Selznick Eugene Odum
<b>Structural</b>	<b>Critical structural</b>	Labour process theory Radical Weberianism Socialist feminism	Harry Braverman  Max Weber Shulie Firestone
<b>Anti-structural</b>	<b>Normative anti-structural</b>	Ethnomethodology Phenomenology Social constructionism	Harold Garfinkel Edmund Husserl Alfred Schutz
<b>Anti-structural</b>	<b>Critical anti-structural</b>	Anti-organization Theory Critical discourse Critical theory	Herbert Marcuse Norman Fairclough Jürgen Habermas
<b>Post-structural</b>	<b>Normative post-structural</b>	Actor-network theory Archeo-genealogy Process theory	Bruno Latour Michel Foucault Henri Bergson
<b>Post-structural</b>	<b>Critical post-structural</b>	Autonomism Post-structural feminism Post-colonialism	Antonio Negri Julia Kristeva Gayatri Spivak

*Source: Adapted from Hassard and Wolfram Cox (2013: 1715)*

Postmodern and poststructural ideas have not had the lasting impact on organisation theory that Cooper and Burrell probably assumed they would have. Their perceived relativism and determinism, together with a seeming inability to translate theory into convincing empirical research, are central factors in this decline. However, although *postmodern* ideas, particularly conceptions of the ‘postmodern organisation’, have largely disappeared from the organisational literature, Hassard and Wolfram Cox show that *poststructuralism*, in various guises, has provided inspiration for a range of contemporary approaches, based on theories from a ‘second generation’ of poststructural theorists.

In this thesis, I propose that poststructuralism is of particular relevance for the study of organisational identity. In my Introduction, I have set out my own poststructural theoretical approach, based primarily upon Derrida (1967/1978), Laclau and Mouffe (1985), and Hansen (2006). However, in order to make this argument, I argue that it is first essential for me to set out an understanding of the forces that gave rise to poststructuralism, its key elements, and the broad range of criticisms levelled against it. I will then set out my poststructural theory of organisational identity.

## **THE ORIGINS OF POSTSTRUCTURALISM**

I identify three elements as central to the development of poststructural thinking: a critique of structuralism; an extension of psychological theories of social identity; and a response to a tumultuous contemporary political and social context. Here, I review each of these elements in turn, proposing that they form the basis for both the key ideas and the main critiques of poststructuralism.

Some authors have focused on the importance of specific writers as influences on the development of poststructuralism, with Taylor (1989: 487-8) for example, noting the influence of 'a certain [partial] reading of Nietzsche,' on Foucault and Derrida, together with the importance of Heidegger and Levinas for Derrida's writing. Cooper and Burrell (1988) also emphasise Nietzsche's influence. However, I consider that such a narrow identification is misleading, given the very broad reading demonstrated by both Derrida and Foucault in their work.

Poststructuralist ideas are both a development and a critique of structuralism, that body of thought derived from the structural linguistics of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss's subsequent development of Saussure's ideas into a general theory of structuralism. At the heart of structuralism is a denial of the representational role of language, meaning instead residing within relationally structured language systems. Although structuralists assert that language and reality are disconnected, they argue that it is possible to fix meanings based upon these underlying structures.

An understanding of Saussure's theory of language is essential to an understanding of poststructural ideas, and especially of Derrida's work. Holdcroft (1991: 8) highlights Saussure's belief that language should be understood as essentially a social institution, 'a sort of contract signed by the members of a community,' marking a break both with assumptions of language as a natural object, and of the prevailing comparative approach to linguistics that focused on the historical development of languages. Central to Saussure's approach was a rejection of language as representation. Instead, he emphasised the arbitrariness of the sign, where there is no innate connection between a label and the thing it is taken to represent. Saussure also stressed the autonomy of language, where its rules articulate their own sets of concepts and objects, and with its structure internal to itself.

For Saussure, in order to be able to produce meaningful sentences, words only have significance *in relation* to other elements in a system. The central concept here is *difference*, with words defined in terms of their relation to other words. Hence his relational conception of language focuses only on 'differences without positive terms' (Saussure, 1916/1977: 120), where language is 'a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others' (Saussure, 1916/1977: 114). Consequently, the material characteristics of a word itself are irrelevant, as its significance lies only in its function within the wider system. The key difference here between Saussure and Derrida's later poststructural conceptualisation is that, for Saussure, this is a game where the rules are knowable and where meanings are fixable, whereas for Derrida the game has constantly shifting rules, and ultimately indeterminate meanings (Holdcroft, 1991: 93).

In his work within the field of anthropology, Lévi-Strauss adopted Saussure's structural linguistics in an attempt to construct a general theory of social science showing that behind apparent cultural variety exists 'a unified, abstract structure governing concrete, observable variations,' where culture is the unconscious expression of universal laws (Sperber, 1979: 19-20). For example, in his analysis of myths from different cultures, Lévi-Strauss identifies an 'external' structure, where myths can be analysed as part of related groups, with these

relations expressible in systematic symmetries and oppositions (although these 'perfect' relationships were not borne out in his evidence) (Sperber, 1979: 40-1). Lévi-Strauss proposed that this structuralist perspective was applicable to all forms of social relationship.

The second of the elements that I have identified as key to the development of poststructuralist thinking is the influence of psychological theories of social identity. Dunn (1997) highlights the parallels between poststructuralism and Mead's concept of the social self, arguing that several aspects of Mead's thinking prefigure key poststructural ideas. Focusing on Judith Butler's (1990) interpretation of poststructuralism, Dunn highlights a shared understanding of a shift from Cartesian notions of innate consciousness to locating the subject in a system of external relations, where Mead situates the subject within a social process defined and shaped by symbolic interaction, while poststructuralists view the subject as a product of the institutionalisation of discursive practices, with both conceptions regarding meaning as ultimately supplied by the outside world. However, Mead's conceptualisation of the Self as a product of socialisation through a process of role taking and social interaction enables him to propose an objective basis for meaning, and to retain some notion of subjectivity as a source of conscious meaning, whereas poststructuralism presents an entirely discursively determined subject, thus eliminating conventional notions of subjectivity.

The final element that I identify as key to the development of poststructural thought is the contemporary political and intellectual context providing the backdrop for the production of key texts, with Foucault's *The Order of Things* published in 1966, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1969 and both Barthes' *Death of the Author* and Derrida's *Of Grammatology* published in 1967. All of these writers were based in Paris and sympathetic to radical political causes. In the late 1960s, political and intellectual thought in Europe remained haunted by the Second World War, yet leftist grand narratives of a successful struggle against authoritarian rule leading to a more democratic and just world were increasingly challenged. Bourg (2017) shows that in France itself, the Algerian War and US involvement in Vietnam highlighted the continuing brutal legacy of

European colonialism and imperialism, with the role of the State increasingly questioned by radical thinkers. On the streets of Paris, this culminated in the May 1968 protests, marked by demonstrations, general strikes and the occupation of universities and factories. It was in this context that the intellectual scepticism and philosophical radicalism of poststructural thinkers proved attractive, providing a critique of existing social norms and the role of the State, but also a scepticism towards the grand narratives of Marxist thought.

## **KEY ELEMENTS OF POSTSTRUCTURAL THOUGHT**

The theorists most associated with poststructuralism did not associate the label with their own work, with Žižek (2000: 242-3) contending that the term only existed 'from the moment it was noted by the foreign [US] gaze.' Rather than constituting a coherent and fully-formed body of theory, poststructuralism has largely been constructed by later writers from a handful of works authored by French intellectuals in the late 1960s, supplemented by a number of subsequent reinterpretations, with Jones (2009: 76) arguing that poststructuralism is 'perhaps most commonly...used as a placeholder for a collection of proper names,' and Giddens (1987: 196) characterising it as a loose label for 'a cluster of authors who, while reacting against some of the distinctive emphases of earlier structuralist thought, at the same time take over some of those very ideas in their own work.'

Any attempt to identify the key elements of poststructural thought depends firstly upon a selection of relevant authors. In this thesis, I focus primarily on Derrida, Foucault, and Laclau and Mouffe, whilst acknowledging that others may place a greater emphasis on Lacan, Kristeva, or Deleuze and Guattari. I have noted that my concern here is primarily with poststructural rather than postmodern thinking, so I have excluded Lyotard and Baudrillard from my list.

In this section, I focus on three key elements, characterised as *crises*, that I consider to be central to poststructural thinking: the crisis of representation, the crisis of knowledge, and the crisis of the subject. I propose that, taken together, these elements present a thoroughgoing destabilisation of Enlightenment, modernist, rationalist, and positivist ideas, and that they constitute a more-or-

less coherent alternative empirical approach. For some scholars, such a project threatens at worst both the end of theory and of academic research, and at best is doomed to collapse in its own contradictions, but for others it constitutes a means of emancipation from constrictive structures and ideas, and a radical and explanatory approach to the empirical investigation of the social world.

Authors have taken a variety of approaches to the characterisation and classification of poststructural and postmodern ideas, often conflating the two bodies of thought. For Calás and Smircich (1999: 653), the key postmodern themes are: incredulity toward metanarratives, the undecidability of meaning, the crisis of representation, and the problematisation of the subject and the author. Alvesson and Deetz (1999: 199) identify seven common themes: the centrality of discourse and constitutive powers of language; fragmented identities with subjectivity as a process; a critique of the philosophy of presence and representation, reflecting the indecidabilities of language; the loss of foundations and power of grand narratives; the connection between power and knowledge; hyperreality and the role of simulacra; and research aimed at resistance and indeterminacy. Giddens (1987: 196) presents the following as persistent and definitive characteristics of both poststructuralism and structuralism: the thesis that linguistics are of key importance to philosophy and social theory as a whole; an emphasis on the relational nature of totalities, the arbitrary character of the sign, and a stress upon the primacy of signifiers over what is signified; the decentring of the subject; a concern with the nature of writing and texts; and an interest in the character of temporality as constitutively involved with the nature of objects and events.

I position the crisis of representation as the most important element of poststructural thinking, with Derrida as its preeminent theorist. Derrida's consideration of language and representation constitutes a radical development of Saussure's theory of linguistics. Whereas for Saussure the relativity and autonomy of language is founded on underlying systems and rules that allow meanings to be fixed and socially agreed-upon, for Derrida this underlying structure simply does not exist, rendering meanings always uncertain, unstable, contextual, and contestable. This indeterminacy of language inevitably raises



the question of where meaning is situated. The answer, for Derrida, is that it clearly does not lie in an objective, external reality, but he is also clear that meaning cannot be reliably positioned within subjective cognition, or in speech (logocentrism). For Derrida, the only place where meaning can be relatively fixed is within writing. A second, related question considers where *identity* lies. The answer to this is that identity (the Self, or the subject) again cannot be approached objectively, but neither can we locate it subjectively. Rather, it is forever in flux, in-between the objective and the subjective, *mutually constituted* between the Self and multiple Others. And, as with meaning, for Derrida the only reliable evidence for identity is to be found within text.

Butler (1990: 40) also locates the heart of poststructuralism in Derrida's writings on representation, where these signal the rejection of 'claims of totality and universality and the presumption of binary structural oppositions that implicitly operate to quell the insistent ambiguity and openness of linguistic and cultural signification,' and where the poststructural focus on the discrepancy between signifier and signified 'renders all referentiality into a potentially limitless displacement.' Cooper (1989: 481-2) contends that Derrida's object in his deconstructive method is to reveal these ambiguities and uncertainties, 'the self-contradictions and double binds, that lie latent in any text.'

Cooper (Ibid pp. 488-9) also emphasises that 'différance' embodies the two meanings of the French verb 'différer': to defer in time, and to differ in space, where the fact that these two meanings reside in the same word signifies that the differential nature of meaning cannot be grasped as a singularity, where one of these aspects of time or space always has to be deferred. Cooper argues that Derrida intends that *différance* should be understood in terms of a continuous absence, as a force that is continually beyond our grasp, highlighting the continual movement of meaning, where, reflecting Saussure, it is captured in differences and relations rather than in the thing itself. Howarth (2013: 54) emphasises the importance of the contextuality of meaning in Derrida's arguments, with signs necessarily connected to and dependent on their context, where Howarth relates this to Wittgenstein's idea of 'meaning is use', so that each repetition of a sign differs in meaning from other iterations,

also reflecting Bakhtin's (Todorov, 1984) concept of 'dialogism', where the idea of iterability captures the interlinking of identity and difference, as well as the intertwining of continuity and discontinuity.

Hansen (2006: 17-18) emphasises the constitutive nature of the poststructural perspective on language, where it is both social and political. It is only through language that objects, subjects, states, living beings and material structures achieve meaning. Hansen highlights Shapiro's (1981: 281) assertion that language is not a transparent tool functioning as a medium for the registration of data as (implicitly) assumed by positivist, empiricist science, but a field of social and political practice, where there is no objective or true meaning beyond the linguistic representation to which one can refer. As the meanings carried by language are not fixed, they are therefore always open to question, contestable, and temporary. For poststructuralists, language is therefore a site of variability, disagreement and potential conflict, a place for the acting out of power relations. Rather than seeking unifying and settled meanings, and searching for underlying structures – quests that poststructuralists regard as essentially futile, poststructuralism necessarily embraces conflict, ambiguity, and multiple meanings and understandings (Burr, 1995: 61-64).

In terms of its empirical manifestation, for Derrida, thought and speech are necessarily unreliable evidence, and it is only in the fixed nature of writing that we have material and reliable evidence of the world, where writing is a way to fix the flux and flow of meaning. From a poststructural perspective, however, texts are not simply privileged, but are also problematised. For example, if we accept the local and contextualised construction of meaning, we must also, following Barthes (1967/1994) and Foucault (1979), question the author's role in creating a text and imbuing it with meaning, with readers as well as authors constructing the meanings of texts within the context of their reading of them at a specific time and place.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) build on Derrida's focus on language and provide a more comprehensive ontological basis for this crisis of representation than Derrida attempts, placing discourse at the centre of their interpretation of

poststructuralism. They argue that poststructuralism does not deny the material or the existence of 'facts', but that it is only through discourse – systems of 'articulations' in language – that meaning is constructed, and that the central indeterminacy and flux of language means that reality – and society itself, can never be presented as a 'sutured and self-defined totality,' where 'society' can only be defined in terms of articulations and discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 108). However, they further argue that the 'impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations – otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert the meaning, there has to be a meaning...Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112). The necessary human response to indeterminacy and to flux is therefore to try to fix and stabilise meanings.

Questions concerning the status of the Self and the subject, my second crisis, are clearly of central importance for a poststructural conceptualisation of identity. Derrida's crisis of representation also constitutes a crisis for the subject. Dunn (1997: 690) argues that it was the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss that opened the way for theorising a post-Cartesian, 'postmetaphysical' subject, but that poststructuralism goes further, by claiming that subjects are discursively constructed through the workings of power. Therefore, in addition to the structuralist claim that the Self cannot be *objective* (because of the separation of language and reality), the absolute situatedness of the Self in its relation to the Other (their inseparability) means that neither can an individual be *subjective*. The Self therefore faces an existential challenge, unable to be *either* objective or subjective. From the perspective of identity, poststructuralists are consequently radically anti-essentialist, where the indeterminacy of meaning in a poststructural world results in a Self that is constantly in a state of flux, where the 'constructive force of language in social interaction ensures a fragmented, shifting and temporary identity for all of us' (Burr, 1995: 62). Judith Butler, focusing on questions of gender, develops Foucault's (1977) thinking on the constitution of the subject by arguing that identity is performatively constituted through discursive enactment (Butler, 1990: 25).

My final key element of poststructural thinking, the crisis of knowledge, is the element that comes, via Foucault, most directly from Nietzsche, although it can also be traced back to the poststructuralist break with the structural linguistics of Lévi-Strauss, and from the central thesis of Kuhn's 1962 *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. This aspect of poststructural thought also forms the key bridge to Lyotard's postmodernism. Responding to Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory, Foucault argues that knowledge is neither universal nor ahistorical, but that different epochs and groups construct their own forms of knowledge, where 'The subject of knowledge itself has a history; the relation of the subject to the object; or, more clearly, truth itself has a history' (Foucault, 1974/2000: 2). For Foucault, knowledge is also fundamentally a site of power struggle, where what is of central importance for the scholar is not the search for truth, but an understanding of how knowledge is constructed in a particular context, and by whom.

I have shown how poststructural ideas were introduced into the organisational literature, quickly gained prominence, yet soon became largely marginalised. I have argued that these ideas originated in a specific historical context in the 1960s, and that, rather than constituting a coherent philosophy, 'poststructuralism' consists of an array of often contradictory positions. Although I argue in this thesis that it is possible to identify some core common elements of poststructural thought that constitute a more-or-less coherent approach, it is clear that the range and variety of positions that have been proposed as poststructuralist leave the term open to critique on a number of levels. In the next section, I address some of the central critiques of poststructuralism, together with responses to them, where I propose that in order to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of poststructuralism it is essential to understand the range and context of criticisms that have been levelled against it.

## **CRITIQUES OF POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND POSTMODERNISM**

Howarth (2013: 56) notes that poststructuralism has attracted criticism on many fronts, including 'rationalists, neo-conservatives, liberals, Marxists, critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, proponents of hermeneutics, structuration

theory, critical theory, and even some Lacanians.’ Here, I review some of the key criticisms, focusing on critiques of poststructuralism, but also covering postmodernism, on the basis that criticisms often conflate the two. I present the critiques under six headings: those regarding poststructuralism and postmodernism as not worthy of serious engagement; positions that recognise the validity of individual theorists and ideas, but do not believe that these add up to a cohesive and coherent philosophical position (where such critics could still potentially describe themselves as poststructuralists); arguments that poststructuralism and postmodernism have run their course as useful approaches; criticisms of perceived relativism and nihilism; criticisms of discursive determinism and the negation of agency; and critiques contending that poststructuralism and postmodernism are incompatible with the application of rigorous empirical method. I argue that it is only through an understanding of these critiques, and of the responses to them by poststructuralist writers, that the marginalisation of poststructural ideas within the organisational literature is explicable.

A number of commentators have derided postmodernist and poststructural thinking as essentially nonsense. For example, Howarth (2013: 57) recounts Alan Sokal’s infamous hoax article written in a postmodern style proposing that quantum gravity is a social and linguistic construct, which he succeeded in getting published in an academic journal in 1996. Habermas rejects postmodernism and poststructuralism on the grounds that they are not really theoretical traditions at all, because they are not concerned with questions pertaining to theoretical reason, such as whether we know something and how we know it, because all questions of truth and objectivity are subverted by what he describes as a ‘levelling of the genre distinction between philosophy and literature’ (Habermas, 1987: 185-210).

I have previously noted Jones’ (2009: 76) comment that poststructuralism is ‘perhaps most commonly...used as a placeholder for a collection of proper names,’ with key theorists (Derrida, Barthes, Foucault) taking very different, and often contradictory, approaches. Howarth (2013: 58) notes claims that terms such as postmodernism and poststructuralism are little more than ‘buzzwords’,

rather than serious theoretical divisions. He also acknowledges that both bodies of thought cover a range of disciplines, with no firm roots in any one, and where those different disciplines often have very different understandings. I have also noted that poststructuralist theorists did not recognise themselves according to that label, and certainly did not regard themselves as part of a distinctive and coherent philosophical tradition.

Other scholars have argued at various times that postmodernism and poststructuralism have outlived any use that they may have once had. As early as 1987 Giddens characterises them as 'dead traditions of thought,' which despite 'the promise they held in the fresh bloom of youth...have ultimately failed to generate the revolution in philosophical understanding and social theory that was once their pledge' (Giddens, 1987: 195).

Writers from both left and right have criticised the perceived moral relativism and nihilism of postmodern and poststructural writing. Commenting on poststructural approaches to identity, Charles Taylor worries about its nihilistic and subjectivistic tendencies, which he traces back to the influence of a partial reading of Nietzsche. For Taylor, Derrida and Foucault 'disclaim any notion of the good' and end up simply 'celebrating...the potential freedom and power of the self' (Taylor, 1989: 489). Linstead (2015: 181) notes a range of criticisms from the left, from an apparent failure to address structural features of power such as hegemony and the organisation of resistance, through to the overdetermination of language and text over agency, and the neglect of non-discursive elements in the construction of meaning.

Howarth (2013: 3) refers to recurring concerns relating to poststructuralism's privileging of language over cognition, where this is seen to generate meaning quite apart from the activity of human beings, as individuals are constituted through a deterministic discourse which denies all agency. Howarth (2013: 70) also notes that this 'idealism' or 'textual reductionism' is seen to obliterate the distinction between the discursive, the non-discursive, and the extra-discursive, so that everything is ultimately reduced to text.

Finally, critics reject claims to methodological rigour on behalf of postmodernism and poststructuralism, highlighting a perceived position that any interpretation is valid, with therefore no basis to prefer any one over another. For example, Eagleton (1983: 144) claims that the advantage of a postmodern epistemology ‘...is that it allows you to drive a coach and horses through anybody else’s beliefs while not saddling you with the inconvenience of having to adopt any yourself.’ I consider criticisms of poststructuralism as anti-method in more detail in the next chapter, where I consider the feasibility of a poststructural methodology.

## **RESPONSES TO CRITICISM**

I argue that some of the criticisms of poststructuralism have little foundation, with some positions essentially caricatures rather than serious attempts to engage on a theoretical level. However, it is undeniable that much writing in the poststructural tradition, from Derrida onwards, often appears to be deliberately obscure and resistant to interpretation, leaving itself open to ridicule. It is also clear that, regardless of their attractiveness as philosophical positions, key poststructural positions have troubling ontological, epistemological, or empirical implications.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985; 1987) have been central figures in addressing some of the key criticisms of poststructuralism. They focus on ‘discourse’ as their key topic, where this has an inclusive scope, equated with human meaning making processes in general, not just ‘talk and text’, where, as Laclau (1993: 341) argues, society in its entirety ‘can...be understood as a vast argumentative texture through which people construct their reality.’ Laclau and Mouffe make no fundamental distinction between the discursive and the extra-discursive, but present a picture of the unceasing human activity of meaning-making from which social agents and objects, social institutions and social structures emerge configured in ever-changing patterns of relations.

In response to criticisms that poststructuralism rejects structures and stability in favour of process and flux, Laclau and Mouffe (1985), do argue, following Derrida (1967/1978), that signification is an infinite play of differences, where

meaning can never be finally fixed and is always in flux, unstable and precarious. However, they propose that people and objects, and the relations between them emerge in stable forms which may last for quite long historical periods. They acknowledge that power is a key factor in the formation of these stable forms, where it has the capacity to make these forms hegemonic and pervasive. In this way, they neatly reconcile Foucault's ideas around the construction of the subject and Derrida's position on the indeterminacy of meaning, at the same time as addressing some of the leftist and Marxist criticism of poststructuralism as failing to address issues of hegemony and power.

Finally, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) also tackle the problem of agency head-on. They conceptualise individuals as *both* passive and active, where on the one hand, they provide the energy required for meaning-making, but on the other the individual subject is both decentred, and subject to the influence of structure. Willmott (2005: 751-2) argues that they propose a solution that effectively transcends agency and structure through a more complex formulation in which processes of identification are central, where the essential indeterminacy of 'the moment of decision is conceived to exist in a relation of indeterminacy to the structure.' So, effectively, they counter Foucault's strong determinism with Derrida's radical uncertainty, where the complete determinism of structure is never entirely possible, because meanings can never be entirely fixed, with individuals always having some room to construct their own meanings and to resist the dominating meanings of structure.

## **TOWARDS A POSTSTRUCTURAL APPROACH TO ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

In my Introduction, I presented a definition of poststructuralism with identity at its heart, one drawing on the ideas of Derrida (1967/1978), Foucault (1972, 1974, 1977), Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Hansen (2006), where the destabilisation of both the subjective and the objective means that questions of 'who am I?' and 'what is that?' become central to social and organisational life, as actors seek to fix meanings. Here, I propose a set of key elements for a



poststructural theory of identity, and specifically, of organisational identity, and assess the theoretical validity of my proposal. I begin this section with a brief review of some literature that has addressed identity at the level of the individual from a poststructural perspective. I then introduce the work of Lene Hansen (2006), which I propose provides a theoretical and a methodological framework that illustrates the rigorous application of a poststructural approach to identity in an empirical study. I then set out the key elements of my poststructural approach to organisational identity and finally, referring back to the critiques of poststructuralism that I introduced earlier, I consider whether my proposal is theoretically defensible.

Butler's (1990) work on gender and sexuality has been influential on poststructural approaches to identity, including research in organisation theory (Thomas and Davies, 2005). Butler's (1990: ix) interpretation of poststructuralism is strongly influenced by Foucault's writings on the construction of the subject (1977) and on juridical power (1974/2000). For example, Butler argues that the category 'women' is both produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought (pp. 3-4). She challenges the assumption that there is a universal basis of feminism, and questions the facticity of gender, presenting it not as a noun, but as a performative, constitutive act, constructed through discourse. She challenges the 'we' applied to feminists as a 'phantasmatic construction...which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent' (p. 194). For Butler, a poststructural identity is essentially performative, dynamic, fragmented, and contested, constructed in discourse through processes of relationships and oppositions.

Within the organisational literature, Thomas and Davies (2005: 687), in their work on resistance in organisations, argue that a poststructural analysis of the discursive production of resistance offers a more 'fluid and generative' understanding of power and agency than other interpretations. In an ethnographic account of a Japanese workplace, Kondo (1990) argues for organisational actors as multiple, gendered selves, with identities open,

negotiable, shifting, and ambiguous, constructed through ambiguity, paradox, and contradiction. Collinson (2006: 181-3), investigating the identities of leadership followers, presents identity as highly ambiguous, multiple and potentially contradictory, with subjectivity located in organisational and social conditions and consequences, so that individuals are viewed as inextricably interwoven with, rather than separate from, society. He cites Foucault's (1977, 1978) emphasis on the social, organisational and historical contingency of subjectivity and its discursive embeddedness in power and knowledge.

My development of a poststructural approach to organisational identity draws directly from Hansen's (2006) *Security as practice: Discourse analysis and the Bosnian War*. Hansen presents a poststructural theory of identity based on the ideas of Derrida (1967/1978) and Foucault (1972, 1974, 1977), as well as that of Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 1987). She proposes that identity is 'at the ontological and epistemological centre' of poststructuralist analysis where, from a poststructural perspective, identities do not exist as objective accounts of entities in the real world, but as continuously restated, negotiated, and reshaped subjects and objects (p. 37). Hansen notes that poststructural identity is primarily rooted in language, and it is only through the construction of language that objects, subjects, states, living beings, or material structures are given meaning and endowed with a particular identity. In the same way that language is inherently unstable, this is also true of identity, which authors may only *present* as stable.

Hansen (2006: 6-7) also conceptualises identity as essentially *social*, established through a set of collectively articulated codes, rather than as the private property of the individual, where what we perceive as individual identity is constituted within and through a collective terrain. Identity, like meaning, is also always contestable, therefore *political*. Hansen argues that this emphasis on the political in poststructuralism's concept of identity sets it aside from conceptualisations of identity as culture. Finally, Hansen characterises poststructural identity as *relational*, in that it is always situated through reference to something that it is not, again constituted within and through a collective terrain. Identity is therefore always articulated in terms of the Self and

multiple Others, where these Others can be both spatially and temporally situated, reflecting Derrida's conception of language as a system of differential signs, establishing meaning not by the essence of the thing itself but through a series of juxtapositions.

Hansen's poststructural conception of identity has many parallels with a substantial organisational literature rooted in Foucauldian ideas of discourse, the subject, identity and power, where identity is seen to be constructed through discourse (Mangan, 2009, Clarke et al., 2009, McInnes et al., 2006, Corlett et al., 2017). For example, Knights and Willmott (1985, 1989) draw upon Foucault to explore the relationship between identity and power in organisations, and in relation to labour process theory. Investigating resistance to dominant organisational discourses, Thomas and Davies (2005) reject what they see as overly deterministic readings of Foucault to argue for workers' self-identity as an arena for resistance, where resistance is produced in discourses of identity.

In addition to a poststructural theoretical conception of identity, four key perspectives have influenced the development of my theoretical and methodological approach in this thesis. I introduce them briefly here and cover them in detail in the next chapter. The first approach is Bakhtin's (Todorov, 1984) dialogical and intertextual approach to meaning and to identity, where he emphasises the primacy of context over content, and the dynamic, relational and distributed nature of meaning, contained in networks of texts. Although not a poststructuralist, with his core ideas predating the writings of Derrida, I propose that Bakhtin's ideas closely mirror key aspects of poststructuralism, and, in particular, complement my conceptualisation of the relationality of poststructural identity.

The second perspective is Gee's (1999) identity-focused approach to discourse analysis. Gee emphasises the central role of identity in texts and discourses, where a primary purpose of a text or discourse is the construction of identity. In Gee's approach, texts and discourses are not simply sites for identity construction, but identity is a pervasive element within them. I propose that Gee's approach complements a poststructural emphasis on the central

importance of identity in the construction of discourse (Butler, 1990; Hansen, 2006).

The third perspective that I have incorporated in my methodological approach is Billig's (1996) focus on argumentation and rhetoric as key aspects of discourse, where social life is characterised by opposing positions, and where organisational actors use various techniques to persuade audiences of the correctness of their own position. I propose that Billig's position complements Bakhtin's dialogical approach and Gee's identity-focused discourse analysis, as well as with poststructural positions on the essential contestability and political nature of identity (Hansen, 2006).

My fourth perspective recognises the inherently multimodal nature of the corporate annual reports that I have used as the main source for this thesis. I argue that contemporary annual reports are carefully designed so that visual and verbal elements are tightly integrated, with both elements clearly contributing to meaning-making and to the construction of identity. Within my analysis, I have therefore incorporated a multimodal approach to meaning-making that goes beyond verbal text and encompasses other modes, specifically the visual. Based on the social semiotic theory of Halliday (1978), the concept of multimodality, as described by Kress (2009) is being introduced into organisation theory, where scholars present it as a necessary extension to language-focused approaches to discourse (Höllerer, 2017; Iedema, 2007; Boxenbaum, 2018). I argue that the social semiotic approach more broadly, with its focus on social context and its concern for the workings of power in meaning-making, is inherently sympathetic to a poststructural conception of identity. I also argue for clear parallels with Bakhtin's context-focused approach to linguistics, and Billig's focus on rhetoric and argumentation.

In this section, I present the key elements of my poststructural approach to organisational identity. From a poststructural perspective, I argue that identity is a central feature of organisational life. Poststructural identity is contestable, unstable, and ambiguous. It is also a fundamentally relational concept, where, as Hansen (2006: 6-7) suggests, identities are always situated through

reference to something they are not, always articulated in terms of the Self and multiple Others, where those Others can be both spatially and temporally situated, through comparison and opposition to other identities, or to the past or future of the focal identity. Finally, poststructural identity is constructed in discourse (Hansen, 2006: 42), and the rejection of the reification of social concepts determines that it is conceptualised not as a noun, but as a performative, constitutive act (Butler, 1990: 25).

In my review of the OI literature, I have shown that a number of works taking what I have described as a 'centrifugal' approach have presented identity in terms of some of the elements that I have described above, including views that OI is changeable (Corley and Gioia, 2004, Gioia et al., 2000), and even essentially unstable (Kozica et al., 2015), examining the spatial and temporal aspects of OI construction (Clegg et al., 2007), situating the identity of the organisation within a relational network of other identities (Raffaelli, 2013b), emphasising the multiplicity and ambiguity of organisational identities (Sillince and Suddaby, 2008), or the primacy of text and language in the construction of OI (Coupland and Brown, 2004, Sillince and Brown, 2009, Ybema et al., 2009). However, I have argued that none of these works have adopted an explicitly poststructural approach.

In this thesis, I propose that a poststructural theoretical and methodological approach to the study of OI is able to provide a coherent account of the processes of identity construction in organisations. In the previous chapter, I highlighted the tension between 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' accounts of OI, where I argued that the former focuses on attempts by organisational actors to understand and to present OI as largely stable and agreed-upon, and the latter highlights the dynamic, fragmented and contested evidence of identity claims in text and practice. I argue that a poststructural approach to OI can help to account for this gap between the understanding and presentation of OI by organisational actors and the empirical evidence for identity construction in texts and discourses.

In this chapter, I have presented a detailed justification for a poststructural theoretical approach to the study of OI. However, I have shown that, in addition to critiques of its theoretical viability, poststructuralism has also been criticised as incompatible with a rigorous methodological approach, and even as anti-method. In the next chapter, in setting out a poststructural methodology for the study of OI, I seek to address these criticisms, arguing that a rigorous poststructural methodology is not only feasible, but that it demands rigour. As I have done in this chapter, I argue that it is essential to consider the methodological basis of poststructuralism in detail in order to justify and to explain my approach.

I begin the next chapter by setting out the key elements of my poststructural methodological approach to OI. I then review the main criticisms of poststructuralism in relation to its methodological status. Next, I review empirical research from the organisational literature and elsewhere that adopts a poststructural methodology. I then set out the overall framework for my analysis and present an overview of each of my methodological approaches to the study of OI in turn, highlighting previous relevant work in these areas.

## **CHAPTER 4: A POSTSTRUCTURAL METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

In this thesis, I address the following research questions:

1. How can we explain the tension between understandings of organisational identity as a generally agreed-upon and stable attribute of organisations and empirical research that frequently reveals OI as fragmented, dynamic and contested?

2. What kinds of empirical data do organisations draw on to create an organisational identity and how do these forms of data help us to understand organisational identity as a post-structural concept?

In this chapter, I cover my approach to addressing the second of these questions, in seeking to demonstrate the validity of a poststructural empirical approach to the study of organisational identity. In addition to the theoretical criticisms that I covered in the last chapter, here I note continuing concerns around poststructuralism's perceived inability to translate persuasive theory into valid and rigorous empirical practice. I argue that a rigorous poststructural method is not only possible, but that rigour should be at the heart of a poststructural methodological approach, and that this can in turn translate into a powerful explanatory analysis of social processes. In setting out a methodology for a poststructural approach to OI, I have proposed a framework drawing upon four approaches that I believe are complementary: intertextual analysis, discourse analysis, multimodality, and argumentation. Within this overarching approach, in Chapter 6, I present some novel methods and analytical techniques that I have developed to address my second research question, and to fit my research context and data sources.

### **KEY ELEMENTS OF A POSTSTRUCTURAL METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

A poststructural approach assumes that identity is primarily constructed in texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: 23). The principle method for any analysis of

identity therefore involves the study of texts and discourses. However, a poststructural analysis should not study a text in isolation, as individual texts are only understandable as nodes in a wider intertextual network of texts and discourses, where This contextual study should encompass both spatial and temporal dimensions, incorporating the construction of texts longitudinally and across other texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: 55). The poststructural de-privileging of the primary role of the author, where author and the reader are co-creators of meaning requires that the study of texts must also engage with the processes of their creation and consumption (Derrida, 1988: 144-5). In this thesis, I also seek to incorporate the social semiotic contention that meaning-making extends beyond the textual elements of language to include other modes of communication, including the visual and the material, where annual reports, for example, should be analysed as multimodal documents, where the conception of 'text' is extended to include other modes, specifically the visual (Kress, 2009). I argue that this is commensurate with a poststructural approach.

From a poststructural perspective, a concern for identity is a central and pervasive feature of discourse (Hansen, 2006: 37). A poststructural analysis of identity therefore requires the systematic study of texts, covering their content, structure and presentation, encompassing visual as well as textual elements, in addition to the analysis of their production and their wider intertextual context (Hansen, 2006: 42). Hansen (2006: 6) proposes that key features of a poststructural identity are that it is decentred and dynamic, implying that texts need to be studied within their spatial and temporal context, allowing for the analysis of spatial and temporal patterns of identity construction and reconstruction, with poststructural identity also fundamentally relational, with identities mutually constituted in relationships between the Self and multiple Others. This requires that the analysis of identity in texts and discourses cannot be restricted to a focal identity, but must concern itself with multiple, related, identities, where this will often require the study of a wide range of texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: 82-3). Finally, as poststructural identities are assumed to be endlessly contestable, any analysis of identity construction in texts must examine the processes by which organisational actors seek to



privilege some identities over others and persuade audiences of the legitimacy of those identities (Hansen, 2006:19).

In order to explore these features of a poststructural identity, in this thesis I propose that a combination of intertextual analysis, discourse analysis, a multimodal approach, and the analysis of argumentation provides a suitable methodological framework for the investigation of the applicability of a poststructural approach to the study of OI. Prior to setting out these approaches, however, I review the main criticisms of the feasibility of a poststructural method, and some responses to these criticisms.

### **CRITIQUES OF A POSTSTRUCTURAL METHOD**

Concerns around the validity of a poststructural method can be traced back to Derrida's own statements, where Hansen notes that he condemned method as tied to Western rationalist and positivist truth claims (Hansen, 2006: xix).

Subsequent critiques have, unsurprisingly, attacked poststructuralism as not just resistant to methodological validity and rigour, but as fundamentally anti-method. Following Hansen (2006), I argue here that poststructuralism is not inherently anti-method, and, moreover, that its focus on the study of written and spoken texts both requires and supports a rigorous methodology.

Although Derrida pointedly criticised rationalist method, insisting that his own deconstructive approach could not be defined as a method according to usual definitions of the term, evidence from his writing challenges the view that he was simply anti-method, where he argued that in order to understand a text a rigorous analysis was both possible and necessary, for example:

‘...And once again, what holds for the context “Rousseau” or the “Essay on the Origin of Languages” also holds for the context in which we speak of it today...To evaluate the two sides and to get one's bearings, one must be armed, one must understand and write, even translate French as well as possible, know the corpus of Rousseau as well as possible, including all the contexts that determine it (the literary, philosophical, rhetorical traditions, the history of the French language, society, history, which is to say, so many other things as well). Otherwise, one could indeed say just anything at all and I

have never accepted saying, or encouraging others to say, just anything at all, nor have I argued for indeterminacy as such' (Derrida, 1988: 144-5).

Howarth (2013: 84-5) lists a range of criticisms of poststructural approaches to methodology, from narrow questions about the role of research design and particular research methods to broader issues concerning the character of explanation, the role of interpretation, and its connection to values, ideals, and critique. He notes arguments that poststructuralists' reflection on these matters is virtually not existent, with Marxists, critical realists, and positivists all alleging 'self-refuting and paralysing relativism...methodological anarchism, and scientific naïveté.' From the perspective of organisation theory, Alvesson and Kärreman (2013: 1365) have alleged a poststructural idealism or textual reductionism that excludes the extra-discursive from any analysis, with Fairclough (2003: 160) also arguing that poststructuralism fails to recognise the importance of our embodied, practical engagement with the world. Others have focused on the quality of poststructural interpretations and explanations, for example Howarth notes Townshend's (2003) assertion that many studies carried out in the name of poststructuralism simply describe, or re-describe, social phenomena without actually explaining them at all.

Hansen (2006: xviii-xix) acknowledges widespread criticisms that poststructuralism is antithetical to method, that it denies the use of evidence, and that poststructural empirical research is not capable of epistemological and methodological rigour, but she argues, that, on the contrary, a poststructuralist focus on discourses articulated in written and spoken texts necessarily requires a rigorous methodological approach. However, she does emphasise that rigour in poststructural method is not equivalent to positivist rigour, where, as poststructural identity only exists discursively, it cannot therefore be treated as a variable amenable to falsifiable hypotheses, and nor can it be implicated in causal relationships. For poststructuralists, Hansen argues, what constitutes 'proper knowledge' cannot be a theory's ability to uncover causal truths, as knowledge is necessarily both historically and politically situated, where, for causal epistemology is, as Foucault (1972) points out, just another particular

discourse of knowledge which cannot sustain its privilege outside of its own historical and political context (Hansen, 2006: 9-10).

Hansen (2006: 45, 11) also notes concerns around the reliability of a poststructural approach to discourse analysis, for example questioning whether different researchers could ever come to the same conclusion working with the same selection of texts if it is the case that poststructuralism regards any reading as equally valid. She argues that such criticisms are invalidated so long as any discourse analysis insists on readings that are based on *explicit discursive articulations* of signs and identities – evidence coming directly from the texts, where researchers need to pay careful analytical attention to the linking and juxtaposition of those signs and how they construct the Self and related Others. She does caution, however, that poststructural discourse analysis requires extensive knowledge of the topic in question and that analysis should therefore be restricted to a small number of cases.

## **APPROACHES TO POSTSTRUCTURAL METHODOLOGY IN ORGANISATIONAL THEORY**

In this section, I review empirical studies within the organisational literature that are based, to a greater or lesser extent, on a poststructural methodological approach. As with my review of poststructural theory, this exercise raises issues of terminology, with poststructural and postmodern approaches often conflated, and, for example, 'Foucauldian' approaches generally not explicitly associated with poststructuralism by their authors.

I have identified five distinct approaches to poststructural methodology in the organisational literature: deconstructionist approaches, following Derrida; discursive approaches based upon Foucault's ideas of power and knowledge; discursive approaches following Laclau and Mouffe's (1985), reinterpretation of poststructuralism; intertextual analyses based on Bakhtin (Todorov, 1984) and Kristeva (Kristeva, 1986); and approaches focusing on poststructuralism as an aid to reflexivity in research, as proposed by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003). The first three approaches share the common objective of using textual analysis to destabilise the explicit meanings of texts in order to highlight hidden or

marginal meanings, exposing the use of power by organisational actors to construct reality through discourse. An intertextual analytical approach focuses on the exploration of the construction of meaning through a relational network of texts. The final, reflexive, approach shares the destabilising drive of the first three approaches, but rejects the absolute power of discourses to construct reality.

Culler (1982) is a key source for organisational scholars adopting a deconstructive approach to the study of organisational texts and discourses. Following Derrida, Culler emphasises that deconstruction is not a school or a method, a philosophy or a practice, but something that happens when the arguments of a text undercut the presuppositions on which it relies. Martin (1990: 340) argues that deconstruction is far more than a methodology, with profound implications for theory building and research in any field, challenging logical positivist claims of privileged access to objective knowledge. Calás and Smircich (1991), employing feminist strategies of deconstruction, seek to expose some of the underlying assumptions and contradictions of the organisational leadership literature. Kilduff (1993: 15-6) based on a deconstructive re-reading of March and Simon's 1958 *Organizations*, questions how this canonical text was constructed to include and exclude certain categories of thought and communication, revealing how a marginalised and hidden text contradicts what is explicitly stated. In his analysis of the Disney Corporation, Boje (1995) uses deconstruction to explore the multiple meanings of narratives, analysing relations between the dualities in stories to reveal their ambiguities.

Although deconstruction as a concept has permeated wider culture, from literature to architecture and food, it is no longer much used as an approach to poststructural analysis in the organisational literature. Part of the reason for its demise is surely the legacy of Derrida's insistence that it was not a method, but its focus on critique at the same time as refusing to adopt an explicit political position has not endeared it to scholars from a critical perspective, and other academics, such as Ellis (1989), have characterised deconstruction as simply critical reading, a case of the 'emperor's new clothes.' Kilduff (1993) concedes

that one key problem with deconstruction is that it is not possible to reduce the process to a set of techniques, so that each analysis is specific to a particular text, reducing the utility of the approach in terms of transferability or for comparative studies.

Within the broad range of approaches falling under the umbrella of discourse analysis, many organisational researchers have focused on the role of power, both explicitly using critical discourse analysis (CDA), or the overlapping and more diffuse 'Foucauldian' flavour of discourse analysis. The influence of poststructural thinking on either approach can be difficult to assess. From a CDA perspective, Van Dijk (1993: 249) emphasises the 'role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance,' where social power is seen to result in inequality, where he notes how critical discourse analysts take an explicit socio-political stance. Heracleous and Barrett (2001: 757) contend that CDA is 'informed' by Foucault's notion of discourse as productive of social life and subjectivity, where CDA conceptualises discourses as power/knowledge relations embedded in social practice; however, they do not associate this explicitly with poststructuralism.

Alvesson and Kärreman (2000b) characterise Foucauldian discourse analysis as based on the poststructural assumption that language constitutes objects and subjects through discourse. They highlight Foucault's (1972, 1974) two approaches to investigating discourses: archaeology and genealogy, where archaeology clarifies the history of the rules that regulate particular discourses and genealogy investigates the forces and events that shape discursive practices (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000b: 1128). Reed (2000) associates a growing influence of 'Foucauldian' discourse analysis with increasing disillusionment with mainstream methodologies. However, he criticises the Foucauldian method as a postmodern approach that needs to be 'repaired' by drawing on critical realist ideas. Countering Reed's criticism of the discursive determinism of a poststructural discourse analysis, Hardy and Thomas (2013), referencing Hall (2001), argue that Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse is not purely a 'linguistic' or discursive concept, but that it is also concerned with practice.

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002: 4) concede that Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) approach to discourse is much more a theoretical engagement than a methodology, and is therefore 'short on specific methodological guidelines and illustrative examples.' However, other writers have attempted to adapt their ideas for empirical study. Within organisation theory, MacKillop (2017) draws on Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and notes their theory's mobilisation in critical leadership studies of organisational change (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012, Kelly, 2014). Glynos and Howarth (2007) have proposed an approach based on logics of critical explanation as a five-step methodology to help apply poststructural discourse theory empirically. They share Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) concern to introduce a positive, ethical dimension to poststructural analysis and not to limit analysis to just talk and text. They also emphasise a rigorous approach that they claim does not allow for 'anything goes'.

Kristeva both introduced Bakhtin's idea of dialogism to western audiences, and coined the term intertextuality to refer to a text's relations to other texts in a 'mosaic' of cultural practices and their expression (Kristeva, 1986: 36). Although Kristeva is associated with poststructural ideas, intertextual analysis has generally not been explicitly linked to poststructuralism in its limited adoption within the organisational literature. Lupu and Sandu (2017) base their analysis upon Fairclough's (1992) CDA interpretation of intertextuality, whereas Maclean et al. (2016) reposition intertextuality within the recent 'historical turn', referencing Porter (1986) and O'Connor (2002), as well as Fairclough. Although the latter two references do not link intertextuality to poststructuralism, Porter argues that intertextuality has been associated with both structuralist and poststructuralist approaches.

Finally, Hassard and Wolfram Cox (2013) note that some authors have positioned poststructuralism in organisation theory primarily as way of promoting a reflexive approach to methodology, where the linguistic focus of poststructuralism emphasises the unstable, ambiguous, relational and context-dependent nature of language and discourse. For example, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003: 1167) present poststructuralism as crucial to the understanding of identity work in a turbulent and multifaceted world where identity becomes

destabilised. However, Sveningsson and Alvesson are resistant to the idea that discourse constructs rather than uncovers a phenomenon, arguing that it is possible to 'avoid an "essentialistic" position without moving to the other corner, assuming highly fluid and fragmented forms of subjectivity or privileging discourse.' Sveningsson and Alvesson's position, therefore, although adopting a poststructural 'flavour', cannot be regarded as a poststructural perspective per se, as it rejects the central poststructural position on the discursive construction of meaning.

#### **FOUR ELEMENTS OF A POSTSTRUCTURAL METHODOLOGY**

I have argued that attempts to apply poststructural methods within the organisational literature have tended to focus on the deconstruction of meanings and the critiquing of certain phenomena. My central empirical concern in this thesis is somewhat different, I believe, as I seek to assess the explanatory power of a poststructural approach to the study of organisational identity. I propose that this exercise therefore requires methods that are more suited to explanation than to critique. I propose that a combination of discourse analysis, intertextual analysis, the study of argumentation, and multimodality are suitable methods for investigating the explanatory power of a poststructural methodological approach to the study of OI.

At the centre of my methodological approach is the use of intertextual analysis, based on the theories of Bakhtin (Todorov, 1984) and Kristeva (Kristeva, 1986), for exploring the decentred, dialogical, and unstable nature of identity construction in organisational texts. My twin-track approach to discourse analysis, as set out in my Introduction, using the identity-focused approach of Gee (1999) and the approach to texts as discourses presented by Wood and Kroger (2000) examines texts and discourses from a poststructural perspective that the construction of identity is both a central purpose and pervasive feature of both (Hansen, 2006: 37). My examination of the use of argumentation in texts, based on Billig (1996), focuses on the contested nature of meaning-making within organisational texts and discourses. Finally, a multimodal approach to the analysis of texts, based upon Kress (2009), allows me to

analyse the visual and verbal elements of annual reports as jointly contributing to meaning-making and identity construction in the reports. I seek to assess the validity and the usefulness of a poststructural approach to the study of OI based upon this combination of approaches. In the next sections, I address each of the four approaches in turn, assessing their key features and previous consideration within the organisational literature, before I set out how I have used them in my analysis.

### **Intertextual analysis**

Intertextuality proposes that texts build their arguments and authority through references to other texts, through direct quotation or by referencing concepts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: 8). In making links to older texts, new texts rely upon the status and meaning of the older ones, but this process of reading and linking also produces new meaning, where references never reproduce the originals in an identical manner. A full understanding of texts as intertextually linked requires an empirical analysis of the construction of those links, together with theorising the way in which texts build authority (Hansen, 2006: 55). In studying texts within their wider context, they do not just call on other texts, but also on broader collective meanings of language, or discourses, what Foucault (1972: 49) describes as the 'practices which form the objects of which we speak.'

Although I have noted that examples of intertextual analysis in the organisational literature generally do not take a poststructural approach, I argue that intertextuality does entail radical implications for the construction of meaning that mirror poststructural thinking. Primary amongst these is a focus on the contextual and relational nature of meaning, where intertextuality stresses that the meaning of a text only fully exists within a relational and dialogical network of other texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: 55-63). The text, its author(s), and meaning itself, are therefore radically decentred. This radical decentring of meaning emerges from Bakhtin's concept of *dialogism* (Todorov, 1984). Bakhtin's ideas on discourse and text are rooted in the essential distinction he makes between the natural and the human sciences. Whereas in



the former objects of study can be treated as independent from any understanding of them, in the latter objects cannot be detached from the process of their study, so that there can be ‘no knowledge of the subject but *dialogical* [italics in the original]’ – which for Bakhtin involves an intertwined and dynamic relationship. Mirroring Derrida, the object of the human sciences therefore becomes the *text*, in the broad sense of signifying matter, as it is only through text that thoughts, meanings, and significations coming from objects are realised and become accessible (Todorov, 1984: 17-18).

Extending this to the author and their audience, rejecting the binary Saussurian sender-receiver model of communication, Bakhtin stresses the fundamental duality of utterer and receiver, where understanding is only achievable through a dynamic and relational interchange between the two through dialogue. A text is therefore effectively meaningless outside of the context of its creation and consumption. Emphasising the uniqueness of meaning in space and time, Bakhtin effectively moves beyond linguistics, so that the basic building block of discourse no longer lies *within* the text, but is captured by the *utterance*, a statement that is unique in space and time – a package encapsulating both text and context. Although Bakhtin developed these ideas independently of Derrida and Barthes, the parallels with poststructuralism’s emphasis on the decentred and relational nature of meaning are clear.

A central characteristic of Bakhtin’s concept of the utterance is its relatedness to other utterances, through what Kristeva presents as *intertextual* relationships (Kristeva, 1986), where each text is itself constructed from previous texts and discourses. In the same way that speaker and listener have a dialogical and identity-constitutive relationship with each other, each occurrence of a text relates to other texts and discourses across time and space.

Identity is a key aspect of intertextual analysis. For Bakhtin (Todorov, 1984: 43), identity is central to discourse, where the focus is not on what the listener might be saying, but ‘oriented toward what that person is.’ As with texts, Bakhtin also presents identity as fundamentally dialogical and relational, where ‘we can never see ourselves as a whole; the other is necessary to accomplish, even if

temporarily, a perception of the self that the individual can achieve only partially with respect to himself. Only someone else's gaze can give me the feeling that I form a totality' (Todorov, 1984: 95). Bakhtin's perspective here has clear parallels in both Mead's social Self, and a Derridean relational perspective to language. It is this emphasis on identity, and on its decentred, relational, and unstable nature, that I propose makes intertextuality particularly relevant for addressing a poststructural approach to the construction of organisational identity.

I have noted that few works addressing intertextuality have appeared in the organisational literature. Despite, or perhaps because of, this limited coverage, studies that have considered it have taken a variety of approaches to the concept. Although works in other disciplines, for example Hansen (2006) in the field of international relations, have presented intertextuality within an explicitly poststructural theoretical framework, none of the studies in the organisational literature that I refer to here do so. Fairclough (1992) adopts intertextual analysis as a key element in a broader approach to critical discourse analysis, where he argues that it is not possible to analyse the content of texts without also considering their form, organisation, and their relationship to wider discourses. His discourse-focused conceptualisation of intertextuality explores 'how texts selectively draw upon orders of discourse – the particular configurations of conventionalized practices (genres, discourses, narratives, etc.) which are available to text producers and interpreters in particular social circumstances...' where texts are dependent upon broader social and historical discourses (Fairclough, 1992: 194-5). He draws a distinction between *intertextual* relations between texts, and 'interdiscursivity', linking several discourses.

Shaw and Pecorari (2013) propose a very different interpretation of intertextual analysis. Examining a longitudinal set of chairman's statements taken from corporate annual reports, they highlight the intertextual relationships between statements made *within* the set of texts, without referencing other texts or broader discourses. They explore patterns of repeated phraseology and acknowledged intertextuality (links explicitly referred to in the texts) within the

set of statements for an individual firm, basing their analysis upon Hohl Trillini and Quassdorf's (2010: 272) definition that 'intertextual processes involve, minimally, an earlier and a later text and an element from the former that is discernible in the latter.' Shaw and Pecorari identify intertextual relationships between statements by means of the computer-assisted identification and linking of *n-grams* – strings of words of length *n* which appear in more than one text. They note that explicit references to other texts within their sets of texts were quite rare, but that there was a great deal of intertextuality in the form of chunks of language repeated across statements.

Maclean et al. (2016: 2) present intertextuality as a method that can be used as part of an historical approach to the study of organisations. They explore how managers at Proctor and Gamble used rhetorical techniques to draw on previous company texts, revealing an intertextual network resembling 'a tapestry woven by multiple hands that tells an unfolding story over a prolonged period to generate a blended but evolving discourse,' where this intertextual network emphasises the dynamic and unstable nature of organisational narratives. Following O'Connor (2002), they suggest that the active management of an organisation's history over an extended period demands particular *intertextual competence* on the part of executives, relating this to the concept of rhetorical history (Foster et al., 2011; Suddaby et al., 2010) and placing particular emphasis on *intertextual management* – the ability of managers to reconcile 'deep-rooted structures' and discontinuities. Their focus, therefore, is on intertextuality as part of a deliberate rhetorical strategy by organisational actors.

Finally, Lupu and Sandu (2017), basing their interpretation of intertextuality on Fairclough's (1992) conceptualisation, employ a critical discourse analysis of documents relating to a contested privatisation, where they use intertextuality to explore how those documents draw upon texts and discourses *external* to the organisation. They argue that organisational legitimacy relies upon multiple processes of intertextuality linking corporate narratives and media texts, emphasising the discursive and dialogical aspects of corporate communication and legitimation processes. They suggest that there is a need to examine not

only the content of texts but also their trajectories: where they emanate from, how they are used by organisational actors, and what connections are established between them. They argue that their longitudinal perspective enables an understanding of how context shapes the production of corporate narratives, and how texts contribute to the production of that context.

In my review of the OI literature I have found few references to intertextuality, and those that do make no direct references to poststructuralism, to Bakhtin or to Kristeva, except for Carlsen (2014: 13), who cites Bakhtin in the context of the authoring of identities ‘through borrowing, shaping, and molding story elements from many sources and in many relational configurations.’ Both Brown (2006: 736), writing of narratives of reciprocal and dynamic power relationships forming ‘an intertextual (self-referencing) network,’ and Wagner and Pedersen (2014: 169), noting ‘intertextual references’ and ‘intertextual statements’, reference Fairclough’s (1992) CDA conceptualisation of intertextuality, sharing Fairclough’s focus on the interdiscursive, rather than the intertextual per se.

In my analysis, I have adopted a poststructural conception of intertextuality, where I address the network of texts and discourses in my analysis as fundamentally dialogical, with meaning decentred across both spatial and temporal dimensions (Hansen, 2006: 47-49). Following Shaw and Pecorari (2013), I examine intertextuality at the level of individual identity claims, or statements, within texts, but I also explore how these statements draw from other texts and discourses, both internal and external to the organisation. Although my operationalisation of intertextuality most closely follows the approach taken by Hansen (2006), I also adapt elements from Fairclough (1992) and from Shaw and Pecorari (2013) to construct an approach to intertextuality that addresses my methodological research question, specifically to explore a poststructural focus on the distributed and contextual nature of identity claims in organisational texts. I describe my approach to intertextual analysis in more detail in Chapter 6.

## Discourse analysis

As I have discussed in my Introduction, discourse analysis encapsulates a broad range of methods and theoretical perspectives. I have emphasised the centrality of discourse for my chosen approach to poststructuralism, based upon Foucault (1972), Laclau and Mouffe (1985), and Hansen (2006), where poststructuralists view language as constitutive for what is brought into being, with 'reality' constructed through discursive practice (Hansen, 2006: 17). I have noted that Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 105) define discourse as the 'structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice.' Although discourses strive to fix meaning around a closed structure, following Derrida's insistence on the indeterminacy of any text, there are always slips and instabilities, where 'neither absolute fixity nor absolute non-fixity is possible' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111). I have followed Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Hansen (2006) in locating discourse broadly 'at the level of explicit articulations' (Hansen, 2006: 41), where a poststructural discourse analysis necessarily encompasses the analysis of both individual texts and broader 'systems' of articulations.

However, I have also noted that Foucault (1972) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) were primarily concerned with the theoretical rather than the methodological aspects of discourse. Burr (1995: 178) notes two broad approaches to discourse analysis: a *micro* ('small d') approach – the study of language in everyday interactions within texts; and a *macro* ('big D') approach, derived from Foucault, focusing on discourses as extra-textual social constructions that themselves serve to construct texts. Although these differing approaches to discourse have very different empirical and methodological implications, both share a common focus on the construction of meaning through language, and I believe that both can form the basis of useful, and complementary, methods for the analysis of texts and broader discourses.

The growth in popularity of discourse analysis in the organisational literature can be associated with the 'linguistic turn', and a focus on culture and symbolism within organisations, dating from the 1980s onwards (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000a), with increasing attention given to narratives (Czarniawska,

1997, Czarniawska, 1998) and to stories (Boje, 2008, Gabriel, 2000). Hardy (2001) proposes that discourse analysis enables the incorporation of the 'linguistic turn' into the study of organisations through the problematisation of language. Cederström and Spicer (2014: 179) associate the rise of interest in discourse with a growing awareness that the production, distribution and consumption of texts constitutes a central aspect of organisational life, with employees spending large parts of their days talking in meetings, writing reports, producing and delivering PowerPoint slides, and writing and reading emails.

The increasing importance of discourse analysis as a methodological approach in organisational research has attracted criticism. Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) complain that it is often used in the literature in vague and all-embracing ways, where almost everything is presented as constituted by discourse, thus excluding, for example, the role of materiality and practice. They also criticise what they see as loose definitions of 'context', where writers present it as the source of agency and determinism, but are unclear on what it does and does not include, and exactly *how* discourse is supposed to constitute reality. In a response to Alvesson and Kärreman, Mumby (2011: 1159) argues that one of the key problems with their consideration of the split between the material and the discursive is that 'the material is rarely "just that," nor is it always visible'. How, for example, asks Mumby, do we adequately account for class in our analyses 'if we don't examine the ways that the material (including the economic and political) is normalised through discourses and various systems of signification?' He adds that whilst no-one would want to deny the material existence of cars, cooking, cleaning, bridges etc., what is interesting from a discourse perspective is the politics of their construction in the context of mediated realities.

Ravasi and Canato (2013: 194) have argued for the greater application of techniques of linguistic and discourse analysis in the OI literature, noting that relatively few studies have explored these approaches empirically. Amongst those that do, Brown (2006), presenting a narrative approach to collective identities, characterises organisations' identities as discursive constructs.

Coupland and Brown (2004: 1325) use a discourse analytic methodology in the study of online email exchanges, where they present organisational identities 'as discursive achievements, and stakeholders in organizations as rhetors (persuaders) engaged in ongoing identity-centred debates.' They characterise texts as sites both of social action and of argument between internal and external organisational stakeholders. Approaching discourse from the perspective of social psychology, not focusing exclusively on language, Ran and Duimering (2007: 165) address 'the cognitive processes operating through discourse rather than...the semantic contents or themes referenced by discourse,' exploring how language is used in identity claims to construct OI through cognitive processes of categorisation. Ybema et al. (2009: 303) consider how a discursive perspective presents identity as constituted through situated practices of talking and writing, where 'taking language seriously' enables researchers to begin to understand the processes of identity formation and construction in everyday organisational talk and texts. Finally, from an institutionalist perspective, Wagner and Pedersen (2014: 163) use a CDA framework based on Fairclough (1992) in order to study key discourses in texts published by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), proposing that language exists in an interplay with institutions, where, as well as being socially constitutive, discourses are themselves constrained, challenged and changed by wider social practice.

In my analysis, I am concerned with discourse at both the micro and the macro level. At the macro level, I consider key industry discourses that emerge from a variety of industry texts. At the micro level, I undertake an analysis of corporate annual reports and industry texts as discourses in themselves. I present both macro and micro approaches within a poststructural discursive framework, broadly following Hansen's (2006: 37) approach, where 'identity is at the ontological and epistemological centre of poststructuralist discourse analysis.'

Following Gee's (1999: 8) approach to discourse analysis, I conceptualise organisational texts as *identity discourses*, where identity construction is a key purpose of texts. For Gee, authors focus on framing a text for its intended audience and constructing language around how they want that audience to 'be,

think, feel and behave' – to position them to certain identities. For Gee, discourses are also concerned not only with constructing the identity of the Self, but also that of the Other, where we 'build identities for others as a way to build ones for ourselves' (Gee, 1999: 33). I argue that this aspect of Gee's approach reflects the relationality of a poststructural conception of identity.

For Gee (1999: 21-22), the role of the audience is also critical to the construction of identity through discourse, where audience members give a text specific meanings based both on how it is constructed and the context in which they receive it, invariably preparing a response to the text, regardless of whether that response is ever delivered. For Gee then, mirroring both Bakhtin (Todorov, 1984) and poststructuralist thinking (Hansen, 2006: 6-7), identity construction is inherently dialogical, with audience and author essential to the construction of the other's identity.

Although Gee does not position his work within a poststructural theoretical perspective, I argue that the key elements of his approach reflect a poststructural conception of identity. Both approaches are sceptical of the relationship between beliefs and their expression, and of the totalising narratives imposed on the world by organisational actors, and both privilege texts as sites of meaning. Furthermore, both Gee and poststructuralists seek to decentre the Self, emphasising the mutually constitutive and relational roles of the Self and the Other.

Taking an explicitly poststructural perspective, Hansen (2006: 20) focuses on the macro aspect of discourse, exploring the intertextual constitution of representations in texts from broader discourses. She highlights some of the methodological challenges inherent in a poststructural analysis of discourses. Following Foucault (1972), Hansen argues that, unlike texts, that can be identified, referenced and isolated, discourses are potentially infinitely fluid, multiple, and contestable. From a poststructuralist perspective, discourses strive to fix meaning around a closed structure that can never be entirely complete, so that both their existence and their meaning are necessarily ambiguous and contestable (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111). Hansen (2006: 51)



emphasises that discourses are analytical constructions, not empirical objects, only identifiable through the (subjective) reading of texts, where there are potentially as many discourses as there are texts.

### **Multimodality**

I have noted that the chief data source for my analysis, a set of corporate annual reports, are texts comprising visual as well as verbal elements, where I propose that both modes are integral to the construction of organisational identity. However, a multimodal approach not only acknowledges multiple means of meaning-making, but attempts to offer a unified approach, with multiple modes contributing to meaning concurrently. The concept of multimodality is rooted in the social semiotic theory of Halliday (1978), which both builds on and challenges the semiotic theory of Saussure (1916/1977) with its central concern for signs and signifiers. Social semiotics, as the name suggests, focuses on the social basis of signs. Following Foucault, Halliday's conception also incorporated concerns for power, leading to the development of a critical approach to semiotics. Kress (2009: 72) notes that this critical approach to linguistics, with power and its effects at its core, evolved into the 'larger and theoretically more diffuse project of critical discourse analysis.'

Kress (2009: 56) contends that social semiotics rests on a set of fundamental assumptions: Signs are always newly made by individuals in social interaction, rather than, as Saussure argued, simply being selected from pre-formed elements. Signs are *motivated*, rather than arbitrary relations of meaning and form, meaning that the relationship between meaning and form may be carefully selected by individuals when they make signs. This motivated relation between form and meaning is based on, and arises out of, the *interest* of makers of signs, where they act in order to fulfil their own (political) requirements. The forms/signifiers used in the making of signs by individuals in social interaction in turn become part of the overall semiotic resources of a culture. Finally, the relationship between form and meaning is one of *aptness*, of a best fit, where the form of the signifier suggests itself as suitable for the expression of the meaning – the signified – which is to be realised. Aptness means that the form

used has the requisite features to be the carrier of the meaning. In focusing on the context of language production, rather than simply its content, social semiotics highlights the various means or *modes* by which meaning is constructed and communicated, and is concerned with how these modes may construct meanings in different ways.

Whereas mainstream linguistic theories separate meaning and form, Kress (2009: 61) therefore emphasises that multimodal social semiotics deals regards meaning and form as an integrated whole. Moreover, in social semiotics the environments and circumstances of use are always also an integral part of the making of signs. In contrast to Saussure, who considered that semiotic systems changed only slowly, both temporally and socially, social semiotics emphasises variability in semiotic practices, with individuals having considerable agency in framing usage, where they actively *design* signs in order to make meaning and to frame communication. Kress (2009: 26) also emphasises that the importance of power means that rhetoric becomes an important aspect of meaning-making and communication, as individuals seek to construct meanings to persuade audiences.

Kress (2009: 79) defines a mode as 'a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning,' where examples of modes include images, writing, music and speech. In contrast to Saussure's abstract understanding of language, for Kress (2009: 13) 'the study of modes in multimodal social semiotics focuses on the material, the specific, making of signs now, in this environment for this occasion' and 'represents a move away from high abstraction to the specific, the material; from the mentalistic to the bodily.' Bezemer (2012) emphasises that multimodality assumes that representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which contribute to meaning. Kress (2009: 28) contends that such 'modal ensembles', are based on *designs*, selections and arrangements of resources that make a specific message about a particular issue for a particular audience. He also notes that design rests on the possibility of choice and that choice is always circumscribed by power.

Kress (2009: 79-81) emphasises that multimodal semiotic theory does not negate the importance of language in meaning-making, rather arguing that it presents language as one means among others, therefore exposing the boundedness of language. Different modes offer different potentialities or *affordances* for making meaning. He notes that there are also fundamental differences as well as commonalities within modes, for example, speech in different languages often varies greatly in terms of intonation, although all speech occurs over time, with one clause following another. The distinct affordances of different modes allow them to carry out specific semiotic work. However, Kress points out that the uses of modes are constantly reshaped according to the social requirements of those who make meanings and reflecting changes in social practices.

Addressing the reasons why theorisations of multimodality have only emerged in the last two decades, Kress (2009: 5-6) argues that, in a globalising world with increasingly complex and dynamic communication, accompanied by technological shifts from the printed book to the screen and from the word to the image, a unified approach to semiotics that can encompass various means of meaning-making and that does not privilege verbal text is clearly required. For Kress the 'effects of globalisation are clear. From (relative) permanence and stability there has been a marked shift to provisionality and instability.' He argues that, in such a world, the commonly understood notion of grammar, with its relatively fixed rules, is no longer useful, and should be replaced with the concept of *resources*, where individuals construct meanings according to what they need at that time, where such semiotic resources are 'socially made and therefore carry the discernible regularities of social occasions, events and hence a certain stability; they are never fixed, let alone rigidly fixed' (Kress, 2009: 9).

The recent interest in multimodal approaches into organisation theory can be partly traced to concerns that the perceived dominance of the 'linguistic turn' in organisation theory has led to a shift away from the 'reality' of organisations (e.g. Reed, 2005). Other scholars have expressed concerns that a focus on language ignores other avenues of meaning-making, for example the visual

(Iedema, 2007, Meyer et al., 2013, Bell et al., 2014), or the material (Carlile and Langley, 2013, Jarzabkowski et al., 2013).

A multimodal approach is also attractive to empirical researchers concerned with the lack of methodologies for analysing the increasingly visual nature of organisational documents, electronic and multimedia sources (Warren, 2009, Meyer et al., 2013, Davison and Warren, 2017), where Boxenbaum et al. (2018: 598) note that contemporary organisations ‘increasingly rely on images, logos, videos, building materials, graphic and product design, and a range of other material and visual tools and expressions to compete, communicate, form identity and organize their activities.’ Finally, multimodality is a relevant concept for those interested in the use of research methods utilising modes of communication other than verbal language, for example video (Rose, 2007, Whiting et al., 2018, LeBaron et al., 2018).

Organisational scholars who are proponents of a multimodal approach accept that consideration of the concept in organisation theory is still in its early stages, with Höllerer et al. (2017: 1) noting that systematic research on multimodality ‘has remained rather sparse in our domain of scholarly inquiry.’ Boxenbaum et al. (2018: 598) argue that, at present, ‘our theories of organizations are ill equipped to capture the role that materiality and visuality play in the ways in which organizational actors engage with novel ideas and innovations.’ Höllerer et al. (2017: 1) propose that one of the reasons for this is that ‘multimodality is notoriously difficult to pin down and to define precisely.’ They also note that research on multimodality is developing from an initial focus on individual modes to work encompassing multiple modes, and only then towards a more ‘radically multimodal’ phase, where researchers address both the differentiation and the integration of modes simultaneously, what Zilber (2017) proposes as a ‘strong’ approach to multimodality.

In recent work on multimodality in organisational theory, Höllerer et al. (2018b), examining the visual and textual of newspaper reporting of the global financial crisis, argue that multimodal compositions of verbal text, images, and other visual artefacts can constitute a key resource for sensemaking and sensegiving.

Puyou and Quattrone (2018) explore how the visual and material dimensions of accounts provided social actors with an opportunity to explore their positions and ties within a community, aiming to contribute to the literature on legitimacy by investigating its material and visual dimensions.

Recent research on multimodality has examined identity using a multimodal approach (Bullinger, 2017, Forgues and May, 2017, Jones and Svejenova, 2017). A number of scholars have considered the role of the visual in the construction of organisational identity. Indeed, the concept of OI was preceded by interest in the visual identity of organisations (Olins, 1978). Albert and Whetten (1985) themselves noted how OI could be expressed through, for example, logos, products and the appearance of a corporate headquarters. Oberg et al. (2017) examine OI change through the study of changing university logos. Halgin et al. (2018) analyse depictions of organisations on covers of BusinessWeek magazine, examining complementarity between visual and verbal modes, where they argue that verbal text highlights the oppositional nature of paradox while the visual image offers interpretations for the management of these tensions. In terms of research methods for OI that embrace modes other than verbal language, Oliver and Roos (2007) have explored how research subjects expressed their thoughts around OI through the use of three dimensional toy models, Stiles (2014) examines the use of visual methods in gaining understandings of research subjects' understanding of OI through representations in drawings, and Warren and Parker (2009) have researched professional identity amongst accountants using the visual representations of photographs as elicitation tools.

I propose that a multimodal, social semiotic approach complements the other approaches that I have adopted in this thesis, as well as broadly supporting a poststructural perspective in that social semiotics and poststructuralism are both sceptical of definitive meanings and both emphasise the contextual, dynamic, and provisional nature of meaning. Kress (2009: 26) argues that the semiotic world is 'marked by instability and provisionality, every event of communication is in principle unpredictable in its form, structure and in its "unfolding".' Both also highlight the role of power in the social construction of meaning, with Kress

(2009: 26) proposing that the role of power in social semiotics demands a rhetorical approach to communication, where the rhetor's *interests* need to be fully acknowledged, and where such a rhetorical approach 'draws on the resources both of competence and of critique and utilises them in the process of design.'

In terms of multimodality, although Derrida focused on verbal text, it has been argued that a Derridean approach to deconstruction could equally be applied to visual images (Campbell, 2012). Barthes clearly recognised the importance of the visual in communication (Barthes, 1957/1972), although Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 17) argue that Barthes presents the visual primarily as supplemental to verbal text, where the fundamental ambiguity of the image requires language to 'rescue it', therefore negating a fully multimodal approach.

### **Argumentation**

I have argued that a key element of a poststructural identity is its endless contestability, where texts are sites of political conflict rather than neutral mechanisms for communication (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). I therefore propose that texts and discourses should be analysed with a concern for how they construct arguments and how audiences react to these arguments. Kilduff and Mehra (1997: 464-5) stress that postmodernists 'refuse to exempt any text from rhetorical examination, no matter how objective sounding, no matter how matter-of-fact the text may appear to be. All texts represent a series of choices concerning how arguments should be presented, and these choices are embodied in the text.' I argue that approaches to discourse analysis generally pay insufficient account to this contested nature of discourse, where the ongoing struggle between privileged and devalued meanings is central to a poststructural conception of language (Hansen, 2006: 19). I have therefore turned to Billig's (1996) *Arguing and Thinking*, which provides a theoretical foundation for the study of argumentation in texts. Billig proposes that argumentation and rhetoric are central to social life and pervasive within texts. Furthermore, I believe that his view that a 'rhetorical approach stresses the two-sidedness of human thinking and of our conceptual capacities,' mirrors the

poststructuralist concern for the contestable and unstable nature of language (Billig, 1996: 76).

I propose that an emphasis on the importance of argumentation in organisational texts supports a poststructural approach to the study of identity, where identity claims need to be understood within their broader argumentative and presentational context, also taking into consideration their authors and audiences (Derrida, 1988: 144-5). Bakhtin, cited in (Holquist, 1981: 268-9) argues that once, 'rhetorical discourse is brought into the study with all its living diversity, it cannot fail to have a deeply revolutionary influence on linguistics and on the philosophy of language.' A concern with argumentation reflects the poststructuralist scepticism towards 'rational' discourse. Billig (1996: 79) also shares with Bakhtin a dialogical approach, where argumentation and dialogue, rather than logical and rational processes, are the basis of social life. Mirroring the intertextual focus on context, Billig (1996: 121-122) also emphasises that argument is always entwined with its context, where the meaning of a text can be unclear if its argumentative context is ignored.

Billig (1996) seeks to rehabilitate rhetoric, specifically relating to its role as the aspect of argumentation concerned with its presentation, as a central feature of the analysis of texts, referencing Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) as the modern authority in this area. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca consider argumentation above all in its practical effects, as it attempts to bring about some action on the part of its audience, emphasising the performative nature of discourse over its communicative role. Finally, where Billig and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca focus on argumentation in verbal text, Meyer et al. (2013) highlight the importance of the visual in argumentation and rhetoric. This is very relevant for my analysis, as corporate annual reports incorporate many visual elements, for example making extensive use of photographs, charts and diagrams, where this ties in to my approach to annual reports as multimodal documents.

There have been few direct references to Billig's 1996 work on argumentation within the OI literature. Coupland and Brown (2004: 1326), in their analysis of

online email exchanges, propose that the argumentative context of their study suggested that interactants were not simply engaged in persuading homogenous audiences, but were 'taking up a position in a multi-voiced controversy.' Rather more attention has been devoted to the use of rhetoric in the broader study of organisational texts. Sillince and Brown (2009: 1830) explore the rhetorical construction of multiple identities by organisational actors seeking to claim legitimacy for their organisations. Golant et al. (2014: 1) highlight the rhetorical device of *dissociation* – a method of distinguishing the claim of an accurate or essential interpretation of core and distinctive values from a peripheral or apparent understanding – in their study of how leaders actively construct fresh potentialities for organisational change. Finally, Moufahim et al. (2014) analyse how a political organisation used rhetorical framing and strategies to construct its collective identity.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I have presented a detailed consideration of a poststructural methodological approach to the study of organisational identity. I have mapped the key elements of a poststructural theory of OI to the key requirements for a poststructural methodological approach which involve: a focus on the study of texts and discourses; a contextual spatial and temporal approach to data analysis; a requirement to study both focal and related identities as mutually constituted; the importance of considering other modes of communication outside of verbal language; and the need to account for the contested nature of identity. I have identified four broad methodological approaches that I propose are suitable for such a poststructural analysis of OI: intertextual analysis, discourse analysis, multimodality, and argumentation.

I have highlighted some of the key criticisms of a poststructural methodology, and provided responses to these criticisms. I have critically reviewed a broad range of empirical studies in the organisational literature that have either adopted a poststructural methodology or have used one or other of the four methodological approaches that I have proposed for my analysis, with a focus on studies addressing identity.



In the next chapter, I begin to set out the specific elements of my empirical approach to the poststructural study of OI. Based upon the key elements of the poststructural methodological approach that I have set out in this chapter, I address my selection of an appropriate research context and data sources. I first assess the suitability of the UK B2B and professional magazine publishing industry for my research, addressing some of the potential issues with my selection. I then turn to my principal data source, corporate annual reports, assessing their suitability for my analysis and reviewing previous literature in this area, including a consideration of the feasibility of using annual reports for the study of OI, and the multimodal nature of annual reports. I also review the other data sources that I have used, including contemporary online industry blogs and industry reports. The discussion in my next chapter leads into Chapter 6, where I present my detailed methodology.

## CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH CONTEXT AND DATA

As I set out in my Introduction, my thesis originated with my interest in the transformational change that the UK magazine publishing industry was undergoing in the period following the turn of the century, where I was involved a small way in some of those changes. My research context focuses specifically on firms operating in the business-to-business (B2B) magazine sector, on the basis that I have been more familiar with that sector than with consumer magazines, although the issues faced by firms in both sectors were broadly similar. I selected the period 2004-13 for my analysis primarily because the end-date coincided with the start of my data analysis, and because, after my initial analysis of annual reports, I considered that a ten-year period would be sufficient to undertake an intertextual analysis of my data, but would also allow me to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the identity work of each of the annual reports in my analysis (in total thirty reports). I was also fortunate that the year 2008, with the global financial crisis, fell in the middle of my analysis, enabling me to explore how identity work in the reports changed in response to the crisis.

In 2004, at the start of my period of analysis, the UK magazine publishing industry focused largely on publishing print magazines. For firms operating in the (B2B) area, print advertising, particularly job vacancies, was the chief source of revenue. Over the next ten years however, the rise of digital technologies, primarily relating to the Internet, resulted in the increasing marginalisation of the print magazine as a product and the undermining of the business models that supported it, forcing firms in the industry to find new ways to deliver revenue and profit. There proved to be no simple solution to this problem, and by 2013, at the end of my period, the B2B and professional magazine publishing industry in the UK had fragmented, as firms struggled to match their earlier success by introducing a wide range of new products and business models. As I discuss in this thesis, these changes had profound implications for the identity of both the industry and the firms operating within it.

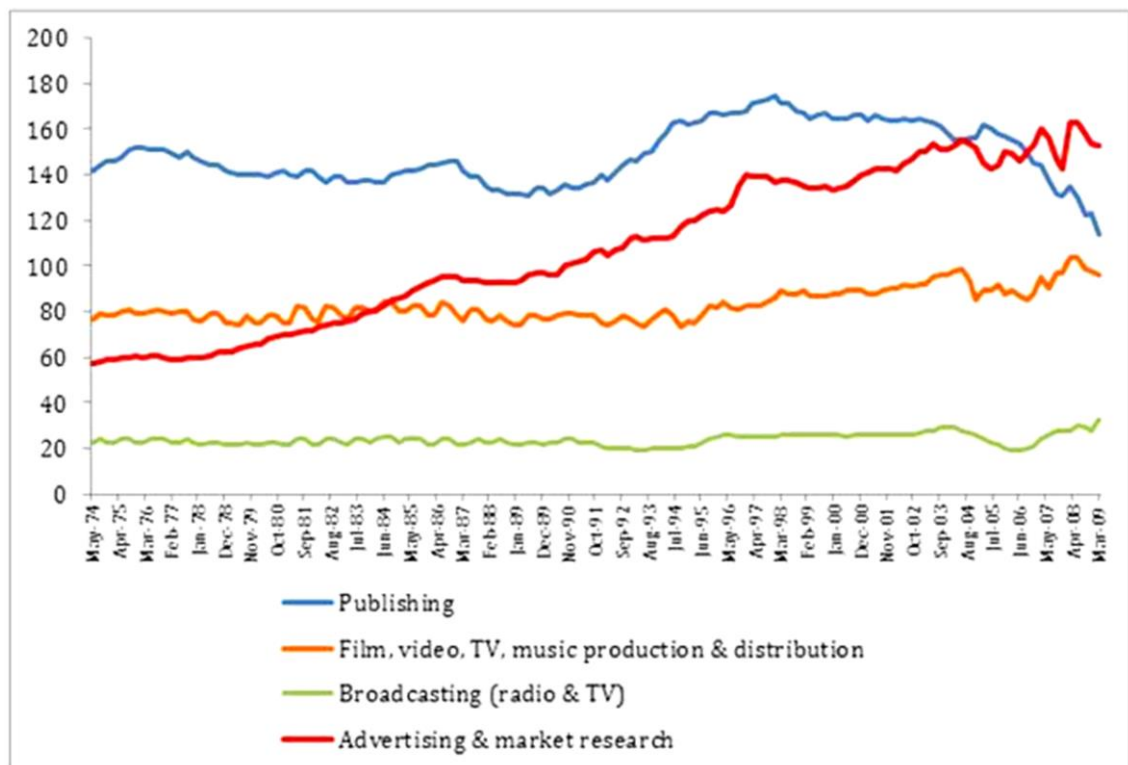
Until the emergence of the Internet in the late 1990s, the print magazine had been the primary product, and the principal source of revenue, for the magazine publishing industry in the UK for around 150 years. Compaine and Gomery (2000) define a magazine as a publication that is printed periodically, with a minimum of four copies per year. They define a business, professional, or trade magazine as a publication designed to provide a vehicle for advertisers to reach niche customers for their products and services, provided to readers either on a paid-for basis or through controlled distribution, with readers sent the magazines free of charge. Stam and Scott (2014) note that, in the UK, 'Lloyd's List', first published in 1734, is often regarded as the earliest trade publication, although perhaps William Reed's launch of 'The Grocer' in 1862 is a more appropriate date for the start of the B2B publishing industry.

Despite the long-term dominance of the print magazine as a product, technology change in various forms is a recurring theme in the history of the UK magazine industry, from the introduction of presses capable of printing mass market publications, to the rise of the railways allowing for cheap and efficient postal services. Cox and Mowatt (2008) argue that new technology had a significant impact on the industry in the 1980s and 1990s, where the introduction of desktop publishing (DTP) helped to drive down production costs, boost margins, and encourage previously stifled innovation. Driver and Gillespie (1992) note that during this period of change the industry in the UK, previously dominated by established firms, was infiltrated by new entrants able to take advantage of the flexibility of the new technology in order to innovate, and who forced the bigger players to become more responsive to the needs of consumers. Cox and Mowatt (2008) highlight a rapid rise in the number of magazine titles published in the 1990s, so that the industry was at its largest and most profitable as it was about to face its biggest challenge.

From the late 1990s, technology change in the industry was primarily associated with the development of the Internet, the new technology regarded both as an existential challenge to the industry, its products and business models, and a source of seemingly limitless opportunities. Navasky and Cornog (2012) argue that debates around the impact of the Internet on the industry in

this period followed a chronological development, with early optimism replaced by a more cautious optimism, and then by uncertainty. In the middle of the 2000s, both publishers and scholars still presented the Internet largely as a complementary platform to print, with Kuivalainen et al. (2007) providing examples of web sites operating successfully alongside print magazines. In 2008, in the midst of the financial crash, Ala-Fossi et al. (2008) argued that the Internet did not fundamentally challenge the core competencies of magazine publishers, claiming that the industry was gradually evolving a multi-platform strategy. Even prior to that, however, Kaiser and Kongsted (2005) assumed that online growth would ultimately shrink demand for print products. By the end of my period of study, it was clear that the print magazine, as well as its underlying business models, was undergoing a period of dramatic, if not terminal, decline, with its supporters, such as Stam and Scott (2014), reduced to defiant assertions of the magazine’s dogged ability to survive in a largely hostile world.

**Figure 1: Employment in selected UK media and creative industries, 1974-2009**



Source: Kirwan (2013), figures from the Office for National Statistics

The UK publishing industry suffered a sharp decline in employment from 2005, as is clear from Figure 1 (where the statistics include all publishing activities, not only the magazine sector). This fall clearly predated the 2008 financial crash, indicating a structural rather than cyclical basis for the decline. Kirwan (2013) estimates that between 2005 and 2009 the magazine publishing industry lost around 35% of its workforce, together with many of its publications. Figure 2 illustrates the dramatic impact of the 2008 financial crash on revenues in the global B2B magazine industry, as print advertising revenues collapsed. In 2010, a consultancy report claimed that the industry was rapidly abandoning print for digital, estimating that leading firms were already generating 40-50% of their revenue online (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010b: 4).

Figure 2: Global B2B publishing growth, 2006-14



Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers (2010b: 12)

In addition to substantial layoffs and magazine closures in the industry, firms were undergoing significant organisational change, seeking new business models, and attempting to cope with significantly lower margins. However, academic work exploring the impact of organisational change in publishing has tended to focus on the newspaper rather than the magazine industry with, for example, Gade and Perry (2003) examining factors driving change in a US newspaper from 1996 to 2000, including declining readership and new media competition, and highlighting the difficulties faced in changing an established culture.

I argue that this background of transformational change in the magazine publishing industry, both in the UK and globally, means that questions of identity inevitably came to the fore at multiple levels. The identity of the industry itself was under threat, with questions around whether its core print products could be transferred to the digital realm without losing their essential character, and whether established business models could be updated to adapt to a changing marketplace. For firms, extending their activities beyond those traditionally considered as falling within publishing, or, increasingly, divesting their publishing activities entirely, existential questions of who they were and what they did become increasingly relevant.

## **SELECTION OF INDUSTRY CONTEXT AND CASES**

I have noted that I decided to focus my analysis on firms in the UK business-to-business (B2B) and professional publishing industry partly because of my personal familiarity with this sector during the period of my study, where I was very aware of the transformational changes underway in the industry. Although consumer magazine publishers were subject to similar challenges, the distinctive business model of B2B publishers proved to be particularly susceptible to disruption from new technology. The selection of firms from the same sector has also allowed for a comparative analysis, enabling me to trace the different responses of firms to similar external pressures. The cases that I selected for my analysis consist of three of the largest publicly listed UK magazine publishing firms: UBM, Centaur, and Future Publishing. Future Publishing would generally be classified primarily as a consumer publisher rather than B2B, having little reliance on recruitment advertising at the start of my period. However, I felt justified to include them as one of my cases because during the period of my study their annual reports emphasised the professional audience that many of their products were aimed at, with Future's CEO claiming that the 'economics of Future are more comparable to those of a business to business publisher rather than those of a general business to consumer publisher' (quoted in David Shaw, GRID Media Blog: 22 January 2008). In Appendix 1, I provide brief biographies of each of the three firms.

In examining organisational identity in an industry undergoing transformational change, I concede that I am open to charges of confirmation bias, selecting the very phenomenon that I seek to prove. Foreman and Whetten argue that findings of instability in OI are 'in large part due to the fact that most studies look at it in flux (e.g., during organizational change) and examine an "extreme case",' so that other contexts where OI might be quite stable are overlooked (Foreman and Whetten, 2016: 57). I believe that, although my context might be an 'extreme' case, that many contemporary firms and industries are increasingly finding themselves in such states of 'flux', so that the study of OI in such contexts may increasingly reflect 'normal' rather than extreme cases.

## **PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY**

I have highlighted a burgeoning body of empirical work in the OI literature. However, there have been few studies on OI focused directly on the publishing industry. In this section, I consider studies in this area, but I also extend my discussion to empirical work that explores identity at the individual level in the publishing industry, and to studies of OI in other media and creative industries.

Ybema (2010) describes how employees at a Dutch newspaper sought to construct its OI, highlighting discontinuities and tensions as journalists discursively constructed a contrast between legacies from a common past and plans for the future. Ybema (2014) considers how the same newspaper's editors used history as a resource for identity construction. Antal and Strauß (2014) explore the impact of artistic interventions on OI in a range of organisations, with one of their cases a textbook publisher. Perkmann and Spicer (2014) examine how emerging organisations take form and establish their OI, using a grassroots media collective as a case study, and Kozica et al. (2015) argue that a 'stable state of instability' characterises the continual reconstruction of the OI of the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia.

Other studies have focused on personal and professional identities within the publishing industry. For example, Fagerling and Norbäck (2005) investigate the tensions between journalistic values and commercial necessity in the social



identities of journalists when a newspaper introduced an online edition. Daymon and Ybema (1999) examine how members of media organisations coped with increasingly commercialised working environments, comparing a Dutch newspaper and a British television station. Deuze (2005; 2008) and Elefante and Deuze (2012) focus on the professional identities of journalists and media workers in the context of industry change.

Institutional and population ecology scholars have used the newspaper and publishing industries as contexts in order to explore identity-related themes. Endo (2012) writes about resistance to institutional change in the Japanese publishing industry. Thornton et al. (2005) discuss institutional change across several industries, including publishing. Thornton and Ocasio (1999) and Thornton (2004) explore institutional logics in higher education publishing. From a population ecology perspective, research into the distribution of newspaper publishers has been a popular theme (Carroll and Hannan, 1989; 2000) .

Researchers have also investigated OI in relation to other forms of media and creative organisation. Carlsen (2014) explores the role of the tacit in the construction of OI in a Scandinavian communications agency. Evans (2015) examines the link between OI, strategy and perceptions of competition in the US public radio industry. Voss et al. (2006) consider the impact on organisational performance of disagreements over OI in professional theatres, and Glynn (2000) investigates conflicting perceptions of OI in a professional orchestra.

Although the magazine publishing industry maintained a similar business model for 150 years, the challenge of the Internet did not constitute the first episode of profound technology change for the industry. However, the OI literature I have identified does not examine the implications of technology change on OI. Ybema (2010, 2014), focusing on how a newspaper's editors sought to construct the identity of the title, references fieldwork from 1998 and 2002, with the identity work of editors largely concerned with the changing social role of the newspaper in the context of broader social change, but does not consider technology. Kozica et al. (2015) focus on ongoing change in the identity of

Wikipedia, where technology is a facilitator of that change, but technology change per se is not a factor. The other works that I have referenced on the publishing industry addressing OI focus on particular aspects of identity, and do not consider identity change at all, with Antal and Strauß (2014) exploring the relationship between OI and organisational learning, and Perkmann and Spicer (2014) examining OI formation.

Some of the studies on individual and group identities in the publishing industry explore various aspects of change. Fagerling and Norbäck (2005) look at the changing social identities of newspaper employees associated with a move from content- to market-focused orientation resulting from the introduction of an online edition. Daymon and Ybema (1999), examining increasing commercialisation in media industries, find that technology change does play a role, although they identify this in the television industry, but not with the newspapers in their study.

Works in the area of institutional theory and population ecology on the publishing industry do not consider identity change at the level of the firm. Endo (2012) does consider the impact of technology, as well as regulatory change, on the industry, although he does not include identity as a central concept. Thornton (2005) touches on the changing identity of book publishers in the 1970s, as they moved from a view of publishing as a profession to publishing as a business and to a market logic. Thornton and Ocasio (1999) and Thornton (2004) focus on the move from an editorial to a market logic, but do not consider identity. Analysing long-term trends in the density of newspaper distribution across the US, (Carroll and Hannan, 1989; 2000) argue that processes of legitimation and competition determine distribution, but again do not consider identity as a factor.

Finally, with reference to studies of OI in other media and creative industries, Evans (2015) regards increased competition resulting from new technology as a central factor in OI change in the US public radio sector. Voss (2006) focuses on conflicting OI beliefs in professional theatres, with Glynn (2000) taking a similar approach to a study of professional orchestras, but neither considers OI

change or technology change in their respective sectors. Carlsen (2014) focuses on identity formation in a communications firm, and does not reference identity change.

Considering the importance of publishing in terms of its economic output and the number of people employed in the industry, as well as the considerable disruption to the industry following the introduction of new technology, particularly the Internet from the late 1990s, I consider that the examination of change from the perspective of identity, at the level of the individual, the firm and the industry, is an area clearly warranting further study. I have shown here that the existing literature has not really addressed this topic fully at any of these levels.

## **SELECTION OF DATA**

In this section, I introduce the data sources that I have selected for my analysis, and assess their suitability for the analysis of organisational identity from a poststructural perspective. I then review each of my selected data sources in turn, with a focus on corporate annual reports as the principal source that I have used in my analysis.

As I have noted in my Introduction, a poststructural methodology of discourse analysis focuses on the analysis of the explicit articulations of signs (Hansen, 2006: 41), where the construction of identity 'should therefore be situated inside a careful investigation of which signs are articulated by a particular discourse or text' (Hansen, 2006: 42). A poststructural study of identity therefore privileges the analysis of texts and discourses, where I have noted that these can include documents, the spoken word, and visual and material artefacts (Hansen, 2006: 23). Poststructural identity is decentred, fragmented and unstable, implying that multiple different identity claims will be found within a range of relevant texts and discourses, across both temporal and spatial dimensions, so that any analysis is required to study a variety of texts and discourses longitudinally (Hansen, 2006: 21, 44). A poststructural conception of identity assumes the relational construction of identity, based on the mutual constitution of the Self and multiple Others (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). This requirement again presumes that

any analysis is likely to require the study of a variety of texts and discourses, from both inside and outside of the organisation (Derrida, 1988: 144-5). Finally, poststructural identities are contestable, implying the need to analyse the use of argumentation and presentation within texts and discourses, again from both inside and outside of the organisation, allowing for the capture of a range of alternative views of identity, including marginalised views (Hansen, 2006: 6).

I have identified intertextual analysis as the key approach for my study of poststructural identity. Intertextual analysis requires an understanding of a broad range of texts and discourses, both temporally and spatially, in order to construct a dialogical network of relationships between texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: 55-7). My second approach, discourse analysis, requires an understanding of the context of texts, including their authors, audiences, and purposes, together with an analysis of broader discourses (Wood and Kroger, 2000; Gee, 1999). A multimodal approach goes beyond the analysis of verbal language, with the understanding that meaning (and identity) is constructed through multiple modes, taking into account the visual and material aspects of organisational documents (Kress, 2009). Finally, the study of argumentation within texts requires a close study of the construction of arguments within those texts, both within verbal text and in visual elements, as well as an understanding of the authors and audiences of the texts (Billig, 1996).

The principal data source that I have used for this thesis comprises a set of corporate annual reports published by the three firms that I have selected as cases, covering the period 2004-13. In addition to this, I have used online blogs authored by industry commentators, contemporary industry reports, press articles, institutional texts, and interviews with industry figures. I believe that these sources are suitable texts for the exploration of a poststructural approach to OI, as they represent a wide variety of contemporary voices on the industry, across a temporal period, allowing for an analysis of identity construction in texts from both a spatial and a temporal perspective. Following a brief consideration of my selection of cases for my study, in the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the sources that I have selected for my analysis in more detail, with a focus on corporate annual reports.

## Corporate annual reports

I have selected corporate annual reports as the principal data source for my analysis in this thesis. As rich sources of organisational data, available longitudinally, I propose that they support a poststructural analysis of organisational identity claims, although I acknowledge that they only reflect a certain narrow perspective on OI construction, namely the identity claims of senior managers, with alternative voices marginalised. In my analysis, I have examined annual reports as discourses in themselves, as nodes in an intertextual analysis, as multimodal texts, and as sites for an analysis of the use of argumentation and presentation in identity construction. In this section, I highlight that annual reports have been extensively used as sources for the study of organisations, and I propose that they provide a number of advantages in this regard: they are available in time series, making them suitable for longitudinal analysis; they have a broadly consistent format and content, so can be useful for comparative studies; and they are not retrospectively edited, so avoid some of the issues encountered with the retrospective collection of data. In terms of their use for the study of OI, Tripsas (2009) argues that they represent the salient concerns of firms, and are therefore suitable sources for OI claims.

However, I also recognise that annual reports have been criticised as sources on several grounds. They have been characterised as essentially corporate spin (Neu et al., 1998), or as solely representative of 'official' identity claims authored by senior managers and directed at external stakeholders, and therefore not reflective of the underlying identity beliefs of the rest of the organisation (Chreim, 2005). Although I acknowledge this limitation, I contend that identity claims made in annual reports will inevitably also be pertinent to identity discourses *within* the firm, on the basis that these documents are a key element in the firm's communication with both internal and external stakeholders, and that senior managers will have an interest in maintaining some consistency between internal and external communications.

Originally produced as a brief summary of financial accounts, the annual report has grown into a document providing ever more complex and regulated financial and corporate governance statements, accompanied by an increasing proportion of discretionary words and pictures. Davison (2011: 118) characterises reports as a 'powerful instrument of organisational communication, rich in content and image construction.' Davison and Skerratt (2007) note that they are also complex documents, with multiple authors addressing multiple purposes aimed at multiple audiences.

Although firms have considerable flexibility in determining both the content and the structure of their annual reports, Shaw and Pecorari (2013) note that contemporary reports tend to coalesce around a fairly standard structure both between firms and from year to year, with reports often largely templated from previous years, with occasional innovations in presentation. However, Beattie (2014: 120) finds that, whereas the financial statements in annual reports have changed only slowly over time, narrative sections change more frequently, often in response to external pressures. She identifies three particular influences: the changing nature of business; changing social attitudes with regard to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability; and systemic shocks such as the 2008 financial crisis. In the UK, changes to annual reports have been driven primarily by government legislation, in the form of *The Companies Act*, and regulation, from the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), which is enabled through UK legislation to govern reporting through a 'comply or explain' approach. The Companies Acts, FRC Corporate Governance Codes, and various other sources of institutional guidance and advice, have encouraged, and in some cases mandated, companies to use their annual reports to develop the scope and depth of their reporting.

At the same time that their scope has broadened, annual reports have also become much more visual documents. Scholars have highlighted their increasingly visual nature, with McKinstry (1996) noting the increased involvement of graphic designers in the production process, and Beattie et al. (2008) arguing that imagery in annual reports has become central to their role in impression management. A number of works have examined the role of visual

elements in the reports, including charts and photographs (Beattie and Jones, 1997, Beattie and Jones, 1992, Beattie and Jones, 2000, Ditlevsen, 2012, Anderson and Imperia, 1992, Benschop and Meihuizen, 2002, Campbell et al., 2009, Frownfelter-Lohrke and Fulkerson, 2001).

Although research has highlighted the role of the visual in contributing to meaning-making in annual reports, empirical analysis of visual elements has hitherto remained largely separate from analysis of the verbal text of the reports. Typically, visual elements are presented in terms of complementing or supplementing the meaning of the verbal text. However, even a cursory glance at a page from one of the annual reports from my analysis, as shown in Figure 3, reveals issues with such an approach, as the mixture of visual and textual elements on the page shows that verbal and visual modes are intertwined, their boundaries overlapping, for example with verbal text presented in different colours and font sizes, and text an integral part of visual elements. Furthermore, the placement of verbal and visual elements on the page is clearly not arbitrary, indicating a need to analyse the overall *design* of the text, encompassing both verbal text and visual elements in an integrated analysis of multimodal meaning-making.

Figure 3: Example page from 2011 UBM annual report



Source: UBM (2011: 10)



Extending the analysis of verbal language to encompass the consideration of visual elements of documents is just one aspect of multimodality, however, with organisational scholars also becoming interested in a multimodal approach because it embraces the material as well as the textual. Organisational documents clearly have a material presence. The annual reports in my analysis were designed for printing on glossy paper in an A4 format. They were therefore intended to be material artefacts, where this physicality would convey certain meanings to those who handled them. However, it is also clear that annual reports are increasingly consumed online in a digital format, rather than in their printed form, where report designers are afforded both more options in designing for interactivity, but less control over the medium through which their design is consumed, as digital formats increasingly become the 'primary text' in accounting reporting (Locke et al., 2018). In this thesis, bearing in mind this uncertainty around the reading of annual reports by their audiences, I have not considered the materiality of organisational identity, although I acknowledge that the material can be an important element of identity construction and meaning-making.

In terms of the authorship of annual reports, whereas they have traditionally been the responsibility of the CFO and finance team, the breadth of information demanded has increasingly required the input of a number of other key individuals and teams within, and in some cases external to, the organisation (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011a). Davison (2011: 124) claims that behind the 'onymity and pseudonymity' of reports are a hidden army of individual authors who remain anonymous, with ghost-writers often responsible for the statements of chairmen and CEOs. Beattie et al. (2004) agree that, although some sections, such as the chairman's statement, may have formal authorship attributed, the text is often, at least initially, drafted by someone else or by multiple authors as part of a complex process of scripting. In addition to in-house contributors, Lee (1994) notes that by the end of the 1980s professional design agencies were involved in the production of most corporate annual reports, and increasingly contributed to the messaging as well as the visual design of the reports.

Firms ostensibly produce their annual reports primarily with shareholders in mind as their key audience. However, writing from a US perspective, Anderson and Imperia (1992: 113) include in the potential target readership 'individual investors, potential customers, institutional investors, professional analysts, the interested public, bankers, leaders in the company's communities, financial reporters, union members and their leaders, a firm's suppliers, prospective purchasers, consumer groups, and even possible merger or acquisition candidates...present and future employees.' Frownfelter-Lohrke and Fulkerson (2001) likewise propose that companies prepare annual reports with a diverse audience in mind, noting research revealing that shareholders, employees, and other interested parties read the report. Ditlevsen (2012) argues that the diversity of the target audience (she highlights creditors, investment and credit analysts, the government and their agencies, employees, and society at large) contributes to the complexity of reports.

In considering corporate annual reports as texts for analysis, Rutherford (2005: 353) proposes that the narrative sections of the report should be studied as a distinct *genre* of communications, where genre theory posits that a genre is defined by recurring structural patterns which emerge from the objective and setting of the communication. He presents annual reports as 'a middle-range genre of corporate communication between organisations and their stakeholders...lying within the broader genre of accounting narration generally...' Alternatively, conceptualising reports as *narratives*, Beattie et al. (2008) divide the narrative sections of annual reports into those elements that tell a story and those that present specific data, where storytelling narratives include the chairman's statement, the chief executive's review, and the operating and financial review. Jameson (2000), however, identifies a more fragmented 'nonlinear hyperstructure' within annual reports, highlighting contrasting narrators, a variety of subgenres, and interaction between verbal and visual discourse, where, encouraged to create their own navigation through the report, readers effectively become co-narrators.

Graves et al. (1996) focus on the visual aspects of annual reports, presenting visual elements in terms of a form of rhetoric supporting the 'truth claims' and

values of the content of the reports. Davison (2002: 594) also focuses on the rhetorical qualities of reports, highlighting the role of both visual and textual elements in this. She examines the use of the rhetorical device of *antithesis* in the structure, visual material and text of an annual report, arguing that it can be effective 'not simply to embellish, but also to influence or even engender patterns of reading and thinking in the user of corporate annual reports.' Davison (2008) returns to the rhetoric of narratives and pictures in annual reporting, focusing specifically on the use of *repetition*.

Annual reports can also be characterised in terms of *multimodal accomplishments*. Jancsary et al. (2016: 15) argue that annual reports 'instrumentalize multimodality to a high degree.' They note that not only are visual elements such as graphs, charts, figures and photographs used to 'enhance, amplify, or disguise verbal text,' but that some corporations add material and haptic (forms of interaction involving touch) modes to their reports by using different surfaces or three-dimensional elements, or feature video clips in the electronic version of the report.

Although Ditlevsen (2012) argues that the annual report is still first and foremost a publication in which a company meets legal requirements in order to prepare annual accounts, other writers highlight that reports are increasingly required to fulfil a variety of purposes, including impression management and identity construction. Skinner (1994) shows that managers tend to disclose good news in reports with quantitative data and bad news with qualitative information. Anderson and Imperia (1992: 113) contend that the annual report forms 'an integral part of a firm's promotion' as 'a multi-objective, multi-audience, public relations communication.' Neimark (1992: 100) reports that companies 'use their annual reports to construct themselves and their relationships with others as they strive to create and maintain the conditions necessary for their continued profitability and growth.' Industry bodies also highlight the potential role of annual reports in firms' impression management, with the UK's Investor Relations Society (2013: 1) arguing that annual reports can help an organisation to 'communicate its strategic progress, performance and personality.'

Several OI scholars have considered annual reports to be a useful source for identity claims. Albert and Whetten (1985) propose that OI is often communicated via official documents, including annual reports. Fiol (1995) contends that the chairman's letter to shareholders provides a good indication of managerial attention and beliefs about key issues. Chreim (2005), focusing on the chairman's message to shareholders in the annual reports of Canadian banks, notes that reports provide longitudinal data produced on a regular basis, and that this and their public availability and uniformity of production make them a suitable document for the study of continuity and change in OI over time. Ran and Duimering (2007) examine mission statements taken from annual reports, presenting them as prototypic examples of OI claims. As a supplement to interview data, Tripsas (2009) finds confirmation of internal identity in the letter to shareholders in a company's annual reports, which she notes have the advantage of providing a consistent, comparable measure over time. Tripsas claims that identity claims made in the letter to shareholders represent what management considers most salient to the firm. Finally, He and Baruch (2010) argue that annual reports constitute a robust source for longitudinal studies of identity, and can provide insight into strategic and identity changes over time.

Following Gee (1999), I conceptualise annual reports as discourses with a central concern for the creation of identity. However, I also identify multiple distinct discourses within the reports, reflecting the various purposes that reports are expected to fulfil, which I refer to here as *sub discourses*. Although I argue that the construction of OI is a key concern of annual reports, from a poststructural, relational, perspective I propose that they are also concerned with the construction of other identities, such as customers, employees, and products, and are therefore the sites for multiple claims relating to the Self and multiple Others (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). The longitudinal nature of annual reports allows for the intertextual analysis of identity construction over time, where identity claims may be traced across a set of reports for a firm. At the same time, intertextual analysis allows for the exploration of references that identity claims in reports make to other texts and discourses. Contemporary annual reports are multimodal documents, utilising verbal, visual, and material modes of communication, where each mode contributes to the overall meaning-

making, and identity construction, of the report. Finally, reports are also sites of argumentation and rhetoric, as authors use a range of techniques to persuade audiences, with this argumentation undertaken multimodally through visual as well as textual means.

### **Online blogs**

I have selected online industry blogs as a data source for my study, primarily for the identification of key industry discourses in the UK B2B and professional magazine publishing industry in the period of my study. However, the blogs also provide some commentary on the identity claims made in the annual reports of the firms in my analysis. A community of industry bloggers active during this period provide a critical and informed commentary on the industry and on the firms operating within it. I propose that the bloggers were engaged in identity work on several levels: with the changing identity of the industry, the firms operating within it, its key products, customers and employees, as well as their own professional and individual identities.

For my analysis of online blogs, I selected nineteen industry bloggers who were active at some point in the period 2004-13. Eleven of the bloggers were UK-based and eight were based in the US. I included the US bloggers on the basis that they commented on the UK as well as the US industry, and on the firms included in my analysis, where the largest publishing firms generally operated across multiple national markets. Moreover, both the US and the UK bloggers identified themselves in terms of a single community commenting on a global, or at least a transatlantic, industry. I identified relevant blogs through Internet searches and by following links between blogs. The community- and link-oriented nature of blogs means that it was unlikely that I missed any significant bloggers from my analysis, although some blogs had already disappeared from the Internet when I undertook my analysis.

The bloggers came from a range of backgrounds. Two of the UK bloggers were anonymous, but in their posts claimed to be employed as publishers within the industry. The others worked in a variety of roles within industry, as publishing executives, journalists, or consultants, with some claiming experience at a very

senior level. In all of these cases, a process of triangulation indicated that the bloggers were who they said they were. In terms of the reliability of the content of their blog posts, although they are far from systematic in their use of supporting evidence and the citation of sources, I generally assume that the bloggers' position within a community of perceived peers, and the facility (in most of the blogs) for commenters to hold them to task by posting comments on their blogs, provides some validation for their claims.

I identified considerable variations in the level of activity both between bloggers and across the period, with peaks in 2008 and 2009 coinciding with the crisis in the industry following the 2008 financial crash. Only four of the blogs were active throughout the whole period of my study. Fewer blogs were active at the start of the period, reflecting the gradual emergence of blogging as a phenomenon. A decline in blogging activity towards the end of the period partly corresponds to the overall decline in the fortunes of the magazine publishing industry (and, professionally, of some of the bloggers themselves), and partly to this form of commentary moving onto other social media platforms, such as LinkedIn. Finally, I supplemented my analysis of blog posts with interviews with some of the bloggers. I interviewed five bloggers via email or telephone, with the interviews providing an insight into their practice of, and reasons for, blogging, as well as for their views on the publishing industry.

As a source of data for academic research, I argue that blogs can constitute a valuable longitudinal resource for the study of the identity of industries and organisations, with the construction of identity a central concern of bloggers. Miller and Shepherd (2004: 15) highlight the construction of individual identity in blogs, which they view as taking shape in the context of rhetorical positions. They propose that the public disclosure of blogs 'yields an intensification of the self, a reflexive elaboration of identity' where this 'mediated' identity is the rhetorical achievement of the blog, a part of the postmodern effort to establish the self against the forces of fragmentation. Gurak et al. (2004: 1) agree that blogs are 'a means of representing and expressing the self, forming identity.'

For the purposes of a poststructural approach to the study of OI, I propose that blogs help to identify and validate the dominant industry discourses that form the backdrop of identity construction. They highlight the contested nature of identity, with blog posts typically taking one position in an argument. Blogs also emphasise the relational nature of identity construction, comparing firms and industries, with bloggers seeking to construct a variety of relevant identities, such as products, technology, and consumers. Although not central to my analysis, the blogs and blog posts in themselves form a rich intertextual network.

### **Other sources of data**

In order to identify key industry discourses in the period of my study, in addition to online blogs, I also selected four industry reports concerned with the UK magazine publishing industry. These reports provide an overview of the industry context during the period, and, as with the blogs, present a useful counterpoint to the identity claims made by the firms. The reports that I have used for my analysis were published in 2002 (Pira International, 2002), 2005 (The Business Information Forum, 2005), 2010 (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010b) and 2013 (JJP Associates, 2013). Although the 2002 Pira report falls just outside the period of my analysis, it provides a detailed and relevant review of the industry just prior to the start of my period.

The 2002 report was jointly commissioned by a UK Government department and industry trade associations. The 2005 report was produced by an industry body, with UK Government support. The two later reports were published by consultancy firms. As contemporary documents produced in close consultation with firms in the industry and with industry bodies, the reports provide an overview of industry concerns and beliefs, and enable the identification of key industry discourses. The distribution of the four reports throughout the period of my study also enables a consideration of how industry discourses developed over time. However, as I discuss later, the reports were produced by different organisations for very different purposes, and therefore contain quite different perspectives on the industry and its identity.

I have used press articles primarily as supporting documentation for my analysis, rather than as direct evidence of identity construction. Although I identified a large number of articles that addressed either the industry as a whole or the firms used as my cases, articles were generally brief and factual, not rich sources for the construction of identity. In order to identify relevant press articles, I conducted a series of searches on the Nexis online database for articles that either covered the magazine publishing industry or directly referenced the firms in my sample in my period. For the period 2000-13, I identified 188 relevant articles, from 36 separate sources, although just over half were from just three UK publications: an online trade news website 'Media Briefing' (43), 'The Guardian', a national daily newspaper (37), and 'Press Gazette', a weekly trade newspaper (14). Many of the articles were based on press releases produced by the firms themselves, or on company results. Some articles, however, provided some commentary on results, a broader commentary on the industry, or featured interviews with, or profiles of, the CEOs of firms.

UK Government legislation and guidance from the UK's official financial regulator, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), help to shape much of the form and content, as well as the identity claims, of the annual reports in my analysis. It is not possible to undertake any detailed analysis of annual reports, particularly intertextual analysis, without careful reference to these sources. The relevant UK Government legislation covering corporate annual reporting is *The Companies Act*. At the start of the period of my study, the relevant version of the Companies Act was published in 1985. This was later superseded by the 2006 version, itself supplemented in 2013 by the *Strategic Report and Directors' Report* regulations. The FRC is responsible for the publication of the *UK Corporate Governance Code*. Several versions of the Code were published between 2004 and 2013. I present a detailed analysis of the Companies Acts and FRC Governance Codes in Appendix 5.



## RESEARCH ETHICS

The main data sources that I have used for my thesis are corporate annual reports for three publicly listed UK publishing companies. These sources are publicly available and freely accessible via the Internet, and I considered that there were no ethical implications in using this data. Online blogs are also publicly available online sources, however, Markham and Buchanan (2012: 13) note that, although blogs are often considered to be public, published texts, some bloggers have described their blogs as a part of their identity, not to be treated as simply publicly accessible data, where they may view their blogging activities as participation in a private community. I have taken the position here that the bloggers in my sample all intended their blogging to be in the public domain, and, as publishing professionals, they understood that their blogs would be publicly accessible. I have noted that two of the bloggers published anonymously, and I have made no efforts to seek to establish their true identities. I have therefore treated the blogs in my analysis as I would any other online publication, where my responsibility extends to citing and referencing them accurately. The other documents that I have used in this thesis, including industry reports, are all publicly available, and I consider that there are no issues in using this data.

In addition to my analysis of texts, I undertook some interviews. One, with the former CFO of one of the publishing companies in my sample, was face-to-face and one, with one of the UK bloggers was over the telephone. Both of these were recorded. The other interviews, with UK and US bloggers, were via email, where I sent an initial list of questions to the bloggers, and then followed up where I required further clarification. For all of the interviews, the subjects were provided with information sheets and consent forms, as shown in Appendix 2. In the information sheet, I explained the purpose of my research and how I would deal with the information provided. The recordings and texts of the interviews have been stored securely on a password protected computer, and I have not used the data for any other purpose than for my thesis.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have set out the research context for my study – the UK B2B and professional magazine publishing industry for the period 2004-13. I have reviewed previous academic studies in this area, noting that although there has been relatively little work on organisational identity in the publishing industry, a number of studies have covered professional identity, with further work on OI in other media and creative industries.

I have presented the three firms that I have used as cases for my study and I have introduced the data sources that I have used for my analysis. I have used corporate annual reports as my principal data source, and I have argued that these longitudinal documents are rich sources of OI claims and that they support a poststructural analysis of the concept, using my selected approaches of intertextual analysis, discourse analysis, multimodality and argumentation. However, I have acknowledged that reports are narrowly focused on the identity claims of senior managers, rather than reflecting the identity beliefs of organisational actors more broadly. I have shown that the literature on annual reports highlights the richness and complexity of reports as data sources, and that, as visual as well as textual documents, a multimodal approach is required for their analysis. Following Gee (1999), I present annual reports as discourses with identity construction as a key purpose, with multiple authors making multiple identity claims aimed at multiple audiences. I have noted that annual reports have been used as data sources in the OI literature, and that scholars have recognised them as an important source of evidence for OI. In addition to annual reports, I have also used contemporary online industry blogs, industry reports, press articles and institutional texts as data sources for my study. I propose that the data sources I have used broadly support a poststructural approach to the study of OI and to an analysis based upon intertextuality, discourse analysis, multimodality, and argumentation. In the next chapter, I describe in detail the methods that I have used for my poststructural analysis.

## CHAPTER 6: METHODOLOGY

To recap from my Introduction, my research questions in this thesis are as follows:

1. How can we explain the tension between understandings of organisational identity as a generally agreed-upon and stable attribute of organisations and empirical research that frequently reveals OI as fragmented, dynamic and contested?
2. What kinds of empirical data do organisations draw on to create an organisational identity and how do these forms of data help us to understand organisational identity as a post-structural concept?

I have argued that at the heart of a poststructural approach to identity is an understanding that identities do not originate in beliefs, values, or behaviour, but are constructed through, and reside within, texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: 6; Butler, 1990: 25). Furthermore, poststructural identity is fundamentally relational, with identities constructed in terms of the Self and multiple Others, where this identity construction takes place spatially and temporally across multiple texts and discourses within an ever-changing intertextual canvas (Hansen, 2006: 47-9). In my analysis, I conceptualise identity as constructed through distinct *claims* made by organisational actors that are instantiated as unique *utterances* in texts and discourses. However, although my empirical focus is at this lower level of the utterance, I propose that a comprehensive understanding of identity construction must necessarily encompass multiple levels of analysis, where claims may be encapsulated in a single sentence or at the level of an entire text. In addition, I address annual reports as multimodal documents, containing visual elements, such as photographs or charts, as well as written text, with identity construction accomplished through multiple modes.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of my approach to the identification of individual identity claims and utterances within the verbal text of annual reports, and the issues that I encountered in the course of this exercise. I then review each of my methods in turn: the analysis of intertextual patterns and of

intertextual sources, the relational nature of identity claims in verbal text, argumentation and presentation in annual reports using a multimodal analytical approach, annual reports as individual discourses based on the approach of Wood and Kroger (2000), and, finally, an analysis of key broader industry discourses. I conclude with a discussion of the robustness and validity of these methods.

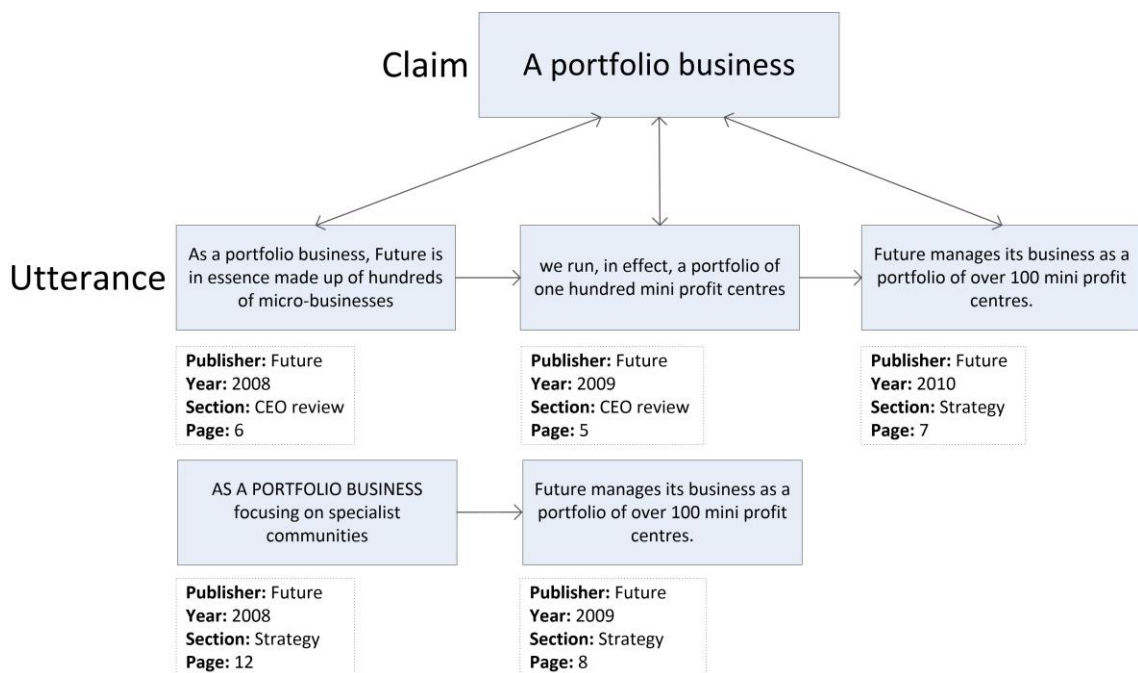
## DEFINING IDENTITY CLAIMS AND UTTERANCES

I define an identity *claim* as a statement of identity that transcends the level of its instantiation, a generalised form that is repeatable within and across texts. The poststructural emphasis on the situatedness of meaning, however, requires a more granular, contextual, unit of analysis, Bakhtin's (Todorov, 1984) conception of the *utterance* – the unique instantiation of a statement at a particular time and place. An individual identity claim can therefore relate to one or more *utterances*, whereas an utterance can only relate to a single claim. I have sought to accommodate this structure within my data analysis by capturing each identity statement at both the level of the claim and of the utterance. In order to illustrate this central distinction, in Figures 4 and 5 I present two examples of identity claims and related utterances from annual reports in my analysis, highlighting that claims can be repeated both across and within reports.

**Figure 4: An example identity claim and related utterances, UBM, 2010-13**



**Figure 5: An example identity claim and related utterances, Future, 2008-10**



In the intertextual analysis that I describe here, I have only considered identity claims and utterances made within the verbal text of the annual reports. As I discuss below, in the section ‘Analysing visual elements of identity’, I argue that the visual elements of reports can also be analysed using intertextual methods, but that this mode of analysis requires a different set of methodological techniques to the analysis of claims and utterances in verbal text that I present here. I have not attempted this here, primarily for reasons of time.

## **IDENTIFYING IDENTITY CLAIMS AND UTTERANCES WITHIN ORGANISATIONAL TEXTS**

A central concern for an empirical analysis of organisational identity based on identity claims is how to identify distinct claims from within texts. I have noted that OI researchers, where they have elaborated on their methods, have proposed various criteria to identify identity claims in texts and to distinguish those key claims that they equate to the organisation’s central identity.

Addressing the first of these exercises, a typical approach is described by He and Baruch (2010: 50), where they sought out certain key words, such as ‘we are’, ‘is’ and ‘as’ as signifiers of OI claims in annual reports. In relation to the

second exercise, the identification of key claims, I have noted that researchers have adopted the frequency of a claim (He and Baruch, 2010, Kjærgaard et al., 2011), or the importance assigned to the claim through a close reading of its context (Ravasi and Canato, 2013).

From postmodern or poststructural approaches, emphasising the fragmented and plurivocal nature of identity (e.g. Boje, 1995), the second of these exercises becomes irrelevant, as I consider that all those claims that I have identified are necessarily valid identity claims. Rejection of totalising narratives (Lyotard, 1979) suggests that it is not for the researcher to determine the legitimacy of identity claims through filtering or prioritising. The poststructural emphasis on the fundamentally relational nature of identity construction in terms of the Self and multiple Others (Hansen, 2006: 6-7) also requires that identity claims are not restricted to those claims relating to the focal identity, but should also embrace other related entities, where, in addition to identity claims made for the organisation, my analysis encompasses claims relating to, for example, the identities of products, markets and industry. From a poststructural perspective, identity construction in texts and discourses is also a deeply contested and political concern, where authors and audiences accord salience to particular identity claims and dismiss others, and attempt to persuade others of the legitimacy of their own favoured claims (Hansen, 2006: 17). I address this last aspect within my analysis through an examination of the presentation of claims in texts within a framework of argumentation. Finally, a multimodal approach to meaning-making (Kress, 2009) implies that identity construction goes beyond verbal language to embrace other modes, where identity claims may not only be communicated through those other modes, for example through photographs and charts, but that the inherently multimodal nature of *all* communication means that a claim's legitimacy might not be determinable purely through the analysis of a single mode, for example where the photograph of a company chairman in proximity to a verbal textual claim may afford it legitimacy that it would not otherwise have.

For my analysis, I have developed a definition for determining identity claims within the verbal mode of organisational texts, which I present below. In this

definition, I have sought to present an inclusive set of criteria that aims to avoid any bias towards particular conceptions of identity (for example by privileging 'distinctive' or 'categorical' claims) and I have noted claims where salience is highlighted by authors, but I have not excluded claims that do not. I have also introduced a temporal dimension into my definition, to ensure that the *content* of claims reflects some sense of an *intended* enduring character. Although a poststructural perspective emphasises the instability of identity *in practice*, I argue that the *understanding* of OI as a social construct by organisational actors clearly comes with an expectation from them of an enduring quality to identity claims, reflecting Laclau and Mouffe's (1985: 112) assertion that all discourse *seeks* to fix meanings and identities. The definition that I have used for my analysis is as follows:

An identity claim relates to an attribute, behaviour, function, belief, resource, or category membership ascribed to an identity within a text, where the claim is presented as relating to a feature of the identity that is permanent or enduring, rather than temporary.

I believe that a broad definition of identity is required in order to capture the empirical complexity and variety of identity construction in texts. I consider that my definition has proved broadly effective in my analysis as a means of identifying a rich range of identity claims in organisational texts, whilst restricting the number of claims in order to allow a comparative, intertextual analysis between texts over time. I do not claim that it constitutes in any way a 'comprehensive' definition for identity claims.

I acknowledge that where, from a poststructural perspective, identity construction is both a pervasive feature and a key purpose of discourse, *everything* within a text or discourse potentially becomes a valid identity claim. Indeed, a potential criticism of my inclusive approach could be that it extends identity into other areas of organisational life, for example strategy. However, taking this specific example, my definition considers identity claims to be valid only when *presented* as enduring or permanent. I therefore accept the identity claim, 'Our goal is to be the partner of choice for companies looking to do business with our communities of enthusiasts' (Future, 2010: 7), as this statement presents an anticipated *enduring* characteristic of the firm. However,

the statement, 'Our target is to double the sales and profits of the business' (Future, 2004: 7) does not refer to any existing or anticipated enduring characteristic, so I do not accept it as an identity claim. I have found that firms do sometimes present strategy as enduring, for example, 'Centaur's strategy, since the formation of the group in 1981, has been based firstly on identifying and serving the information needs of distinct business communities and secondly on facilitating contact between buyers and sellers in those communities' (Centaur, 2006: 6). I have concluded that such statements constitute an identity claim rather than a claim relating to temporary strategy, as they explicitly refer to an enduring rather than to a temporary state.

Central to my analysis is the relationship between identity claims and utterances – the instantiations of these claims in texts, as I illustrate in Figures 4 and 5, above. The exercise of identifying claims and their associated utterances and linking them proved to be quite a labour-intensive process, with limited scope for assistance from automated computing techniques. The first step in this exercise involved the identification of identity claims within the annual reports in my analysis, using the definition above as my selection criteria. I then linked each claim to its specific instantiations, or utterances, within the set of reports for each firm.

As I show in Figures 4 and 5, the textual content of claims is not necessarily identical across utterances. Variations in content generally do not substantially alter the meaning of the utterance, although in some cases quite subtle changes can alter the meaning of the claim. For example, the claim in Centaur's 2005 report that, 'virtually all of our portfolio was created and launched within the business as opposed to being acquired' (Centaur, 2005: 6), changes in 2006's report to the more modest, 'most of our portfolio has been created and launched within the business as opposed to being acquired' (Centaur, 2006: 6). When linking claims and utterances, I needed to establish that all instantiations related to the same common claim, where the content, as discussed above, was not necessarily identical. In order to ensure this, I adopted two criteria: firstly, I established that the general sentiment of the claim was shared by the utterance, as in the example above, where a common meaning, signifying that



that Centaur's portfolio was created in-house, is clear; and secondly, I identified any distinctive shared elements of the text that pointed to a common origin, as with the phrase 'created and launched' in the above example.

In practice, although the process of identifying and linking claims and utterances across multiple texts proved painstaking, I am reasonably confident that a rigorous cross-checking between reports ensured that I missed few links between claims, and that I made few 'false' matches between utterances that did not share the same source identity claim.

### **ANALYSING INTERTEXTUAL PATTERNS**

In Chapter 4, I characterised an intertextual approach, as set out by Bakhtin and Kristeva, as positioning texts within a dialogical network of other texts and discourses, where no text can be written or understood in isolation from previous texts (Todorov, 1984, Kristeva, 1986). For my analysis, I have developed two distinct methods of intertextual analysis for verbal text. The first of these focuses on the identification of patterns of identity claims over time within a set of texts. This method, loosely based on the approach taken by Shaw and Pecorari (2013) that I have described in Chapter 4, examines how patterns of identity claims can be traced through a firm's annual reports over time. I also assess the extent to which the content of related utterances changes over time. As with Shaw and Pecorari, I have restricted this analysis to statements made *within* the sets of annual reports. In my findings in Chapter 7, I assess whether an analysis of the continuities and discontinuities within this network of intertextual connections provides empirical evidence of the temporal stability or instability of identity claims over time, where this addresses the *unstable* nature of poststructural identity.

### **ANALYSING INTERTEXTUAL SOURCES**

The second method of my intertextual analysis is based loosely on Hansen's (2006) approach to intertextuality and aligns to a certain extent with Fairclough's (1992) conception, as I have described in Chapter 4. My method specifically explores the intertextual *sources* of identity claims, where these are both

internal and external to the organisation. I developed a simple typology for classifying intertextual references based partly on Hansen, but also following a close reading of my data sources. My method considers both individual texts and broader industry discourses as relevant intertextual sources, rather than, as Fairclough does, focusing on broader discourses. My focus is on verbal texts, excluding images from my analysis.

Hansen (2006: 57) distinguishes between the *explicit* references that texts make to other texts, consisting of quotes or references, and *implicit* references, those referring to other texts more indirectly (*secondary sources*), to broader discourses, for example ‘democracy’ or ‘security’ (*conceptual*), or to specific well-used phrases, such as ‘clash of civilizations’ (*catchphrases*). I have reproduced Hansen’s classification in Table 10.

**Table 10: Forms of intertextuality**

<b>Intertextuality</b>	<b>Intertextual linkages</b>
Explicit	Quotes References
Implicit	Secondary sources Conceptual Catchphrases

*Source: Hansen (2006: 57)*

In the course of my close reading of the annual reports in my analysis, I noted that intertextual references associated with identity claims sometimes refer to *actual* texts, where I have adopted a reasonably broad interpretation of ‘text’, for example in, ‘Future is a special-interest media group, based in the UK and listed on the London Stock Exchange (symbol FUTR)’ (Future, 2006: 10), where I consider the LSE listing as a text. Other references cite sources that may or may not equate to an actual text, for example, ‘Centaur’s product strategy is media-neutral’ (Centaur, 2010: 9), where ‘strategy’ may or may not refer to a specific, physical text. I have classified these sources as *implied texts*. Identity claims may also refer to broader *discourses*, where these cannot reasonably be associated with single or actual texts, for example references to ‘the market’, such as, ‘UBM seeks to take advantage of the fragmentation of broad media

markets into many smaller markets that address narrower, more specialist communities of interest' (UBM, 2006: 18). Finally, I noted that many identity claims do not appear to reference other texts or discourses at all, but rather directly reference events in the world, for example, 'over the last five years, we have re-shaped the portfolio and geographic exposure of UBM' (UBM, 2010: 9). I have classified these as references to *events*. I have categorised these different types of intertextual source (*event, text, implied text, discourse*) under the dimension of *intertextual level*. I have further categorised intertextual references based on whether they reference sources that are *internal* or *external* to the firm. I have termed this *intertextual orientation*.

From these two dimensions, I have proposed the simple typology for intertextual references shown in Table 11. The key difference between my approach and that of Hansen is that I am primarily concerned with the nature of the *sources* of intertextual claims, rather than the nature of the *reference*, i.e. whether the reference is a direct quotation from another text. I consider the nature of intertextual references in my analysis of argumentation and presentation, as I introduce later in this chapter. In my coding, I recorded intertextual references at the level of the identity claim rather than the utterance, on the assumption that individual utterances relating to a claim must necessarily share a common intertextual source.

**Table 11: A typology for intertextual references**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Internal</b>	<b>External</b>
Event		
Text		
Implied text		
Discourse		

My analysis of intertextual sources reflects a poststructural emphasis on the *decentred* nature of identity, where meaning is situated in the relations between texts as much as in the content of texts themselves, where the 'meaning of a text is thus never fully given by the text itself but is always a product of other readings and interpretations' (Hansen, 2006: 55).

## **ANALYSING THE RELATIONALITY OF IDENTITY IN TEXTS**

A poststructural perspective considers that identity is fundamentally *relational*, with the Self and multiple Others conceptualised as mutually constituted rather than ontologically separate (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). I have undertaken two distinct, but, I believe, complementary, analyses to explore this relational nature of identity construction. Firstly, I examine identity claims that do not directly relate to entities other than the focal identity of my study – the organisation – for example claims concerning customers, technologies or markets, arguing that such claims are in fact integral to the construction of the identity of the firm. In my second analysis, I address identity claims that focus on the firm but where their content explicitly encompasses other entities, for example where a claim relating to a firm also refers explicitly to its customers. Again, in this analysis I have focused on identity claims made in verbal text, excluding images from my analysis, although identities other than the firm, for example technology and products, are frequently represented visually in the annual reports.

In my literature review, I have noted two strands within the OI literature that have considered the relational nature of identity. Firstly, institutionalist (Glynn and Abzug, 2002, Glynn, 2008, Navis and Glynn, 2010) and population ecologist (Porac et al., 1995, Hsu and Hannan, 2005, Hannan and Freeman, 1977) approaches explicitly position the identity of organisations relative to their peers and to their wider industry context. Secondly, and more pertinent to my analysis, recent work by Raffaelli (2013b) and Ravasi and Canato (2010) has highlighted the mutually constitutive relationship between the construction of organisational identity and the construction of other identities, such as products, industries, and communities.

For the first of my methods of relational analysis, I recorded identity claims within the verbal text of annual reports that had a focus on identities other than the firms themselves. Claims included those relating to the publishing industry as a whole, the wider market that the firms operated within, the products and services they delivered, the technology they used, their employees, and their customers. For example, UBM's annual reports make a number of claims about

the market, including, 'The B2B marketplace in which UBM operates is highly fragmented due to the number and variety of communities and geographies we serve and the diversity of products and services we offer' (UBM, 2010: 8). From a poststructural perspective, I argue that in making such claims about 'multiple Others', organisational actors are effectively seeking to construct the identity of the organisational Self at the same time, with the two exercises intertwined (Hansen, 2006: 6-7).

The second element of my relational analysis examines those identity claims where the organisation is the focal identity of the claim, but where the content of the claim also explicitly involves related identities. An example of such a claim is, 'The depth of our editorial content and the close relationship that readers have with our magazines provide valuable, targeted marketing channels for our advertisers' (Future, 2005: 23). Here, Future is making a claim about itself as an organisation (specifically its editorial proposition) but does so by explicitly linking this to the identity of its *readers* (their close relationship with magazines) and to its *products* (providing valuable marketing channels for advertisers). A claim regarding the identity of the firm can therefore also be a claim about other identities. In poststructural terms, this again can be conceptualised in terms of the Self as mutually constituted in relation to multiple Others (Hansen, 2006: 6-7).

## **ANALYSING MULTIMODAL ELEMENTS OF IDENTITY**

In this thesis, I have set out a multimodal approach as one of the elements of my methodological framework for exploring a poststructural perspective on the construction of organisational identity. I have done so on the basis that contemporary corporate annual reports are designed to communicate meaning, and therefore to construct identity, multimodally, where not only is the verbal text of reports accompanied by visual elements, but meanings can only be fully understood through an analysis of multiple modes simultaneously (Jancsary et al. 2016). However, I have also highlighted the methodological obstacles in conducting such an analysis, and I concede that I have only partially begun to address the requirements of a 'strong' multimodal analysis (Zilber, 2017).

In addressing the potential advantages of a multimodal approach to the study of organisational texts, Höllerer et al. (2018b) highlight a number of studies showing ways in which visual modes are able to present meaning and sensemaking where verbal text may struggle, for example, with Slutskaya et al. (2012) arguing that photographs provide insights into physicality, aesthetics and affect where respondents were not able to express such ideas verbally. Following Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), Höllerer et al. note their contention that the spatial composition of visuals provides additional means for relating categories and examples to each other, through multidimensional spatial models, charts and diagrams, while the sequential structuring of verbal text makes it better suited to constructing the temporality of complex narratives. Höllerer et al. (2018b) also propose that visuals can also invoke broader discourses and myths through their capacity to bridge disconnected spheres of meaning and integrate them in complex compositions, where they can embed novel ideas in shared understandings more subtly than verbal text and help avoid controversy (McQuarrie and Phillips, 2005). They also highlight the ability of the visual to condense large amounts of information in a limited space and to create attention immediately (Meyer et al., 2018), where visualisations can link elements of the verbal text to broader meaning structures that are otherwise not immediately conceivable. Lefsrud et al. (2017) argue that visuals enable the *detailing* of the verbal, by focusing attention on a specific aspect or part of the issue that it presents in greater detail.

Boxenbaum et al. (2018) point out that studies engaging with the visual in organisations are often inherently multimodal, but without explicitly reflecting or theorising this engagement. They note that comprehensive multimodal studies are yet to be conducted in organisational research, although they cite Meyer et al. (2018) who identify features and affordances of visual and verbal modes of communication and propose how, and under which conditions, the visual mode of communication is superior to the verbal mode (and vice versa) in advancing processes of institutionalisation. They also identify Iedema (2003) as an early study of multimodality, where he shows how different modes become central in different stages of an organisational change process.

In this thesis, I have incorporated multimodality into my analysis at two levels: the utterance, and the text as an overarching discourse. At the level of the utterance, I have considered visual elements in relation to the presentation of identity claims in a specific context in annual reports, for example, where the photograph of a firm's chairman is positioned next to a claim made within verbal text. At the level of the discourse, I propose that visual elements are used to present overarching identity claims within the annual reports, with the report front cover the most prominent example of this.

Although I argue that visual elements are a key aspect of multimodal identity work in annual reports, I also propose that they require different analytical techniques to those applied to verbal texts, where, for example, the content of visual identity claims are often more ambiguous than claims made in verbal text. Because of the methodological challenges of rigorous multimodal analysis, I have not examined the multimodal nature of identity construction in annual reports to the extent that I consider it deserves, and I have not built it into my intertextual analysis. I do, however, as I have discussed, consider that the ambiguous and indeterminate nature of visual images mean that multimodal analysis does support a poststructural perspective on identity, with its focus on the inherent instability of signs (Hansen, 2006: 17).

## **ARGUMENTATION AND PRESENTATION**

I have suggested that a poststructural emphasis on the fragmentation of identity results empirically in a multiplicity of identity claims, where poststructuralists would contend that it is not the role of the researcher to filter and prioritise those claims. At the same time, poststructuralism highlights the contested and political nature of identity, where claims are always open to contest and debate, with both claimants and audiences seeking to prioritise certain claims over others (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). From a poststructural perspective, the salience of claims is simply a reflection of the political ability or influence of organisational actors rather than objective evidence of any underlying centrality of the claims themselves. Moreover, in this thesis, reflecting a multimodal approach to the

analysis of texts, I argue that evidence of this contestability of identity claims is found as much in their presentational context as in their content.

I have noted that several works in the OI literature have argued for the importance of argumentation and rhetoric in identity construction (Sillince and Brown, 2009, Suddaby et al., 2010, Anteby and Molnár, 2012). These works reference a broader literature on argumentation and rhetoric, most notably Billig (1996) on argumentation, and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) on rhetoric. For my analysis of argumentation, I have developed a simple framework based both on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) and on a close reading of the annual reports in my study, where I have categorised the use of argumentation in annual reports across different *types* of argument: arguments of position, arguments of presentation, arguments of repetition, arguments from authority, and arguments from example.

In my earlier section on multimodality, I have noted that Halliday (1978) highlighted the role of power in the social semiotic construction of meaning, with Kress (2009: 26) proposing that this requires a rhetorical approach to communication, where the *interests* of the rhetor need to be fully acknowledged. Although highlighting the potential importance of power and rhetoric, Kress (2009: 45) nevertheless proposes that in conditions of political and social stability there is little need to give much attention to rhetoric, where it is replaced by 'rules', 'conventions', 'how things are done and how things have always been done', in those social domains where there tends to be little contestation of power. In this thesis, I argue that although instability and contestation are emphasised in contemporary social and organisational life, they have always been present. Indeed, from a poststructural perspective, I argue that stability and consensus, both in terms of power relations and in language itself, have never been more than superficial.

My intertextual analysis of identity claims in verbal text, as described earlier in this chapter, also highlights an important aspect of argumentation in terms the *repetition* of claims, with claims repeated both within and between reports, allowing them to derive authority through this repetition. Saliency can also be



signified through intertextual references to other sources, either texts or discourses, that are able to confer *authority* on the claim, with such sources including industry reports and government legislation.

I have presented my analysis of *argumentation* at the level of the text. From a multimodal perspective, I have also been concerned not to focus on argumentation exclusively within verbal text, so I have also emphasised the multimodal nature of argumentation and rhetoric, following previous literature on the visual in corporate annual reports (Davison et al., 2012, Davison, 2014, Beattie et al., 2008), and in organisational research (Meyer et al., 2013), and recent multimodal approaches to organisational research (Höllerer et al., 2017, Boxenbaum et al., 2018), where a multimodal approach considers the meaning-making of visual and verbal elements of text to be both intertwined and part of a unified conception of communication.

As I have previously noted, I have situated my analysis of the *presentation* of identity at the level of the utterance, where I argue that authors seek to highlight and prioritise certain claims over others through presentational devices in *specific contexts*. I have adopted a multimodal approach in order to capture this contextual meaning, one that has involved recording presentational aspects of identity utterances across three dimensions: 'format', 'position on page', and 'presentational context'. The format of an utterance relates to its textual presentation on the page, for example whether it is displayed as a headline, in bold, or in italics. Position on page relates to the placement of the utterance on the page, for example, whether it is situated at the top of the page, or at the start of a section. Finally, presentational context records the immediate context of an identity utterance on the page, for example, whether it is positioned alongside a chart, or a photograph of a key organisational actor, such as the CEO or chairman.

I also recognise, however, that the attribution of salience can be conveyed through the *verbal textual content* of an identity claim, where I approach this at the level of the claim rather than the utterance, on the basis that the content of a claim is largely common across utterances. I have identified as *core claims*

those where their content explicitly emphasises their intended salience, for example through the use of such terms as 'focused on', 'we base everything we do around', 'our core competence', 'at the heart of', or 'our strength is', or where claims can be interpreted as referring to an *essential* attribute of an identity, for example, 'We provide information, data, marketing services and distribution products,' or 'UBM is a global business-to business events-led marketing services and communications business.'

## **ANNUAL REPORTS AS TEXTS AND DISCOURSES**

Reflecting a poststructural focus on texts as inextricably entwined with their wider context, in addition to my analysis of identity claims within annual reports I also examine annual reports as texts and discourses in their own right using discourse analysis reflecting my definitions set out in the Introduction (Wood and Kroger, 2000; Gee, 1999). At the textual level of analysis, I analyse annual reports as discourses and sub discourses, and as visual as well as written texts. Although presented as a single document, annual reports are made up of a number of distinct sections, each encompassing a range of authors, audiences and purposes. My analysis of annual reports examines them both as a single document, or discourse, and each section, or sub discourse, also as a separate unit of analysis. I also note that the annual reports are divided, explicitly or implicitly, into three broad 'meta sections', namely a 'review', 'governance', and 'financial' meta section, always presented in that order. Finally, I have characterised annual reports as multimodal documents, not just verbal text, but also including a range of visual elements such as photographs, charts and graphics. Taking a multimodal approach, I consider these visual elements to be integral to the identity work undertaken within the reports, rather than simply supplemental to the meaning-making of verbal text (Kress, 2009). However, I have also recognised that visual and verbal textual modes require a distinct analytical approach to the analysis of their role in communication. In Appendix 3, I review the structure and format of the annual reports in my analysis in some detail, focusing on their overall design as multimodal documents.

I have based my approach to discourse analysis at the level of a single text on the framework proposed by Wood and Kroger (2000), structured around answers to the following questions: who is creating the discourse, and why?; who is the intended audience, and how do they react to the discourse?; what resources are present and used to perform this activity?; what is the discourse attempting to do?; how is the discourse constructed to do this?; and what is the wider context for the discourse? I have applied this analysis at the level of discourse and *sub discourse*, where the answers to Wood and Kroger's questions might have very different answers in different sub discourses. In my review of the literature on corporate annual reports in Chapter 6, I have noted their complex authorship. In my analysis, I have carefully reviewed each section of each report in order to identify both their *explicit* and *implicit* authors, on the basis that it is often possible to make a fair assumption of the individual responsible for each section (although not necessarily the literal author) where this is not explicitly identified within the text.

I argue that my discourse analytical approach to annual reports as texts has allowed me to clearly present the richness, complexity and plurivocity of these documents as discourses, and to describe how internal and external forces shape their content and presentation, where a multimodal approach highlights the role of the visual and verbal textual elements of the reports in presenting a unified means of communication and identity construction. I argue that this analysis, from a poststructural perspective, also highlights the fragmented and decentred nature of identity construction, as senior managers make a range of identity claims aimed at a variety of organisational stakeholders.

## **KEY INDUSTRY DISCOURSES**

In my Introduction, I have set out my understanding of a poststructural approach to broader discourses, drawing on Foucault (1972), but more directly from Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 105) and their definition of discourse as the 'structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice,' where their poststructural discourse is characterised by relationality, where any changes reciprocally condition one or another in a 'system which is always being

threatened, always being restored,' and where they argue that 'neither absolute fixity nor absolute non-fixity is possible' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111).

My method for the analysis of the intertextual sources of identity claims in annual reports described earlier involves referencing the broader discourses referred to in those claims. Separate to this analysis, I have surveyed a set of industry texts in order to identify overarching key industry discourses, where I characterise these discourses as attempts to fix meanings and identities (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111). I have based my analysis of key industry discourses on an analysis of industry reports and of posts by industry bloggers. I propose that these two types of texts offer very different but complementary, perspectives on the publishing industry. Both share a bias towards totalising discourses, coherent narratives, and simple explanations of change, presenting the industry as essentially homogeneous, with a 'simple' past and a 'complex' future, yet my close analysis reveals the 'slips and instabilities' (Hansen, 2006: 20-1) between the accounts set out in these discourses. I present a detailed analysis of the two types of industry text in Appendices 9 and 10.

To support my discourse analysis of these texts, I have constructed a simple typology for the categorisation of industry discourses. Firstly, I identified a number of 'macro' industry discourses, encapsulating key debates in the industry, characterised by oppositional arguments, for example 'migration or revolution?' Secondly, I identified a number of discourses highlighting key drivers of change in the industry, including 'business models', 'technology', and 'customers'. I have noted that Hansen (2006: 51) highlights several potential issues with the study of discourses at this level. Unlike texts, discourses are analytical constructions rather than empirical objects, so, from a poststructural perspective, any assertion of 'agreed-upon' discourses is problematic. Researchers are therefore required to theorise the choices and principles upon which they construct discourses and select the texts that they use as sources for those discourses, where different researchers may well make different choices.

I acknowledge that my approach to the identification of key discourses, including my selection of relevant texts, is a subjective exercise. However, I also emphasise that my proposed categorisation of discourses is intended solely for the purposes of my analysis, where this does not infer deeper structures and relationships. Moreover, I argue that I have selected a range of texts for this exercise that are likely to capture key industry discourses.

## **ENSURING A ROBUST AND VALID METHODOLOGY**

In Chapter 4, I have responded to criticisms that poststructuralism is anti-method, arguing that the poststructuralist focus on the analysis of discourses articulated in texts in fact necessitates a careful collection of evidence and a rigorous methodology, where the adoption of 'non-causal epistemology does not imply an abandonment of theoretically rigorous frameworks, empirical analyses of "real-world relevance", or systematic assessments of data and methodology' (Hansen, 2006: 4-5). In Chapter 5, I have also responded to potential concerns with the selection of my research context, period of study and cases, and with the data that I have chosen to undertake my analysis. I have highlighted Derrida's assertion that the analysis of texts demands rigour (Derrida, 1988: 144-5). Indeed, far from accepting that anything goes, and that all analyses are equally valid, I argue that the poststructural insistence on texts (in the wider context of texts as signifying matter) as evidence, and its focus on the importance of understanding texts within their wider spatial and temporal context, requires a depth of analysis that goes beyond most positivist approaches to the study of texts.

In my poststructural approach to the study of organisational identity, I argue that I have been rigorous in my analysis of the content of identity claims in texts, but I have also focused on the broader context of claims, embracing a range of other texts and discourses, addressing both temporal and spatial dimensions, and considering the authorship, audiences and purposes of texts. In contrast, empirical analysis in much of the OI literature focuses on the content of claims, without problematising the production or consumption of the texts where claims are encountered, or examining their wider context. I have also recognised the

multimodal nature of organisational texts, specifically corporate annual reports, where my analysis does not just acknowledge alternative modes of meaning-making to that of verbal language, but seeks (within constraints of time and space) to account for both the differentiation and integration of multiple modes in the communication of meaning and the construction of identity.

At the same time as presenting a poststructural, qualitative, analysis, I acknowledge that I have used some quantitative elements in my study, for example by providing totals and summaries of identity claims. I consider that this is justified within the context of my analysis, and that it should not be taken to imply any positivist assumptions or statistical inferences. I do not consider that it is necessary for qualitative analysis to entirely exclude quantitative elements, so long as there are clear caveats around their interpretation. For example, I contend that it is reasonable to assume that where more identity claims reference texts external to a firm than to internal texts, this may well indicate something of importance in terms of the firm's identity work, but I do not consider that this significance can be understood terms of statistical significance.

At the heart of my methodological approach has been the identification and analysis of identity claims and utterances within annual reports. Here, I highlight four key areas of concern relating to validity in this area: firstly, whether it is legitimate to analyse identity primarily through the analysis of distinct identity *claims* within texts; secondly, whether any analysis of identity that does not fully embrace the multimodal nature of meaning-making and identity construction can ever reveal more than a partial picture; thirdly, whether it is possible to effectively differentiate identity claims from 'non-identity' content; and finally, whether the relationship between identity claims and utterances is conceptually justifiable, and, if so, if it is possible to capture empirically.

Addressing the first and second concerns, I do not consider that a comprehensive understanding of identity construction within texts is achievable solely through the analysis of distinct identity claims within those texts. Indeed, I argue in this thesis that, in addition, it is necessary to study the texts holistically,

as discourses and sub discourses with distinct authors, audiences and purposes, to study the visual elements and presentation and argumentation of texts as multimodal accomplishments, and to examine the wider intertextual sources of texts, including both texts and discourses, where this requires a deep knowledge of the wider context within which texts are situated. However, I consider that even an account covering all of these levels will, mirroring a general poststructural concern, inevitably be incomplete and unfinalised. I recognise that my analysis at the level of the identity claims and utterance, and my focus on verbal text in relation to my intertextual analysis, does present a partial picture of identity work in annual reports.

With regard to the second issue, although I consider that I have presented a reasonable operational definition in order to determine identity claims, I do not believe that it is at all possible to reach an empirically 'correct' result with such an exercise. In many cases, it may not be possible to capture a single identity claim within a single phrase or sentence of text. Alternatively, a single phrase may be decomposable into several separate identity claims. I have also highlighted that any determination of legitimacy for identity claims is influenced by their wider context, where this includes the multimodal character of claims.

One area where I argue that my data collection has been particularly incomplete is in the identification of those claims where the focal identity is not the organisation. I have restricted my data collection here using the criteria that I include only claims that are relevant to *organisational* identity construction, but, from a poststructural perspective, any such a restriction is questionable, where *any* identity work within a firm's annual report *must* be assumed to have some relationship to organisational identity work.

Finally, in relation to the conceptual and methodological legitimacy of relating identity claims and utterances, I acknowledge that I have somewhat stretched the concepts of intertextuality and dialogism beyond what either Kristeva (Kristeva, 1986) or Bakhtin (Todorov, 1984) might recognise. I do, however, argue that highlighting the relationship between claims that are supra-textual, and the instantiations of those claims within texts is conceptually valid, and that

it at least matches the spirit of Bakhtin's approach. I also argue that my operationalisation of the linking of claims and utterances has been empirically robust, where I consider that I have not missed many 'true' links, or made many 'false' ones.

Despite the issues that I have discussed here, I propose that a poststructural analysis of identity construction within texts has the clear advantage that it is rooted in artefacts (texts) that exist in the real world, and it is this central element that underpins my general claims for the methodological rigour of a poststructural approach. I am less confident regarding discourses, where these are inherently more subjective, however I do argue that rigour in this area is possible by ensuring that as far as possible any discourses presented in an analysis are based exclusively upon a close reading of texts, recognising, as Hansen (2006: 51) emphasises, that 'texts converge around common themes, around certain constructions of identity...' where these themes can be legitimately grouped around a smaller number of discourses.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I have set out in detail the methods that I have used for my study. I first defined the key units of my analysis – identity claims and utterances. I then discussed how, based on my poststructural approach, I have identified claims and utterances within annual reports, and I identified the key elements of such an approach. My approach has led to the identification of multiple identity claims; and I set out how I have linked identity claims and utterances.

To support the first part of my analysis, I have developed two intertextual methods, the first for the analysis of temporal patterns, and the second tracing the intertextual sources of identity claims. I then set out my methods for the analysis of the relational nature of identity construction, where the Self of the organisation is mutually constituted with multiple Other identities. I described my multimodal approach to the analysis of identity in annual reports, integrating the analysis of the visual and of verbal text, relating this to argumentation and presentation, with the former at the level of the text, and the latter at the level of



the identity utterance. I then described the second part of my analysis, which relates to the study of identity through broader discourses, where I address annual reports as texts and discourses, examining the role of industry discourses in identity construction.

Finally, I discussed how I have sought to ensure robustness and validity in my analysis, where I emphasise that a poststructural approach demands rigour, but I also stress that a poststructural conception of validity is very different to positivist notions. I also argued that the inclusion of quantitative elements in my analysis, in the manner of totals and summaries, should not be taken as evidence of underlying positivist assumptions.

In the next three chapters, I set out my findings. In Chapter 7, I first review the extent and structure of identity claims and utterances within the annual reports in my analysis. After covering the centripetal focus of the content of identity claims, I examine the intertextual patterns of identity utterances within the set of annual reports. I then present an intertextual analysis of the internal and external texts and discourses that identity claims reference as intertextual sources, and present an analysis of the relational nature of identity claims. In Chapter 8, I present an analysis of annual reports as identity discourses, including a review of the various sub genres that make up the annual reports in my analysis, and a brief analysis of visual identity work within the reports. I then discuss the use of argumentation and presentation in identity construction in the reports. Next, I examine the construction of key discourses in the magazine publishing industry. In Chapter 9, I present detailed case studies of the three firms in my analysis.

## CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS – IDENTITY CLAIMS

The emergence of the internet as an effective information and marketing medium is highly complementary to the way that readers use magazines. We believe that magazines remain a uniquely effective medium with which to develop an in-depth relationship with their readers and to establish effective and valuable information brands, which can be exploited through multiple channels. (Centaur Annual Report, 2008: 9)

My analysis of organisational identity emphasises the importance of both the content of an identity claim and its broader temporal and spatial context. I have proposed that claims are constructed intertextually within a dynamic network of texts and discourses, and that identity construction is fundamentally relational, with identities mutually constituted with multiple other identities, both spatially and temporally (Hansen, 2006: 47-9). In this chapter, I explore these different elements of a poststructural conceptualisation of OI through the analysis of OI claims, arguing that my multi-faceted analysis presents a picture of OI construction that encompasses what I have described as the ‘centripetal’ and ‘centrifugal’ approaches to OI, accounting for both the need for organisational actors to fix meanings, and the empirical evidence that reveals identity to be dynamic, fragmented and contested. I acknowledge that my analysis in this chapter focuses on identity claims in the verbal text of annual reports, where this analysis does not capture the multimodal dimensions of meaning in the reports, where the visual is an important part of meaning-making. I seek to address this multimodal aspect of identity construction in Chapter 8, in the second part of my findings.

My opening quote in this chapter, from Centaur’s 2008 annual report, ostensibly presents a claim relating to the identity of magazines, not directly to the identity of the firm. However, taken within the broader context of Centaur’s annual reports, I argue that it clearly constitutes an integral part of Centaur’s central identity claim to be a magazine publisher. In this claim, in addition to highlighting the continuing effectiveness of the magazine, the report’s authors argue that the emergence of the Internet complements magazine publishing, thereby reinforcing its central organisational claim to be a magazine publisher in

the face of the challenge of new technology. In one statement, then, the authors make claims about the identities of the organisation, the magazine as a product, the Internet, and Centaur's readers, highlighting, I argue, the relational basis of identity construction.

In my analysis, I examine Centaur's identity claims within the temporal context of a set of annual reports, where I show how claims do not (generally) appear in isolation, but are repeated and reframed over time. For example, this particular claim, its content varying slightly between reports, is present in each of Centaur's reports from 2004 to 2008, and then, following the 2008 financial crash and the retirement of the firm's founder, disappears from the reports. I also show how identity claims in the reports are constructed intertextually from previous texts and discourses, and I highlight the relationality of identity construction, where I argue that identities are necessarily mutually constituted, where *in order to* construct its identity as a magazine publisher, Centaur is necessarily also required to construct the identity of multiple other identities.

In this chapter, I first review the extent and structure of identity claims and utterances within the annual reports in my analysis, before presenting a typology of identity claims. I examine the centripetal focus of the content of identity claims, where this highlights the need for organisational actors to understand and to present identity in terms of unitary and stable attributes. I then explore the intertextual patterns of identity utterances within the set of annual reports, identifying continuities and discontinuities in identity construction. Next, I present an intertextual analysis of the internal and external texts and discourses that identity claims reference as intertextual sources. I conclude by presenting an analysis of the relational nature of identity claims in the annual reports.

## **THE INCIDENCE OF IDENTITY CLAIMS AND UTTERANCES IN THE ANNUAL REPORTS**

In Chapter 6, I set out my methodological approach to an analysis of organisational identity, where this embraces multiple levels of analysis. At the heart of my analysis are identity *claims* and *utterances*, where an identity claim

is a statement of identity that transcends the level of its instantiation, a generalised form that is repeatable within and across texts, and the utterance is a unique instantiation of a claim at a particular time and place, where an identity claim can therefore relate to one or more utterances, whereas an utterance can only relate to a single claim. In Chapter 6, I also set out my definition for the identification of organisational identity claims. I also noted that my focus in this section of my analysis is on claims and utterances made in the verbal text of the annual reports.

A key element of my poststructural approach is that it anticipates multiple identity claims in texts. Consequently, my poststructural analysis of OI is required to accommodate multiple claims. This has led to a certain tension, where I have argued that an essentially qualitative and interpretive approach may benefit from quantitative presentation in some areas, for example in categorising the temporal character of identity claims. Although throughout this section, and in Chapter 9, I present charts and totals in order to illustrate my analysis, I emphasise that no statistical significance should be inferred from this, and that they should not be taken to reflect any underlying positivist assumptions in my approach.

Each of the set of thirty annual reports in my analysis is a substantial and complex document. However, as I show in detail in Appendix 3, there are considerable variations in size and format between the reports, both between publishers and over time. Although the reports share a largely common structure, there are a number of differences, for example, in the proportion of visual material that they contain in relation to written text. These variations have an impact on the extent and distribution of identity work within the reports.

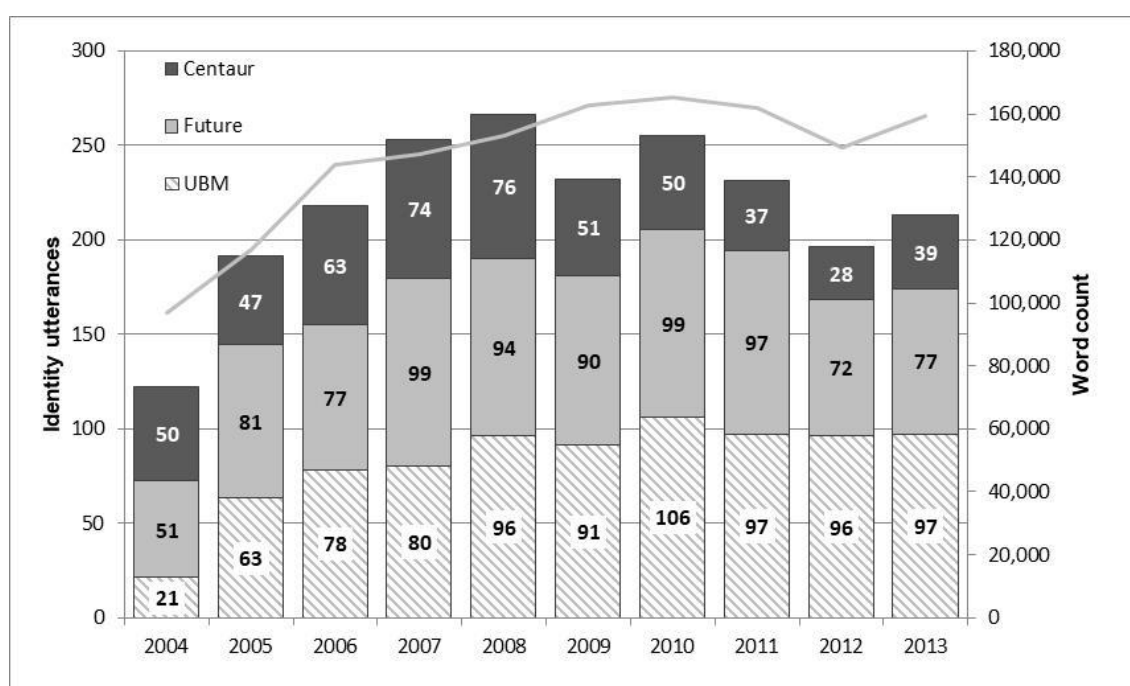
In Table 12, I present summary totals of the identity claims and utterances that I have identified in the verbal text of the thirty annual reports covered in my analysis, broken down by firm. This table reveals variations between the three firms in the total number of identity claims and utterances made within their reports, where there is some correlation between total claims and utterances and the overall word counts of the respective reports, for example with

Centaur's reports containing less words than those of the other two firms. In Figure 6, I present the total number of identity utterances identified in the annual reports, broken down by year and firm, plotted against the total word count for all reports.

**Table 12: Total identity claims and utterances in annual reports, 2004-13**

	Centaur	Future	UBM	Total
<b>Total utterances</b>	515	837	825	2177
<b>Total claims</b>	156	251	323	730

**Figure 6: Identity utterances by year, 2004-13**



*Note that the line in the chart relates to word count*

Although this chart shows considerable variation in the number of utterances over time, when viewed against the total word count for the reports for the three firms, as shown by the line in the chart, it reveals that the variation in identity utterances reasonably closely reflects the variation in the length of the reports. Reports with a higher word count therefore, unsurprisingly, tend to have more identity claims, and this is the case both between firms and over time. I do not consider this to be a significant finding, but I present it to provide a context for the charts and totals that I provide in this section.

Although I have identified a broad relationship between the total word count of reports and the number of identity claims and utterances contained within them, I do argue that there are qualitative differences in the attention paid to identity work by the firms, with Centaur, for example, rather less concerned with presenting identity claims in their reports than the other two firms. I consider these differences in detail in my case studies in Chapter 9.

## **THE CENTRIPETAL CONTENT OF IDENTITY CLAIMS**

In this thesis, I attempt to account for the gap between OI as understood and presented by organisational actors, and as it is empirically realised in organisational texts and discourses. In the first, 'centripetal', conception, identity is a more or less stable, unitary and agreed-upon attribute of organisations. The second, 'centrifugal', approach to OI regards it as empirically fragmented, unstable, decentred, and contested. The focus of my thesis is largely concerned with the exploration of the latter conception. However, I propose that although poststructuralism exposes the centrifugal empirical 'realities' of identity, it also helps to account for the efforts of organisational actors to understand and to present OI and other identities in centripetal terms, as they seek to fix unambiguous meanings on an uncertain world (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111).

Here, I focus on the efforts by organisational actors to create centripetal conceptions of OI, where these are primarily located in the *content* of the text of their identity claims. I show that, in the face of the centrifugal forces that resulted in the empirical fragmentation of identity in texts and discourses, organisational actors sought to *present* identity claims as central and unitary. I also show that, despite the transformational changes that the firms in my study were subject to during this period, actors also sought to present claims as enduring and stable, even at the same time as they attempted to accommodate change, where considerable rhetorical skill was often required in order to reconcile the two.

Although verbal textual identity claims in the reports rarely present themselves explicitly as *identity* claims, there are a few instances where they do so:

UBM now has a clear identity as a focused events-led marketing services and communications business, with negligible exposure to print products (UBM, 2013: 15)

Our commitment to 'doing the right thing' is a part of our identity (UBM, 2013: 22)

The reports also contain explicit claims of identity that do not relate to the organisation directly, but to other identities:

In pursuit of market leadership, Centaur's strategy has generally been initially to establish a weekly periodical that becomes a trusted brand, whose identity becomes inextricably linked with that of the community it serves (Centaur, 2004: 13)

As a natural extension of our core mission to create a market identity for a community and diminish the sense of isolation between its members, the development of meetings based events is a core part of Centaur's strategy (Centaur, 2004: 14)

The commitments are the key to establishing a singular cultural identity for all employees (UBM, 2013: 20)

In my analysis of identity claims in annual reports, I have identified certain 'core' claims – claims *self-described* as central to the organisation, and 'essential' claims – those purporting to relate to an essential attribute of the identity. For core identity claims, the textual content of the claim itself provides an indication of centrality, where they contain phrases such as, 'at its heart', 'focused on', 'does best', and 'our vision'. Below, I list some examples of core claims, where I have highlighted the phrases that I have taken to indicate their core nature in italics. I have also added the identity type from my typology in square brackets:

Future, *at its heart*, is a company focused on creating or curating content for communities of enthusiasts who are passionate about their interests (Future, 2010: 4)  
[Function]

We have *remained focused* on news distribution and business-to-business activities bringing buyers and sellers together through a combination of print, exhibitions, business information (or data) and increasingly, online offerings (UBM, 2006: 2)  
[Function]

What Future *does best* is produce high quality English-language content that can be exploited across different platforms – in print, online and face-to-face (Future, 2007: 4)  
[Behaviour]

*We are focused on creating long-term value for shareholders* (Future, 2013: 12)  
[Behaviour]

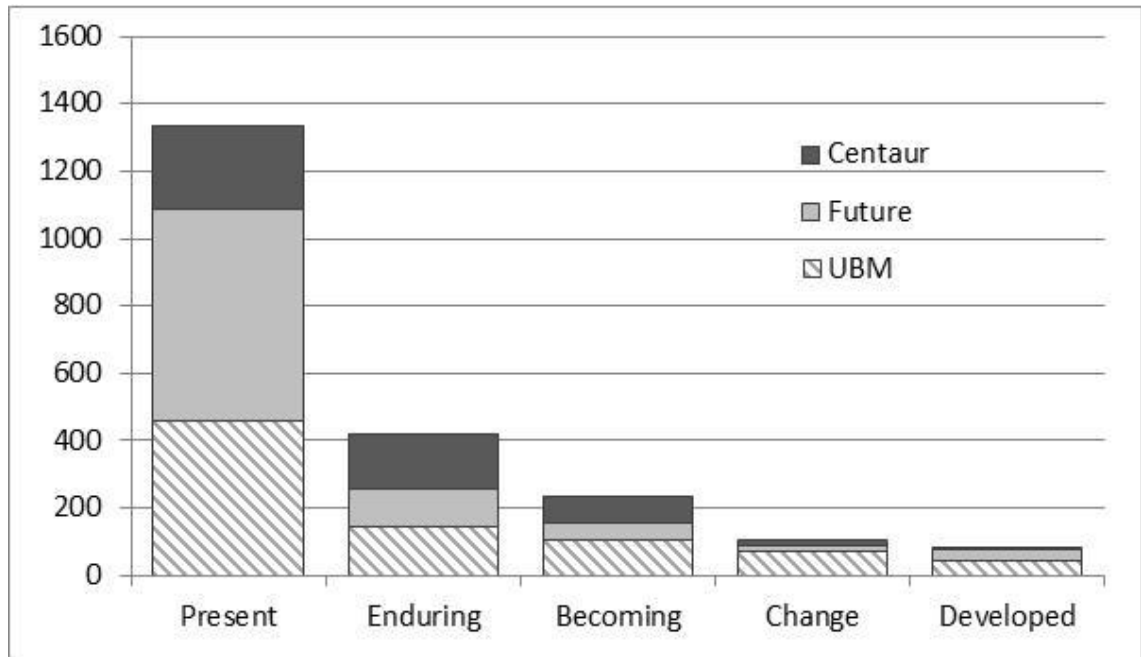
Centaur's *vision is to be* the UK's leading specialist provider of news, information and related services to its chosen business communities (Centaur, 2004: 12) [Positional]

Essential claims emphasise the centrality of a function or role to the organisation, for example, 'Centaur is a leading provider of business information and marketing solutions to high value professional and commercial markets' (Centaur, 2012: 11). Core claims are not restricted to any one of the identity types that I have identified, with 'behaviour', 'function', and 'resource' claims all containing a high proportion of core claims. I have categorised all essential claims as core claims. In total, I have categorised 334 identity utterances as core claims, comprising just over 15% of the total utterances in my analysis.

In my criteria for identifying verbal textual identity claims, I specify that a valid claim must relate to a feature of an identity that is 'permanent or enduring, rather than temporary.' All valid identity claims therefore must have at least an implicit temporal reference. For the majority of the claims in my analysis this is the case, where this corresponds to the general formula '*x is y*', as in, 'Future is a leading customer publisher.' Such claims therefore have no explicit temporal reference, but there is an implicit implication of permanence. I have categorised such identity claims with temporal category of 'present', and, as I show in Figure 7, this is the most common temporal categorisation in my analysis.



**Figure 7: A temporal categorisation of identity utterances, 2004-13**



In addition to those verbal textual identity claims where the temporal aspect is implicit, other claims, as I show in Figure 7, contain explicit references to temporality, generally emphasising their centripetal nature. For claims that I have associated with the category of 'enduring', the content of the claim indicates an emphasis on stability and continuity, for example, 'Future has long-standing, deeply embedded publishing partnerships with some of the world's biggest technology, telecoms and broadcast companies' (Future, 2006: 9). Claims of 'becoming' refer to an identity journey that has commenced, but is not yet complete, for example, 'Driving Future's transformation into a global, digitally-led content business' (Future, 2013: 5). Claims of 'change' highlight identities that are changing. Often these claims refer to entities outside of the firm, for example, 'We operate in a highly competitive environment that is subject to rapid change and must continue to invest and adapt to remain competitive' (UBM, 2005: 18). Finally, temporal claims that I have categorised as 'developed' refer to an identity that has developed over time but which is now presented as stable. Such claims often refer to structural changes within the firm, for example, 'During the year we have significantly reorganised our operations which are now grouped around the two core activities; B2B Communities and B2B Distribution, Monitoring and Targeting' (UBM, 2008: 5).

From my analysis of the temporal content of verbal textual identity claims in annual reports, I propose that content referring to the enduring nature of claims is intended to emphasise continuity, perhaps where this might be in doubt, as in the above example referencing Future's partnerships. Claims explicitly highlighting the enduring nature of identity also frequently reference a firm's culture, for example, 'We aim to maintain a strong culture of entrepreneurialism and professionalism within the business' (Centaur, 2010: 9). In terms of accommodating change, claims focusing on *changing* identities generally reference identities other than that of the organisation itself, as in UBM's claim above concerning the environment. Where claims of change reference the organisation, they are typically expressed as claims of 'becoming', with change positioned towards a future stable state as in Future's claim highlighting its transformation into a digital business, so that even change is expressed in terms of stability.

From the centripetal perspective of the *agreed-upon* nature of verbal textual identity claims, the content of claims in the annual reports provides no evidence of disagreement, or of the existence of marginal views, so that claims are inevitably presented in terms of unanimity. Claims often use 'we' to indicate one clear organisational voice. However, I have identified two distinct conceptions of 'we' used in identity claims. The first represents the voice of the senior management team, those responsible for taking action on behalf of the firm. The second form of 'we' is presented as representing the organisation as a whole. Below, I present examples of both of these conceptions of 'we', noting that the first type is considerably more common than the second:

We are committed to delivering sustainable growth based on honesty, integrity and our core values, fostering partnerships and local involvement in the communities in which we operate. (UBM, 2009, 1)

We work collaboratively. We bring passion and expertise. We put customers at the heart of what we do. We are bold. (UBM, 2013, 12)

I have shown here that authors of identity claims in the annual reports in my analysis often sought to present those claims as central and unitary. In addition,

despite covering a period of transformational change, claims often emphasise the enduring nature of identity. Although the firms in my analysis did seek to change their identity in order to adopt to a changing world, in doing so they emphasised elements of continuity where possible, attempting to legitimise transformational change within the context of enduring identity elements, or in terms of moving to a future stable state. Finally, although claims are invariably presented as agreed-upon, I have shown that the unanimity of claims might alternatively refer to either the senior management team or to all members of the organisation.

## **AN ANALYSIS OF INTERTEXTUAL PATTERNS**

In this thesis, I argue that centripetal perspectives in the OI literature have privileged the claims of organisational actors in presenting OI as a relatively stable concept, resistant to change, whereas empirical studies embracing more centrifugal tendencies tend to present OI as much more dynamic and unstable. A poststructural approach, although recognising the imperative for organisational actors to *present* identity as stable and fixed, highlights the dynamic and unstable empirical nature of identity, continually reconstructed in texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: xvi).

In Chapter 6, I describe how I recorded the incidence and content of textual identity utterances in the annual reports in my analysis, and how I linked these to generalised identity claims. This exercise has enabled me to identify continuities and discontinuities in identity claims in the reports for each of the three firms in my analysis over the ten-year period of my study. In keeping with an intertextual approach, I propose that the meaning of each textual identity utterance is necessarily unique, regardless of whether its content is identical or not, where a claim's meaning is inextricably entwined with its broader context.

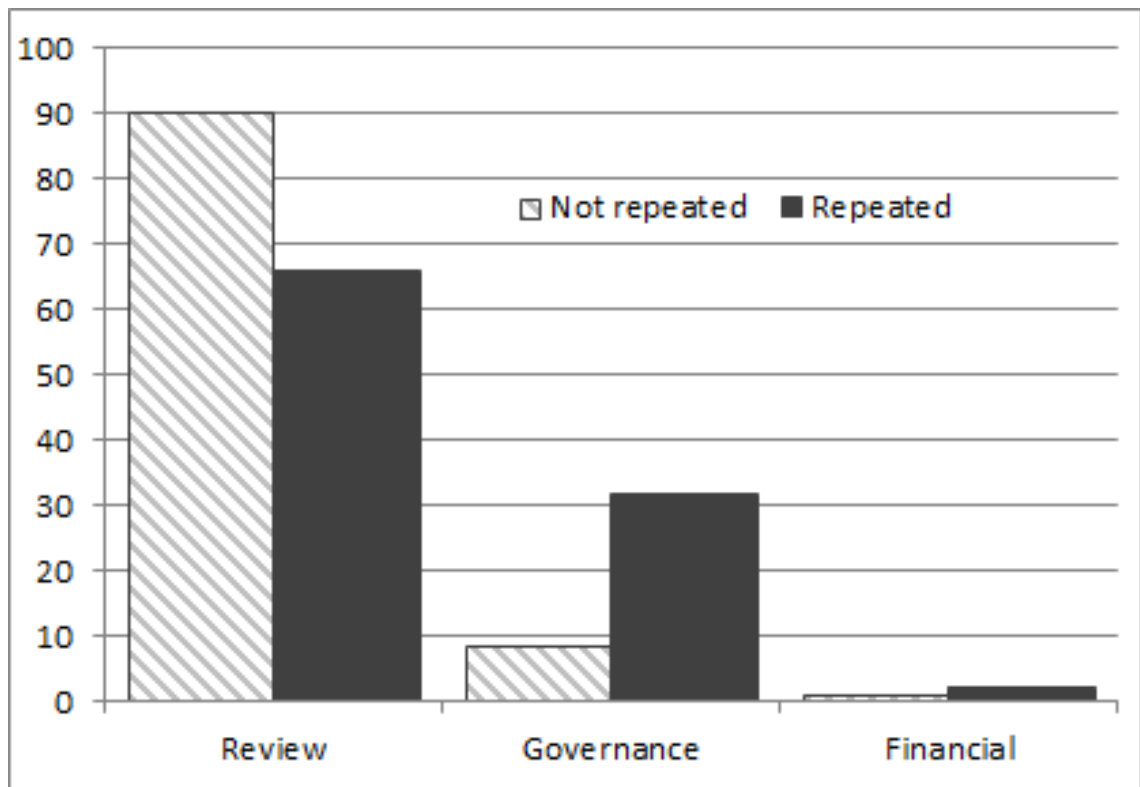
For my analysis of the patterns of intertextual continuity and discontinuity in verbal textual identity claims, I have linked utterances corresponding to a common claim in order to build up *chains* of utterances longitudinally across sets of annual reports for each firm in my analysis for the period 2004-13.

In Table 13, I show the total number of identity claims and utterances that I have identified, broken down into those claims that are not repeated across reports (although these may be repeated within the same report), and those relating to utterances that span more than one report. The table shows that only slightly fewer claims are not repeated across reports than are repeated, indicating a high degree of discontinuity in identity work in the reports, with Centaur’s claims appearing to be more enduring than those of the other two firms. Figure 8 shows that claims repeated across reports are disproportionately located within the governance meta section of the reports, indicating greater continuity in claims in this part of the reports.

**Table 13: Total identity claims and utterances in annual reports, 2004-13**

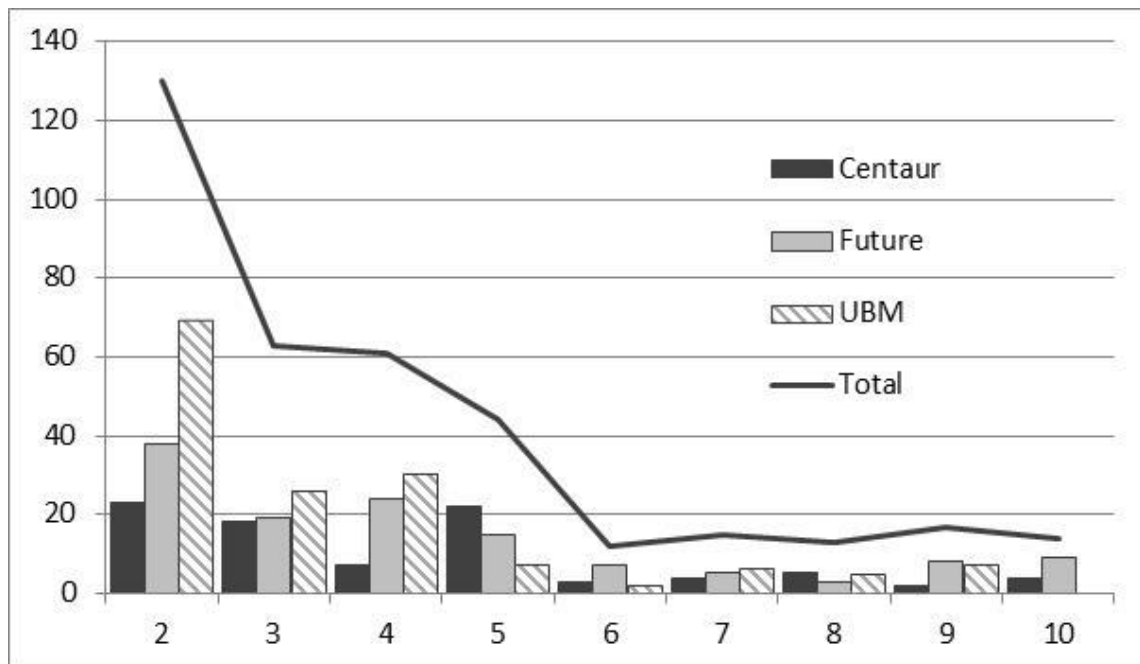
<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Total claims</b>	<b>Total utterances</b>	<b>Claims restricted to a single report</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Claims spanning multiple reports</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Centaur</b>	156	515	68	44	88	56
<b>Future</b>	250	837	122	49	128	51
<b>UBM</b>	323	825	170	53	153	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>2177</b>	<b>360</b>		<b>369</b>	

**Figure 8: Percentage of identity utterances repeated and not repeated, all firms, 2004-13**



In my analysis, I have also identified the *length* of chains of multiple identity claims – the number of reports in which the claims are repeated, where a maximum of ten corresponds to the total number of reports for a firm in the period. In Figure 9, I present identity claims by length of identity chain. This reveals, unsurprisingly, that the longer the length of the chain, the fewer claims there are, with fewer than twenty identity claims persisting throughout the period across all three firms. Figure 9 shows that the distribution of chain lengths across the period for Future and Centaur are slightly flatter than for UBM, signifying a higher proportion of longer identity chains for those two firms, indicating a slightly higher proportion of more enduring claims.

**Figure 9: Total identity claims, by length of chain of utterances**



Textual identity claims spanning nine or ten reports total just 31 out of 729 claims (4.25%), although their repetition across reports means that they make up a larger number of total utterances, 339 out of 2177 (just over 15%). Common enduring claims in my analysis include those focused on the firms' governance, such as risk management or remuneration, claims around employee practices and policies, and social responsibility, for example, with Future's claim that the board 'continues to support best practice in corporate governance,' repeated across all of its reports.

My analysis shows that verbal textual identity claims are equally likely not to be repeated across reports as they are to be repeated. This highlights the provisional nature of much of the identity work in the reports, where authors may present claims as enduring, but where the empirical evidence suggests otherwise. For example, Centaur's 2009 report, the first following the departure of the firm's founder, makes a number of novel claims that are not repeated in subsequent reports, for example:

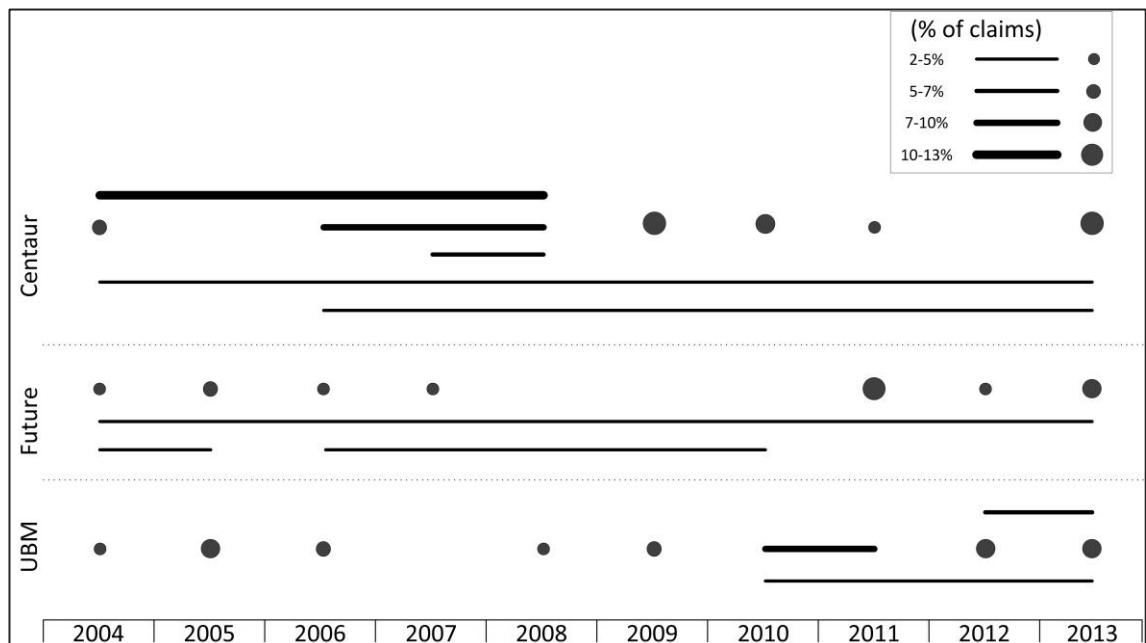
Established brand strength, including market leading positions in many of our served markets, facilitates a deeper and wider penetration into the existing market and adjacent areas. (Centaur, 2009: 6)

The core editorial and production competencies across the Group ensure a dynamic and innovative approach to content and distribution. (Centaur, 2009: 6)

Centaur's core strategic competencies of community building, information needs fulfilment and the provision of targeted routes to market. (Centaur, 2009: 8)

In addition to identifying the length of strings of repeated textual utterances within the set of annual reports, I recorded *patterns* of continuity and discontinuity in identity claims. In Figure 10, I visualise the most frequently occurring strings of identity utterances for each firm. Here, lines represent claims repeated across reports and dots represent claims present in just one report, where thicker lines and larger dots represent proportionally more claims. For example, the top line in Figure 10 represents those identity claims repeated in each of Centaur's reports from 2004 to 2008. The key on the top right of the chart indicates that these claims represent 10-13% of the total identity claims recorded for Centaur. Similarly, the large dot recorded for 2009 indicates that 10-13% of Centaur's total claims across their set of reports occurred in the 2009 report, with these claims not repeated in any other reports.

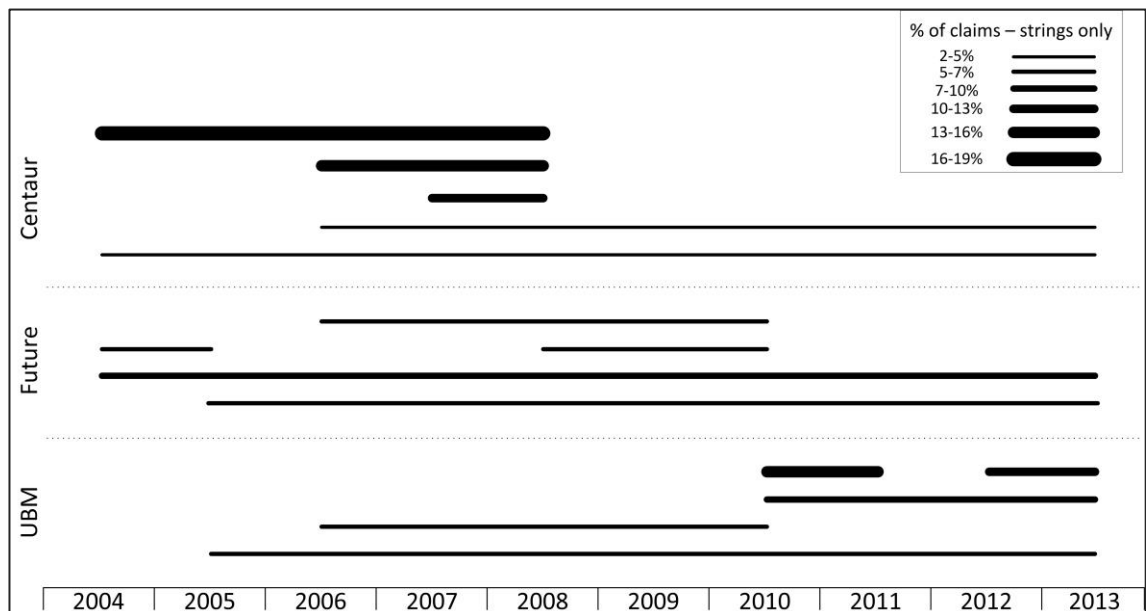
**Figure 10: Representation of the top ten most frequent intertextual strings**



*Note: I selected the categorisation of proportions (e.g. 10-13%) in order to maximise the visual impact of the diagram*

In the example of Centaur, I associate the pattern of a large number of repeated textual claims recorded between 2004 and 2008 followed by years characterised by very little continuity in identity claims with the firm's founder stepping aside prior to 2009's report. In Figure 11, I have repeated the exercise shown in Figure 10, but here I have excluded all non-repeated claims and focused only on the five most frequently occurring strings for each firm. Figure 11 highlights the period of relative stability in identity work in Centaur's reports between 2004 and 2008, together with a period of stability in UBM's identity work between 2010 and 2013, corresponding to the firm settling on a central identity as an events provider.

**Figure 11: Representation of top five most frequent intertextual strings – repeated claims only**



The preceding analysis has focused on the repetition of verbal textual identity claims over time. However, I have also noted the frequent repetition of identity claims *within* individual annual reports. I propose that this tends to relate to efforts by organisational actors to determine the salience of particular claims, which I cover in Chapter 8, where I discuss argumentation and presentation within reports.



From a poststructural perspective, I argue that discontinuities in identity work point to the inherent dynamism and instability in identity construction (Hansen, 2006: 20-1). However, I have noted that poststructuralism does not simply consider identity to be dynamic in the sense that it changes over time, but characterises it as continually reconstituted in texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: xvi). Therefore, regardless of the apparent continuity of claims over time, each instantiation, or utterance, is conceptualised as both produced, and consumed, afresh, where not only every repetition of a claim across reports, but every reading of that claim, encapsulates a unique meaning.

From my data, it is not possible to ascertain the understandings of readers of distinct identity claims, although industry bloggers do provide some general responses in their posts, for example, displaying increasing antagonism towards publishers persevering with business models centred on the print magazine. However, I am able to examine the extent to which the *content* of verbal textual identity claims within the annual reports varies between utterances, where even cosmetic changes indicate that a claim was not simply copied and pasted from one report to the next. In practice, it has proved difficult to quantify the *extent* to which the content of identity claims in the annual reports changes over time. For example, the content of some claims may change subtly between reports and that of others more substantially, where content changes may or may not correspond to any significant change in meaning. Furthermore, the position of claims within the reports may change over time, where this may or may not be significant to their meaning.

I present two examples here to illustrate changes of content over time. First, I consider a claim present in Centaur's annual reports from 2004 to 2008, a period where I have noted considerable continuity in identity work:

Editorially, the weekly magazine provides an ideal medium for news analysis and special emphasis features, whilst the internet is better suited to breaking news highlights and database searching (Centaur, 2004: 14).

Editorially, the weekly magazine provides an ideal medium for news analysis and special emphasis features, whilst the internet is better suited to breaking news highlights and database searching (Centaur, 2005: 7).

Editorially, the weekly magazine provides an ideal medium for news analysis and special emphasis features, whilst the internet is better suited to breaking news highlights, multimedia content, user-generated content, data analysis and database searching (Centaur, 2006: 7).

Editorially, the magazine provides an ideal medium for news analysis and special emphasis features...the internet is better suited to breaking news highlights, multimedia content, user generated content, data analysis and database searching (Centaur, 2007: 9).

Editorially, the magazine provides an ideal medium for news analysis and special emphasis features, whilst the internet is better suited to breaking news highlights, multimedia content, user generated content, data analysis and database searching (Centaur, 2008: 9).

In this first example, what initially may appear to be identical content for each year in fact subtly changes from 2006, with the addition of 'multimedia content, user-generated content' added to the list of advantages of the Internet, and again, from 2007, where 'weekly' is removed from 'weekly magazine', and a hyphen removed from 'user-generated'. Both sets of amendments change the meaning of the utterances subtly, but I argue, significantly. For my second example, I take a claim made in UBM's reports from 2005 to 2010. For the first five occurrences, the content of the claim is identical: 'We operate in a highly competitive environment that is subject to rapid change and must continue to invest and adapt to remain competitive.' Yet, over time the claim moves between different sections of the reports, starting in the financial review, moving to the operating review, and finally ending up in the section on risks. In 2010, the content of the claim changes to 'Our businesses operate in highly competitive markets that continue to change in response to technological innovation and other factors.' Despite these changes, however, in my interpretation of this claim, neither the change in content, nor of its location in the report is particularly significant.

My analysis shows that, unsurprisingly, it is the content of the most prominent verbal textual identity claims in the reports that changes most frequently and significantly, with less central claims, for example in the areas of employee policies and governance, more likely to be templated and copied from report to

report. I emphasise again, however, that Bakhtin's concept of the utterance asserts that the meaning of statements are unique in the context of both their production and their consumption, where even identical claims will have different meanings in different contexts, for different readers (Clark and Holquist, 1984: 204-11).

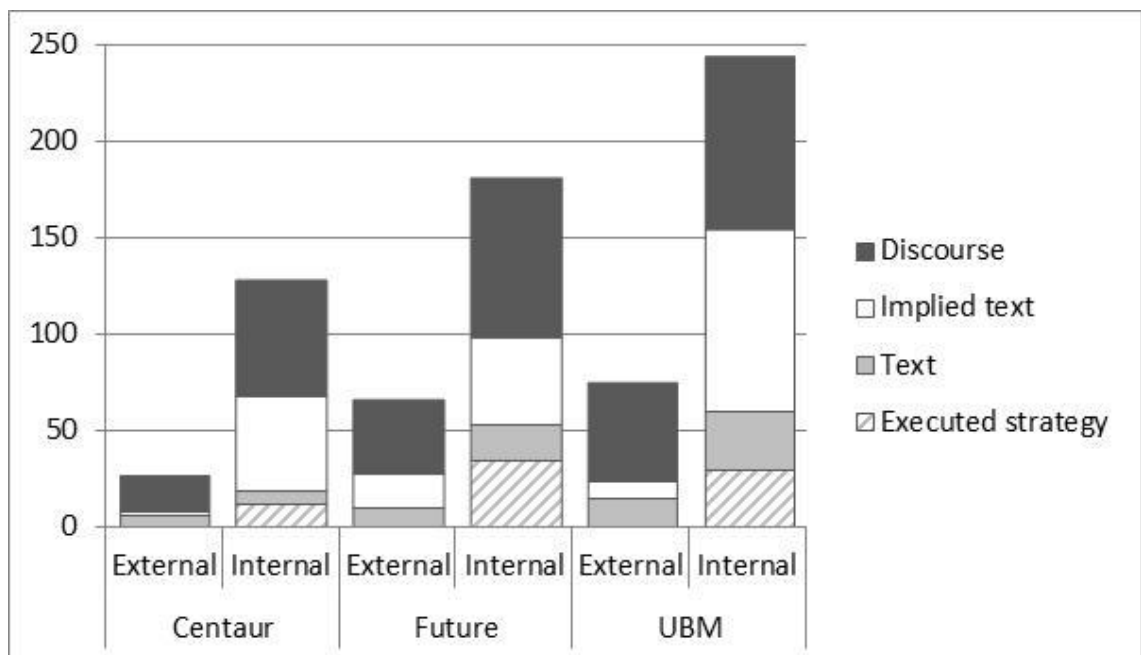
In Chapter 6, I noted that my analysis of intertextual patterns is loosely based on Shaw and Pecorari's (2013) approach to the intertextual analysis of statements in chairmen's statements. However, I argue that my analysis extends the scope of their work in two important areas. Firstly, rather than simply noting repeated verbal textual statements in texts, I have mapped these visually across a set of annual reports over a ten year period, as shown in Figures 10 and 11, highlighting patterns of identity work in terms of continuities and discontinuities. Secondly, my analysis has also accommodated the changing content of claims, so that I have both been able to track identity claims over time even when the content of the claim has changed, and to analyse the changes to that content.

My analysis of the intertextual patterns of verbal textual identity claims in annual reports reveals considerable discontinuity in identity construction for the three firms over this period, but it has also identified some periods of relative continuity in identity work. Although evidence of the templating of the content of many identity claims between reports does not appear to support the poststructural conception of the essential instability of identity, my analysis reveals extensive changes in the content of central and prominent identity claims, indicating that these claims were revisited for each new report, even if the meaning of claims often does not appear to change. Moreover, an intertextual perspective that implies that every meaning is unique within the context both of its production and its consumption means that any analysis of claims over time needs to account not only for changes in the content of a claim, but also its multimodal presentation, its context within the report, the wider industry context at the time of the report's production, and the consumption of the claim by the report's readers.

## AN ANALYSIS OF INTERTEXTUAL SOURCES

I have presented an analysis of patterns of textual identity utterances longitudinally across firms' annual reports, and I have highlighted the continuities and discontinuities revealed by this analysis. Here, I turn to another approach to intertextual analysis, one focusing on the other texts and discourses that are referenced by verbal textual identity claims in the reports. In Chapter 6, I outlined my methodology for this intertextual analysis, and in Table 11, on page 174, I presented a schema setting out my intertextual typology. In Figure 12, I summarise the identity claims in my analysis across each of the intertextual categories that I identified in that schema, broken down by firm. Figure 12 reveals that, in my analysis of verbal textual identity claims, references to internal texts and discourses are much more frequent than references to external sources, and that references to discourses are generally more frequent than to other types of reference.

**Figure 12: Identity claims summarised by intertextual category**



In Table 14, I provide examples from the reports for each of my intertextual categories. To recap from Chapter 7, some claims can be associated with specific, though not necessarily explicitly referenced, texts. Where claims refer to sources that may or may not exist as physical texts but where they refer to them *as if* they are, I have categorised these references as *implied texts*. Other claims refer to broader *discourses* that are not relatable to either specific or implied texts. Finally, some claims appear to directly reference *events*, as in the following example, where the claim for UBM as a firm with a 'sustainable and profitable set of leading titles' appears to be directly based upon ongoing action by the firm, rather than on any text or discourse:

We will continue to review our portfolio systematically...to ensure we have a commercially sustainable and profitable set of leading titles. (UBM, 2010: 31)

**Table 14: Examples of intertextual sources across categories**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Internal</b>	<b>External</b>
<b>Text</b>	Financial accounts Accounting policies Staff communication Press release Employee training programme Employment policies Focus groups Meetings Staff survey Newsletters Website Risk policy Payroll giving scheme Planning process Internal research Supplier policy Code of conduct AGM resolution Partnership agreements	Industry report FTSE Media Index Listing Rules of the Financial Services Authority London Stock Exchange List Public reports Standards accreditation IFRS, UK GAAP accounting standards Companies Act FRC Code Social and environmental awards and accreditations Industry awards UN Declaration on Human Rights UN Global Compact on the Responsibilities for Business
<b>Implied text</b>	Company data Business model Strategy Mission Vision Practices	Market position Industry body membership Best practice Competitors
<b>Discourse</b>	Customer understanding Culture High standards Employee strengths Good governance Expertise Good corporate citizen Brand strength Principles History Established approach	Customer/consumer needs The market Technology Shareholder views

I found that identity claims citing specific internal texts may refer to a document explicitly, or the text may be inferred from the reference, for example:

Participation in ubmVOICE, our employee engagement survey, continued its upward trend in 2012. (UBM, 2012: 24) (Internal communications)

The majority of Group revenues and profits are built on our own brands. (Future, 2007: 23) (Financial results)

External texts referred to by verbal textual identity claims include legislation, such as the UK Companies Act, as well as standards and codes, for example the Financial Reporting Council's Combined Code, social and environmental

accreditations, memberships of industry bodies, and external industry research, as in the following examples:

As with all aspects of corporate governance, the Board seeks to apply best practice to its remuneration policy, in line with the provisions of the Combined Code issued in July 2003 and Schedule 7A to the Companies Act 1985. (Future, 2004: 53)

Research by UBM companies shows that even within technology markets, media consumers (or buyers) favour online media for immediate news content while preferring print over online as a medium for conceptual and analytical content. (UBM, 2006: 18)

Claims in the reports that refer to internal implied texts include those relating to a firm's strategy, mission, or vision, for example:

Our strategy is to build businesses which target the needs of specialist communities in B2B and business information distribution, monitoring and targeting. (UBM, 2008: 4)

The Future Mission: To reach and grow high-value global audiences with world-class content produced by talented experts... (Future, 2013:4)

References to external implied texts often relate to a firm's relative position in the market, where I have assumed that such claims reference some form of external assessment (although this is often not entirely clear), as in the following examples:

Future is now a recognised global leader in tablet publishing... (Future, 2012: 9)

In computer games and guitar magazines, Future is the worldwide leader. In computing and other segments we hold attractive positions. (Future, 2005: 6)

Other claims reference broader discourses that cannot be associated with individual texts, either direct or implied. These discourses can be internal or external to the firm. For example, references to *internal* discourses might refer to a firm's culture, its employees, or its ways of working, as in the following examples:

Centaur's culture has been built on the key qualities of integrity, energy and entrepreneurship. (Centaur, 2004: 11)

Essential to Future are our people, who are the lifeblood of any creative industry.  
(Future, 2007: 5)

Acting with respect is central to the way we do business, and we believe that acting in a responsible manner is key to delivering sustainable value for our shareholders. (UBM, 2010: 13)

I found that verbal textual identity claims based on *external* discourses are most frequently associated with customers, technology, or the market, as in the following examples:

Our understanding of the changing needs of our customers has enabled us to develop many market-leading brands. (Centaur, 2007: 7)

The internet offers many new ways to serve our core markets and also dramatically extends our reach and therefore the size and potential of our markets. (Centaur, 2008: 9)

The desire for buyers and sellers to meet face-to-face is strengthening, even as online digital media has grown. (UBM, 2006: 17)

I propose that this method for the intertextual analysis of verbal textual identity claims in annual reports provides a valid and practical framework for understanding how organisational actors construct identity claims from a range of intertextual sources, both internal and external to the organisation. It highlights how some types of identity claim, for example, those relating to corporate governance or social responsibility, tend to be shaped by institutional sources such as legislation or guidance from regulators, whereas other claims, for example those relating to culture, are more likely to be based on internal texts and discourses. I propose that the use of both internal and external intertextual references can provide authority to identity claims, for example, with UBM's reports drawing on external industry research as intertextual support for claims relating to the firm's strategic vision, and all firms referencing their financial results to provide authority for claims of performance.

I noted in Chapter 7 that my approach to intertextual analysis differs from that of Hansen (2006) in that I am not concerned with the *nature* of the linkages from referring texts and discourses. In my analysis, I have noted very little direct



quotation, either acknowledged or otherwise, from intertextual sources. My approach also differs from Fairclough (1992) in that I give as much weight to references from specific texts as from broader discourses, where Fairclough tends to privilege the latter. As with my intertextual analysis of the patterns of identity construction, I argue that my analysis of the intertextual sources of identity claims supports a poststructural, discursive conceptualisation of identity construction, with identity claims constructed from other texts and discourses, rather than constructed by organisational actors through the accessing of collectively-held beliefs (Hansen, 2006: 8). However, I recognise the methodological limitations of this approach, where both the immediate intertextual sources of many claims, as well as their ultimate origins, will remain elusive in even the most rigorous analysis.

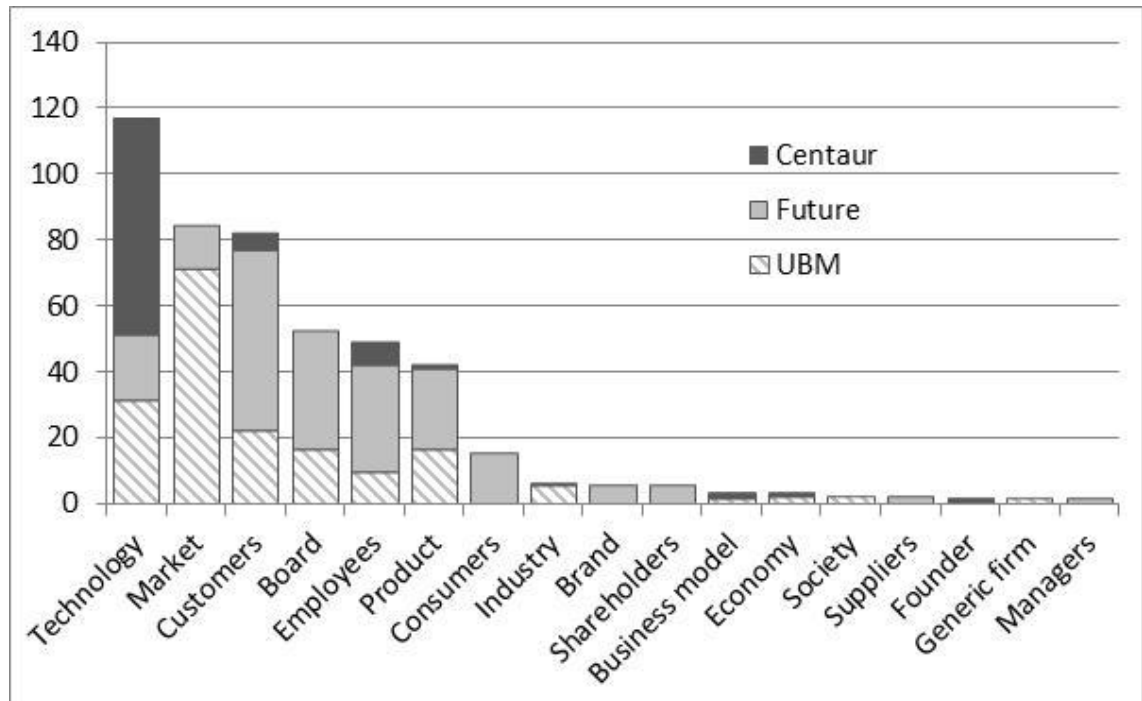
## **THE RELATIONAL ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY CLAIMS**

I have proposed that a key element of a poststructural approach to identity is the mutual constitution of the Self and multiple Others, where the construction of organisational identity is inextricably entwined with the construction of other related identities (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). In Chapter 7, I set out the two methods that I have used in order to examine this relational aspect of identity construction, with the first addressing verbal textual identity claims made in the annual reports for entities *other* than the firm, on the basis that such claims are in fact integral to the construction of the identity of the firm, and the second examining identity claims where the content of the claim itself refers to multiple identities, including that of the firm. I begin with a discussion of my findings relating to the first of these methods, noting that in Chapter 6 I have highlighted issues with the identification of claims in this area, specifically the difficulty in establishing the extent to which a specific identity claim is relevant to the identity construction of the organisation.

The vast majority of verbal textual identity claims that I identified in my analysis, constituting nearly 80% of individual utterances, have the identity of the firm itself as their focus. The remaining claims are concerned with a range of other identities, as I show in Figure 13. Although I have identified claims relating to 17

separate identities in addition to that of the firm, over 90% of these utterances relate to the six most frequently occurring. Figure 13 also reveals considerable variation between the three firms in terms of the other identities featured in their annual reports.

**Figure 13: Identity claims – identities other than the firm**



For Centaur, the majority of textual claims relating to identities other than the firm are concerned with technology, where I refer to both the Internet and magazines as examples of technology. Examples of such claims include, ‘The medium of the internet is highly complementary to the role of the business magazine’ (Centaur, 2004: 14), and ‘We believe that magazines remain a uniquely effective medium with which to develop an in-depth relationship with their readers and to establish effective and valuable information brands...’ (Centaur, 2008: 9). In the case of UBM, claims about the market are dominant, where these position the firm within its broader marketplace. Examples include, ‘We operate in a highly competitive environment that is subject to rapid change and must continue to invest and adapt to remain competitive’ (UBM, 2006: 38), and, ‘The B2B Communities marketplace is highly fragmented, reflecting the varied types of products and services, and the ranges of business models

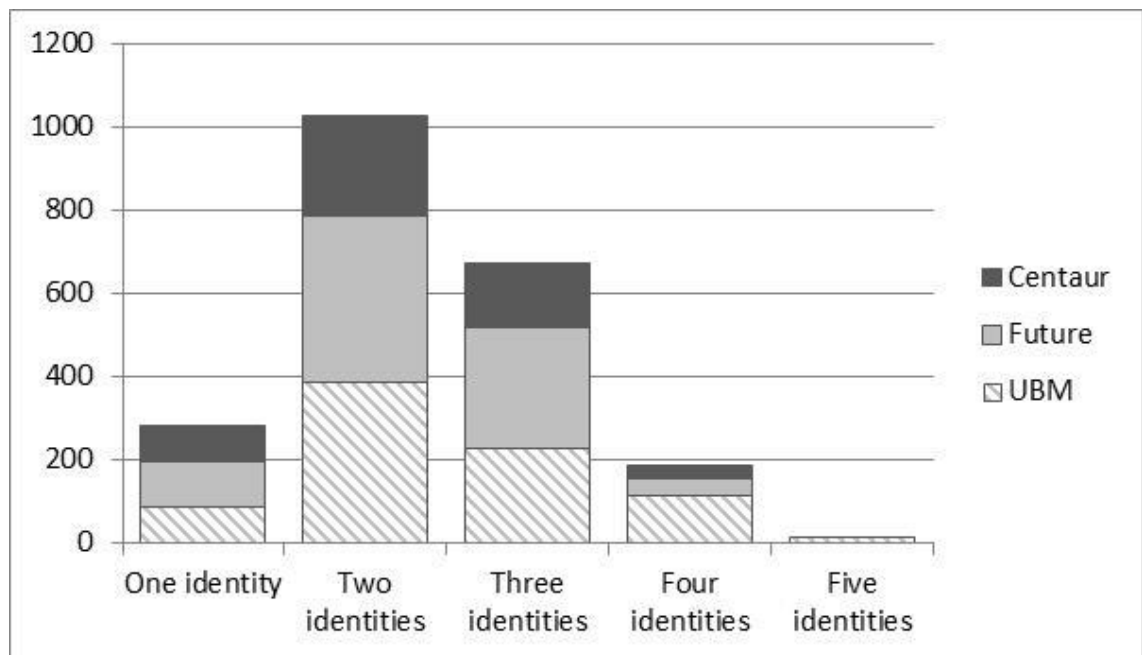
operating in the market' (UBM, 2008: 6). Finally, for Future, Figure 13 reveals a large number of claims made about the firm's customers, as in 'Future's core readership is male, young and young-at-heart' (Future, 2011: 6), and '...our readers are typically people who advertisers and retailers are keen to reach' (Future, 2011: 7). Future's reports also feature a number of claims about their employees, for example with the claim, 'We have world-class content creators and digital innovators whose passion is to connect, inspire and entertain the millions of engaged consumers who make up our global audience' (Future, 2013: 7).

As I argued in the example at the start of this chapter, I propose that verbal textual identity claims in the annual reports in my analysis that do not directly address the identity of the organisation nevertheless invariably contribute to OI construction in some way, and reflect firms' overall identity strategies. In the case of Future, its central identity claims tend to encompass both its readers and its employees, for example with the claim, 'We share the same passions as our consumers' (Future, 2007), where such central claims are supported by a number of claims that focus specifically on the identity of its employees and its customers. UBM's identity claims often focus on the identity of the market where, I argue, they are intended to support its shift from a publishing business to an events organiser, tending to downplay the prospects for print publishing and focus on the advantages of the events business. I contend that such examples support the poststructural assertion of the identity of the Self as mutually constituted with multiple Others (Hansen, 2006: 6-7), where networks of identity relationships will both differ between firms and change over time.

For the second part of my analysis of the relational nature of the construction of verbal textual identity claims, I have examined those identity claims that have a focus on the firm, but where the claims are also explicitly constructed in relation to other identities. For example, the claim 'Future's core readership is male, young and young at heart' relates both to an aspect of the identity of the firm – the nature of its readers, and to the identity of its customers – 'young and young at heart' men, where the two identities are mutually constituted within the same claim. For each identity claim in my analysis, I recorded both the focal identity

for the claim and what I considered to be related identities (where I made the assumption that the firm was the focal identity if it was involved in a claim). In Figure 14, I summarise the findings from this exercise, revealing that only a small minority of claims focus solely on a single identity, for example, 'UBM is a leading global business media company' (UBM, 2006: 4), whereas nearly 90% of identity utterances involve two or more identities.

**Figure 14: Number of identities involved in identity utterances, 2004-13**



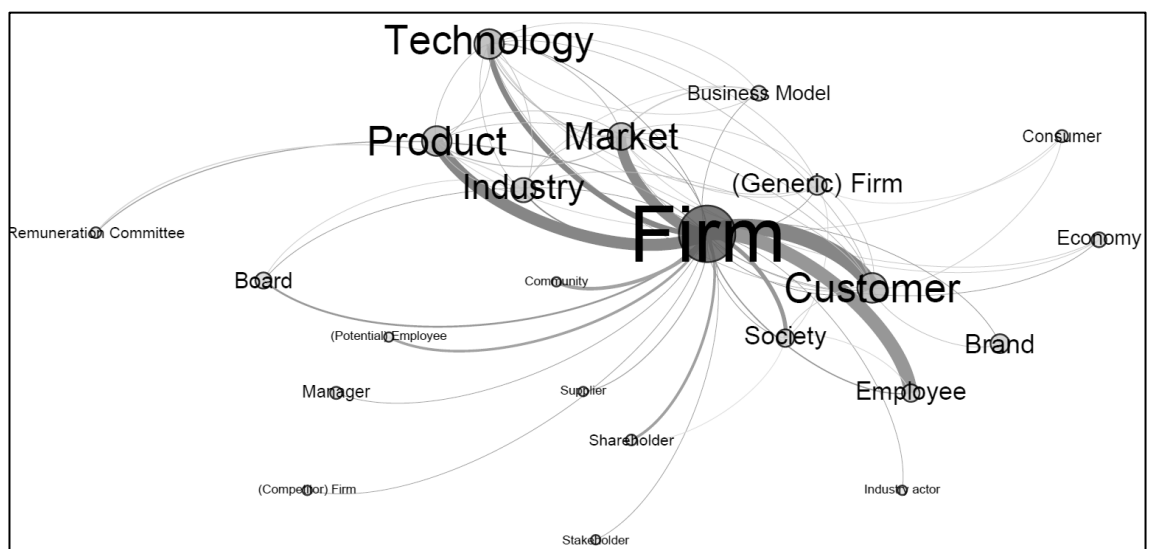
In Table 15, I present the ten most commonly occurring combinations of identities that I identified in my analysis. These cover around 50% of the total number of textual claims involving multiple identities. As over 80% of identity utterances that relate to more than one identity have a focus on the firm, it is not surprising that the most common combinations all have the firm as a focal identity. None of these common combinations involve more than three identities, although, as I show in Figure 14, I identified some claims involving up to five identities. Table 15 shows that the most common identity combinations involve firms, employees, customers and products.

**Table 15: Top ten combinations of identity relationships, all firms**

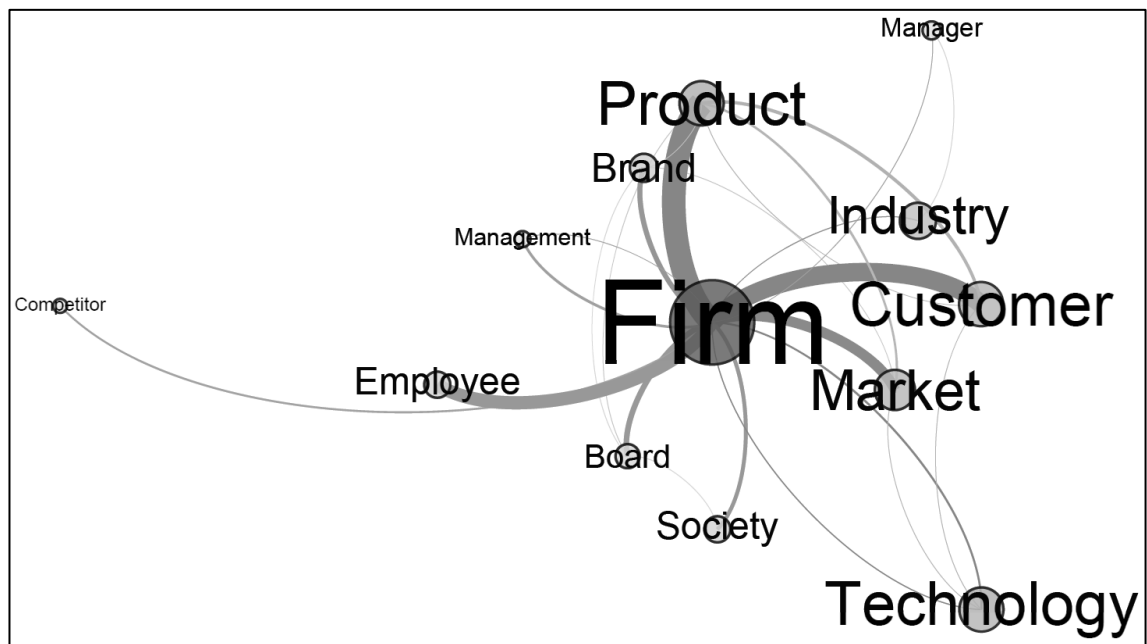
<b>Focal identity</b>	<b>Related identity 1</b>	<b>Related identity 2</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Total utterances</b>
Firm	Employee		'Essential to Future are our people, who are the lifeblood of any creative industry' (Future, 2007: 5)	168
Firm	Customer		'We help businesses do business by connecting them with a targeted, qualified audience, through live events, press releases and other digital and print media' (UBM, 2013:Inside cover)	144
Firm	Product		'We provide information, data, marketing services and distribution products' (UBM, 2008: 4)	123
Firm	Product	Customer	'We aim for each of our businesses to be at the heart of commercial and professional communities, providing each community with a rich, tailored and complete range of media products – the 'must attend' event, the "must read" content, the "must use" market (UBM, 2007: 4)	114
Firm	Product	Market	'Each UBM business meets the needs of the specific professional communities it serves with a range of media products' (UBM, 2006: 6)	80
Firm	Market		'operating as it does as a federation of small businesses serving individual vertical communities' (Centaur, 2006: 6)	78
Firm	Employee	Society	'We will also continue to encourage greater awareness and involvement from our employees with wider internal communication of CR issues and strategy' (Future, 2004: 52)	61
Firm	Industry		'Future leads industry initiatives in relation to piracy and is actively involved in efforts to combat piracy at a national and European level' (Future, 2011: 17)	54
Firm	Society		'For us, being a sustainable business isn't just about being green, it's about how UBM achieves business success today, which includes being profitable, whilst assuring its success tomorrow, through long-term responsible management and stewardship' (UBM, 2011: 44)	53
Firm	Technology		'The Group continued to successfully migrate its business onto digital platforms' (Centaur, 2011: 10)	53

The identity combinations that I have listed in Table 16 represents a small proportion of over 130 different combinations of identities identified in my analysis. In Figures 15 and 16, I present the identity relationships in visual form as a network, using the social network analysis tool Gephi. This software maps links between *nodes*, where nodes in this case equate to an identity participating in a verbal textual identity claim. In order to capture linkages, each identity claim is reduced to a binary pair, so that a single claim relating to the identities of firm, employee, and society would be recorded as three binary pairs: *firm – employee*, *firm – society*, and *employee – society*. Each of these *dyads* is represented on the diagram, where the most common links are represented by the thickest lines and those nodes participating in most links are relatively larger. The distance between, and placement of, nodes has no significance, except for the node with the most connections, which is situated at the centre of the diagram. The chief advantage of using this type of diagram for the presentation of the relational nature of identity claims compared to a tabular format is that it allows for the presentation of all identities and combinations of links in a compact visual form, and highlights key nodes and relationships. It also has the advantage of allowing visual comparisons between different cases.

**Figure 15: Network diagram of relational identity links, UBM, 2004-13**



**Figure 16: Network diagram of relational identity links, Centaur, 2004-13**



The network diagrams in Figures 15 and 16 illustrate the different patterns of identity relationships in the identity work of UBM and Centaur. Figure 16, for UBM, reveals that, after the firm itself, the identities of customer, product, technology and market are most prominent in verbal textual identity claims. UBM's identity claims also include a greater variety of identities than Centaur, including for example, shareholders, business models and consumers. For Centaur the four prominent identities are the same as for UBM, but fewer identities are involved in identity construction overall. One disadvantage of these network diagrams, however, as presented, given my emphasis on the dynamic nature of identity construction, is that they are static, representing the entire period of my analysis, whereas an analysis of changing patterns over time might better complement my poststructural approach.

My second method of relational analysis highlights the relational nature of identity claims more explicitly than my first method, with the different identities involved in identity construction directly contained within the content of the claim. However, the conclusions that I have drawn are much the same, with a firm's identity constructed mutually with the identity of key other identities, such as its products, customers, and employees. My network diagrams reflect the

differing profiles of this relational identity work between firms, for example, highlighting Centaur's focus on technology in the form of the magazine in its identity construction.

Although I have acknowledged limitations with both my data collection and my methodology in terms of the relational analysis of identity construction, for example, where I do not consider the multimodality of identity claims, I propose that my analysis does support a conceptualisation of the mutual constitution of organisational identity in relation to other identities. I argue that the relational construction of identity in discourse is not only central to the processes of identity construction, but that an understanding of these processes contributes to a deeper understanding of the richness and complexity of identity construction at the organisational level. My analysis complements work on relationality at the level of individual identity (Ramarajan, 2014) and Rafaelli's (2013b: 123) understanding of the essentially relational nature of identity construction at the industry level, where how 'who we are' (as a community) and 'what we do' (as watch producers) were mutually constitutive in the Swiss watchmaking industry.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I have introduced the findings of my analysis in relation to verbal textual identity claims and utterances in annual reports. I have argued that these findings support both centripetal and centrifugal interpretations of OI. With regard to the former, I have shown how the *content* of textual OI claims in reports emphasises stable and agreed-upon conceptions of identity, where, even with firms subject to transformational change, organisational actors seek to emphasise underlying enduring claims, and where claims of 'we-ness' assume a unanimity of identity beliefs, reflecting a desire to fix meanings and identities (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111).

In terms of the centrifugal empirical 'reality' of OI, I have presented two methods of intertextual analysis. The first of these focuses on tracking textual OI claims over time, where I highlight the continuities and discontinuities of patterns of identity utterance, noting that as many claims were not repeated over time as



were. The second method examines how OI claims in reports referenced existing texts and discourses internal and external to the organisation, highlighting the role of intertextual processes in identity construction (Hansen, 2006: 55).

Finally, I have addressed the central poststructural assertion of the mutual, relational, constitution of identities (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). I have argued that many verbal textual identity claims in annual reports not directly focused on the identity of the firm are nevertheless fundamentally concerned with OI construction. I have also argued that the majority of the identity claims that are focused on the firm are also concerned with the construction of other identities, further highlighting the mutually constituted and relational nature of identity construction from a poststructural perspective. In the next chapter, I broaden my analysis from identity claims and utterances, to address identity construction at two levels of discourse: annual reports as identity discourses and wider industry discourses. I also address the multimodal nature of identity construction in annual reports, by exploring the identity work of visual elements in the reports, and looking at how argumentation and rhetorical presentation unify both verbal text and the visual in constructing identity.

## CHAPTER 8: FINDINGS – IDENTITY DISCOURSES

In this thesis, I argue that, in addition to claims at the level of the individual statement, identity construction also encompasses the broader levels of text and discourse. In this chapter, I present corporate annual reports as *identity discourses*, where, following Gee (1999), I position identity construction as a key purpose of texts and discourses. I propose that the complex nature of annual reports as overarching identity discourses containing multiple *sub discourses* reflects the complex purposes of the firms themselves, as they seek to accommodate the requirements of a variety of stakeholders, both inside and outside of the firm. I argue that this complexity supports a poststructural perspective on identity, with the authors of reports engaged in an ongoing process involving the construction of multiple, mutually constituted identities (Hansen, 2006: 44-5).

I present this chapter in three parts. In the first part, I introduce my analysis of annual reports as texts as identity discourses, examining their multiple purposes, audiences, authorships, and the resources that they call upon in their construction, based upon Wood and Kroger's (2000) framework for discourse analysis. I then address the various sub discourses that make up the reports, and consider the visual aspects of identity construction, highlighting the important role of the front cover in the identity work of reports. In the second part, I examine the role of argumentation and presentation in identity construction in the annual reports, emphasising the role of multimodality in the construction of argumentation in annual reports. In the final part of this chapter, I focus on broader industry discourses, addressing a range of industry texts and their role in shaping the identity of the UK B2B and professional publishing industry in the period of my study.

### ANNUAL REPORTS AS IDENTITY DISCOURSES

In the UK, the corporate annual report is a document produced on an annual basis by firms listed on the FTSE financial index. Firms are mandated to produce the report by UK government legislation, with detailed guidance

provided by the official regulator, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC). Although these institutional sources provide a set of requirements for the reports, the firms themselves have considerable flexibility in the format and presentation of these requirements in their reports (Financial Reporting Council, 2014c).

Annual reports are substantial, complex, and dynamic documents, with multiple authors, audiences and purposes (Davison and Skerratt, 2007). In this thesis, I propose that organisational authors construct reports intertextually, by referencing multiple internal and external texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: 55). Although I argue that strong institutional pressures contribute to shaping both the structure and the content of reports, firms have considerable latitude in how they interpret these institutional demands and present their reports, and I have argued in the previous chapter that internal texts and discourses can play as important a role in report construction as external ones. Annual reports are powerful tools for impression management, targeted at a variety of organisational stakeholders (Anderson and Imperia, 1992). Although firms package their annual reports as unitary documents, presenting them in terms of coherent and cohesive narratives, in practice I have shown that they consist of a number of distinct sections, each with their own particular purpose and conventions, often having distinct authors and intended audiences. Therefore, rather than comprising a single discourse, I propose that annual reports consist of a number of distinct *sub discourses*, relating to separate sections of the reports. Annual reports are also visual as well as textual documents (Beattie et al. 2008), and I argue that any comprehensive analysis needs to address both textual and visual aspects of the reports. Finally, I have noted that the structure and format of reports is neither stable nor consistent, either between firms or longitudinally, with change driven by a range of both internal and external factors (Beattie, 2014).

I begin the first part of this chapter with a consideration of the annual report as an overarching discourse. In doing so, I adopt the framework proposed by Wood and Kroger (2000), where I ask the following questions of texts: who is creating the discourse, and why?; who is the intended audience and how do

they react to the discourse?; what resources are present and used to perform this activity?; what is the discourse attempting to do?; how is the discourse constructed to do this?; and, what is the wider context for the discourse? I then review each sub discourse of the annual report in turn, focusing on its particular role in the construction of identity in the report. Finally, I conclude with a consideration of the visual elements of the annual report, where I emphasise their key role in identity construction.

### **The purposes of the annual reports**

The relevant pieces of government legislation covering annual reporting in my period of study, the 1985 and 2006 *Companies Acts*, do not themselves directly define what the annual report is, or its purpose, but rather refer to a number of separate requirements that firms are required to report on an annual basis, providing little elaboration around these requirements (UK Government, 1985, 2006). Instead, separate legislation sets out the explicit role of the FRC as the official regulator to provide detailed guidance to firms, which it does through the publication of the *UK Corporate Governance Code*. The Code states that the 'purpose of the annual report is to provide shareholders with relevant information that is useful for making resource allocation decisions and assessing the directors' stewardship' (Financial Reporting Council, 2014a: 8). In Appendix 5, I review the detailed requirements of government legislation and the FRC Code for annual reporting.

The ostensible focus of both government legislation and the FRC Code is on the annual report as an instrument for a firm to communicate essential financial and governance information about itself to an external audience, primarily its stakeholders. However, as I show here, other sources have proposed a range of purposes for the report. For example, the Investor Relations Society, an organisation promoting best practice in investor relations, argues that, in addition to communicating financial data, reports should also consider promoting the 'personality' of the firm, with reports providing firms with an opportunity 'to build their corporate reputation with a wider group of stakeholders and showcase their company to customers, prospective business

partners, staff and their local community' (Investor Relations Society, 2013: 1-2).

The consultancy PricewaterhouseCoopers argues for the central role of the annual report in improving the perception of the firm amongst its stakeholders, where 'communicating effectively and consistently across all mediums, especially the annual report, makes a difference to the way stakeholders perceive your organisation' (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011a: 8). The PwC report highlights a range of intangible benefits that firms could achieve from effective reporting, including reducing the number of issues raised by regulators, increasing confidence and trust across stakeholders, and enhancing corporate reputation. It argues, however, that the most fundamental benefits of the annual report are internal, where the act of its production highlights the internal workings of the firm and therefore contributes to supporting 'management decision making, board review and employee awareness' (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011a: 9).

PwC's argument reflects a broad aspiration embraced by legislators and regulators that improved reporting can in itself be instrumental in the creation of more transparent, well governed, and enduringly successful firms. The annual report therefore becomes transformed from a Saussurian instrument for the communication of information to a tool anticipated to achieve positive action in the real world. In this thesis, I propose that a key purpose of the annual report is the construction of the identity of the firm, where the report's authors also seek to meet and to anticipate the expectations of stakeholders in relation to its identity. I also argue that the multiple purposes of the contemporary firm, where it is expected to satisfy performance, governance, and societal functions, are necessarily reflected in a multiplicity of identity claims in its annual report, where these claims will change over time in response to changes in external expectations and internal priorities, and where these different identity claims may well conflict, so that the construction of a coherent organisational identity becomes problematic.

## **The audiences for the annual reports**

In a response to a UK government consultation, PwC argued that the annual report should have shareholders as its primary audience, on the basis that attempting to meet the differing information needs of other stakeholders could lead to 'clutter and confusion' (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011b). However, the 2006 Companies Act emphasises the annual report's role as a public document that should be produced, 'in a manner calculated to invite members of the public generally, or any class of members of the public, to read it' (UK Government, 2006: 436). The 2014 FRC guidance, although emphasising that the primary focus of the report should be the firm's shareholders, notes that the information contained within may also be of interest to other investors, potential investors and creditors, customers, employees and 'members of society more widely' (Financial Reporting Council, 2014a: 8).

From my reading of the annual reports in my analysis, they provide few direct references to their potential readership, although the chairman's statement frequently uses the form 'dear shareholder', and the chairman customarily directs a vote of thanks to the firm's employees, as well as a welcome or farewell to new or departing members of the board. However, I contend that my analysis of the content and presentation of identity claims provides a strong indication of the multiple stakeholder groups that the reports seek to address.

References to societal concerns are primarily located within the corporate social responsibility section of the annual reports, where societal stakeholder groups might be assumed to have an interest in this content. Demonstrations of firms' social and community concerns might also be assumed to appeal to potential employees. UBM's reports appear to contain messages designed to appeal to this latter audience, highlighting the firm's policies on the recruitment and development of staff, and linking these to both its societal contribution and to its overall success, for example with the claim that, 'Our commitment to "doing the right thing" ...is a part of our identity. We believe that this approach strengthens the business, helps us recruit and retain employees, and improves our reputation with customers and suppliers' (UBM, 2013: 22). However, it is also

possible to argue that appeals to societal stakeholders and potential employees might rather be primarily part of the overall message to shareholders, who could be interested in such topics from a value, governance or ethical perspective, or perhaps with a concern for reputational risk. Lending support to this interpretation is the claim in Future's 2005 report that the firm's focus on corporate responsibility 'attracts investment from the growing number of socially responsible investors' (Future, 2005: 26).

A further group of potential readers of the annual reports are the legislators and regulators who set out the requirements for reporting and, in the case of the latter, are required to monitor, and themselves report on, adherence to those requirements. I have noted that the FRC Code requires firms to explicitly note their compliance with, or explain their deviation from, the Code within their reporting. However, such assertions of obedience to the rules might also increase firms' legitimacy in the eyes of investors, where shareholders may also be an intended audience for these statements of institutional compliance.

I have argued here that the annual reports in my analysis have a range of potential audiences, where the differing concerns and priorities of these various audiences translate into a complex range of requirements that firms need to address in their identity work. I propose that these multiple requirements result in multiple identity claims in the reports, where a cohesive, unitary, identity is unlikely to be able to satisfy the needs of multiple stakeholders, and where, as described by Sillince and Brown (2009) in relation to police websites, multiple identity claims are required to secure legitimacy with a range of stakeholders. For example, UBM's commitment to 'doing the right thing' might present an attractive identity for potential employees with a social conscience, but have little relevance for those shareholders focused on short-term financial returns.

### **The authorship of the annual reports**

The scale and complexity of contemporary corporate annual reports means that they are inevitably the product of multiple authors (Davison and Skerratt, 2007). However, the precise authorship of the reports in my analysis is often far from clear. I have noted Davison's (2011) argument that behind annual reports lies

an army of anonymous, hidden writers, where sections of the reports are often effectively ghost-written. Although it is important to acknowledge the complexities of authorship, in my analysis I have assumed that the nominal authors of sections are effectively the 'true' authors, at least to the extent that I assume that the content of the published text corresponds to their own views. However, even establishing nominal authorship against individual sections of the reports is not always straightforward. Some sections clearly identify a nominal author, who is often strongly associated with the content. For example, a photograph of the chairman or CEO, together with a facsimile of their signature, frequently accompanies the chairman's statement or CEO review respectively, where I argue that a multimodal approach provides additional legitimacy to the authorship of that section. In contrast, other sections of the reports often have no explicit author associated with them at all, and contain no clear indication of authorship.

Although the firms of auditors responsible for the independent audit report are the only external voices that feature directly in the annual reports, the agencies responsible for the design of most of the reports in my analysis constitute another important set of authors. The visual design of the reports was not necessarily the only responsibility of these firms, where a brief review of two of their websites from this period reveals that they considered their role to include not only the visual elements of report design, but also the fashioning and communication of corporate messages. For example, salterbaxter, the agency engaged by Future to design the firm's reports from 2006-11, described themselves in 2012 as 'renowned as experts in the governance and regulatory agenda' (salterbaxter, 2012), and UBM's report designers from 2006-11, Radley Yeldar, advertised that they undertook their own research into annual reports, including a review of the narrative reporting of FTSE100 companies (Radley Yeldar, 2008). Although I have not been able to directly detect the hand of these agencies in shaping the content of the reports, they clearly believed that they had expertise in this area.

The *nominal* authorship of the annual reports in my analysis is largely restricted to a narrow group of senior office holders in the firms. Outside of this group,



reports do occasionally identify other contributors, for example divisional managers, although their contribution is generally either anonymous or placed under the nominal authorship of the CEO or CFO. It seems reasonable to assume, however, that for large parts of the review sections of the reports middle managers were responsible at least for the initial drafts.

Authorship is generally clearly attributed in the sections within the governance meta section of the annual reports in my analysis, although here authorship is not always associated with a single individual. The directors' report is generally associated with the company secretary as author, writing on behalf of the board, or with the board as a whole. The company secretary or the board are also generally noted as the authors of the corporate governance report, although this report sometimes also contains an introduction from the chairman. The directors' remuneration report is associated with the chairman of the remuneration committee, or the remuneration committee as a body. The independent auditor's reports are the only part of the annual report explicitly authored by outsiders, attributed to a named individual or individuals employed by an external auditing firm, or simply to the name of the auditing firm. The attributed authorship of the corporate responsibility sections of the annual reports varies both between firms and longitudinally within firms. In some instances, it is associated either with the CEO or CFO, in others it is the board. Finally, the financial sections of the report are generally not explicitly associated with an author, although they are clearly the overall responsibility of the CFO.

Although I have noted that the authorship of some sections of the annual reports is not explicitly stated in the text, in cases of doubt I believe that I have been able to identify a nominal author for most sections with a reasonable degree of certainty. I have categorised each section of each report with an *explicit*, and an *implicit* author. In Appendix 4, I have listed explicit and, where these are not provided in the report, implicit, authors against each section for each of the reports in my analysis, where I have generally attributed anonymous sections to either the CEO or the CFO, depending upon the nature of the content in that section. In Table 16, I present a summary of the key authors of

the annual reports in my analysis, together with the sections that they are associated with and a summary of their role within the reports.

**Table 16: Summary of main authors and their roles in the production of annual reports**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Section</b>	<b>Role</b>
CEO	CEO review, operating review, corporate social responsibility report	Operational and financial performance of the firm. Strategy.
Finance Director (CFO)	Financial review, financial statements	Financial performance of the firm. Financial control and risk management.
Chairman	Chairman's statement	Overview of operational and financial performance of the firm, and strategy. Overview of governance.
Board	Board of Directors' Report, Corporate governance report	Governance of the firm
Chairman of Remuneration Committee	Remuneration report	Oversee remuneration of executives
Company Secretary	Board of Directors' Report, Corporate governance report	Governance of the firm
External auditors	Independent auditors report	Assess financial governance of the firm
Divisional managers	Operating review	Operational performance of the firm
Report designers	All visual elements	To present a positive image of the firm

Outside of the dominance of the senior office holders, other voices are not entirely absent in the annual reports, however. Reports occasionally record the words of employees, although these are invariably accompanied by their photographs, with photographs generally much more dominant than the accompanying text in the design of these elements. I provide two examples of this in Figure 17. Such employee contributions to the reports generally provide either positive examples of work carried out, or employees' declarations of their identification with the firm and its values.

**Figure 17: Two examples of employees' voices in annual reports, Future, 2005, 2012**



Sources: *Future* (2005: 13); *Future* (2012: 4)

Although I have shown that a few senior managers were responsible for the overwhelming majority of the written content of the annual reports in my analysis, reports were clearly 'plurivocal' to a certain extent, reflecting the different roles and responsibilities of the senior management teams and boards of the firms. As I discuss further when I consider the sub discourses of the reports, different authors were responsible for different sections of the reports, had different purposes to address, and, to an extent, different audiences to persuade. Furthermore, I contend that the authors each had their own personal and professional concerns and priorities outside of their organisational roles that would also shape their approach to identity construction.

**Table 17: Implicit authorship of identity claims in annual reports, 2004-13**

<b>Implicit author</b>	<b>Centaur</b>	<b>Future</b>	<b>UBM</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of total</b>
CEO	270	392	436	1098	50
CFO	54	219	103	376	17
Board	109	50	43	202	9
Anonymous	15	48	121	184	8
Chairman	38	46	77	161	7
CEO/CFO	0	42	29	71	3
Chairman of Remuneration Committee	18	32	15	65	3
Company Secretary	5	8	0	13	1
Chairman/CEO	6	0	0	6	0
COO	0	0	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>515</b>	<b>837</b>	<b>825</b>	<b>2177</b>	

In addition to recording authorship at the section, or sub discourse level, I also recorded it at the level of the individual identity utterance. In Table 17, I present identity utterances in the reports broken down by implicit author and firm. This reveals that CEOs are associated with around half of all identity claims made in the annual reports, the proportion roughly consistent across the three firms. The CFO is responsible for around 17% of claims, although this does vary between firms, with Future's CFO responsible for a higher proportion of claims than the CFOs of the other two firms. The chairman and the board combined contribute around another 16% overall, with the proportion higher for Centaur than for the other two firms. The proportion of identity utterances in the reports where I have not been able to identify an author, classified as 'Anonymous' in Table 17, varies considerably between the firms, although I do not consider that this has any particular significance on the overall shape of the authorship of the reports.

This narrow authorship of annual reports appears to support a centripetal rather than a centrifugal perspective on OI construction, with the key authors limited to a handful of senior managers, and other perspectives, such as employees, effectively marginalised. This does not mean, however, that OI claims in the reports are a reflection of the beliefs of all organisational members, and my analysis of online blogs indicates that dissenting perspectives clearly did exist. However, my key argument here is that the various sub discourses that constitute the annual reports have a range of purposes and authors, and that

this is reflected in a range of identity claims, where this does point to a more centrifugal, fragmented, perspective on identity construction in the reports.

My discussion on authorship above has not accounted for change over time. In the previous chapter, I highlighted clear discontinuities in identity work for each of the firms over the ten-year period of my analysis. These discontinuities generally correspond to changes in the senior management team in the firms, where a new CEO, for example, introduced a new approach to identity work and a host of new identity claims, with old claims discarded. This is seen for all three of the firms in my analysis, but perhaps most clearly in the case of Centaur where, following the retirement of the founder, a number of recurring identity claims about the firm were dropped from their reports, with the new CEO introducing a number of new identity claims in the 2009 report. The chart in Figure 10, on page 202, shows that the claims associated with the new CEO largely did not take hold, with most not repeated in the 2010 report. I explore these temporal discontinuities in authorship for each of the firms in more detail in Chapter 9.

Of course, in a period of industry transformation, with frequent changes of senior management in firms, it should be expected that many identity claims were unlikely to endure between reports. A key point here, however, is that the *content* of identity claims in my analysis continued to be *presented* as enduring and agreed-upon, so that an analysis of OI focusing solely on the content of claims, and not based on longitudinal data, would not have identified the fragmented and provisional nature of claims in the reports to the extent that my analysis has done. I propose that, even in more stable times, incoming leaders would attempt to impose their own interpretation of OI on the organisation and to distance themselves from at least some aspects of the previous regime's identity claims, at the same time as presenting identity *in terms of* continuity. With the average tenure of contemporary UK CEOs reportedly less than five years (Cornish, 2017), and assuming that identity claims take some time to become established, I propose that even in 'stable' organisations identity work is likely to be marked by instability.

## The resources used by the annual reports

A poststructural and intertextual perspective on identity construction privileges texts as sites for the construction of meaning, where each text is situated within a decentred network of mutually constituted texts and discourses, and where a poststructural analysis of organisational identity cannot focus solely on identity claims within texts, but must also encompass those other texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: 55). Taking a multimodal perspective (Kress, 2009), this network extends from purely verbal linguistic resources to include a wider set of semiotic resources, including visual elements. In Chapter 7, I set out the findings of my intertextual analysis examining the sources of verbal textual identity claims. In this section, I examine some of those intertextual sources in more detail, focusing on texts that form the institutional basis for UK corporate annual reports, where I propose that these texts play a central role in identity construction within the annual reports in my analysis. I then briefly consider other semiotic resources that are used in the reports.

I have noted that the legislative and regulatory requirements for UK annual reports are based primarily upon successive versions of the UK *Companies Act*, and the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) *Corporate Governance Code*. I argue here that the changing institutional demands of these texts play a central role in shaping the content, structure and identity construction of the annual reports in my analysis, with the scope of these institutional requirements increasing over the period of my study. However, I emphasise that the firms were not entirely passive in their response to these institutional demands. Neither the government legislation nor the FRC Code prescribes how firms interpret their requirements, and I show that firms often adopted institutional requirements to their own identity purposes.

I have taken as the baseline for my analysis the relevant versions of the *Companies Act* and *FRC Code* as they stood in 2004, and I have aligned my analysis with their subsequent development through to 2013. In Appendix 5, I review the changing requirements of the relevant *Companies Acts*, *FRC Codes* and other relevant institutional texts during this period in detail.

Company reporting at the start of my period came under the 1985 Companies Act, subsequently superseded by the 2006 Companies Act. Following the 2008 financial crisis, additional reporting requirements were mandated through the *Companies Act 2006 (Strategic Report and Directors' Report) Regulations 2013* (UK Government, 2013, UK Government, 2006, UK Government, 1985). The FRC republished its Corporate Governance Code periodically through this period, with some revisions more concerned with reporting requirements than others. Other government legislation, such as the *Large and Medium-sized Companies and Groups (Accounts and Reports) Regulations* (UK Government, 2008), applied in some areas of reporting, and parts of the report came under the remit of other governance bodies, such as the Accounting Standards Board (ASB) (subsumed into the FRC from 2012). A range of other organisations produced guidance for firms on the requirements and best practice for reporting, including industry bodies such as the Investor Relations Society, and commercial consultancies such as PricewaterhouseCoopers (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007, Investor Relations Society, 2013).

In my intertextual analysis, I have been able to trace a number of identity claims back to these institutional sources. In some cases, reports repeat guidance from the sources more-or-less word-for-word, sometimes even directly citing the relevant texts, for example:

As with all aspects of corporate governance, the Board seeks to apply best practice to its remuneration policy, in line with the provisions of the Combined Code issued in July 2003 and Schedule 7A to the Companies Act 1985. (Future, 2004: 53)

In other cases, identity claims integrate institutional requirements into broader identity claims for the firm:

Good governance is not merely about having the right policies and procedures in place, but is integral to the culture of the organisation. The Board takes seriously its role in promoting and supporting this culture, which is an essential element in generating value for our shareholders, employees and other stakeholders on a sustainable basis. (UBM, 2012: 46)

It is sometimes possible to directly trace the impact of specific directives from institutional texts, for example, the requirement from the 2012 version of the FRC Code to report on gender diversity at board level was immediately reflected in UBM's reporting:

We strongly support the principle of reducing any gender imbalance both at Board level and throughout our businesses. We take seriously the development of female talent at a senior level and will take this into account in all future board appointments. (UBM, 2012: 49)

Firms even incorporate institutional requirements into their core identity claims, most notably in the reports of UBM:

Acting with respect for the various communities in which we operate is central to the way in which UBM does business, and we believe that being a good corporate citizen is an opportunity not only to respond to the concerns of our employees, our customers and the wider community, but to enhance our businesses and contribute to the development of a positive workplace culture. (UBM, 2008: 32)

Our commitment to 'doing the right thing' is a part of our identity. We believe that this approach strengthens the business, helps us recruit and retain employees, and improves our reputation with customers and suppliers. (UBM, 2013: 22)

Although I argue that institutional texts influence identity construction in the annual reports in my analysis, I cannot demonstrate that identity claims focusing on good corporate citizenship are primarily a response to institutional texts, or that they are solely directed towards an institutional audience. As I have discussed, reports have multiple audiences to persuade, so claims about 'doing the right thing' might be aimed not only at regulators, but also at potential employees, social actors, shareholders, and potential investors. However, whoever the audience for the claims, I argue that my analysis does demonstrate the intertextual construction of identity in annual reports, with identity claims drawing from institutional texts, where both annual reports and the institutional texts they reference change over time, making the relationship between them a dynamic and reciprocal one, as reports respond to changing institutional demands, and institutional guidance is itself shaped by developments in reporting.



As designed documents, containing a range of visual elements, the annual reports in my analysis also draw on a range of extra-textual resources in order to make meanings and to construct identity. Although I do not consider these in detail in this thesis, here I present two examples of visual resources that are used in the reports. A common example found in my analysis is the use of logos of companies, other organisations and accreditation schemes. In Figure 18, I show the logos for the three publishing firms in my analysis from the front covers of their reports. Clearly, the reports could simply list the names of the organisations, however, logos provide additional layers of meanings through the use of multiple modes, where these are designed to communicate a distinct corporate image (Van Riel and Balmer, 1997).

**Figure 18: Publisher logos: UBM, Future, Centaur**



*Sources: UBM, 2010; Future, 2010; Centaur, 2010*

A second example of the use of non-textual semiotic resources in the annual reports in my analysis is the inclusion of facsimiles of signatures of senior office holders. As with logos, the report could simply provide the name of the individual, but the report designers clearly regard a facsimile signature as having some power to confer authority upon the accompanying text. However, I note that in my analysis the use of the facsimile signature is not ubiquitous, where it clearly remains a design choice rather than a convention of the genre.

**Figure 19: Facsimile signatures from annual reports: UBM, Future**



**David Levin**  
Chief Executive Officer  
United Business Media Limited



**Roger Parry**  
24 November 2010

*Sources: UBM (2010: 7); Future (2010: 1)*

### **Sub discourses of the annual reports**

In this thesis, I have argued that the annual report is a complex document resistant to totalising analysis as a simple, unitary discourse, reflected in multiple identity claims that are resistant to unitary conceptions of organisational identity, where identity construction is not constrained to verbal text but can be also be conceptualised multimodally. In addition to my analysis of the annual report as a single discourse, I have proposed that it is necessary to analyse identity construction in relation to the various *sub discourses* that constitute reports. I argue that although organisational actors, in the form of senior management, attempt to present a coherent and cohesive identity narrative within the reports, in practice, in order to meet the various demands of multiple stakeholders, the firm is required to construct multiple identity claims across multiple sub discourses, each of these having their own distinct purposes, sets of resources they draw upon, authors and audiences. I propose that this multiplicity helps to reveal the central tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces in identity construction where managers seek to fix meanings and identities that are inherently resistant to their efforts.

In this section, I briefly address the role of each of these sub discourses in the identity construction of the annual reports in my analysis, highlighting how they contribute to the multiplicity of identity claims made by the firms. In Table 18, I set out a standardised list of sub discourses for the annual reports, noting that the presence, title, function, content, and position within the report of these sections varies both between firms and longitudinally. I provide a detailed review of each sub discourse in Appendix 6. I consider the front covers of annual reports in the next part of this chapter.


**Table 18: Sub discourses of the annual report**

<b>Sub discourse</b>	<b>Meta section</b>
Report front cover	N/A
Contents and highlights	Review
Who we are and what we do/Strategy	Review
Chairman's report	Review
CEO review/Operating review	Review
Strategy	Review
Financial review	Review
Corporate responsibility	Governance
Report of the Directors	Governance
Corporate governance report	Governance
Remuneration report	Governance
Audit report	Governance
Financial sections	Financial
Interstitial pages	N/A

The sub discourse that I have categorised as the 'contents and highlights' section of the annual report often plays an important role in the identity work of the report as an overarching discourse, by highlighting, at the very start of the content of the report, those identity claims that senior management consider to be of most importance. This section often pulls out key themes from the main body of the report, and sets out the key values and objectives of the firm. Its position at the front of the report makes it a key site for the identity work of the reports. In my analysis, this section contains a disproportionate proportion of identity claims, with claims initially made here often repeated elsewhere in the report. In Figure 20, I show the contents page for Future's 2007 report, where a cluster of identity statements featuring prominently at the top of the page mark the first content that a reader would encounter inside the report. Key messages

here are repeated elsewhere in the report, for example with the phrase 'clusters of like-minded individuals' repeated in the Chairman's statement on the next page of the report. This section tends to be heavily designed, with extensive use of colour, textual effects, and visual elements used to highlight key identity messages.

Figure 20: Contents and highlights section, Future, 2007

<p>The Progress Report Introduction</p> <hr/>  <hr/> <p>Contents</p> <hr/> <p>Chairman's statement 01 The dynamics of our business 02</p> <p>Business review 04  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ Chief Executive's review</li> <li>▣ Group strategy</li> <li>▣ Financial review</li> <li>▣ Business outlook for 2008</li> <li>▣ Corporate Responsibility</li> </ul> </p> <p>Board of Directors 28  Directors' report 30  Corporate Governance report 34  Directors' remuneration report 41  Independent auditors' report 51  Financial statements 53  Normalised results 85  FTSE Media and Entertainment Sector Index 87  Notice of Annual General Meeting 88  Investor information 90  Directors and advisers 91  Financial calendar 92  Where to contact us 92</p> <hr/> <p>Financial highlights</p> <hr/>	<p>At Future we base everything we do around clusters of like-minded individuals who are passionate about their interests. At this time of overwhelming choice, people want trusted editorial services more than ever before. And this is what Future does best. From computer games to film, from cycling to music-making, we provide magazines, websites and events that inform, entertain and unite these communities. We share the same passions as our consumers. These insights and our expertise are helping us to build and exploit our market-leading positions across different platforms in all of the core sectors in which we operate.</p>																								
<table border="0" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Year ended 30 September 2007</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">£165.7m</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">£14.0m</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">2.5p</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: right;">1.1p</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">Revenue</td> <td style="text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">EBITAE</td> <td style="text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">Adjusted Earnings Per Share</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Dividends</td> </tr> </table> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Year ended 30 September 2006</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">£188.1m</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">£12.1m</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">2.2p</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: right;">1.0p</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">Revenue</td> <td style="text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">EBITAE</td> <td style="text-align: right; border-right: 1px solid black;">Adjusted Earnings Per Share</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Dividends</td> </tr> </table>	Year ended 30 September 2007				£165.7m	£14.0m	2.5p	1.1p	Revenue	EBITAE	Adjusted Earnings Per Share	Dividends	Year ended 30 September 2006				£188.1m	£12.1m	2.2p	1.0p	Revenue	EBITAE	Adjusted Earnings Per Share	Dividends	<p style="font-size: small;">EBITAE represents operating profit before exceptional items, impairment and amortisation of intangible assets. Adjusted earnings per share are based on normalised results and exclude exceptional items, impairment and amortisation of intangibles and related tax effects.</p>
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£188.1m	£12.1m	2.2p	1.0p																						
Revenue	EBITAE	Adjusted Earnings Per Share	Dividends																						

Source: Future (2007: inside cover)

The 'Who we are and what we do' and 'Strategy' sub discourses of the annual reports tend to fulfil a similar function to the 'Contents and highlights' section, often summarising the key identity messages of the report in order to present an overarching identity message. These sections often contain many visual elements, although, compared to the contents pages, there is generally more scope for a narrative approach. As these sections generally avoid details of the firm's financial performance, they are a key site for identity claims. For example, Centaur's annual reports from the first half of my period, largely restricted to matter-of-fact reporting in most sections, use its 'Vision and Values' section to communicate the firm's core identity messages, as I show in Figure 21.

**Figure 21: 'Vision and Values', Centaur, 2006**

## Vision & Values

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### Finding new ways to inform and connect in strong markets

**Centaur's Vision - what we aim to do**  
Centaur's focus is on serving defined business and special interest communities, within which we identify two broad customer groups – those we call our audiences (ie information consumers who read our print and online publications and visit our events) and those we call marketers (ie those who wish to do business with our audiences). We aim to be market leaders within our chosen specialist communities in the following areas of activity:

- To be the leading provider of high need information to our community audiences
- To be the leading provider of marketing and lead generation multimedia solutions to our community marketers

**Centaur's Strategy - how we aim to do it**  
The success of our business depends upon our ability to maintain the trust and support of our audiences, through the delivery of relevant content, so that we can connect them with prospective marketers. The key elements of our strategy are therefore as follows:

- To identify high value business and special interest audiences and understand their information needs
- To build high quality databases of influential individuals within our communities and understand the marketing needs of those wishing to connect with our audiences
- To establish the most appropriate media (print publications, online and events) which best engage with our audience's information and business needs and in so doing create or reinforce a community's distinctive identity
- To use our media and our databases to provide effective marketing and lead generation solutions to those seeking to connect with our audiences
- To achieve and sustain market leadership through investment in customer-focussed innovation

**Centaur's Values - who we aim to be**  
Centaur's culture has, since its formation, been built on the foundation stones of integrity and enterprise. We want our people and our products to inspire trust, we aim to treat people with honesty and respect and we reward merit. As an entrepreneurial business, we encourage our people to think like owners, to be creative, take initiative, work hard and embrace change. We believe that these values are integral to our past and future success.

*Source: Centaur (2006: 4)*

The variety in the format and content of these introductory sections of the annual reports indicates that they are largely driven by internal rather than

external institutional requirements. However, the appearance after 2010 of sections at the front of the reports dedicated to the firms' business models appear to be a direct response to the guidance provided in the 2010 FRC Code requiring the inclusion of such content, prior to legislation in the form of the 2013 amendment of the Companies Act (Financial Reporting Council, 2010: 18).

Although a short section in the report, never more than a few hundred words in length, the chairman's statement assumes a disproportionate importance for identity construction in the reports. This is due both to its prominent position towards the beginning of the report and to the authoritative and legitimising role of the chairman at the head of the board. The chairman's statement is also unique within the report for its direct form of address to shareholders. The statement often contains central identity claims for the firm, often repeating, and therefore reinforcing and legitimising, claims made elsewhere in the report. In Future's 2009 report, following a dramatic collapse in revenues, the chairman's statement restates key identity claims made elsewhere in the report by the senior management team, for example referring to the 'underlying strength of our special-interest model' (Future, 2009: 1). The chairman's statement is invariably accompanied by a photograph of the chairman, and generally a facsimile of their signature.

The CEO review/operating review is a central element in all of the annual reports in my analysis, and a key site for identity construction, as it contains the most direct evidence of the views and beliefs of the CEO. This section generally forms the most substantial narrative section of the reports. Although its length provides more scope for identity claims, much of its content focuses on the performance of the firm, so the density of identity claims is lower than for other parts of the review meta section. The CEO review provides a more detailed analysis than the higher-level view provided by the chairman's statement. In my analysis, I have not been able to detect a notable difference in the nature of the identity claims addressed in the chairman's statement and the CEO review, with both sections covering strategy, vision, people, and culture, as well as identifying the firm's key strengths and challenges.



However, I argue that a key difference between the roles of the CEO and of the chairman in the construction of identity in the reports is that the chairman highlights key identity messages and provides legitimacy for claims, whereas the CEO, primarily within the CEO review section of the report, develops those identity messages, and provides supporting evidence to justify them. An example from Future's 2011 report illustrates the use of the CEO review section as a site for the development of identity messages, with the section containing a host of identity claims relating to the firm and other entities. The identity arguments of Future's newly appointed CEO have a clear focus on the future, although with a nod to the failures of the past, noting the firm's 'previous silo structure.' He emphasises the existing strengths of Future's content, products, skills, and customers, proposing that a new digital identity can be constructed by using these existing strengths and successfully harnessing changing technology and markets (Future, 2011: 4-6). As with the chairman's report, the CEO statement is generally accompanied by a photograph of the CEO, and often a facsimile of their signature.

For both the Centaur and the UBM reports, the financial review section of the report is relatively brief, with a focus on financial performance limiting the scope for identity work. However, the financial review section in Future's reports between 2006 and 2012 is the most substantial narrative section of those reports in terms of length, containing a range of content not found in the equivalent sections elsewhere, with identity work also more extensive, reflecting a much more prominent role for the CFO in the senior management team at Future in that time than for the other two firms. Generally, however, identity claims in the financial review section of the reports focus on highlighting the fundamental financial strength of the firm and supporting overarching identity claims. As with the CEO review, the financial review often contains a number of charts and tables, accompanying the narrative elements of the review.

The corporate social responsibility section of the reports is a key site for identity work, and marks an intersection between the core identity messages emerging from the firm itself and the social and institutional demands placed on the firm by its stakeholders. This section highlights the firms' positions towards their

employees, suppliers, and to wider society. In Centaur's reports, displaying a relative lack of concern with societal stakeholders compared to the other two firms, this section of the report is largely focused on meeting institutional requirements, for example, noting that the 'Board is aware of the potential impact on the environment of the Group's activities and recognises its responsibility to the environment...' (Centaur, 2011: 32). However, in these sections of both Future and UBM's reports, identity claims seek to incorporate corporate responsibility within the firms' overall identity, for example, with the claim that 'Corporate responsibility is integral to the way Future conducts its business' (Future, 2013: 21). The corporate responsibility section frequently includes the logos of relevant organisations and certification schemes, as well as photographs representing community initiatives undertaken by the firms.

The governance sections of the annual reports have both a different authorship and a different role in identity construction to the review sections of the reports, but still play an important role in organisational identity work, with institutional texts particularly important as intertextual sources shaping identity claims. The report of the directors generally contains relatively little identity work, however it does, significantly, contain a statement of the firms' principal activities, which provides a core statement of the firms' identity, although the requirement for this statement was discontinued from 2013. Changes to the principle activities statement over time can highlight the changing priorities of the firm. Examples of statements include:

The principal activities of the Group are the creation and dissemination of business, specialist and professional information through publications, exhibitions, conferences and electronic services. (Centaur, 2010: 26)

The principal activity of the Company and its subsidiaries (the 'Group') as a whole is the publishing of special-interest consumer magazines, apps and websites, notably in the areas of Technology, Entertainment, Music, Creative and Sport & Auto sectors. (Future, 2012: 26)

The Group's principal activities were in the areas of business to business (B2B) communities and B2B information and news distribution, monitoring and targeting. (UBM, 2008: 53)

The corporate governance report section of the annual reports is a rich source for identity claims relating to governance for both Future and UBM, although less so for Centaur. In Future's reports, this section is marked by a repeated emphasis on the Board's support for corporate governance, with the firm 'committed to ensuring that good corporate governance is embedded at the heart of our business structure and processes' (Future, 2011: 26). UBM's corporate governance reports likewise emphasise the importance of governance to its identity, emphasising a relationship between governance and culture.

The remuneration report section does not feature significant identity work, although it does generally provide a list of firms that the publishers regard as their competitors or peers, helping to situate the publishers' identity work within a broader industry field. Finally, reflecting its external authorship, the audit report is not a site for identity claims by the firm, and the financial sections of the annual report, although comprising around 50% of the page length of the reports, likewise contain very few identity claims, with their content primarily in the form of tables and figures.

Overall, the sub discourses in the reports provide potential for both centripetal and centrifugal interpretations of OI, with the largely anonymous sections at the start of the report, coming before the chairman's statement, providing the opportunity to present overarching statements of the firm's identity. The chairman's statement, as I have discussed, also provides a key site for core identity claims. Beyond this, however, the other sub discourses that I have described have their own specific purposes within the reports, and, I argue, are often aimed at distinct audiences. Consequently, the identity work within these sections may not necessarily reflect, and may conflict with, overarching identity themes. Moreover, the extent to which sub discourses echo and repeat core identity claims varies between reports and between firms. UBM's later reports in the period are notable for core claims that are repeated across several sections, whereas, in Centaur's reports, particularly in the first half of my period, core identity claims are generally restricted to a couple of pages at the start of the report. This suggests that UBM's senior management were much more

concerned than Centaur's to present coherent and persuasive identity claims to their stakeholders.

### **Visual identity work in the annual reports**

A multimodal approach to the analysis of organisational documents extends the traditional focus on verbal language to include other modes of communication, particularly the visual (Kress, 2009). I have noted that a thoroughgoing multimodal approach not only considers how different modes make meanings, but focuses on how they combine in a unified approach to communication. I have characterised contemporary annual reports as carefully designed documents, where the verbal and visual aspects of identity construction are intertwined, where any analysis of either mode independent of the other is inevitably incomplete. Although I do not claim to have undertaken a thorough multimodal analysis in this thesis, with most of my analysis focusing on the role of verbal text in identity construction, in the next two sections, focusing on argumentation and presentation, I consider the importance of the visual mode in the construction of identity in annual reports.

The reports in my analysis use a wide range of visual devices, including charts, photographs, and diagrams. I argue that these visual elements are integral to processes of identity construction, and I propose that the analysis of this visual mode, combined with an analysis of the verbal text of the reports, can help to support a poststructural interpretation of organisational identity, in showing how managers seek to fix meanings at the same time that empirical evidence reveals considerable instability over time. However, as I have discussed, visual identity construction in reports is not readily amenable to the same methodological approaches used for written texts. In this section, I review the front cover as a distinct sub discourse of the annual report, and I relate a specific example of the use of visual elements to identity construction in the reports. In the next part of this chapter, focusing on argumentation and presentation in the reports, I attempt to show that visual elements are integral to a multimodal rhetorical presentation of identity claims.

The annual reports of the firms vary both in the extent of their use of visual elements, and in their overall focus on design, with the reports produced by professional design agencies generally visually more sophisticated than those reports (all of the Centaur reports and the 2013 Future report) that were produced in-house. In my analysis, I found that visual elements in annual reports are largely concentrated in the narrative sections of the reports, primarily within the review meta section. In Appendix 8, I present a detailed review of the different types of visual element found in the annual reports in my analysis.

I argue that the visual elements in the annual reports generally support the overarching identity messages that senior management seek to convey, where images are able to convey complex ideas in a simplified fashion, but where they are also able to maintain ambiguity in their meaning in ways that are not possible in written text, which may be useful in communicating with different audiences. Visual elements can also support individual identity claims, however, for example, where the photograph of a chairman in proximity to an identity claim lends authority to that claim, as I discuss in the following section, where I cover arguments from authority in the reports.

### ***Annual report front covers***

I identify the report front cover as a distinct sub discourse of the annual reports in my analysis. This section stands apart from the other sub discourses of the reports due to its prominence at the front of the reports and because its content is primarily visual rather than textual. The front cover provides firms with an opportunity to present an overarching identity message that all of the potential audiences of the report are likely to see. As I note in Appendix 6, and show in Appendix 7, the front covers of the reports in my analysis are predominantly visual, with any written text usually restricted to a brief caption. Several of UBM's and Future's report front covers demonstrate a keen concern with the visual construction of identity; however, other front covers, for example, most of Centaur's, do not appear to share this focus. Here, I have selected two front

covers – one from UBM and one from Future – in order to examine visual identity construction.

The front cover of Future's 2012 annual report, as I show in Figure 22, marks a clear change in approach from the firm's previous reports. The front covers of Future's annual reports from previous years, as I show in Appendix 7, generally present depictions of the firm's customers (or they may be employees) engaged in the activities addressed by Future's magazines, for example cycling, playing the guitar, or taking photographs, with images of the relevant magazines as the background. The customers/employees are invariably young and male. A change in senior management regime at Future in 2011 heralds a change in the design approach for the front cover of 2011's report, although the content remains essentially the same. By 2012's report, however, the front cover reflects the changed priorities of the new regime. The only object on display is an Apple iPad, emphasising the digital focus of the 'new' Future. There is no sign of editorial content at all, indicating that Future's strategic focus will be on the move to a digital firm, rather than on its portfolio of products. Significantly, the subject on the front cover (identified as an employee) is female, signifying a break from the male-dominated identity previously associated with Future's products and customers. Accompanying this new visual identity is a new logo, ditching Future's long-standing motto of 'media with passion'. Future's senior management clearly intended the 2012 front cover to support an overarching identity claim for the firm as a 'global digital business'.

Figure 22: Future, 2012, front cover



Source: *Future (2012: front cover)*

An intriguing aspect of the front covers of UBM's annual reports under David Levin as CEO is that, at a time when the firm was transforming its business from being primarily a publisher of print magazines to that of an events business, the front covers of all of its reports (apart from 2007) all convey essentially the same message – that 'we help businesses do business.' In Figure 23, I have selected the front cover of 2011's report as representative of these covers. The key identity message presented is, I argue, essentially one of ambiguity. Beyond the general assertion that UBM is in the B2B business, there is no indication of what it actually does. This ambiguity enables the firm to provide a simple identity message that covers all of its various business functions, but, crucially, it also enables changes of strategy, and of identity, to be accommodated, for example UBM's development and subsequent disposal of its data business, without highlighting these changes to stakeholders.



Figure 23: UBM, 2011, front cover



Source: UBM (2011: front cover)

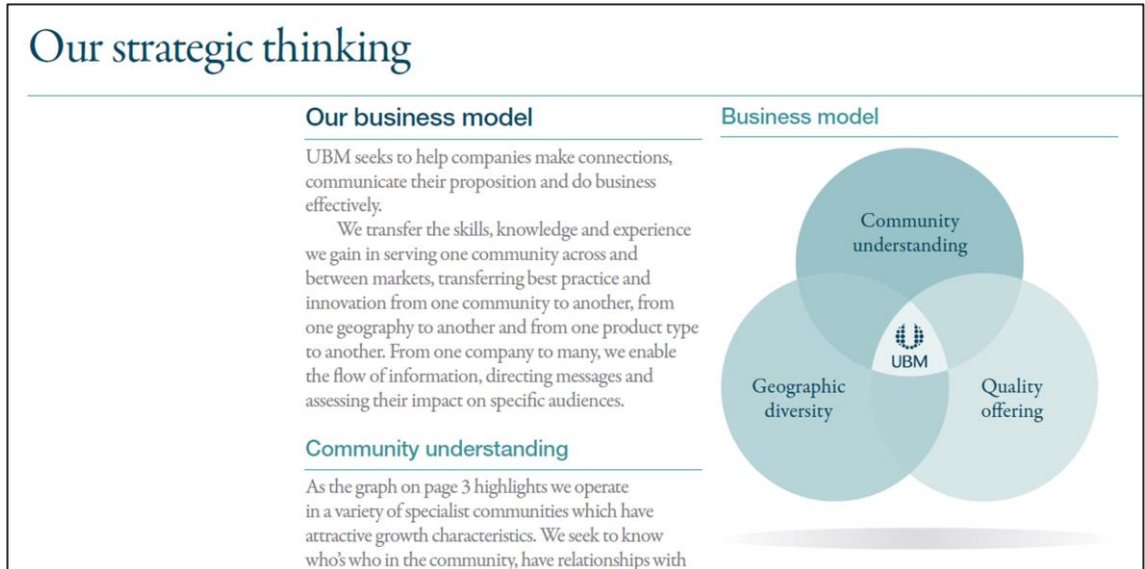
## ***Constructing identity through visual devices***

I have argued that the firms in my analysis used their annual report front cover as a key way of presenting an overarching, multimodal, identity message. Within the reports, the firms also employed a range of visual devices and techniques in order to support the construction of their identity. I cover these in more detail in Appendix 8. Here I focus on just one example – UBM’s presentation of its business model.

The 2010 FRC Code introduced the requirement for company directors to include in their annual report an explanation of the basis on which the company generated or preserved value over the longer term – its business model (Financial Reporting Council, 2010). *The Companies Act 2006 (Strategic Report and Directors’ Report) Regulations 2013* enacted this requirement into legislation. Although the firms in my analysis frequently refer to ‘business models’ in their reports prior to 2010, the requirement to report on their ‘business model’ is only incorporated in their reporting after 2010. UBM incorporates the business model concept into its reports from 2010 but also, I argue, attempts to incorporate it into its overarching identity claims. Here I examine how these attempts incorporate visual as well as textual elements in a multimodal exercise in identity construction.

In its reports of 2010 and 2011, as I show in Figures 24 and 25, UBM presents its business model by listing central identity claims in verbal text, and supporting these claims with a simple graphical representation across three dimensions that represent its business model: community understanding, geographical diversity, and quality offering, then addressing each of these dimensions in the text of the reports.

**Figure 24: Visual presentation of 'Our business model', UBM, 2010**



Source: UBM (2010: 8)

**Figure 25: Visual presentation of 'Our business model', UBM, 2011**

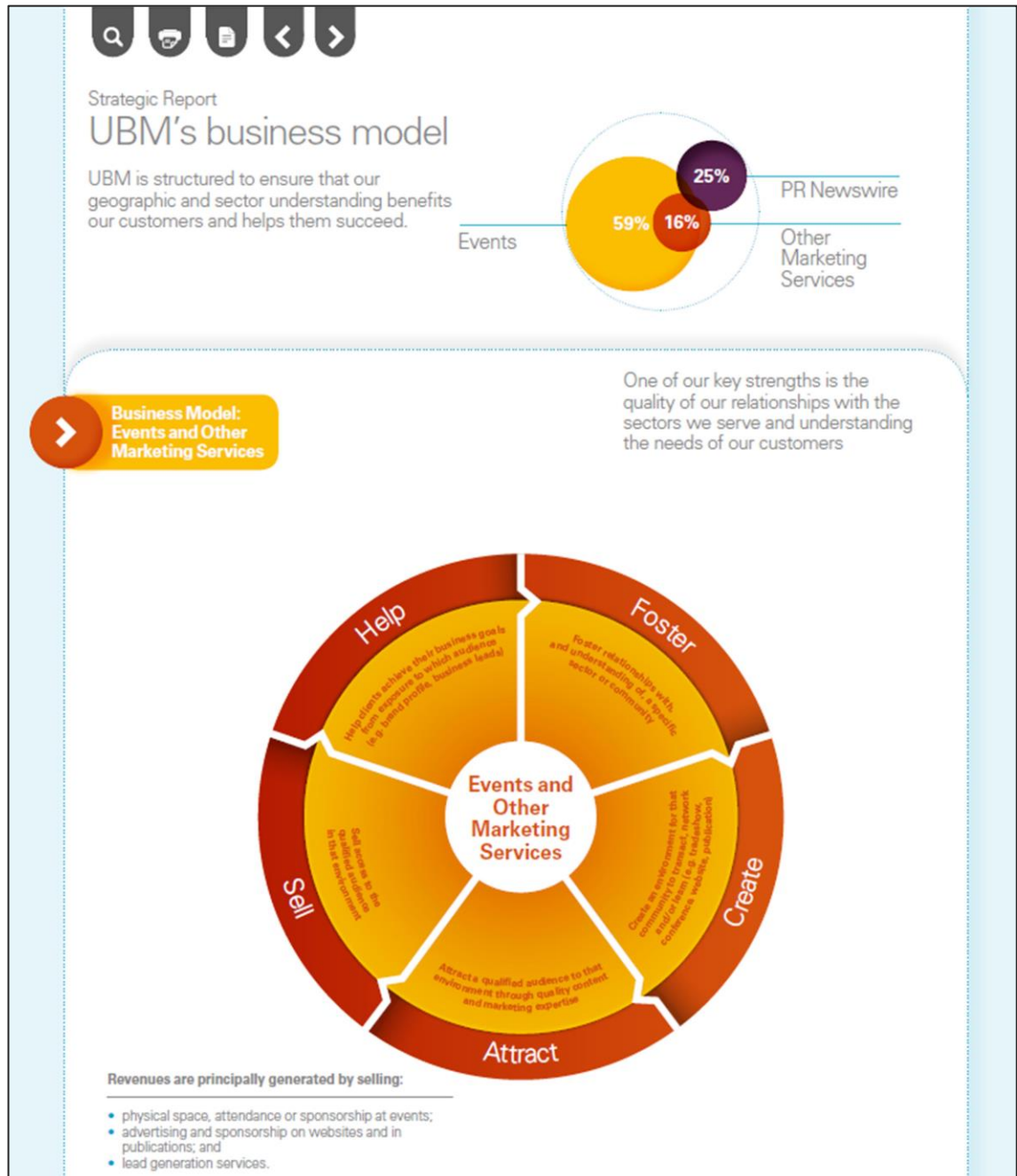


Source: UBM (2011: 8)

By the 2013 report, however, the visual and textual depiction of UBM's business model becomes much more sophisticated. Firstly, more accurately reflecting the firm's different areas of activities than the previous representations, the report presents three separate business models instead of one overarching one, corresponding to each of its three divisions. In Figure 26, I show the depiction for the 'Events and Other Marketing Services' area of the business. Here, the

details of the business model are specific to that area, although an overarching identity claim features prominently: 'One of our key strengths is the quality of our relationships with the sectors we serve and understanding the needs of our customers.'

**Figure 26: Visual presentation of 'UBM's business model', UBM, 2013**



Source: UBM (2013: 4)

I propose that the development of the business model concept in UBM's reports reveals how the firm sought to accommodate changing institutional requirements into its identity work, where visual devices helped it to achieve that aim. However, the firm clearly struggled to present an overarching identity in this context at the same time as satisfying institutional requirements that called for a more granular approach. So, although visual devices can assist in the construction of overarching identity claims from complex, or even conflicting elements, there appears to be a limit on how successful this can be.

The integral role of visual elements in the multimodal construction of organisational identity in annual reports deserves more space than I have been able to give it in this thesis. A key reason for not considering this subject more fully, as I have noted, is that verbal and visual texts require different approaches to their analysis. Moreover, taking a thoroughgoing multimodal perspective, they should not be studied separately.

I have argued that visual elements provide the authors of annual reports with means of communicating identity claims that are not available through verbal text alone. From a poststructural perspective on identity, a key advantage of the visual is that it allows the authors of reports to embrace ambiguity and indeterminacy in order to gloss over potentially conflicting identity claims, to appeal to multiple audiences, and to support multiple and changing organisational identities. I have shown how the front covers of UBM's annual reports presented a consistent, yet ambiguous, identity for several years, at the same time that the core identity of the company was being transformed. I have also shown how UBM used visual representations of its business model to present multiple identity elements as a coherent whole. The visual mode can therefore allow organisational actors to present an empirically dynamic and fragmented OI in terms that make it *appear* to be stable and coherent. In summary, I argue that an analysis of OI based solely on claims made in verbal texts cannot, at least in the context of contemporary annual reports, adequately capture the entirety of identity work, where a multimodal approach considers all modes of communication to contribute to a unified attempt at meaning-making and identity construction.

## ARGUMENTATION AND PRESENTATION

In what I have characterised as the centripetal approach in the organisational identity literature, organisational actors are seen to coalesce around a unitary, agreed-upon identity. A poststructural approach to OI rejects the view of identity as a shared cognitive belief. Instead, poststructuralists present identity as fragmented and contested, endlessly discursively constructed and reconstructed in texts (Hansen, 2006: xvi). At the heart of my thesis is the proposition that organisational actors need to both understand and present identity as unitary, stable, and agreed-upon in an attempt to impose meaning on an empirical reality that is fragmented, unstable, local, and contested. I propose that it is through argumentation in texts that these actors seek to persuade audiences of the unitary and enduring nature of identity, and to afford salience to certain identity claims over others. In addition to the construction of arguments within texts, I emphasise the central role of intertextuality in these processes of argumentation, as organisational actors call upon external texts and discourses as resources to support their claims.

I have noted that Halliday's (1978) conception of social semiotics recognises the role of power in constructing communication, and Kress (2009) highlights the role of rhetoric, where this reflects the *interests* of individuals in constructing attempts at meaning-making in order to persuade others in conditions of ambiguity and social instability. A multimodal approach recognises that rhetors may use multiple modes in order to construct signs and communicate meanings, where *aptness* for the requirements of the task in hand determines the mode or combination of modes selected.

In this section, I show that the construction of arguments in the annual reports in my analysis is, to a large extent, a multimodal accomplishment, with relatively few instances of arguments constructed exclusively through 'unadorned' verbal text. Moreover, in line with a multimodal approach, I show that in the construction of documents, all elements are *designed* to a certain extent, for example, in their placement within the text. In this multimodal construction, I

show that verbal text and visual elements are entwined, where analysis of each individually could not express their full meaning.

I first explore how authors construct identity arguments in annual reports, highlighting how they use intertextual references from other texts and discourses as resources for their arguments. I then explore how authors use multimodal techniques of presentation within the annual reports in order to promote the salience of certain identity claims over others. Although I argue that the textual or visual *content* of claims is important for determining salience, in line with both a poststructural and a social semiotic perspective, I propose that the *context* and *presentation* of claims is also critical, where an analysis based purely on the content of claims presents only a partial picture of identity construction and meaning. I consider these contextual and presentational factors within a framework of types of argumentation, focusing on arguments of *position*, *presentation*, and *repetition*, and arguments from *authority*.

### **Constructing identity through argument**

In order to investigate the role of argumentation in identity construction, here focusing on the verbal content of the text, I have taken an example from the CEO review section of UBM's 2009 annual report, using three quotes from that section:

We continued to take action to mitigate the effects of both structural decline and cyclical pressures on revenues, closing 31 titles as well as merging and reducing the frequency of a number of other titles. These actions resulted in a reduction in revenue and operating profit of £31.8m and £6.5m respectively. The £16.5m exceptional charge largely reflects the costs of taking these actions. The margins generated by our Print – Magazines recovered in the second half to 7.1%, compared with the 3.8% achieved for the first half of the year.

The B2B magazine market remains significantly over-published in the developed world and many titles will close in the coming years. In many – but not all – of the markets we serve, there will continue to be sufficient demand to support one or two leading titles, a position which each market will reach by means of a 'last man standing' process. We continue to manage our print portfolio actively towards a medium term goal of a smaller,

commercially sustainable, more profitable portfolio in which most titles operate as part of an integrated portfolio of products serving a particular community.

Reader demand for quality content in print remains robust in many markets and geographies. We continue to see opportunities in emerging economies for new print titles and during 2009 we launched a number of new publications to test markets in India. In addition, data derived from registrations for controlled circulation publications, particularly those serving the US technology markets, represent an important resource for our event lead generation and performance marketing businesses, providing them with a significant competitive advantage over their 'internet only' competitors. (UBM, 2009: 21)

In these quotes, UBM's CEO, David Levin, seeks to redefine UBM's identity as a publisher, where the key message is that UBM remains a B2B magazine publisher, but only to a limited extent, with this previously core identity now marginalised. Here I approach Levin's construction of this identity argument both from the poststructural perspective of the mutual constitution of the Self and multiple Others, and the intertextual perspective of the construction of texts from other texts and discourses (Hansen, 2006: 6-8).

The focal identity in these quotes is UBM's organisational identity as a B2B magazine publisher, which is both downplayed and reinforced in the quotes, with Levin arguing for a smaller, yet sustainable, identity for this 'portfolio' within the firm. At the same time as constructing the identity of the firm, Levin also seeks to construct the identity of the B2B market, and the readers of UBM's products. He presents a problematised identity for the B2B magazine market, noting its 'structural decline' and that it is 'over-published.' He also seeks to construct the identity of the reader, superficially changing, but fundamentally constant, who may be turning away from print in many areas, but remains interested in quality content in a print format. Through this mutual constitution of the identities of the firm, the market, and the customer, and through careful argumentation, Levin is able to argue both that UBM's identity as a magazine publisher is valid, and that it should be marginalised.

In these quotes, Levin also calls upon a range of intertextual sources to support both the logic of his argument, and to provide legitimacy for it. He refers to



various financial figures from the internal texts of the financial accounts, as well as business data in the form of registrations to publications. He also refers to the implied text of UBM's strategy. In relation to broader discourses, Levin references both discourses of the market and of the reader.

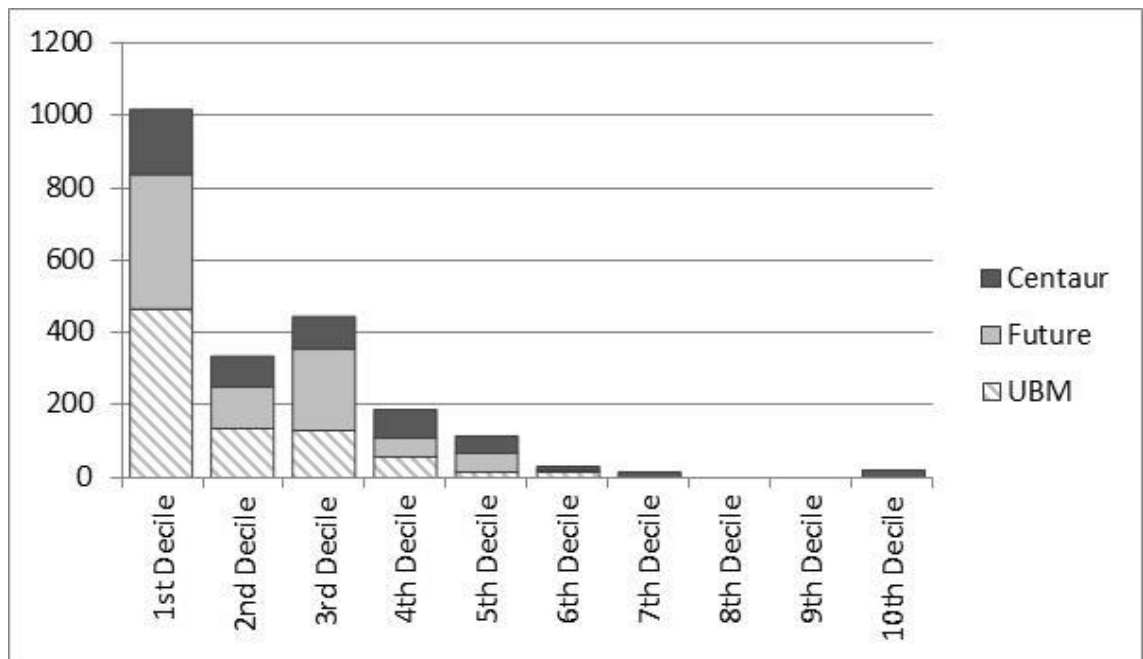
### **Using argumentation to determine salience**

A poststructural approach emphasises the multiplicity, instability, and contestability of organisational identity, where organisational actors are required both to construct identities within texts, and to persuade audiences of the validity and importance of their claims (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). In this section, I examine the techniques used by organisational actors to assert the salience of their identity claims within the annual reports in my analysis, where these techniques invariably encompass multiple modes of communication, focusing on arguments of position, of presentation, and of repetition, and arguments from authority.

#### ***Arguments of position***

In Figure 27, I present a chart displaying the position of identity claims within the annual reports in my analysis, from the perspective of percentiles of the total page count of the reports. This shows that claims are overwhelmingly concentrated in the first half of the reports, corresponding to sections within the review and governance meta sections, and that the first 10% of pages contain just under half of all identity utterances. This finding indicates that the positioning of identity claims within the overall structure of the reports is significant, where I assume that claims positioned towards the front of the reports are more likely to be read, and to be afforded salience, by readers.

**Figure 27: Distribution of identity utterances in annual reports, 2004-13**



I also propose that the positioning of an identity claim towards the start of a section, or at the top of a page, will contribute to its salience. In Figure 28, I reproduce the first page of the financial review section from Future’s 2006 report. I have highlighted a number of distinct identity claims on this page. I contend that, due to its position at the top of the page, its authors intend the claim ‘Future is a special-interest media group...’ to be more salient than other claims made on that page. As the first page in the section, I further propose that claims on this page will tend to be afforded more salience than claims on subsequent pages. From a multimodal perspective, this positioning of identity claims in the reports reflects both the rhetorical aspect of the multimodal, and the concern with the overall *design* of various elements of communication into a unified whole.

**Figure 28: Example of ordering of identity utterances on a page, Future 2006**

**10 Operating and financial review**  
Financial review





**John Bowman**  
GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR, FUTURE PLC  
29 NOVEMBER 2006

*John Bowman*

- 1** Future is a special-interest media group, based in the UK and listed on the London Stock Exchange (symbol FUTR). Future creates high-quality, special-interest consumer magazines and websites for people with a passion.
- 2** We have strong market positions in games and other areas of screen-based entertainment, technology, automotive, music-making and sports magazine sectors.
- 3** We employ over 1,400 people in offices in the UK, US and France. Over 100 international editions of Future's magazines are also published under licence by our partners in 30 other countries across the world.

**Strategy**  
An overview of the Group's revised strategy is set out in the Chief Executive's statement.

**Annual Report**  
In this year's Annual Report we have included information in our operating and financial review similar to that provided last year, although a change in regulation means that we are no longer required to publish all of it. We hope that this Annual Report as a whole provides you with sufficient information on the Group and the challenges it faces.

**History of the Group**  
**5** Future was founded as a small UK company in 1985. Its focus on special interest has been built on a creative, innovative and competitive culture which underpins the Group's business.

In 1994 Future UK was acquired by Pearson plc, which subsequently sold the business in 1998 to a management buy-out backed by Apax. In June 1999 the enlarged Group (now including UK, US and other countries) was floated on the London Stock Exchange. Future's expansion included the acquisition of further overseas subsidiaries and a rapid build-up of internet operations.

Following this period of over-extension, the Group was scaled back during 2001, and its bank debt significantly reduced by (i) the disposal of its then largest magazine and (ii) a 20p rights issue.

Since 2001 the Group has run subsidiaries only in the UK, US, France and Italy. The Group had no net bank debt for three years from May 2002. From 2003 to 2005 Future made a number of small acquisitions, funded from its net cash position.

In December 2004 the Group announced an intention to double its size by 2008, and in June 2005 acquired a number of titles from Highbury House Communications plc, funded by bank debt. The results from this acquisition have been disappointing and coincided with a period of reduced profits, largely driven by the current games transition.

In 2006 the Board conducted an extensive review of the business, scaled back the ambitious policy of rapid expansion, and appointed a new Chief Executive, whose statement is set out on pages 4 and 5.

The results for the year ended 30 September 2006 are explained in this operating and financial review.

**Competitive environment**  
Like every company in the consumer media sector, Future competes for the time and attention of consumers. Future sees its key competitors as those who also publish special-interest offerings. **6**

In the UK, these competitors include Emap, IPC (part of Time Warner), BBC Worldwide, Dennis Publishing and Haymarket. In the US, key competitors are Ziff Davis Media, IDG, Primedia, CMP Media, and Transworld Media (part of Time Warner). In France, they are VNU, IDG and Groupe Teste. **7**

In games and guitar magazines, Future is the worldwide leader. In computing and other segments, the market is more fragmented but we hold a number of attractive positions. **8**

**Macro-economic environment**  
In the countries where Future operates, there is relative economic stability, with some overall economic growth. Over the last year interest rates, whilst still at low levels, have risen in each territory.

Source: Future (2006: 10)

**Arguments of presentation**


In this thesis, I emphasise the importance of the visual as part of the multimodal construction of contemporary annual reports. In addition to the use of discrete visual elements such as photographs, charts, and diagrams, report designers

use various visual techniques to present verbal text so that it stands out from other text on a page. For example, in Figure 29, I show a page that uses bold text, large fonts, different colours for text, and boxes around text in order to highlight certain textual content. I have underlined the verbal textual identity claims that I identified in my analysis on the page, showing how they are emphasised over other text using such visual textual devices. I argue that such devices constitute another presentational method that are used to accord salience to verbal textual identity claims in reports.

Figure 29: Example of visual textual devices for arguments of presentation, Future 2013

05
Future plc

**Chief Executive's review**



**Our strategy**

The past 12 months have seen Future make good progress against its strategy as we maintain momentum towards digital transition and diversified revenues.

## Significant progress

Future has achieved further significant progress in the transition to a diversified digital business and delivered revenue growth, despite challenging trading conditions over much of the year. Digital revenues rose 38% – the highest rate of growth in recent years – and we passed a significant inflection point, with more than half of all advertising revenues (59% across the Group) now digital. This demonstrates how far the business has developed in its digital transformation.

**Mark Wood**  
Chief Executive

01.
Driving Future's transformation into a global, digitally-led content business
02.
Focussing on building brands across channels – TechRadar is our no.1 priority
03.
Innovating digitally to increase audience engagement and diversify monetisation
04.
Managing our print assets for cash generation
05.
Constantly controlling costs & targeting investment to manage margin

**Overview**

Overall, Digital and Diversified revenues – including revenues from digital circulation, digital advertising, digital commerce, software business FutureFolio, custom publishing business FuturePlus and events – made up 32% of the business.

As a result of disposals and restructuring we

a loss in the prior year of £2.7m, with growth in digital revenues more than offsetting print declines. A cyclical decline in the Games market was a significant drag on the business in the first three quarters. But by the fourth quarter Games had substantially recovered and trading was stronger in Q4 across all other sectors.

During the second half a number of key elements of the transition programme were

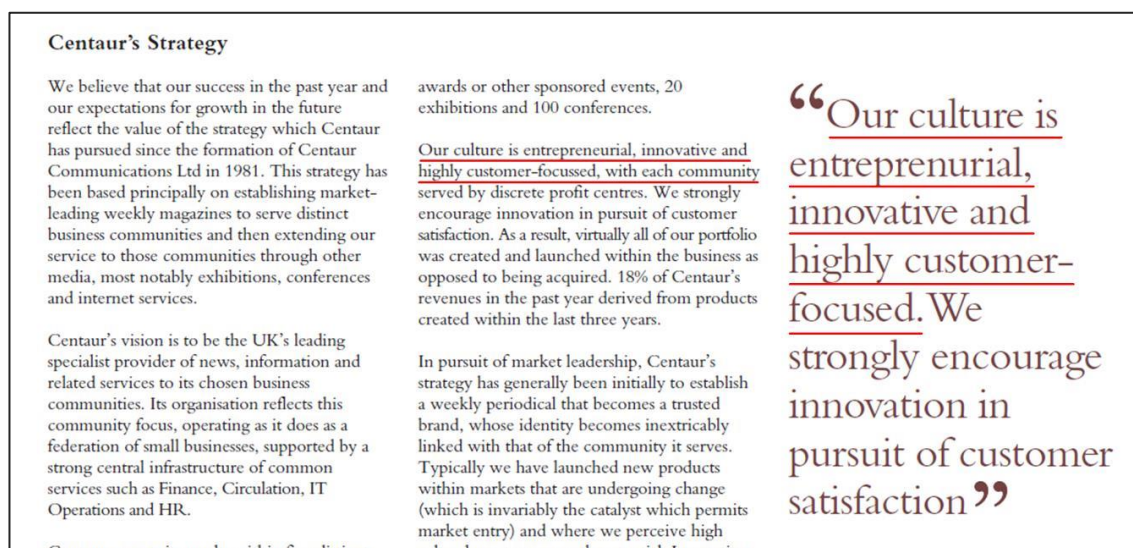
Source: Future (2013: 5). Textual identity claims underlined

### Arguments of repetition

In addition to the repetition of verbal textual identity claims *between* annual reports that I discussed in my analysis of intertextual patterns in Chapter 8, I

also noted the frequent repetition of claims *within* reports. I found that just over 20% of verbal textual identity claims were repeated at least once within the same report. Instances of repetition are often combined in the reports with visual indicators of salience, for example, the use of headlines or pull quotes. I propose that repetition is a key technique used by authors of the annual reports to accord salience to identity claims, where multimodality is often a key element in highlighting and differentiating the repetition of verbal textual claims. In Figure 30, I present an example of an identity claim made in the body of a page's text and repeated verbatim (apart from a slight difference in spelling) in a pull-quote on the same page.

**Figure 30: Arguments of repetition – an identity claim in body text and pull-quote, Centaur 2004**



Source: Centaur (2004: 13). Textual identity claim underlined.

In my analysis, I discovered that some identity claims were repeated multiple times within a single report, where such repetitions may occur in different sections of a report, elsewhere in the same section, or, as in Figure 30, on the same page. I found several examples of claims that were made initially in the contents/highlights section of the report and then repeated in a later section, with the first claim effectively trailing the claim made in the main report content. UBM's later reports contain a number of examples of claims repeated across several sections of the report. In Figure 31, I highlight a claim repeated, with



slightly different content and associated with different authors, four times across three different sections of UBM's 2013 report. As with other such claims, visual textual devices are used to emphasise and differentiate different utterances. I argue that this example demonstrates the considerable efforts taken by UBM's CEO to assert a coherent and agreed-upon identity for the firm.

**Figure 31: Arguments of repetition – multiple references to the ‘events-led B2B marketing and communications provider,’ UBM 2013**

Source: UBM (2013: 2-3, 10, 15)

### Arguments from authority

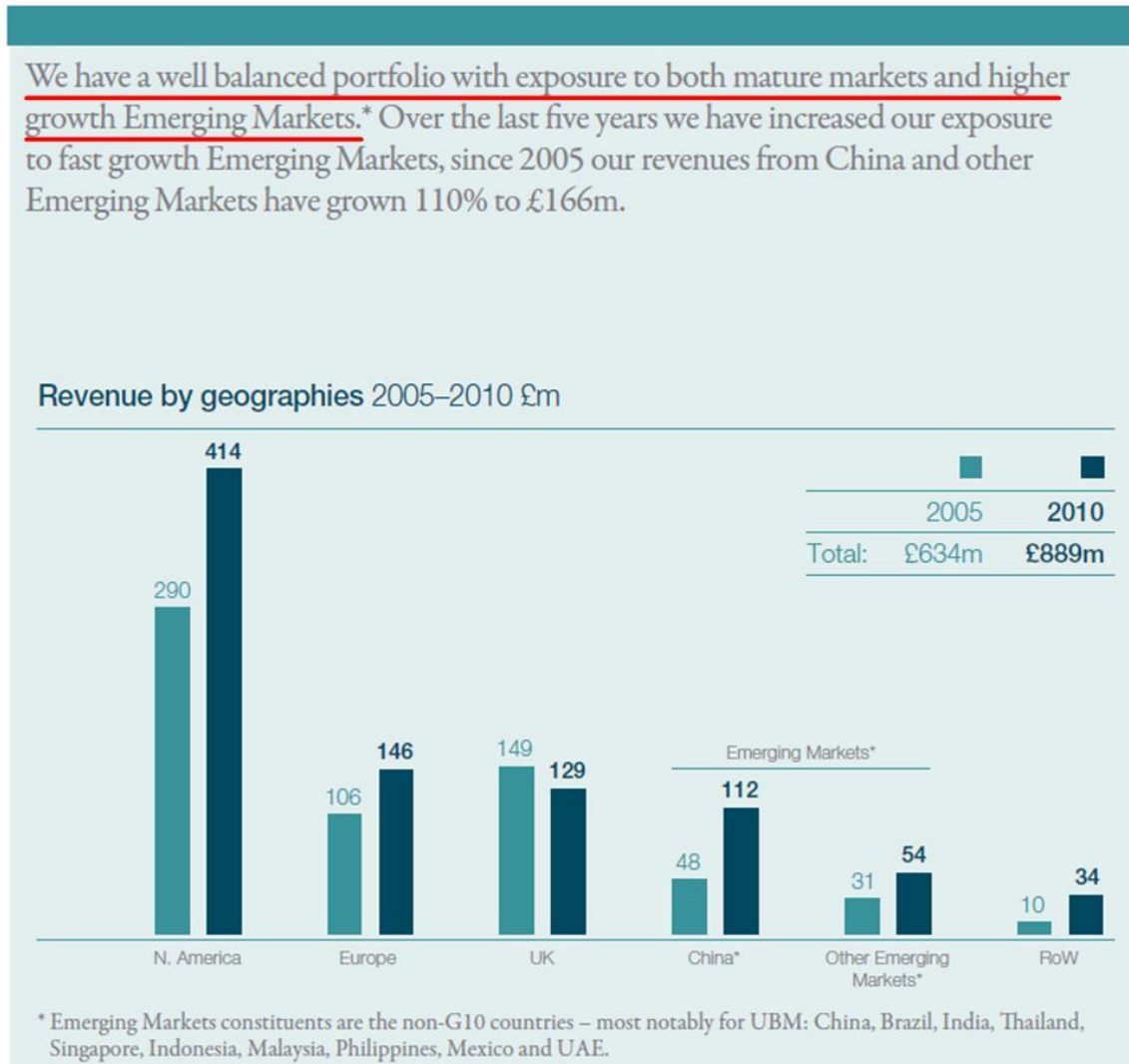
I propose that verbal textual identity claims made in annual reports may gain authority through their association with authoritative individuals and organisations, where these references may be textual or visual. For example, in Figure 31 the claim of UBM as a leading events-led B2B marketing and communications provider is afforded authority by its association with the firm's Chairman and its CEO, both by being featured in content where they are

identified as author, and by proximity to photographs of those individuals. I have found a number of other examples within the reports where the association of identity claims with visual elements appears intended by authors to lend authority to the claims. The most common example of this is the placement of claims next to charts, for example in Figure 32, the claim of 'well balanced portfolio' appears above a chart illustrating UBM's mix of revenue by region. Reports also use external bodies in order to lend authority to identity claims, for example placing claims alongside the logos of various organisations and accreditation schemes, as I show in Figure 33. I propose that the multimodal construction of such arguments from authority points to different roles played by different modes in argumentation.



Figure 32: Argument from authority – the use of charts, UBM 2010

## Where do we operate?



Source: UBM (2010: 3). Textual identity claim underlined.

Figure 33: Argument from authority – the use of logos, Future 2011

 <p>FSC www.fsc.org FSC® C007184 The mark of responsible forestry</p>	<p>Future in the UK holds FSC Chain of Custody certification. This recognises Future's commitment to sourcing paper supplies from well managed forestry.</p>		<p>We have continued our partnership with Bath-based charitable foundation, Quartet.</p>		<p>We are members of the Periodical Publishers' Association (PPA) and support its initiative encouraging readers to recycle their magazines after use. We incorporate the recycle logo in all our UK magazines.</p>		<p>Future's employee initiative, Go Green, encourages staff to engage in environmentally sustainable practices.</p>
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Source: Future (2011: 18)

Concluding my review of the use of argumentation and presentation in identity construction in the annual reports in my analysis, I have argued that empirical research on OI that focuses solely on the *content* of identity claims is unable to capture the richness of identity work in annual reports. Such approaches tend to determine the salience of claims either purely through the content of the claims or through their frequency. Although I believe that these measures are valid in themselves, I argue that, at least for the reports in my analysis, techniques of argumentation and presentation are central to both the construction of identity claims and to the efforts of organisational actors to highlight salient claims, where the context of the claim is often at least as important as its content.

I have shown that organisational authors adopt a range of techniques, in text and visually, in order to construct identity claims and to persuade audiences of the legitimacy and salience of those claims. Moreover, argumentation within the reports can be conceptualised in terms of a multimodal exercise, where, following Kress (2009), rhetors construct signs from the modes most appropriate to their own *interests* in framing communications in ways that they view most likely to persuade audiences.

Even though oppositional perspectives are absent from the reports directly, I agree with Billig (1996) that processes of argumentation always, implicitly or explicitly, acknowledge opposite views. So, where Centaur's reports promote the value of the magazine as complementary to the Internet, I propose that they are also implicitly recognising, and countering, the argument that the Internet will lead to the death of the magazine, where, even in the absence of the opposing argument, its presence can be inferred. Although Billig (1996) does not link argumentation to poststructuralism, I consider that there are clear parallels with a poststructural approach to identity that I have presented in this thesis, where the indeterminacy of poststructural identity means that it is always open to argument and contestation, and meaning is also constructed through comparison and opposition (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 108). Billig does recognise a connection between his work on argumentation and Bakhtin's dialogical approach to discourse (Todorov, 1984). I argue that approaching annual reports from the perspective of argumentation highlights the dialogical

nature of texts and discourses, where, for example the arguments that Centaur makes in support of the magazine can be understood as a response to (unacknowledged) texts and discourses arguing against that position as part of an ongoing dialogue, rather than as identity claims reflecting underlying collectively-shared organisational beliefs.

## **INDUSTRY DISCOURSES**

From a poststructuralist perspective, discourses are representations of the world that are constituted through and within a collective terrain that is not stable but constantly reconstituted through texts, where meanings within those texts necessarily remain unique, but converge towards common themes (Hansen, 2006: 51). In this thesis, taking a poststructural approach, I propose that organisational identity construction in annual reports takes place within a dynamic dialogue between individual texts and broader discourses, and between multiple identities.

In the last part of this chapter, I examine industry discourses in the UK B2B and professional publishing industry in the period 2004-13, consider their role in the construction of industry and related identities, and, revisiting my analysis of intertextual sources, investigate how the three firms in my study incorporated industry discourses into the construction of organisational identity in their annual reports. Through an analysis of two types of text – industry reports and online blogs – I identify a number of key discourses relating to the UK B2B and professional publishing industry during the period of my study. I have supplemented the evidence from these texts with interviews with some of the bloggers, and from contemporary press articles.

The identification of discourses requires two separate tasks: firstly the selection of relevant texts, and secondly the identification and categorisation of discourses within those texts (Hansen, 2006: 82-7). As I discuss in Chapter 5, I have used a range of online industry blogs and four contemporary industry reports for my analysis. I contend that these texts provide multiple perspectives on the industry, from informed insiders and outsiders, taking a variety of positions towards the industry and the firms operating within it, and that they are

relevant sources for the identification of industry discourses. In Chapter 6, I emphasised that, in contrast to the empirical facticity of texts, discourses are analytical constructions, where any proposed interpretation can only be one of a range of possible constructions. The identification of key discourses from texts is therefore reliant on the judgement of the researcher. In order to ensure rigour in this exercise, I have attempted to ensure that my analytical constructs are as grounded in the texts themselves as possible.

From a poststructural perspective, discourses are dynamic and unstable, continually constructed and reconstructed within texts, but never fully fixed (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111). They are also always contestable, where any position always has an opposing position available, although this opposing position is not necessarily explicit (Hansen, 2006: 6). Poststructural identity discourses are concerned with the relational construction of identity, with the Self constructed in relation to multiple Others, where they are constructed relationally across both spatial and temporal dimensions (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). The spatial dimension situates identities in terms of their relationship to other identities, for example, where the blogger Colin Morrison differentiates the B2B sector, with its function of supplying 'need to know' information, from consumer publishing, which produces content that is merely 'nice to have' (Colin Morrison, 10 April 2010). The temporal dimension positions entities relative to their past, present, or future states, for example where Rory Brown notes in his blog how the B2B publishing industry of the past was characterised by firms with high overheads and high margins, but would be replaced in the future by an industry of firms operating with low overheads and low margins (Rory Brown, November 2008).

I begin here by briefly reviewing the two principal sets of texts that I have used for this exercise, identifying their key features, and their advantages and disadvantages for my analysis. I argue that the sources take distinct approaches towards the identity construction of both the industry and of related identities. I propose that it is useful to consider these perspectives through a lens of argumentation, with texts taking positions in debates. I next consider how the texts define and delineate the publishing industry, arguing that the

differing purposes of the texts result in the presentation of very different definitions of the industry. I discuss how the texts use their own definitions of the industry in order to shape their preferred quantifications of the size and scope of the sector. I present a more detailed analysis of both types of industry text in Appendices 9 and 10.

I then, based upon my analysis of the two sets of industry texts, propose a two-fold typology of industry discourses, the first consisting of key identity *themes*, and the second focusing on several *key identities*: competition, business models, customers, and technology. I note that a key theme running through all of the industry discourses is one of change. Finally, revisiting my analysis of intertextual sources, I examine how industry discourses frame the construction of OI claims in the annual reports in my study.

### **Industry texts as sources of industry discourses**

In Chapter 5, I introduced the two sets of industry texts – industry reports and online blogs – that I have used in my analysis of industry discourses. I have used four industry reports, ten UK-based blogs and eight US-based blogs. In Appendices 9 and 10, I examine these two sets of texts using discourse analysis, based on Wood and Kroger's (2000) framework, investigating the authors, intended audiences, and purposes of the discourses, together with the external resources used in their construction.

The industry reports and the blogs in my analysis share the advantage of a close and contemporary engagement with the publishing industry, with the former utilising interviews with, and surveys of, industry figures, and the latter authored by individuals working within the industry. However, they are very different types of texts in terms of their structure, format and approach. Moreover, as I discuss in Appendices 8 and 9, they encompass a range of purposes, resulting in quite different presentations of the industry, and take quite distinct approaches to identity construction. However, a number of shared identity themes do emerge from a close study of the texts. In Table 19, I present my categorisation of the two types of text. I have categorised the industry reports based on whether they were produced on behalf of the industry itself or

by consultancy firms, with the overall approach of the reports framed by this distinction in authorship. In terms of the blogs, I have identified a number of bloggers who presented themselves in the guise of consultants – the ‘guides for hire’ – who clearly hoped for some form of positive engagement with the firms in the industry, whereas the ‘critical commentators’, as the title suggests, took a much more critical line, emphasising their independence from industry patronage.

**Table 19: Categorising two types of industry text**

Type of source	Approach	Texts
Industry report	Industry-driven	Pira, 2002; PPA, 2005
	Consultancy	PWC, 2010; JJP, 2013
Blog	Guide for hire	Adam Tinworth, David Worlock, John Welsh, Rory Brown, Neil Thackray, Colin Morrison, Tim Holmes
	Critical commentator	Business media blogger, Private Frazer, Peter Kirwan

Although I show that the two types of texts I have used for my analysis offer different perspectives on industry discourses, I argue that they both tend to prefer totalising discourses and simple explanations of change, presenting both the industry and the issues it faces as essentially homogeneous rather than complex and fragmented. I argue that this is partly a reflection of their focus on the largest firms in the industry and on the dominant products and business models, but mainly a function of the sensemaking and sensegiving purposes of the texts, seeking to provide generalised explanations of events, and generalised predications and prescriptions for the future. I argue that this translates into a centripetal approach to identity construction, with identities presented by authors as largely unitary and agreed-upon, despite an empirical context of disruption and change. It is this challenge which, I argue, dominates the texts and the discourses that emerge from them, as authors seek to identify stable and cohesive identities.

## **How do industry discourses define industry identity?**

In this section, I highlight a lack of agreement within the industry texts concerning the identity of the UK B2B publishing industry. I argue that this in part relates to the transformational changes taking place in the industry at this time, but, more importantly, reflects the differing purposes of the texts themselves, as authors sought to construct the identity of the industry in a way that suited their own purposes. I argue that this supports a poststructural understanding of the essential instability and contestability of discourse and identity, with language itself a site of political struggle (Hansen, 2006: 18), where apparently uncontroversial terms such as ‘publishing’ and ‘content’ are, upon closer examination, far from agreed-upon by organisational actors.

Of the two types of texts, the bloggers are less concerned with providing explicit definitions of the sector, although some posts discuss how changes in the sector challenge established definitions. Adam Tinworth argues that firms such as RBI and UBM are no longer ‘publishers’, but rather ‘B2B information companies’ (Adam Tinworth, August 2012). In my interviews with bloggers, I asked them to provide definitions for the industry. David Shaw comments that, even prior to 2000, firms often earned large revenues from trade shows yet were still referred to as publishing companies. He prefers an industry definition based on a core function, namely ‘to serve the needs of our target decision making audiences with the information and analysis they need,’ where firms such as UBM are therefore publishers as part of a broader range of activities (interview with US blogger David Shaw, 2016). The blogger Tim Holmes argues that definitions are primarily the responsibility of the firms themselves, where, ‘if they still want to call themselves publishers (presumably because there is still some value in being seen as a publisher) then they are publishers’ (interview with blogger Tim Holmes, 2016).

The 2002 and 2005 industry reports – those commissioned by the industry – present detailed definitions of the sector, where I argue that they intend these definitions to support their particular interpretation of the scope, revenue, and therefore importance of the industry. Both reports highlight the key issue of

whether to define the industry according to those functions, products and services considered to fall under the umbrella of publishing, or by definitions centred on the firms themselves, where their activities may extend into areas not necessarily considered as publishing activities. The 2002 Pira report highlights this distinction between ‘the activity of publishing as traditionally defined’ and ‘the business of publishing companies, which may include activities not currently in the mainstream of publishing’ (Pira International, 2002: 88).

All four industry reports generally move from a focus on product and format through to definitions that embrace function, audience, and, increasingly, value proposition. For example, the 2005 PPA report highlights a central function of the industry as connecting businesses by linking buyers and sellers, and distinguishes the activity of publishing, which it refers to almost exclusively in terms of ‘publishing products’, from a broader definition of the industry. The report’s expanded definition of the sector encompasses a range of activities, separating these into publishing products, events and exhibitions, list-based products and services, and business directories and databases (The Business Information Forum, 2005: 4). In acknowledging a lack of consensus on the activities included in the sector, the 2005 PPA report does, however, assert (without supporting evidence) that ‘the most widely accepted definition describes the industry as comprising those businesses supplying and delivering information and intelligence to those working in industry, commerce and the professions in the UK’ (The Business Information Forum, 2005: 7). The Pira report argues that technology effectively changes the definition of key concepts such as ‘content’, which can be increasingly manifested in a range of forms (Pira International, 2002: 7), where publishing can no longer be ‘inextricably linked’ to printing, and needs to be redefined to focus on its function as the producer of content, ‘a set of skills and core competences consisting of the acquisition, selection, editing, management, marketing and sale of content,’ where the ‘wrappers’ for the content are not the crucial feature (Pira International, 2002: 2).

The two later industry reports, targeted primarily at the industry itself, are less concerned with providing detailed definitions of the industry. The 2010 PwC



report defines the 'B2B publishing market' as the 'sale to business professionals and companies of business information, print and online directory advertising, print advertising in trade magazines, advertising on trade magazine websites, and trade magazine circulation spending' (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010b: 9). The 2013 JJP report does not provide an industry definition, focusing instead on change, where, for example, 'content has traditionally been consumed via paper-based products and this is now increasingly happening in a digital format' (JJP Associates, 2013: 3).

I propose that the definitions that the industry reports select are clearly linked to their efforts to quantify the sector, where I argue that definitions are adopted at least in part to be able to make certain quantitative claims. For example, the 2005 PPA report, with a clear purpose of emphasising the importance of the sector, attempts to extend the definition of the industry as widely as possible, thus enabling it to point to 'revenues greater than the combined turnover of the much-lauded UK television, radio, film and video industries' (The Business Information Forum, 2005: 10). In addition to definitional issues influencing attempts to quantify the sector, the 2002 Pira report highlights concerns with the data used for industry estimates, noting serious gaps for total turnover and estimates of employment within the sector, widely varying estimates of the number of companies operating in the sector, with no regular data capturing the increasingly significant 'brand extension activities' of B2B magazine publishers (Pira International, 2002: 66-67). It is clear from the industry reports, therefore, that even prior to the start of my period it was possible to present a variety of definitions for the B2B and professional publishing industry, where any references in the texts implying that definitions are agreed-upon and static should be taken as efforts to fix meanings where no such stability should be assumed to exist.

### **Categorising industry discourses**

A number of key themes emerge from my reading of the two types of industry text in my analysis: the perceived decline of the sector; questions concerning whether the crisis is essentially structural or cyclical; whether solutions should

involve gradual migration or fundamental revolution; and whether barriers to change are structural or cultural. I have presented these themes in terms of oppositional arguments, and this, particularly in the context of the online blogs, reflects their presentation in the texts themselves. I propose that this conceptualisation of the industry discourses supports a poststructural perspective, where meanings and identities are constructed in relation to other meanings and identities (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 106). In addition to these themes, I identify four key identities as central to industry discourses: competition, business models, customers, and technology, where I position each of these as key drivers of change in the industry. In Table 20, I set out my categorisation of industry discourses.

**Table 20: A categorisation of industry discourses**

Key industry discourses	Industry decline and death Causes of decline – structural or cyclical? Calls for reinvention – migration or revolution? Barriers to change – structure or culture?
Other discourses – drivers of change	Competition Business models Technology Customers

The industry bloggers frequently present the challenges faced by the publishing industry in existential terms, as a binary choice between *survival and extinction*. They sometimes relate this to the industry’s dominant product of the magazine, for example, ‘The era of the business magazine began 150 years ago. Its [sic] all but over’ (Business Media Blogger, 15 April 2008), or in terms of the industry itself, with Private Frazer quoting US blogger Paul Conley’s comment that, ‘Much of b-to-b publishing...has sunk into a death spiral’ (Private Frazer, 15 April 2008). Despite such pessimistic accounts however, predictions of imminent demise are usually accompanied by the proviso that the industry could possibly be saved, providing that publishers act quickly and follow good advice, specifically the advice provided by the bloggers, for example, ‘there is still time to get the heads out of the sand – but not much...It’s too late to mind the shop and hope the customers will come back, we need a new innovative

approach to business media' (Business Media Blogger, 7 May, 2008). The industry reports, in contrast, with their focus on either promoting or selling to the industry, although emphasising the need for change do not question the future of the industry in such existential terms.

In attempting to explain the causes of the industry's problems, a central debate in the blogs, particularly following the 2008 financial crisis, relates to whether these problems were essentially *structural or cyclical* in nature, with those making the structural argument pointing to the collapse of the traditional print/advertising business models that the industry was based on, and those taking a cyclical view countering that the industry's fortunes had always reflected the peaks and troughs of the wider economy, and that it had successfully adapted to previous challenges. The bloggers overwhelmingly favour the structural argument, asserting, for example, 'That the market was turning down in 2008 was pretty obvious, as was the fact that this was a structural rather than a cyclical downturn (although there were numerous voices both in my company and the broader industry that argued that this was temporary and that the good times would return)' (Private Frazer, 12 March, 2013).

In their prescriptions for the future of the publishing industry, the key debate in the industry texts can be characterised in terms of the oppositional argument of *migration or revolution*, where the former presents this in terms of the successful migration of print to digital products, and the latter treats both problems and solutions as transformational rather than incremental. Sources from the first half of my period, particularly the first two industry reports, buoyed by the industry's success in fighting off the initial challenge of the Internet in the late 1990s, emphasise the ability of the industry to adapt, and to co-opt the new digital technology into existing models. The 2005 PPA report argues that, 'Far from precipitating the demise of more traditional means of serving the market, electronic delivery is seen as enhancing and complementing, rather than replacing, other forms of information provision' (The Business Information Forum, 2005: 27). In contrast, later sources, especially the bloggers, emphasise the transformative and disruptive impact of changes resulting from new

technology, with Rory Brown, for example, writing of a 'radical disruption' comparable to the introduction of the railroad in the US (Rory Brown, 7 June, 2010), which would inevitably lead to widespread casualties in the industry, and which required radical solutions in order for the industry to survive.

In their analysis of the feasibility of both firms and the industry successfully reinventing themselves for the future, a key debate in both the blogs and the industry reports explores *barriers to change*, questioning whether these are related to *structure or culture*. Arguments emphasising structural barriers tend to highlight the inherent difficulties faced by high-margin, high-cost firms attempting to transition from declining but still profitable print products to low-margin low-cost digital businesses. The texts also note the challenges faced by an industry transitioning from dominance by a few big, horizontally focused 'portfolio' firms, to one where firms tend to be smaller, more specialist, and vertically integrated. Arguments emphasising cultural barriers, on the other hand, particularly favoured by the critical bloggers and in the industry reports produced by the consultancy firms, focus on the cultural and managerial barriers to change. Publishing firms and their senior management teams are characterised as complacent, conservative, short-sighted, and fearful of change, wedded to print through familiarity and fear for the future. A common criticism from the bloggers is that publishers have their 'heads in the sand' and are unwilling to face up to a changing world. The 2013 JJP report argues that 'organisations are stooped in a corporate culture constrained by silos, rigid managerial hierarchies, restrictive practices and corporate bureaucracy' (JJP Associates, 2013: 9).

Both the blogs and the industry reports present *competition* as a key industry discourse, positioning the industry within a rapidly changing competitive landscape. This identity discourse has both temporal and spatial dimensions. Texts generally characterise the past as stable, with competition largely coming from established firms within the industry. They contrast this with an unstable present, where the introduction of digital technology has brought competition from several new directions. Global technology giants, such as Google and LinkedIn, allow users to search for free content in an increasingly commoditised

information environment, and therefore threaten traditional advertising models. The new digital landscape also creates opportunities for agile and disruptive new online entrants, able to adopt new publishing models and to develop innovative ways of monetising their offerings. In some cases, these new entrants are able to challenge established publishers simply through lower costs, where the high cost base of traditional publishers in an age of flexible and lightweight technology solutions allows for the rise of smaller niche players.

However, an opposing discourse of *partnership* coexists with this dominant discourse of competition, where competitors are also potential partners in a world where publishers become less concerned with restricting access to proprietary content and start to exploit innovations such as shared technology platforms and licensing. The 2010 PwC report, for example, argues that publishers could use the audience reach of established Internet players in order to connect with their target audiences (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010b: 37), and the 2013 JJP report proposes that firms could form relationships with other types of provider, such as software developers and data analysis companies (JJP Associates, 2013: 8). In this way, two opposing discourses co-exist, with competition as a threat and partnership as an opportunity.

Discussions around *business models* become increasingly frequent in the industry reports and blogs, marking a shift from a focus on the creation of products to the creation of value. The texts present business models as both drivers of change and the means for firms to enable that change. They highlight a shift from simple, ubiquitous, and stable business models to complex and unstable ones, where the traditional print publishing model, centred on firms providing advertisers with access to potential customers via the platform of the print magazine, gives way to a dynamic mix of models, with an increasingly digital focus. Although traditional models tend to be presented as static and ubiquitous, where, for example, the 'business formula of printing and distributing newsletters and later specialist magazines to paying subscribers and selling advertising in them has been remarkably profitable for over a century' (JJP Associates, 2013: 2), other texts acknowledge that even in pre-Internet days firms operated multiple business models, for example with the 2005 PPA report

highlighting that publishers also operated 'other channels of business and professional communication, like exhibitions, conferences and management reports' (The Business Information Forum, 2005: 8).

The dominant narrative within the texts of changing business models contrasts largely homogeneous established models with an uncertain and more complex present and future, with firms operating multiple models with varying levels of success. The blogger Rory Brown notes a commentator likening the challenge of delivering new business models to 'changing the tyres on a moving truck' (Rory Brown, 15 July 2009). The texts generally extend the uncertainty of the present into the future, where business models are 'likely to need regular adjustment to keep pace with technological developments and changes in the industries they serve' (JJP Associates, 2013: 1).

Both the industry reports and the blogs are concerned with the identities of the industry's *customers* and with *consumers* in general, where they see the changing demands of these groups as another key driver of industry change, contrasting the behaviour and attitudes of both customers and publishers in the past to those of the present and the future. In an industry where profits are increasingly hard to come by, the texts emphasise that customers and consumers are worthy of more consideration than in the past, where they were often taken for granted. Furthermore, new technology enables the reader to transition from a passive consumer of content into an active participant in the process of content creation, and from a transactional participant about whom little is known to an individual with a significant 'digital footprint'. Advertisers, previously considered primarily as sources of revenue, another transactional relationship, are increasingly positioned as partners, with publishers as their 'trusted media advisors' (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010b: 26).

The industry texts acknowledge that, in addition to developing technology driving the changing relationship between publishers and their customers, the broader societal relationship between consumers and businesses with technology and information is also changing. They argue that even as it is increasingly commoditised, the value of information for businesses becomes of

ever greater importance, where customers need information more quickly, and therefore require digital delivery mechanisms to supply it (The Business Information Forum, 2005: 8). The texts also highlight changing consumer demands, for example the trend towards the consumption of 'bite-size' information (Colin Morrison, 27 August, 2013), or the demand for 'anytime, anywhere, anyhow' access to content (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010b: 4).

Underpinning all of the industry texts is an assumption that *technology* is a key driver of change. I have identified two broad narratives within the overall technology discourse – from print to online and from tangible products to intangible services. As with the other discourses I cover here, the texts generally present these narratives in terms of a temporal shift from a previously stable industry dominated by a core product (print magazines) to a more complex world where publishers are responsible for a dynamic mix of (increasingly digital) products and services. However, as I have noted, countering this totalising discourse, texts do acknowledge that even prior to the start of this period publishers produced a variety of products and services both in print and digitally (Pira International, 2002: 56).

Within the overall discourse of technology change, the industry texts debate the nature of the *content* that publishers provide, with the provision of data, insight and analysis, rather than news, increasingly presented as the future for publishers in the face of the perceived commoditisation of content. The texts present this increasing commoditisation of content as a driver towards publishers producing new products and services increasingly focused around workflow and data, reflecting a greater vertical engagement with sectors. However, such approaches still presuppose a continuing focus on the publisher's role in the delivery of content to readers. Other texts problematise this, arguing that the 'real' customers of B2B publishing are, and always have been, advertisers rather than readers, where the central function of publishers is connecting buyers and sellers, rather than delivering products.

In contrast to discourses that focus on the overwhelmingly destructive impact of digital technology, the survival of the magazine is a common oppositional

discourse within the texts. Some predict the survival of the magazine in print as a niche product within an increasingly digital world, where, for example, print magazines might offer 'the kind of content not readily available or easily consumed in a digital format' (Neil Thackray, September 2009). Other texts consider the potential for digital versions of the periodical magazine, where, for example, the idea of the 'edition' is potentially as powerful in a digital form as in print (Adam Tinworth, January 2014).

In my consideration of industry discourses, I have explored how the authors of industry texts sought to construct industry identity and other identities in those texts. I have argued that texts used oppositional discourses to shape industry identity in arguments of survival versus destruction, structural versus cyclical change, business model migration versus revolution, and structural versus cultural barriers to change. These arguments involved both temporal and spatial dimensions, with texts contrasting the industry of the past to that of the present and the future, and the B2B publishing sector with consumer publishing. I have argued that the authors of industry texts sought to construct the identity of publishing firms and the wider industry in relation to other identities, including competitors, business models, technology, and customers. I have also shown that the categories of 'publishing industry' and 'B2B publishing industry' were themselves unstable and contested throughout this period, with industry actors seeking to define these terms to suit their own purposes.

I propose that the processes of identity construction that I have described here, marked by the relational, mutual constitution of related identities, and the fundamental indeterminacy, instability and contestability of identities, support a poststructural understanding of identity, reflecting Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 111-3) when they write of the essentially relational nature of a 'field of identities which never manage to be fully fixed.' For example, I have shown that efforts to define the identity of the industry itself are constituted in relation to other identities, where any effort to define one depends on the identities of the others, where definitions are never fixed, but tailored by authors to suit local contingencies.



## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have addressed identity construction in and around the annual reports in my analysis encompassing both reports as texts as discourses, and broader discourses. I began the chapter by proposing that annual reports are discourses that are focused on the construction of identity. I then presented a discourse analysis of the reports, focusing in turn on their purposes, audiences, authorship, and the resources they call upon in their construction. I further argued that reports can be conceptualised as consisting of a number of sub discourses, each having a distinct set of purposes, audiences, authors and resources. In my analysis, I showed that identity work in reports reflects both centripetal and centrifugal forces, which I argue supports a poststructural conception of the tension between efforts by organisational actors to fix stable and coherent meanings and a more dynamic and fragmented empirical 'reality'.

Although much of my study has focused on the analysis of verbal text, in the first part of this chapter I have emphasised the relevance of a multimodal approach to the analysis of identity construction in contemporary annual reports. I have emphasised the importance of visual elements in identity construction and highlighted the importance of the annual report front cover in presenting overarching OI claims. Although I have stressed that visual identity work requires a different approach to analysis than verbal text, I have argued for the need for a multimodal approach which considers that multiple modes act concurrently to provide unified meanings. I have specifically proposed that visual elements provide organisational actors with certain advantages in their identity work, allowing them to embrace ambiguity and indeterminacy in order to present coherent identity messages to multiple audiences.

I addressed the role of argumentation and presentation in the construction of identity in annual reports, where I noted that these operate at both the level of the text and of the identity utterance. I proposed that the key elements of argumentation, as presented by Billig (1996), support a poststructural and intertextual approach to OI, highlighting the essentially contested nature of identity, together with the dialogical nature of texts and discourses. I have

argued that any analysis of argumentation within contemporary annual reports invariably needs to take a multimodal approach, considering not just the verbal and visual aspects of argumentation, but also the overall design of the texts.

Finally, I examined the construction of industry discourses through two types of contemporary industry texts: industry reports and online blogs. Although I highlighted that these sources comprise a wide range of purposes, and that these strongly shape their approach to identity, I argued that it is possible to identify a number of clear industry discourses in this period, where these form the backdrop to identity construction within the annual reports. In the next chapter, I pull together my analysis from this and the previous chapter and apply it to each of the three firms in my study in turn.

## **CHAPTER 9: CASE STUDIES OF THREE PUBLISHING FIRMS**

In the previous two chapters, I have explored organisational identity through the analysis of a set of annual reports and industry texts relating to the UK B2B and professional publishing industry from 2004-13. I argue that I have demonstrated that a poststructural approach to such an analysis can provide a suitable framework for a methodologically rigorous examination of identity construction in texts and discourses, one which helps to account for the tension identified in the OI literature between a 'centripetal' identity as conceptualised and presented by organisational actors, and a 'centrifugal' identity empirically constructed in texts and discourses.

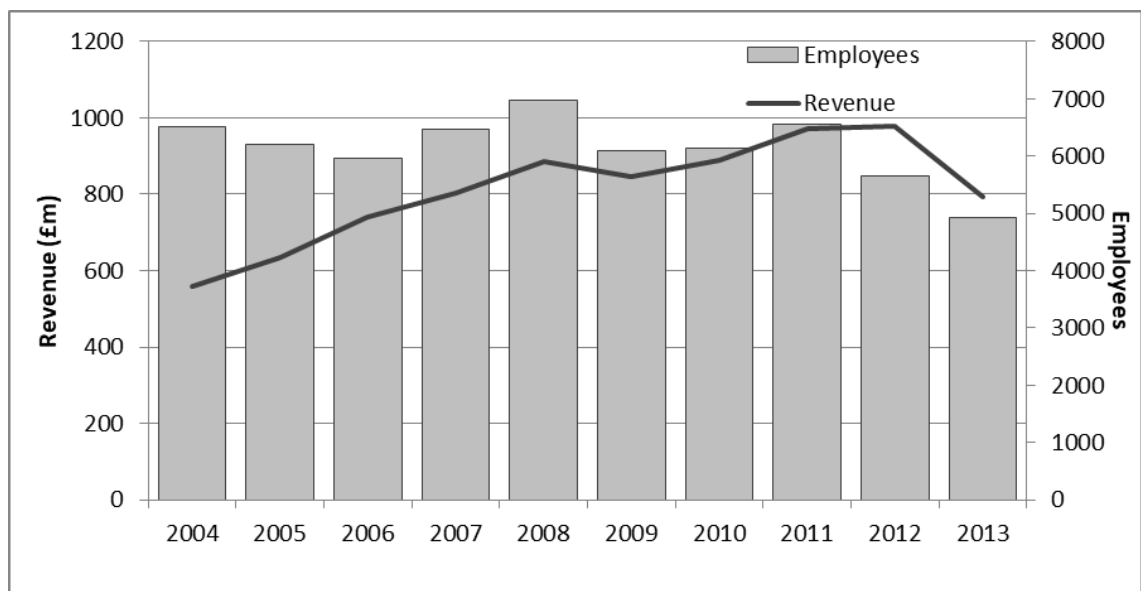
In this chapter, I apply my analysis to each of the three publishing firms that I have selected as my case studies. Although operating within the same industry and, at the beginning of this period at least, producing very similar products, the firms had very different histories, and, during this period, each followed a very different strategic path. For each of the firms in my analysis, I first present some contextual data. I then consider any changes in management regime over the period, leading into a discussion of the authorship of identity claims in the firm's annual reports. I examine key themes from the content of claims in the reports before turning to address my intertextual analyses of the patterns and sources of claims. Finally, I consider the relational and decentred nature of identity construction in the firm's annual reports.

## UBM

The business is no longer dependent on advertising-supported print products. Instead UBM now has a clear identity as a focused events-led marketing services and communications business, with negligible exposure to print products. (UBM, 2013: 15)

My analysis of UBM's annual reports from 2004-13 reveals a fundamental shift in the firm's approach to identity work following the appointment of David Levin as CEO in 2004. I find that identity work in the reports from 2005 onwards is characterised by the dominance of a single authorial voice (Levin as CEO), carefully argued identity claims focused on the construction of a changing identity for the firm, a concern for external legitimation and the annual report's role in impression management, and efforts to integrate the social and commercial purposes of the firm into a coherent, overarching organisational identity. However, my intertextual analysis of verbal textual identity claims across UBM's reports reveals temporal discontinuities and inconsistencies in the firm's identity work, reflecting a strategic trajectory that was far from the smooth narrative presented in the reports.

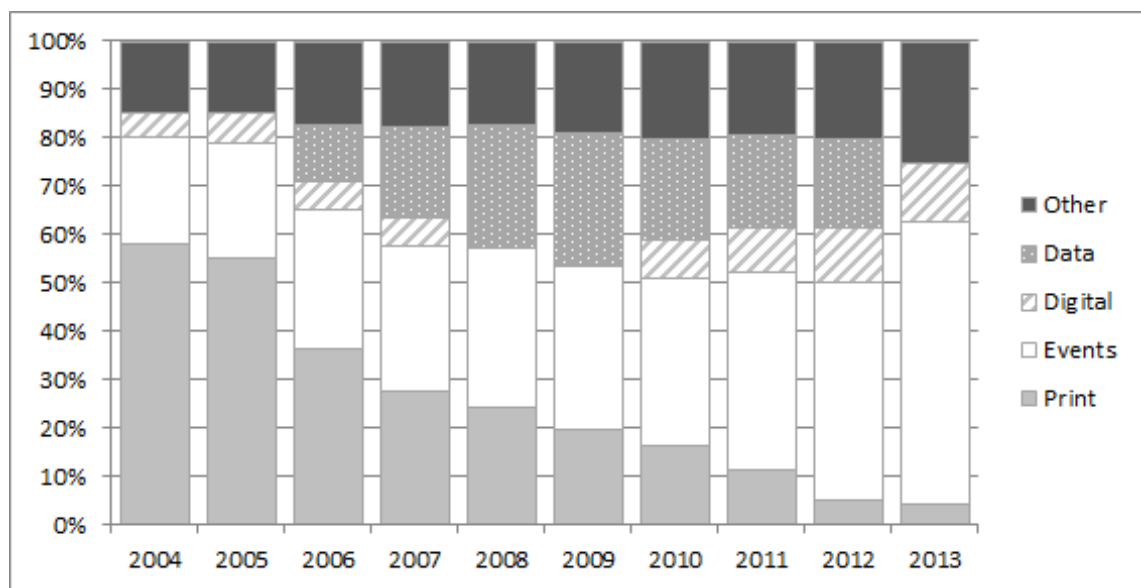
**Figure 34: Revenue and employees, UBM, 2004-13**



*Source: UBM annual reports, 2004-13*

In terms of revenue and employees, during this period UBM was the largest of the three firms in my analysis, with annual revenues averaging just over £800 million, and with over 6,000 employees for most of the period, as I show in Figure 34. Of the three firms, it experienced the least turnover in key management positions (CEO, CFO, chairman), with David Levin as CEO from 2005-13, two CFO's and three chairman serving over the period. However, despite this continuity in leadership, the core activities of UBM changed quite fundamentally in the decade of my study, transformed, largely through acquisitions and disposals, from a firm with a focus on the publication of print magazines to one where over 50% of its revenue derived from events, with very little revenue coming from legacy print products, as I show in the chart in Figure 35.

**Figure 35: Proportion of revenue from core business functions, UBM, 2004-13**



*Source: UBM annual reports, 2004-13*

Reflecting its relatively greater size, UBM's annual reports during the period of my study are generally more substantial than those of the other two firms in terms of both page length and word count (see Figures 44 and 45, in Appendix 3), and this is reflected in the greater number of identity claims in UBM's reports compared to the other two firms.

UBM's reports in this period from 2006 onwards clearly reflect Levin's dominant influence at the firm. The 2004 report, published before Levin's arrival, is very different in format, design, content and length to subsequent reports. With the 2005 report not yet fully reflecting Levin's influence, the design, structure and content of UBM's reports from 2006 onwards through to 2013 demonstrate considerable continuity, as is reflected in the reports' front covers, as shown in Figure 68, in Appendix 7.

In terms of the authorship of UBM's annual reports, Levin as CEO dominates to an extent not seen in the reports of the other two firms. Whereas UBM's 2004 report demonstrates a generally 'hands-off' approach from the long-standing CEO Clive Hollick, with the firm's Chief Operating Officer attributed as the author of the brief operating review section, Levin appears to have personally written most of the content of the review sections of UBM's reports from 2006 onwards, including the corporate responsibility section of several reports, and even a section on risk in two of the reports, this latter section generally firmly the responsibility of a firm's CFO. I have associated Levin with the authorship of over 50% of the narrative content of UBM's reports in the period 2006-13, corresponding to over 50% of identity claims, as I show in Table 17 (on page 231). It seems clear that Levin's influence on identity work in UBM's reports also permeates the anonymous sections of the reports and those associated with other authors. For example, as I show in Figure 31 (on page 266), the phrase 'events-led B2B marketing and communications provider' appears in UBM's 2013 report not only in Levin's CEO statement, but also prominently at the front of the report, and in the Chairman's statement.

UBM's Board and Chairmen are responsible for around 15% of identity claims in the reports, as shown in Table 17, on page 231. Their role in identity work becomes particularly prominent following the appointment of Dame Helen Alexander as Chairman in 2012, accompanied by an increased focus within the reports on governance. In terms of audiences, I have noted that the identity work within UBM's reports appears to be more sensitive than the other two firms to a wide range of potential audiences for the reports, including regulators and

potential employees, as well as shareholders, with a greater focus on responding to institutional and societal demands.

My analysis finds that a central theme in the identity work of UBM's annual reports from 2006 to 2013 is its efforts to reposition its core identity away from that of a publisher of print magazines. In addition to this overarching theme, however, I argue that the various sub discourses of UBM's reports are sites for a range of identity work addressing, and seeking to reconcile, the various commercial and social obligations of the firm, where the identity work does not simply involve the construction of organisational identity, but also that of a range of other identities.

In addition to attempts to construct an identity as a commercially successful firm and an attractive proposition to its shareholders, in its annual reports UBM also seeks to establish an identity as a well governed company and as a responsible social actor. In contrast to the other two firms in my analysis, identity claims in UBM's reports attempt to reconcile these identities in order to construct an overarching and coherent identity for the firm. For example, in 2011's report Levin writes:

For us, being a sustainable business isn't just about being green, it's about how UBM achieves business success today, which includes being profitable, whilst assuring its success tomorrow, through long-term responsible management and stewardship. (UBM, 2011: 44)

Levin also seeks to link financial performance to the firm's culture and treatment of its workforce:

UBM strives to attract, develop and retain the most talented people at all levels and to foster a learning culture. We believe this gives us a competitive advantage and results in a more engaged and effective workforce. UBM's unique culture therefore makes a key contribution to the creation of long-term shareholder value. (UBM, 2013: 20)

At the same time as attempting to construct this overarching, integrated, identity, the verbal textual identity work in UBM's reports seeks to emphasise underlying continuity and stability in key elements of its identity at the same time as emphasising transformational change in others. This involves a careful

presentation of identity messages, where the portrayal of identity change as planned, controlled and deliberate, and part of an overall vision, is crucial:

The business is no longer dependent on advertising-supported print products. Instead UBM now has a clear identity as a focused events-led marketing services and communications business, with negligible exposure to print products. We achieved this transformation by making more than 100 bolt-on acquisitions, disposing of almost £1bn of revenues and investing in organic growth opportunities. We continued to progress this strategic shift in 2013 with the Delta disposal and the Marketing Services restructuring, as well as the acquisition of ten small events. (UBM, Chief Executive's statement, 2013: 15)

In this way, Levin is able to present transformational change in terms of a continuous, planned process instead of one marked by disruption, ambiguity and uncertainty. A key aspect of this is Levin's emphasis on culture as a central element of the firm's identity, where the inherently enduring nature of cultural claims are intended to transcend any perceived lack of consistency in strategy:

Both of the first two shifts [*the shift to an events business, and a refocus on international markets*] have been underpinned by the business's third pivot (and the one I believe has been the most important): the development of a positive, engaged and collaborative UBM-wide business culture. (UBM, Chief Executive's statement, 2013: 15)

In Chapter 7, I noted that the design of the front covers of UBM's reports reflects a theme of continuity, evolution, and cohesion in the content of its identity work. The visual design of the inside of the reports matches this overall consistency, with continuity in design approaches and motifs, where the same design agency, Radley Yeldar, was responsible for producing each of the reports from 2006 to 2011.

My intertextual analysis of verbal textual identity claims, however, reveals that this apparent continuity and cohesion in identity work in UBM's reports masks underlying discontinuities, with considerable changes in the structure and content of the reports from year to year reflecting a fundamental lack of continuity in the firm's overall strategy. My intertextual analysis of the patterns of identity utterances across UBM's reports in this period reveals substantial discontinuities in identity claims, with very little continuity in claims between



reports. As I showed in Figures 10 and 11 (on page 203), relatively few identity claims span more than one or two of the reports, with little consistency in core claims outside of a brief period between 2010 and 2013, where a clear identity as an events-focused firm is maintained.

As I show in Table 21, my analysis of intertextual sources reveals that, as with the other two firms, the majority of references in UBM's identity claims to other texts and discourses refer to internal rather than external sources. For UBM, however, the most common internal references refer to implied texts, for example to the firm's strategy and mission. In Table 22, I show the most common examples for each type of intertextual reference.

**Table 21: Summary of intertextual references, UBM**

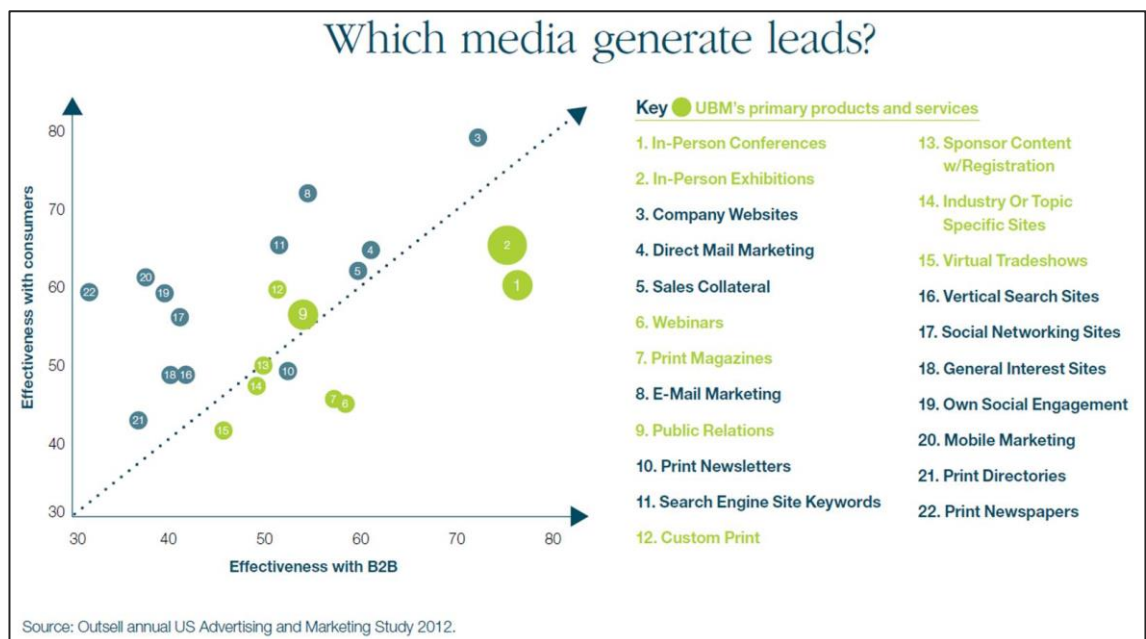
	Internal	External	Total	%
<b>Executed strategy</b>	30	N/A	30	9
<b>Texts</b>	30	15	45	14
<b>Implied texts</b>	94	9	103	32
<b>Discourse</b>	90	51	141	44
<b>Total</b>	244	75	319	

**Table 22: Key sources for identity claims, UBM**

	Internal	External
<b>Texts</b>	Financial accounts	Industry survey
	Risk processes	UN Declaration on Human Rights
	Training programmes	FTSE Media index
	Staff communications	IFRS/UK GaaP accounting standards
<b>Implied texts</b>	Financial controls	Market position
	Strategy	Regulatory change
	Company data	New media models
	Mission	Local best practice
	Business model	Industry standards
<b>Discourses</b>	Culture	
	Customer understanding	The market
	Expertise	Technology
	Social responsibility	Customers
	Brand strength	

In my analysis, I identified two types of external text that are of particular importance for identity construction in UBM's annual reports. The first are industry reports, where these help to establish and legitimise UBM's changing identity by referencing change to the broader media market. In Figure 36, I present an example of an external report referenced by UBM's 2012 report, used to support UBM's argument for its identity change from a print publisher to an event organiser.

**Figure 36: Outsell annual study referenced by UBM annual report, 2012**



Source: UBM (2012: 11)

The second set of texts that I argue play an important role in shaping UBM's identity work in its annual reports are the UK Companies Act and the FRC Combined Code, representing the key institutional demands on the firm. I described in the previous chapter how UBM addresses the concept of 'business model' in its reports from 2010, following a specific requirement in the 2010 FRC Code, developing it further following the 2013 change to the Companies Act which introduced the concept into legislation. Of the three firms in my analysis, UBM proved to be the most responsive in responding to these institutional demands in its annual reports, and was the most likely to attempt to incorporate them into its identity claims.

I argue that identity construction in UBM's annual reports involved the relational, mutual constitution of identities, with the identity of the firm as the focus in a dynamic network of related identities in identity construction within the reports. In Table 23, where I summarise those identity utterances in the reports that do not focus on the firm itself, I show that a key related identity in UBM's identity construction is the market, where identity claims are concerned with the firm's shift from print to online products and the advantages of the events business compared to print publishing. A secondary focus is on technology, where claims link changes in technology to changes in customer behaviour, therefore supporting a changing identity for the firm.

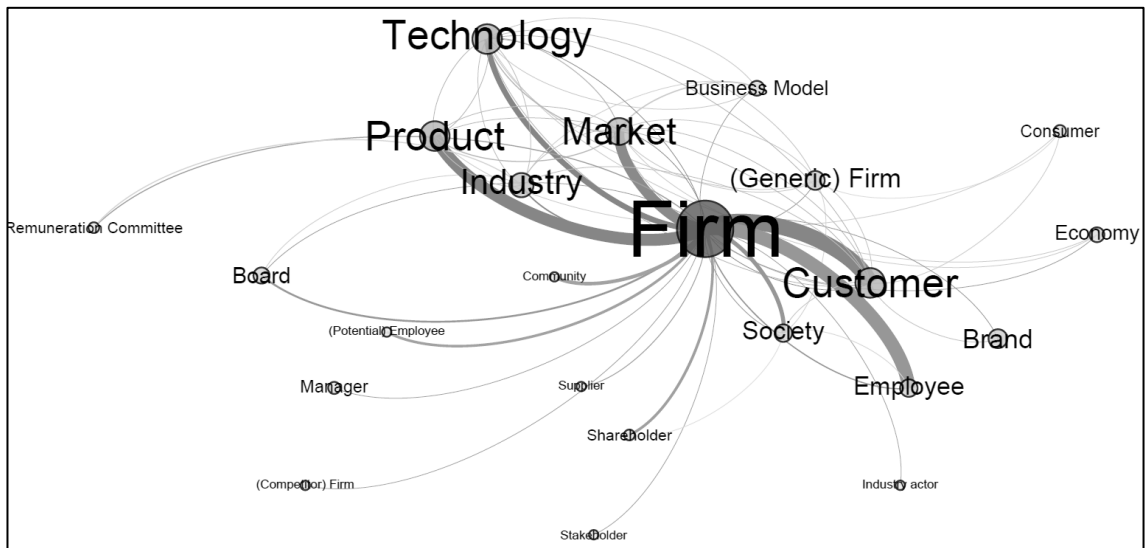
**Table 23: Summary of claims for identities other than the firm, UBM**

Level	Claim	Utterances
Market	Fragmented market, Cyclical advertising, Competitive industry, Digitalisation and Emerging markets, Technology impact on markets, Competition from tech companies, Technology change, Industry more integrated, Print decline, Connecting buyers and sellers, Growing markets, Market shift from print to online, Shift to online, Continuing role of print, Market moving to online, Events market growth, Geographic spread as advantage, Increase in online advertising, Industry change, Markets shifting, Online business models unproven, Opportunities of changing market	71
Technology	Continuing role of print, Technology impact on markets, Technology change, New online business models, Distribution channels changing, Effectiveness of events, Importance of earned media, Events and online as complementary, Market shift from print to online, Digital media strengths, Importance of content	31
Customers	Buyers and sellers meeting face-to-face, Customers trust brands, Customer desire to globalise, Customer focus on efficiency and profitability, Customers moving online, From horizontal to vertical media, Print complementing online for customers	22
Board	High governance standards, Board role and responsibilities, Gender balance, Board strength, Importance of good governance, Improving transparency and accountability	16
Products	Workflow products, Premium media products, Continuing role of print, Events market growth, Events as effective, Events, Events and online as complementary	16
Employees	Employees committed and skilled, Employees focus on needs of customer communities, Employee energy	9
Industry	Long term industry shifts, Continuing role of print, Technology impact	5
Economy	Shift to a global economy	2
Society	Governance as social priority, Responsible business	2
Business models	Models moving from print to online	1

*Note: Firm level claims excluded from this table*

The identity construction in UBM's reports that is focused on other identities is, I argue, nevertheless fundamentally concerned with the construction of the firm's own organisational identity, where in UBM's case it helps to position the firm as a modern, digital, events-focused business. In Figure 37, I present a network analysis that graphically illustrates the relational dimension of identity construction in UBM's reports, with the firm itself at the centre, highlighting the importance of technology, customers and products in the construction of UBM's identity, but also showing the wide range of identities involved.

**Figure 37: Network analysis of relational identity links, UBM, 2004-13**



My analysis of the identity work in UBM’s annual reports, in this chapter, and elsewhere in my findings, reveals a striking contrast between a firm striving to present a coherent, consistent and agreed-upon identity within the content of its identity claims, and empirical evidence that reveals that for much of the period claims were rarely enduring, and that visual and textual techniques of argumentation and presentation were used to convey a central identity that was deliberately ambiguous, in order to mask an underlying ongoing lack of resolution concerning the core identity of the firm. I have shown that, under the leadership of David Levin, UBM’s reports presented a unity of visual design, and an apparently coherent overarching message, conveyed in the front covers of its reports, of ‘helping business to do business,’ yet my intertextual analysis of identity claims over time reveals discontinuity rather than continuity in claims. I propose that a multimodal approach to the analysis of UBM’s identity work in its annual reports therefore shows that the potential for ambiguity afforded by visual imagery allowed the firm to present reassuring continuity and stability in its overarching claims over a period of time, at the same time that the detail of the verbal text in its annual reports reflected a more fragmented and unstable identity picture.

## **FUTURE**

You can't cash eyeballs at the bank! (Future, 2007: 6)

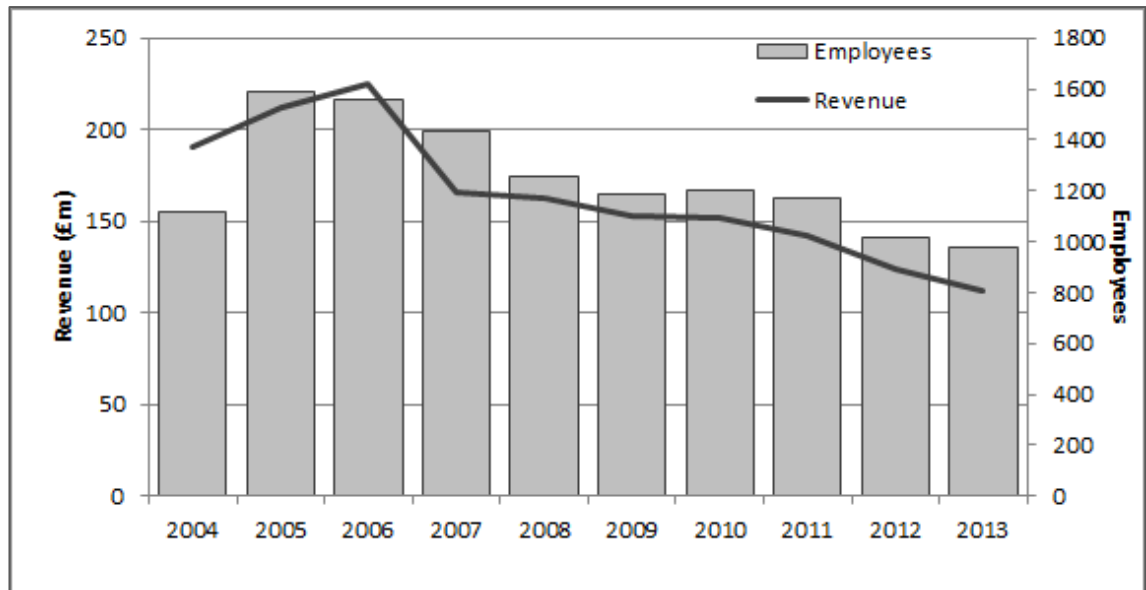
The period of my study coincides with a turbulent time in Future's history, marked by several changes of management regime as the firm struggled to cope with overexpansion at the start of the period and the impact of the financial crash from the middle of the period onwards. My analysis shows that identity work in Future's annual reports reflects this instability, yet, at the same time, a drive to maintain its distinct niche identity within the publishing industry is evidenced in a core of repeated identity claims that span the reports. I reveal that, as with the other two firms, the impact of technology change, specifically the rise of the Internet, was a key driver for Future's identity work during the period, where different management regimes took very different approaches to this challenge, with these differences clearly reflected in identity claims.

In line with my poststructural approach, I conceptualise identity construction in the Future reports as a process of mutual constitution of the Self, in the shape of the firm, and multiple Other identities (Hansen, 2006: 6-7), where these include technology, products, and customers. In addition to this, identity work in Future's reports is concerned with the challenges of accommodating the multiple roles of the firm: as a financial success, as well governed, and as socially responsible. Yet, in contrast to UBM, I find that Future's reports do not seek to integrate all of these roles in an attempt to construct an overarching organisational identity.

Following an ambitious expansion of the firm at the beginning of my study, marked by a number of acquisitions, for the rest of the period Future's fortunes were characterised by declining revenues and falling numbers of employees, as I show in Figure 38. In contrast to the other two publishers, Future's revenues were almost exclusively based on print publishing at the start of the period, with Figure 39 showing that even in 2007 virtually 90% of revenues were derived from print products, with this percentage not falling significantly until 2012. This dependence upon print, and little cash in the bank, meant that Future had less scope to diversify than the other two publishers, so that a sharp drop in print

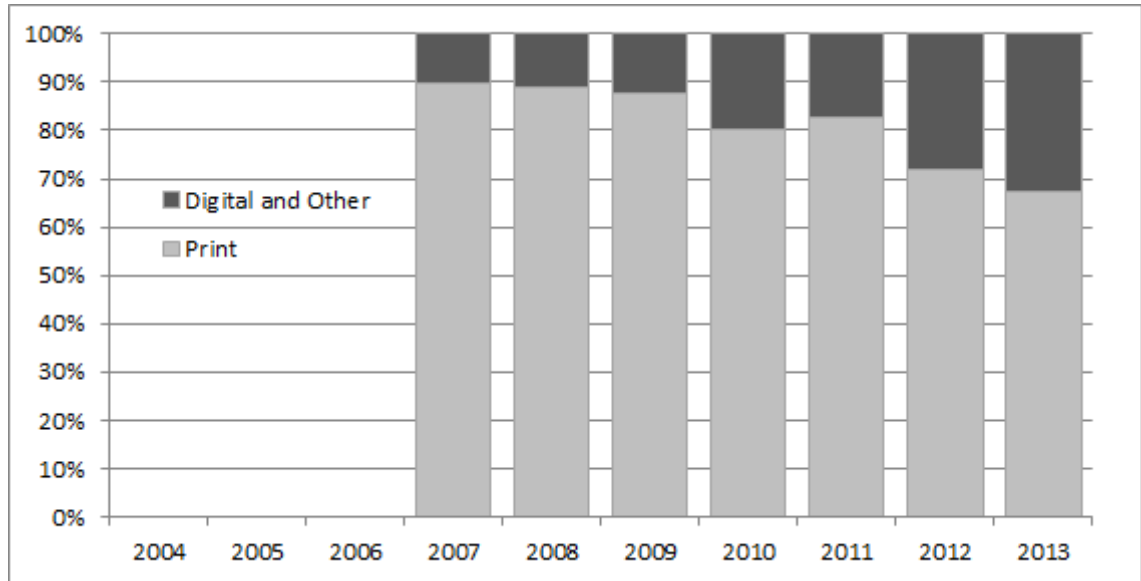
advertising from 2007 affected it more significantly than the other firms. The biggest drop in its revenues, however, from 2006 to 2007, primarily reflected disposals of unprofitable parts of the business that related to its earlier expansion. Future's turbulent financial performance in this period was reflected in a high turnover in its senior management, with three CEOs, three CFOs, and two Chairmen serving during the ten-year period of my study.

**Figure 38: Revenue and number of employees, Future, 2004-13**



*Source: Future annual reports, 2004-13*

**Figure 39: Revenue breakdown, Future, 2004-13**



*Source: Future annual reports, 2007-13; data not available prior to 2007.*

For my analysis, I have divided identity work in Future's annual reports into three periods. The first period covers the reports of 2004 and 2005, with Greg Ingham as CEO. The overall focus in these two reports is on the expansion of the firm, both in terms of the acquisition of titles and a drive for international growth, with the reports demonstrating a bullish attitude towards prospects for the firm and for the wider publishing industry. The reports in the second period, from 2006 to 2010, following the appointment of Stevie Spring as CEO, are marked by a withdrawal from the previous expansionist strategy, and are characterised by a 'back to basics' approach to identity work, accompanied by a focus on the core identity and values of the firm. Finally, the reports of 2011 to 2013 cover Mark Wood's period as CEO. Although identity messages in these reports lack consistency, an overarching theme emphasises the transformation of Future's identity from a print to a digital company.

In terms of the authorship of Future's reports, the voice of the CEO does not dominate in the same way as Levin's does at UBM. The CFO's at Future have a relatively large role in authoring the narrative sections of the reports, particularly in the reports from 2006-10, which are characterised by long financial review



sections, with the CFO even responsible for a section covering Future's history. In four out of ten reports, the CFO is also associated with the corporate social responsibility section of the report. Unsurprisingly, a higher proportion of identity work is undertaken by CFO's at Future than in the other two firms, with 26% of the total identity utterances compared to 47% for the CEO, as shown in Table 17 (on page 231). The proportion of identity claims made by the Chairmen and the Board, at just over 11%, is less than for the other firms.

My intertextual analysis of Future's reports reveals a number of recurring themes spanning the central period of 2006-10, with Spring as CEO, where claims highlight key identity elements of 'prosumers', 'partnerships' and 'portfolio', and emphasise the close relationship between the firm, its employees, and its customers. However, there are also more persistent claims that span the whole set of Future's reports for the period. Most of these enduring claims are concerned with employees, corporate governance, or wider social themes, for example citing Future's Employee Involvement Group and employment policies. Indicating continuity in Future's core business, the description of the firm as a publisher of special-interest consumer magazines and websites appears in the reports throughout the period.

A key element of identity work throughout the period, but most notably in the central period with Spring as CEO, are claims that present the close relationship between the passions of Future's employees and its customers as a central strength of the firm. The introductory statement of Future's 2007 report illustrates this:

At Future we base everything we do around clusters of like-minded individuals who are passionate about their interests. At this time of overwhelming choice, people want trusted editorial services more than ever before. And this is what Future does best. From computer games to film, from cycling to music-making, we provide magazines, websites and events that inform, entertain and unite these communities. We share the same passions as our consumers. These insights and our expertise are helping us to build and exploit our market-leading positions across different platforms in all of the core sectors in which we operate. (Future, 2007: inside cover)

In contrast to UBM's reports, which barely refer to the firm's long history, for much of the period of my study Future's reports highlight, and generally celebrate, the firm's legacy, with no apparent difficulty in reconciling the identity of the past to the identities of the present and of the future; however, the approach taken to that history changes over time. The 2004 report presents Future's history in terms of a simple set of events, without any accompanying commentary. Later reports provide a level of interpretation, with 2006's report highlighting the firm's distinctive culture, where a 'focus on special-interest has been built on a creative, innovative and competitive culture which underpins the Group's business,' but also distancing the current management from the recent history of over-expansion (Future, 2006: 10). Thus, the new management uses Future's history to both distance itself from the identity of the regime immediately preceding it and to establish its own version of Future's identity based on what it presents as the enduring cultural values of the firm. Finally, the identity claims in Future's reports demonstrate a concern to present an identity that satisfies both the commercial and societal demands on the firm, but, in contrast to UBM, Future's reports make little effort to integrate all of these roles into overarching identity statements for the firm.

The format and visual design of Future's annual reports over the period reflect the changes of management at the firm, with different management regimes even selecting different design agencies to produce the firm's reports. The front covers of the reports reflect these changes, as I show in Appendix 7. From a multimodal perspective, I argue that its front covers are an integral part of the overall identity messages of Future's annual reports. In addition to reflecting the changing management regimes at the firm, the covers also highlight a change in focus from a print to a digital identity. The 2004 report front cover highlights Future's identity as a publisher of print magazines, depicting a range of the firm's employees each holding a copy of a magazine. The 2006 to 2010 front covers share a common design approach, featuring cut-out illustrations of (young male) enthusiasts filled with images from Future's magazines, with those images increasingly including representations of digital devices. Finally, for the front covers in 2012 and 2013, new designs and logos emphasise the digital

technology used for consuming content, moving completely away from content and from the print magazine.

In addition to those verbal textual identity claims that endure throughout the period, and claims spanning the reports of specific management regimes, my analysis of the intertextual patterns of identity claims reveals that many claims do not span more than one report. Figure 10, on page 203, shows that Future's reports before and after the central period of 2006-10 show very little continuity in identity work, with 2011's report particularly notable for a high number of claims not repeated in subsequent years, as the new CEO sought to establish a new identity for the firm.

In Table 24, I present a summary of intertextual references to Future's identity claims, and, in Table 25, I list the key internal and external intertextual references. As with the other two firms, references to discourses make up the largest category for both internal and external references. For Future, the most frequently cited internal discourse concerns the firm's understanding of the attitudes and beliefs of its customers, where this is invariably presented as a key strength, reflecting 'our vast experience of building deep relationships with readers' (2006: 5). Frequently referenced external discourses include the Internet, consumers and the market.

**Table 24: Summary of intertextual references, Future**

	<b>Internal</b>	<b>External</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Executed strategy</b>	35	N/A	35	14
<b>Texts</b>	18	10	28	11
<b>Implied texts</b>	45	18	63	26
<b>Discourse</b>	83	38	121	49
<b>Total</b>	181	66	247	

**Table 25: Key sources for identity claims, Future**

	<b>Internal</b>	<b>External</b>
<b>Texts</b>	Financial accounts	FTSE Media and Entertainment Sector Index
	Supplier policy + questionnaire	FRC Combined Code
	HR policies	External assessment - FSC certification
	Accounting policy	UN Global Compact
	Charitable donation policy	London Stock Exchange list
<b>Implied texts</b>	Company data	Customer insight + conversations
	Strategy	Market data - none referred to
	Business model	Market position
	Mission	Combined code, board processes
	Company structure	Industry initiative
<b>Discourses</b>	Customer insight	Market data
	Board considerations	The Internet
	Employees	Consumer insight
	Products	Core competence
	Approach	The market
		Advertiser needs + insight
		Shareholder views

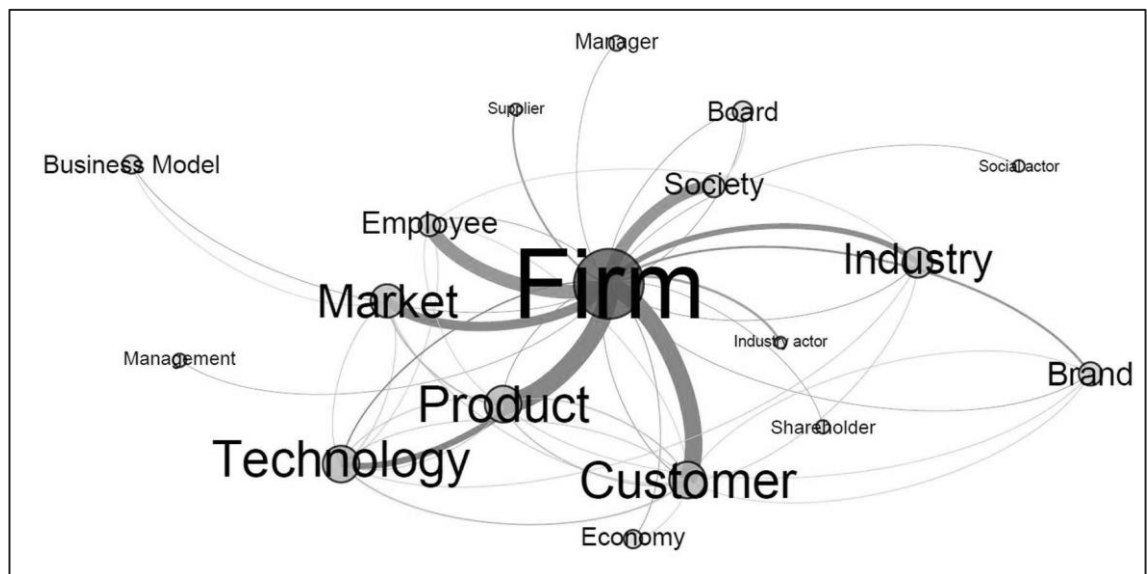
As with the other two firms, I argue that identity work in Future's reports involves the mutual constitution of the identity of the firm with the identity of a number of related identities. Outside of those identity claims focused on the firm itself, a key feature of Future's identity work, particularly during the period 2006-10, are attempts to construct the identity of its customers, and of consumers more generally. Claims are concerned with the firm's core customer demographic of young and 'young at heart' men, their attitudes, behaviour, and their relationship to Future. Claims present Future's customers as wealthy, loyal, and therefore appealing to advertisers, in contrast to consumers of other publications. The underlying message is that Future's identity as a successful magazine publisher is secure, at least in part due to its distinctive customer base, 'the lifeblood of Future' where, 'Their passion, loyalty and commitment ensure our success as a business' (Future, 2008: 8). In Table 26, I present a summary of the identity claims relating to other identities in Future's annual reports, highlighting the importance of the firm's customers in its identity work.

**Table 26: Summary of claims for identities other than the firm, Future**

Level	Claim	Utterances
Customers	Core audience of young at heart men, Loyal customers, Prosumers, Advertiser needs, Customers using range of media, Customers' changing demands, Digital transformation, Changing technology, Customers more likely to purchase, From print to online, Global appeal of content, Global communities of interest, Passionate customers, Providing trusted content to customers, Special-interest customers paying premium	55
Board	Board supporting responsible business, Good governance, Role of non-execs in good governance	36
Employees	Employees as key assets, Qualities of employees, Passionate employees, Employee expertise, Employees engaging with customers	33
Products	Global content, Magazines as low-cost treat, Video products, Innovation, Magazines' enduring role, Employee expertise, Magazines appeal to enthusiasts, Magazines in digital age, Products for enthusiasts, Providing quality content for readers, Technology friendly content, Valued and valuable content	25
Technology	Internet as opportunity, Internet as threat and opportunity, Internet for enthusiasts, Digital transformation, Internet as complementary, Internet as English-language, Internet increasingly important to Future, Multiple platform products and services, New digital markets	20
Consumers	Consumers influenced by economic factors, Consumers spending more time online, Consumer demand for trusted content, Consumer demand for technology	15
Market	Digital markets, Digital transformation, Changing markets, Magazine market dynamic, competitive, Global markets	13
Brand	Brands as channels, Brands as hubs, Brands for consumers, Building on brands	5
Shareholders	Shareholder patience	5
Suppliers	Ethical approach to suppliers	2
Business model	Digital transformation	1
Industry	Impact of technology on business models	1
Managers	Management expertise	1

I have shown that identity claims in Future's reports are frequently constructed by referencing multiple identities. The network analysis diagram in Figure 40 graphically illustrates this. This diagram highlights the role of technology, customers, products and markets in the construction of Future's identity claims.

**Figure 40: Network analysis of relational identity links, Future, 2004-13**



My analysis indicates that the identity work in Future's annual reports is marked by discontinuity, mirroring upheaval in its senior management team, itself reflecting the ongoing financial difficulties for the firm. Even where a regime was in place for an extended period, between 2006 and 2010, it took time to establish its own identity messages. However, I show that the leadership team that took over in 2006, although keen to distance itself from the previous management regime, nevertheless sought to identify itself with what it saw as core, enduring identity elements by seeking to establish itself as the 'true heir' to Future's culture and values. Indeed, despite, or perhaps because of, the ongoing turbulence at the firm, certain underlying themes around the 'special-interest' focus of the firm, and its relationship with its customers and its employees, remain throughout the period, in contrast to the other two firms in my analysis, where no such continuity is apparent in my analysis.

From my analysis of identity claims, the management regime in charge between 2006 and 2010 invested considerable energy in identity work in Future's annual reports in that period. Although some of this work was concerned with 'reconnecting' with core identity elements, much of it focused on constructing a distinctive identity for the firm, for example with the introduction of the term 'prosumer' to characterise the firm's readers in a creative attempt to position the firm as a B2B as well as a consumer publisher. Above all, I argue that Future's

identity work in this period provides a clear example of the mutual, relational, constitution of identities, where the reports seek to construct the identity of the firm by at the same time constructing the identities of its employees and its readers, amongst other identities. In order to do this, to a certain extent managers were able to call upon what they presented as Future's historical identity as a company founded by enthusiasts writing for other enthusiasts. However, maintaining this core identity required ongoing identity work, with the wider context for identity construction constantly shifting, particularly in terms of technology and audiences.

## CENTAUR

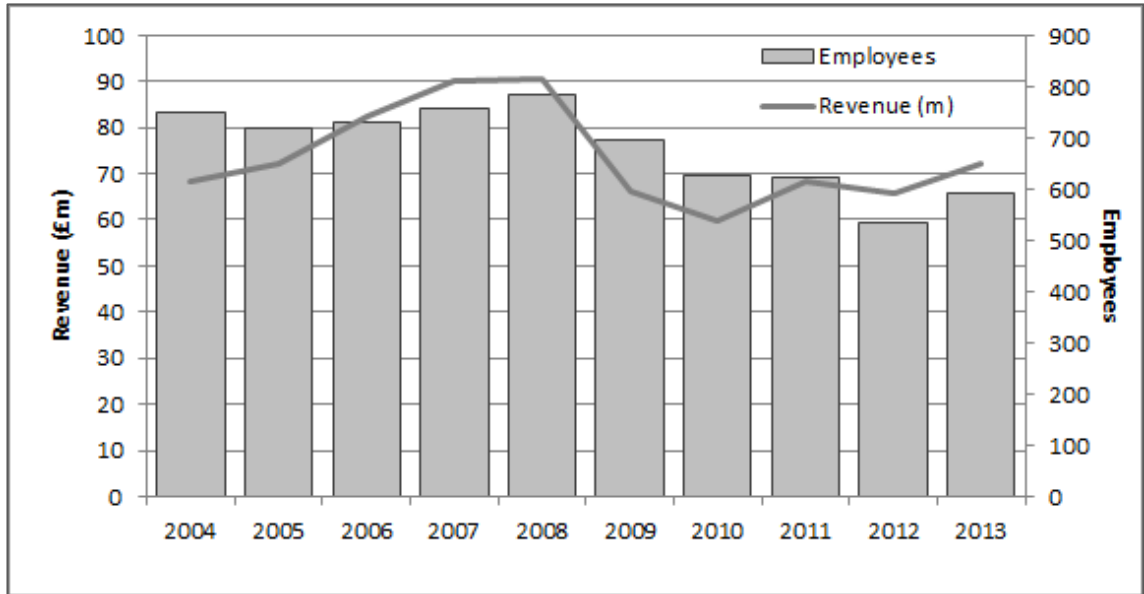
To many people and for many years, Graham has been Centaur and a doyen of business media in business media in the UK and beyond (Centaur, 2010: 7)

Despite leaving Centaur in 2009, the imposing figure of its founder, Graham Sherren, dominates identity work in my analysis of the firm's reports in this period. Verbal textual identity claims show considerable continuity, even in the face of a rapidly changing environment, during his time in charge, only to be followed by a dramatic change in approach as soon as he left the firm. Newly listed on the London Stock Exchange at the start of my period, Centaur's reports display a less polished approach than those of the other two firms. Produced by in-house designers, they are relatively short in length, lack the visual sophistication found in the reports of the other two firms, and generally appear to focus on meeting institutional requirements as much as on impression management. Nevertheless, they are still rich sites of identity construction, reflecting Centaur's efforts to accommodate changes in technology and customer demands into its identity work at the same time as attempting to maintain continuity in its core identity.

Figure 41 shows that, in terms of revenue and employees, Centaur was the smallest of the three firms in my analysis. The chart also shows that, as with Future, Centaur's fortunes suffered after the 2008 financial crisis, with a sharp drop in revenue recorded in the 2009 and 2010 reports. In Figure 42, I show the revenue breakdown underlying the overall revenue figures, revealing that, even at the start of the period, print products made up little more than 50% of Centaur's revenues. Revenues from events and digital activities gradually increased until, in 2013, they constituted over 70% of total revenues. This diverse revenue base provided Centaur with some protection from the collapse of the print advertising business model.

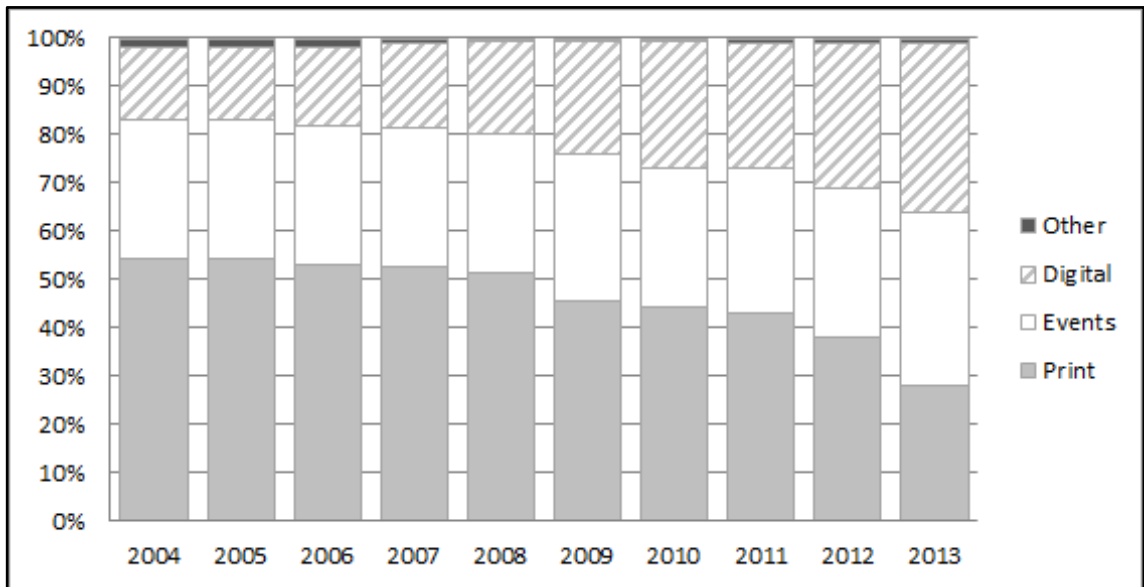


**Figure 41: Revenue and number of employees, Centaur, 2004-13**



Source: Centaur annual reports, 2004-13

**Figure 42: Revenue breakdown, Centaur, 2004-13**



Source: Centaur annual reports, 2004-13

As the opening quote in this section suggests, commentators viewed Sherren as synonymous with Centaur. Even his eventual retirement did not result in any immediate break in managerial regime, as his successor Geoff Wilmot had already been acting as CEO for three years and had been CFO prior to that. When Wilmot himself was ousted in 2013, he was replaced by Mark Karswell,

who himself had been CFO. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Centaur's identity work shows less discontinuity than is found in the reports of UBM and Future, with only two chairmen, one of them Sherren himself, during my period of analysis.

I divide the identity work in Centaur's reports into two periods – before and after Sherren's departure from the firm in 2009. Although Sherren began the period as Executive Chairman, before moving to Chairman, it appears clear from both the reports themselves and from other sources that he remained firmly in charge, with identity claims demonstrating considerable consistency between 2004 and 2009. In the period from 2010 to 2013, in contrast, the reports are characterised by instability in identity work, as senior managers sought to fashion a post-Sherren identity for the firm.

In terms of the authorship of identity claims, Table 17 (on page 231) shows that I have attributed over 50% of identity claims to Centaur's CEOs, and relatively few to its CFOs, with just under 30% of claims coming from the Chairmen or the Board. I find that the identity work in Centaur's annual reports tends to focus on the firm as a commercial entity rather than on addressing governance or societal concerns, with claims relating to the latter two areas often clearly directed towards fulfilling the institutional obligations of the Companies Act or the FRC Code of Governance. This is seen, for example, in the 2007 report, where the Corporate Governance report opens with a simple statement of compliance with the FRC Code, 'The Board of Centaur Media plc is accountable to the Company's shareholders for good Corporate Governance and in doing so is committed to the principles outlined in the 2003 FRC Combined Code on Corporate Governance' (Centaur, 2007: 40).

From 2004 to 2008, with Sherren in charge, my analysis shows that identity claims in the reports tend to focus on Centaur's place in the 'readership business', where printed magazines are central to the firm's business model. However, identity claims in these reports present the essence of Centaur's identity residing not so much in its products but rather in its tried and trusted methods, which:

Centaur has pursued since the formation of Centaur Communications Ltd in 1981. This strategy has been based principally on establishing market leading weekly magazines to serve distinct business communities and then extending our service to those communities through other media, most notably exhibitions, conferences and internet services. (Centaur, 2004: 13)

However, in the face of challenges to the print magazine business model, by 2008's report this claim has subtly changed to a more media-neutral claim, where:

Centaur's strategy, since the formation of the Group in 1982 [sic], has been based firstly on identifying and serving the information needs of distinct business communities and secondly on facilitating contact between buyers and sellers in those communities. (Centaur, 2008: 8)

I find that much of Centaur's identity work in its reports from 2004 to 2008 is concerned with attempts to reconcile its foundational identity, built upon a tried and tested formula centred on the print magazine, to the rise of new technology that appeared to undermine that model. Attempting to address this, identity claims in these reports focus on a comparison between the respective identities of the magazine and of the Internet, presenting these two technologies as complementary rather than antithetical:

Editorially, the weekly magazine provides an ideal medium for news analysis and special emphasis features, whilst the internet is better suited to breaking news highlights and database searching. (Centaur, 2004: 14)

Following Sherren's departure from the firm, this defence of Centaur's foundational strategy, increasingly problematic in the face of market realities, disappears from its annual reports. However, I find that the reports from 2010 fail to replace it with a coherent and compelling identity narrative, until 2013's report, which focuses on a central digital identity for the firm. My analysis shows that identity claims in this report definitively shift Centaur from a magazine business to a digital one, with the firm's strategy aimed at delivering 'a modern, digital, entrepreneurial business with a culture of innovation, collaboration, openness and trust' (Centaur, 2013: 3).

I find that Centaur is somewhat more insular in its identity work than the other two firms in relation to intertextual references, as I show in Table 27, with claims calling on a variety of internal texts and discourses, for example, the internal discourses of its history and culture, where ‘Centaur’s culture has, since its formation, been built on the foundation stones of integrity and enterprise’ (Centaur, 2006: 3). I also identify a number of external intertextual sources used to shape identity claims, for example, with the implied text recognising the firm ‘as the leading event organiser in each of our markets’ (Centaur, 2010: 9). In Table 28, I present a list of the intertextual sources referenced in Centaur’s identity work.

**Table 27: Summary of intertextual references, Centaur**

	<b>Internal</b>	<b>External</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Executed strategy</b>	12	N/A	12	8
<b>Texts</b>	7	6	13	8
<b>Implied texts</b>	49	2	51	33
<b>Discourse</b>	60	19	79	51
<b>Total</b>	128	27	155	

**Table 28: Key sources for identity claims, Centaur**

	<b>Internal</b>	<b>External</b>
<b>Text</b>	Accounting policy Employment policies Reporting policy Management style/training programmes	FTSE 350 M&E Index, graph TSR Comparator Group - Competitors Companies Act 1985 FTSE Small Cap Index Alternative Investment Market ('AIM')
<b>Implied text</b>	Strategy Company structure Company data Established strategy Employment policies	Market position
<b>Discourse</b>	Culture	Technology insight Advertiser belief Business models

As with the other two firms, identity work in Centaur's reports is concerned with identities other than that of the firm. As I show in Table 29, technology is the key identity outside of the firm for identity construction in Centaur's reports. Claims focus on the contrasting attributes of the print magazine and the Internet, the two presented as complementary, therefore rejecting the industry narrative that portrays digital technology as supplanting print:

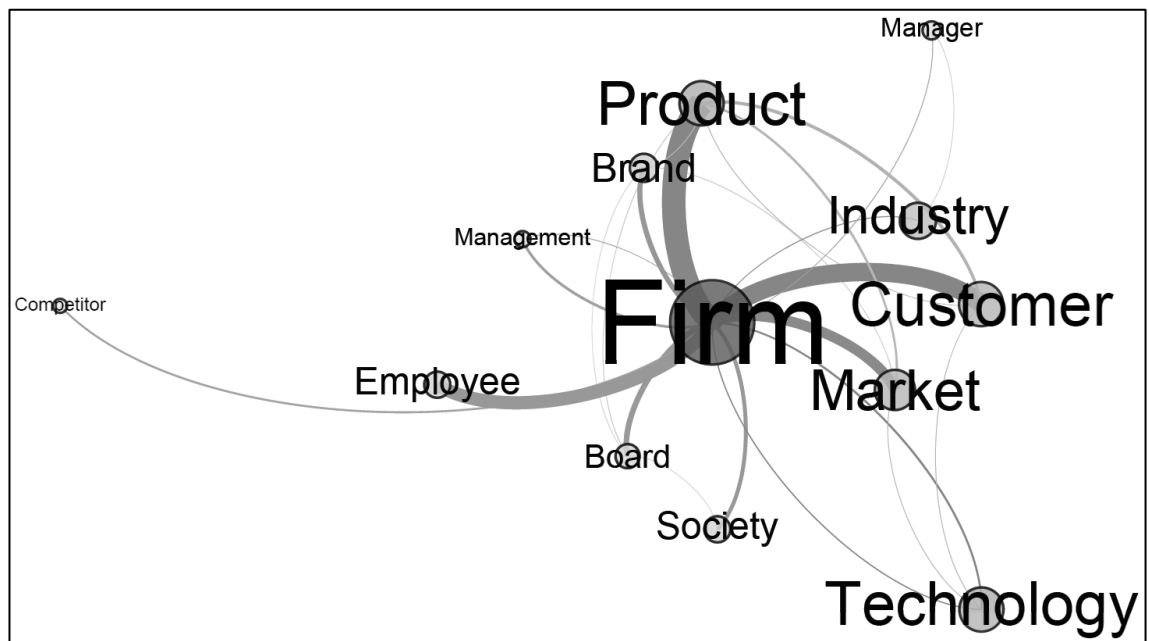
While the importance of magazines will to some extent diminish, print products will continue to represent an important means of communicating broader analysis and comment and a continuing effective means of maintaining an in-depth relationship with our audiences while re-enforcing the identity and relevance of our brands within that community. (Centaur, 2009: 7)

**Table 29: Summary of claims for identities other than the firm, Centaur**

Level	Claim	Utterances
Technology	Magazine attributes, Magazine vs internet, Internet attributes, Online increasingly important, Internet impact, Decline in value of breaking news, Developing workflow solutions, Print decline	66
Employees	Success based on people, People hard work, People passionate, People skills	7
Customers	Customers want high standards, Creating identity for communities, Customers as professional, special interest	5
Business models	Internet business models	1
Economy	UK as centre of excellence	1
Founder	Founder qualities	1
Product	Magazine change	1

Finally, in terms of the relational construction of individual identity claims in Centaur’s annual reports, my network diagram visualising these relationships in Figure 43 suggests that the most important relationships in identity work are between the firm and its products, the firm and its customers, and the firm and its employees, as with the claim, ‘Our people represent the heart of our business and we provide a working environment where entrepreneurship and innovation will thrive’ (Centaur, 2009: 5).

**Figure 43: Network analysis of relational identity links, Centaur, 2004-13**



Of the three firms in my analysis, Centaur appears least concerned with externally focused identity work, with all of its reports during this period designed in-house, with no apparent external input, and marked by occasional typographic errors. Although it responds to institutional requirements around reporting, it does not attempt to integrate governance and social concerns into its core identity, focusing instead on its financial performance.

Despite the difficulties faced by the magazine publishing industry in this period, in some ways Centaur fares best of the three firms financially, with a significant dip in revenue after 2008 leading to a slow recovery after 2010. However, in terms of identity work, my analysis reveals a significant crisis, with continuity in claims in the reports between 2004 and 2008 followed by several reports containing many identity claims that were not repeated in subsequent reports. Unlike UBM, which I argue detached itself from its historic identity and reinvented itself as an events company, and Future, which emphasised its employees and customers in its identity over the format of its products, I argue that Centaur's identity as a *magazine* publisher was so closely tied to its history, its founder and its business model that its new leadership after 2009 found it impossible to establish an identity that successfully mirrored both its operational reality and the changed external environment.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In these three case studies I have argued that, in a period of industry transformation, questions of identity were a key concern for organisational leaders, attempting to fix meanings in the face of instability and uncertainty. I have shown that their identity work, although much of it was concerned with facilitating change, nevertheless sought at the same time to highlight enduring elements of identity. Moreover, I find that reports invariably *presented* identity claims as both coherent and agreed-upon within the organisation. However, my analysis shows that the empirical evidence of identity work in the annual reports reveals it to be much more fragmented and provisional than managers presented it.

Although I have not focused on the multimodal construction of identity in this chapter, referring principally to my analysis of identity claims made in verbal text, the reports of all three of the firms construct identity through a mixture of verbal text and visual elements, where the two combine to provide an overall picture of identity construction that an analysis of each separately could not convey. However, the firms, and individual reports, differ in the way that they use the multiple modes available to them in constructing meanings and identity arguments. For example, Centaur's in-house designed reports use visual elements much less than those of the other two firms.

In the next chapter, I bring together my poststructural analyses of organisational identity to assess whether a poststructural theoretical and methodological approach to OI provides an account that is theoretically valid, displays methodological rigour, and that, most importantly, provides insight into processes of identity construction at the organisational level. I begin the chapter with a recap of my research questions, followed by a consideration of my problematisation and proposed categorisation of the OI literature. Next, I assess my poststructural theoretical and methodological approach to the study of OI, evaluating the overall validity of such an approach and considering in turn the key elements that I have proposed for a poststructural OI: one constructed within texts and discourses; a pervasive feature of texts and discourses; fragmented and dynamic; decentred and relational; and constructed through argumentation. I then assess the extent to which I have shown that identity construction in the annual reports is a multimodal accomplishment. Finally, I summarise my contributions and assess the scope for the transferability of my findings to other areas, and for future research in this area.



## CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION

In this thesis, I have proposed that a poststructural approach to the study of organisational identity is both a valid exercise and one that can provide valuable analytical insights into the concept. I have argued that a poststructural conception of OI is able to account for both 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' approaches to the concept in the OI literature, where the former corresponds to the stated beliefs of organisational actors and the latter to the empirical 'reality' of identity construction. I have also argued that a poststructural approach can be empirically rigorous. In this chapter, I evaluate the extent to which my findings have demonstrated that a poststructural approach to OI is theoretically and methodologically valid, and whether it provides additional analytical insights over established approaches.

My central research questions in this thesis have been as follows:

1. How can we explain the tension between understandings of organisational identity as a generally agreed-upon and stable attribute of organisations and empirical research that frequently reveals OI as fragmented, dynamic and contested?
2. What kinds of empirical data do organisations draw on to create an organisational identity and how do these forms of data help us to understand organisational identity as a post-structural concept?

I consider that my thesis makes significant theoretical and methodological contributions. My theoretical approach helps to account for the gap between a centripetal perspective of OI as understood and presented by organisational actors, and the centrifugal empirical evidence of OI as constructed in organisational texts. On the methodological level, I have presented a novel intertextual approach to the analysis of identity within a set of organisational texts that I argue contributes to the development of methodology in that area more broadly. I have also presented a multimodal approach to the study of identity construction in annual reports that I argue contributes to this important and burgeoning area of organisational research.

## **PROBLEMATISING ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

In my literature review, I have argued that the ontological basis of OI tends to be loosely and ambiguously conceptualised in the literature in this area, with scholars frequently failing to make clear their ontological assumptions. I have argued that the majority of the OI literature is based upon an implicit assumption of OI as socially constructed. However, I have proposed that two very different traditions of social construction, which I have characterised in terms of 'sociological' and 'psychological' accounts, translate into very different conceptions of OI.

In this thesis, focusing on research explicitly or implicitly treating OI as a social construct, I have proposed a six-fold categorisation of the OI literature. In addition to this, I have positioned the literature, together with the key debates on OI, along a *centripetal* and *centrifugal* axis, one which I propose focuses on the central tension in the literature between the centripetal content of identity claims made by organisational actors and the centrifugal 'reality' of claims evidenced in organisational texts and discourses. I have proposed that this tension opens up OI to a poststructural interpretation.

## **A POSTSTRUCTURAL ACCOUNT OF ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

The methods that I have used in my analysis have enabled me to explore the centripetal and centrifugal aspects of OI in annual reports, examining both the *content* of identity claims – together with the argumentative methods used by organisational actors to present their claims – and the *context* of claims in their temporal and spatial distribution across texts and discourses. For example, I have noted how, in Future's 2011 report, the firm's new CEO makes a number of identity claims in an effort to fix a central and enduring identity for the firm, but that none of these claims are repeated in reports before or after that date. Through this and other examples, I have argued that it is precisely where and when identity is most uncertain that organisational actors will work hardest to persuade audiences that claims are agreed-upon and enduring, and that this is also where empirical evidence reveals identity work to be the most fragmented, dynamic, and contested.

A poststructural account of OI effectively turns Albert and Whetten's (1985) original conception on its head. Instead of a central, pervasive, and usually well-hidden, attribute of an organisation that only rises to the surface in times of crisis, in a poststructural reading, organisational actors attempt to construct and to fix a coherent and persuasive organisational identity within texts and discourses, where identity is empirically necessarily always fragmented and contested. Acknowledging that poststructuralism is itself a contested concept, in my Introduction I have set out my own interpretation, rooted in Derrida's (1967/78) perspective on language, but primarily derived from Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Hansen (2006), where the former provide a powerful account of the centrality of discourse in attempting to 'arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre' in the face of the 'incomplete character of every totality' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111-2), and the latter presents what I believe to be a practical and rigorous methodological approach to the analysis of those discourses.

In this thesis, I have proposed a poststructural conception of identity that consists of several key elements. A poststructural identity is discursively constructed in texts and discourses, where language is constitutive for what is brought into being (Hansen, 2006: 17). It is unstable, dynamic, fragmented, and always provisional, requiring continual reconstruction from organisational actors (Hansen, 2006: xvi). The construction of poststructural identity takes place through relational processes involving the mutual constitution of identities – the Self and multiple others – both spatially and temporally (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). Finally, a poststructural identity is always political and contestable, as actors fashion identity claims using argumentation, constructing identities through processes of relation and opposition to other identities (Hansen, 2006: 18).

At the heart of my thesis is the contention, following Laclau and Mouffe (1985) that it is precisely the fundamental indeterminacy of identity that makes it central to organisational (and social) life. Where meanings can never be entirely closed, alternative interpretations of identity are always possible, with organisational actors engaged in an ongoing struggle to establish, and to

secure agreement on, their preferred identity claims, where this is essential for them in order to make decisions and to legitimise their actions.

## **THE VALIDITY OF A POSTSTRUCTURAL METHODOLOGY FOR ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

In addition to criticisms of poststructuralism from a theoretical perspective, I have also discussed concerns relating to its methodological aspirations. I have argued that poststructuralism is not anti-method, indeed that it demands a rigorous approach to empirical study. My focus in this thesis has been to set out and demonstrate a poststructural approach to identity, and I have assembled a set of methods in order to do this. Although I have used a mixture of methodological approaches for my analysis, I consider that each of them supports a poststructural approach to identity, and that, taken together, they constitute a coherent, valid, and powerful explanatory approach to the study of this concept.

At the heart of my empirical approach to the analysis of organisational identity are the concepts of the identity claim and the identity utterance, based upon Bakhtin's dialogism (Todorov, 1984), and providing the units of analysis for my intertextual and relational analysis. I propose that an analysis at the level of claim and utterance enables the study of both the 'centripetal' accounts of organisational actors, expressed in the content of identity claims, and the 'centrifugal' empirical evidence of identity revealed in utterances in texts. I have acknowledged the difficulties of focusing my analysis of identity at the level of the identity claim and utterance in equating these to single statements in texts, where such an approach does not easily accommodate overarching or implicit claims, or the multimodal nature of texts and identity construction. Perhaps a more fundamental issue with my approach, however, relates to my criteria for the identification of identity claims. Adopting an inclusive approach to claims, I have accepted identity claims that other scholars would likely reject on the basis that they hardly constitute central statements about an identity. By taking such an inclusive approach, does *everything* therefore become identity? A

poststructural answer to this might well be yes, with clear implications for the practice of the study of identity.

Unlike previous accounts in the organisational literature that have adopted intertextual methods, I have, based on Hansen (2006), adopted a poststructural approach to intertextuality, where I argue that intertextual analysis supports a poststructural focus on the decentred and relational nature of identity construction. An intertextual analysis can show how multiple texts and discourses are used as a resource in the construction of identity claims in annual reports, where terms such as 'governance' and 'value' take on a meaning that can only really be understood within the broader context of an intertextual network of texts and discourses, and where identity claims cannot be analysed purely on the basis of their content, or even their immediate context within texts.

I have used two distinct intertextual methods for the analysis of identity claims and utterances in verbal text in annual reports: the investigation of the intertextual patterns of claims as they are distributed across sets of annual reports, and the identification of the texts and discourses referenced by claims. My analysis of intertextual patterns has identified continuities and discontinuities in identity construction in the reports of the firms, and has highlighted how the content of claims can change between reports. My analysis of the intertextual sources of identity claims in annual reports has revealed the diverse range of the sources used by identity claims, including both texts and discourses. I have acknowledged that any intertextual analysis is necessarily incomplete, where even the immediate texts and discourses that identity claims reference, as well as the ultimate intertextual origins of claims, are often impossible to trace.

I have also approached the empirical study of identity claims in annual reports from the poststructural perspective that identities are necessarily relational and mutually constituted (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 106-7). I have addressed this using two techniques: firstly, by identifying claims in the reports that relate to identities *other than* the organisation directly; and, secondly, by addressing *individual* identity claims as sites for the construction of multiple identities,

where I have shown that the majority of identity claims in the reports in my analysis were, in addition to the focal identity, also concerned with the construction of other identities. I have highlighted that a potential issue in my analysis is an implication that *all* identity claims made in an annual report must relate in some way to the identity of the firm, so that all claims relating to all identities must therefore be included in any analysis of identity construction in a text or set of texts, again with implications for the feasibility of the study of identity in practice.

In my Introduction, I have provided a definition of poststructural discourse based on Laclau and Mouffe (1985), and of a poststructural approach to discourse analysis drawing on Hansen (2006). In my analysis, I have undertaken two distinct 'flavours' of discourse analysis. My first approach, based on Wood and Kroger's (2000) framework and Gee's (1999) emphasis on identity construction, focused at the level of the text, has explored how annual reports can be addressed both as overarching discourses and as a number of distinct sub discourses, where each of these has its own role and purpose in the report, reflecting the multiple purposes of the firm. I have argued that identity work within the reports reflects this duality, consisting of both overarching claims for the firm and claims specific to individual sub discourses. My analysis has shown that annual reports are, to a limited extent, plurivocal, with authorial voices explicitly acknowledged in the reports restricted to those of a few senior managers, where their differing roles also result in distinct identity claims. I have also argued that the reports address a variety of audiences, not just shareholders, where I assume that each of these audiences make their own distinct demands, which are in turn addressed by distinct identity claims within the reports.

My second, broader, approach to discourse analysis, drawing on the concept of discourse as presented by Foucault (1972) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985), uses online blogs and industry reports as key sources. My analysis shows that both of these sources share a central concern with the identity of the publishing industry and of the firms operating within that industry. A key element of the identity work in these texts is a continuing debate concerning the definition and

scope of the industry. I argue that the authors of industry texts seek to construct the identity of the industry in order to suit their own purposes, for example by expanding its scope in order to emphasise its importance to the overall economy. The varied perspectives presented by the industry reports and online blogs have allowed me to identify within them key industry discourses. I have argued that, supporting a poststructural understanding, these texts construct discourses in terms of comparison and opposition, both temporally and spatially. For example, some bloggers position their own arguments that the industry is experiencing structural decline against arguments for a cyclical interpretation of industry performance, and the industry reports seek to construct the identity of a low-margin, low-overhead publishing industry of the future by contrasting it with the high-margin, high-overhead industry of the past and the present.

In my intertextual analysis and discourse analysis, I have focused on identity construction in verbal text. However, I have emphasised that contemporary annual reports are multimodal documents, with identity construction and meaning-making achieved through multiple modes, primarily through a combination of verbal text and visual images. I have argued that any analysis of identity construction focusing on a single mode is inevitably partial in its explanatory power, but also that it is impossible to analyse modes separately. However, organisational scholars have highlighted the methodological obstacles in undertaking such an integrated analysis (Höllerer et al., 2017b, Boxenbaum et al., 2018), and I do not claim to have provided a rigorous or comprehensive multimodal analysis in this thesis.

The area where I have provided an element of a multimodal analysis is in my analysis of identity construction in annual reports within a framework of argumentation, where I have investigated the ways in which organisational actors seek to convince audiences of their version of identity. I have proposed that this framework of argumentation supports a poststructural approach to identity construction, with contested identities constructed in relation to other identities through processes of comparison and opposition (Hansen, 2006: 6-7). For example, my analysis shows how Centaur sought to construct the identity of

the magazine by comparing and contrasting it with the identity of the Internet. I have also argued that authors used various techniques of argumentation and presentation in order to legitimise identity claims and to assert the salience of certain claims over others. Such techniques can relate to the content or to the context of claims, where the context may include the immediate textual vicinity of the claim, for example placing claims next to visual elements such as photographs, the claim's position within the report, or to the other texts and discourses that the claim references. A framework of argumentation therefore highlights the importance of the wider context of texts in identity construction, where a narrow focus on the content of identity claims does not take into account a wide range of methods used by authors to assert salience and obtain legitimacy. I have also argued that techniques of argumentation and presentation in annual reports are inherently multimodal, with verbal text invariably entwined with visual elements, but also where the *design* of arguments within the overall text is critical. I have furthermore noted that multimodal and social semiotic approaches highlight the role of power in meaning-making (Kress, 2009; Halliday, 1978), where this is expressed in annual reports through the use of rhetorical techniques to construct meaning.

### **THE VALIDITY OF A POSTSTRUCTURAL INTERPRETATION OF ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY**

Alvesson and Robertson (2016: 174) suggest that 'OI as a field appears to be characterized by a tension between objectivist ideas about the fundamental nature of organizations and the strong possibility that organizational life today is far more complex, characterized by varied and contested identity claims.' I argue that my poststructural account of organisational identity accounts for the gap between the centripetal understanding of identity as understood and presented by organisational actors, and the complex centrifugal 'reality' of identity as evidenced in organisational texts and discourses. Here, I address each of the key elements of my poststructural approach to OI to assess the extent to which I believe that I have demonstrated their validity and usefulness in my analysis.



## **Identity constructed within texts and discourses**

I have presented a poststructuralist position that does not deny the material basis of reality, following Laclau and Mouffe (1985) in embracing both discursive and extra-discursive forms of meaning-making. However, this position nevertheless positions 'articulations' in texts and discourses at the centre of meaning-making, where 'every object is constituted as an object of discourse' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 107). A key question following from this is whether a poststructural approach to identity construction necessarily restricts itself to discourse expressed through verbal language, where I have noted that Hansen (2006: 23) accepts that language need not be verbal. Although my analysis has largely focused on identity claims in verbal text, in my analysis of argumentation I have also sought to embrace multiple modalities, arguing that the identity work in annual reports can only be fully understood with an appreciation of how visual and verbal modes of communication are combined to construct meaning.

A key ontological question here is not where identity is constructed, but where it resides, where scholars taking what I have categorised as a cognitive socially constructed approach to OI assume that identity resides in cognition, in collectively-held identity beliefs that can be accessed by organisational actors. For poststructuralists, this position is both ontologically and evidentially dubious. They assert that identity is both constructed and resident within discourse and text, where, given the essential indeterminacy and flux of meaning, and the decentred and contested nature of identity, any evidence of meaning or identity can be found only within discourse (Hansen, 2006: 18), where I argue that this focus does not exclude the visual and material nature of texts.

Any analysis of identity that proposes that it is exclusively constructed and resident within texts and discourses, but that restricts the scope of its study analysis solely to those texts and discourses is clearly open to accusations of confirmation bias. I acknowledge that I have not demonstrated, nor have I sought to demonstrate, that identity is constructed or resident *solely* within discourse and text. However, I have argued that identity *is* constructed within

texts and discourses, and that it is possible to study this discursive construction using the methods that I have adopted in this thesis.

I have argued that identity claims made within the annual reports in my analysis cannot be conceptualised as simple representations of underlying beliefs, but that the authors of claims use various techniques of argumentation and presentation to persuade audiences of the legitimacy of claims and to accord salience to certain claims over others, where the content and immediate presentational context of claims is clearly carefully constructed, and where both multiple modes of communication and the overall *design* of texts is crucial. In my analysis, the majority of verbal textual identity claims explicitly reference some existing text or discourse, either internal or external to the firm. I have also shown that a large proportion of identity claims made in the annual reports directly reference claims made in previous reports, where the textual content of the claim is often identical to claims in previous reports. Furthermore, I have shown that identity claims made in annual reports frequently reference institutional texts, such as the Financial Reporting Council's Code of Governance, not simply as sources of authority or legitimacy, but in order to integrate them into firms' core identity claims.

### **Identity as pervasive in texts and discourses**

I have presented a poststructural approach to OI that privileges texts and discourses as evidence for identity construction. I have acknowledged that my inclusive definition of identity claims inevitably leads to the identification of a large number of claims in annual reports, relating both to the organisation and to other identities, where I have argued for a poststructural, relational conception of identity construction that encompasses the analysis of multiple identities. I contend that my analysis has demonstrated that annual reports are sites for complex and extensive identity work. I have argued that identity construction in annual reports can be analysed not only at the granular level of the claim and the utterance, but also at the level of the reports as discourses and sub discourses, and through wider industry discourses, and that identity work is multimodal, embracing both verbal text and visual elements. I propose

that my analysis at the level of the identity claim and at the broader level of the reports as sub discourses reveals the multiple purposes of the identity work of reports, whereas analysis at the level of the reports as single discourse highlights the efforts of firms to construct overarching claims in order to present a coherent identity. I contend that these various levels of analysis reveal that all of my sources – annual reports, online blogs, and industry texts – have identity construction as a central concern.

### **Identity as fragmented and dynamic**

My analysis has shown that, despite the turmoil in the UK B2B and professional publishing industry during the period of my study, firms in their annual reports sought to present cohesive, coherent and enduring organisational identities. However, the evidence from my intertextual analysis of the reports reveals a much more fragmented and dynamic picture. In my analysis, I have identified over 700 individual verbal textual identity claims relating to over 2000 identity utterances in the reports, including claims focusing on the organisation itself and claims concerning other related identities, including customers, products and markets. I propose that this evidence of multiple identity claims partly reflects the multiple purposes and multiple audiences of the firm, and, to a limited extent, the different roles of the authors of the reports, confirming the view of Sillince and Brown (2009) that the identity work of organisations is a complex project directed at satisfying the varying requirements of multiple stakeholder groups.

My intertextual analysis of patterns of verbal textual identity claims across the sets of annual reports in my study has revealed significant discontinuities between reports for the firms, to the extent that around fifty percent of claims are not repeated in more than one report. I contend that this highlights the fundamentally dynamic nature of identity construction for the firms in my study during this period. However, from a poststructural perspective, identity is not simply dynamic, but it is continually reconstructed in texts and discourses (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111), as Kozica et al. (2015) show in their study of Wikipedia's 'stable state of instability'. I have shown in my analysis that, even

where identity claims are repeated between reports, they are generally not simply copied and pasted. Moreover, I have argued that the *context* of an identity utterance is always unique, where its meaning must therefore also be unique, regardless of whether its content is identical to a previous utterance.

### **Identity as decentred and relational**

The most radical element of a poststructural approach to identity is the assertion that identity is fundamentally relational, where distinctions between 'who we are' and 'what that is' fall away, and where identities are seen to be mutually constituted with other related identities (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 106-7). I contend that my two analyses of the relational nature of OI support this poststructural perspective on identity. I have argued, firstly, that identity work in the annual reports involved the construction of multiple identities in addition to that of the firms themselves, but that this form of relational identity construction was still very often indirectly focused on the firm, as in the construction of the identity of the magazine as a product in Centaur's reports, supporting the firm's central identity claim to be a magazine publisher. In my second approach to a relational analysis, I have argued that even those identity claims with a focus on the firm generally also involve the construction of other identities within that claim, where, for example, Future often combine the identity of the firm with the identities of their employees and their readers in their identity claims.

I have also explored the essential relationality of identity construction in my analysis of the construction of industry discourses in industry reports and online blogs, where claims focused on the construction of the identity of the publishing industry also sought to construct the identities of related identities, such as customers, products, and technology. As with identity claims in the annual reports, industry texts also looked to construct industry identity through processes of comparisons and contrasts, where, for example, bloggers present change as structural rather than cyclical, or industry reports argue that barriers to change are cultural rather than structural.

## **Identity as contested**

My analysis of organisational identity has largely focused on the identity claims of a small group of senior managers, expressed in a set of corporate annual reports. I have shown that these claims were invariably presented as agreed-upon, with the 'we' of claims either referring to the firms' senior management, or to the firm as a whole. The reports contain no evidence of dissent or of marginalised identity claims, with the few voices of employees in the reports invariably supporting senior management claims. A poststructural conception of identity, however, not only assumes that identity claims might be contested, but that claims are always and inevitably contestable, with meanings never entirely fixable (Hansen, 2006: 6).

I have argued that the poststructural conception of the indeterminacy of meaning mirrors both Bakhtin's dialogism (Todorov, 1984) and Billig's (1996) positioning of argumentation at the centre of social life, with meanings (and identities) constructed through relations and oppositions. For Billig, this means that all arguments necessarily have an opposing position, whether this opposing position is expressed or not. I have shown examples of this in my analysis of annual reports where, for example, Centaur's reports argue for the continuing relevance of the magazine in the face of the rise of the Internet, where it is clear in my analysis of online blogs, that many commentators were arguing that the Internet signalled the imminent death of the magazine. In addition to this, I have explored how the authors of annual reports sought to construct identities using techniques of argumentation rooted in both the content of claims and in their presentation, using multimodal techniques, and referencing intertextual resources in order to legitimise claims.

## **Identity construction as a multimodal accomplishment**

I have argued that a poststructural focus on text and discourse does not imply an exclusive focus on verbal textual language (Hansen, 2006: 23). Indeed, I have argued that social semiotics and a multimodal approach are consistent with a poststructural perspective on meaning-making. They share a view that language and signs are socially-produced, rather than residing in extra-

discursive systems, and present meaning-making as a local activity, with signs constructed in the here-and-now rather than pre-existing in cognition, and where social context is critical to meaning. They also share a concern with the role of power in constructing meaning, where rhetoric can be a central mechanism in communication, as individuals seek to persuade others of their claims.

Although verbal textual language has distinct capabilities from other modes of communication (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996), writers in the poststructural and postmodern tradition, such as Barthes (1957/1972), acknowledge the role of the visual in the construction of meaning. I have argued that, although it is possible to analyse identity construction through a focus on verbal text, this provides only a partial picture, particularly in organisational documents such as corporate annual reports where visual elements are integral to their overall means of communication. However, I have also argued that visual identity construction should not be treated simply as a supplement to identity construction in verbal text, but that the two modes combine to create a unified means of communication, where this necessitates a unified approach to analysis. I have also noted the material aspect of the annual reports, where I have argued that the importance of this mode is complicated by uncertainty surrounding whether readers consume reports as printed or as digital artefacts.

Although I have highlighted multimodal identity construction in this thesis in relation to argumentation, I have not attempted a rigorous analysis. However, although I recognise that the techniques for multimodal analysis are necessarily different across different modes, I believe that the intertextual methods I have used here for the analysis of verbal text could be extended to a multimodal analysis that incorporated visual elements. My omission of this from my own analysis has been primarily a question of time and space.

## **SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTIONS**

In this thesis, I have sought to demonstrate that a poststructural approach to the study of organisational identity can be philosophically defensible, methodologically rigorous, and provide significant explanatory value. I have

proposed that such an approach is able to account for both the centripetal efforts of organisational actors to present a unitary, stable and enduring view of OI through the content of their identity claims, and the provisional, contingent, and contested, centrifugal 'reality' of identity construction revealed in the context of texts and discourses. In addition to this, I propose that my thesis makes contributions in several areas of organisation theory: the OI literature; poststructuralism as a theoretical approach; poststructural methodological approaches; intertextuality and multimodal analysis.

I have presented a critique of the OI literature that I believe highlights important ongoing issues in the conceptualisation of OI, particularly with reference to understandings of its socially constructed nature. I have highlighted problems in existing classifications of the subject, and I have presented a categorisation that I propose more adequately reflects both the social constructionist roots of OI and the key tension in the literature between centripetal and centrifugal approaches. I have proposed that poststructuralism both presents a rigorous and coherent conceptualisation of OI as a social construct and enables the bridging of this central tension in the literature between centripetal and centrifugal perspectives.

I have proposed a poststructural approach to OI that I consider to be both persuasive and coherent, but one that I believe is also increasingly relevant to the dynamism, fragmentation and complexity of contemporary organisational life. OI theorists have presented a range of arguments for OI as a central construct in organisational life, and I propose that a poststructural conception of OI supports this perspective, on the basis that the central indeterminacy of poststructural meaning inevitably raises identity to a central position.

I have set out a poststructural methodological approach to OI that I believe presents poststructuralism in terms of a comprehensive and constructive approach to empirical analysis, rather than simply as deconstruction and critique. I have argued that such a poststructural approach can support methodological rigour countering criticisms that poststructuralism is anti-method. I have identified Hansen (2006) as presenting an empirical approach to

poststructuralism from outside of the organisational literature that I argue merits attention from organisational scholars.

I have presented a methodology based upon four approaches that I believe are complementary: intertextual analysis, discourse analysis, multimodality, and argumentation. Although I have identified some works in the organisational literature that have used intertextual analysis, none of these has combined this explicitly with a poststructural theoretical approach. I contend that intertextuality, and particularly its roots in Bakhtin's dialogism (Todorov, 1984), strongly complements a poststructural approach. Moreover, I consider that I have demonstrated that intertextual analysis can be a powerful technique for exploring not only the study of identity, but more generally for the construction of meaning in texts, including the analysis of how organisational texts such as annual reports are shaped by institutional texts and discourses.

Although multimodal approaches in social semiotics are well-established (e.g. Kress, 2009), they have recently generated considerable interest from scholars with a concern for the importance of the visual (Meyer et al., 2013) and the material (Carlile and Langley, 2013) in organisational research, and from those from an institutionalist perspective (Höllerer et al., 2017). I have noted that this burgeoning interest relates to a number of factors, including a recognition of the increasingly visual nature of organisations, and a concern to move away from approaches focusing exclusively on verbal language. However, scholars have also noted that methodologies for such multimodal analyses of organisations are in their infancy (Boxenbaum et al., 2018). Although much of my analysis has focused on the verbal text of annual reports, I have also both recognised the multimodal nature of these documents and provided some analysis, particularly around argumentation and presentation, that I believe constitutes a contribution to this developing area of organisational research.

In terms of argumentation, I have noted that Billig's (1996) work on argumentation acknowledges Bakhtin, but not poststructuralism. I have highlighted the close connection between these approaches, where I have



positioned the analysis of argumentation and presentation as central to a discursive poststructural analysis.

Finally, I propose that I make some other, less direct, contributions. Although I have highlighted a large literature relating to the study of corporate annual reports, I propose that my approach to reports as identity discourses, as sites of argumentation, and as nodes in an intertextual network of texts and discourses provides a distinct contribution to that literature. Although online blogs have provided only a supplementary data source in my study, I believe that my analysis here contributes to the literature on blogs as sources for the longitudinal study of organisations, particularly at the industry level.

## **TRANSFERABILITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Pratt et al. (2016a) question how organisational identity as a concept can respond to centrifugal trends such as organisations becoming more distributed, with their functions outsourced, where careers are increasingly turbulent and employees are identifying less with one long-term employer. I propose that a poststructural interpretation of OI, following Laclau and Mouffe (1985), is able to present a powerful account of such centrifugal trends at the same time as providing an explanation for the increasing efforts of organisational actors to present unitary and stable identities in order to fix meanings and to persuade diverse audiences.

Scholars have noted that meaning within contemporary organisations, reflecting wider social and technological change, is increasingly both constructed and communicated remotely, for example via emails and written policies, with face-to-face interaction between organisational members often becoming rare (Cederström and Spicer, 2014: 179). Such changes in organisational life inevitably call into question perspectives on social construction that conceptualise identity as constructed in a shared, collective environment. I argue that a discursive, poststructural approach to social construction, with its empirical focus on texts and discourses, is therefore increasingly appropriate for the study of meaning-making in such organisational contexts.

In an increasingly dynamic, fragmented, and complex organisational world, a poststructural perspective on identity suggests that centrifugal pressures will require organisations to devote increasing efforts to the presentation of a centripetal, coherent, stable, and, at least apparently agreed-upon OI in order to fix, albeit temporarily, meanings and identities. I propose that a poststructural approach to organisational analysis in general can help to account for the increasing gap between the centripetal identities presented by firms and the centrifugal empirical evidence as revealed in organisational texts and discourses.

I have argued that poststructuralism positions identity at the heart of organisational life at multiple levels, including the individual, the organisation, and the industry. Although I have noted some research in OI that has started to explore relationships between multiple levels of identity (Ashforth et al., 2011, Kozica et al., 2015), I propose that a poststructural approach to analysis is well suited for the study of identity at multiple levels, where a poststructural emphasis on the relational nature of identity construction conceptualises organisational identity as entwined with other identities, including those at other levels of analysis (Ravasi and Canato, 2010, Raffaelli, 2013b).

I believe that there is considerable scope for the wider adoption of intertextual analysis in organisation theory as a methodology for the study of organisational texts within a broader network of texts and discourses, on the basis that the study of the content of text without the accompanying examination of its temporal and spatial context can only lead to a partial understanding of its meaning. Although my study has adopted a poststructural perspective to intertextuality, I have argued that previous work in the organisational literature has not necessarily taken that route, but has still found value in this approach.

Boxenbaum et al. (2018) have proposed that the linguistic or discursive turn in organisation theory should be extended to include the material and the visual partly in order to reflect changing organisational realities, where multimodality is an approach that can conceptualise different modes as a unified means of meaning-making. However, they have also highlighted the methodological

challenges to be overcome in order to present such an integrated approach, where Höllerer et al. (2017) argue for the need for the development of a conceptual language that will allow us to understand how different modes convey meaning. In examining the interplay between verbal text and visual elements in the rhetorical construction of annual reports, I consider that I have pointed to the importance of multimodality in the construction of organisational identity. However, I believe that there would be considerable potential in extending a multimodal approach into the other aspects of my analysis, principally intertextuality, where an analysis of the intertextual basis of visual elements of texts, referencing visual elements from other texts and broader visual discourses, would, I propose, add greatly to the understanding of identity construction in organisational texts.

Boxenbaum et al. (2018) also contend that a greater understanding of materiality and visuality could provide insights into the workings of power relations in organisations that analysis of verbal text alone might not be able to do. I have shown that, although annual reports are ultimately authored by a small number of senior managers in firms, they are often presented within verbal text in terms of a broader organisational 'we', and that employees are represented visually either as silent, complicit voices or with carefully orchestrated utterances that support the image of a firm where everyone is moving in the same direction. Boxenbaum et al. (2018) propose that the study of multimodal rhetorics potentially allows for the unveiling of hidden processes of power, and I consider that organisational documents, such as annual reports, are rich sites for such analysis, where both verbal text and visual images provide evidence for such processes.

## CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

Taylor (1989: ix) places identity at the heart of modernity, arguing that it shapes our philosophical thought, our epistemology, and our philosophy of language. I propose that identity is also central to organisational life, shaping the thoughts and actions of organisational actors. In this thesis, I have shown that organisational identity is a highly contested concept, with debate revolving around some key central questions: Where does identity reside – in cognition or in discourse? Is it constructed by organisational insiders or outsiders? Is it concerned with establishing legitimacy or distinctiveness? Does it change or is it fundamentally stable? I propose that a poststructural approach to OI offers persuasive and coherent answers to each of these questions.

In addressing organisational identity, my central research questions in this thesis have addressed both theory and method. My central theoretical research question has addressed the tension between OI as a generally agreed-upon and stable attribute of organisations and empirical research that frequently reveals OI as fragmented, dynamic and contested. I have proposed a poststructural theoretical approach that I argue accounts for this tension between centripetal and centrifugal views of OI.

Following Laclau and Mouffe (1985), I propose that it is poststructuralism's assertion of the fundamental indeterminacy of meaning, at the same time as its recognition of the need of individuals to fix meanings, however temporarily, that enables it to offer a powerful and holistic account of OI, one that can account for both the totalising efforts of organisational actors and the fragmented and contested empirical 'reality' of identity. I argue that my key theoretical contribution is to outline how such a poststructural approach helps to bridge what I have described as the 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' tensions in the OI literature. I believe that it also provides a coherent ontological approach to social construction, in the face of what I have presented as the largely under-theorised and inconsistent social constructionist assumptions that underpin much of the OI literature.

I have presented an interpretation of a poststructural OI with the destabilisation and ambiguity of language and meaning at its root, with identities entwined within an ever-changing context, their meanings never fixed. This poststructural identity is inherently relational, with identities mutually constituted – the organisational Self continually reconstructed in relation to multiple Other identities in a decentred and shifting network of relations. To attempt to fix meanings in order to enable or justify action, organisational actors must constantly concern themselves with the construction and promotion of identity claims not just relating to the organisation, but also to a host of related identities, such as products, customers and markets. Their ever-shifting and ambiguous nature means that identities are also always contestable, where every claim can always be countered by opposing claims. I propose that these central elements of a poststructural OI ensure that identity is necessarily a pervasive and ongoing concern for organisations. I believe that I have demonstrated that a poststructural theoretical approach to OI presents a coherent and compelling account of identity construction.

My central methodological research question has addressed what kinds of empirical data organisations draw on to create an organisational identity and how these forms of data help us to understand organisational identity as a post-structural concept, where this can encompass multimodal identity construction in texts. A poststructural approach to identity holds that identity is constructed discursively in texts and discourses, where both the *content* and the *context* of identity claims are central to this construction. I have presented a poststructural methodological approach that I consider enables a rigorous explanatory empirical study of OI. The central element in my methodology has been intertextual analysis, which, with its focus on the unique spatial and temporal meaning of utterances in texts, is an approach that I believe is highly complementary to an analysis of the decentred, dynamic and fragmented nature of a poststructural identity. I also propose that poststructuralism shares assumptions around the contested nature of identity with Billig's (1996) approach to argumentation, and so I have incorporated an analysis of argumentation and presentation into my methodological approach. I believe that

my methodological approach is not only suitable for a poststructural analysis, but that it both supports and demands rigour.

For my analysis, I have selected corporate annual reports as my principal data source, where, as contemporary texts that are available longitudinally, I propose that they are a suitable focus for an intertextual analysis. From a poststructural perspective, I argue that annual reports are not simply a means of communication from the firm to its stakeholders, and merely an incidental repository for identity claims, but that their key purpose is the construction of identity, where this is a complex process involving multiple purposes, authors and audiences.

Although my intertextual analysis has focused in identity construction in the verbal text of annual reports, I have recognised that verbal text is just one mode of meaning-making in the reports, and I argue that visual elements are also central to meaning-making and identity construction. I have argued that a multimodal approach is not only suitable for the analysis of organisational documents such as annual reports, but that, with its focus on the social, contextual, and rhetorical aspects of communication, it complements the key elements of a poststructural conception of identity that I have set out here. I have argued, through my analysis of the argumentation and presentation of identity claims in annual reports, that visual and verbal textual modes of meaning-making require an integrated analysis that also considers the overall design of documents. I have also emphasised that different modes play different roles in the making of meaning and the construction of identity.

I believe that I have made a contribution to poststructural approaches in the organisational literature by providing a conceptualisation of a poststructural interpretation of OI that challenges existing socially constructed accounts of OI, and that provides an organisational complement to poststructural approaches to individual identity (e.g. Butler, 1990). I propose that my approach builds upon work in the OI literature on multiple levels of identity (Ashforth et al., 2011), multiple organisational identities (Sillince and Brown, 2009, Brown, 2006), and

relational approaches that situate OI construction within a broader network of identities (Ravasi and Canato, 2010, Raffaelli, 2013b).

I have proposed that a poststructural approach to OI is increasingly relevant in the face of contemporary trends in organisations, where I have noted recent concerns from OI scholars that, for example, organisations are ‘becoming more distributed, with functions being outsourced, networks replacing traditional hierarchies, and employees being displaced by contractors’ (Pratt et al., 2016a: 497-8). I propose that poststructuralism provides a theoretical and methodological basis for both understanding the fragmentation, dynamism and complexity of contemporary organisations, and for placing concerns of identity at the centre of organisational life.

At the end of his adventures, Don Quixote is defeated by his foes for the final time, but, shortly before he dies, he recovers his sanity briefly and renounces ‘those detestable books of chivalry’ that had inspired his journey. And so, shortly before his own death, Cervantes hoped to signal a definitive ending to his tale, well aware that other authors were keen to add more, lucrative, chapters to Don Quixote’s story. Yet, befitting its own intertextual nature, Cervantes’ novel has lived on, adopted and adapted by a long list of dramatists, writers, painters, composers, and filmmakers into their own works. Of most relevance to my poststructural account is, perhaps, Borges’ 1939 short story *Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote* (Borges, 1964), in which Borges relates Menard’s intention to write a contemporary Quixote, not simply another version of the *Quixote*, ‘which is easy,’ but *the Quixote* itself, where, after much effort the author was able to produce a few pages that coincided – word for word and line for line – with those Cervantes (p.39).

I believe that Borges’ story highlights both the inherent intertextuality in the creation of any text, where we are always in some way reliant on what has gone before, and a central element of poststructuralism’s understanding of text and meaning, where meaning cannot be assumed to lie *within* a text, but can only be understood in relation to the broader context of its production, authorship and consumption, where an identical text can never be the ‘same’ text. For

poststructuralists, then, the study of organisational identity purely through a reading of the content of identity claims cannot be expected to fully capture the temporal and spatial essence of identity, in the same way that Don Quixote cannot exist independently of the chivalrous tales that he read and of the readings of those who share his adventures.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: BIOGRAPHIES OF PUBLISHING FIRMS

Originally incorporated as United Newspapers Limited in 1918, the company that is now UBM changed its name to United News and Media in 1995, United Business Media in 2000, and finally to UBM plc in 2011. Historically, UBM owned, bought and sold a wide range of media businesses, including broadcast television, market research and national newspapers (UBM plc, 2016). At the start of the period of my study in 2004, UBM presented itself as an 'integrated' media group, operating a range of businesses including 'trade magazine and newspaper publishing, event and conference organisation, market research, news distribution, education and on-line information products' (UBM, 2004: 6). It subsequently increasingly focused on developing a global portfolio of tradeshows, by 2016 describing itself as 'a global events-led marketing and communications services business' (UBM plc, 2016).

Founded in 1981 on the basis of the success of a single magazine – Marketing Week – Centaur grew to be a 'formidable magazine and events business' (Clark, 2011). Its character was tied closely to its founder Graham Sherren, 'a doyen of B2B publishing' (Morrison, 2015). In 2004's annual report, Centaur described itself as 'one of the leading business magazine publishers in the UK with one of the best portfolio of magazines in the industry,' and as a 'federation of small businesses' (Centaur, 2004: 4, 8). However, by 2013, its founder departed, its annual report described the firm as 'an integrated, multi-platform business media group, providing business information, events and marketing solutions to selected professional and commercial markets' (Centaur, 2013: 3).

Founded in Bath, England, in 1985 by Chris Anderson, Future initially specialised in computing magazines aimed at hobbyists. By 2016, the publisher was organised across technology, games, film, photography, music, and creative/design sectors, targeting professional and consumer audiences with a mixture of print and online titles (Future plc, 2016b). It described itself as 'an

international publishing group and leading digital business...a portfolio of over 200 print titles, apps, websites and events' (Future plc, 2016a).

## APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM AND INFORMATION SHEET



Department of Management

### Postgraduate Research Information Sheet

**Title of thesis: Organizational and professional identities in a changing industry: UK B2B magazine publishing**

**Alastair Milne, Birkbeck, University of London**

#### **Who am I?**

I am undertaking a part-time postgraduate research degree in the School of Management at Birkbeck, University of London, with the aim of being awarded a PhD. My supervisor at Birkbeck is Dr Richard Tacon. I also work as a project management consultant in the publishing industry. I am currently working on a project for the British Standards Institution, and was previously employed by TES (Times Educational Supplement).

#### **Research aims**

My research explores organisational change in the UK B2B magazine publishing sector since the year 2000. I am interested in how firms have adopted to the impact of new technology, and the implications of those changes for the firms concerned and for the sector as a whole.

#### **Data collection process**

My data collection will involve the analysis of corporate documents, including annual reports, blog posts and media articles, together with interviews with individuals working in the sector.

#### **Ethics of data collection**

In order to carry out postgraduate research at Birkbeck, I am required to go through an ethics approval process to get my research approved. This is intended to ensure that I carry out my research in a responsible way, and that I protect those who are participating. The process operates around the principle of informed consent, so that you are clear as to the purpose of the interviews, their format and the subsequent treatment of the data collected. You are required to explicitly consent to your participation in the research before I commence the interview process.

#### **Consent to use content of blog posts in my research**

Although the blog posts that I am using as part of my research are in the public domain on the Internet, I am requesting your consent to make use of them in the course of my research.

#### **Online interviews**

Prior to answering the interview questions I will ask you to confirm that you have read and understood this Information Sheet, and will ask you to consent to participation in the research. You are not obliged to answer the questions presented to you.

#### **After the interview**

At any point prior to the submission of my research, you will be able to ask me to remove your contribution, or any section of it.



I would like to be able to use the content of your answers, including direct quotes, from the online interview questions as part of my research. If you would prefer any content or quotes to be anonymous, then please note this when indicating your consent to participate.

If you would like to see a copy of my dissertation prior to submission, I will be happy to send it to you so that you can feed back if you have any issues. Please let me know if this is the case. If you do not want particular quotes to be included, or believe that they, or any of your contributions, are taken out of context, then please let me know.

Note that, in addition to my PhD thesis, I would also hope to publish articles based upon my research. These may also include quotes taken from the interviews.

Although I will be very happy to remove or change any references that you believe are inaccurate or taken out of context, this does not mean that I will necessarily change any conclusions that you might not agree with.

**Contact details**

Alastair Milne: amilne01@mail.bbk.ac.uk  
Dr Richard Tacon: r.tacon@bbk.ac.uk



**Consent Form  
Department of Management**

Please read the following before participating in this research:

- I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.
- I agree to provide information to the researcher(s) on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. (The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.)
- I agree/do not agree to the interview being taped.
- I agree/do not agree to the interview being video-taped.
- I understand that I have the right to ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.
- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet

Signed by:

The researcher: .....

Date: .....

The interviewee: .....

Date: .....

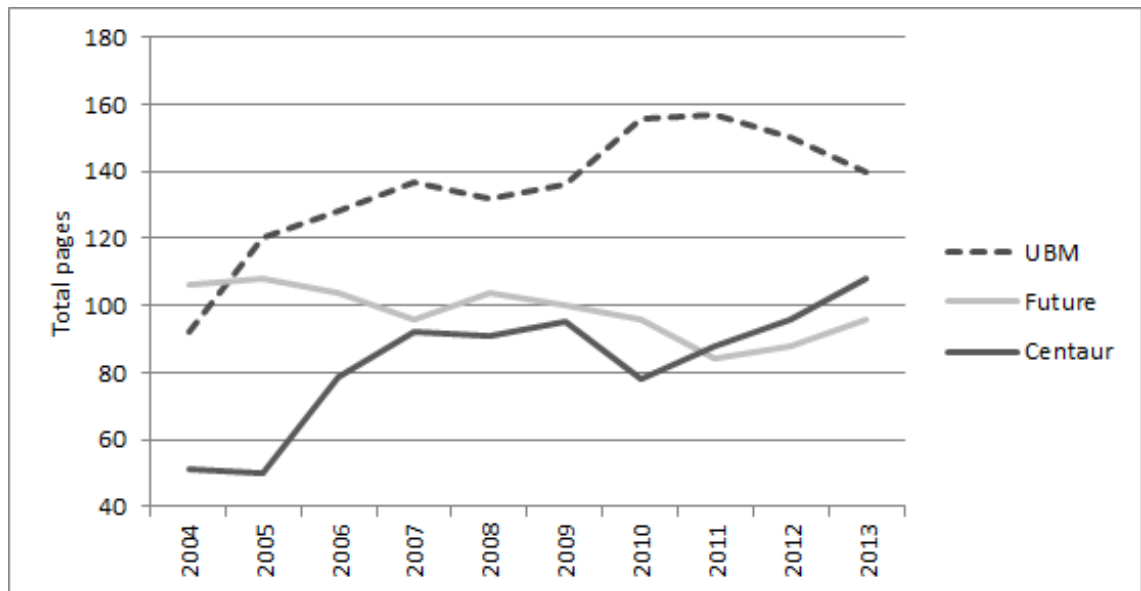


## APPENDIX 3: STRUCTURE AND FORMAT OF THE ANNUAL REPORTS

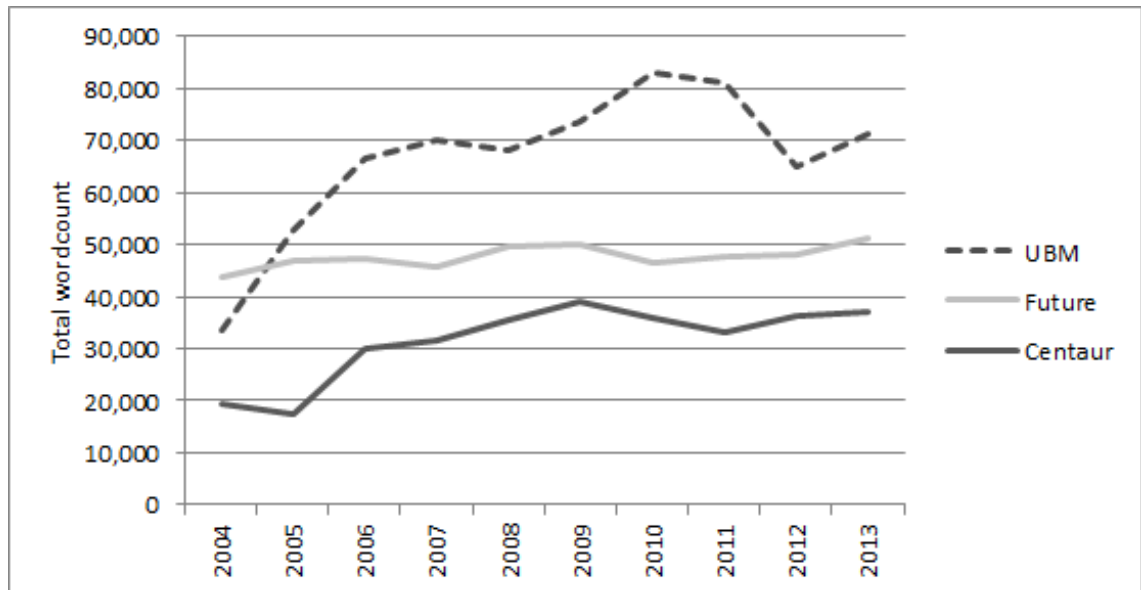
### Length and word count of the annual reports

I have based my analysis on a set of corporate annual reports from three UK publishing firms over a ten year period, 2004-13. The data set comprises thirty reports in total. The annual reports are substantial documents, both in terms of number of pages and total word count. As I show in Figure 44, the total number of pages of individual reports varies considerably, with an average page count over the period of just over 105. Across all three firms, the page count increased by just over 38% between the start and the end of the period, although the count for Future's reports fell slightly over the period.

**Figure 44: Total pages of annual reports**

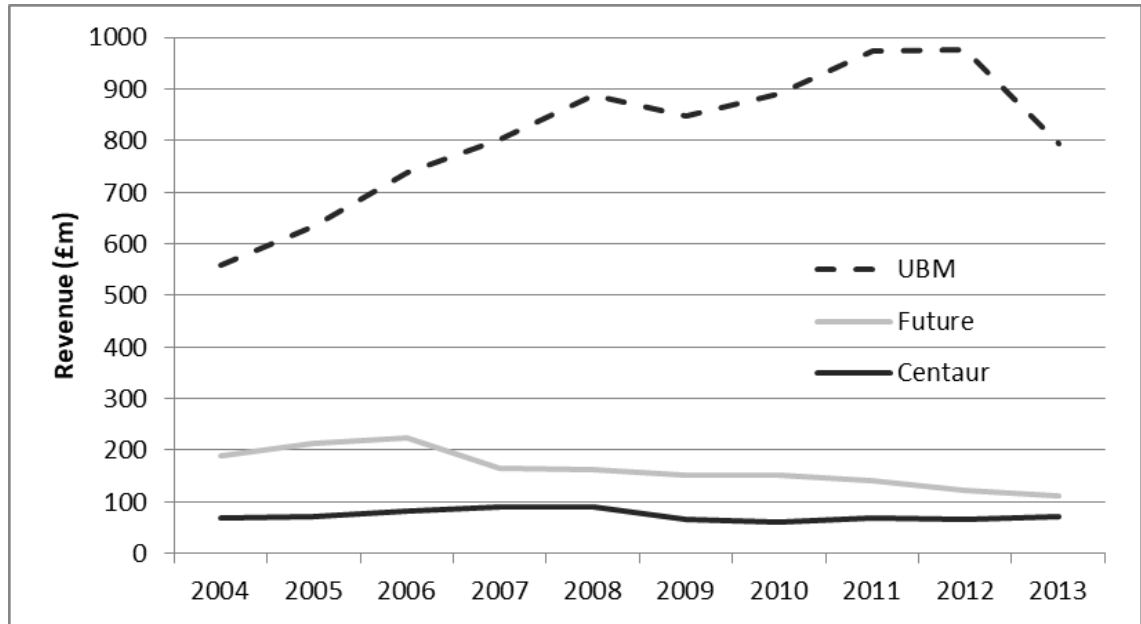


**Figure 45: Total word count of annual reports**



In Figure 45, I show that the word count of the reports also varies considerably, from less than 20,000 to over 80,000 words, with an average across all of the reports for the whole period of just over 48,000 words. Word count increases for all of the firms over the period, with the average increase across all firms of just under 65%. I argue that the increase in the total pages and word count of the reports is largely a result of increased institutional requirements for firms' reporting, as I discuss later when I consider the intertextual resources that inform the content and structure of the reports. The differences in page and word count between firms somewhat reflects their relative size as expressed in terms of revenue, as I show in Figure 46. The relatively larger increase in word count compared to the increase in the number of pages signifies an increase in the density of text in the reports, which, assuming a general consistency in the size of fonts used and of page size, indicates a relative decline in the proportion of visual elements used in the reports.

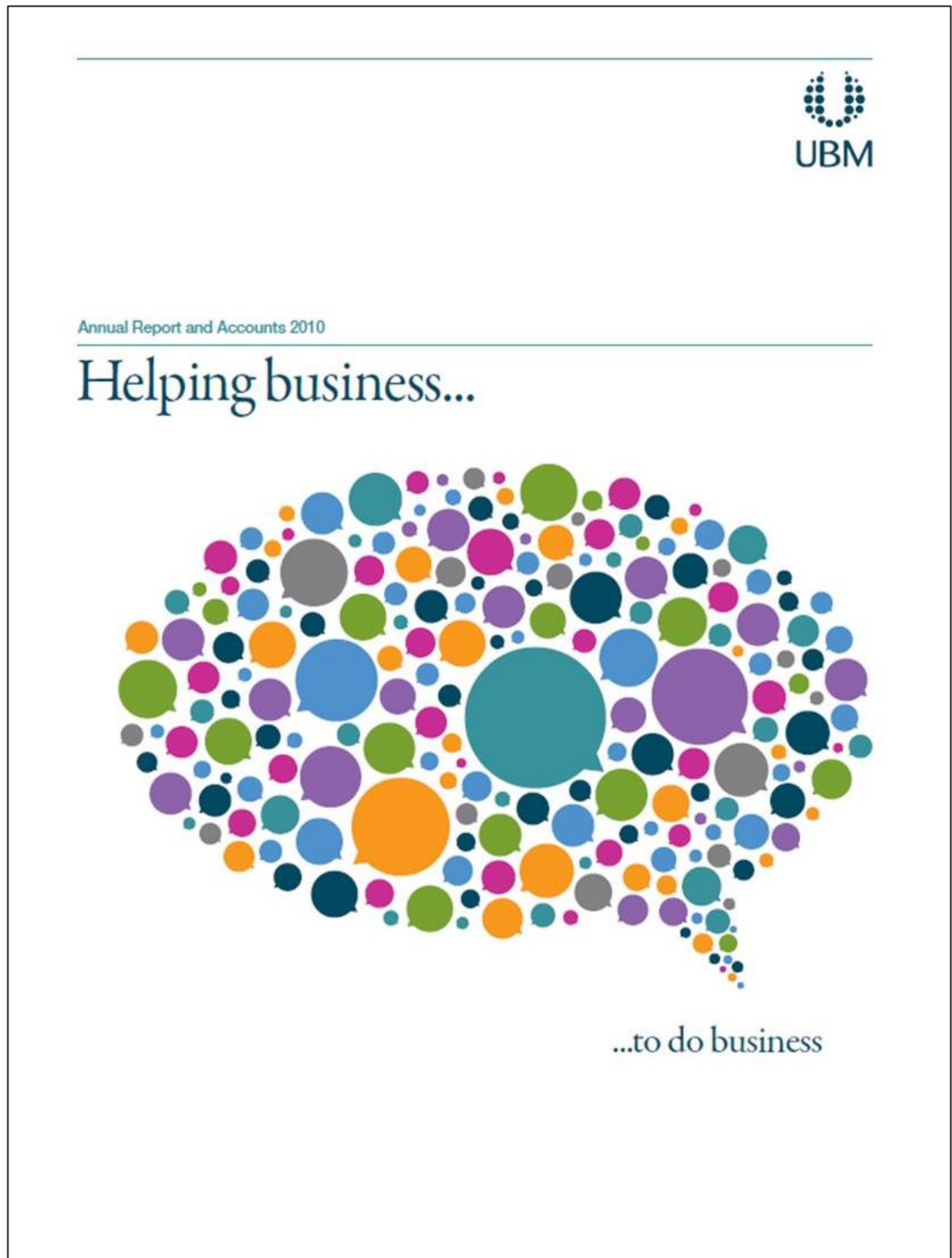
**Figure 46: Annual revenue for selected publishers, 2004-13**



### **Design, format, and structure of the annual reports**

All of the annual reports that I have used in my analysis are professionally designed documents. External design agencies specialising in the production of such corporate communications generally produced the reports, although in-house designers were responsible for all of Centaur's reports, as well as Future's 2013 report. In addition to their textual content, the reports all contain a variety of visual elements, such as photographs, illustrations and charts. The extent and variety of visual elements varies between firms and between reports. In Figures 47 and 48, I show the front and inside cover and first three pages of the 2010 UBM annual report, demonstrating the highly visual nature of many of the reports. In the section on annual reports as identity discourses later in this chapter, I discuss the visual elements of the reports in detail, together with their role in identity construction.

Figure 47: Front cover of UBM annual report, 2010



Source: UBM (2010: front cover)

Figure 48: Inside cover and first three pages of UBM annual report, 2010

We help businesses do business.

We enable professional people around the world to connect and engage with each other, with the markets they serve and with the information they need to succeed.

We do this by providing them with access both to their audiences and to insightful, business-critical information by whatever means works best – at live events, through digital media or in publications.

Our expert staff are deeply embedded within each of the many professional communities we serve. Working within a culture of creativity and collaboration, we share knowledge, know-how and ideas right across UBM's businesses and around the globe.

### Financial highlights

**Revenue £m**  
**+4.9%**

**Adjusted operating profit\* £m**  
**+0.4%**

**Adjusted operating margin\* %**  
**-0.9%pt**

**Adjusted diluted EPS\* pence**  
**-7.4%**

**Dividend per share pence**  
**+3.3%**

**Cash generated from operations £m**  
**+8.4%**

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**At a glance**

UBM is a global live media and B2B communications, marketing service and data provider. We seek to help companies make connections, communicate their proposition and do business effectively.

**What do we do?**

**Events**

We organize trade shows and other live 'to person' events which enable communication to do business – UBM is the world's second largest 'post play' event organizer. Revenue is generated by exhibitors purchasing exhibition space, through event sponsorship, for certain events, through attendee entrance fees.

**Targeting, Distribution and Monitoring (TD&M)**

Our TD&M business provides communications products and services to professionals working in marketing, public relations, corporate communications or investor relations roles, as well as advertising within client' magazine and information. TD&M revenue is also derived from advertising and marketing services.

**Data Services (DS)**

We provide data and information products which support professionals in their decision making and day-to-day activities. We look to create unique, market leading data sets that can be utilized by multiple users in the sector. Revenue is generated through annual subscriptions and listing fees, consulting, content and training services, and advertising or marketing support.

**Online – Marketing Services (Online)**

We execute campaigns on behalf of clients looking to enhance their branding, customer awareness, reach and engagement or to generate sales leads. We offer our clients measurable return on investment and high audience engagement. Revenue is generated through advertising such as banner ads, lead generation services and increasingly, virtual event organization and building/ managing community websites on behalf of clients.

**Print – Magazines (Print)**

We also publish 123 print titles which provide clients with a more traditional advertising platform. The majority of titles are controlled circulation magazines which continue to play an important role in serving specific professional and commercial communities. We have seen growing use over with online marketing services as clients seek an integrated marketing approach or as publications engage online. We are managing the print business through a focused portfolio of leading titles.

**What are our key strengths?**

A market leader in hosting face-to-face interactions – increasingly important in the digital age

Transitioned to capitalise on growth in the digital age with a range of quality ready-made products and services

Strong presence in high-growth and emerging economies – broad geographical infrastructure

Diverse portfolio of products and services with cross integration

Committed, skilled people working in an innovative and collaborative culture

Brand strength within attractive business communities

Diversified customer base – no single customer generation more than 1% of UBM's revenues

Highly cash generative

Strong balance sheet

**Contribution to 2010 revenue %**

1. Events	34.8
2. TD&M	20.4
3. DS	20.8
4. Online	7.8
5. Print	16.2

We transfer the skills, knowledge and experience we gain in serving one community across and between markets, transferring best practice and innovation from one community to another, from one geography to another and from one product type to another.

**Where do we operate?**

We have a well-balanced portfolio with exposure to both mature markets and higher growth Emerging Markets. Over the last five years we have increased our exposure to fast growth Emerging Markets, since 2005 our revenues from China and other Emerging Markets have grown 110% to £166m.

**Revenue by geographies 2005-2010 £m**

**Who are our customers?**

UBM services a variety of specialist business communities. It is through in-depth knowledge of these client communities that we can service our customers most effectively.

**2010 Revenue by community %**

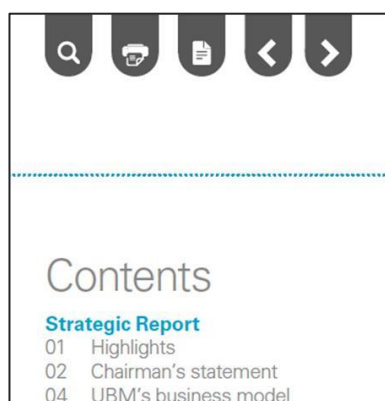
1. Technology & IT	22.4
2. News Distribution	20.4
3. Health	20.2
4. Lifestyle	7.4
5. Trade & Transport	5.0
6. Engineering	4.2
7. Fashion	5.6
8. Built Environment	5.5
9. Sport	2.0
10. Other	3.3

Source: UBM (2010: inside cover, 1-3)

Although by the start of my period in 2004 all of the firms published their annual reports online in a pdf format, they are clearly generally still designed and formatted in order to be printed on glossy colour paper, generally in an A4 size

portrait format. However, some of the later reports do contain design elements that incorporate online functionality. For example, the 2013 UBM report contains icons that function as navigable links within the online pdf document, as I show in Figure 49. Moreover, the reports increasingly provide links to additional online resources, for example company policies. For example, UBM's 2012 report directs readers to its website in order to obtain the terms of reference for all of its committees (UBM, 2012: 50).

**Figure 49: Navigable icons in UBM annual report, 2013**



*Source: UBM (2013: inside cover)*

### **Sections and meta sections of the annual reports**

The annual reports in my analysis vary considerably in their structure and organisation, both between firms and longitudinally. However, a number of key elements remain more or less consistent across reports. Although the names, positions, and composition of individual sections vary between reports, I have proposed a common categorisation in order to enable a comparative analysis.

Each of the annual reports can be divided into three 'meta' sections, each consisting of a number of sections. I have labelled these meta sections 'review', 'governance' and 'financial'. The review meta section focuses on the performance and strategy of the firm, and is primarily the responsibility of the chief executive officer (CEO). The governance meta section focuses on the governance of the firm, and is primarily the responsibility of the firm's board. The financial meta section presents the detailed financial results and policies,

and is primarily the responsibility of the chief financial officer (CFO). In some cases, these meta sections are explicitly referenced in the annual reports, as I show in Figure 50, whereas in others the division is not explicit, but can be clearly inferred, as in Figure 51. The meta sections are always arranged in the same order in the reports, with the review meta section followed by governance and the financial results at the end.

**Figure 50: Sections and meta sections listed in the table of contents of UBM's annual report, 2009**

Section 1: 2009 Review		Section 2: Governance		Section 3: Financial statements	
02	Chairman's Statement	38	Board of Directors	56	Consolidated income statement
04	Operating and Financial Review	40	Directors' remuneration report	57	Consolidated statement of comprehensive income
04	Strategy and Performance	48	Corporate governance statement	58	Consolidated statement of financial position
22	Financial Review	52	Independent auditors' report to the members of United Business Media Limited	59	Consolidated statement of changes in equity
28	Risks and Uncertainties	53	Report of the directors	60	Consolidated statement of cash flows
32	Corporate Responsibility			61	Notes to the consolidated financial statements
				119	Five year financial summary
				120	Independent auditors' report to the members of United Business Media Limited
				121	Parent company profit and loss account
				122	Parent company balance sheet
				123	Notes to the parent company financial statements
				130	Shareholder information
				132	Financial calendar 2010
				132	Cautionary statement
					<b>01</b>

Source: UBM (2009: 1)

**Figure 51: Sections and meta sections listed in the table of contents of Future's annual report, 2009**

Group financial highlights		Contents	
Year ended 30 September 2009			
<b>Revenue</b>	<b>EBITA</b>	Chairman's statement	1
(2008: £162.9m)	(2008: £14.9m)	Dynamics of our business	2
<b>£153.1m</b>	<b>£10.1m</b>	Business review	4
		Chief Executive's review	4
		Group strategy update	7
		Financial review	14
		Business outlook for 2010	25
		Corporate Responsibility	27
<b>Adjusted Earnings Per Share</b>	<b>Dividends</b>	Board of Directors	30
(2008: 2.8p)	(2008: 1.1p)	Directors' report	32
<b>1.8p</b>	<b>0.9p</b>	Corporate Governance report	38
		Directors' remuneration report	45
		Independent auditors' report	54
		Financial statements	55
		FTSE Media Sector Index	89
		Notice of Annual General Meeting	90
		Investor information	95
		Directors and advisers	96
		Financial calendar and contacts	97
<small>EBITA represents operating profit before amortisation of intangible assets, as shown on page 17 along with other key figures in the statutory results.</small>			
<small>Adjusted earnings per share are based on statutory results and exclude amortisation of intangibles and related tax effects.</small>			

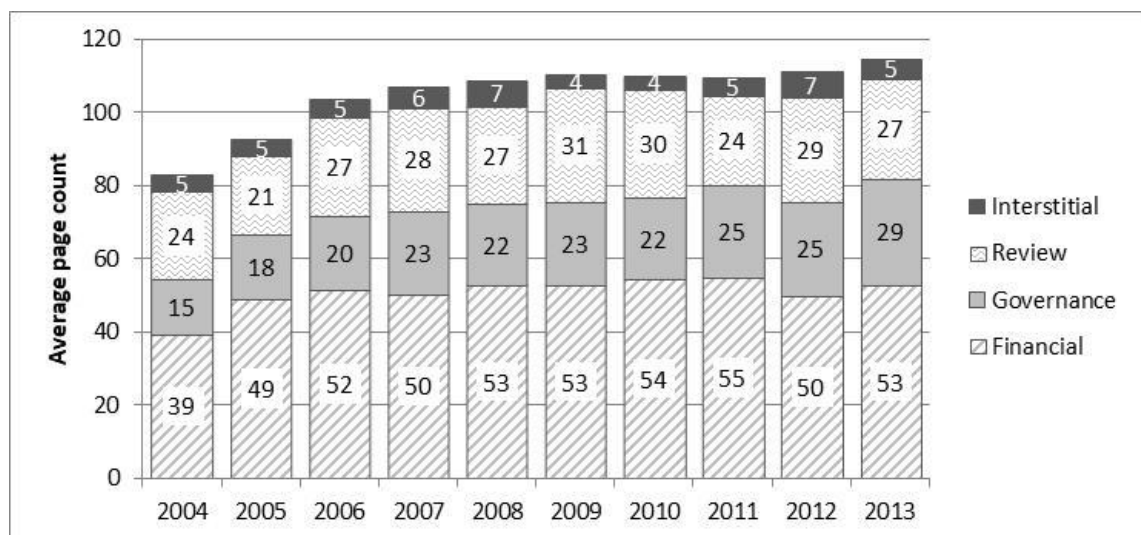
Source: Future (2009: inside cover)



In Figure 52, I display the average page count of the reports across the three publishers by year, broken down by meta section. This shows that the financial meta section makes up the largest proportion of the reports, constituting just under half of the average total page count of the reports throughout the period. The most significant change in the page count of meta sections over time is an increase in the average number of pages in the governance sections, almost doubling from 2004 to 2013. I argue that this reflects an increase in regulatory and governance requirements over the period, which I discuss further later in this chapter, when I cover the resources used to shape the annual reports.

For my analysis of identity work in the reports, I have focused on the review and governance meta sections, as the financial pages, dominated by tables of figures, contain little of relevance for identity construction. I have allocated each section of the report to a meta section with two exceptions: the front cover of the report and the occasional ‘intermediate’ or ‘connecting’ pages that cannot be determined to sit within a particular meta section. I have labelled the latter as ‘interstitial’ pages.

**Figure 52: Average page count of annual reports, by year**



Both the review and the governance meta sections of the reports are made up of a number of sections. Although there is considerable variation both between firms and longitudinally in terms of the names, content, length and placement within the reports of these sections, I have identified a core common structure



that is generally shared across the reports, and I have mapped individual report sections to this structure. In Table 30, I set out this mapping, including the alternative names by which reports refer to these sections.

**Table 30: Mapping of sections and meta sections in annual reports**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Meta section</b>	<b>Also referred to as</b>
Contents and highlights	Review	
Who we are and what we do/ Strategy	Review	At a glance, Products and services, Key business models, Description of business/strategy, Vision and values, Overview of company, Dynamics of our business, Business model
Chairman's report	Review	
CEO review/Operating review	Review	Business review, CEO's report, Chief Executive Officer's statement, Chief Executive review, Operating and financial review, Performance, Strategy and performance
Financial review	Review	Chief Financial Officer's report
Corporate responsibility	Governance	Corporate social responsibility, Sustainability, Responsible business
Report of the Directors	Governance	Directors' Report
Corporate governance report	Governance	Corporate governance statement, structure and corporate governance
Remuneration report	Governance	Directors' remuneration report, Directors' Report on remuneration
Audit report	Governance	
Financial sections	Financial	
Interstitial pages	N/A	

In addition to differences in the naming of sections between reports, their content also varies greatly, resulting in considerable differences in the length of sections both between firms, and longitudinally. In Appendix 4, for each of the three firms in my analysis, I present a table listing each section, noting the years where it was present in the report, the average number of pages and word count for the section, and its authorship.

## APPENDIX 4: REVIEW OF ANNUAL REPORT SECTIONS FOR SELECTED FIRMS, 2004-13

**Table 31: Summary of report sections, Future, 2004-13**

Section (standardised section names in brackets)	Meta section	Author(s) (implicit – if different – in brackets)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Average pages	Average word count
Contents/highlights	Review	Anon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.9	n/a
Future at a glance (Who we are...)	Review	Anon (CEO)	X	X	X					X	X		2.0	n/a
Chairman's statement	Review	Chairman	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.2	658
Chief Executive's review	Review	CEO	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	3.2	1939
Business model/what we do (Who we are...)	Review	Anon (CEO)	X			X	X	X	X			X	2.0	n/a
Operating and financial review	Review	2004: Anon (CEO) 2005: CEO/CFO	X	X									14.5	6664
Business review/risk (Operating review)	Review	Anon (CEO)										X	8.0	3914
Strategy	Review	Anon (CEO)			X	X	X	X	X		X		5.6	1656
Financial review	Review	CFO/GFD (CFO)			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10.6	4950
Board of Directors	Governance	Anon (Board)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.9	n/a
Directors' Report	Governance	Company Secretary and Board (Board)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	4.2	3725
Corporate governance report	Governance	Company Secretary and Board (Board)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	6.2	4473
Corporate responsibility (Corporate social responsibility report)	Governance	2004=CFO, 2005=CEO/CFO, 2006-10=CEO, 2011-12=GFD (CFO), 2013=not specified (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	3.0	2011
Directors' remuneration report	Governance	Chairman of Remuneration Committee	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8.6	5593

<b>Section (standardised section names in brackets)</b>	<b>Meta section</b>	<b>Author(s) (implicit – if different – in brackets)</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Average pages</b>	<b>Average word count</b>
Independent auditors' report	Governance	PricewaterhouseCoopers (External auditor)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.5	1080
Financial statements	Financial statements	Chairman/CFO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	6.7	n/a
Notes to financial statements	Financial statements	Anon (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	24.9	n/a
Accounting policies	Financial statements	Anon (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	3.6	3020
FTSE Media and Entertainment Sector (Other financial)	Financial statements	Anon (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				1.0	n/a
Notice of AGM (Other governance)	Financial statements	Company Secretary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	4.2	n/a
Investor information (Other financial)	Financial statements	Anon (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.0	n/a
Financial Calendar/Contacts (Other financial)	Financial statements	Anon (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.2	n/a
Directors and Advisors (Other governance)	Financial statements	Anon (Company Secretary)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			0.9	n/a
Our offices/ how others have rated us (Who we are...)	Other	Anon (CFO)	X										1.0	n/a
Interstitial pages	Other	Anon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			4.5	n/a

**Table 32: Summary of report sections, UBM, 2004-13**

Section (standardised section names in brackets)	Meta section	Author(s) (implicit – if different – in brackets)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Average pages	Average word count
Highlights/Summary (Contents/highlights)	Review	Anon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	3.0	n/a
Chairman's Review/Statement (Chairman's statement)	Review	Chairman	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.9	1019
Chief Executive Review	Review	CEO	X	X					X	X	X	X	6.0	2903
Operating and financial review	Review	CEO/CFO		X									10.0	5496
Operating review	Review	2004=COO, 2006-09=CEO, 2010-11=Anon	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			16.7	9047
Key performance indicators (Operating review)	Review	Anon (CEO)										X	1.0	n/a
What we do/Business model (Strategy)	Review	Anon (CEO)	X		X						X	X	11.5	2276
Strategy	Review	Anon (CEO)		X					X	X			5.3	2128
Financial review	Review	CFO	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	5.6	3002
Risks	Review	2006-7=Board, 2008-11=Anon (CFO), 2012-13=CEO			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	3.5	1831
Corporate social responsibility	Governance	2004=Board, 2005=CEO/CFO, 2006-8=CFO, 2009-13=CEO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		4.2	2627
Explanation of business measures (Accounting policy)	Governance	Anon (CFO)							X	X			1.0	n/a
Board of Directors	Governance	Anon (Board)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	2.1	n/a
Directors' remuneration Report	Governance	Chair of Remuneration Committee	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9.9	6345
Corporate governance	Governance	Board	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	4.9	3453

<b>Section (standardised section names in brackets)</b>	<b>Meta section</b>	<b>Author(s) (implicit – if different – in brackets)</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Average pages</b>	<b>Average word count</b>
statement (Corporate governance report) Report of the Directors (Directors' Report)	Governance	2004-5=Board, 2006-13=Company Secretary/Board (Board)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	2.7	2042
Financial accounts (Financial statements)	Financial	CFO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	6.0	n/a
Accounting policies	Financial	Anon (CFO)	X										3.0	1898
Notes to financial statements	Financial	Anon (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	58.0	n/a
Independent Auditors Report (incl. parent company)	Financial	Ernst & Young LLP (External auditor)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	2.1	1659
Other financial information (Other financial)	Financial	Anon (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	3.9	n/a
Interstitials	Other	Anon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	5.0	n/a

**Table 33: Summary of report sections, Centaur, 2004-13**

Section (standardised section names in brackets)	Meta section	Author(s) (implicit – if different – in brackets)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Average pages	Average word count
Who we are/Vision/Values (Who we are...)	Review	Anon (CEO)			X	X	X	X	X				1.6	534
Highlights/summary (Contents/highlights)	Review	Anon	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	2.3	n/a
Operating review	Review	Chairman/CEO, CEO, various senior management (CEO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				9.9	4255
Trends (Who we are...)	Review	Anon (CEO)				X	X						1.0	n/a
Strategy	Review	Anon (CEO)			X	X	X	X					1.6	857
Business models (Who we are...)	Review	Anon (CEO)		X	X	X	X						1.0	588
Products and services (Who we are...)	Review	Anon (CEO)	X	X	X								2.0	n/a
Chairman's Review (Chairman's statement)	Review	Chairman	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.3	815
Chief Executive Review	Review	CEO								X	X	X	7.3	2779
Financial review	Review	CFO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	4.8	2594
Board of Directors	Governance	Anon (Board)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.6	n/a
Senior Management Team (Other governance)	Governance	Anon (Company Secretary)	X	X	X	X							1.3	n/a
Corporate Social Responsibility	Governance	Anon (Board)				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.9	1011
Report of the Directors (Directors' Report)	Governance	Company Secretary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	3.0	1546
Corporate Governance Statement (Corporate governance report)	Governance	Directors (Board)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	4.4	3053
Directors' Report on remuneration (Directors' remuneration report)	Governance	Chairman of the Remuneration Committee	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	5.2	2883
Independent auditors'	Governance	PricewaterhouseCoop	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.5	834

<b>Section (standardised section names in brackets)</b>	<b>Meta section</b>	<b>Author(s) (implicit – if different – in brackets)</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Average pages</b>	<b>Average word count</b>
Report		ers (External auditor)												
Financial statements	Financial statements	Anon (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	6.0	n/a
Accounting policies	Financial statements	Anon (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	3.9	3807
Notes to financial statements	Financial statements	Anon (CFO)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	28.2	n/a
Other corporate information (Other governance)	Financial statements	Company Secretary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1.0	n/a
Interstitials	Interstitials	Anon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			6.2	n/a

## **APPENDIX 5: REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL TEXTS SHAPING UK CORPORATE ANNUAL REPORTS**

### **The Companies Act**

The UK government legislation relating to company reporting has tended to focus on principles, rather than setting out detailed requirements for firms, so relevant clauses tend to be both brief and open to interpretation. The 1985 Companies Act has the Directors' Report as its central concern. The Act requires the Report to set out a 'fair review' of the development of the business of the company and its subsidiaries during the financial year, and of their position at the end of it, including the amount to be paid as dividend, the names of the directors, and the company's principal activities. The Report also is required to detail directors' shareholdings and other interests, and company contributions to political and charitable causes. With regard to its employment practices, the company is required to report on the employment, training and advancement of disabled persons, the health, safety and welfare at work of its employees, and the involvement of employees in the company (UK Government, 1985).

The 2006 Companies Act, replacing the 1985 Act, introduced stakeholder involvement in the firm and the concept of corporate social responsibility into reporting. The Act also covers financial reporting, the directors' remuneration report, and the auditor's report. In addition to providing a fair review of the company's business, the business review is required to include a description of the principal risks and uncertainties that the company faces, and 'the main trends and factors likely to affect the future development, performance and position of the company's business.' In the area of corporate social responsibility, the review is required to present information about environmental matters and social and community issues (UK Government, 2006: 416-418).

The Companies Act 2006 (Strategic Report and Directors' Report) Regulations 2013, a supplement to the 2006 Act focusing on company reporting, sets out the requirements for a 'strategic report', intended to replace the business review in the annual report. This strategic report covers all of the content previously



contained within the business review, with some additional requirements. The key additions relate to the requirement of firms to report on their strategy and their business model (this latter removing the requirement to detail the firm's 'principal activities'), information on human rights issues, greenhouse gas emissions, and data on gender diversity (UK Government, 2013, Financial Reporting Council, 2014b).

### **The Financial Reporting Council Combined Code**

The interpretation, guidance, and enforcement of the legislation set out in the Companies Act in this period were the responsibility of the statutory regulator, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), publisher of the UK Corporate Governance Code. The Code sets out its basis on the principle of 'comply or explain', where companies are obliged to report that they have followed the requirements of the Code, or explain where they have not. As with the Companies Act, the Code is principles-based, so firms are given considerable flexibility in how they comply (Financial Reporting Council, 2014c). The 2003 version of the FRC Combined Code emphasises this role in setting out principles, rather than rules, allowing companies to have 'a free hand' in explaining their policies in the light of the principles, and notes that divergence is acceptable so long as boards report and explain them (Financial Reporting Council, 2003: 1).

The 2003 Code focuses on the governance and control of the firm. Statements to be included in the annual report should cover how the board operates and which types of decisions are taken by the board and which delegated to management. The report should identify the chairman, chief executive and other board members, and should note the independent non-executive directors. It should set out the number of meetings of the board and other committees, and should list the other significant commitments of the chairman. The report should describe the work of the nomination committee and the board should state how performance evaluation of board members, committees and individual directors has been conducted. The 2003 Code requires that directors should explain their responsibility for preparing the accounts, and that there should also be a

statement by the auditors of their reporting responsibilities. The company's directors are required to report that the business is a going concern, with supporting assumptions or qualifications as necessary. In relation to communication with shareholders, the board should state the steps they have taken to ensure that they develop an understanding of the views of major shareholders concerning the company. Finally, the company is obliged to provide a statement of how it has applied the principles set out in the Code in a manner that enables shareholders to evaluate how the principles have been applied (Financial Reporting Council, 2003: 3).

There were no substantive changes made to the 2006 or 2008 FRC Codes affecting the requirements for annual reporting (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010a: 137, Financial Reporting Council, 2007: 1). However, following the 2008 financial crisis a more thorough review of the Code was undertaken, resulting in what the FRC described as 'limited but significant changes to signal the importance of the general principles which should guide board behaviours' (Financial Reporting Council, 2010: 3). The two substantive innovations in the 2010 Code are firstly that chairmen are encouraged to report personally on how the principles relating to the role and effectiveness of the board have been applied, and secondly that the directors are required to include in the annual report an explanation of the basis on which the company generates or preserves value over the longer term (its business model), together with its strategy for delivering the objectives of the company (Financial Reporting Council, 2010). This latter requirement was subsequently incorporated into the 2013 Strategic Report and Directors' Report supplement to the 2006 Companies Act, as I have detailed above.

The 2012 FRC Code contains two important additions. The first requires that the board *explicitly* confirms that the report 'taken as a whole is fair, balanced and understandable and provides the information necessary for shareholders to assess the company's performance, business model and strategy,' and to establish and report on the arrangements that will enable it to make this assessment. Secondly, boards are required to disclose their policy, and measurable objectives, on boardroom diversity, including gender, together with

a consideration of 'the balance of skills, experience, independence and knowledge of the company on the board...how the board works together as a unit, and other factors relevant to its effectiveness as part of the board evaluation' (Financial Reporting Council, 2012: 2-3).

### **Other institutional texts**

Outside of the Companies Act and the FRC Code, firms in this period also fell under the auspices of a variety of other institutional texts in their reporting, with these both mandatory and voluntary. The operating and financial review sections of the reports were covered by the Accounting Standards Board's (ASB) Reporting Statement: Operating and Financial Review until 2012, when this was subsumed into the FRC Code. The financial accounts fell under the remit of the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) or UK GaaP standards (Deloitte, 2011: 3). Within their reports, the firms in my analysis also note their adherence to a variety of environmental and social standards and accreditations. For example, UBM in its 2010 report notes that it has achieved the Carbon Trust Standard in the UK and, in 2013's report, that their London office has been certified to the ISO14001 Environmental Management System. In its 2008 report, Future highlights its support for the standards set out in the United Nations Global Compact on the Responsibilities of Business.

## **APPENDIX 6: REVIEW OF ANNUAL REPORT SUB GENRES**

### **The report front cover**

Its location makes the front cover an important feature of the annual report, where it can operate as a key element of the identity work of the report. The front covers of the reports in my analysis generally share some common features. They invariably display the name of the firm, and, in most cases, a logo. They feature the phrase 'annual report' or 'annual report and accounts'. They also contain a reference to the year of the report. The 2013 Centaur front cover shown in Figure 53 demonstrates a minimal approach to the design of a front cover. The 2007 UBM report shown alongside it displays two further elements generally found in the report front covers in my analysis: a caption, and some kind of visual image. The captions in the reports are usually short, presenting a general message or theme for the report.

Figure 53: Annual report front covers – Centaur, 2013 and UBM, 2007



Sources: Centaur, 2013; UBM, 2007

The visual imagery presented on the report front covers varies considerably between reports, as I show in Appendix 7. The images sometimes use illustrations or photographs, or a combination of both elements. Although a visual designer will have been responsible for producing the front cover, its prominent position at the front of the report indicates that the senior management of the firm would be responsible for developing, or at the very least approving, its content and identity message. The front cover's position at the front of the report means that all potential readers of the report are likely to start there first, so its messaging is therefore likely to be directed at all potential audiences of the report.

### **Content and highlights**

Immediately following the front cover of the annual reports is a brief section of one or two pages that typically features a table of contents for the report, some financial highlights, often taking the form of charts or tables, and, occasionally, general statements about the firm's mission or values. The content, format and length of this section varies considerably both between firms and longitudinally, although it generally contains a high proportion of visual content in the form of charts and diagrams. As with the front cover, the authorship of this section is generally anonymous. However, the general focus on visual design indicates that the report's designers are responsible for its production, and its position at the start of the report implies the involvement of senior management in developing its key messages. As with the front cover, its position at the front of the report indicates that it is likely to be targeted at all of the potential audiences of the report. The content of this section often simply repeats and summarises content found elsewhere in the report, including figures from the financial reports, vision statements and references to the firm's strategy.

Figure 54: Content and highlights section, UBM, 2012



Source: UBM (2012: inside front cover, 1)

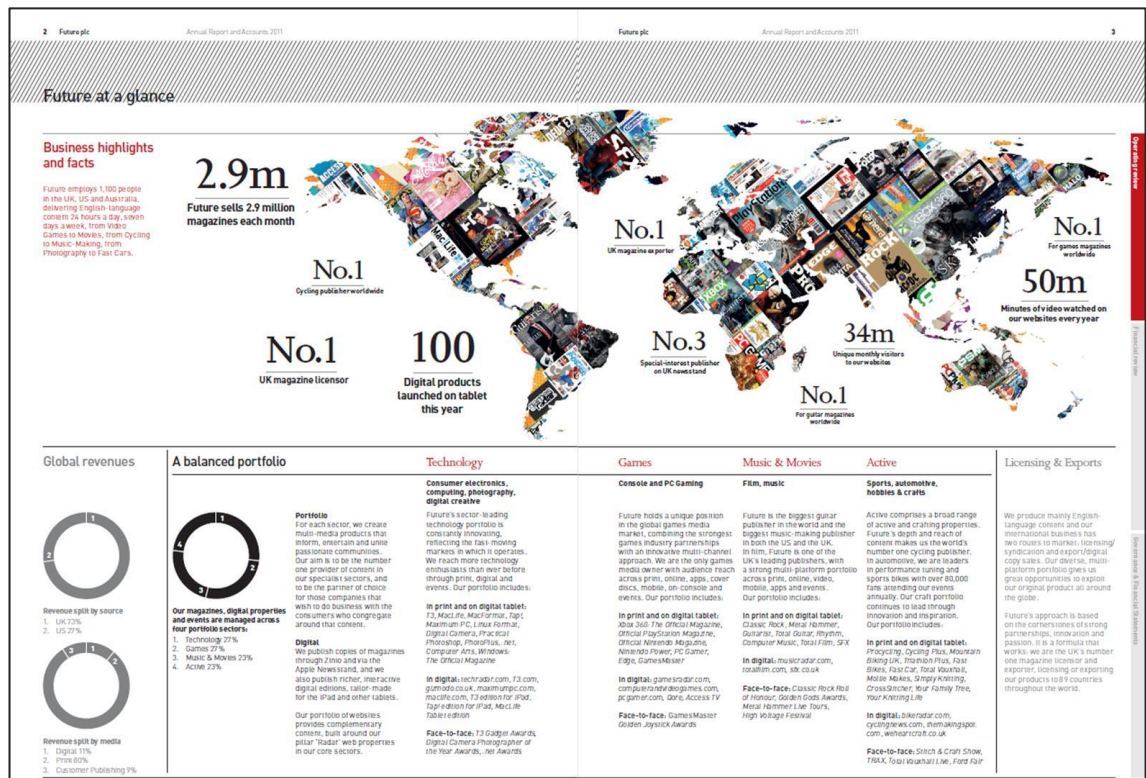
## 'Who we are and what we do', and strategy sections

The content within the review meta section of the annual reports is primarily focused on the performance of the firm over the previous year. However, firms also present content relating to more enduring elements, such as their structure, mission and values, together with their long-term strategy. In some cases, this content can be found within the operating and financial review sections, but is sometimes presented separately. I have categorised these sections under the headings 'Who we are and what we do', and 'Strategy'. As I have noted in Table 30, on page 380, in the reports this content is presented under various headings, such as 'At a glance', 'Products and services', 'Key business models', 'Description of business/strategy', 'Vision and values', 'Overview of company', 'Dynamics of our business', 'Strategy' or 'Business model'. These sections are generally positioned immediately prior to or immediately following the CEO review or operating review.

As with the front cover and contents and highlights sections, these sections tend to be anonymous. However, given the central importance of their content to the firm, it is likely that the responsibility for these sections ultimately lies with the CEO. As with the contents and highlights sections, these sections often contain a high proportion of visual elements, indicating the close involvement of the report's designers in their production. Their generally prominent position within the reports, suggests that these sections are intended for a general audience. The sections vary considerably in both length and content.

In Figures 55 and 56, I present two examples of these sections. The first, from the 2011 Future report, presents key metrics for Future as a global publisher, and details the scope of its varied portfolio of interests. The second, from Centaur's 2007 report, sets out Centaur's three key areas of business: magazines, online products, and events, and describes the key features of each of the models, together with Centaur's overall approach and strategy in these areas.

Figure 55: 'Future at a glance', Future, 2011



Source: Future (2011: 2-3)



Figure 56: 'Centaur's Key Media Models', Centaur, 2007


## Centaur's Key Media Models

### Magazines

Magazines have traditionally been at the core of Centaur's strategy. Their ability to engage with their readers can allow them to become an integral part of the community they serve. This is particularly true of weekly magazines, whose frequency reinforces their importance to their market. The key editorial functions of magazines are as follows:

- (a) They provide a forum for news and analysis about the market, where topicality and depth of understanding are essential;
- (b) They serve to diminish the sense of isolation experienced by people working within one part of a community by informing them of the experiences and achievements of contemporaries working in a parallel area;
- (c) They monitor the pulse of the sector and provide key data and analysis on a regular basis;
- (d) They provide guidance to readers to assist them in improving their performance in their area of special interest.

The emergence of the internet as an effective information and marketing medium is highly complementary to the way that readers use magazines. We believe that magazines remain a uniquely effective medium with which to develop an in-depth relationship with their readers and to establish effective and valuable information brands, which can be exploited through multiple channels.




### Online products

The internet offers many new ways to serve our core markets and also dramatically extends our reach and therefore the size and potential of our markets. We expect online products to become an increasingly important medium over the next few years.

Editorially, the magazine provides an ideal medium for news analysis and special emphasis features, whilst the internet is better suited to breaking news highlights, multimedia content, user-generated content, data analysis and database searching. From an advertiser's perspective, the business magazine is an ideal medium for brand building and achieving in-depth engagement with "information consumers", whilst the internet is more suited to advertising designed for lead-generation and providing access to "information searchers".

In terms of circulation, the magazine typically addresses the top end of a community, whilst the internet, with its very low marginal cost of distribution, permits a much broader reach.

Centaur has successfully launched internet services to support each of its main magazine brands. Revenues and profits from these services have grown rapidly in the last few years and they have become an integral part of the service we provide to our communities.



### Events


As a natural extension of our core mission to create a market identity for a community and diminish the sense of isolation between its members, the development of meetings-based events is a core part of Centaur's strategy. These take a number of forms, the most important of which are Exhibitions, Conferences, Summits and Awards.

The strategy for exhibitions is primarily to build small to medium-sized shows that seek to serve clearly defined vertical markets. These vertical markets may be subsets of a broader market served by the relevant weekly or monthly periodical. Revenues are derived principally from stand sales.

Centaur's conferences model is essentially based on one or two day programmes addressing topics of high current interest. Revenues are principally from delegates, so great emphasis is placed on the quality of programme research and choice of speakers.

Summits typically comprise workshop and meetings-based events, bringing together relatively small numbers of senior members of particular vertical markets. They have a strong information base, but revenues are normally derived from sponsorship.

Centaur also stages the leading annual awards ceremony in each of its major communities. These events reinforce the strength of the related information brands and provide invaluable opportunities to communicate with the market.



Source: Centaur (2007: 9)

## **The chairman's statement**

The chairman's statement is a ubiquitous feature of the annual reports in my analysis. Although generally short in length, at just one or two pages and a few hundred words of text, the statement always features prominently towards the front of the report, emphasising the importance of the chairman as the figurehead for the firm. Scholars have recognised the chairman's statement as a distinctive sub-genre in its own right (Clatworthy and Jones, 2006, Shaw and Pecorari, 2013, Smith and Taffler, 2000). Although situated within the review meta section of the report, and concerned with providing an overview of the firm's performance, the chairman's role at the head of the board of directors also positions the statement as relevant to the governance elements of the report.

In Figures 57 and 58, I present two examples of chairman's statements from the annual reports in my analysis. Statements exhibit a number of common features. Firstly, they generally appear very near to the front of the report, usually immediately following the contents and highlights section. They always appear prior to the CEO's statement and the operating review. Consequently, the chairman's will be the first nonymous voice encountered in the report. The chart in Figure 59 shows that the majority of statements range between 600 and 1200 words in length. They usually fit onto one page of the report, as in Figure 57, although the design of the report means that they sometimes span two pages, as in Figure 58.

The statements generally take the form of a letter addressed to shareholders, adopting some of the forms of the letter genre, such as an address to the recipient ('Dear shareholder'), and a facsimile of the chairman's signature. Statements are also invariably accompanied by a, generally smiling, photograph of the chairman. In my analysis, all except one of the chairmen are male and white. Key financial indicators often surround the text of the statements, as shown in Figures 57 and 58. A pull-out quote often emphasises key messages within the statements.

Figure 57: Chairman's statement, Future, 2006

Chairman's statement
1



**Roger Parry**  
CHAIRMAN, FUTURE PLC  
29 NOVEMBER 2006

2006 has been a year of significant change in the wider media sector. Many companies have experienced reduced advertising demand. Many are also planning how best to re-orient their business models to reflect the continuing growth of the internet and its impact on advertisers and consumer behaviour.

For Future, these fundamental market changes have coincided with a difficult trading period, driven by the extended transition between second and third generation games consoles. This has led to the disappointing financial results reported for the year.



**£224.9m**  
Revenue

**£13.7m**  
EBITAE profit

**£(49.0)m**  
Loss before tax

**2.5p**  
Adjusted earnings per share

**1.0p**  
Dividends relating to year

**Future's financial performance**

Group revenue was £224.9m (2005: £212.3m) and EBITAE profit was £13.7m (2005: £20.4m). This disappointing financial performance was caused predominantly by lower sales and advertising revenue from magazines in the games sector. Anticipated compensatory profits from 2005 acquired magazines – notably ex-Highbury – have significantly underperformed against our expectations.

Exceptional items totalling £9.2m (2005: £5.1m) arose during the year, the majority of which related to our acquisition programme. The largest elements relate to restructuring costs and property provisions following relocation.

The Group has taken an impairment charge of £45.0m (2005: Nil) against the carrying value of the intangible assets relating to the Group's UK, US and Italian subsidiaries to reflect more accurately the trading levels of these businesses. This is a non-cash charge.

After these one-off charges, amortisation of £5.9m (2005: £1.8m) and net financing costs of £2.6m (2005: £1.0m) the Group recorded a pre-tax loss of £49.0m (2005: pre-tax profit of £12.5m). Adjusted earnings per share were 2.5p (2005: 4.4p).

**New leadership and new strategic direction**

Stevie Spring was appointed Chief Executive in July 2006. Under her leadership, Future has implemented a number of initiatives designed to tackle the immediate operational issues facing the business, as well as the mid-term strategic challenges. These actions, which are set out in the accompanying pages, have created significant cost savings which are being fully re-invested in strengthening the business.

The Board has agreed six key areas of focus for the business for 2007 and beyond, as we evolve our business models to reflect changing consumer behaviour, and to ensure a more focused and responsive Group. These priorities encapsulate how we are going to deliver on our objective to improve our financial performance and rebuild shareholder confidence in the business.

**Dividend**

Last year the interim dividend was 0.5p and the final 1.3p per share. The level of dividends this year flows from the Company's dividend policy, which is unchanged and which states that dividends should be covered at least twice by adjusted earnings per share.

Having paid an interim dividend of 0.5p, the Board now recommends a final dividend of 0.5p per share, bringing this year's total to 1.0p per share. This reduced level of dividend will assist the financing of investment priorities in 2007.

**Current trading and outlook**

Although the new financial year has begun satisfactorily, we continue to take a cautious view of our markets and anticipate that trading conditions will remain challenging throughout 2007.

2007 will be a year of transition as the remedial and refocusing actions we have taken start to take effect. We aim to achieve modest growth in like-for-like revenues in the financial year to 30 September 2007, which we expect to have a second-half bias. Full-year margins will be similar to those for 2006, as we re-invest the cost savings achieved in reshaping and strengthening the Group.

**The Future team**

On behalf of the Board I would like to thank everyone at Future for their enthusiasm and commitment. This has been particularly important in such a period of change and challenge.

I would also like to thank our shareholders for their continued patience. We are determined to improve our financial performance and rebuild shareholder confidence in the business. I am confident that the steps we are taking will add value to the business and provide the platform for a return to profitable growth in the medium term.

Source: Future (2006: 1)

Figure 58: Chairman's statement, UBM, 2013

Strategic Report  
**Chairman's statement**

Dame Helen Alexander

Chairman





**Underlying revenue growth\*\***

3.7%

**Fully diluted Adjusted EPS\***

53.6p

1 Continuing only.

**Dear Shareholder,**

UBM is now more clearly focused as an events-led B2B marketing and communications service provider, following the sale of the data services businesses in April 2013 and the restructuring of our Marketing Services operations.

In 2013 I visited more of our operations and tradeshows in North America, China, Continental Europe, India and South America, and encountered very capable, energetic and experienced teams in all those centres. Many of these people have taken part in UBM's leadership development programmes, and our staff survey results confirm that they are highly engaged in the business, as are the people who report to them. The calibre of these individuals shows that we are successfully attracting and developing talent. As an advocate of gender diversity in business, I am also pleased that in 2013 the proportion of women in management positions continued to increase. The initiatives related to corporate culture and our people are important for our long-term strategy.

Our Board evaluation shows a number of areas where the Board has improved its performance. We keep up-to-date with all areas of the business through regular visits and presentations from business managers. The Board takes the management of our portfolio and allocation of resources very seriously, and particularly those decisions about which geographies and sectors to invest in, and which media to focus on. For example, when the Board reviewed our events business in China, we looked at the market and our position in

it, and used an innovative scenario planning process in assessing the associated risks.

We are focused on creating long-term value for shareholders. As a Board we seek shareholder views and, in order to enhance our understanding of them, we commissioned an independent investor survey during the latter part of the year. New regulations in the financial marketplace mirror our own aims to reduce complexity, to clarify communication, to be transparent and to report in a balanced way. The Board has reviewed the process by which we produce our Annual Report and Accounts and is satisfied that, taken as a whole, they provide a fair, balanced and understandable assessment of the Group's position as at 31 December 2013.

Following analysis with our advisers and engagement with shareholders, we are recommending a new remuneration framework which is clearer, simpler and more closely aligned with performance. The Directors' Remuneration Report, on page 44, provides more detail on this.

The Nominations Committee has also been busy during 2013, particularly since David Levin informed the Board in September of his decision to step down as CEO. With his appointment as President and Chief Executive Officer of McGraw-Hill Education in New York, David's departure from UBM will be effective as of 1 March 2014. I would like to take this opportunity to thank David for his commitment to UBM and wish him every success in the future. He has led the remarkable transformation of the Company into a focused, international events-led marketing

communications business, during a time of huge change in the media industry. He has successfully laid the foundations for UBM's next phase of development.

I am very pleased to confirm that the Board has appointed Tim Cobbold as our new CEO with effect from 6 May. Tim joins us from security printers De La Rue where he has served as CEO since 2011, and I am looking forward very much to working with him. I will become Executive Chairman for the few weeks between David's departure and Tim's arrival.

We have successfully recruited John McConnell as a new Non-Executive Director who will assume the role of Audit Committee Chairman on 1 March 2014, taking over from Jonathan Newcomb, who will remain on the Board.

Karen Thomson will leave the Board on 31 March 2014, having served as an independent Non-Executive Director since 2006. I thank her warmly for her support and for her great contribution to the Board, and also during the process of appointment of a new CEO.

UBM is a high-quality international business and we are making progress in our vision of becoming the leading events-led B2B marketing and communications provider. In 2013 we delivered 3.7% underlying revenue growth while continuing fully diluted adjusted EPS increased by 12.8% to 53.6p. I'm excited to be part of UBM and look forward to further progress in 2014.



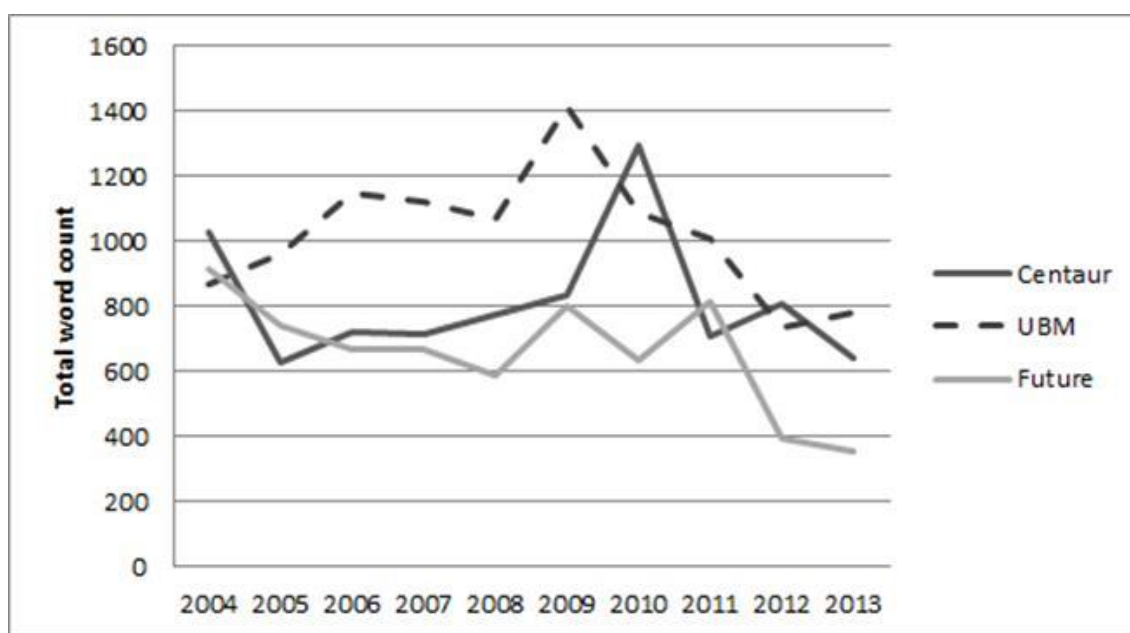
**Dame Helen Alexander**  
Chairman

"Our new remuneration framework is clearer, simpler and more closely aligned"

Source: UBM (2013: 2-3)



**Figure 59: Word count for chairman's statements in annual reports, 2004-13**



The presence of the photograph and signature of the chairman accompanying the statements, together with the familiar tone of their presentation, clearly associates the authorship of the statements with the person of the chairman, although this does not necessarily indicate that the chairmen actually wrote the text. With their direct reference to shareholders, the chairman's statements are the only section of the reports explicitly directed at an audience. I have noted that, in terms of content, the statements cover both the performance and the governance of the firm. In addition to providing a summary of the firm's performance, the chairman may also provide a broader context to the results, for example, '2006 has been a year of significant change in the wider media sector. Many companies have experienced reduced advertising demand. Many are also planning how best to re-orient their business models to reflect the continuing growth of the internet and its impact on advertisers and consumer behaviour' (Future, 2006, 1).

Chairmen's statements cover various aspects of corporate governance, including remuneration, for example, 'Following analysis with our advisers and engagement with shareholders, we are recommending a new remuneration framework which is clearer, simpler and more closely aligned with performance'

(UBM, 2013, 2). Statements also note changes in the structure of the board, and will often convey some words of thanks towards the firm's employees, as, for example, 'On behalf of the Board I would like to thank everyone at Future for their enthusiasm and commitment. This has been particularly important in such a period of change and challenge' (Future, 2006, 1).

The statements call upon a range of internal and external resources, from the firm's financial statements and strategy, discussions in board meetings, external events, and discourses of the market. The chairmen, reflecting their position at the head of the board of directors, are also subject personally to changing obligations resulting from the institutional pressures of legislation and regulation, for example, in the 2010 FRC Code where chairmen are encouraged to report personally on how the principles relating to the role and effectiveness of the board have been applied.

### **The CEO review/operating review**

The CEO review, or operating review, with its focus on the detailed performance of the firm, is at the heart of the annual report as a review of, and explanation for, the performance of the firm over the previous twelve months. In the reports in my analysis, there is considerable variance in the format, length and content of this section, both between firms and longitudinally within the same firm. There is also often considerable overlap between this and other sections, for example the financial review or strategy sections. The review, in addition to its focus on the performance of the firm, may also contain content covering strategy, risk, and even corporate responsibility.


The CEO review focuses primarily on a detailed account of the annual performance of the firm, relating this to the firm's strategy and to external market conditions, and presenting an assessment of the firm's longer-term prospects. Generally, in line with the rest of the report, it emphasises positive messages. The section often provides an overview of the market sectors in which the firm operates. Although the CEO review contains a considerable amount of text, often over ten times more than the chairman's statement, it also

generally contains a range of visual elements, such as charts, tables, and photographs.

In terms of authorship, this section is associated, either explicitly or implicitly, with the firm's CEO, although in some reports the CEO is attributed as author only for the first couple of pages of the section, with the remainder presented anonymously. Where reports explicitly present the CEO as the author of this section, as in UBM's 2009 report, shown in Figure 60, a photograph, and sometimes a signature, generally feature on the first page of the section. The scope of the content of these substantial sections of the reports indicates that a number of authors are at least involved in initial drafting, with these likely to be divisional managers. The review sections occasionally feature such managers explicitly, displaying photographs and direct quotes.

**Figure 60: Operating and Financial Review, UBM, 2009**

## Operating and Financial Review Strategy and Performance



*David Levin*  
David Levin  
Chief Executive Officer

### 2009 Results

In 2009 UBM continued to make good operational and strategic progress. Revenues from continuing operations declined by 4.4% to £847.6m (2008: £887.0m) and adjusted operating profit<sup>4</sup> from operations decreased by 1.3% to £171.2m (2008: £173.5m). Adjusted profit before tax<sup>5</sup> was £165.1m (2008: £171.5m). In 2009 operating margins were 20.2% (2008: 19.6%). Adjusted diluted earnings per share<sup>6</sup> fell by 2.9% to 54.2p from 55.8p and adjusted earnings per share by 3.3% to 55.1p from 57.0p. We ended the year with £226.4m of net debt (2008: £260.4m). At the end of 2009, the ratio of net debt to earnings before interest, taxation, depreciation and amortisation was 1.2 times (2008: 1.4 times). The Board has declared a second interim dividend of 18.2p, taking the total dividend for 2009 to 24.2p, an increase of 1.7% from 23.8p in 2008.

### Marketplace introduction

UBM provides a wide range of events, distribution, information and other media products and services which bring buyers and sellers together and which support the interactions of commercial and professional communities. UBM has operations in more than 40 countries, serving more than 70 specific industry markets. The broad marketplace which UBM operates in is fragmented, reflecting the number and variety of industries and geographies being served in the marketplace, as well as the diversity of products and services offered. UBM's products and services range from tradeshows and conferences (Events) to enterprise workflow solutions and information suppliers, directories, databases (Data, Services and Online) to direct marketing and media platforms supported by lead generation through to traditional display and classified advertising (Print), as well as products and services that support professional communicators and marketers (Targeting, Distribution and Monitoring). Because of the diversity of products and services, the range of business models operating in the marketplace is similarly broad. UBM operates in many specialist markets, serving distinct communities of professionals in each market. UBM's most important markets (by revenue) are technology, healthcare, trade and transportation, lifestyle and pharmaceutical ingredients.

Source: UBM (2009: 4)

### The financial review

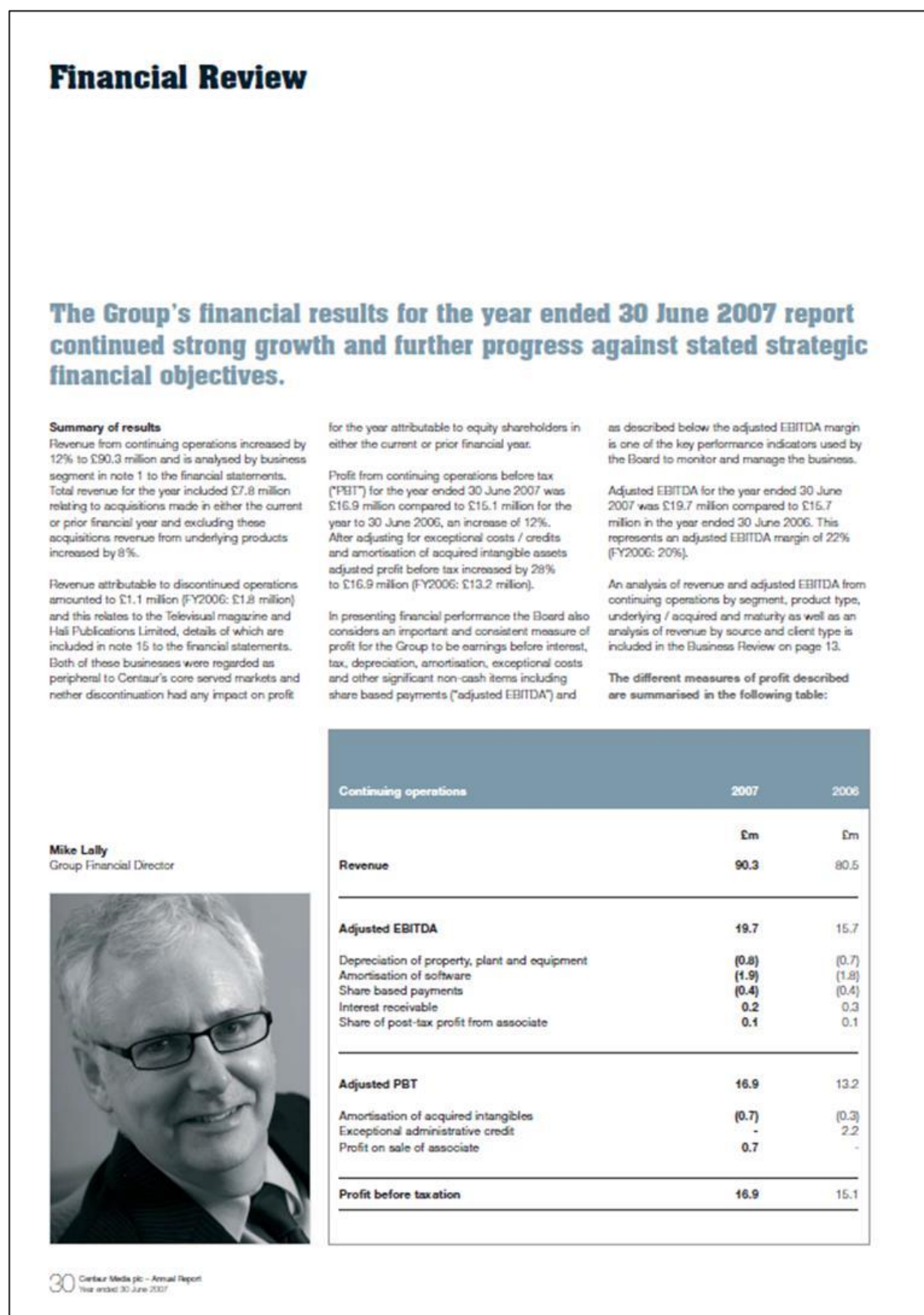
The financial review is a distinct section in all but three of the annual reports in my analysis. In those exceptions, the content of the financial review is merged with the operating review. Associated with the authorship of the CFO, the financial review presents a narrative overview and interpretation of the firm's detailed financial accounts, often including a review of risks to the business. The content and length of this section varies considerably, both between



publishers and longitudinally, with some elements, such as the risk review, alternatively in this section or in the CEO review/operating review.

In the reports in my analysis, the financial review sections generally immediately follow the CEO or operating review. They are generally explicitly associated with the CFO as author, often also featuring a photograph and sometimes a facsimile signature of the CFO, as I show in Figure 61, implying the importance of the CFO as one of the principal officers of the firm. In terms of their content and format, these sections present a largely narrative account of the financial results of the firm, accompanied by numerous tables of figures and charts. In some cases, generally for the Centaur and UBM reports, this section is relatively brief and focused on financial performance. However, in the Future reports between 2006 and 2012 the financial review is the most substantial section of the report in terms of length, containing a range of content not found in the equivalent sections elsewhere, such as a review of market conditions and a summary of the history of the firm.

Figure 61: Financial review, Centaur, 2007



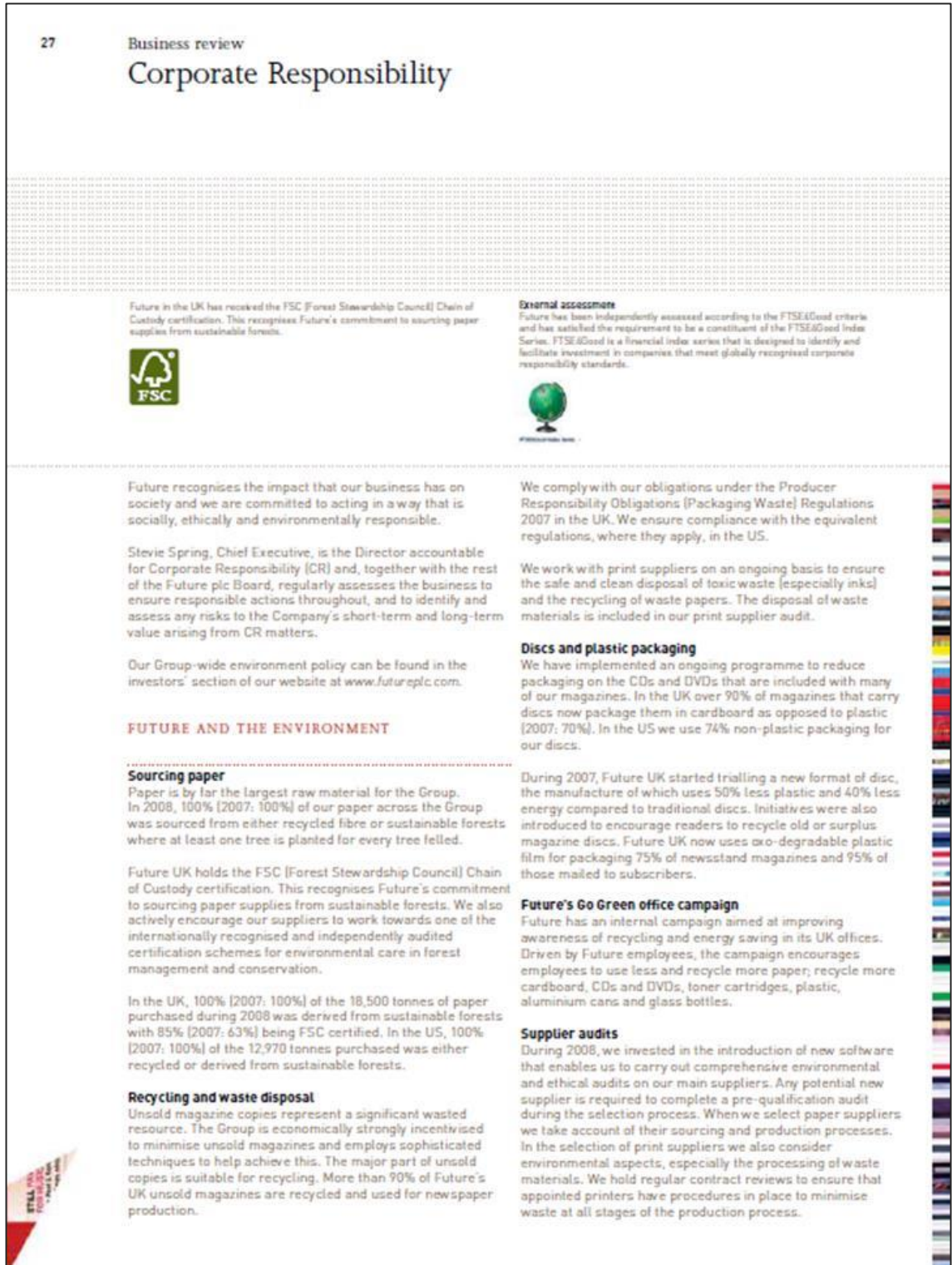
Source: Centaur (2007: 30)

## **The corporate responsibility report**

The corporate responsibility report, alternatively titled 'corporate social responsibility', 'sustainability', or 'responsible business', is a significant section within the annual reports in my analysis. However, its status within the reports is somewhat ambiguous, where it is sometimes positioned in the narrative meta section and sometimes within the governance meta section. Institutional requirements frame much of the content presented in this section, but firms have considerable latitude in focusing on their own particular concerns. The section is usually positioned at the end of the review meta section or at the start of the governance meta section. Its length varies, both between firms and longitudinally, from less than 500 words to over 4000.

A variety of authors are associated with the corporate responsibility report. In some cases, the CEO is identified as the author, as in Future's 2008 report, shown in Figure 62, whereas in others authorship is attributed to the CFO or to the board of directors. Unlike other sections of the report, where the content appears to be directed primarily at shareholders, this section appears to address a wider audience, including employees, potential employees, and societal stakeholders. In terms of content, the section encompasses the broad themes of people, environment and community. The content around people focuses on the firms' employment and recruitment policies, including diversity, equal opportunities, rewards, training, and communication between the firm and its employees. Content on the environment covers firms' environmental impact and their efforts to mitigate this impact, as well as supplier relations. Finally, the theme of community covers a number of areas, ranging from the firms' charitable activities through to corporate ethics.

Figure 62: Corporate responsibility report, Future, 2008



Source: Future (2008: 27)

In some cases, for example in the Centaur reports, the focus in this section appears to be largely on satisfying the minimum requirements of legislation and

regulation. In other cases, however, for example in the UBM reports from 2005 onwards, this section of the report positions social responsibility as an integral part of the firm's identity. To a greater extent than other areas of the reports, the corporate responsibility section of the reports leverages a variety of external agencies in order to confer legitimacy upon the firms' activities. These include environmental and social accreditation schemes, with references often accompanied by logos representing those external bodies as shown, for example, in Figure 62, with logos of the Forestry Stewardship Council and FTSE4Good.

### **The report of the directors**

The report of the directors, or directors' report, is an important and ubiquitous section within the annual report, central to the governance reporting of the firm. It is a mandatory section within the report, with its requirements set out explicitly in the 1985 and 2006 Companies Acts, and further elaborated in the FRC Codes. As with other sections of the report, however, although institutional texts define the requirements for the section, firms still have a considerable degree of latitude in the presentation of its content.



**Figure 63: Directors' report, Future, 2010**

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## Directors' report

For the year ended 30 September 2010

The information presented in this Directors' report relates to Future plc and its subsidiaries. The Chairman's statement, Chief Executive's review, Financial review and Corporate Responsibility statement are each incorporated by reference into, and form part of, this Directors' report.

**Principal activity**  
The Group's principal activity is the publishing of special-interest consumer magazines and websites, notably in the areas of games, music & movies, technology and active sectors.

The Company has subsidiaries operating in the UK, the US and Australia.

**Business review**  
The purpose of the Annual Report is to provide information to the shareholders of the Company.

Reviews of the Group's activities during the year, the position at the year-end and developments since then are set out in the Chairman's statement, Chief Executive's review, the Corporate Governance report and the Financial review.

The Financial review explains financial performance, key performance indicators, the position at the year-end, any post balance sheet events, any likely future developments and a description of the principal risks and uncertainties facing the Group and how these are managed.

The Annual Report contains certain forward-looking statements with respect to the operations, performance and financial condition of the Group. By their nature, these statements involve uncertainty since future events and circumstances can cause results to differ from those anticipated. The forward-looking statements reflect knowledge and information available at the date of preparation of this Annual Report and the Company undertakes no obligation to update those forward-looking statements.

**Result of 2010 Annual General Meeting**  
All resolutions put to the Annual General Meeting held on 18 March 2010 were passed unanimously on a show of hands. Shareholders holding more than 81% of all issued shares submitted proxy votes and of these, more than 96% were cast in favour of all resolutions other than the resolution to adopt the Directors' remuneration report which attracted 64% of votes in favour. The AGM authorised the Company to pay a final dividend of 0.5p per Ordinary share on 1 April 2010 to those shareholders on the register on 12 March 2010, bringing total dividends relating to 2009 to 0.9p per Ordinary share.

**Reported financial results**  
The audited financial statements for the year ended 30 September 2010 are set out on pages 51 to 82. Details of the Group's results are set out in the consolidated income statement on page 52 and in the notes to the financial statements on pages 61 to 82.

**Dividends**  
The Board's policy on dividends and its recommendation for a final dividend are set out in the Chairman's statement and on page 17 of the Financial review. The Company's Employee Benefit Trust waives its entitlement to any dividends.

**Share capital (all Ordinary shares)**  
The Company has a single class of share capital which is divided into Ordinary shares of one penny each. The rights and obligations attaching to the Company's Ordinary shares and provisions governing the appointment and replacement of, as well as the powers of, the Directors, are set out in the Company's articles of association, copies of which can be obtained from Companies House in the UK or by writing to the Company Secretary. Save for restrictions that may from time to time be set out in the Company's articles of association or imposed by laws and regulations (including the Listing Rules of the Financial Services Authority), there are no restrictions on the voting rights attaching to the Ordinary shares or on the transfer of the Ordinary shares. The articles of association may be amended only by a special resolution of the Company's shareholders.

Details of all movements in share capital are given in note 23 on page 77. As at 30 September 2010, the number of shares in issue was 328.0 million. This represents a small increase of 0.24% compared with the number of shares in issue as at 30 September 2009. All of the new shares were issued in satisfaction of employee share option exercises or share awards vesting during the year.

The Company was granted authority, at the Annual General Meeting held on 18 March 2010, to purchase up to 32,719,000 of its own shares, representing just under 10% of the Company's issued share capital as at 7 December 2009, the date the notice was prepared. The Company has never purchased any of its shares and the authority will expire following the end of the Company's Annual General Meeting to be held on 9 February 2011, at which a resolution to renew such authority is proposed.

**Significant shareholdings**  
At 9 December 2010, the Company had been notified of the following significant interests in its Ordinary shares:

Shareholder	Number of shares	Percentage of issued share capital
Aberforth Partners LLP	59,241,848	18.06%
Schroders Plc	56,067,597	17.10%
Fidelity International Limited	39,677,762	12.10%
Investec Asset Management Ltd	28,710,000	8.75%
Franklin Templeton Investments Corp	16,663,407	5.08%
BT Pension Scheme Trustees Limited	13,171,683	4.02%
Artemis Investment Management Ltd	10,627,757	3.24%
	224,160,054	68.35%
Directors' holdings (see opposite)	3,344,780	1.02%
<b>Total of significant holdings</b>	<b>227,504,834</b>	<b>69.37%</b>
<b>Total number of shares in issue</b>	<b>327,979,803</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Directors**  
Biographical details of the Directors holding office as at 30 September 2010 are set out on pages 30 and 31.

Directors' shareholdings in the Company's share capital are set out opposite. No Director has any interest in any other share capital of the Company or any Group Company, nor does any Director have a material interest in any contract of significance to the Group.

Source: *Future (2010: 32)*

The report of the directors is usually positioned at the start of the governance meta section of the report, immediately following photographs of the board members. It is generally between about 1000 and 5000 words in length. For all three of the firms in my analysis, this section of the report approximately doubles in length over the period, reflecting an increase in the information required of firms by the Companies Act and the FRC Code. As with other

sections within the governance meta section, the report contains few visual elements except for tables of figures. The company secretary, acting on behalf of the board, is generally attributed as the author of this section, with their name sometimes accompanied by a photograph and/or signature, as shown in Figure 64.

**Figure 64: Signature on directors' report, Future, 2010**



*Source: Future (2010: 35)*

In terms of its content, the directors' report was mandated by the Companies Act to set out the principal activities of the firm, a statement of director's responsibilities and their interests and shareholdings, details of dividends and dividend policy, and information on the firm's AGM. The report sometimes includes elements that might otherwise feature in the corporate responsibility or financial review sections, such as employment policies, CSR policies and metrics, and key risks to the firm.

### **The corporate governance report**

The corporate governance report is another ubiquitous section of the annual reports. Whereas the legislative requirements of the Companies Act primarily dictate the content of the report of the directors, the FRC Code shapes the requirements for this section of the annual report. As with the report of the

directors, however, institutional requirements allow firms considerable latitude in how they present the required information. The corporate governance report generally follows immediately after the report of the directors in the governance meta section of the reports. In the case of Future, where I have noted that the report of the directors includes details of the firm's AGM, the corporate governance report is virtually the same length as the report of the directors, whereas for the other two firms it is generally around twice the length of that report. Although the corporate governance report remains around the same length in Future's reports over the period of my analysis, for UBM and Centaur it increases substantially, reflecting increasing requirements from the FRC Code. The attributed authorship of the corporate governance report is not consistent. In some cases, it is attributed to the board, whereas in other reports the company secretary is identified as author, occasionally accompanied by their signature and photograph. In some instances, as shown in Figure 65, the firm's chairman supplies an introduction to the report, or a quote from them is included.

The content and presentation of this section varies considerably across the reports. The main content of the report focuses on the role of the board, its duties, composition and meetings, together with its role in internal control and risk management. The report also deals with the responsibilities of individual board members, covering their induction, training and performance evaluation, as well as the composition and responsibilities of the various board committees.



**Figure 65: Corporate governance statement, UBM, 2010**

Section 2: Governance

## Corporate governance statement

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### Chairman's introduction



**John Botts**

2010 was a year in which, more than ever, governance considerations for companies listed in the UK focused on sustainability and the need to promote the long term success of companies. The Walker Review of corporate governance, while not directly applicable to UBM, laid the groundwork for the Financial Reporting Council's review of the Combined Code which places increased emphasis on the management of risk and on the role of the Board and its chairman in providing leadership and rigorous challenge.

As a Board, we are ultimately responsible for framing and executing UBM's strategy and for overseeing risk management. We consider the practice of good governance to be integral to that role and we are committed to maintaining high standards of financial reporting, transparency and business integrity in all UBM's undertakings. As UBM's businesses evolve into new areas and expand into new geographical markets, the issues become more complex and the Board's role becomes ever more challenging. In order to ensure that we are fully equipped to perform our role effectively, in 2010 we concentrated our attention on the following areas:

- We undertook an ongoing and in-depth review of strategy, including assessment and consideration of risk management.
- We reviewed Board composition to ensure we have the appropriate mix of experience and personality around the boardroom table.
- We increased our non-executive directors' access to and engagement with the businesses, through site visits (the Board visited two of our largest exhibitions in Brazil and India during the year), management presentations and the development of mentoring programmes.
- We reviewed talent management and succession planning to ensure we have the necessary management resource to continue to build on UBM's success.

The following report describes in more detail how we seek to embed good governance in the Board's activities.



**John Botts**  
Chairman  
United Business Media Limited

### Compliance statement

The Board of UBM is responsible for the Group's policy on corporate governance. As a company with a premium listing of equity shares on the London Stock Exchange, UBM is subject to the Listing Rules of the Financial Services Authority and the provisions of the UK Corporate Governance Code (previously known as the Combined Code on Corporate Governance ('the Code')). Prior to April 2010, UBM was not subject to the Code but complied voluntarily with its provisions.

The directors consider that throughout 2010 UBM complied with all provisions set out in Section 1 of the 2008 Combined Code except for the composition of the Audit Committee, which is discussed in more detail on page 68.

The Board has taken note of the changes to the Code introduced by the Financial Reporting Council, which take effect for accounting periods beginning on or after 29 June 2010. The Board will determine its response to these changes during the course of 2011 and will report on this in its annual report for 2011.

As a non-UK registered company, UBM is not subject to UK companies legislation. However, the Board considers it appropriate to provide shareholder safeguards which are similar to those that are consistent with the relevant provisions of the UK Companies Act. Specifically, provisions such as pre-emption rights and shareholder information rights are contained in the Company's Articles of Association.

### The Board

A formal schedule of matters to be considered by the Board is in place and is reviewed annually.

Responsibilities reserved to the Board include:

- Approval of the annual budget (including capital expenditure) and Treasury policy.
- Approval of the interim and annual financial statements.
- Succession planning.
- Dividend policy.
- Major acquisitions and disposals and substantial property transactions.
- The Group's system of internal controls.

Decisions on operational matters are delegated to the executive directors and to divisional boards under formally documented authorities.

The agenda for Board meetings includes standing items on strategy and governance as well the Group's finances and operations. The Board also considers matters such as acquisitions, borrowing facilities and major capital projects as appropriate, and receives regular presentations from divisional management on the Group's businesses.

Source: UBM (2010: 62)

### The remuneration report

The remuneration report is a substantial section within the governance meta section of the annual reports, concerned with matters of pay and reward for the firm's directors. The length of this section increases substantially over the period, reflecting the increasing requirements of legislation and the FRC Code. The chairman of the remuneration committee, a non-executive board director, is generally identified as the author of this section, their name sometimes accompanied by their signature or photo. The requirement for publicly quoted

firms in the UK to provide an annual report on directors' financial remuneration is contained in the 2006 Companies Act, with detailed requirements for this reporting provided by the Large and Medium-sized Companies and Groups (Accounts and Reports) Regulations of 2008 (UK Government, 2008). The requirements of legislation therefore largely drive the content of this report. The content of the report includes details of the remuneration committee, the firm's remuneration policy and principles, a comparison of the firm's performance compared to other firms or to the relevant stock market sector, and various tables of remuneration, including salary, shareholdings, incentive plans and pensions.

### **The audit report**

The audit report is a mandatory section within the governance meta section of the annual report, providing a brief summary of the audit of the firm's financial statements by an external auditing firm. The audit report is a unique section within the annual report in that its authorship is external to the firm. The report is generally between 1,000 and 2,000 words. Unlike other areas in the governance meta section, this section shows little increase in length over my period of analysis. The section follows a standardised structure, centred on a declaration that the firm in its financial statements has presented 'a true and fair' picture of its business.

### **The financial sections of the annual report**

The financial sections of the annual reports, although representing around half of the total page count of the reports, contain relatively little narrative content, consisting largely of tables of data and related notes. However, they include some narrative elements, such as explanations for the segmentation of reporting, or a section setting out accounting policies. The financial sections are not explicitly associated with an author, although it is clear that they are the responsibility of the CFO and his or her team.

## **Interstitial pages in the annual report**

I have defined interstitial pages as those pages that sit outside of named sections in the report, generally single pages between sections. The number of interstitial pages in the individual reports in my analysis varies widely, from between two and ten pages. Interstitial pages sit outside of the general contents of the reports, and I have not placed them in any of the three meta sections that I have defined. Instead, I have treated them, as with the front pages of the reports, as a part of the overarching discourse of the annual report. Interstitial pages vary greatly in their format and content, generally containing little text beyond perhaps a caption to a photograph.

## APPENDIX 7: ANNUAL REPORT FRONT COVERS

Figure 66: Annual report covers, Future, 2004-13

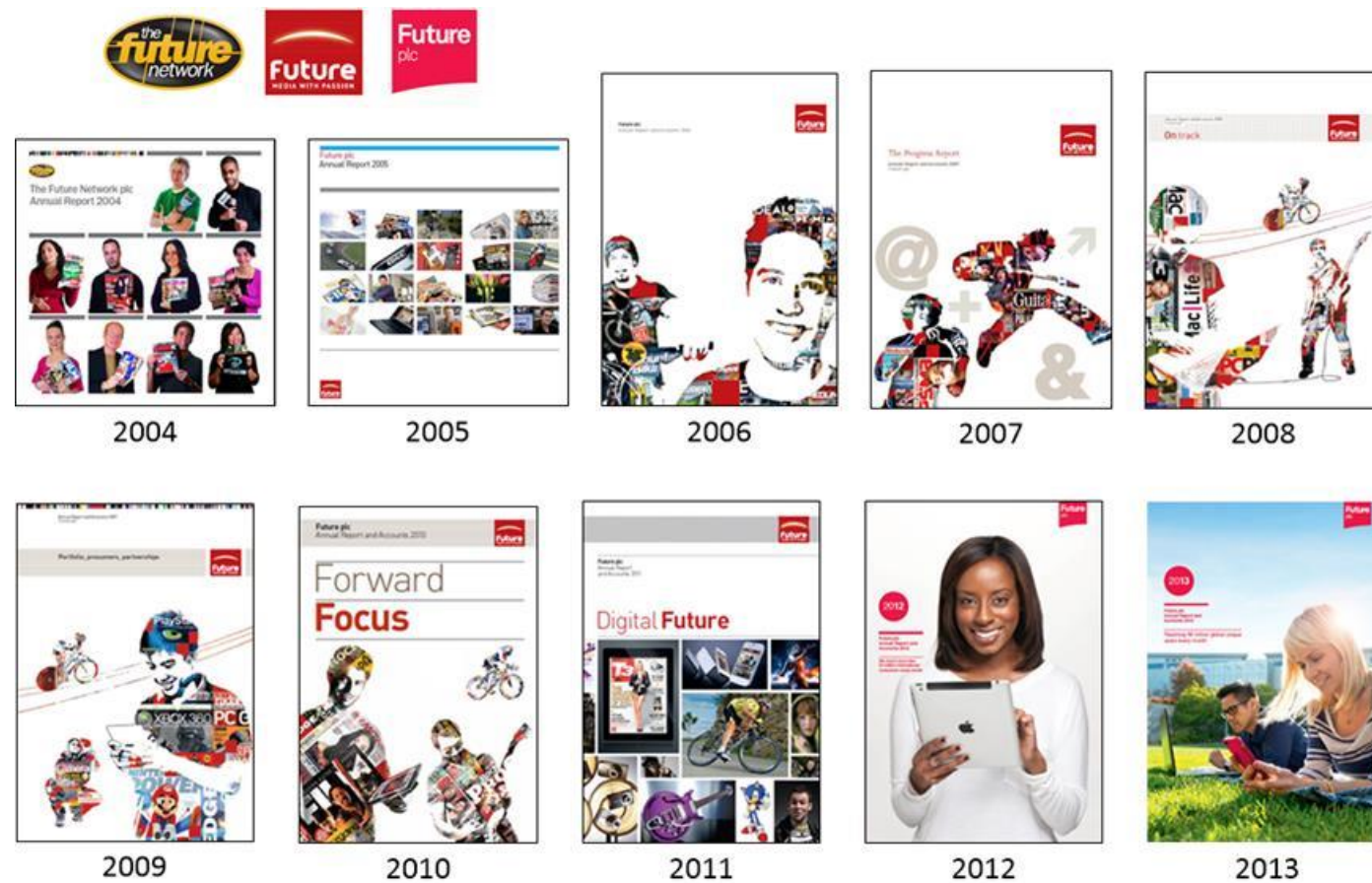
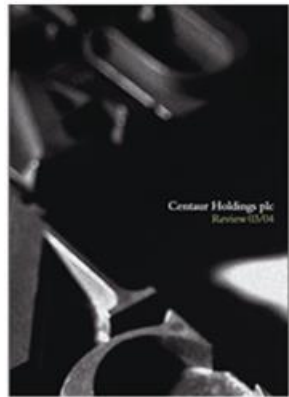


Figure 67: Annual report covers, Centaur, 2004-13



2004



2005



2006



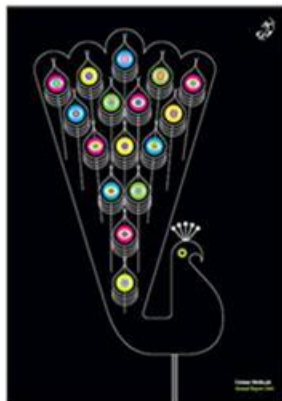
2007



2008



2009



2010



2011



2012



2013



Figure 68: Annual report covers, UBM, 2004-13



## APPENDIX 8: REVIEW OF VISUAL ELEMENTS IN ANNUAL REPORTS

The annual reports in my analysis contain a range of visual elements. I present a categorisation of these elements in Table 34. Visual elements generally either contain, or are associated in some way with, textual elements; for example, illustrations often contain text, and captions often accompany photographs. I have broadened the scope of my categorisation here to include textual devices, such as headlines and pull-quotes, on the basis that these are also elements concerned with presentation, not only with content. In this section, I review each of my categories of visual element in turn.

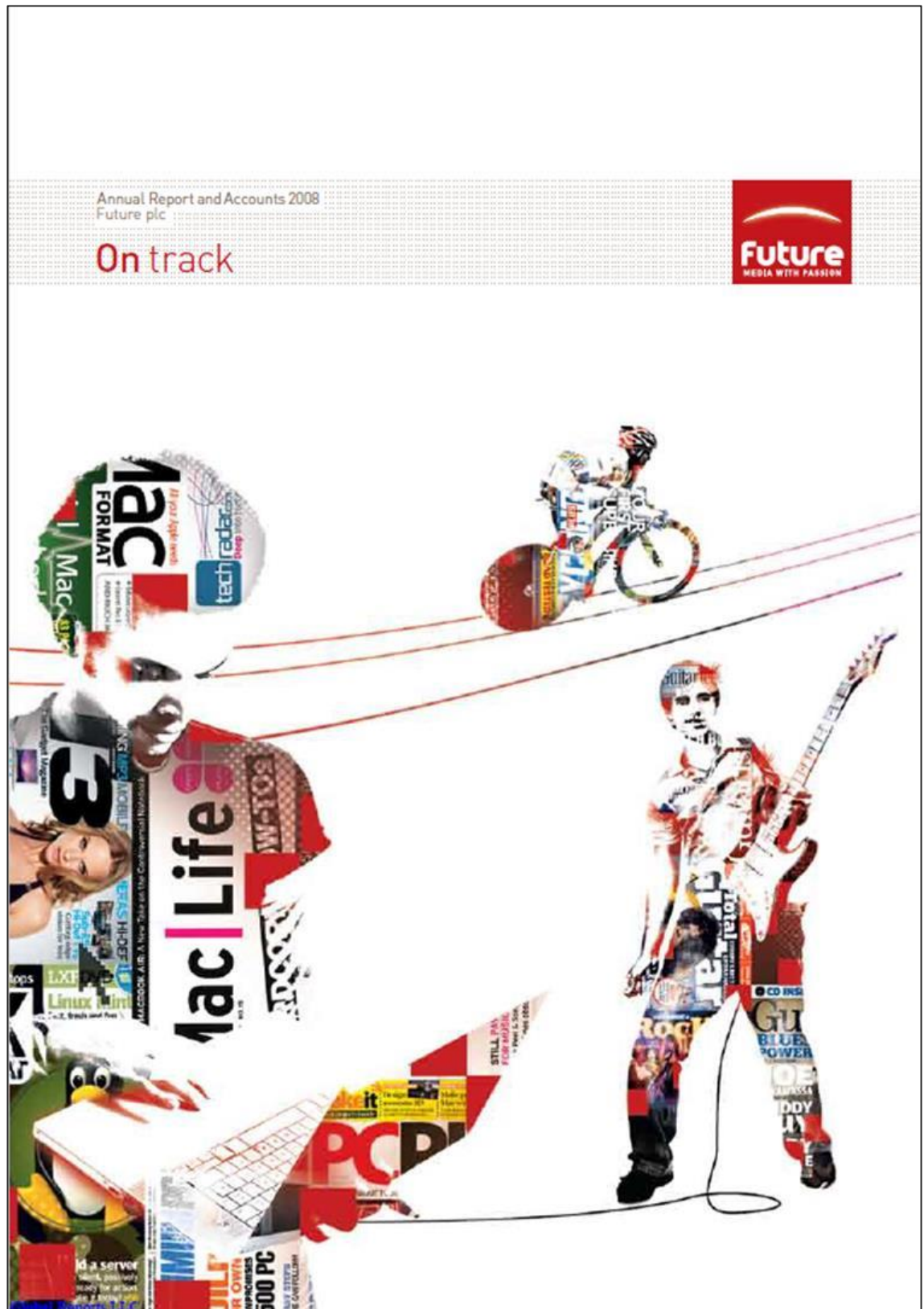
**Table 34: A typology for visual elements in annual reports**

<b>Photograph</b>	An image originally created by a camera, which may have subsequently been enhanced by other means
<b>Illustration</b>	An image primarily created by hand that may contain photographic elements
<b>Diagram</b>	A schematic representation designed to explain a concept
<b>Chart</b>	Generally numerical information presented in the form of a graph or chart
<b>Table</b>	Textual or numerical information presented in a tabular fashion
<b>Textual device</b>	A visual presentation of text enabling it to be differentiated from other text

### Photographs

All of the annual reports in my analysis contain photographs. In some instances, for example in Centaur's 2010 report, these consist solely of black and white portraits of the Chairman, CEO and Board. Most of the other reports contain a wide variety of photographic representations, both of people and of other subjects, generally in colour. There are also many examples of photographs combined with illustrations to produce images, as I show in Figure 69. The most common photographic representations in the reports depict the senior office holders of the firm – the CEO, chairman, and CFO – together with photographs of the board of directors, occasionally taken as a group but generally captured individually and presented in the form of a collage, as shown in Figure 70.

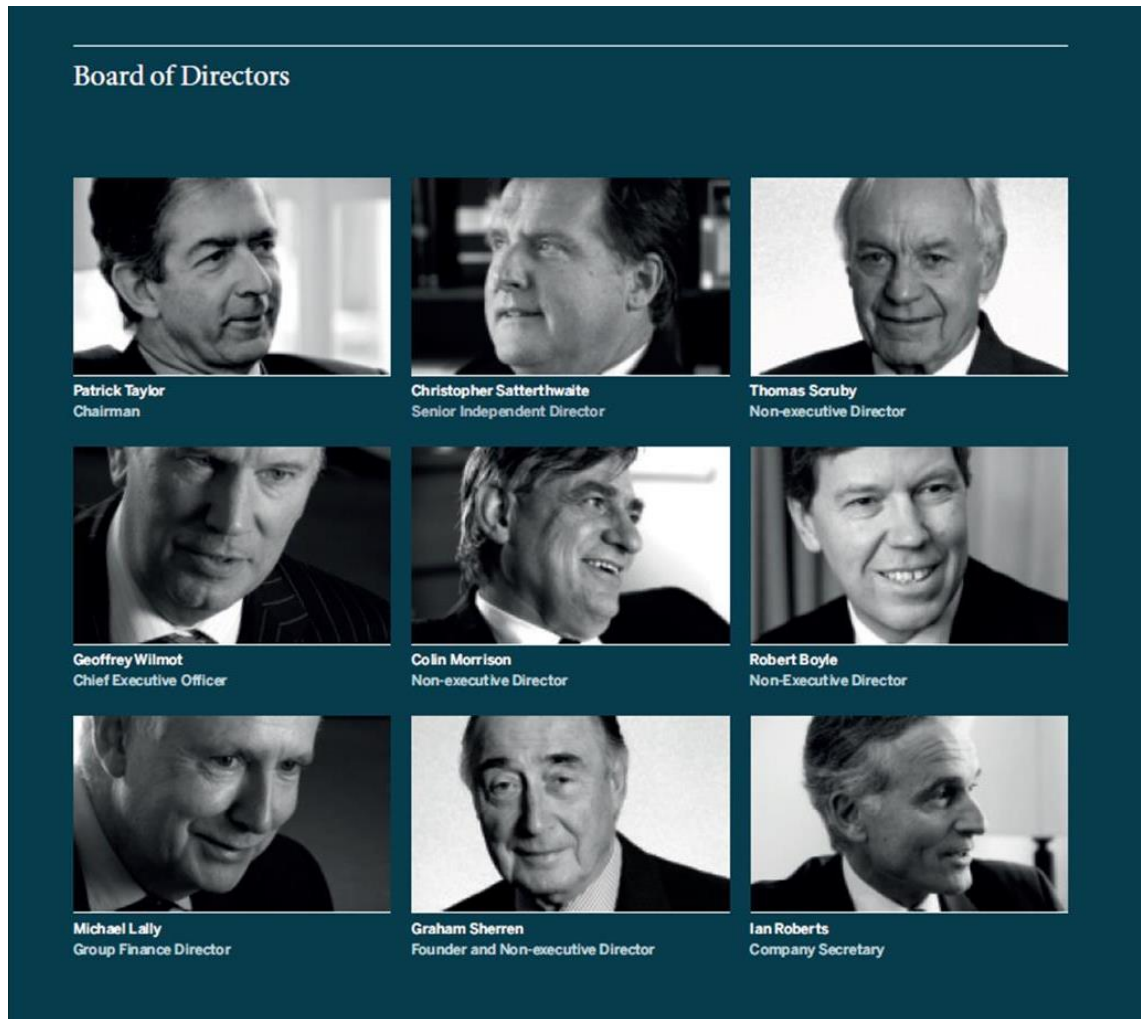
Figure 69: Front cover of annual report, Future, 2008



Source: Future (2008: front cover)



Figure 70: Photograph of Board of Directors, Centaur, 2010



Source: *Centaur* (2010: 24)

Apart from the senior office holders and the board, the reports occasionally contain photographs of other managers and employees. Photographs of managers tend to be associated with a named individual, presented in the context of their specific achievements or responsibilities, whereas reports generally portray other employees anonymously, often illustrating general aspects of the firm, as I show in Figures 71 and 72. In contrast to the middle-aged men who dominate the photographs of senior office holders, the photographs of employees generally feature young and attractive individuals, more than half of whom are female.

**Figure 71: Photograph of employees, Centaur, 2005**



*Source: Centaur (2005: 6)*

**Figure 72: Photographs of (presumed) employees, Future, 2004**



*Source: Future (2004: 7, 9)*

In addition to photographs of the firms' employees, reports often also feature 'stock' photography, together with staged photographs representing customers and employees, featuring, I assume, actors or models. Figure 73 shows two examples of this from UBM's 2006 report.

**Figure 73: Photographs of ‘customers’ and ‘employees’, UBM, 2006**



*Source: UBM (2006: 6, front cover)*

In addition to images of people, photographs in the annual reports also often include representations of physical products, as in Figure 74, showing a selection of photographic elements taken from Future’s 2009 report. In the reports from the start of the period of my analysis, such images often focus on representations of physical magazines, but these are increasingly supplemented, and then replaced, by images representing online manifestations of products, such as screenshots of websites, or photographs of individuals holding electronic devices, as shown in Figure 75.

**Figure 74: Selected photographic elements, Future, 2009**



*Source: Future (2009: various)*

**Figure 75: Annual report cover, Future, 2013**



*Source: Future (2013: front cover)*



## Illustrations

Illustrations with no photographic element are unusual in the annual reports in my analysis, but are a feature of some of Centaur's in-house designed reports, with commissioned illustrations used for both front covers and interstitial pages for some reports, as shown in Figure 76. Generally, however, illustrations are more commonly used in combination with photographic elements, as is the case with many of the front covers of the Future reports, as I show in Figure 69 (on page 419).

**Figure 76: Front cover and interstitial page, Centaur, 2008**



*Source: Centaur (2008: front cover, 4)*

Organisational logos are a very common form of illustration found in the annual reports. Firm's own logos usually feature on the front cover of the report, as can be seen for example in Figures 75 and 76. Logos of brands and of divisions within the business are also common, as shown in Figure 77. Reports often also include logos from other organisations, for example of accreditation schemes commonly cited within the corporate responsibility sections of reports. I show some examples of these in Figure 78.

**Figure 77: Internal brand logos, UBM, 2010**



Source: UBM (2010: 15)

**Figure 78: Logos of organisations and accreditations, Future, 2009**



Source: Future (2009: 27-28)

## Diagrams

The narrative sections of the annual reports in my analysis contain a range of diagrams, used as a presentational device for communicating information. A common type of diagram used in the reports is a geographical representation of the firm's interests, usually in the form of a global map with information superimposed onto it, as shown in Figures 79 and 80.

**Figure 79: Global map of UBM's office locations, UBM, 2011**



Source: UBM (2011: 3)

**Figure 80: Global map with key metrics, Future, 2011**



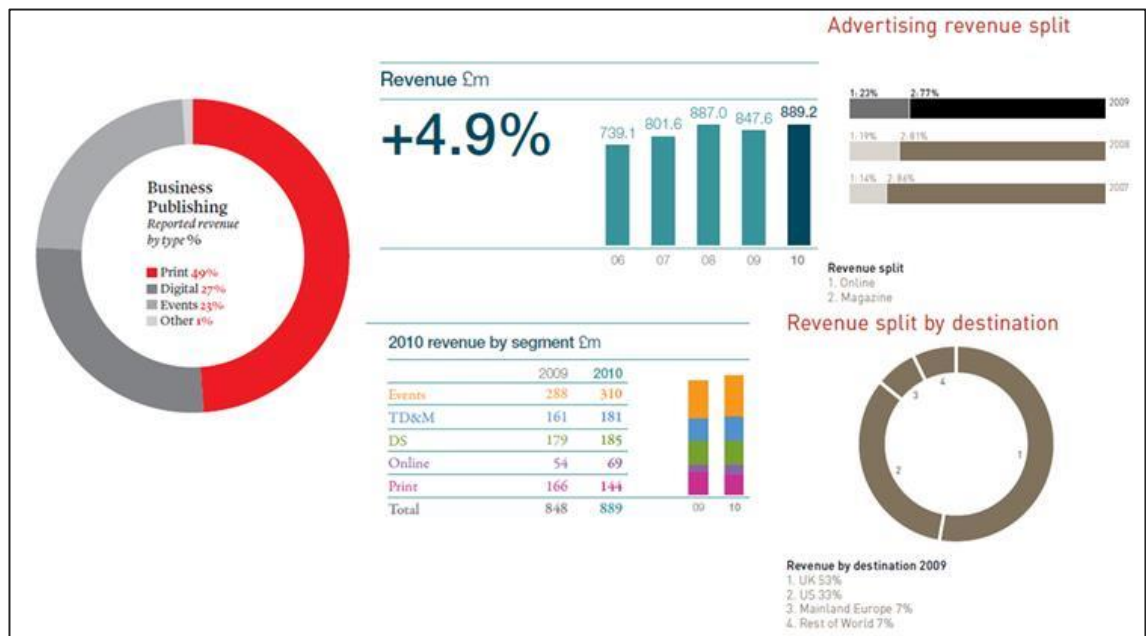
Source: Future (2011: 2-3)

### Charts and tables

Charts and tables are the most commonly found visual devices in the annual reports. Charts generally fall into one of three categories: pie charts, column charts or bar charts. Report designers use a wide variety of graphical devices to

present each of these types, although some of these do not necessarily enhance the effectiveness of the charts in communicating information, supporting research by Frownfelter-Lohrke and Fulkerson (2001) that has shown that designers frequently distort charts, intentionally or otherwise, in ways that can lead to the misinterpretation of data. Designers have less latitude to manipulate numerical data presented within tables, although, as with charts, table designers can select or exclude certain data in order to present the firm in a more favourable light. In Figure 81, I show several examples of charts and tables from the reports.

**Figure 81: Selected charts and tables: Centaur, 2012; UBM, 2010; Future, 2009**



Sources: Centaur, 2012; UBM, 2010; Future, 2009: various

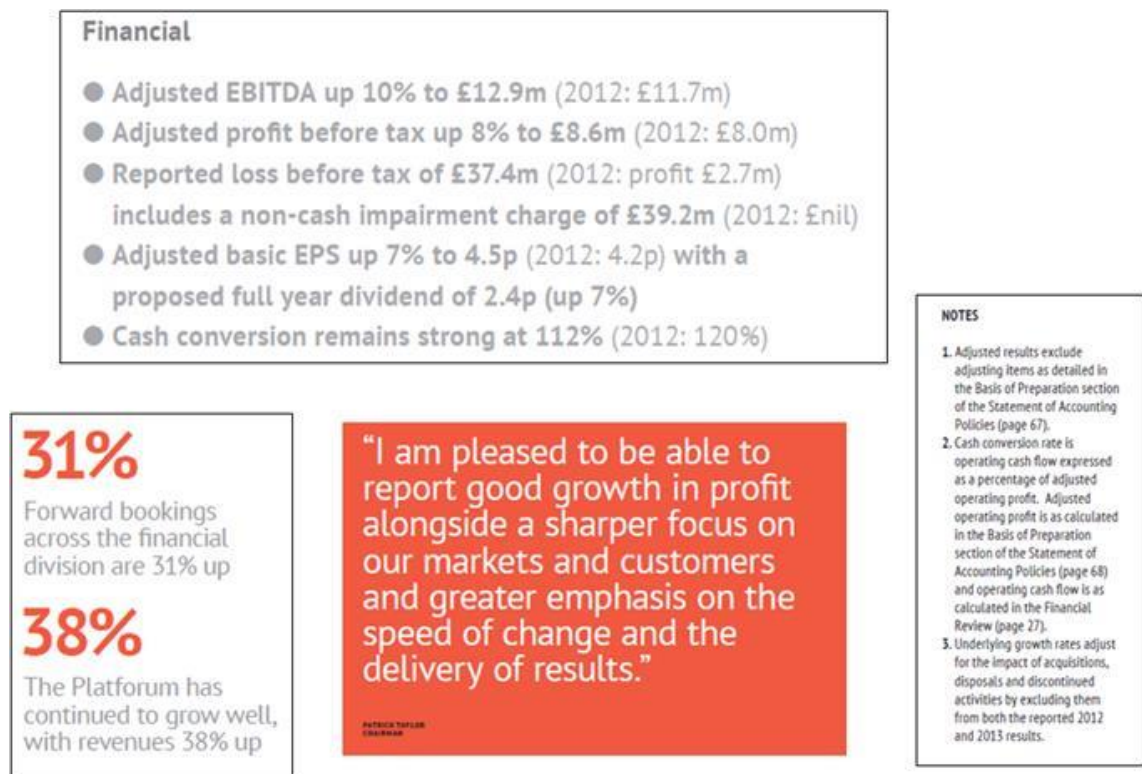
### Visual textual devices

I define a visual textual device as any textual element differentiated from its surrounding context on a page. Such elements include textual devices, such as headlines, where text is emphasised through the size of the font used; emphasis of text using bold, italics or underlining; bullet points; and the presentation of text in a different colour to other text. Text can also be differentiated using visual devices, for example by placing it within boxes, or



separating it from the main content of the text in notes, or as a sidebar. A common device used within annual reports for highlighting a piece of text is by duplicating the text from the main copy text and placing it elsewhere on the page within quotation marks, usually using a large font, as a *pull-quote*. In Figure 82, I present some examples of visual textual devices from the 2013 Centaur report.

**Figure 82: Examples of visual textual devices, Centaur, 2013**



Sources: Centaur, 2013: various

## APPENDIX 9: INDUSTRY REPORTS AS DISCOURSES

For my analysis, I have used four contemporary industry reports that focus on the B2B and professional publishing industry. The first three of these reports use data from interviews with, and surveys of, industry members. The final report, from 2013, presents a set of case studies that do not indicate any direct engagement with the firms themselves. I present a summary of the reports in Table 35. I consider that the industry reports are a good source for the identification of key industry discourses: their publication dates cover my period entire period of study; they are contemporary; and are they are based on a close engagement with the industry. I have categorised the reports into two types, two that are *industry-driven*, produced primarily by the industry itself and two published by external *consultancy* firms. I have based my analysis of these sources on Wood and Kroger's (2000) framework for discourse analysis.

**Table 35: List of industry reports**

Title	Author	Year
Publishing in the knowledge economy: Competitiveness analysis of the UK publishing media sector	Pira International	2002
Professional Media: Connecting Business	The Business Information Forum	2005
From paper to platform: transforming the B2B publishing business	PricewaterhouseCoopers	2010
Reinventing B2B Publishing	JJP Associates	2013

### The authorship of industry reports

A range of bodies commissioned and produced the industry reports in my analysis. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), a department of the UK government, in association with a number of industry bodies, together commissioned the 2002 Pira report. The report's scope covers the whole of the UK publishing industry, not only B2B publishing, and this is reflected in the range of industry associations involved in its production, including the Newspaper Society, The Newspaper Publishers Association, The Periodical Publishers Association (PPA) and the Publishers Association. The PPA represented B2B and professional publishing interests, although it covered both consumer and B2B publishers.

The 2005 report focused on the B2B and professional publishing sector. It presents itself as 'prepared' by the PPA, based on a survey and report commissioned by the 'Business Information Forum', another alliance of industry bodies, comprising of the Association of Exhibition Organisers (AEO), the UK Association of Online Publishers (AOP), the Data Publishers Association (DPA), the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), the Exhibition Venues Association (EVA), the Periodical Publishers Association (PPA), and the UK Newsletter and Electronic Publishers Association (UKNEPA). Significantly, although the report concentrates on B2B publishers, the inclusion of trade associations covering the areas of marketing and exhibitions reflects a broader conception of the scope of the publishing industry than the 2002 report. Although the report notes support from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) there is no evidence of any UK government involvement in the production of the report.

The Global Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Publishing at the global consultancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) published the 2010 report. Although focused on the B2B sector, the report has an international coverage, based on interviews and data from France, Germany, the Netherlands, the US and the UK. Finally, the 2013 report was produced by the UK-based consultancy JJP Associates, which described itself as 'an agency specialising in business development with a particular emphasis on the media sector, advising on business strategy, content marketing and strategy and editorial issues' (JJP Associates, 2013: 16). This report focuses solely on the UK publishing sector.

### **The audiences for the industry reports**

All of the four industry reports in my analysis appear to have the industry itself as their primary audience, although they do note other potential audiences. For example, the 2002 Pira report presents sets of recommendations for firms operating within the sector, for industry trade associations, and for the UK government. The 2005 PPA report states that it is directed primarily at an audience 'in Government, the financial arena and media commentators,' but also at those 'working with the industry on a day-to-day basis – companies, and their customers, suppliers and personnel' (The Business Information Forum,

2005: 6). The 2010 PwC report appears to primarily target the publishers themselves, but also industry analysts and investors, perhaps unsurprisingly given PwC's commercial role advising on mergers and acquisitions. The 2013 JJP report appears to focus on the UK publishing firms as its primary audience, reflecting the commercial services to the sector that the firm advertises at the end of the report (JJP Associates, 2013: 16).

### **The purposes of the industry reports**

The industry reports each present themselves as an objective analysis of the publishing industry, based on empirical research and containing references to previous industry reports and a variety of sources of data. However, the reports are clearly intended to address a specific purpose or set of purposes, with their data clearly presented in order to support a particular perspective on the industry. I have noted that the industry itself published the first two reports, with the other two produced by consultancy firms. I argue that these different authorships shape the purposes of the discourses.

The first of the two industry-commissioned reports, the 2002 Pira report, describes itself as 'commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) as part of a series of investigations into the competitive performance and the factors promoting and impeding competitiveness in UK industry sectors' (Pira International, 2002: iv). It presents itself as objective and rigorously researched, providing a detailed methodology, paying careful attention to the definition of key terms, and relating its findings to UK government produced statistics. However, despite this ostensibly objective approach, the report has a clear central focus on the promotion of the industry. Its conclusions are presented in the form of a set of action plans, where it argues that, 'Spanning the gap between the challenges being faced and the industry's existing progress to meeting them is the key to further strengthening the industry' (Pira International, 2002: 120). The report emphasises the government's role in supporting the industry, presenting it with its own set of action points.

The 2005 PPA report demonstrates little of the methodological rigour of the 2002 report. It presents itself more directly as reflective of the perspective of the

industry itself, and focuses on presenting a positive account of the industry to external audiences. Although the report positions itself as commissioned by an alliance of trade associations, it appears to be primarily the work of the PPA. In its title it describes itself as a 'portrait of a £17bn sector,' emphasising the size and importance of the industry for the UK economy. In the introduction to the report, it reinforces this promotional aim, to show 'the role and value of business information and professional media in sustaining health and in stimulating growth in every area of business, industry and commerce – through the supply and delivery of information' (The Business Information Forum, 2005: 6). The report demonstrates little concern with a critical or reflective approach to its source data or to the methodology adopted, and it does not balance its focus on positive messages with any consideration of challenges faced by the sector. In contrast to the 2002 Pira report, it provides no action points for the industry or the government. The overall purpose of this report therefore appears to be largely one of impression management.

A central purpose of both of the 2010 and 2013 reports produced by the consultancy firms is clearly the commercial aim of persuading firms in the industry to engage their professional services. Both reports emphasise an uncertain, but potentially lucrative, future for the industry. The 2010 PwC report has the subtitle, 'Outlook for B2B publishing in the digital age,' and has the stated purpose of identifying 'the outlook for the B2B publishing market in this period of unprecedented multimedia innovation and transformation' (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010b: 3). The 2013 JJP report also considers the future for the industry within a context of transformation, reviewing changes in the B2B publishing marketplace and arguing 'that B2B publishing is in the midst of a revolution and one that still has some way to go due to emerging technological and economic trends' (JJP Associates, 2013: 1). The 2010 and 2013 reports present a more critical view of the industry than the earlier reports. Partly, no doubt, this reflects their recognition of the significant problems faced by the sector following the 2008 financial crash. However, as both of these reports target the industry itself rather than external audiences, their outside-in rather than inside-out perspective means that they have less of a requirement to promote the industry's interests than the earlier reports.

## **The resources used by the industry reports**

I have noted that the industry reports were based on surveys of, and interviews with, industry figures, with the exception of the 2013 JJP report, based on case studies rather than on primary research. In addition to this primary research, the reports also reference previous industry reports and data produced by the UK government and industry bodies. The reports make some attempt to follow common definitions of the industry, although the varying purposes of the reports tend to be the key factor in shaping definitions of the industry.

The 2002 Pira report claims to be based upon the results of questionnaires, workshops, and interviews with industry figures, with the latter comprising mainly senior executives. It also claims to have referenced previous industry reports, together with individual company reports and accounts (Pira International, 2002: 126). The 2005 PPA report largely sources its data from a survey consisting of a set of telephone interviews with 'very senior managers.' This report provides limited references to previous reports and to other industry data (The Business Information Forum, 2005: 35). The 2010 PwC report notes that it is based upon an online survey of business professionals, together with interviews with 'leading business publishers and advertisers in five countries: France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States,' its findings supplemented by industry reports, annual reports, and analysts' reviews (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010b: 3). Finally, the 2013 JJP report cites some data from previous reports, but presents its findings largely around a set of short case studies of individual publishing firms, where it is not clear that there was any direct engagement with industry figures in producing the report.

## APPENDIX 10: ONLINE BLOGS AS DISCOURSES

I have based my analysis of online blogs as discourses primarily on ten UK-based industry blogs, as listed in Table 36, although I have also referenced US bloggers. To supplement this analysis, I interviewed some of the bloggers over email and telephone. Although they share a common industry focus, the bloggers differ widely in their backgrounds and motivations, and blogs and blog posts vary considerably in format, length, and frequency. As I have noted in Table 19 (on page 273), I have categorised the bloggers as ‘guides for hire’, and ‘critical commentators’, reflecting the different motivations behind their blogging.

**Table 36: Details of bloggers on the UK publishing industry**

Blog title	Author	Description of blogger
business media blog	Anonymous	Anonymous - business magazine publisher
DavidWorlock.com	David Worlock	Senior manager and consultant in media
Flashes and Flames	Colin Morrison	Director and consultant of B2B media companies
Fullrunner	Peter Kirwan	Media journalist
John Welsh's Blog	John Welsh	Ex-journalist, digital director at UBM
MagBlog	Tim Holmes	Journalist, journalism lecturer
Matt McAlister	Matt McAlister	Digital director
Neil Thackray's Business Media Blog	Neil Thackray	CEO of media businesses, co-founder of media business
One Man & His Blog	Adam Tinworth	Business journalist and publishing strategist
Private Frazer's Doomed Magazines	Anonymous	Anonymous – publisher
Rory Brown	Rory Brown	Publishing manager, co-founder of publishing company

### The authors of the blogs

The authors of the UK-based blogs were employed in a wide range of roles within and relating to the industry, including journalists, marketers, and publishers, as I have listed in Table 36. Several of the bloggers had been employed in very senior roles in the industry, including board level posts. The authors of two of the blogs are anonymous, although both of these bloggers describe themselves in their blogs as publishers, and are recognised as such in

posts by the other bloggers. All of the bloggers, including the anonymous ones, appeared to be male.

### **The audiences for the blogs**

The industry blogs address an audience of peers in the industry, with comments on posts appearing to confirm this. They do not target a broader audience. Despite this limited scope, in interviews the bloggers were confident that their blogs had a wide readership, with some claiming large audiences, for example, 'between 20-40k [views per month]...divided evenly between managers and executives in traditional media companies and 'new' digital businesses' (email interview with blogger, December 2015). Although it is not possible to verify such claimed figures, for those blogs accepting comments against posts it is possible to get some idea of the nature of their readership and the level of interaction of audiences with the content of the blogs. Commenters on the blog posts invariably appear to come from within the sector, generally from the UK or the US, often themselves other industry bloggers. Indeed bloggers frequently cite, quote or comment on other industry blogs, highlighting the community, perhaps self-referential, nature of blogging.

In interviews, the bloggers noted that feedback on their blogging came to them via a number of routes, not just from comments uploaded directly against posts. The blogger cited above claimed to receive about twenty comments on each blog, usually sent to him as emails rather than published as a comment on the post. In contrast to this, however, in a post, the anonymous blogger Private Frazer, emphasises a lack of both audience and influence for his blog, noting that the 'reach of the blog is small, with generally just over 1,000 visits a month (one picture of cute kittens would probably get more traffic). Its 'influence' is zero, knowledge of its existence is marginal and it attracts few comments.' Despite this apparent modesty, however, he boasts that it 'has annoyed senior people at several publishing companies' (Private Frazer, March 12, 2013).



## **The purposes of the blogs**

The bloggers claimed a range of motivations for their blogging activity, with several admitting to have started their blogs without any clear objectives. For Peter Kirwan (Fullrunner), a journalist commenting on the media, blogging was a reflection and extension of his professional role. For the other nonymous bloggers, blogging appears to have provided at least the prospect of tangible professional and commercial benefits. One blogger interviewed declared that, 'I adopted this longer form because I sell my time...I want it to make people feel that here is a place where opinions are held and analysis is done, ideas are worked on, and that if they got a hold of this chap and got him in for half a day or worked with him on a project...' (Interview with blogger, January 2016). For these bloggers, who I have categorised as 'guides for hire', their blogs were effectively a shop window advertising their professional expertise to potential clients, or at least to enhance their professional standing in some way, where they always needed to balance any criticism of particular firms against the hope of future employment.

In contrast, the two anonymous bloggers, categorised here as 'critical commentators', are clear in their posts that they expect no direct professional benefit from their blogging. The Business Media Blogger claims that 'I am not doing this to make money, or to fan my not insignificant ego. I am doing this because I care about the future of our industry and I want us to challenge how we think about it. I want us to take our heads out of the sand and recognise the scale of the challenges we face. I want us to debate what we are doing and how we are doing it. I want us to say the unthinkable, challenge the immutable and support the irrefutable' (Business Media Blogger, comment on John Welsh's blog, January 2009). Unconstrained by any need to be polite to potential clients, the anonymous bloggers are more inclined to be blunt about the failings of publishers, although they ostensibly have the same overarching objective of helping the industry as do the 'guides for hire'.

Individual blogs posts appear to address a variety of purposes, even within the same post. In some cases their role appears to be simply relaying back to their

audience information obtained from other sources, corresponding to the 'gatewatching' function of blogs identified by Bruns (2005), where posts are doing little more than compiling and summarising information. However, the posts included in my sample generally also provide some interpretation or opinion, as in the following example:

...as UBM observed when it unveiled its full year results in March, sufficient demand exists to maintain 'one or two leading titles, a position which each market will reach by means of a "last man standing" process.' In other words, the big publishers will circle their wagons in an ever-tighter defensive cordon. They will try and fail to make 'one or two leading titles' cover vast stretches of vertical market activity. Thankfully, the results, for everyone else, should include plenty of opportunity (Peter Kirwan, Fullrunner, April 2010).

With this role of interpreting the meaning of other texts, industry bloggers can be seen to be engaging in a process of *sensemaking* (Weick, 1995), explaining the underlying 'reality' of the industry to their audiences. However, I argue that their role also extends to one of *sensegiving*, where they seek to persuade their audience of their own preferred definition of reality (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). They do this by presenting their own predictions for the future, or by setting out how firms and the industry *should* act in order to guarantee future success. Although such sensegiving posts consist of the ideas and opinions of the bloggers themselves, they generally always have an external source as the starting point for their thoughts, as with the quote above, with its reference to UBM's financial results. I argue that the construction of identity is central to the bloggers' roles of sensemaking and sensegiving, as they seek to construct the identity of the publishing industry and the firms within it, the key products and customers of the industry, and their own personal and professional identities.

### **Resources used by the blogs**

The industry blogs in my analysis draw on a wide range of resources, with the starting point for posts generally a first- or second-hand reference to an external source such as a press article, industry report, a post by another blogger, or a company statement. Although they are often vague in their references to their sources, bloggers will invariably provide a URL link back to the original source

where it is online. Despite citing a wide variety of types of sources, references in blog posts are predominantly from within the sector itself, very often coming from other bloggers, with blogger Rory Brown complaining that 'one of the things that I find most irritating about media industry 'punditry' is the fact that a lot of the commentators tend to exist in their own little bubble' (Rory Brown, 7 June, 2010).