

Welcome to the course **Branding Project 2026!**
Department of Marketing, Hanken School of Economics

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| Course code | 23063 |
| Course scope | 4 ECTS |
| Level of course | Intermediate / Bachelor level |
| Course Description | In this course, you step into the shoes of a marketing manager. The course functions as an on-site course focusing on the application of branding and market communication theory into practice. In the course we emphasize consumer insight and participate in an international marketing competition, L'Oréal Brandstorm . |
| | The course aims to provide participants with knowledge and skills in understanding consumer insight, and translating it into brand management and market communication practice. The course also aims to support the development of analytical skills and provides opportunities to learn how to present ideas convincingly both verbally and in writing. |
| Instructors | Sonja Sarasvuo, DSc, Assistant Professor in Marketing, sonja.sarasvuo@hanken.fi Gustav Medberg, DSc, Lecturer in Marketing, gustav.medberg@hanken.fi |
| Workload | A total of 108 hours distributed as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Scheduled (contact) hours: 18 h○ Non-scheduled work: 90 h |
| Period | Period 3 (19 th January - 6 th March 2026) |
| Registration | Before the course starts, please register to the course in Sisu (sisu.hanken.fi). After the Sisu registration has closed, an e-mail will be sent to you with a registration key to sign up to the course web site on Moodle (moodle.hanken.fi). Additionally, later in the course you should also register your team at L'Oréal's official competition web site (brandstorm.loreal.com). |
| Teaching format | The course consists of a case introduction session, two coaching sessions, a minimum of three guest lectures, a video presentation and a selling pitch in class. Please see a detailed schedule at the end of this syllabus. The sessions are primarily held on site at Hanken in Helsinki. Lecture materials and other resources are uploaded into the course web site on Moodle. |
| Prerequisites | To participate in this course, you are required to either: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Have a minimum of 12 ECTS completed in the areas of marketing or communication, or○ Have 8 ECTS completed in marketing or communication, <i>and</i> to participate simultaneously in the course 23133 "<i>Branding och Marknadskommunikation</i>" (in same period, taught in Swedish) |
| | The course cannot be taken by anyone who has earlier taken part in the competition <i>L'Oréal Brandstorm</i> . Furthermore, the official <i>L'Oréal Brandstorm</i> competition has an age limit of 30 years. If you are over 30 but wish to participate in the course (but not the official competition), please contact the instructors. |
| Learning objectives | Upon completion of the course, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ analyze branding and communication aspects in a company○ identify consumer needs based on market data and consumer insights○ put your ideas into a selling pitch and present them to a board of company representatives. |

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| Course assignment | <p>The participants of the course will form 3-person-teams and take part in L'Oréal's international marketing competition for students, <i>L'Oréal Brandstorm</i>. In the competition, participants will complete a case, the theme of which varies every year. This year's theme for the competition is "<i>L'Oréal Brandstorm 2026: Craft the Future of Luxury Fragrance</i>".</p> <p>The assignment consists of three parts (please check for any updates from L'Oréal):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ a written-report (3 summary slides + max 25 slides for the full report),○ a 3-minute video, structured based on pre-defined questions by L'Oréal○ a 5-minute pitch around the 3 summary slides, at the Hanken Campus Final to a jury of representatives from L'Oréal <p>The 3-person teams should register in Moodle by 26th January 2026 at 23.59, and submit all the different parts of the assignment on Moodle by 2nd March 2026 at 23.59. The teams will also separately register and submit the 3 summary slides and the 3-minute video via the official competition website for L'Oréal Brandstorm (L'Oréal's deadline is on the 31st March, 2026).</p> <p>The Assessment on the course is done by Hanken, however, L'Oréal picks the winner. The winning team at Hanken will advance to the Nordic Final in Copenhagen, and then perhaps even on to the International Final in Paris. The official course ends at the Hanken Campus Final, but the competition continues for the best team on the course.</p> <p>For details and instructions for group formation and completing the case assignment, please carefully familiarize with the materials uploaded on the course web page on Moodle, as well as the official case study instructions from L'Oréal.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Coaching and feedback for the teams | <p>During the course, two coaching sessions will be organized in class with the instructors. The purpose of the coaching sessions is to provide the teams with information, tools and support for their case work and presentations. While attendance is voluntary, it is strongly recommended that at least one person from each team attends the coaching sessions.</p> <p>Additionally, each team has an opportunity to book a voluntary 30-minute feedback meeting. This gives each team the opportunity to ask questions and gain individualized feedback on their ideas for the case.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Examination and assessment | <p>The course grade is evaluated based on the Group Case Assignment (100p, 100% of grade), consisting of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ A 3-minute video and a 5-minute pitch in front of a jury (40p, 40% of grade)○ A written case report, including a 3-slide summary and a full, max 25-slide report (60p, 60% of grade) <p>The points will be converted into a grade (1-5) as follows:</p> <table><tbody><tr><td>90-100 = 5</td><td>Excellent (E)</td></tr><tr><td>80-89 = 4</td><td>Very good (VG)</td></tr><tr><td>70-79 = 3</td><td>Good (G)</td></tr><tr><td>60-69 = 2</td><td>Satisfactory (SA)</td></tr><tr><td>50-59 = 1</td><td>Sufficient (SU)</td></tr><tr><td>0-49 = 0</td><td>Fail (not passed)</td></tr></tbody></table> <p>A detailed evaluation rubric will be made available on the course web site in Moodle.</p> | 90-100 = 5 | Excellent (E) | 80-89 = 4 | Very good (VG) | 70-79 = 3 | Good (G) | 60-69 = 2 | Satisfactory (SA) | 50-59 = 1 | Sufficient (SU) | 0-49 = 0 | Fail (not passed) |
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| Case award | Participants that qualify for and present at the Nordic Final of the competition in Copenhagen can be awarded with an extra 4 ECTS as a custom course credit. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Guest lectures | Guest lectures with representatives from the corporate world are offered to support the learning objectives and to bring insights for the case work. Each guest lecture focuses on a different topic related to branding and market communications - please see a detailed schedule at the end of the syllabus for details. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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| Course materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Access to L'Oréal's case platform and case materials ○ Academic articles (max 150 pages) related to different topics around branding and market communication: <p><i>Foundational concepts in branding theory:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parris, D. L., & Guzmán, F. (2023). Evolving brand boundaries and expectations: looking back on brand equity, brand loyalty, and brand image research to move forward. <i>Journal of Product & Brand Management</i>, 32(2), 191-234. ○ Rindell, A., & Strandvik, T. (2010). Corporate brand evolution: corporate brand images evolving in consumers' everyday life. <i>European Business Review</i>, 22(3), 276-286. <p><i>Branding and market communications in digital contexts and social media:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Holt, D. (2016). Branding in the age of social media. <i>Harvard Business Review</i>, 94(3), 40-50. ○ Kirk, C. P., & Givi, J. (2025). The AI-authorship effect: Understanding authenticity, moral disgust, and consumer responses to AI-generated marketing communications. <i>Journal of Business Research</i>, 186, 114984. ○ Leung, F. F., Gu, F. F., & Palmatier, R. W. (2022). Online influencer marketing. <i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>, 50(2), 226-251. ○ Shankar, V., Grewal, D., Sunder, S., Fossen, B., Peters, K., & Agarwal, A. (2022). Digital marketing communication in global marketplaces: A review of extant research, future directions, and potential approaches. <i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>, 39(2), 541-565. <p><i>Sustainability in branding and market communications:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Park, H., & Minton, E. A. (2025). Navigating the Complexity of Sustainability Communications: The Influence of Product Type, Media Type, and Brand Realism. <i>Psychology & Marketing</i>, 42(12), 3123-3140. |
| Attendance policy | Mandatory presence is required at the Case Introduction, at three guest lectures, and the pitching session at the Hanken Campus Final. If you miss a mandatory session, please contact the examiner. Absences without valid reason (e.g., illness) lead to point reductions. No compensation assignments will be offered to compensate for missed sessions. |
| Plagiarism policy | Hanken's action plan for dealing with plagiarism is applied in cases of cheating, academic dishonesty, or suspicion of cheating or dishonesty in connection with academic performance. |
| Late submission policy | If the assignments are delayed, 20 % of the obtained points will be reduced for every 24 hours the assignments are delayed. Please note that it is not possible to compensate an already submitted passed assignment. |
| AI Policy | <p> Blue – AI Use Required</p> <p>A critical use of AI tools is required in the case, using tools like Adobe Express, which participants in L'Oréal Brandstorm have access to. Other potential tools that can be used are Microsoft Copilot or similar generative AI tools. Participants are expected to critically engage with AI outputs and document and report their process. You are expected to collaborate with AI to enhance creativity and productivity.</p> <p>AI may be used for instance to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the structuring and language of the case report • Enhance the visual design of the case report and video • Support the writing of the script for the pitch <p>As an exception to the above guideline, the use of AI-generated voiceovers or avatars are not allowed when preparing the video. Participants are expected to act as presenters and all team members should be visible in the videos.</p> <p><i>Information about Hanken's guidelines around AI can also be found here:</i></p> <p>https://www.hanken.fi/en/students/learning-lab/ai-studies-hanken-guidelines-students</p> |
| Individual arrangements | Please find information about individual arrangements on Hanken's web site: https://www.hanken.fi/en/students/study-practicalities/individual-arrangements |

Course 23063 Branding Project 2026 (4ECTS) – Preliminary course schedule

NB! Updates to the schedule are possible - any changes will be communicated to the participants.

| | Date | Time | Place | Theme | Lecturer |
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| 1 | Tue 20.1 | 10.15- 11.45 | A307 / MS Teams | Case introduction: L'Oréal Brandstorm 2026* | Thea Roseth , Nordic Talent Acquisition Specialist, L'Oréal Nordic |
| 2 | Mon 26.1 | 10.15- 11.45 | A307 | Guest lecture 1**: Branding in Digital Travel Markets: Building Trust, Meaning, and Demand in High-Involvement Categories | Hannu Sääskilahti , Tjäreborg |
| | Mon 26.1 | DL 23.59 | | <i>Sign up to a 3-member team in Moodle</i> | |
| 3 | Tue 27.1 | 10.15- 11.45 | A307 | Coaching Session I | Sonja Sarasvuo & Gustav Medberg |
| 4 | Thu 29.1 | 10.15- 11.45 | A307 / MS Teams | Guest lecture 2**: Brand Alchemy: Turning Emotion into Brand Strategy, Revenue, and Fandom | Harry Elonen , Mojang Studios / Minecraft |
| 5 | Tue 3.2 | 10.15- 11.45 | A307 | Guest lecture 3**: Definition and application of the Kiltö Brand Concept | Johanna Hornborg- Ojala , Kiilto |
| 6 | Tue 10.2 | 10.15- 11.45 | A307 | Guest lecture 4**: Credible and distinctive sustainability communication in an era of new regulation and turbulent operating environment | Heidi Kalmari , Miltton |
| | Mo 16.2- Thu 19.2 | 9.00- 15.30 | MS Teams | <i>Opportunity for groups to book 30-minute feedback meeting (voluntary)</i> | Sonja Sarasvuo |
| 7 | Tue 17.2 | 10.15- 11.45 | A307 | Guest lecture 5**: Strategic Influencer Marketing | Pinja Orre , PING Helsinki |
| 8 | Thu 19.2 | 10.15- 11.45 | A307 | Guest lecture 6**: The Brand at the Core of Stockmann's Commercial Strategy – How to Leverage 160 Years of Heritage to Drive Success Today? | Riku Lylly , Stockmann / Lindex Group |
| 9 | Tue 24.2 | 10.15- 11.45 | A307 | Coaching Session II – Final footsteps to victory: From the Hanken Campus Final to the Nordic Final in Copenhagen to the International Final in Paris | Sonja Sarasvuo & Gustav Medberg |
| | Mon 2.3 | DL 23.59 | | <i>Submission in Moodle:</i> 1. Written Case Report, Part 1, 3-side summary 2. Written Case Report, Part 2, full report of max 25 slides 3. A 3-minute Video Presentation | |
| 10 | Thu 5.3 | 8.30- 16.45 | A403 | L'Oréal Brandstorm 2026 – Hanken Campus Final*: Each team presents their 3-minute video, and gives a 5-minute pitch to present their idea. <i>NB. Each team participates either in the full morning session (8.30-11.45) or the afternoon session (12.30- 15.45). Additionally, all teams participate in the closing session (16.00-16.45), where the winner of the competition will be announced.</i> | Sonja Sarasvuo, Gustav Medberg, Thea Roseth & Simon Mærsk , L'Oréal Nordic |

***Mandatory participation** in Course Case Introduction and Hanken Campus Final. Attendance will be registered. If you are absent from a session (e.g., due to illness), please contact the instructors beforehand.

In this course, it is **mandatory to participate in three out of six guest lectures. However, you are warmly welcome to attend all six guest lectures if you want to. The guest lectures are given in English and are jointly organized together with the course *Branding och Marknadskommunikation* (course code 23133).