Università
Ca'Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree in Marketing
and Communication

Curriculum of Innovation &
Marketing

Final Thesis

Applying marketing activities to strengthen brand equity within SMEs: Case studies on Italian and Spanish Language Schools

Supervisor
Prof. Tiziano Vescovi

Graduand
Iuliia Korobtcova
988883

Academic Year
2018 / 2019

INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION

The following chapter is composed of the following sections: background of the study, purpose and research questions, significance of the study, unit of the study and structure of the thesis. The background of the study presents the area of study, providing an explanation of the main concepts in the literature of marketing, branding and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Purpose and research questions are clearly identified and connected to the chapter "Analysis and discussions" where they will be answered and fully explained. The significance of the study illustrates why it is important to investigate brand equity in small and medium enterprises which has a lack of existing literature. The unit of the study is based on the case studies of Italian and Spanish language schools as an example of SMEs. And finally, in the structure of the thesis all the chapters presented in this thesis are discussed.

1.1. Background of the study

In the XXI century, characterized by global market with big variety of organisations of different size, the role of marketing is essential in order to distinguish own brand from competitors' ones, to build brand awareness, to increase sales and to engage customers. Marketing comprises individualisation, targeting and segmentation of consumers and their satisfaction of social and human needs, providing the added value (Kotler et al. 2012). Customers actively evaluate the costs and technical, economic service and social benefits of a given market offer (Anderson et al. 1998). That assessment will reflect on customer's motivation, level of participation, having customer insights, perceptions and expectations from a brand. Marketers should consider what customers value and what customers will gain obtaining their tangible or intangible resources. Thus, marketing can be used to create or strengthen a strong unique brand that can be expressed in long term relationship, and loyalty of customers reveal a promise or bond with a producer (Hoeffler et al. 2002). Therefore, marketers should pay attention to consumer preferences and desirability in order to increase their level of satisfaction or utility that makes a consumer better off (Besanko et al. 2014). It will help to gain a larger share of customers. Getting to know why a customer buys in order to have higher utility is more significant than studying what a customer buys (Peppers et al. 2003).

There is also a great opportunity in marketing to focus on aggregation of the actions, group of large important organisations, and procedures for formation, communication, supplying, and swapping offerings which are essential and have value for customers, clients, partners and

society at large (The American Marketing Association (AMA) 2013). This definition shows that marketing has sophisticated functions to serve many actors of the market.

The marketing literature acknowledged the strategic significance of effective brand management long time ago (Park et al. 1986; Low et al. 1994; Keller 1998; Berthon et al. 1999). This literature assumes that enterprises which lead their managerial operations toward the improvement, purchase, and strengthening of branded goods and services will be better positioned to notice positive benefits in performance (Hankinson 2001; Noble et al. 2002).

To succeed a brand has to propose the sustainable competitive advantage and the difference from other brands for consumers to prefer one brand over others. Branding is a key tool to set up and maintain competitive advantage. A sustainable competitive advantage can be, for example, when an organisation provides customers with high quality product or service than competitors. The differentiation of commodities in consumer's minds is achieved by marketers who make positioning of a product or service of a brand. However, services can differ to a certain level regarding the intangible and tangible aspects as for example Ryanair Airlines and Volotea Airlines, which are quite similar considering the low-cost transportation service. To distinguish better its service a company should add value to customers concerning their needs and wants and make correlation of price-quality. Brands of nowadays represent an integral part in marketing strategy and constitute valuable property and sources of differentiation. Well-designed marketing activities lead an organisation to its success creating added value. This value can be made for a brand in many ways.

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition". To create a brand, marketers have many choices over a quantity and a quality of the brand elements or components they select to give an identification of their products or services. To have a rational choice of combination of brand elements is certainly important, although marketing activities are more important. The creative features and competitive advantages have to be protected in a company in order to give unique, favourable and strong brand associations and self-image to customers (Keller et al. 2012). The special meaning that a brand creates may change perceptions and insight of consumers about a brand as a whole or a product or service. The same good or service can be appraised in a different way by a consumer or a company depending on a brand identification or attribution that is taken into account. When consumers seize advantages and benefits from acquiring the brand, and when they are satisfied from the usage of it, more probable that they

will continue to purchase it. Thus, consumers learn about brands due to previous experiences with a good or a service and its marketing activities.

Brands often decrease consumer search costs (Biswas 1992), risks (Roselius 1971), simplify consumer decision-making and indicate the quality of a good or service (Janiszewski et al. 2000), this way assisting and supporting consumers: providing an information about benefits of a brand.

Branding empowers products and services with the significance of brand equity. The brand equity concept emphasises the importance of the role of the brand in marketing strategies. Thus, branding assists in creating an identity. Furthermore, branding is focused on establishing customer value, not just images.

The brand management in small and medium-sized organizations differs from the large ones (Ahonen 2008; Berthon et al. 2008; Hirvonen et al. 2013). In fact, there is significant amount of literature about well-established brands but there is a lack of background theory for branding within SMEs (Krake 2005; Abimbola et al. 2007). This is a paradox because small and medium-sized enterprises consist of big amount of companies. Moreover, SMEs contribute substantially to a country's gross domestic product, national employment, and export execution (ABS 1997-1998; Graham 1999; Culkin et al. 2000; Blanchard et al. 2013). SMEs can be classified into medium, small and micro enterprises (Ekonomifakta 2018; European Commission, 2019). Medium-sized enterprises have from 50 till 249 employees, less than 43 million Euros of a balance sheet total and a turnover up to 50 million euros. Small companies may have from 10 till 49 employees, 10 million Euros in turnover and a 10 million Euros balance sheet total (European Commission 2019). Micro-organizations have up to 10 employees, 2 million Euros turnover and balance sheet total. However, the competition exists not only in large enterprises but also in SMEs. Thus, it is important to create a strong brand equity to be more competitive.

1.2. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate developments of brand equity in SMEs from the perspective of Italian and Spanish language schools and identify a way to conceptualize such processes. By doing it, this aim is addressed to a concentration on the marketing activities they implement to strengthen their brand equity. Branding has not been largely researched in SMEs and this analysis finds out and specifies the execution of the marketing activities to create a stronger and more favourable brand equity in small and medium-sized enterprises. SMEs will have to work in different ways to strengthen the brand equity (Asamoah 2014) and therefore

create easily recognizable brand and competitive advantage. Thus, the subject is explored through following research questions to guide research:

- What marketing activities do Italian and Spanish language schools apply to strengthen the brand equity?
- How may the marketing activities be conceptualized to better comprehend brand equity within SMEs?

The first research question is formulated to create a descriptive overview of the marketing activities that language schools may work with, in order to then link them to the brand equity and to figure out in what sense the activities may be considered as strengthening. The respond to this issue is carried through both the theoretical and the empirical part of the research. In the theoretical part the marketing activities are searched from the previous literature concerning brand equity and branding in SMEs, and the empirical part is applied to support and complete the findings from the theoretical part.

The second question is based more on theory as the conceptualized activities may contribute to new useful knowledge valuable for SMEs to strengthen their brand equity, as the major amount of literature is based on marketing models for large enterprises.

The study provides a better understanding of the actual situation of small and medium language schools branding in Italy and Spain, and efforts can thus be done to enhance marketing activities within these enterprises. This research makes an intention to contribute to knowledge for SMEs which are interested in building brand equity by giving insight into the conceptualized marketing activities of these study case companies. Therefore, as SMEs are a dominant category in the economies all over the world it is necessary to ensure insight in the development of creating survival and expansion for SMEs (Renton et al. 2015) whereby brand equity may be one way to contribute to this development. This research begins to address the gap of knowledge that scholars have been studying SMEs through the perspectives and theories designed for large enterprises. Thereby, SMEs that work differently with marketing compared to large enterprises in order to reach competitive advantages do not correspond to existing theories and models.

This thesis framework is based on the perception of consumers about the elements of brand equity, which eventually concentrate on the consumer's motivation for consumption from cognitive and sensitive values instead of actual participation of purchasing patterns and consumer choice. The customer perspective is particularly focused because of the importance of realizing which factors influence consumers' assessment of brands in the vast variety of Italian and Spanish language schools available to customers. Faircloth et al. (2001) emphasises the

significance of understanding the building blocks of brand equity instead of measuring the financial value of brands. Consequently, defining a research question that is concentrated on consumer-based brand equity, financial brand equity and brands' financial valuation are neglected in the study. Keller (1993) gives definition to financial brand equity as a measure for estimation the brand's financial value for accounting aims. Such information is needed in large corporate mergers where brand is sold to another party.

Customer-based brand equity consists of customer's brand knowledge driven reaction to the marketing activities of a brand. More favourable reaction by the customer to the marketing activities of the brand, the stronger is the brand equity of the brand. Benevolent consumer reactions are positive associations with the brand which may increase purchase.

Thereby, this research attempts to find ways presented in the case companies' marketing activities in order to raise the chance for consumers to recognize the brand. In the constantly changing marketing communication environment where technologies and internet have changed the way the world interacts and keeps in touch where the brand has become a marketing priority to communicate (Keller 2009).

1.3. Significance of the study

The importance of the research topic is based on several reasons. Firstly, branding and brand equity in SMEs is a current topic of interest. They have been mostly investigated in large enterprises, however brand knowledge in SME environment is a fresh attractive topic (Ahonen 2008). Only a limited quantity of literature may be found on branding and brand building in SMEs (Krake 2005; Ojasalo et al. 2008), and some studies confirm that negligible or no research at all has been done within this field of interest (e.g. Wong et al. 2005; Merrilees 2007; Ahonen 2008; Berthon et al. 2008). The academicians Abimbola and Vallaster (2007) have discovered the role of positive brand equity and reputation in SMEs as a relevant question and further research field. Berthon et al. (2008) also denote that future research should be addressed towards brand management and its impact on brand equity. Moreover, branding and brand equity are topics that have not been widely, if at all, linked to the SME literature and research.

Secondly, existing marketing concepts which are originally developed for large organisations cannot directly be transmitted into small business world without adaptation. In fact, the applying of large organisation models to the context of small and medium companies has been criticized (Gilmore et al. 2001), therefore it is relevant to build models especially for small business area, including the special features of this specific phenomenon. According to Welsh et al. (1981) in

small enterprises the outlook of managers and the principles applied must be different from those of a big company.

Thirdly, the field of service marketing which can strengthen brand equity has limited quantity of literature (Berry 2000; Palmer 2006; Thrassou et al. 2006). Most of bibliography is dedicated to product marketing because the amount of goods is much more than the amount of services in the market. Furthermore, it is more challenging to promote intangible resources than tangible ones because they do not influence sense organs of customers and thus, they cannot be tasted, touched, smelled, heart and seen. This study will contribute in service marketing of small and medium enterprises which use marketing activities to strengthen their brand equity.

There are also more practical reasons for researching marketing activities and brand equity in the field of small and medium-sized enterprises. A strong favourable brand in SMEs, for example, has been admitted to be as a means of gaining new customers (Ojasalo et al. 2008). The quantity of SMEs is bigger than other enterprises, and they comprise the majority of enterprises. Thus, SMEs have been acknowledged to be important players in national economies world-wide trade, which contribute significantly in country's GDP. For example, in 2004 in European Union in the non-financial business economy 99.8 percentages of the companies were small and medium-sized enterprises (Eurostat 2008). There is a constant increase of employees who are motivated to work in SMEs year by year. Therefore, there is not only bigger amount of labour force, but also more customers are being served. Moreover, SMEs take care of employment, offering more working positions, and consequently overcoming unemployment. Thus, it is supposed that it should also be a relevant area of research from the perspective of the society. The benefits of small and medium-sized enterprises for the society are plenty, containing new innovations which SMEs contribute to markets, SMEs perform as catalysts in the community, providing new jobs and assisting in the total economic growth (Reijonen 2008).

In competitive markets, branding may be perceived as one of the most relevant tasks of management (King 1991). A strong favourable brand may bring many marketing advantages (Keller 2000), but only if brand equity is carefully built, nurtured and protected – a challenging task (Keller 2000). In addition, Boyle (2003) mentions that the value of the brand equity is the reason for being able to design strong brands which provide remarkable competitive advantage.

In recent years measuring and managing brand equity has become more and more significant and it is considered one of the most important topics of marketing in companies (Cobb-Walgren et al. 1995). In fact, the interest in brand equity and its development has risen and different interested institutions set more value on it (Ojasalo et al. 2008). With brand equity, a company can achieve

different kinds of advantages such as higher stock returns or acquisition intentions (Pappu et al. 2005). In many businesses brand equity may even include a big part of the value of the whole enterprise and the influence of brand equity to the market value of an organisation or a product/service may be significant.

According to Wong and Merrilees (2005), branding is seen as being important for SMEs. If branding is well-defined and embedded, then it may be a powerful and useful tool for an SME (Merrilees 2007). With branding SMEs can be enabled to optimize and adapt their business to the needs and wants of target audience (Berthon et al. 2008) and have a better chance in dynamic fast changing markets full of competition. Abimbola and Kocak (2007) suppose that SMEs may also have the advantage of facilitating entry when introducing new goods/services or entering new markets. Moreover, strong brand is seen as a durable asset that has a great longevity. With qualitative branding SMEs may also create associations, so strong brand is also an important asset because it cannot be easily imitated by competitors and thus it is difficult for a competitor to replicate the brand (Balmer et al. 2003; Abimbola et al. 2007). In this regard it should be considered as a big advantage also in the long run.

For survival and success, it is important for small companies to have branding as a means of differentiation for their brand (Inskip 2004). With branding, SMEs can distinguish themselves better from competitive organisations. It is an important source, that may offer a company sustainable, competitive advantage, and it may be critically relevant to multiple stakeholder groups (Balmer et al. 2003). Apart of its financial value, the brand may be beneficial and valuable to the organisation when building a partnership or recruiting new employees (ibid.). Abimbola and Kocak (2007) assert that with branding in market strategy, SMEs can positively affect performance and competitiveness of the enterprise. According to Inskip (2004), branding is important to both SMEs and to larger organisations.

Abimbola and Vallaster (2007) emphasize the importance of branding in small and medium-sized enterprises as a critical parameter in the success in competitive markets. With scarce resources, it should be essentially important to investigate the field of branding in SMEs. Having limited resources, sharp lack of reputation and customer base, to build a strong favourable brand is a far more serious topic in SMEs (e.g. Boyle 2003; Krake 2005) compared to larger enterprises which may have better chances to create strong brands because of the ability to apply more resources to branding. Due to the continuously and fastly changing markets, SMEs always need to search ways to be competitive and to survive (Valkokari et al. 2007). As a solution for this SMEs may concentrate on branding and brand equity building. According to Keller (2003), with

the scarce resources of a small enterprises, it could be advantageous to focus on creating a brand in order to effectively build brand equity.

To the scholars the study will contribute to the existing literature in the sphere of branding and marketing experiences in language schools. It should also be a stimulus for further research to optimize and enlarge the present study.

1.4. Unit of the study

Odoom et al. (2017) revealed a gap in existing literature about brand equity in the European context, with cases only from Italy, Germany and Finland. Thus, the chosen case companies for this thesis are Italian and Spanish language schools which represent small and medium enterprises. They have different levels which are named in increasing order of the size of enterprises: local, national and international. Local language schools are present only in one city, national ones are settled in different cities of one country, and international ones cover different countries. A large variety of services are offered by those Italian and Spanish language schools, such as training, translations, interpreting and linguistic services for private individuals, professionals and organizations that work with foreign partners and on international markets. The multicultural teams of trainers, translators, interpreters and consultants operate in Italy and in Spain to satisfy every need and want with high-profile customized solutions. Many of them stand out for constant customer support, innovative solutions, total transparency, passion, enthusiasm and professionalism. Italian and Spanish language schools invest funds in the organizational processes and their marketing activities to create more recognizable brands and to attract more customers. It makes those language schools suitable to investigate the components of brand equity and their functionality in SMEs and to start addressing the gap in the literature. Therefore, the analysis of marketing activities that in Italian and Spanish language schools' cases are undertaken in order to strengthen brand equity can be a great example for other SMEs.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

The study is composed of six main chapters which are illustrated in the structure of the thesis in the Exhibit 1.1. The first chapter provides a framework in the form of the overview of the topic and this study. The background of the study is outlined as well as the purpose of the study, the research questions and the justification of the significance of the study. The second chapter is introduced by theoretical framework which is composed of literature review, key concepts and

conceptual framework. A more specific clarification of the research methodology of this thesis is provided in the third chapter, in which the principles, rules and methods are applied to collect and analyse the data. The fourth chapter provides empirical data, explored by both primary and secondary data. In this chapter the survey respondents of Italian and Spanish language schools are analysed. The chapter five correlates the theoretical and empirical parts by data analysis where an interpretative point of view is developed. The analysis is followed by the discussion with thoughts and ideas about the findings. The conclusions of this thesis are presented in the final chapter, where the study is summed up and the results of the research are connected to the aim and to the contributions. The limitations of the study are evaluated, and further research ideas are announced.

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   1 Introduction    │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                               │
                               ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   2 Theoretical     │
                    │     framework       │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                               │
                               ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │    3 Research       │
                    │    Methodology      │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                               │
                               ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │    4 Empirical      │
                    │       data          │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                               │
                               ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   5 Analysis and    │
                    │     discussion      │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                               │
                               ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   6 Conclusions     │
                    └─────────────────────┘
```
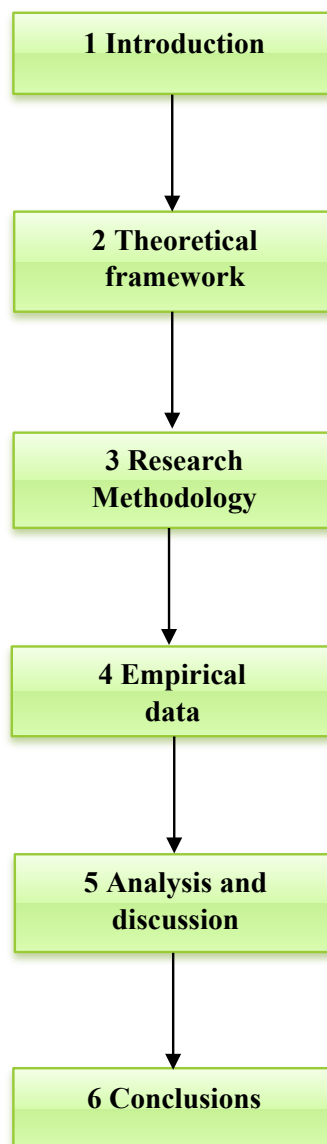
Exhibit 1.1. The structure of the study

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehension of the literature about the gaps in the marketing literature for SMEs. Brand equity and more specifically customer-based brand equity model and its tools are described. Moreover, this chapter presents the key theoretical concepts and definitions that are summarized. Furthermore, the conceptual framework gives the basis for the analysis of the empirical findings.

2.1. Literature review on characteristics of SME marketing

Marketing tends to satisfy the consumers' needs and wants better than the competitors (Fuller 1994; Kotler et al. 2017). To satisfy the consumers' needs and wants, marketing activities may be used to create a brand awareness and to add value to a good/service (Ruekert et al. 1985). Therefore, activities may be advertisement, sales force training, launch activities and events. Although, the marketing function is seen by SMEs to be peripheral to their requirements, regarding sales and promotions only, a vision which has grown from the ability of SMEs to gain sales without planning their marketing activities (Carson 1990; Stokes 2000). It is because the marketing activities in SMEs are inhibited by constraints such as insufficient cash flow, shortage of marketing expertise, organisation size, or tactical and strategic customer-related problems (Carson 1985; Chaston 1998; Simpson et al. 2002; Krake 2005; Merrilees 2005; Doole et al. 2006; Opoku et al. 2007; Berthon et al. 2008). However, despite such restrictions, small and medium-sized enterprises effectively apply marketing activities (Romano et al. 1995; Guersen 1997). The occurring lack of formal and traditional marketing concepts can be misinterpreted as a lack of marketing in some instances, although much of the literature on marketing in SMEs determines the existence of a form of marketing which is unique to small companies (Carson 1993; Stokes 2000), subject to entrepreneurs adjusting general marketing concepts, practices and theories to match their own aims (Carson 1993), while maintaining attention on process and concentrating on incremental innovations (Miles et al. 2006).

One of the initial considerations referring to marketing in SME is the positioning of the SME within a dynamic environment (Murray et al. 2002), that results in SME marketing decisions being taken in a haphazard, non-sequential and unstructured way. This leads to informal, spontaneous, responsive and continuously evolving marketing activities. Moreover, marketing in SMEs continues to evolve during the life-cycle of the organisation in response to new product and market demands, whereas satisfying customer requirements, taking into account the inherent

features and behaviours of the owner/managers, the size and life-cycle stage of the company (Carson 1993; Gilmore et al. 2001).

SMEs are often shown as flat with an informal organizational structure, with an experimental attitude to strive for the new activities (Centeno et al. 2013) which are influenced by the owners/managers values (Gilmore et al. 2001; Abimbola et al. 2007; Horan et al. 2011; Centeno et al. 2013). Thus, central to marketing in SME is the constant development of the experiential knowledge of the entrepreneurs obtained by doing business (Grant et al. 2001). The formation of experiential knowledge is the key competence of the businessman that has been evolved over time. Hence, the entrepreneur is often the main decision maker, who counts on his own experiences and intuitions in controlling the company and the environment (Berthon et al. 2008; Spence & Essoussie, 2010). Therefore, to a certain extent, the marketing characteristics of an SME are gained from the experiential knowledge of the owner/managers and the company characteristics, such as a distinctive managerial style, independence, ownership, having bounded resources, and the scale and scope of operations (Carson et al. 1995). These characteristics combine to shape an inherently innate method of doing business for SME owner/manager, which allows them to concentrate on achieving competitive advantage via added value marketing initiatives (Grant et al. 2001).

Traditionally some marketing approaches focus on the marketing mix which has developed by time. However, instead of concentrating on the traditional firm-advantageous marketing model of the 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) (McCarthy et al. 2002), or more customer-driven replacement of the 4Ps which is 4Cs (commodity, cost, channel and communication) (Shimizu et al. 2016), entrepreneurs emphasise the importance of promotion and word-of-mouth, and have revealed one of the unique selling benefits of their business as the nature of their personal contact with consumers and they focus on the 4Is (Information, Identification, Innovation and Interaction) (Stokes 2000).

Competitive advantage is essential for SMEs and may come from SME communication activities. Dual-direction communications allow firms to listen and to understand better both the individual customers and the industry as a whole. SME communication activities are interacting and participating in social, trade and business activities, these networking activities shape the primary source of market intelligence on which SME planning is built (Gilmore et al. 2001). Within the framework of marketing decisions, there is the tendency that networking with outside individuals, associations and organisations enables businessmen to be successful, and so entrepreneurs utilize networking as an innate marketing tool (Gilmore et al. 1999). The literature about SMEs recognizes that small enterprises cannot compete applying economies of scale; thus,

their competitive advantage can be in the development of innovative products or services, which is dependent from accurate market and customer information (Low et al. 1988; Forrest, 1990). Even if an enterprise has financial resource constraints it may flourish implementing creative, alternative and intuitive marketing practices.

There are proper contextual variables and influences that serve to mould marketing in a SME in a way, which maximises benefit for a SME. Components of this moulding process consist of adapting activities to perform within a dynamic competitive environment with a lot of resource constraints, peculiar owner/manager decision-making and networking and having a consumer orientation (Carson et al. 2009). Therefore, SME marketing activities and practices are moulded to pay attention to competitors, consumers, the business environment and the SME's resource limitations and are strongly affected by the owner/manager's decision-making and inherent skills and capabilities, as illustrated in Exhibit 2.1.
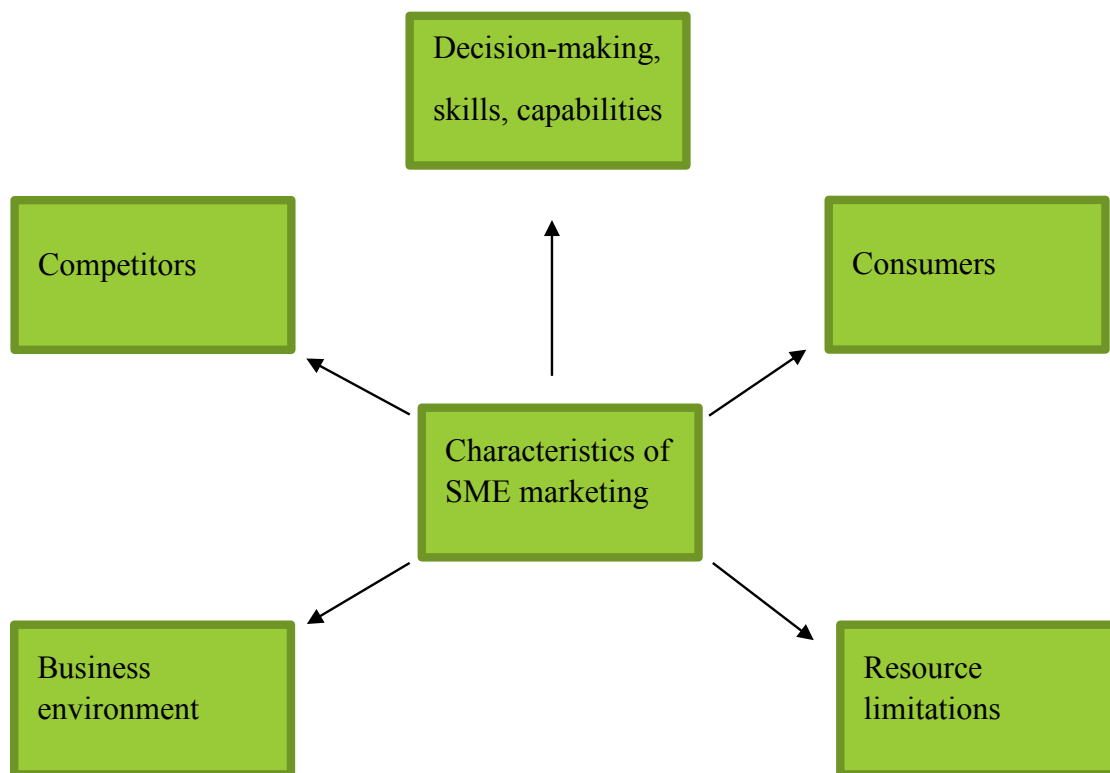
Exhibit 2.1. Characteristics of SME marketing

The SME environment can be described as dynamic, uncertain, fierce competition and complex (Simpson et al. 2002), which is often represented as challenging noticing the differences between SMEs and large enterprises. The differences are in the availability of resources, the size of

expertise or specialist knowledge and the owner's/manager's influence on the decision-making process (Fuller 1994; Coviello et al. 2000; Abimbola 2001; Gilmore et al. 2001; Simpson et al. 2002; Anderson et al. 2004; Krake 2005; Merrillees et al. 2005; Essoussi et al. 2010; Horan et al. 2011; Jämsä et al. 2011; Centeno et al. 2013; Asamoah 2014). These diverse characteristics are considered as opportunities for SMEs by certain scholars and as restrictions by others, concerning their marketing (Odoom et al. 2017).

2.1.1. Marketing differences between SMEs and large organisations

Marketing is becoming an increasingly important aspect for all sizes of organisations towards competitiveness. The marketing practices for SMEs have been argued within existing literature from the viewpoint of large companies which is apparently why SMEs marketing practices are considered as informal, short-term and non-strategic (Coviello et al. 2000). Informal may imply that a firm is more decentralized, that the procedures are not as formal so that reach decisions and that they may be based on non-strategic choices such as owner's/manager's intuitions. The criticism is done through the comparison of SMEs resources and practices of the larger companies (Anderson et al. 2004), which existing theories are built on even though it is known that smaller enterprises act differently than larger ones (Anderson et al. 2009).

The competitive environment component is a subject to several differentiations. First, is the issue of the degree to which a small company affects its market, which is variable according to the structure of the specific market. Second, whether the small company has small size because its market is such small that it is the best option, or it is a matter of choice or ability. Economies of scale and scope are also market characteristics significant in determining the size and growth potential of a company, as are the concentration of small enterprises in their market and the degree and nature of cooperation between companies. Thus, large organisations enjoy economies of scale, their profitability is high due to significant market share whereas SMEs struggle to survive and to enlarge at least a bit their market share (e.g., Buzzell et al. 1975).

In applying marketing activities, SMEs often deviate from their original plans which can result in a continual process of innovative marketing (Kirby et al. 1996). Those innovations or adaptations of marketing are more likely to comprise of enduring supplemental adjustments to a product/service (Knight et al. 1995; Carson et al. 1998), marketing mix (Stokes 1995), distribution systems and channels (Carson et al. 1998; Johne 1999), which let them to differentiate their product or service in market niche from the standardised offerings of larger organisations (Cummins et al. 2000).

To withstand the challenges set out by limited growth terms and larger resource-rich competitors, SMEs can compete creating a combination of invention and pioneering, along with adopting flexible business strategies, structures, and culture, developing their brand (Centeno et al. 2013; Hirvonen et al. 2013). To compensate for any disadvantages experienced because of a SME size, they may generate innovation which can be defined in terms of its nature, continuity, degrees and attributes. The success of SME innovation is defined by its newness, the extent of its adoption and its conversion into an exploitable opportunity for the SME. According to Berthon et al. (2008) SMEs can with their creativity relating to innovative solutions, manage and supply the full potential of their brands even with the stated differences. That may be done by minimizing the constraints through cautious planning, spending the time to realize what branding should imply for the employees within the enterprise and also to involve everybody (Abimbola 2001). Furthermore, SMEs often engage the owner's/managers' network in their marketing, which can relate to friends and family but also competitors to have advices and new ideas (Gilmore et al. 2001; Hirvonen et al. 2013). SME owner/managers has to put marketing into practice in a way that fits a small and/or growing company that does not possess the resources or operational structure of a large organisation. Entrepreneurial marketing relies on knowing how SME owner/managers actually run business and how they make decisions, generate supply and market offering in the market (Carson D. et al. 2007).

Regarding the enterprise's internal environment, the most relevant difference is the strongly upgraded role of the owner/manager in a small company, both in terms of power concentration and also in the sense of the association of most of the company's characteristics and processes with the owner's/manager's individual personality and goals (Thrassou A. et al. 2006). The owner's/managers' own personality and characteristic features are affecting the organization, the culture, the behaviour and the communication (Abimbola and Vallaster 2007) and its employees (Gilmore et al. 2001; Horan et al. 2011).

The influence of an owner/manager may be connected to the brand identity, which is affected by the education and experiences of that person (Hutchinson et al. 2013; Asamoah 2014) and will affect how the brand identity is settled (Essoussi et al. 2010). Moreover, it seems likely that founders choose a business industry depending on their own experiences to suit the needed marketing of the sector (Fuller 1994). Wherefore the owner/managers quite often rely on their own intuition and judgment in various decisions (Berthon et al. 2008) and thus become the centre of the organisation. Therefore, short ways in decision making and communication within the company (Centeno et al. 2013) save time for both the employees and the customers (Abimbola and Vallaster 2007).

Longenecker et al. (2003) present marketing communication especially for small businesses. Despite the theory developed is by and large identical to larger organisation theory found in mainstream literature, there are some potentially important differentiations. First, special emphasis occurs in personal communications methods where the market is small and/or when the organisations have a limited number of customers. Second, small companies are limited in their design of the marketing mix by the lack of their budget. Third, the higher the value offered by the product/service to the customer, the greater the significance of personal communications. Fourth, personal communications by small firms often mean communications by the owner/manager. Fifth, one of the most effective techniques is obtaining personal referrals. Sixth, consequent to financial budget and/or target market restrictions, marketing communications by small businesses often need to be especially focused. Similar findings are found by Palmer (2006) who supports the idea that small service companies, despite having an informal approach to marketing, spend more time with their clients than larger organisations. Palmer also emphasises that owners/managers are typically the ones to perform this task, and he supports the concept of 'generalists' as opposed to 'marketing specialists' for small companies. Further support is given to the above relating to small companies and their characteristics, mainly at the sector level, by Burns et al. (1993) and Storey (1997).

Large firms often have a lack of willingness to conform to modern marketing communication practises that gives a chance to small firms to commit competitive roles and strategic marketing tactics within the industry which are normally unreachable in more usual environments. One possibility is for a small company to be for all practical aims and thus correspondingly work strategically as a market leader or public relations, and lobbying can be a disproportionately relevant marketing communication instrument.

In a small or large firm the most important aspect of creating a value within the mind of the customer about a brand is probably the brand knowledge (Keller 1993), which is based on the brand awareness and the brand image, therefore the recognition and the associations to the brand a customer has in his mind. How to reach that knowledge and thus a strong brand varies between researcher's guidelines (Abimbola 2001; Keller 2001; Krake 2005). An embedded strategy which is concentrated on an inside-out approach, identity-driven approach, where the brand is central for the organisation in order to obtain a long-lasting competitive advantage by the brand focus (Baumgarth et al. 2013). Brand orientation may be defined as such an embedded strategy and a strategic choice or a mindset, which is about seeing the brand as the initial point whereas formulating the firm's strategy (Urde 1994).

Brand orientation concentrates on creating strong brands and as a safeguard for the survival of the firm (Urde 1994). Furthermore, it can be seen as a process within a company where the purpose is to build, develop and protect the brand identity by the constant interaction with the consumers to reach a competitive advantage (Merrilees et al. 2010). But for small and medium-sized enterprises, it seems as if the survival mindset and high sales have more attention (Krake 2005; Berthon et al. 2008). Some scholars claim that the limited resources may be one reason why SMEs have not developed brand orientation to the greater extent (Merrilees et al. 2005). Furthermore, achieving strong brands has not been prioritized because of the common survival mindset and an identity-based framework to strengthen brand equity has been in the absence (Asamoah 2014). Despite that, research has proved a positive relation between brand orientation and a firm's brand performance (Hirvonen et al. 2013; Asamoah 2014; Odoom 2016). The created value that brand orientation may result in is based on brand loyalty, brand awareness, a certain perceived product/service quality and brand associations, which may also be presented as brand equity (Keller 1993; Faircloth et al. 2001).

2.2. Brand Equity and its dimensionality

Brand equity is a term that still does not have general definition and most researchers use their own definition of it (Shocker et al. 1988; Aaker 1991; Ailawadi et al. 2003; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Erdem et al. 2006; Burmann et al. 2009; Keller 2009; Essoussi et al. 2010; Hirvonen et al. 2013; Huang et al. 2015). Since the 1980s brand equity has been one of the most popular and potentially prominent marketing concepts (Keller 1998). The role of brand equity in services marketing has not yet been subjected to detailed analysis (Hartline et al. 2001), in spite of the clear particularities and uniqueness of services and services marketing.

Onkvist and Shaw (1989) state that brands in the service industry are more important than in manufacturing because services are often perceived by customers as a generic commodity, and their intangible nature presents a problem to customers trying to assess quality. The employment of brands in the services sector supplies some quality assurance to customers, while also enabling them to visualize and to gain a better understanding of the intangible characteristics of the service. By using brands, service enterprises can rise above the level of a generic commodity, thus differentiating themselves successfully from the competitors (Berry 2000). Bharadwaj et al. (1993) claim that brands are particularly important in the services sector, since consumers buying services face more complex problems than in other sectors. Consumers often have difficulty in evaluating the content and quality of services, before, during and after the usage

(Hartline et al. 2001). Therefore, a risk arises from the purchase and the usage of services. Nevertheless, this risk may be reduced considerably through the usage of brands (Bharadwaj et al. 1993), because they optimize the ability of customers to process service characteristics cognitively (Onkvist et al. 1989). In other words, branding can increase the tangibility of services.

Brand equity constitutes "the added value" with which a given brand endows a product/service (Farquhar 1989). As Murphy has pointed out, brand equity is the intangible brand property of the brand (Murphy 1989 via Kerin et al. 1998). Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) offered many classifications of multidimensional concept "brand equity" from the aspect of cognitive psychology approach. According to Aaker (1991) brand equity comprises brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and other proprietary brand assets. Keller (1993) focuses on brand knowledge which includes brand awareness and brand image. Other academics identify similar dimensions. Shocker et al. (1988) suggest brand loyalty and brand associations. Kapferer (2005) claims that brand awareness is a key dimension of brand equity. Huang et al. (2015) and Oliver (1997) argued that brand equity is a vital concept to enhance brand loyalty. Other researchers mention that brand equity also includes dimensions such as the trust toward the brand (Degado-Ballester et al. 2005), brand ethics (Keller, 1993; Yoo et al. 2000) and brand personality (Pappu et al. 2005). According to Aaker (1) brand equity creates value both for the customer as for the enterprise, (2) value for the customer enhances value for the enterprise, and (3) brand equity comprises multiple dimensions. Buil et al. (2013) mentioned that brand equity seems as a dynamic strategy for companies. Lassar et al. (1995) as well as Yoo and Donthu (2001) conducted the brand equity research. Lately, it became an important subject in marketing field (Blair et al. 2014).

With the introduction of the concept of brand equity in the early 1990s, the focus of branding began moving away from the branded product/service into the mind of the consumer. Thus, within the marketing literature, lately operationalizations of brand equity fall into two groups: those involving customer perceptions (e.g. brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, brand image) and those involving customer behaviour (e.g. brand loyalty, willingness to pay a high price). Among the perceptual measures, one technique uses customer preference ratings for a branded good/service versus an unbranded equivalent (Aaker 1991). Another approach, used by many authors, treats brand equity as brand name importance, because the name of a brand is often its core indicator (Louviere et al. 1988; Yovovich 1988; Sharkey 1989; MacLachlan et al. 1991).

Brand equity may also be a view of brand performance and the success of the particular brand in the market (Hirvonen et al. 2013). It is about the value of a good or service that may be enhanced due to the associations with the brand name and the meaning attached to it (Keller 1993; Motameni et al. 1998; Essoussi et al. 2010). Brand equity may lead to a competitive advantage, for example customer demand, brand extensions and brand loyalty can be expanded more easily, communication would be more accepted, there could be a better trade leverage, larger margins and less vulnerability towards other competitive market actions may be reached (Aaker 1991; Bendixen et al. 2004; Keller 2009; Armstrong et al. 2017; Kotler et al. 2017). Furthermore, brand equity is utilized to build and measure whether the brand of an organisation or product/service is strong (Motameni et al. 1998; Ailawadi et al. 2003; Burmann et al. 2009; Hirvonen et al. 2013; Armstrong et al. 2017; Kotler et al. 2017). To do so, brand equity has to be integrated in a Long Run focus within brand management to treat the brand as an asset in order to rise the value in the future and to create a brand asset mindset to achieve a strong brand (Wood 2000; Armstrong et al. 2017; Kotler et al. 2017). Many marketers claim that while brands do have value to various target audiences, it is the customer who first determines brand equity (Farquhar 1989; Crimmins 1992).

While most researches have been carried on conceptualizing brand equity from the consumer viewpoint, there is a small quantity of empirical studies that mention how to actually measure brand equity in relation to marketing activities. Therefore, in this thesis Exhibit 2.2 represents the conceptual framework of brand equity, which is an extension of foregoing models. In that figure the first parameter is marketing activities which is antecedent of brand equity. Marketing activities have significant effects on brand equity which consists of brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations, brand quality and brand image. Investigating the link between marketing activities and brand equity is the focus of this research.
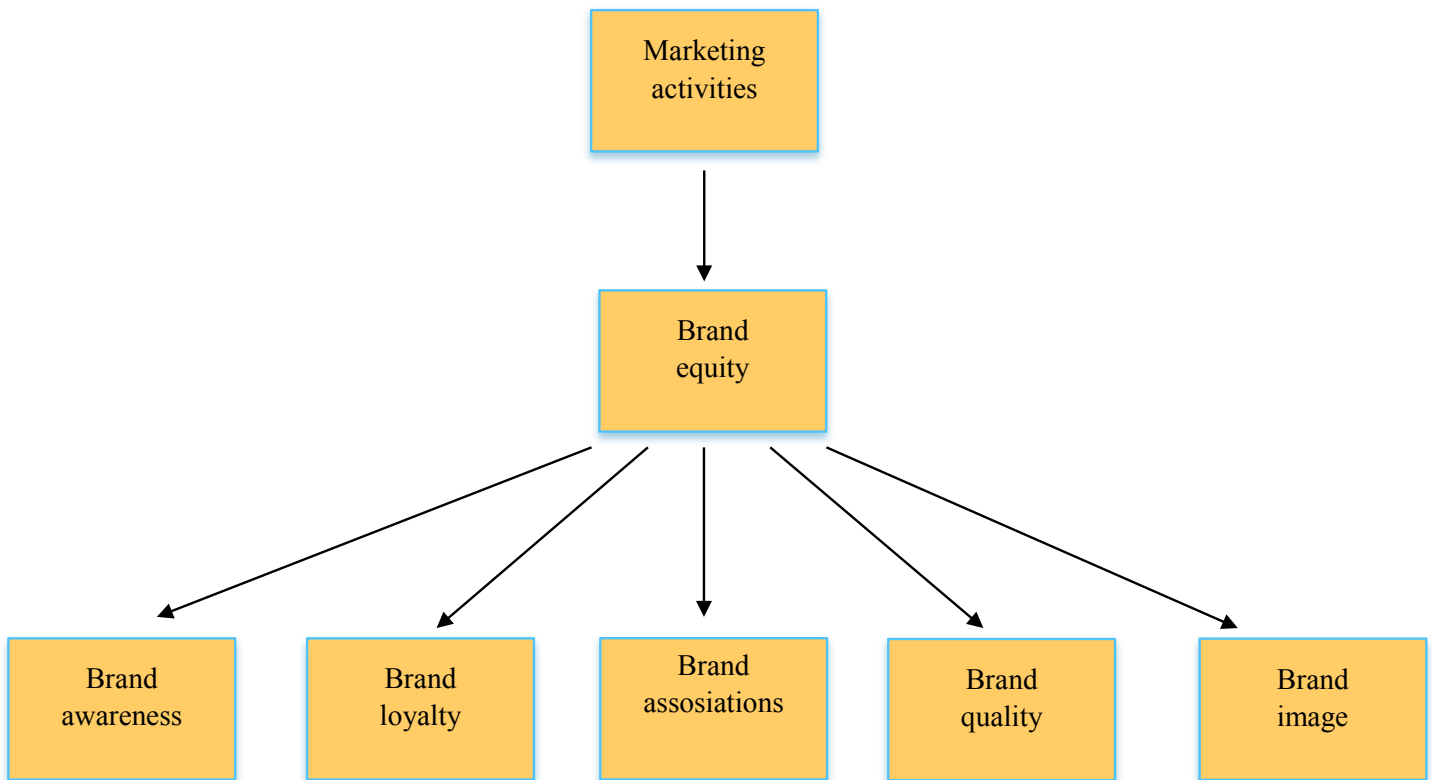
Exhibit 2.2. A conceptual framework of brand equity

Brand equity can be considered as a way of generating a greater importance of the brand and to integrate it in the marketing strategies (Burmann et al. 2009; Keller 2009). Higher brand equity provides the value to the firm which enables the consistent revenue and market share for the market (Busen et al., 2014). Keller (2009) presents a four steps approach to manage brand equity: identifying and setting brand positioning, planning and applying brand marketing programs, measuring and interpreting brand performance and building brand equity. The measuring and interpretation of the brand performance will not be studied in this research. Nevertheless, the four steps are about positioning the brand and creating differences from the competitors, choosing brand elements to build a brand identity, embedding the brand into marketing activities, creating secondary associations and realizing what brand equity is (ibid.).

In summary, the importance of managing and measuring brand equity cannot be completely appreciated until there is clear understanding not only of how brand equity is formed but also how it affects attitudes and behaviours of customers. To build up brand equity a consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) model may be used by companies that are interested in creating a mindset concentrated more on the brand and the relationships with customers. The following exhibit summarizes the evolution of customer-based brand equity concept.

Year	Authors	Contributed thoughts
1988	L. Leuthesser	The set of associations and behaviours of consumers, parent corporation and channel members which allows the brand to earn greater volume or greater margins and that gives for the brand a sustainable, strong and differentiated advantage over their competitors
1988	A.D. Shocker and B. Weitz	Brand loyalty and brand associations
1989	P. H. Farquhar	Advanced performance, stronger risk minimization, lower information costs and a positive image of the good/service
1990	P. H. Farquhar	Positive brand assessment, accessible brand attitude and a consistent brand image
1991	D. A. Aaker	Brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand associations, other proprietary assets
1991	A.D. Shocker, R. K. Srivastava	Brand strength and brand value
1992	N.P. Kapferer	Self-image, personality, physique, culture, reflection and relationship
1993	K.L. Keller	Brand knowledge (Brand Awareness & Brand Image), Consumer Response to Marketing, Differential effect
1993	Young & Rubicam Inc.	Knowledge, differentiation, assessment and relevance
1994	C. S. Park, V. Shrinivasan	Brand equity: attributes based and non-attributes-based pillars
1995	W. Lassar, B. Mittal, A. Sharma	Brand image, quality, value, commitment and trustworthiness
1996	D. A. Aaker	Four components of brand equity: Brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand associations
1996	M. Brown	Brand dynamics: presence, advantage, relevance, performance and bonding
2009	C. Burmann, M. Jost-Benz and N. Riley	Identity-based brand equity model
2011	I. Jacob, K.L. Keller, M. Parameswaran	Brand awareness, brand associations (performance and imagery), brand attitude (judgments & feelings), brand attachments and brand activities (resonance)
2015	Z.J. Huang, L.A. Cai	Brand loyalty

Exhibit 2.3. Evolution of Brand Equity Concept

2.2.1. Customer-based brand equity model

The CBBE-model refers to the added value that a brand grants to a good/service from a customer standpoint (Farquhar 1989; Chan et al. 2010) and is defined as a strong brand that needs a breadth and depth of brand awareness (Keller 2009). Customer-based brand equity model results from the impact of all marketing activities, designed to create positive, strong and unique associations in customers' memory, so that they get a favourable perception of and positive attitude toward the brand (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993; Yoo et al. 2000; Donthu et al. 2001). A

customer analyses information of product/service systematically through these unique associations or mental nodes and attaches meanings to this information.

Since this research is focused on the dual effects of brand equity and relationship marketing on the customer, customer-based measures as well as customer-based conceptualizations will be utilized whenever the opportunity arises. Thus, the value of brand equity is in the behaviour outcomes of customers; brands with high equity get reduced marketing costs as well as greater market share, price premiums, trade leverage and loyalty (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993; Park et al. 1994). To foster brand relationships, enterprises should do careful choices of brand elements that construct the brand identity such as the brand name, logo, or symbols that should be embedded into the marketing programs. In order to develop brand responses and thus relations within the customer mind the CBBE-model is concentrated on four main aspects: brand identity, brand meaning, brand response and brand relationship (Keller 2012; Asamoah 2014).

This model approaches brand equity from the viewpoint of the consumer, irrespective if it is a company or an individual (Keller 2012). The CBBE-model is based on four steps to build a brand and brand equity. Firstly, a joint understanding of brand identity within the enterprise is necessary. Secondly, a brand meaning should be created by unique brand associations which are generated from points of difference. Thirdly, a positive brand response may be created through the marketing activities. And lastly, a brand relationship or brand loyalty should be fostered (ibid.). Consequentially, the questions that should be considered are: 1) Who are you? 2) What are you? 3) What about you? 4) What about you and me? Afterwards these questions can be connected to the four steps which are the foundation of reaching brand equity and according to Keller (2009) to achieve a relationship with the customer. The representation of Keller's CBBE-model is illustrated in Exhibit 2.4.

This model attempts to develop the brand of a firm, to satisfy the consumers' needs to fulfil quality requirements, to create a positive image and to obtain loyal customers. The CBBE-model describes the four steps that are centred on brand identity, brand meaning, brand response and brand relationship, which are elements that may be used to improve an understanding of what effects brand equity may create.
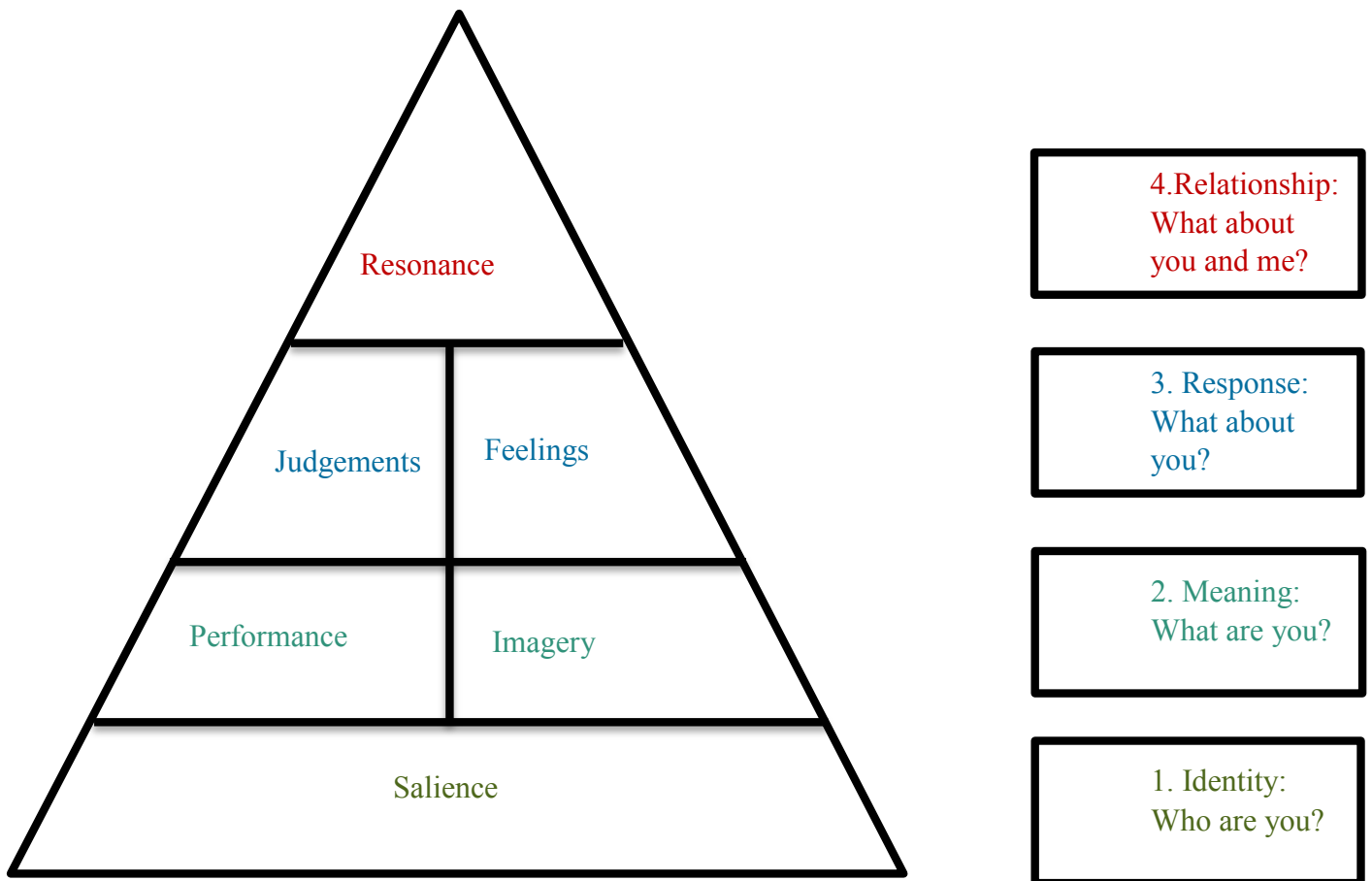
Exhibit 2.4. Keller (2012) brand building of customer-based brand equity

Brand identity (Who are you?)

The brand identity outlines what the firm stands for and in what sense the brand is different compared to competitive firms on the market (Keller 1993). The brand awareness can be considered as an outcome of the brand identity as the different brand can make consumers to recall and recognize the brand in different situations. The brand awareness attempts to connect the needs and basic functions of the consumers to a brand (Keller 2009). When consumers' preferences are defined, the brand should, thus, provide guidelines to lead the consumers with information about what product/service category they provide. Thereby, the process of finding products/services that the consumers need and want will be facilitated. The strategies of product/service differentiation require more concentration on incremental customer satisfaction as well as reengineering the organizational strategies on the other hand obtaining the organizational goals.

To create an opportunity to more easily appear in the consumers' consideration set, which includes the brands that have a chance of being considered for purchase is another outcome of increased brand awareness (Keller 1993). Therefore, the brand identity is built on several brand

elements in order to create an identity that is different from the competitors (Keller 2009). In 1992, Kapferer presented the brand identity concept with six elements: physique, personality, culture, self-image, reflection and relationship as the fundamental characteristics of product/service recognition and differentiation. The brand elements are used to set a connection that a consumer can make seeing the brand name, logo, symbol or others which also are perceived as the salience of the brand and describe who the firm or the organization is. The concept of brand refers to the reputation that has association with name or trademarks of the good, service or firm. It shows specific identity of the product/service by means of product/service features, product/service quality or manufacturer of product/service. The brand identity should express what an organization stands for and what they prefer customers to think about them. Nevertheless, the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the consumers are nothing an enterprise can decide and the consumers' picture and understanding of the brand identity is the brand image, which only exists in the minds of the consumers. The brand awareness is one approach to understand that consumers can think of brands in different ways.

Brand awareness may be divided into the depth and breadth, where the depth of the brand awareness is how easy it is for the consumer to recognize or remember a brand (Keller 2009). The awareness breadth means how broadly a brand is remembered by the consumer in a purchase situation. Breath is not only to recall the brand but to consider the brand in various situations, to increase the chances of consumers thinking of the brand in as many opportunities as possible. To facilitate it that process can be done by creating a brand name that consumers can recall and recognize.

The brand name is one way of strengthening the brand equity and a firm needs to find a suitable name that is attractive, easy to recall, creative, short, simple and that may evoke positive feelings (Centeno et al. 2013). To decide an appropriate brand name Centeno et al. (2013) noted that SMEs receive support from external graphic designers to create a brand with matching colours and symbols to communicate selected associations and brand personality. The owner's personal values are often outlined while defining the brand and brand identity. Together with the owner also the staff represents the brand and should, thus, be integrated into a Long Run approach (Merrilees et al. 2005).

Brand meaning (What are you?)

The brand meaning may be another way of considering the brand image and what kind of associations the brand should create within the consumers' mind (Keller 2009). The brand meaning is built on two components: brand imagery and brand performance. The imagery has

more connection to intangible perspectives that the consumers can base on their own experiences with the brand or by advertisement (ibid.). The examples of such intangible aspects may be evoked in purchase situations, in the usage of a good, in experiences of consumers themselves or through friends and family, heritage and personality.

The brand imagery is about the social needs of the consumer and is connected to the intangible aspects related to the brand and may be age, gender, race, income, and careers that have connection with the consumer and then to the brand (Keller 2009). The brand personality is more related to the personal values that an enterprise should consider identifying and matching to the market segment to attract customers with similar interests that can facilitate the process of buying a product/service (ibid.).

Considering where the consumer should encounter the good, in the purchase or usage situations, it may create beneficial associations and facilitate to take a decision where and when the brand may be used (Keller 2009). Brand associations generate the meaning in consumer mind that to how much extent good/service will satisfy the needs (Aaker 1996). Brands may be connected to new associations as well as associations from the past that consumers have experienced through more personal occasions, through family and friends or events where the brand has been mentioned. Therefore, the brand associations can affect consumers' brand imagery and the same counts for public associations of the brand (ibid.). Publicly accepted goods/services can also affect the brand personality.

The brand personality may be related to the brand imagery, as customers often choose brands that are similar to their own personality, even though they sometimes purchase brands based on their desired personality instead of their actual image (Keller 2009). Furthermore, customer needs are also referred to the search for brands that are similar to their own self-identity in order to show to the world who they are and who they desire to be (Ilaw 2014), based on consumers' own principles and beliefs which they may reflect in their chosen brands that may represent consumers' own taste, wealth, style or membership connected to social groups. Brands may be a way of expressing customers' social identities that represent what they feel, and such information may be useful in order to satisfy their needs (ibid.).

To succeed in the marketing, the good/service should satisfy the consumers' needs with different attributes connected to the good or service (Keller 2012). Brand performance is about whether a firm can satisfy the functional needs of the consumer, based on the good/service and providing the consumers a unique experience. To do so, selected product attributes that characterize the product or service should be carefully chosen to be able to satisfy the customer (Keller 1993).

These attributes may be price, service, packaging, design and style. They will not always be considered as valuable in the purchase decision, but the consumers will have an association in memory from the brand that may be related to the good itself or the package. In that sense, these attributes may facilitate the process of recognizing a brand within the consumers' mind.

Brand response (What about you?)

The brand response is based on consumers' reactions to a brand, which includes marketing activities and the information the consumers get exposed to (Keller 2012). The responses may be built in two different ways: rationally (the brand judgments) or more sentimentally (the brand feelings). Brand judgments are the active choices consumers make through gathering all associations of the brand and create their own opinion (ibid.). The judgments are built on brand quality, brand credibility, brand consideration and brand superiority. Brand quality is about the perceived quality of the brand and thus the perception of the value and satisfaction (ibid.). Brand credibility is based on whether the brand can be considered as credible depending on the expertise, the perceived competence of the brand in the market which may create trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness is determined based on if the brand is dependable or not, regarding the interests of the consumers (Keller 2012). Brand consideration is another brand judgment and it is about the consideration of a consumer to actually include the brand into the set of brands. This one is a crucial step because brand should be considered in order to be relevant and possible to be purchased (ibid.). Brand superiority is the last one and is about if the consumer believes that a brand is unique or not. That means whether consumers actually see brands with advantages compared to others and the superiority is quite important in creating a relationship with consumers (ibid.). In order to see a brand as unique or not brand feelings of consumers matter, they may evoke feelings constituted by the marketing activities or strategies. Mentioned feelings in theory are excitement, warmth, fun, security, entertainment, social approval and self-respect (ibid.).

Brand relationship (What about you and me?)

Brand resonance is the last step in the CBBE-model and it is about the relationship of consumers connected to the brand and to what extent the consumers can identify themselves with the brand (Keller 2012). The relationship is built on intensity or the psychological bond that a consumer can have with a brand and the activity level which is based on the loyalty. The loyalty is measured in terms of the repeated purchases (ibid.). Those two dimensions are subdivided into

four different categories: behavioural loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement.

The behavioural loyalty implies the quantity and frequency of the brand purchases and may contribute to the brand resonance (Keller 2009). Though, sometimes it is more complicated, for example, when consumers buy a brand because other brands are out of stock, too expensive or not accessible. To reach resonance the firm needs to create a stronger personal attachment, in order to gain loyal customers (ibid.). Satisfaction may sometimes not be enough and there may be a need for creating an attachment to the brand. Another way of achieving resonance is to create meaning for the consumer connected to the brand which may be done through communities (ibid.).

If consumers can identify themselves with a brand community, they may feel a unity with other people (Keller 2012). Lastly, the affirmation with the greatest power that can create brand loyalty is when consumers engage in the brand, desiring more than the purchase and consumption behaviours. Instead, they also spend time and efforts to engage in the brand in different ways such as surfing in brand websites, participation in chat rooms or even having a status of ambassadors for the brand (ibid.). The personal identification referred to the brand, the personal attachment and the meaning above the satisfaction are important in order to create a brand resonance or relationship and therefore loyal consumers.

2.2.2. Brand building tools of CBBE-model

The four described steps of the CBBE-model, brand awareness, brand associations, brand response and brand relationship, are the foundation in order to achieve strong, favourable and unique associations, which are the basis of reaching brand equity (Keller 2009). To achieve customer-based brand equity it is necessary to keep these four concepts in mind selecting the brand building tools: brand elements, developing marketing programs and activities and to use the leverage of secondary associations in order to get the advantages. The advantages can be greater loyalty, more interested customers in the brand, larger margins and less vulnerability in relation to competitive marketing actions (ibid.). Keller (2009) considers brand awareness and brand associations as the customer knowledge effects, where the two aspects are necessary in order to reach the customers' attention and curiosity about the brand to obtain the benefits. Nevertheless, the brand response and brand resonance are necessary to keep in mind deciding the brand building tools. That is based on including the customers' feelings, judgements and identification of the brand which may be important in order to create loyal customers. To attract

customers and to make them interested in the brand is one thing, but to set a long-lasting relationship with them and to reach Long-Run buyers needs more than just recognition.

Brand elements

The brand elements can give the possibility of creating a brand identity, which is built on a cluster of brand elements that can strengthen each other (Keller 2009). Brand elements may be logos or symbols, jingles, slogans, the packaging or design of a good. In order to create a brand name, it has to be simple, familiar and distinctive to achieve recognition by the customer (Keller 1993). Brand elements are not just about the brand name but whether they may enhance the brand awareness or the relation to the brand associations. Furthermore, they represent the verbal and visual information that identifies and differentiates a good from their competition (Keller 2009). The brand elements may be chosen depending on these criterions: meaningfulness, memorability, likability, adaptability, transferability and protectability. They are categorized into the more offensive (meaningfulness, memorability, likability) and defensive strategies (adaptability, transferability, protectability) (ibid.).

The offensive criterions are used to build brand equity, they are important to generate easily recognized and recalled associations to a brand, to have an attractive and appealing appearance (Keller 2009). Meaningfulness simplifies the information for the customer in choosing brand elements that indicate what product category the good belongs to and who the good is useful for (ibid.). Memorability has a connection to creating a recognition of the brand in order to keep the brand in mind during a purchase. Likability is related to the brand elements as the brand should be likable and easy to recognize through colourful and attractive brands.

The defensive criterions of adaptability, transferability and protectability may be used to leverage and maintain brand equity (Keller 2009). Adaptability has connection to the brand elements chance of remaining interesting and memorable within the consumers' mind over time. Transferability is about the brand elements chance to maintain the brand equity regarding new products, concerning brand extensions (ibid.). Finally, protectability implies the protection of the brand elements both legally and competitively on the market. The brand name, package or other attributes should be unique and original in order to protect them from other brands that otherwise might be copied (ibid.). The brand elements can be combined and can create the brand identity, which in its turn contributes in generating brand image and brand awareness within the consumers' mind. Then these brand elements are needed to be established in order to sell them and to achieve a competitive advantage in the market (ibid.).

Marketing programs

To build and manage a brand, a marketing program is needed which comprises pricing, distribution channels and communication strategies to sell the product (Keller 2009). These programs are used to rise the brand awareness and to create brand associations within the consumers' mind in their purchase and usage situations of a good or service (Keller 1993). Namely, it may be done by any activity that can make consumer experience the brand which thus can increase the awareness of the brand. Promotions and advertising such as sports sponsorship, media, publicity in the point of purchase situations are examples to expose the customer to the brand (ibid.). Furthermore, enterprises should plan on what kind of attributes that should be used in connection to the product or service in order to let the consumer experience them.

Marketing planning is the first step, although within SMEs it is often a reactive process, where the actions are based on the environment's impact on the firm (O'Donnel 2011). The time on planning is often scarce and is more based on a bottom-up approach, where the consumer constitutes the foundation which the firm tries to satisfy. Keeping existing consumers seems the most important task, due to the effort of acquiring new ones (ibid.). Though, to acquire new consumers the use of word-of-mouth recommendations and the personal interaction are common. In the interaction between employees and consumers information is provided in an informal way, and it decreases the costs of gathering information through formal marketing (ibid.). The same applies for information relating to competitors, which is often collected through employees, suppliers, consumers and advertisements. The information about competitors is also useful when managing the strategies for the product/service offer and the pricing in order to provide products/services that have a high quality and may generate competitive advantages (ibid.).

Strategies that may be used are the pricing strategy, product strategy, channel strategy and communication strategy (Keller 2009). The pricing affects the brand associations directly and puts the good in relation to the other goods in the product category that influence the brand. Depending on what kind of consumer segment a firm has focused on the price matters in order to generate brand associations such as high-quality products/services or mainstream products/services with less quality (ibid.). Furthermore, a firm can choose whether to concentrate on the value-based pricing or channel strategy. The value-based pricing strategy is about achieving an even distribution of the price based on the product costs, the product price, delivery and product design (ibid.). The channel strategy is more about selecting channels that seem suitable for the price, in order to create appropriate associations (O'Donnel 2011).

In order to choose channels, a decision whether it should be through a direct channel or an indirect is the first step (Keller 2009). Direct channels are supposed when the product/service is sold through a direct contact, as for example, by an e-mail, the phone, enterprise-owned store or visits. Indirect channels are when the product/service is sold via a third-party broker, distributors, wholesalers or retailers (ibid.). Often the combination of channels is used and is depending on the market if it is effective or not in order to deliver the product/service to the customer.

The marketing communication strategy is about different options a firm can use to choose activities which should promote the brand (Keller 2009). It can be done through online ads, media or events, with sponsorship and at the point of purchase. Marketing communication may be conducted in many ways, through advertisements in the television, radio, by print, direct response, banner, websites and so on (ibid.). Yet, the place of such advertisements should consider where the customer gets exposed to it. Product placement in a store is also important, many firms pay high prices for it in order to increase the opportunity of reaching the customer with their brand and to amplify the brand knowledge (ibid.). To do so, an enterprise needs to consider if a pull or push strategy should be implemented.

The push strategy occurs when the good is taken to the customer (Keller 2009). This is done when a manufacturer is promoting a good and that a retailer is stocking the good to offer it to the customer and to make it available in the store. Whereas the pull strategy happens when the customer is searching the brand, and the retailer is selling the good based on the request from the customer (ibid.). Push strategies may include activities such as negotiating with the retailer to stock goods, the point of sales displays and promotions in order to increase the demand of the stores. The pull strategies can be reached through activities such as advertising, promotions and sales promotions (ibid.). Nevertheless, retailers have power over manufacturers due to their possible influence on the customers' purchase decisions in the stores (Capon 2009).

Leverage secondary associations

As brand knowledge may be used to increase brand equity, the usage of secondary associations may provide brand knowledge other entities that may be connected to the own brand (Keller 2009). Other entities are used in order to provide customers with the associations from a known organization, firm or person that may be transferred to the own brand. It can be connected to the firm itself, distribution channel, the country of origin, events, other brands, endorsement or other third-party sources that may be rewards or reviews (ibid.). Nevertheless, it is necessary that the customers have previous knowledge about the secondary entity in order to transmit those associations, feelings and judgments to the brand. Public relations, promotions or sponsorship

can be ways of achieving the attention of the customers and creating brand knowledge (Keller 2009). Yet, these seem more expensive alternatives and are often combined with some types of promotions that are sales oriented (Asamoah 2014).

Nevertheless, these associations should be positive and chosen carefully to transmit proper associations to the own brand (Keller 2009). The researcher presents advantages and disadvantages with the different secondary associations. Though, Keller did not describe the differences between the secondary associations concerning the direct or indirect contact with the customer. As for example, regarding events and sponsorships, whereby sponsorship may be through radio and thereby only reach the customer through an indirect channel. Events provide the opportunity to have direct contact with the customers. Furthermore, secondary associations are likely to be used when an enterprise tries to sell a new product/service, where customers lack information to judge that product/service.

Those three brand building tool categories: brand elements, marketing programs and activities, leveraging secondary associations seem rather general and can, thus, be connected to several CBBE attributes. Selecting the brand elements based on the mentioned criterions are ways of achieving more recognition of the brand and this way it is easier to recall a brand in the mind of the customer. Moreover, they contribute to leverage and maintain the brand equity via facilitating the process of generating a continuity of the brand elements.

The brand building tools as outlined by Keller (2009) are elements that may be used in order to build a brand in general but in combination with the CBBE brand attributes they can be used to explain what brand equity is and what it could result in. Hence, the model seems to be about the effects and the outcomes where the attributes are desirable effects in achieving, for example, brand awareness and knowledge about the brand at the customer level. Though, the customer does not seem to be present in the brand building tools but instead has an exclusive perspective from the enterprise. Whereas the customers' perspective seems absent in the tools they are more in focus in the attributes, which are built on the customers' perceptions of the brand, their interpretation of it, the responses to it and the relationship they may build to the brand and therefore the enterprise.

2.3. Key theoretical concepts

In academic research, it is important to determine the key concepts and their meaning in the particular study. The concepts can have multiple meanings depending on the perspective and everyone may have different views of them. These views can also vary in different

circumstances and in time. Exhibit 2.5 provides an overview of the key concepts based on the literature review. These concepts suggest a vocabulary to help others frame and to make sense of brand equity in SMEs and to provide an understanding of the concepts in the conceptual framework presented in 2.4.

Key concepts	Definitions/Explanations
Brand equity	The combination of brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations, brand quality and brand image.
Generating brand identity	The provision of the perspective what the organisation stands for, which influences consumers' image about their brand.
Creating brand meaning	The social and personal needs that can be considered as useful information for an enterprise in order to satisfy their consumers' needs.
Gaining brand response	The consumers' communication concerning their understanding about the brand, and if it satisfies their needs both functionally and emotionally.
Building brand relationship	The possible relationship to the consumers when the personal identification and connection to the brand exist, which creates individual meaning.
Brand elements	Can be the brand name, symbols, logo, and colours to differentiate themselves from competitors, and thus to achieve brand awareness in both purchase and usage situations.
Marketing programs	Marketing activities that can increase the chance of consumers experiencing the brand, and therefore to achieve an increase of the brand awareness and brand reputation, done through various strategies.
Secondary associations	Other brands may be related to the organisation's own brand by using the knowledge and associations of other brands in order to increase the awareness of the consumers
Marketing activities	Activities that may be used by an enterprise to achieve an added value to a product/service and to build brand awareness in order to satisfy the consumers' needs.

Exhibit 2.5. Summary of the key theoretical concepts

Keller (2009) presented the pyramid shaped visualization of the four brand attributes whereas it can be considered as if a firm has to reach the first level in generating a brand identity, in order to create meaning and a response of the customer building a relationship. Nevertheless, the model describes what the brand attributes and brand building tools are and what the desired outcomes should be, but not what an organisation actually should do to strengthen the brand equity. These gaps create the conceptual starting point in order to realize the process of strengthening brand equity.

2.4. Conceptual framework

The theoretical framework of the CBBE-model provides the basis for this research to investigate and analyse marketing activities in SMEs and a particular relevance for brand equity in the case studies on Italian and Spanish language schools. Although, the model is of limited use when striving to understand in what way those activities can be strengthened for the organisations' brand equity. The model describes the attributes and the possible outcomes of them but not how to strengthen the brand. Furthermore, the brand building tools could rather be viewed and will from now on be defined as brand building activities.

Keller (2009) argues that the brand equity and brand building are separated and quite static. Instead marketing activities are not static, but they are seen as a process. The conceptual framework presented in Exhibit 2.6 shows that attributes, marketing activities and brand equity are interconnected. The brand building activities and brand attributes are used to identify and conceptualize the marketing activities of the organisation in order to strengthen the brand equity. This contrasts with Keller's pyramid where the brand attributes are on different levels, which suggest that they have to achieve every level before an enterprise can go on to the next higher one.

In the conceptual framework the brand attributes are combined with brand building activities, whereby the attributes should be considered as a process needing to adapt to the development of the organisation over time. Therefore, this study investigates the experiences of the case companies and interprets their activities that might have contributed to strengthening the brand equity. Though, it might be hard to categorize activities under just one attribute and without an order to achieve these attributes. Using the brand attributes, marketing activities can be seen as a process that continuously needs to be maintained in the daily work. Therefore, the attributes are used to create an understanding of why the organisation choses their brand building activities and their relation to strengthen brand equity. In the conceptual framework the brand building

activities are considered as an addition to the brand attributes. That enforces and supports the brand attributes which in their turn contribute to strengthening the brand equity, instead of perceiving them as two detached models. The second layer in Exhibit 2.6. indicates the brand building and marketing activities.

The brand attributes are directly related to the brand equity but also connected to the marketing and brand building activities in the surrounding layer. Generating brand identity is about providing an information about what the organisation stands for. The brand elements are used to create the visual identity of the brand. Creating brand meaning is based on the personal and social needs that an enterprise has to consider in choosing their marketing activities. Gaining the brand response considers the understanding about the brand of the consumers and in what sense the brand satisfies both functional and emotional needs of the consumers. Building brand relationship is something an organisation can strive for by identifying the personal values of the consumers in order to create loyalty.
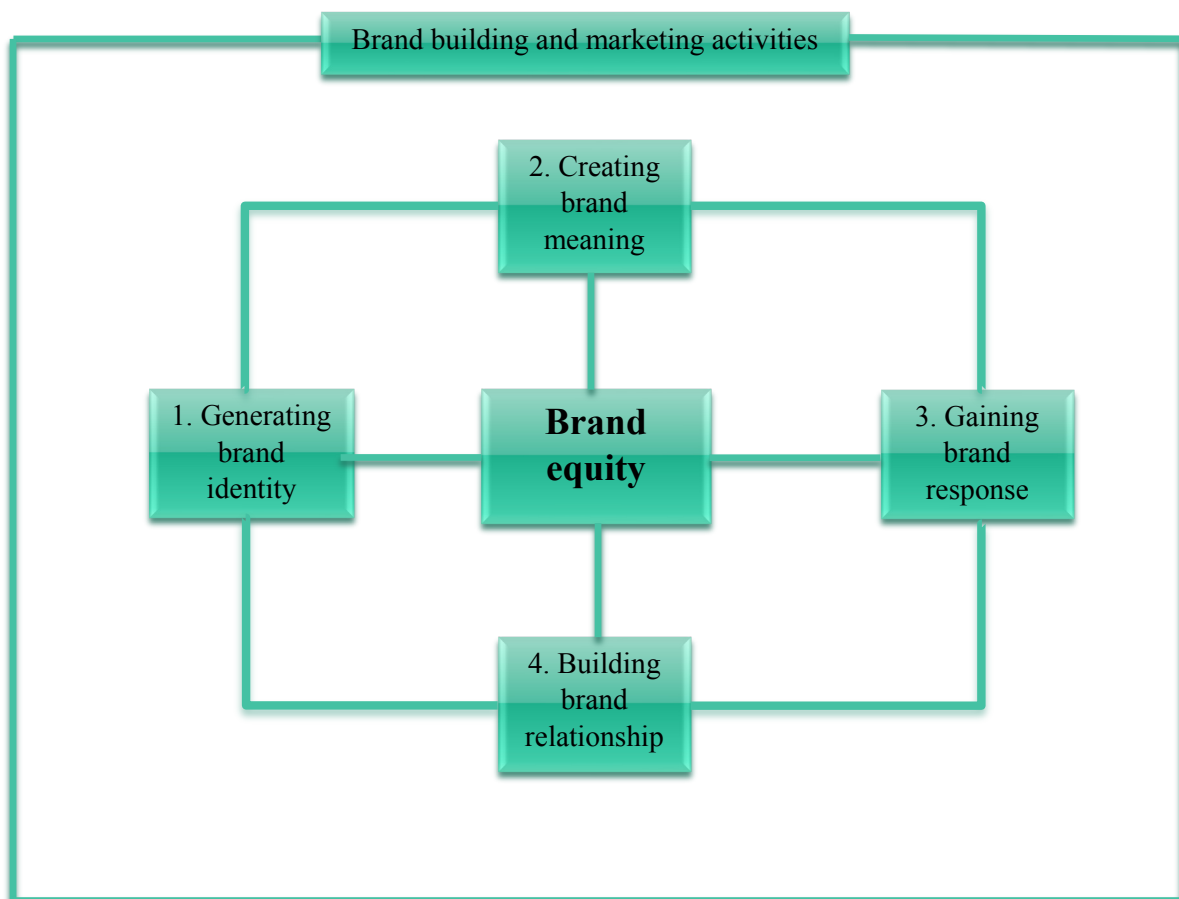

Exhibit 2.6. The conceptual framework of interpreted theory

It is claimed that creating and protecting brand equity starts with a brand-oriented mindset, which is focusing on building strong brands and safeguarding the survival of the organisation (Urde 1994). Furthermore, brand equity can be seen as a process in a company where the purpose is to create, develop and protect the brand identity through the constant interaction with the consumers to reach a competitive advantage (Merrilees et al. 2010). Therefore, the conceptual framework can be seen as the mindset within a company with a focus on the brand which comprises the process of understanding how an SME may strengthen brand equity. All in all, the conceptual framework has the beginning from Keller's pyramid and shows the interrelated process of the brand activities, attributes and brand equity. Secondly, the attributes are used to conceptualize the marketing activities in the enterprise. Thirdly, the brand building tools are considered as activities and supportive tools of the brand attributes. Lastly, the brand-oriented mindset may be helpful to establish in a company in order to create a common comprehension among the employees.

3. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this chapter is to evaluate and discuss the research method and methodology that have been applied for this study. The main area discussed is focused on the information about what methodological approach, strategy and reasoning were chosen to conduct this research and thus ensure the quality and relationship to the aim and research questions. Therefore, more specific techniques and rules have been used to guide the collection of data in order to acquire appropriate knowledge. In addition, an evaluation of the sources is presented, as well as the methods used to increase reliability and validity are emphasized.

3.1. Research approach: paradigm, methodology and reasoning

Research paradigm is defined as an established model accepted by a substantial amount of people in a research community. Nevertheless, it may be challenging for researchers to frame effectively new study because it requires comprehension of what has already been done, how various studies relate and the different methods of approaching the topic (Watson et al. 2002). Reasoning about the research field constantly generates insights that inform and position ongoing research.

There is no 'correct' paradigmatic or theoretical framework: it is a researcher's choice to determine own paradigmatic viewpoint and how that informs a research design to best answer questions of study.

A paradigm is a common viewpoint that represents a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) and values in a discipline and that guides how problems can be addressed and understood in order to obtain knowledge (Schwandt 2001). It includes a set of methods that all exhibit the same pattern or feature in common (Gyampah, et al. 1989). A research paradigm has four components: ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology (Patton 2002; Scotland 2012). Ontology analyses what we believe about the verifiable reality or whether there exist multiple, socially constructed realities. Epistemology investigates the nature of truth and knowledge. Axiology deals with ethics and value systems to which individuals believe. Methodology implies to investigate some certain questions and use suitable approaches to systematic inquiry.

The combination of considering what is real and how is something known, the theoretical perspective about the subject of study, the literature that exists on the topic and a researcher's own value system work together to select the most suitable paradigm to use (Exhibit 3.1).

Paradigm

Suppositions about the nature of reality & knowledge

Literature framework & research practice

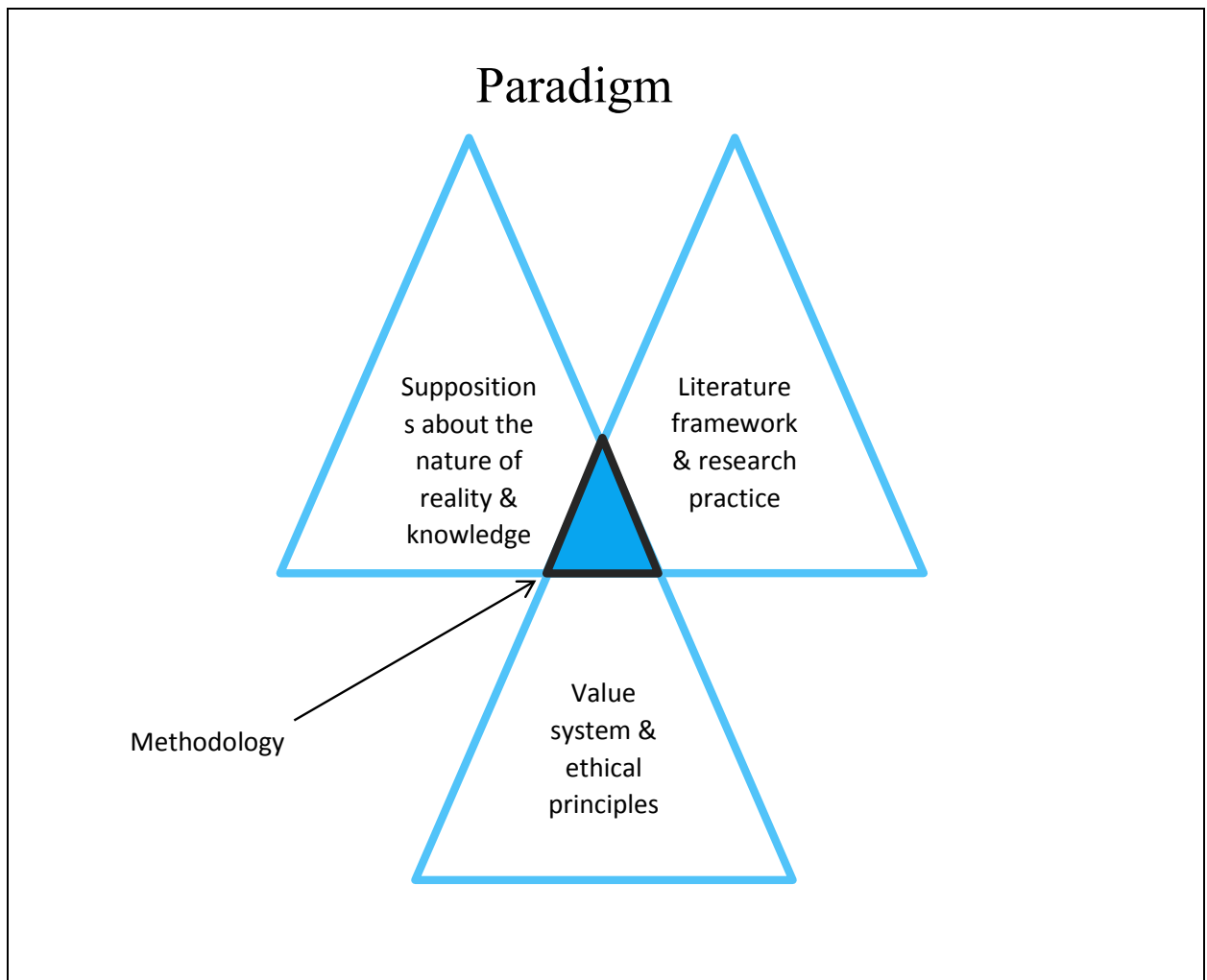Methodology

Value system & ethical principles

Exhibit 3.1. The set of factors influencing the choice of a paradigm and its methodology (source: Garner et al. 2012)

The methodology gives a summary of the research process that explains how the research will proceed. Deciding on a methodology begins with a choice of the research paradigm which informs the study. Hence, the methodological process is run by certain beliefs about the nature of reality, knowledge, values, by the choice of literature with its comprehension, and research practice on a specific topic of study. Methodology is where suppositions about the nature of reality and knowledge, values, theory and practice on a specific topic converge. Exhibit 3.1 demonstrates this relationship. Methods are the means used for collecting data and are an essential part of the methodology.

The research strategy for this study began by gathering and studying some background information regarding the situation of SMEs in Italy and Spain; thereafter the research structured questions were prepared. Furthermore, to collect data from the participants in this thesis a quantitative approach and deductive reasoning were applied. This due to its perspective with a

focus on statistical data and a focus on the verifiability of empirical data collected from interviews by theoretical arguments from literature review.

3.1.1. Quantitative approach

In this thesis, the quantitative approach provided the opportunity to analyse statistically the meaning of Italian and Spanish language schools' marketing activities, the perceptions of students about the language schools and the importance of brand building for strengthening brand equity. Quantitative research usually seeks to quantify data and, typically, applies some forms of statistical analysis.

There are two main approaches with great differences between them to study and understand consumers which are the quantitative and qualitative approaches (Ghauri et al. 1995). Dogmatic positions are often made in favour of either quantitative research or qualitative research by marketing researchers and decision-makers alike. The positions are founded upon which of the approaches is perceived to provide the most accurate understanding of customers. The extreme stances about this question mirror each other. The arguments between quantitative and qualitative marketing researchers about their relative strengths and weaknesses are of genuine practical value. The nature of marketing decision making includes a vast array of problems and types of decision-makers. Many quantitative researchers are capable to dismiss qualitative studies entirely as giving no valid findings – indeed as being a bit better than journalistic accounts. They claim that qualitative researchers ignore representative sampling, with their found data based on a single case or only a few cases. Instead, qualitative researchers state that qualitative techniques are the only method of data collection sensitive enough to capture the nuances of customer attitudes, motives and behaviour (Bloor et al. 2001).

Quantitative approach is problem oriented and more useful in the case of structured decisions. It is suitable in decision situations where most of the important factors are controllable to a reasonable extent and there is complete control over the decision making. Such decision situations are more typical in case of operational decisions. The quantitative approach strives to define a problem clearly and separates the impact of problem from its causes.

When the data to be analysed are quantitative, each questionnaire or observation form is tested or edited and, if necessary, corrected (Birks 2007). Number or letter codes are attributed to represent each response to each question in the questionnaire. The data from the questionnaires are transcribed into a proprietary data analysis package. Verification guarantees that the data

from the original questionnaires have been precisely transcribed, whereas the data analysis gives meaning to the data that have been gathered. Univariate techniques are applied for evaluating data when there is a single measurement of every unit or element in the sample; if there are many measurements of every element, each variable is analysed in isolation. In contrast, multivariate techniques are applied for evaluating data when there are two or more measurements of each unit and the variables are evaluated simultaneously.

Quantitative and survey observation techniques are significant techniques in descriptive research designs. Observation includes recording the behavioural patterns of humans, objects and events in a systematic manner to gather information about the phenomenon of interest. Survey techniques can be classified by mode of administration as traditional telephone interviews, personal in-home or office interviews, computer-assisted telephone interviews, computer-assisted personal interviews, street interviews, postal surveys, mail panels, e-mail and Internet surveys (Birks 2007). In this study, there has been provided the online questionnaire using e-mail. The quantitative approach is more commonly associated with the deductive reasoning; thus, both are applied in this thesis.

3.1.2. Deductive reasoning

The deductive reasoning was chosen for this study, which is "top-down logic" where hypotheses are set and should be tested. Deduction represents a form of reasoning in which a conclusion is validly derived from some premises and must be true if those premises are true (Birks 2007). In deductive reasoning an area of enquiry is identified, set in the context of well-developed theory, which is considered as vital to guide researchers. The issues to focus an enquiry upon appear from the established theoretical framework. Specific variables are revealed that the researchers consider should be measured, i.e. hypotheses are set.

In this thesis the area of enquiry is brand equity of Italian and Spanish language schools. The first proposed hypothesis is that marketing activities can help to Italian and Spanish language schools to strengthen their brand equity. The second hypothesis is that there is a gap in the perception of language schools' representatives and their students about brand equity. Therefore, to prove those hypotheses two interviews has been conducted with responsible of marketing and branding of Italian and Spanish language schools and their students. Specific questions with a consistent language and logic have been requested in online questionnaires. The responses to the set questions have been analysed in terms of a prior established theoretical framework. Furthermore, it is important to test theory according to whether the hypotheses are accepted or

rejected. From testing theory in a new context, there should be developing of existing theory incrementally.

Such a process implies that conclusions based upon agreed and measurable 'facts' are reached. The building and establishment of 'facts' shapes the premises of deductive arguments. Deductive reasoning begins from general principles from which the deduction should be made and follows to a conclusion by way of some statement linking the specific case in question. Therefore, in this study the deductive approach started from the analysis of SMEs literature and led to observations and findings on examples of Italian and Spanish language schools. This approach can be perceived as very linear: all steps in the process follow a logical order. Nevertheless, Bryman et al. (2011) claim various reasons to change of the researchers' opinions concerning the theory after collected data have been analysed. The reasons can be the fact that new theories have been published before the researcher have made any conclusions, the relevance of any data may only become clear after collected data or the data collected may not meet the terms of the hypotheses.

A deductive reasoning has a well-established role for existing theory: it reports the development of hypotheses, the selection of variables and the resultant measures (Ali et al. 1999). Whereas the deductive approach begins with theory stated in the form of hypotheses, which are then tested, an inductive approach excludes this, arguing that it may untimely close off possible areas of enquiry (Bryman 1988). The main reasons in choosing deductive approach for this study are, firstly, the forgoing purposes of the research; and, secondly, the methods that are best suited to test hypotheses and to answer specific research questions.

3.2. Data collection

As a starting point, there was done a literature review to reach a comprehension of the existing literature and to create a general comprehension of the theoretical perspectives and concepts concerning the chosen phenomenon (Creswell 2012). The specific fields researched include benefits and limitations of branding, characteristics of differentiation, value adding and integration and also the different branding tools available. The narrative literature was chosen for this research due to the goal of reaching a comprehension instead of being focused on creating knowledge, as the systematic literature review (Bell et al. 2015). A narrative literature review is used to give a broad comprehension of the existing literature and to achieve an impression of the setting to investigate. To make the search for appropriate sources easier, the researcher focused

on specific keywords to look for the secondary data: brand equity, brand building, branding, brand management, marketing and marketing activities.

Two types of data were used for this thesis: secondary data and primary data. The outcome from these data collected will be analysed and discussed in order to identify the most important results. Secondary data such as books, articles, journals, scientific conferences, documents and internet sources are information that is collected and written for other purposes (Bryman et al. 2015). They are easily accessible, relatively inexpensive and quickly obtained sources of background information. Evaluation of available secondary data is an essential step in the problem definition approach: primary data should not be gathered until the available secondary data have not been completely explored (Birks 2007). This is because past information and forecast can help the researcher to understand the underlying research problem (idem). Primary data for this thesis is the empirical data from the structured interviews conducted with two kinds of respondents: marketing and branding responsible of Italian and Spanish language schools and their students. The advantage of primary data is that the data is originated by the researcher specifically to address the research problem.

3.2.1. Online questionnaire

A questionnaire, whether it is called an interview form, schedule or measuring instrument, is a formalised set of questions for obtaining information from a large amount of people who may not have the time to do an interview or participate in experiments. They enable participants to take their time, think about it and come back to the questionnaire later. Respondents can state their views or feelings privately without being worried about the possible reaction of the researcher. Thus, participants complete and return the questionnaires. There is no verbal interaction between the researcher and the interviewee in the survey process (Ganesan 1994). By this reason some respondents may be inclined to try to give socially acceptable answers. However, participants have been encouraged to answer the questions as honestly and precisely as possible to avoid drawing false conclusions for this study. Furthermore, the anonymous nature of the questionnaire reinforces the sincerity of the answers.

In this thesis an online survey questionnaire was conducted. Each interviewee received the same questionnaire, which provided a set of data. Subsequentially, the data was available for analysis to apply quantitative methods. Primary data was collected employing the convenience sampling method and a self-administered questionnaire distributed to the participants in online format

using Google Drive online questionnaire platform. According to Hair et al. (2011), convenience sampling is centred on the sample that is most readily available to the research. This method was chosen for its easiness and cost efficiency to gather responses using sample of marketing and branding responsibles of Italian and Spanish language schools and sample of their students. Since the e-mail addresses of language schools were available on their official webpages, it was effortless to send a link to the questionnaire via e-mail to marketing and branding responsibles. In that e-mail marketing and branding responsibles were kindly asked to answer the questions of interview clicking on a direct link to the questionnaire. They were also requested to send another interview for their students. Furthermore, in the moment of writing her thesis the researcher had a job of the teacher of Russian language in one of the Italian language schools. Therefore, at work the researcher conducted the interview with the marketing and branding responsible of that language school and with the students of that Italian language school. Moreover, the researcher has many international contacts who studied in Italian and Spanish language schools; thus, they have been asked to participate in the interview for students. By all those methods the researcher collected data from the interviews.

A choice of students as a survey group was made since it is conventional in social sciences to poll students as survey respondents (Aiello et al. 2009). Peterson (2001) states that in social sciences the poll of a student sample is acceptable since the homogeneity of the student survey group regarding education and demographics is favourable to the study. The student sample is accurate from all the population because the interviewed participants represent students who are current ones or those ones who are ex-students of interviewed representatives of language schools.

In total, 23 responses to the questionnaire were received from marketing and branding responsibles of Italian and Spanish language schools and 108 responses from their students, during the three-week time period when the questionnaire was available to the respondents. All answers have been fully completed and accepted in the research. The interviewees have been asked to participate in the questionnaire by filling in their responses to the questions online anytime and anywhere.

The surveys were created in Italian, Spanish and English languages for Italian and Spanish speaking respondents, and an English version was written in this thesis. All the interview questions are provided in the Appendixes in the end of the thesis. The interviews in native languages were provided in order to avoid bias due to differences in language skills within the survey group. The settings of the online questionnaires have been done in the way that every question had to be answered in order to avoid incomplete responses. The questionnaires were

confirmed by several Italian and Spanish people to make sure that the logic, instructions, flow, vocabulary and the layout of questionnaires have been acceptable in order to minimize bias in the answers due to technical features of the questionnaires. The participation was completely voluntary.

The only channel for responding the questionnaire was to log in online and use the answering tool by Google Drive online questionnaire platform. The responding procedure has been made simple in order to start the process, since it only required a click to the direct link distributed via e-mail to the participants. The target for responses to the questionnaire was set at 20 answers of marketing and branding responsibles of Italian and Spanish language schools and 100 answers of their students. The target was exceeded by 3 responses of marketing and branding responsibles of Italian and Spanish language schools with a total of 23 responses, while the target of the students was exceeded as well by 8 responses, with a total of 108 responses.

3.2.2. Structured interviews

In this study survey techniques are built on the use of structured questionnaires given to a sample of population. These questions have been written and sent via a computer to marketing and branding responsibles of Italian and Spanish language schools and to their students, in order to obtain data that can be aggregated because identical questions have been asked of each respondent. Structured type of interview refers to the degree of standardisation implemented on the data collection process. In structured data collection, a formal questionnaire is developed, and the questions are composed in a prearranged order; therefore, the process is also direct (Birks et al. 2007). Whether research is considered as direct or indirect is based on if the true purpose is known to the respondents. A direct approach is explicit in that the purpose of the study is disclosed to the respondents or obvious to them from the formulated questions. The questions for the interviews of this study are structured based on the research from significant literature within the SMEs field. A direct approach was applied in order that respondents have clear overview of brand equity.

In this study many questions are fixed-response alternative questions that required the participant to select from a predefined set of answers. The fixed-response questions, or in other words closed-ended or multiple-choice questions, have simplified response procedure of respondents saving their time and giving them motivation to participate in the survey. Thus, such a significant number of responses have been collected as it has been presented in previous paragraph. For example, the following closed-ended question has been designed to analyse marketing and

branding representatives' choice of channels in order to promote their language schools: "Which channels do you use to promote your language school?" The proposed answers are "Radio, television, journal, newspaper, banner, own site, other sites, blog, e-mail, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube, WOM (person)". However, not only fixed-response questions have been asked in the interview but also some open-ended questions in order to have deeper knowledge and, thus, to be able to do analyses of marketing activities of Italian and Spanish language schools that strengthen their brand equity. Here is the example of open-ended question in the prepared interview: "How do you perceive your work is connected to strengthening your brand?" Nevertheless, the majority of the questions in the interviews for language school representatives and for their students have been closed-ended questions. Therefore, the type of question structure used in this study is partially closed-ended questions.

The structured questionnaire has several advantages. First, this survey method is simple to administer. Second, the gathered data are consistent because the answers are limited to the alternatives stated. The use of closed-ended questions reduces the variability in the results that can be caused by differences in interviewees. Third, coding, analysis and interpretation of data are relatively easy processes (Malhotra et al. 2001).

The disadvantages are that participants may be unable or unwilling to unveil the desired information. For example, the simple possible question can be undesirable for language school representatives: "What is the name of your language school?" The marketing and branding responsibles of language schools may be unwilling to provide the name of their brand because of the privacy policy and confidentiality. Therefore, these types of "uncomfortable" questions have not been asked. In addition, structured questions and multiple-choice alternative questions can result in loss of validity for certain types of data such as beliefs and feelings. For this reason, not only closed-ended questions have been asked but also open-ended once. Finally, to create wording questions on questionnaire design properly is not easy. In other words, the survey method imposes the language and logic of the researcher on the questionnaire participants. Given this core characteristic of the survey techniques, large care must be taken to make sure that the language and logic used in questionnaires have meaning and validity for potential respondents. Despite the mentioned disadvantages, the survey method is by far the most common approach of primary data collection in marketing research which represents around 69% of all marketing research spending (ESOMAR 2018).

3.3. Validity and reliability

The validity of the research and reliability of the results have been evaluated and are presented in this chapter. According to Birks et al. (2007) validity is reached if a measurement is an accurate representation of parameters that exist in a phenomenon that is being studied. Validity tests if a scale developed for the research reflects the nature of a phenomenon as it truly is. If a measure is perfectly valid, it is also perfectly reliable, i.e. perfect validity means perfect reliability.

The measure reliability relates to the consistency of the results of a research if run multiple times. A reliable research scale should result in similar outcome each time it is conducted if the study setting remains unchanged. In other words, a reliable research has minimal random and consistent results in each repetition of the research (Birks et al. 2007).

The specifications or the research design used to gather the data should be critically tested to identify possible sources of prejudice. Such design analyses include size and nature of the sample, quality and response rate, questionnaire design and administration, procedures applied for fieldwork, and data analysis and reporting procedures. These checks give information on the reliability and validity of the data and help determine whether they may be generalised to the problem at hand. The reliability and validity may be further ascertained by a test of the error, objectives, nature and dependability associated with the secondary data.

In this research several actions have been taken in preparation of the questionnaires and at the time of conducting the study for minimization of the risk of sacrificing validity. The survey in the form of questionnaires is based on the existing SMEs literature. The researcher tested also manually the technical functionality of the web-based survey tool and its appropriateness for the purpose before beginning to collect survey responses.

To guarantee the reliability of the survey responses, the questionnaires have been prepared with care. Italian and Spanish languages have been asked to minimize the risk of misinterpretation of the survey questions. Some of the key wordings of the brand attributes in the questionnaires were of similar nature in English, but in Italian and Spanish the words had unique meanings, which led to lower risk of misinterpretation. For example, it was better to translate "brand" into Italian version "marchio" or "marca" and Spanish version "marca" to avoid translation problems that would put reliability at risk. Italian and Spanish translations have been carefully chosen after a deep investigation into the SME literature.

4. EMPIRICAL DATA

This chapter starts with the data about survey respondents followed by the empirical results that are provided from the structured interviews with the respondents from online questionnaire. The empirical data represents the four brand equity attributes connected to being SMEs in Italian and Spanish language schools.

4.1. Survey respondents

In this thesis two types of respondents were polled: marketing and branding responsibles of Italian and Spanish language schools and their current or ex-students. It has been done in order to be able analyse their answers relating to brand equity. The questionnaire received 131 answers in total from which 23 responses of language schools' representatives and 108 responses of their students. Out of the student respondents there were 64% (69) of women and 36% (39) of men who are of many different nationalities. Thus, we can infer that women are more interested in learning languages than men. There are many theories behind this radical gender gap. The most popular theory is that women and men process languages differently. It has been proven that when women learn languages, their brains demonstrate greater activity in the areas used for language encoding. Men's brains, on the other hand, demonstrate more activity in the areas related to visual and oral functions. Therefore, whereas women may more easily handle an abstract piece of language, men need some sensory reinforcement to handle the data. Exhibit 4.1 depicts the ratio between female and male respondents in the survey.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	69	64
Male	39	36
Total	108	100

Exhibit 4.1. Respondent's gender

The age of the respondents ranged from 19 years to 74 years at the time of data collection. The biggest age groups were 19-34 years (59%) and 35-59 years (39%) and the smallest group was 60-74 years (10%). From the age of 19 years and older people realise more in a rational way about their needs of the knowledge of languages. They can start to travel by them own from 18

years, thus, to be able to talk to local people in other countries they need to know local national language or more often the knowledge of international English language is enough. Moreover, foreign language can be necessary for the business communication among international colleagues. Personal education and cultural demand are other reasons for learning languages. The average age of the respondents was 24.1 years. These data are presented in the Exhibit 4.2.

Age	Frequency	Percent
19-34	59	55
35-59	39	36
60-74	10	9
Total	108	100
Average age 24.1		

Exhibit 4.2. Respondent's age

In the interview students have been asked about their level of education. The biggest group was 56 people (52%) with master's degree. Thus, we can see the tendency that highly educated people have desire to get more education also in a language field. Other groups were 24 people (22%) with bachelor's degree, 15 people (14%) with high school's degree, 11 people (10%) with PhD's degree and finally 2 people (2%) with lower secondary school's degree. Therefore, as lower education of a person as lower percentage of them who learn languages where PhD students are exception. However, small number of PhD students can be justified by the luck of time for learning languages, instead dedicating the most of their time on the research at university. The Exhibit 4.3 illustrates educational level of interviewed students.
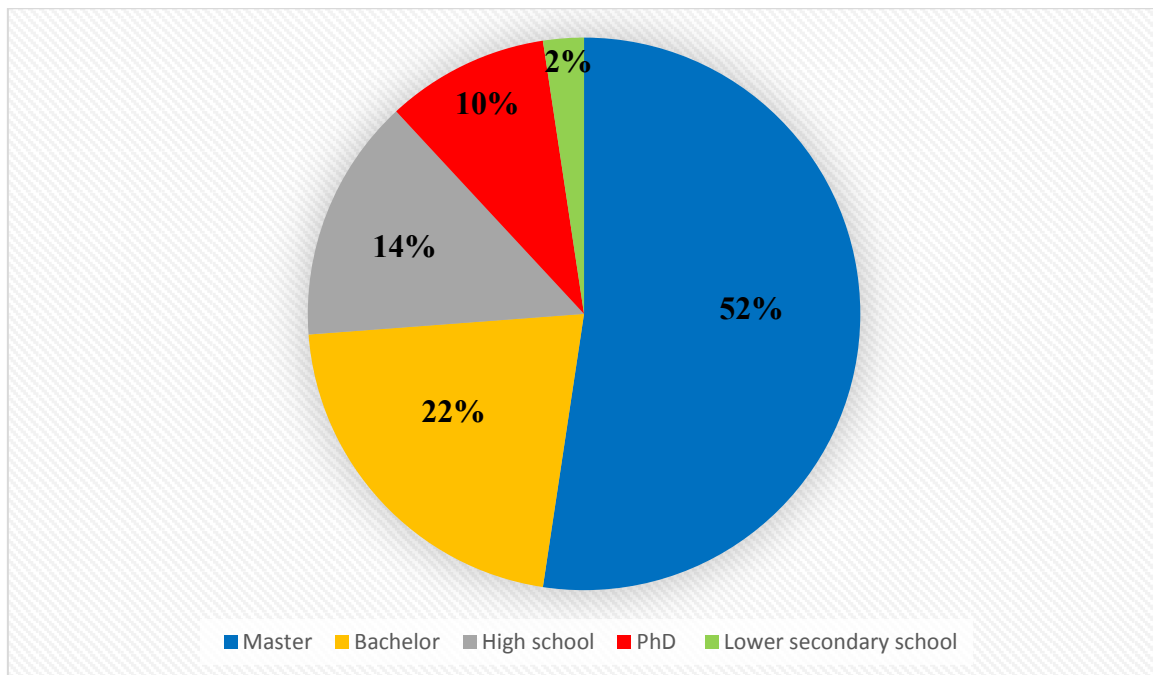
Exhibit 4.3. Educational level of respondents

The other type of the respondents is marketing and branding responsibles of Italian and Spanish language schools. They have these titles of their profession: director, president, business owner and administrator. The fact that the language schools do not have position of marketer can be explained by the shortage of money which is not surprising because they are mostly micro, small and medium enterprises with the small budget. There are different marketing tasks which often the owner of a language school does: designing official website, creating the advertisement and promotion, sending newsletters to their target audience, establishing relationship with traditional media employees and having contact with students by social networks.

In the next paragraph the answers of marketing and branding responsibles of Italian and Spanish language schools and their current and ex-students are going to be analysed by customer-based brand equity pyramid.

4.2. Brand equity attributes

Creating the brand to a mindset in an organisation, language schools try to succeed working on stages of brand development. Therefore, to exhibit the empirical data, this chapter is based on the four brand equity attributes to generate brand identity, to create brand meaning, to gain brand response and to build brand relations regarding the work of analysed Italian and Spanish language schools.

4.2.1. Generating brand identity

The chosen comprehension of brand identity for this thesis has connection to the perception from the language schools' representatives what they want their students to understand by a brand which includes usage of brand elements such as the brand name, website address, logo, symbols, signage, angle, tonality and colours to make them different from their competitors and, thus, achieve brand awareness either in purchase or usage situations. The identities were created in order to get in the top-of-mind of the student where it is easy to recall. Thereby the purpose was to be seen in different contexts in order to create a broader approach of reaching students' attention. Furthermore, it is useful to make clear of what service category the brand competes with its various language courses.

Each analysed Italian and Spanish language school has its own distinguishable brand elements such as the brand name, website address, logo, symbols, signage, angle, tonality and colours. In order to create the new brand with appropriate brand elements some language schools sought for assistance of external graphic design agencies, others instead were using internal employees. Brand name of language schools is reinforced visually with a logo that is transferable easily across geographic and cultural boundaries. The test of the brand-building abilities of brand elements is what students think and feel about language schools and their courses when students only know about a brand name, a logo and other associated characteristics. Thus, brand elements make up its sensory identity in the market and in the minds of the students which are related to the brand silence.

The structure of a language school is a part of a brand identity. They can be local, national and international and can be network or single language school. The most of analysed language schools are presented only by one branch, thus, this type is classified as a local single language school. Being SME, 66% of them have 2-9 employees, the director of which complies with the position of marker. 21% of analysed language schools with 50-249 employees and 13% with 10-49 employees have position of marketer. The visual representation of the quantity of employees in analysed language schools is in the Exhibit 4.4. When a director has to do not only his own job but also a job of marketer, like in the example of micro-organizations where there are only up to 10 employees, it can seem as a complicated responsibility. In those cases, a director is usually the main decision maker, who relies on his own experiences and intuitions in handling business and often short time is dedicated to marketing and branding tasks of a language school. Those micro language school are often informal and decentralized because the processes are not formal for making decisions and they can be based on non-strategic choices such as director's intuition. Instead in small and medium language schools with a proper position of marketer there

are more efforts, time and proper skills are applied to commit marketing and branding tasks. Therefore, marketing job is done in a larger scale with a higher level of quality in small and medium language schools than in those with microstructure.
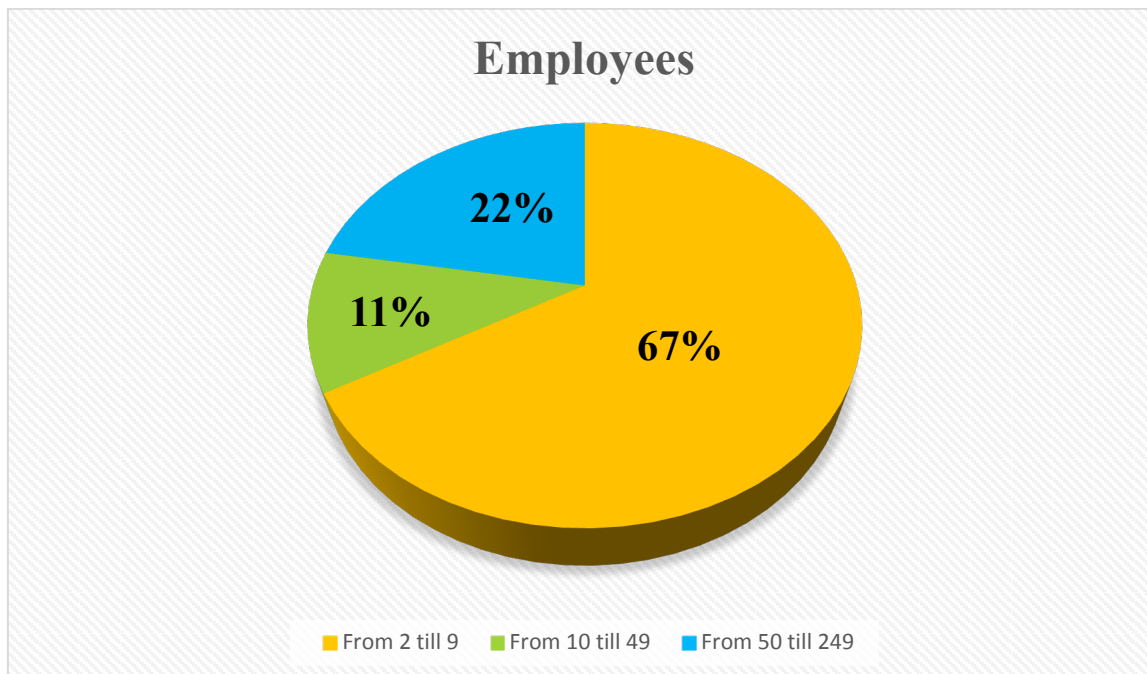

Exhibit 4.4. The quantity of employees in analysed language schools

Marketers or a director of language schools apply marketing activities for their target audience in order to create an increased awareness in the market, recall or recognise their brand, as reflected by the ability to identify the brand. To do so, language schools try to keep up with the time providing innovative methodology of teaching language courses, various events, educational activities and advanced technology. Interest and importance of learning languages is what language school's marketers try to communicate to their potential students. Much effort seems also to be put on evoking curiosity and feelings of students at the same time as the students should learn more about the brand and provided courses. The motivation of students is induced by providing information about language courses and the advantages to learn languages. Being motivated to learn a language, there is expectation of language school representative's that many students will be enrolled.

The content and history take also part in the brand identity and provide the possibility to reach competitive advantages. The respondents of language schools stated that the personal brand is becoming more important concerning the perspective of the students. It was claimed that it is not

only about the quality of services of language courses that language schools compete, but about the brand as well. The brand is the main competitive advantage and according to the language schools' representatives one of the most important factors to be successful in the market.

All the specific aspects that have connection to the brand name, website address, logo, signage, associations and symbols seem to facilitate the method to communicate the brand and to create a meaning.

4.2.2. Creating brand meaning

Brand meaning is in this thesis defined as the image that is created within the mind of the students due to every contact they make with brands, considering points of parity and difference of language schools. The meaning is then created based on performance of the language course services that can satisfy the students' educational needs and cohere with the common values of the chosen market segment. The joint actions in communicating language school's values and the efforts that have been done in order to induce curiosity at the level of the students regarding their marketing activities but also the contact with the language courses by different channels of promotion. Big attention is focused on what students want and need and how to satisfy them providing the maximum level of the utility and thus to achieve a large amount of the students in their school. Language schools encourage potential students to become a member of their school of which students will share spirit and common purposes. Being in a course, a group of students have contact through the prism of language with its culture, lifestyle, traditions, habits, art, literature and so on. The mix of traditional methods with innovative and dynamic structures is created by language schools for obtaining more students and adding value to students' knowledge.

To make language schools more attractive, marketers provide several events for their potential and current students and for their professors, creating for them entertaining and educational experiences. A wide range of cultural activities accompanied with language course is created for students: trips, courses of culture, concerts, festivals, exhibitions, spectacles, workshops, tandems, holidays for children, cultural meetings and delicacies degustations. Often students are interested in the participation of events and, thus, they have a great opportunity not only to get additional knowledge but also to enjoy the events with other students, socializing and creating special group spirit. Different events are provided for professors as well, such as training conferences, in order to keep their education always in a high level.

The associations with a brand have been analysed by the data from the interviews with Spanish and Italian representatives of language schools and their students. There were various associations such as job, travel, lifestyle, culture, communication and study as it can be seen by Exhibit 4.5 and Exhibit 4.6. The most common association "culture" with the highest percentage coincides by the opinion of the language school representatives (37%) and the students (36%). It can mean that during language lesson a significant part of the time is dedicated for discourse about an interesting topic for students and teacher which is culture. The second highest association is "travel" by representatives of a language school (27%) and "communication" - by students (27%). Thus, language schools' representatives create an association of travel which is less important for students than communication. It can be understood by the factor that the relevant purpose for students is to learn a language in order to be able to communicate applying that knowledge in everyday life. The third place in association takes "job" by marketing responsibles (18%) whereas "travel" and "lifestyle" both on the third place estimated by 10% are considered by students. Therefore, it illustrates us that students prefer to use a learnt language for travel and lifestyle instead of job for which is often required quite high level of local language. The least common associations are "communication" and "lifestyle" by opinion of language schools' representatives (9% each of them), "job" and "study" – by students (9% and 8% respectively). Thus, these parameters are the least important for the respondents, and we can see that they differ in the imagination of language schools' representatives and students. Analysing all the association we can reveal that marketing responsibles of language schools try to create the importance of the associations in one way, but students perceive them in a different gradual way.
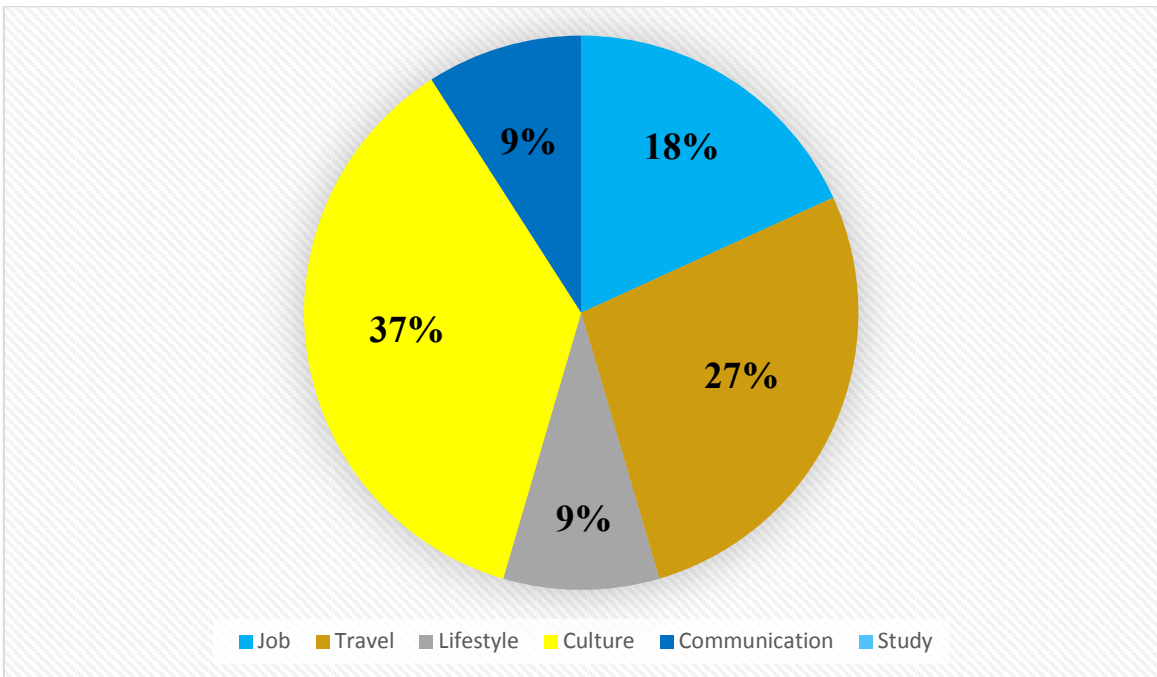
Exhibit 4.5. Associations with a brand by representatives of a language school
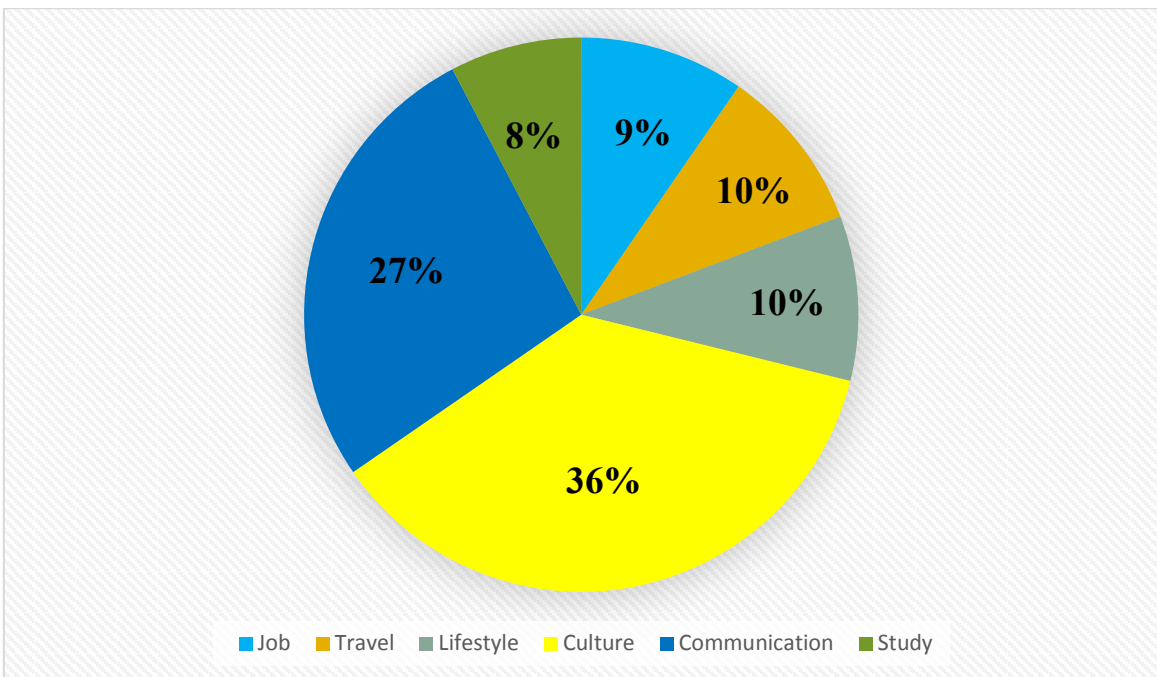

Exhibit 4.6. Associations with a brand by students

The meaning of students about language schools is composed by various characteristics such as book, location, teacher, method of teaching, length of lessons, classmates and classroom as it is shown on the Exhibit 4.7. There is an obvious pattern of the 5th [(the highest)] level for all the characteristics except of classroom. It means that students are satisfied with language schools

and mostly appreciate main characteristics which give them motivation to attend language courses. The satisfaction about classrooms has 3rd [middle] level by majority of students. Therefore, it seems that the interior, furnishing and decoration of the classrooms should be redesigned in order to provide more comfortability and space, thus, to evoke higher motivation of students to come for lessons in those classrooms. Another revealed pattern is about the presence of the 1st [the lowest] level about duration of lessons, classrooms and classmates. Thus, those characteristics should be considered and tried to make a change by language schools' representatives for gaining more students. In fact, language schools' representatives already realize inconveniences for their students because they do surveys as well. Therefore, language schools' representatives try to provide different length of lessons, to create a better psychological atmosphere among the classmates and they also try to do the lessons in the most comfortable classrooms when they are available. Instead, the positive perceptions of language schools' representatives about such parameters as teacher, method of teaching, book and location coincide with perceptions of their students. Being confident in high quality of education of native speakers of teachers, their advanced methods of teaching and the modern qualitative books used for language courses, the representatives underline these advantages and benefits of their language schools and thus provide value for their students.
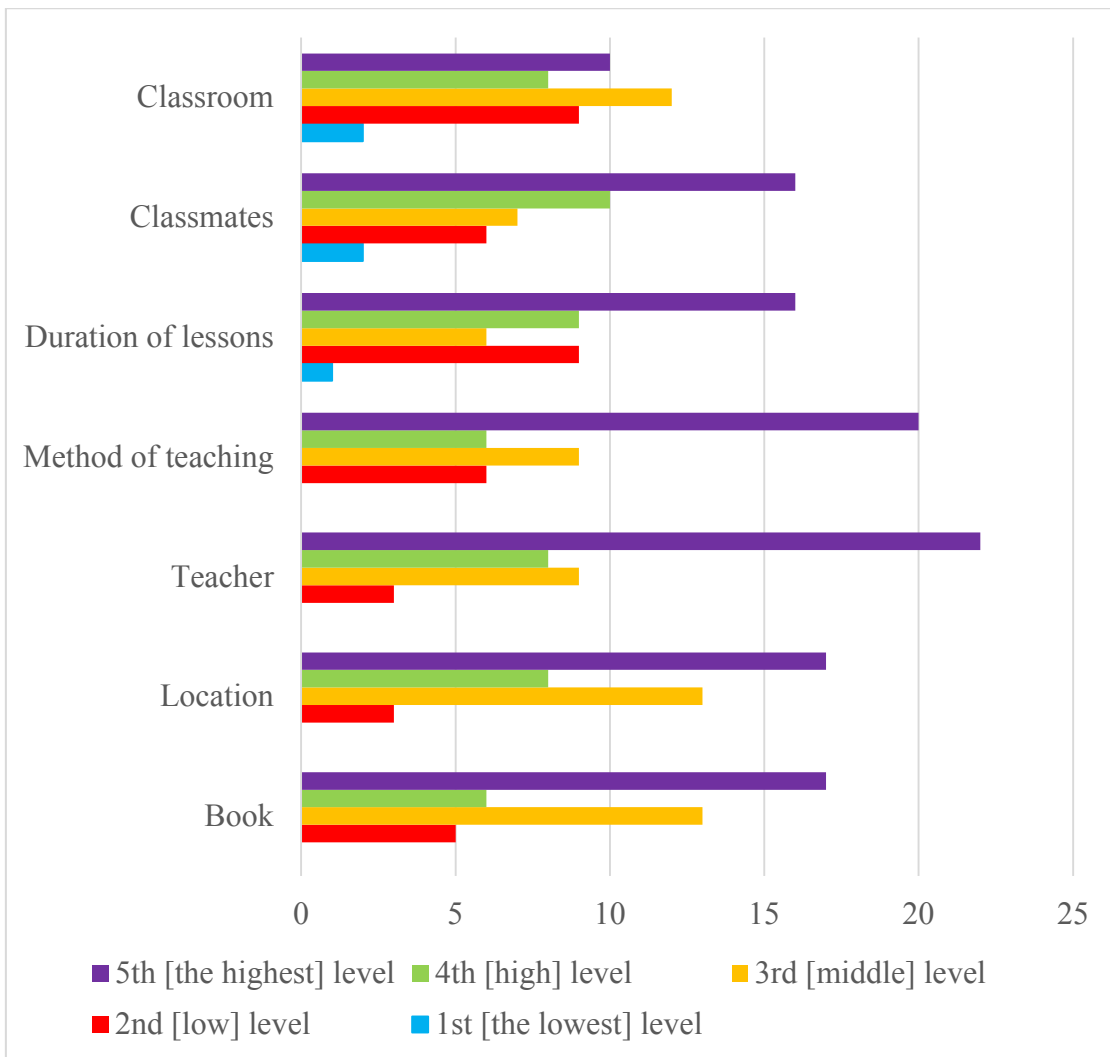
Exhibit 4.7. The viewpoint of students about main characteristics of language schools

There is a tendency of education of all the employees about the language schools' services in order to be able to share the consistent knowledge. Instead of just convincing potential students to buy their services, language schools' representatives try to give them something else like experiences and journeys. Therefore, the students are aware that they can learn something new and extend their knowledge and the range of language use. Providing the consistent knowledge about the language schools' services is also another way to simplify the mental work of the students. It was mentioned during the interviews that the students have quite stressful study/work days, thus the language schools' representatives relieve some of the mental work to offer the students to communicate the knowledge about the language courses. Thereby, it seems as if much effort has been put on generating a continuity and consistency throughout the businesses where the marketing activities, communication, exposures and sales have been connected and are more structured than before.

According to language school representatives' statements, it is important to inform and educate also potential and current students about whole the variety of language courses and additional cultural events. The requirements of structure seem to be quite strict throughout a whole language school, not just by a sale responsible, where also the brand touch points have been taken into account. They are related to all the possible situations a student can come in contact with the brand, regardless whether it is through advertisement, exposures and so on. Marketing responsibles try to promote continuity, especially that all brand elements which are seen at brand touch points, with which the students can come in contact with, remain the same quality. It is about everything connected from how the language courses are perceived to the logos of the brands. All colours, angles, nuances and tonalities which are used in a brand representation matter.

To satisfy the students with the values, characteristics and quality of the brand, the language courses are not enough. Taking responsibility throughout the whole value chain, authenticity and being transparent are multiple comments from the interviewed respondents, in order to satisfy the needs of students above the courses itself. Based on current trends the language schools' responsibles stated that the most important thing at this point seems to be about the history of the language school, where the authenticity and transparency are included.

The price policy for the language school brands can create associations in students' minds to the relevant price tier or level for a brand in the language school category, as well as to its corresponding price variance or volatility. Thus, the pricing strategy approved for a brand can impose students to categorize the price of a brand and how a language school is flexible about a price. On the interview's question for students about their opinion if the price of a language course is correct considering the service which they receive from the language school, most of them responded "yes" (91%). It confirms us that almost all students are satisfied with the price which they paid for language courses. It makes sense because many language courses are provided with rather low price or some of them even for free. The data about price satisfaction is demonstrated on the Exhibit 4.8.
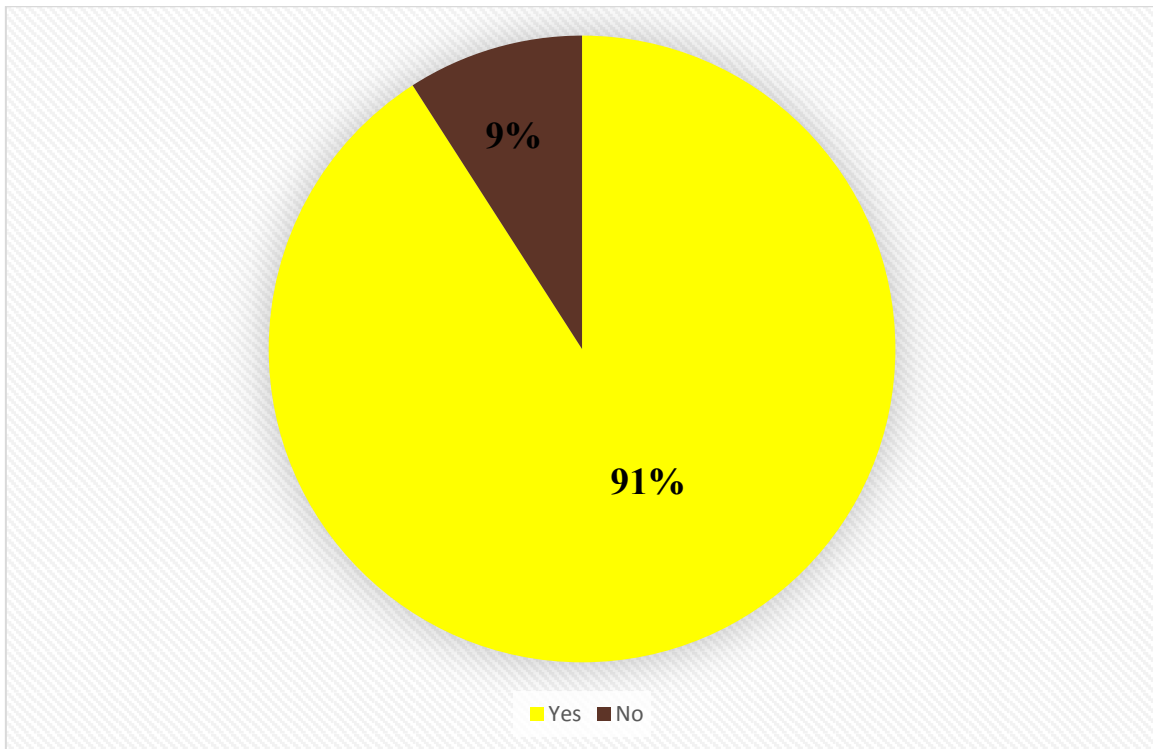
Exhibit 4.8. Opinions of students about the correctness of the price for a language course

When the proper meaning has been developed, the next step in branding ladder occurs, which is brand response.

4.2.3. Gaining brand response

In this study the brand response is defined as how the students think or feel about the brand of a language school, how they respond regarding their comprehension of the brand and the marketing activities and if it satisfies their needs and desires both rationally and emotionally. Thereby this presents what language schools have done in order to communicate their values to potential and current students. In developing efficient integrated marketing communication campaigns, marketing communications should often be explicitly tied together to build or enhance brand equity (Keller et al. 2012). The brand awareness of the students seems to have been increased as certain marketing communication options have been focused on creating a higher opportunity of achieving the attention of the students.

In the interview students have been asked about their expectations which they had had before the language course started which are displayed on the Exhibit 4.9. The data illustrates that the majority of answers are learning expectation (53%) such as to learn a language well and fast, to acquire mastery of base, to improve the knowledge of the language, to learn by doing homework.

The priority of learning is obvious because that is what language courses are for and that is also one of the main aims which language schools' representatives provide. The second expectation is communication (14%). Students have preference not only to know a language but also to be able to use it by communication. The third place about students' expectation was shared between improvement of grammar (8%), qualified professors (8%) and negative expectations (8%). The students consider improvement of their grammar in order to use a language properly and without mistakes. The expectation about qualified professors gives them additional reason to enrol for a language course. However, students had had not only positive expectations but also negative ones such as boring and difficult lessons, few conversations to practice a language, a strict professor and that it would be hard to reconcile studying and working. The next expectation was about receiving a certificate (6%) in the end of language course, although not all language schools provide this option. And finally, the least common expectation is about modern methods of education which would be interactive and efficient. This way, students may have curiosity to get more knowledge about a language specifically in the language school. It can be outlined that most of the students' expectations are centred on practical and effective language learning, as it results putting together the answers about "learning" with those ones about "communication" and "grammar", which are also related with learning but in a more specific way. Their concerns about official recognition of the linguistic level (certificate) or about concrete teaching methods are clearly less mentioned. From their answers, students also seem to prioritise oral speaking (communication) over written language (grammar).

Expectations

Legend:
- Learning
- Communication
- Grammar
- Certificate
- Qualified professors
- Modern methods
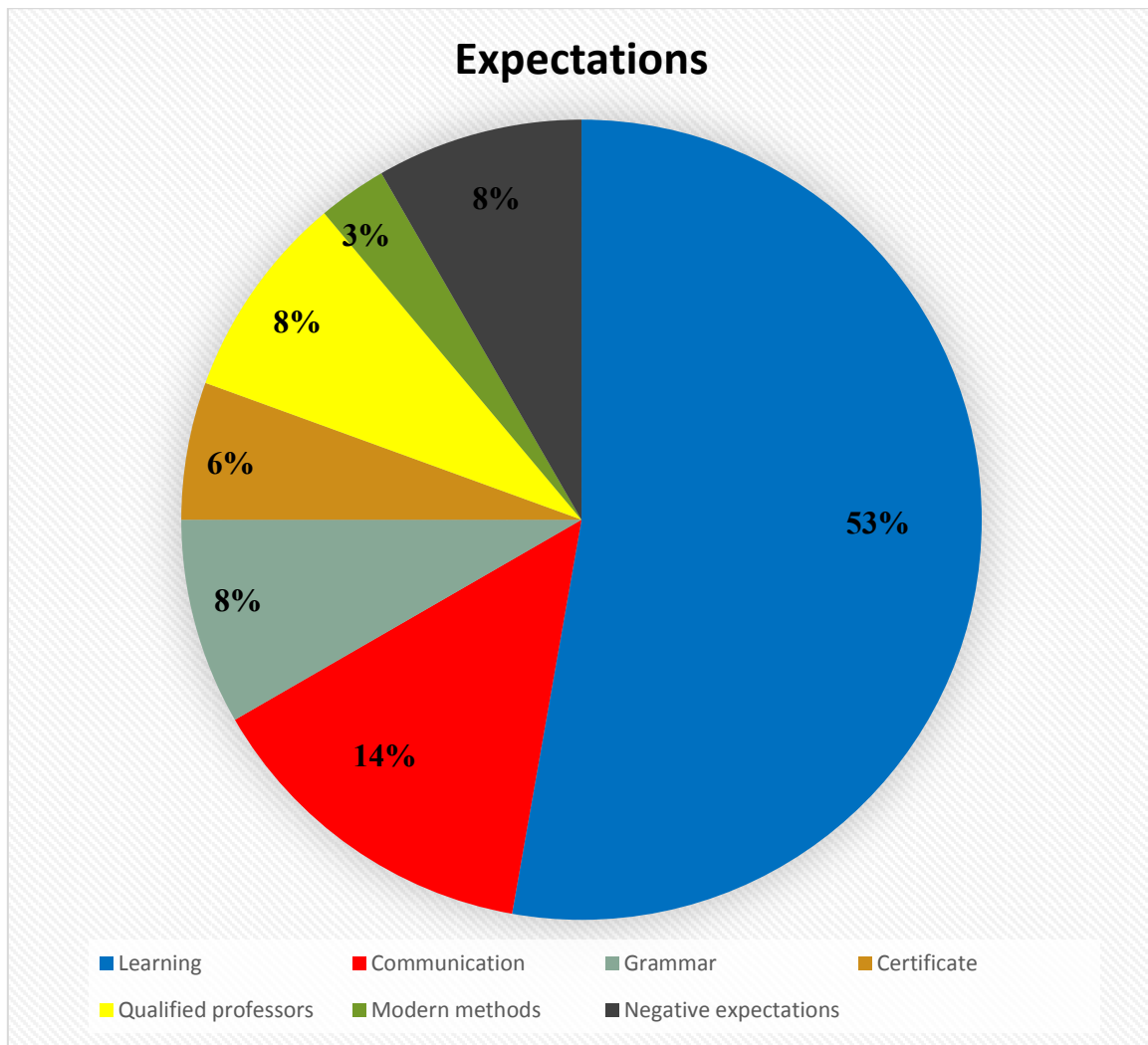- Negative expectations

Exhibit 4.9. Expectations which students had had before the language course started

Motives of students to study in a chosen language school were also pooled. They are demonstrated on the Exhibit 4.10. Personal education was the most popular motive of students (29%). Within this field, they mentioned the following reasons: the passion for a language and the wish to improve it, the enrichment of personal culture, the activation of the brains' work, the achievement of a superior level and the learning of grammar. The second motive was to learn a language for living abroad. The life in another country often implies to be able to use local language in routine everyday life (21%). The third place was shared between these motives: the interest in Italy and Spain (17%) and the job (17%). The interest in Italy and Spain was motivated by the fact that the students liked those countries and their languages, or that they went on vacations to Italy and Spain. The job motivation was justified by the desire to work in those countries and to improve their CVs. The next motive was about the reputation of a famous brand (7%). The students got to know about a particular language school by different marketing

communication channels which will be discussed in the next paragraph. Especially by the Word-Of-Mouth students received a positive opinion from other people and decided to study concretely in the promoted language schools. The next motive to learn a language was because respondents had a foreigner couple (5%). In order to be able to communicate in the native language of their foreigner couples, students decided to learn Spanish or Italian. In the end, the least common answers were about cheap courses (2%) and certificates (2%). The motive to obtain a certificate was also proved by the Exhibit 4.9, where it also has a secondary importance. Cheap courses sound attractive for students because in this way they can learn a desired language for relatively low prices as it was mentioned in Exhibit 4.8 by an overwhelming majority of the interviewees.
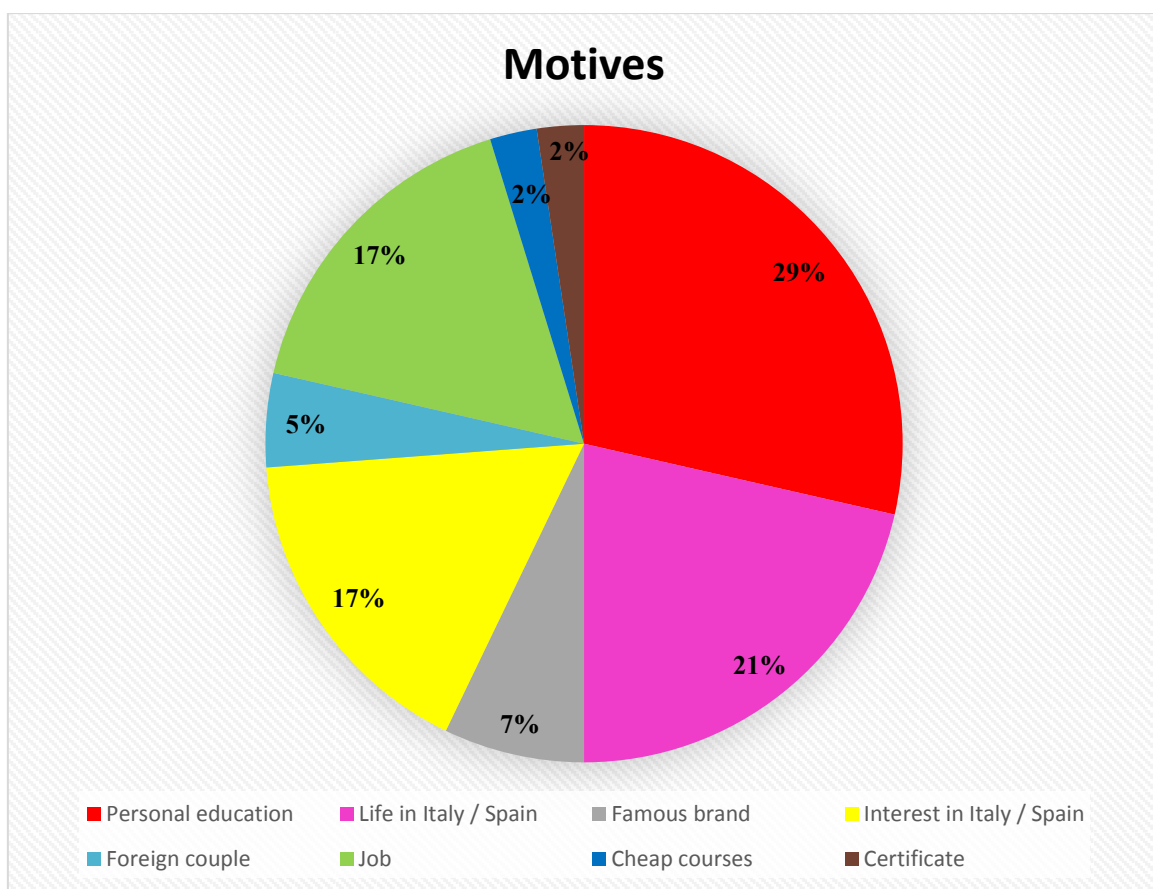

Exhibit 4.10. Motives of students to study in a chosen language school

One of the hypotheses proposed in this study presumes that there is a gap in the perception of language schools' representatives and their students about brand equity. To discover it language schools' representatives and their students have been asked to answer this question: "Which adjectives would you use to describe the language school? Estimate the language school by proposed adjectives from 1 to 5 (where 1 [blue colour] is the lowest mark and 5 [violet colour] is

the highest mark)". Thus, there was an evaluation by each of these parameters: original, trusting, informative, popular, mainstream, immediate, connected, interactive, entertaining, young, fantastic, genuine, rebellious and changing. The estimation of language schools' representatives is shown in the Exhibit 4.11 and the students' one in the Exhibit 4.12. Therefore, we can see from both graphs that there is no gap by the same opinion of language schools' representatives and the students about the same dominant level of estimation: 3rd [middle] level of originality, 5th [the highest] level of trust, 5th [the highest] level of interaction, 5th [the highest] level of being young, 4th [high] level of being fantastic, 1st [the lowest] level of being rebellious. This tendency demonstrates that brand identity by language schools and brand image by students about a language school coincide and, thus, both viewpoints are realistic. Instead, we can see that students have better opinion of the language schools than the representatives of those schools by the gap in these parameters: popular (4th [high] level estimated by marketing responsibles, but 5th [the highest] level estimated by students), mainstream (2nd [low] level estimated by marketing responsibles, but 4th [high] level estimated by students), immediate (3rd [middle] level estimated by marketing responsibles, but 5th [the highest] level estimated by students), entertaining (4th [high] level estimated by marketing responsibles, but 5th [the highest] level estimated by students). Worse opinion of language schools about themselves can be seen as being critical and to have a desire of constant development, maintaining high standards of services. Another pattern indicates that for all the parameters there is the highest level of estimation at least by some students, meanwhile language schools don't evaluate themselves by the highest level for all the parameters, just for some of them. Therefore, some parameters have different estimation by language schools' representatives and the students, hence, there is a gap; other parameters have the same estimation by two types of respondents, hence, there is no gap. Overall, we can talk about a high level of coincidence between representatives and students, with small variations in their respective perceptions, and always in the sense of a better opinion of the students about the language schools, which is a good sign of the brand equity of these companies and the quality of their courses.
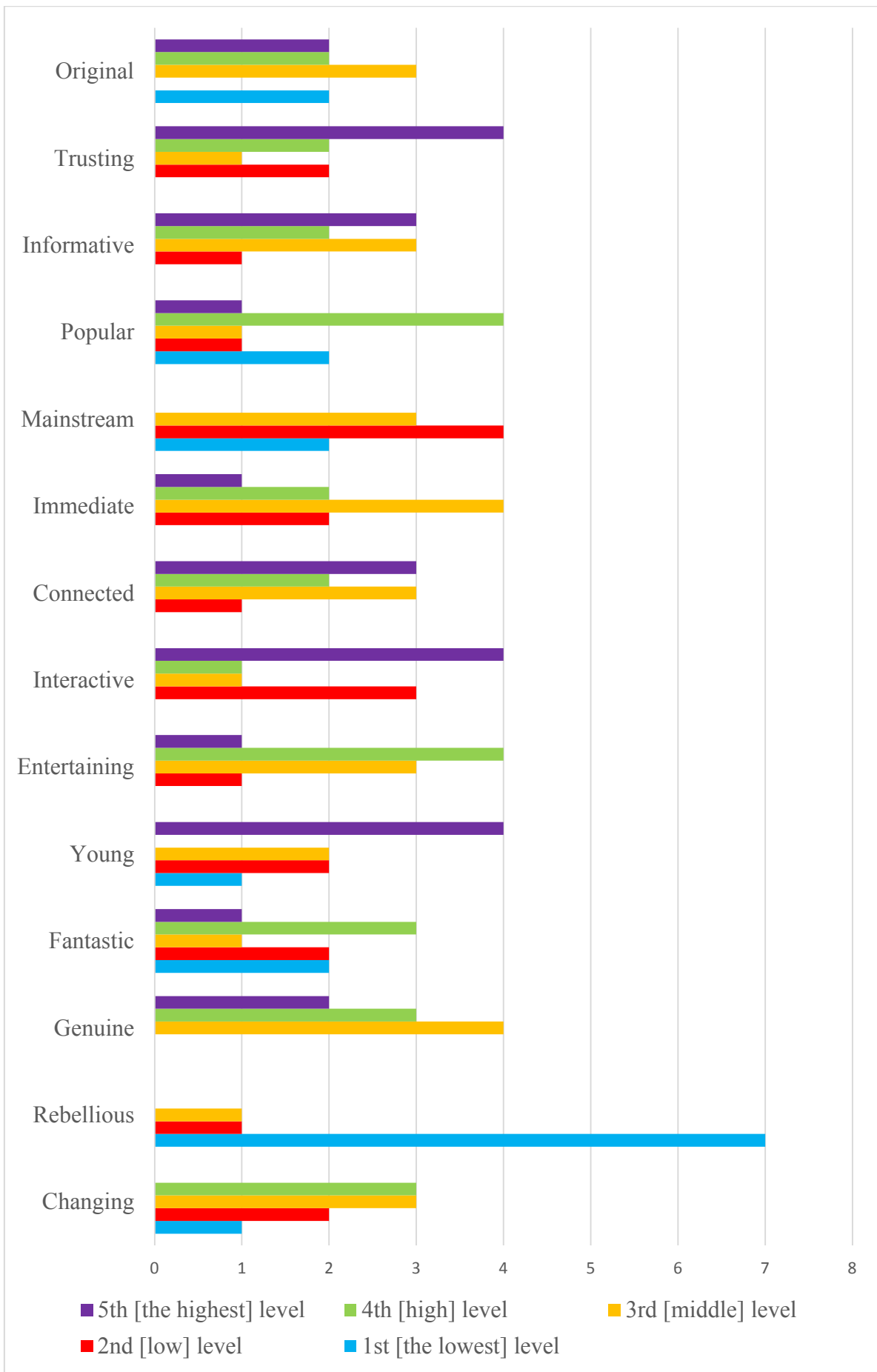
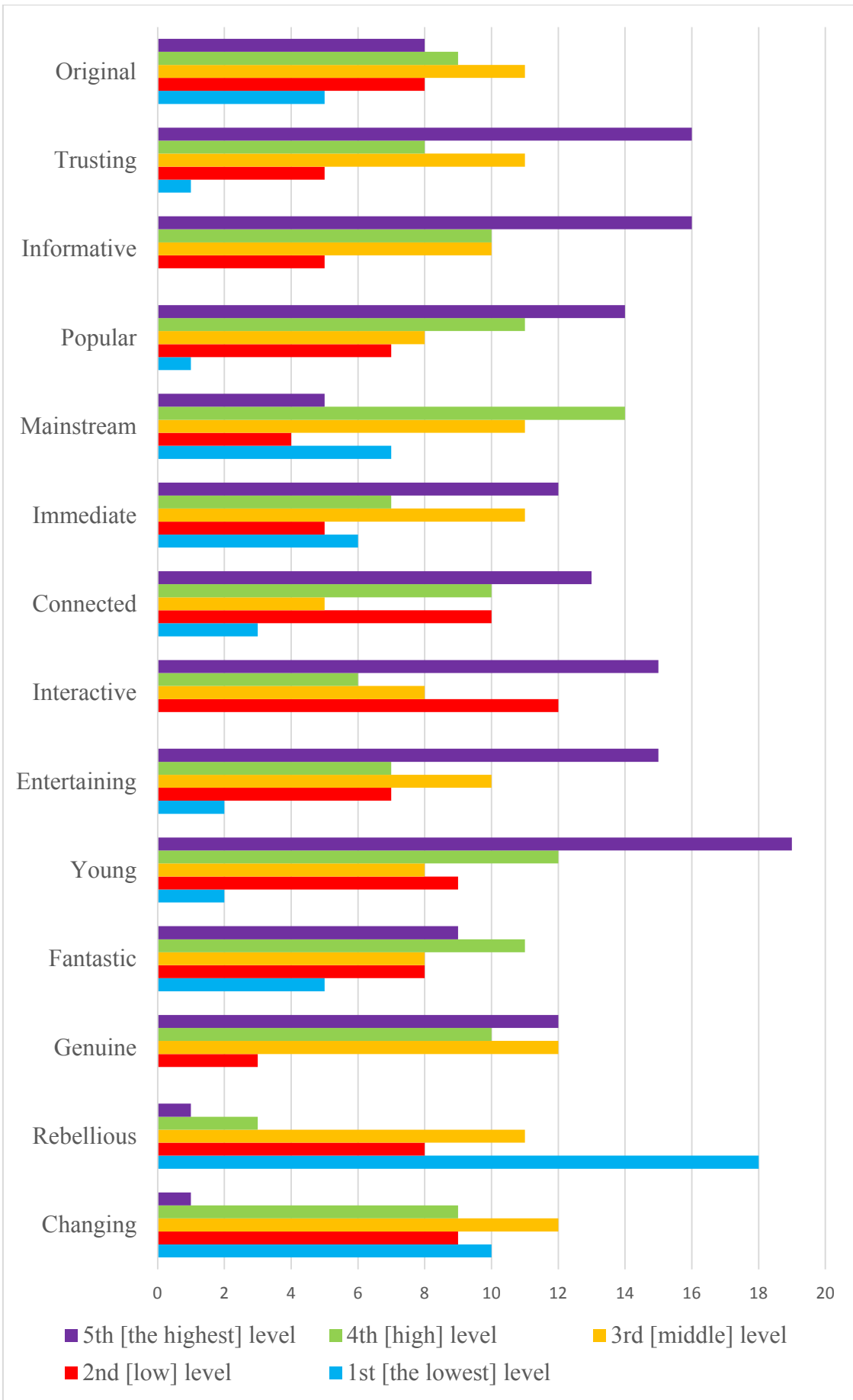Exhibit 4.11. Description of language schools by their representatives

Exhibit 4.12. Description of language schools by students

To discover which are the reasons of students who are not completely satisfied and what language schools representatives can do to make their business better off, in the interview there was asked a question to both students and language school representatives about 2 things which should be improved for the language school. Exhibit 4.13 demonstrates the suggestions of students about improvement of language schools. The opinions of students are clear and well-defined, thus, the desires of students about language schools in decreasing order are to have more conversations during the lessons (25%), higher frequency of lessons (21%), bigger classrooms (14%), more grammar (11%), more interactive activities (11%), native speaker teachers (7%), lower frequency of lessons (7%) and other reasons (4%). Analysing this data, we can say that marketing responsible should communicate to teachers of the language school to practice especially more the conversational skills of the students during lessons, and also to teach more grammar and to implement more interactive activities in order to encourage students to participate more. The frequency of lessons by the opinion of a clear majority of students should be higher, but there is also a minority demanding a smaller frequency. In the Exhibit 4.7 it has been already discovered that students are not as much satisfied with the classroom as with other main characteristics of language schools. Thus, Exhibit 4.7 and Exhibit 4.13 display disapproval of students about small and not comfortable classrooms, therefore they have a desire that language schools' facilities will be improved. The suggestions about employing native speaker professors can be explained by the desire of students to learn how to speak, listen, write and read properly with the correct accent. The desire to have a better audio-visual equipment in classrooms demonstrates that the current audio-visual technologic tools which some language schools have are old-fashion and not so convenient. Other reasons of students about improvement of language schools were to provide a certificate of attendance to the language course, to give more homework, and to give the possibility to access to a library with materials in original language, such as books, films and so on. Instead, Exhibit 4.14 depicts the reasons of language schools' representatives about improvement of their institutions. Some of them coincide with the same reasons which students gave, such as more comfortable classrooms (17%) and better audio-visual equipment (17%). Therefore, it seems that language schools' representatives realise those nuisances but cannot afford to provide better facilities because of the shortage of budget. The desire of better external communication (33%) can be explained by the reason that language schools have difficulties to reach a big amount of students by different marketing communication channels, as it will be discussed in more detail in the next paragraph. Then language schools' representatives desire to create more diversification of the offer (25%) and more options for different types of courses, such as monographs, distance learning and so

on. Other reasons (8%) include improvement of the website's visualisation and better organised administrative procedures, which can help to decrease the level of bureaucracy.
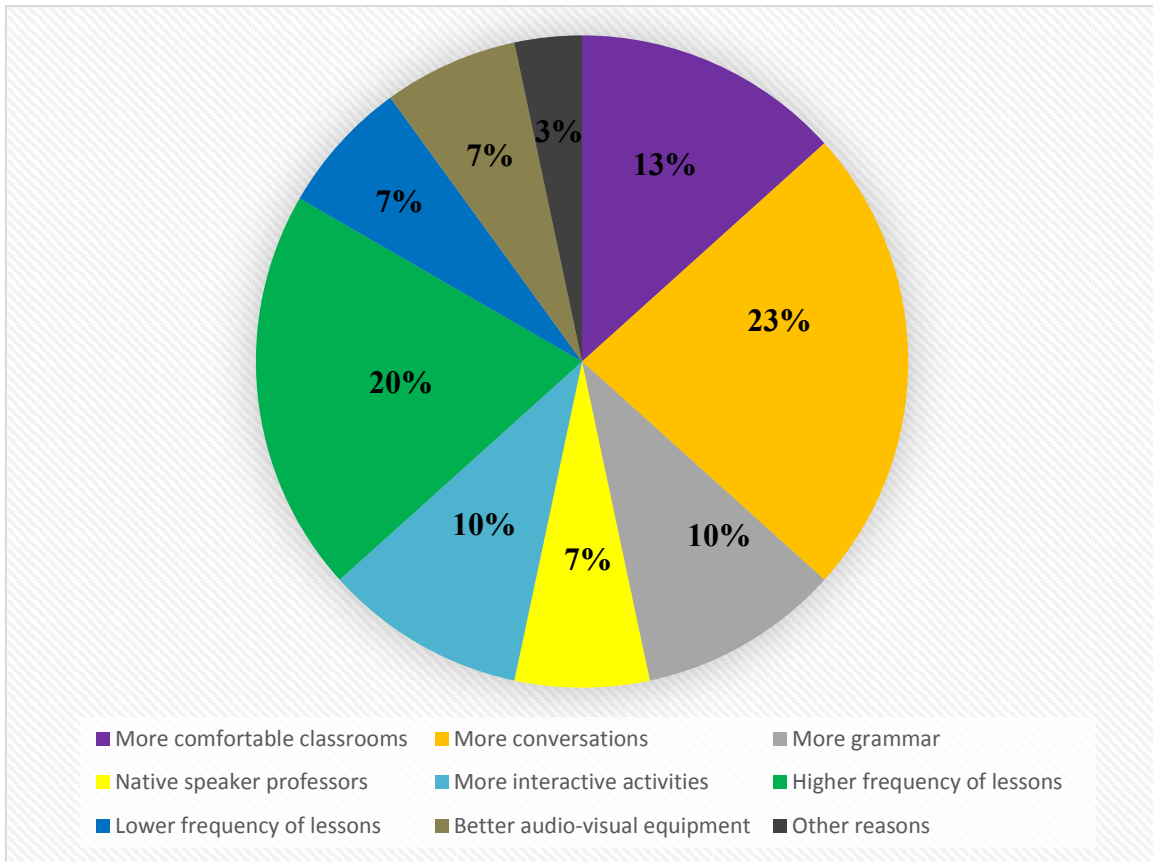

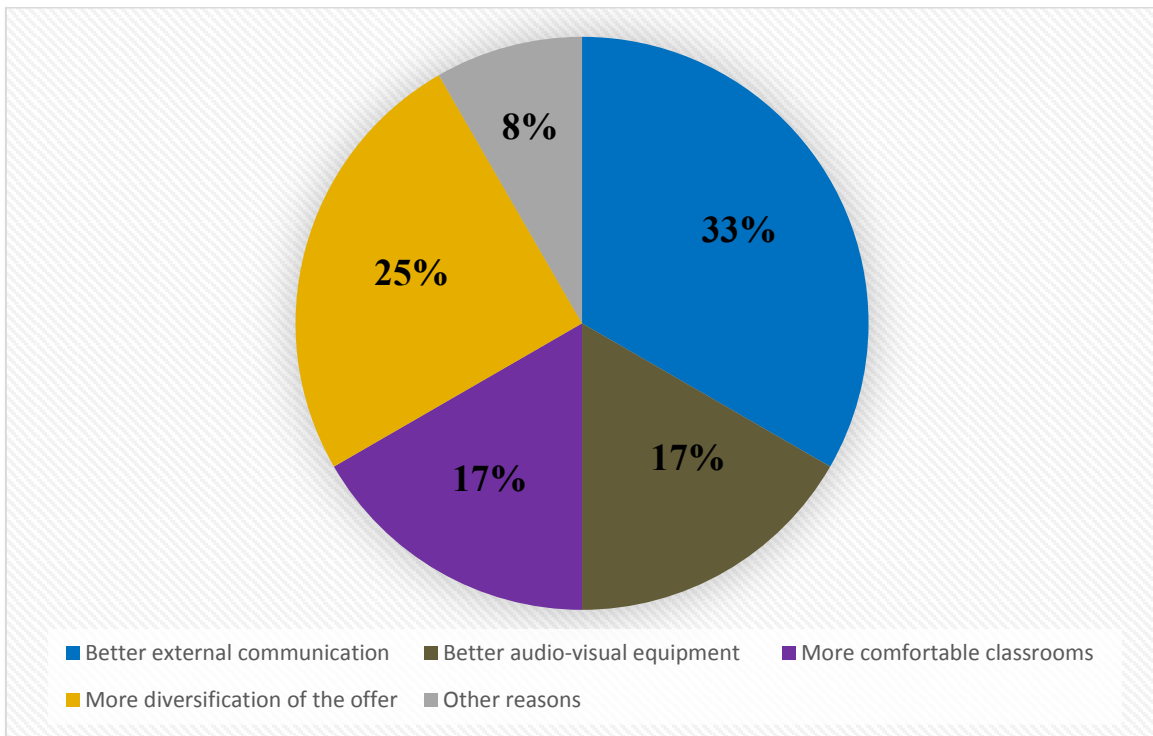Exhibit 4.13. Suggestions of students about improvement of language schools

Exhibit 4.14. The reasons of language schools' representatives about improvement of their institutions

Language schools stand for many positive values which are demonstrated on the Exhibit 4.15. The majority of marketing and branding responsibles of language schools responded that they care the most about quality values (46%) such as reliability, seriousness, credibility, professionality, officiality, experience and competence. High quality of services often gets attention of their customers. The second most important group of values mentioned was moral (25%), which included solidarity, volunteering and mental openness. Caring about moral issues benefits a language school, increasing its prestige and giving a good impression of the school with regards to the students. The next priority was given to comfortability (14%), which comprised such answers of respondents as hospitality, flexibility, sharing choices and centrality of communication. The value of available prices gained 11% of the answers, where accessibility for all citizens and honesty of prices were emphasised. This way, the opportunity to learn a language paying a low price is affordable to a wide amount of population. And the least common category is modernity (4%), where creativity and modern technology were mentioned. These parameters may attract potential students to study in the language schools, focusing on their proved teaching quality but also appealing to the moral values of their potential students, and to a lesser extent mentioning attractive aspects like comfort and affordable prices. In general, language schools present their brands as efficient, flexible, unique, competent, serious, trustworthy and open to the world.
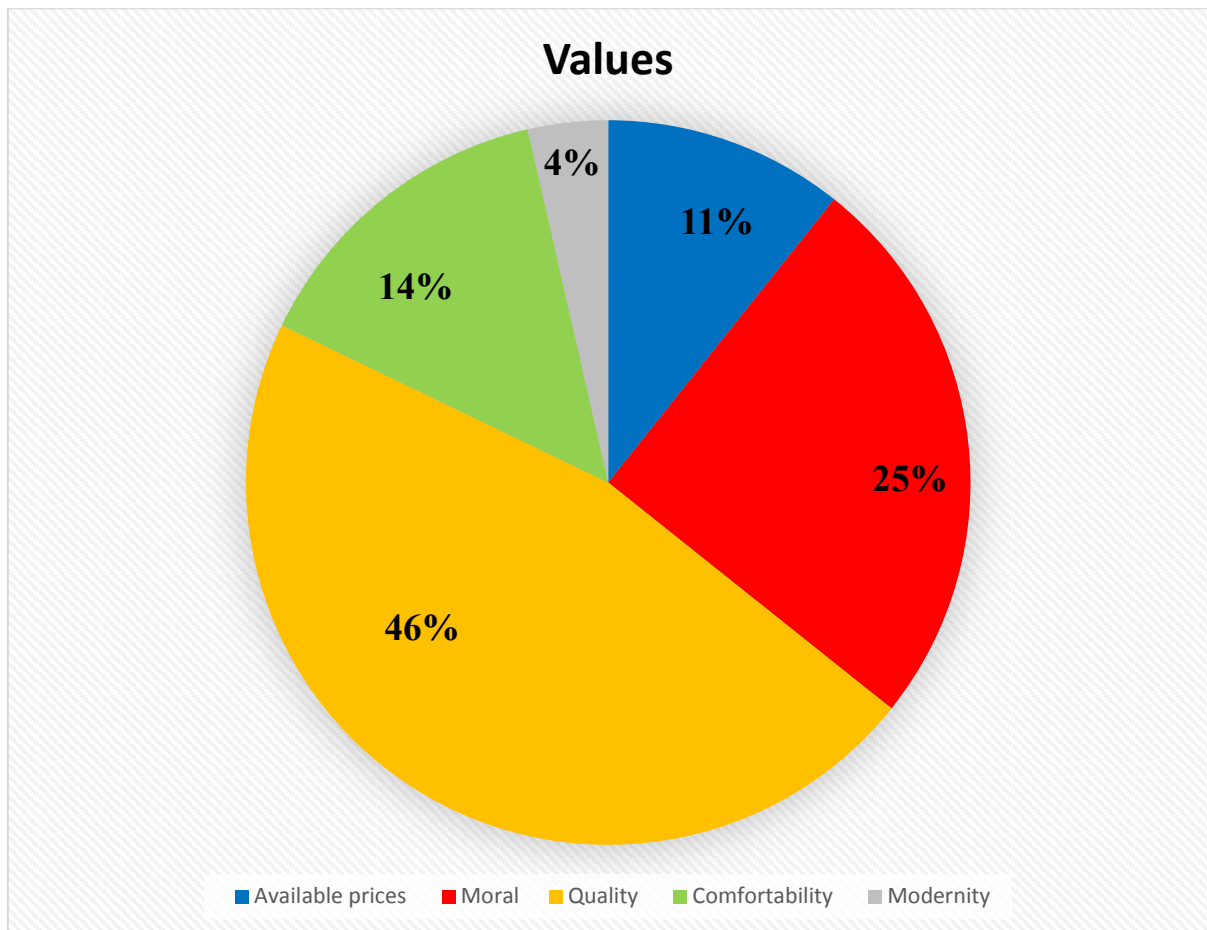
Values

Exhibit 4.15. Values for which language schools stand for

When the proper responses have been elicited the branding ladder continues to the last step of building brand relationship and thus invokes students to be loyal to their brand.

4.2.4. Building brand relationship

In this study the brand relationship is defined as the possible relationship to the students when there are personal identification and connection to the brand that create personal and individual meaning for every student. In this case, the resonance has connection to the relationship between a language school and students, in the way they may facilitate the process of reaching students for provided language courses. The mentioned relationship gives information about the history that shapes the content of the services and so also the brand. From the survey with language schools' responsibles and their students it is revealed that the demand and consciousness about language courses have increased.

In the interview for students there was asked a question about how many courses a student has attended in the language school and if he or she would like to subscribe for a language course again in the future in the same language school or advise it to somebody. The quantity of attended courses by a student at the same language school is represented on the Exhibit 4.16. Thus, we can see that 45% of students attended only one course, probably in most cases because they achieved the result which they wanted and decided not to do a course of higher level of the same language or a different language course. Although, the other 55% of students attended more than one language course at the same language school. It can mean that most students are satisfied with provided services and conditions and, thus, continue to study and advise people to attend courses in the language schools. In fact, the majority of the interviewed students (82%) replied to the survey that they desire to subscribe again for a language course in the same language school in the future or to advise it to somebody. Only 11% of interviewed students had a doubt if they would recommend or not the language school which they attended, and 7% responded negatively on that proposal. Therefore, those 11% and 7% of interviewed students didn't like something about the language school. Thus, the number of not satisfied students is relatively small compared to the satisfied ones. Exhibit 4.17 illustrates this data.
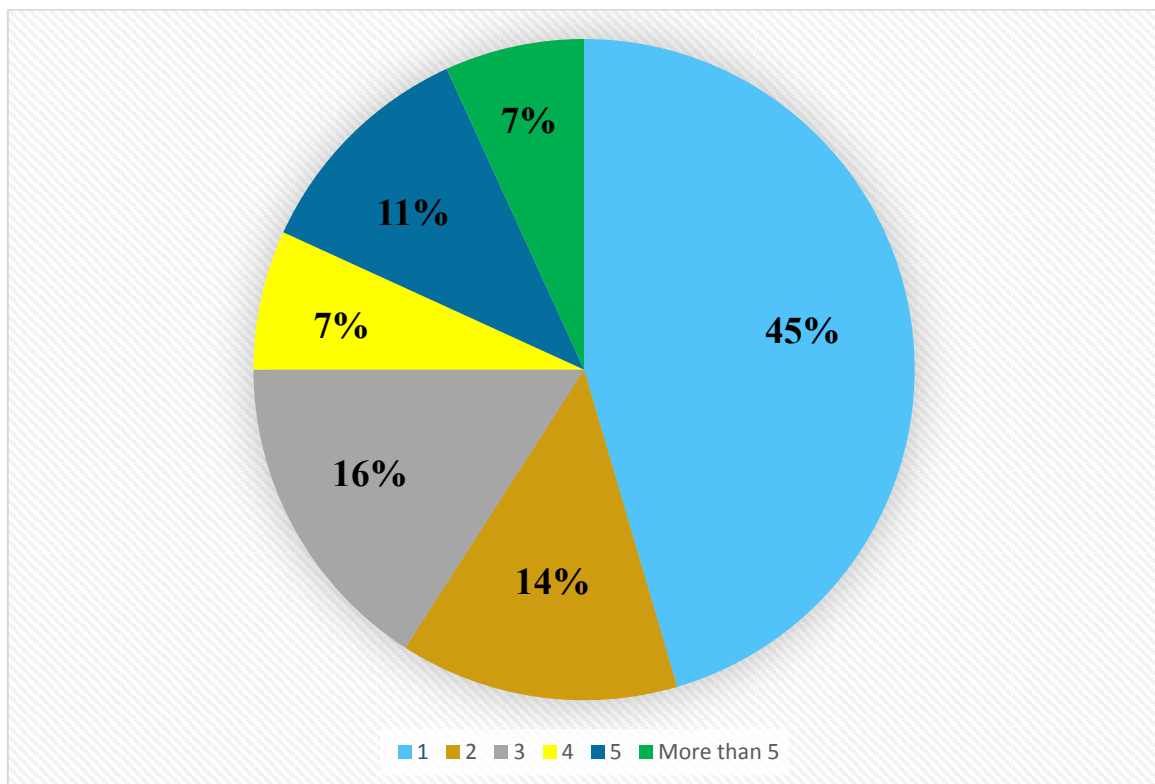

Exhibit 4.16. The quantity of attended courses by a student at the same language school
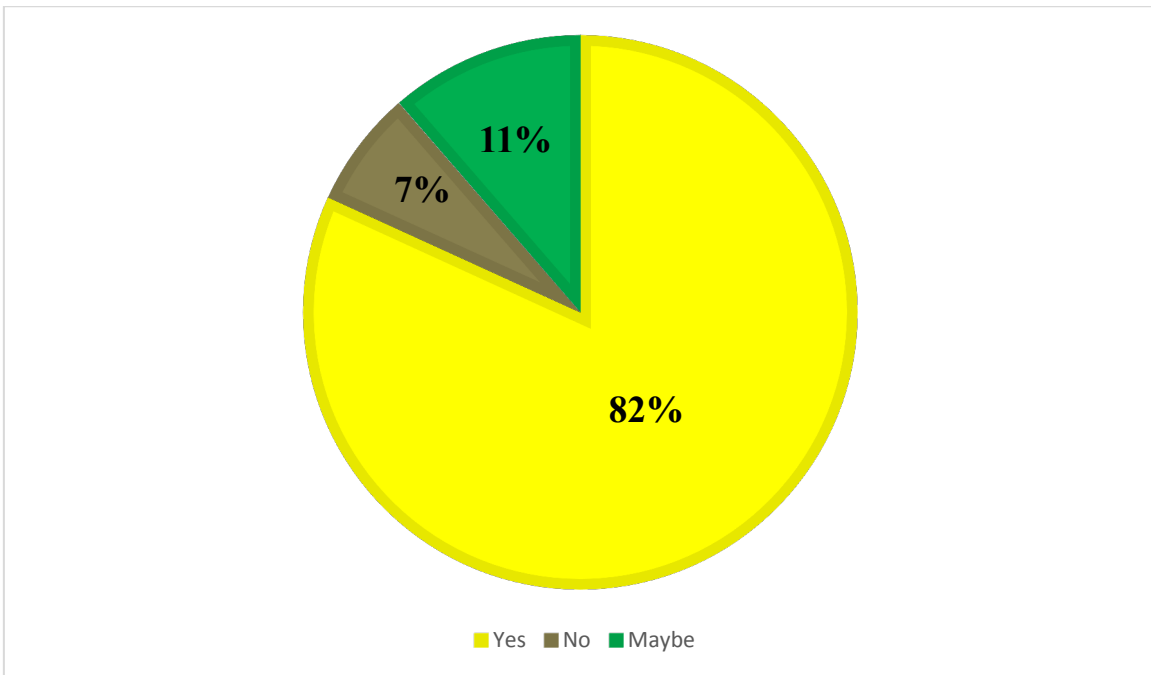
Exhibit 4.17. The will of students to subscribe to the same language school again in the future or advise it to somebody

When potential or current students have questions about language course services, language schools' representatives try to supply them with fast answers, complete information and seek to be attentive to what students want and need. Such relationships are intended to satisfy the basis for the demand of transparency and information for the students. Thereby, marketing responsibles of language schools strive to be a good business partner by caring about students' wishes and thus customize their offering to their specific situation concerning their customer base, purposes and timeframe. Moreover, building personal relationship, language schools try to be not only a supplier which provides various language courses, but also try to add a value. To be a business partner also consists in helping to create an offer for the students and the possibility to build relations with the students.

The consideration and the cooperation to achieve loyal relationship applying good business solutions are important for language schools. They also care about the educational satisfaction of their students, security of offering clear communication, available language courses and information where the students are also included and have the possibility to engage. The marketing representatives have mentioned the importance of students' feelings in the language school but it also connects to the students' feelings relating to the brand. The language schools' representatives focus on the creation of a feeling of the students in order to sell better their services of language courses. They also take care about the way to communicate and build interpersonal relationship with their target audience, capture the attention of potential students,

72

promote brand services showing the business concept, provide languages learning to students, keep up with the change in the traditional media and social networks and also add value by utility and professionalism.

Other ways of getting new students, engaging them and inspiring them to enjoy learning a language and to get more information about the offer of courses can be through different marketing communication channels. Therefore, interviewed Spanish and Italian language schools promote themselves by various marketing communication options: media advertising (newspaper, magazine), direct response advertising (e-mail, telephone, print media), online advertising (own website, other websites, blog, YouTube), place advertising (billboards and posters), consumer promotion (premiums, bonus packs), publicity and public relations, social networks (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter) and event marketing (trips, courses of culture, concerts, festivals, exhibitions, spectacles, workshops, tandems, holidays for children, cultural meetings and delicacies degustations).

The marketing communication options used by the interviewed Spanish and Italian language schools and the way their students get to know about them are depicted on Exhibit 4.18 and Exhibit 4.19 respectively. Spanish and Italian language schools' representatives have been asked to estimate each channel from the highest point (from where they have the most students) decreasing to the lowest point 1 (from where they don't have students). Instead, the students had to mention just one channel by which they discovered about a language school. By the graph 4.18 we can see that marketing and branding responsible of language schools never promotes the school by radio, television and Pinterest. It illustrates us that radio and television are expensive traditional media which are not affordable for small and medium enterprises. And Pinterest didn't become so popular yet. In fact, by the graph 4.19 it is clear that no students got to know about the school by radio, television or Pinterest. From all the provided answers students chose these options of how they discovered about a language school: 48% WOM (Word-Of-Mouth), 39% official website of language school, 7% other websites, 2% e-mail, 2% Facebook and 2% YouTube. Thus, the biggest number of them comes by Word-Of-Mouth which is made by current or ex-students who have a positive impression of a language school and likely tell about it to their relatives, friends and acquaintances. This way they promote a language school even without realizing that, which is very beneficial for language schools. Therefore, the schools' employees should create the best possible conditions for their students in order that they spread positive opinions to people about language schools, increasing their reputation, and in order to have them subscribed again for a next course. In fact, marketing responsibles of language schools are aware of WOM promotion of their schools as a main channel of reaching students as

we can see it by 5th [the highest] evaluation level on the Exhibit 4.18. Other good ways of making advertisement by the consideration of language schools' representatives where they promote their schools are these channels with the presence of 5th [the highest] level in a decreasing order: official website of the language school, other websites, e-mail, telephone, Facebook, YouTube. In fact, by the responses on interview from students we can see that they got to know about language schools by the same marketing communication channels which language schools use the most. Therefore, in order to obtain more potential students, language schools should do more promotion by the channels from where they have major quantity of students, and should also try to improve methods of promotion in other channels from where they have less or no students. Nowadays, social networks become more and more popular because many people, including potential students, use them every day with a constant frequency. Thus, language schools could consider this great opportunity to promote themselves more efficiently in such immediate cheap and widespread social networks as for example Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter.
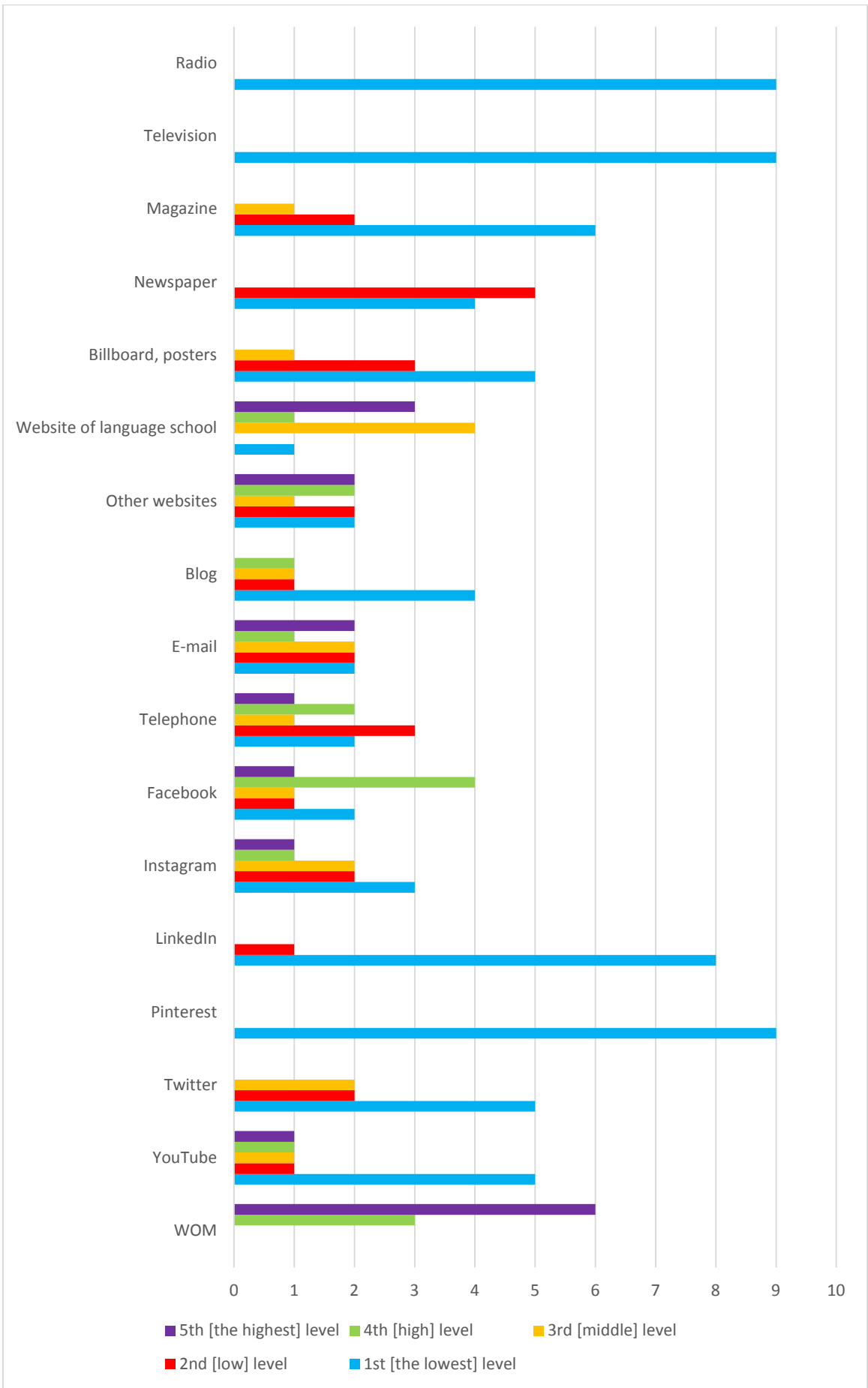
Exhibit 4.18. Channels of promotion used by language schools
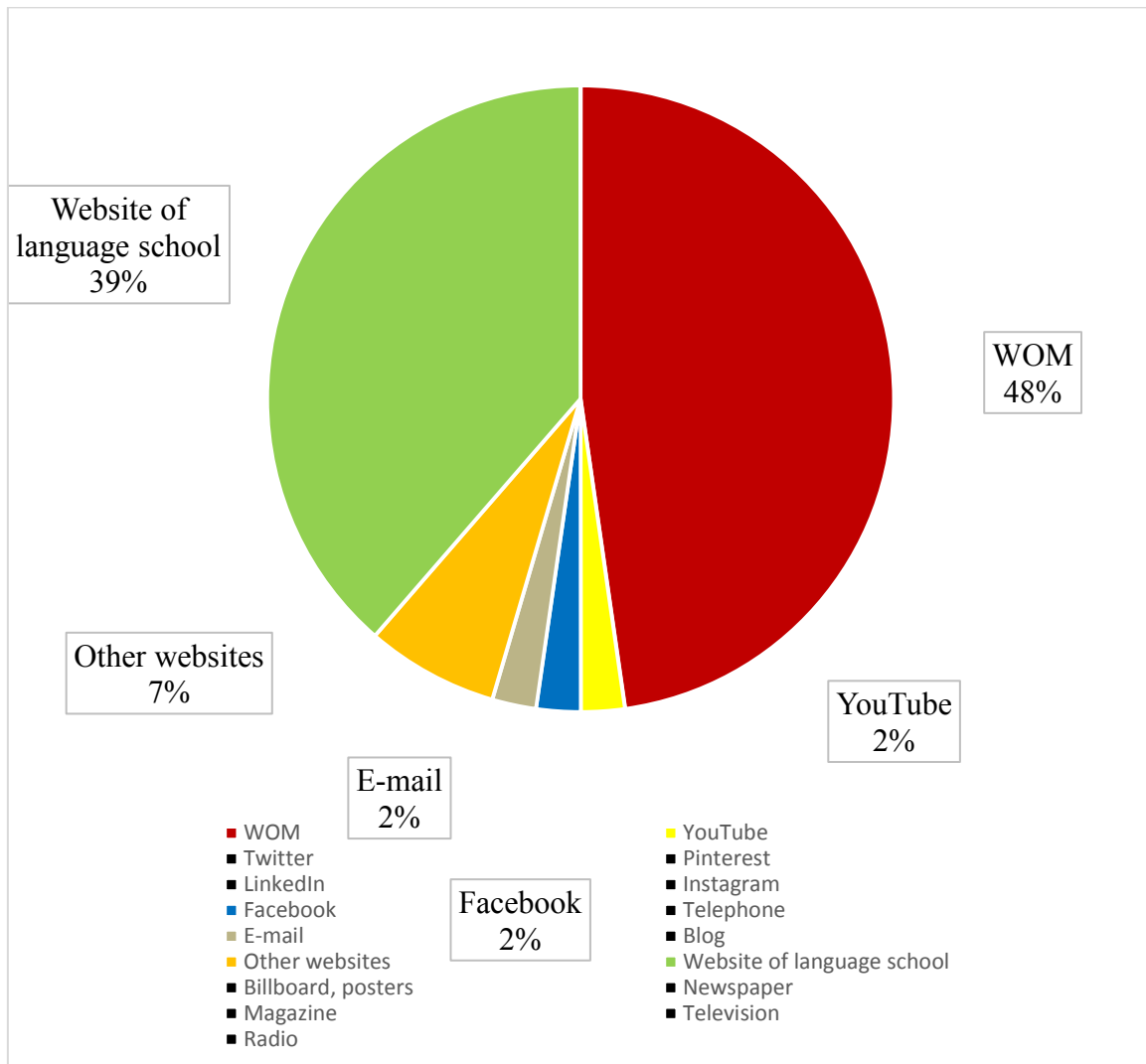
Exhibit 4.19. Students' discovery about language schools

Another marketing communication option which marketing responsibles of language schools apply is consumer promotions such as premiums and bonus packs. Premium type of promotion makes possible to reward current students with discounts for other language courses to have them subscribed again. And bonus packs are often provided with different bonuses for special occasions such as the anniversary of the school's founding date, Christmas and New Year period, black Friday and so on.

Through all the above-mentioned marketing options, students find language schools and their offers, having the possibility to engage and to come in contact with other potential students who have the same interests in learning languages. Thus, some methods to measure the loyalty of the

students about language courses and about the brand in general are through visit frequency on the official website of a language school or through the sales numbers. Language schools' respondents of the interview stated that the potential students would like to know more about their language courses considering increased visits and clicks on the homepages. Furthermore, interviewed language schools get more and more e-mails where the potential students ask for more information about their language courses. Thereby, we can see that not only the demand for language courses has increased recently, but also the recognition and consciousness of the students about the brands, as well as loyalty and engagement.

4.2.5. Final conclusions

In conclusion of the current chapter about empirical data, some inferences can be made about answers of surveys with both types of respondents through the prism of customer-based brand equity (CBBE) pyramid. The first level of the pyramid, brand identity of the interviewed language schools, was analysed through brand awareness of the interviewed students about the language school brands. Marketing communication channels - such as the official websites of language schools, other websites, Word-Of-Mouth, e-mail, Facebook and YouTube - helped students to be aware of the language schools and their services. The second level of the pyramid, brand meaning, demonstrated brand associations and brand image of the students about points of parity and differences of the language schools. The revealed points of parity were the range of languages and the provision of cultural enrichment for the students. The points of differences were various events and prices of language courses. The third level of the pyramid is brand response of the students about brand quality. This response was based mostly on positive judgments and feeling of the students about the language school brands. Lastly, the fourth level of the pyramid demonstrated strong brand relationship because the majority of students show to be loyal to the chosen language school. The behavioural loyalty of the students has been represented through repeated purchases of language course services, through the will of students to subscribe to the same language school again in the future and through their will to advise the language school to other people by Word-Of-Mouth. The fifth chapter will provide the connection of the empirical data from the fourth chapter to the theoretical framework of the second chapter.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of the empirical data which are connected to the conceptual framework pertaining to brand equity within SMEs and how brand equity can be strengthened. In the conclusion of this chapter an overview of the conceptualized marketing activities is demonstrated, and it is shown in which sense they have contributed to the process of strengthening the brand equity.

5.1. Brand equity attributes connected to the marketing activities

The conceptual framework about the four brand attributes described in previous chapter is implemented to create a comprehension of what the language schools have worked with and what activities they have applied concerning the brand building and the contribution to strengthen the brands. To remind the reader of keeping the research questions in mind which have guided the analysis, they are outlined below:

- What marketing activities do Italian and Spanish language schools apply to strengthen the brand equity?
- How may the marketing activities be conceptualized to better comprehend brand equity within SMEs?

5.1.1. Generating brand identity

The brand name is considered as the first step to enlarge the brand equity, where the name is supposed to be attractive, prestigious, easy to recall, short, simple and evoking positive feelings (Keller 2012; Aaker 1991; Centeno et al. 2013). The name is one brand element needed to generate the brand identity and to communicate what a language school stands for. Marketing activities of the interviewed language schools were applied to get attention and to increase engagement of potential and current students, as well as to improve sales. Through the brand name, it was stated that the aim was to create an enhanced brand awareness. This fits with the theory that notes the increased recognition and chance to recall a brand in several situations if the brand differentiates the services from other competitors on the market (Keller 2012).

In order to distinguish the brand, other brand elements which are the logo, symbol, jingles, design or slogans may be used to create a cluster that communicates what the brand stands for (Keller 2009). Analysing it technically, whenever a marketer generates a name, logo or symbol

for a new service, that person has created a brand. It is supposed to be recognised, although many marketers refer to a brand as more than that, determining a brand in terms of having generated awareness, reputation and prominence. According to the CBBE-model, brand elements may be selected to increase brand awareness, to make easier the creation of strong, favourable and unique brand associations, or to evoke positive judgements and feelings (Keller 2012), while the brand elements may result in an increased brand awareness, which consists in the language schools' results in relation to the enhanced brand awareness recently. The language schools' representatives stated on various occasions that the awareness has enhanced while this depicted in the sales numbers of the promoted language courses, from the direct contact of students at events and visits to the official websites' pages and social networks. This may be related to the enhanced recognition of the brands.

The six criteria of brand elements should be chosen considering memorability (easily recognised, easily recalled), meaningful (descriptive, persuasive), likeable (fun and interesting, reach verbal and visual imagery, aesthetically pleasing), transferable (within and across service categories, across geographic boundaries and cultures), adaptable (flexible, can be updated), protectable (legally, competitively) (Keller 2012). The brand names of language schools combined with various brand elements were often chosen relying on the guidelines where the logo, colours, angle, font, signage, symbols, tonality in images and texts were based on various interviews with the graphic design organisation or by employees of language schools, in order to correspond to the language schools' core values.

Not just the brand elements were chosen but also the mission, aims, vision and core values based on the history of the language school, the director's personality and the competences of the employees in the market. The influence of a director is linked to the brand identity, which has impact by the education and experiences of that person (Mitchell et al. 2013; Asamoah 2014) and will influence how the brand identity is set (Berthon et al. 2008; Essoussi et al. 2010). The created brand name, the brand elements and the design coincide with the theory exposed. All of them are linked to the meaning of including the employees and the director (Wong et al. 2005), and the graphic designers as well (Centeno et al. 2013). Furthermore, this information should be integrated into the enterprise in a Long-Run perspective in order to obtain an effect (Merrilees et al. 2005), which is the case of interviewed language schools due to the presented mission, aims, vision, guidelines and core values that each employee has available, and is outlined at employees' meetings. Thus, a continuity, consistency and transparency are developed through all material and communication that directed on the potential and current students. Through the continuity, consistency and transparency in the marketing material and the communication in a

language school, as well as to the students, it creates an enhanced recognition, which facilitates the process to recall a brand, which corresponds to Keller (2009).

The brand elements are also about achieving an increased brand awareness and about outlining both verbal and visual information that identifies and distinguishes the brand from competitors (Keller 2012). The continuity, consistency, transparency and simplicity through a whole language school are words stated by the language schools' representatives during the interviews that the brands are based on and may be considered as a unit of differences. To make it easier for potential or current students to get to know information about language school's courses, marketers were sending e-mails to their target audience clarifying the name of the language school, its courses, its prices and its location. A brand identity is something that may provide information about the service category a brand related to, while the brand awareness also connects the needs and desires of the customers to the brand (Keller 2012). Nevertheless, the brand awareness may be created when the brand identity is different from the competitors where the name, signage or other attributes should be special in order to be copyrighted.

Brand identity is also represented by the structure of a language school. In the interview with language schools' representatives 66% of language schools have up to 10 employees, 21% - up to 250 employees and 13% - up to 50 employees, thus all of them are SMEs. These numbers are perfectly proved by conceptual framework about quantity of employees in medium, small and micro enterprises (Ekonomifakta 2018; European Commission 2019).

The linguistic sector has a limited surface, limited time to gain the students, thus it was thought to let students discover the services in order to make a decision as the language schools' respondents mentioned. Thereby, the brand elements should be taken into account as being transferable, adaptable and protectable to support the brand equity (Keller 2009). To do so, the language schools provided not only language courses but also events, such as trips, courses of culture, concerts, festivals, exhibitions, spectacles, workshops, tandems, holidays for children, cultural meetings and delicacies degustations. They can be seen as tools to become attractive and memorable in the students' mind, to defend the brand competitively and to promote new language courses, which complies with the defensive criterions of the brand elements.

To emerge in the consideration set indicates that a customer gets considered for purchase of a service (Keller 2012). Through the brand and the brand elements which differ between existing competitors in the market with the colourful tonalities and fonts, combined with the exposures in language schools, marketing and branding responsibles have created a possibility to emerge more easily in the consideration set of the students at the purchase situation. Integrated with the

marketing activities, the language schools also provide to the students information about the various language courses and events in order to synchronise the courses with the advertisement campaigns. Therefore, the language courses and events appear in the students' consideration set and seem to create a depth of the brand awareness in order to recall and recognize the brand better.

A breadth of the brand which is remembered in a purchase decision and in changing situations is another aspect to keep in mind through achieving a brand awareness (Abimbola et al. 2007; Keller 2009). Another change in the focus of the language schools has been related to the students. Previously the marketing strategies were focused on a language school itself and less effort was put into obtaining and attracting the students. Nowadays, language schools have changed their concentration on a consumer perspective with a pull strategy united with the brand focus integrated into the whole language school. Therefore, the brands may appear in various situations such as at events, on the billboards, in the websites or in the social networks which all strive to recall a brand.

The brand awareness may be increased through marketing activities that make the customers experience the brand (Keller 1993), which fits to language schools' cases and the marketing activities they have worked with. Thus, students get information about language courses and events by various marketing communication channels, which provide chances for them to remember the brand and generate a breadth of the brand awareness. Regarding both potential and current students, the marketing activities have not only been about generating an awareness but also about education and about forming a knowledgeable trading house that helps the students to gain beneficial market opportunities and thus also develop a brand meaning.

5.1.2. Creating brand meaning

The language courses itself are at the centre of brand equity, because it is the primary influence on what students experience with a brand, what they hear about a brand by Word-Of-Mouth and what the brand representative can tell students about the brand.

One type of the brand meaning is the brand imagery which is related to the more intangible perspective like psychological or social, connected to the brand and the consumers own experiences of the brand or advertisement (Keller 2012). What the interviewed language schools have done in order to generate meaning concerning more intangible aspects may be bound to the joint communication through various marketing channels. The focus on the communication through several brand touch points may provide a meaning based on that the students know what

to expect from a language school. That may develop a feeling of confidence and reliability even as some new language courses or events are presented if the brand is always present and communicates the same aim.

The other type of brand meaning, the brand performance, is related to fulfilment of the functional needs concerning a service and the customers' experience of it (Keller 2009). This can be related to the variety of language courses and additional events provided by language schools. Language courses differ by difficulty levels, which are usually A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. These levels include multiple language courses, as for example Italian, Spanish, English, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, French, German, etc. In order to immerse and integrate into language and into its culture, language schools provide for their students such events as trips, cultural courses, concerts, festivals, exhibitions, spectacles, delicacies degustations, tandems, holidays for children, cultural meetings and workshops. The service of language courses and events is another way of generating meaning through being accommodated towards students' requests.

To satisfy consumers functional needs an organisation has to consider the price, service, style, design and how the service feels like (Keller 2009). Through the work with shaping a structure throughout a language school relating to aspects such as the brand touch points, the control of the marketer and the students' visits, the exposures, brand elements and option of new services are all carefully chosen. Regarding a price of language courses, the most students are satisfied with the correlation of price and quality of a service. It is not surprising because many language schools provide language courses by very low prices or even free of charge. However, some courses which are not so cheap can be justified by allocating a budget of a language school on providing language schools' facilities, the employees' salaries, the control, the monitoring and effort to achieve qualitative services. Nevertheless, to motivate that to the students requires transparency and information that is quite easy to access if there are questions, which also can differentiate a language school from their competitors. Thus, language schools strive to satisfy the students' needs and desires by being innovative and modern in their development and choices concerning the services in all steps of the process.

SMEs pay attention to create favourability, strength and uniqueness of brand associations. Whether associations are linked strongly to a brand depends on how the marketing campaign and other various factors affect customers' brand experience (Keller 2012). Associations differ in the strength of their relation to the brand node. Strength is a function of either the quantity of processing that information receives and the nature, or the quality of that processing. The more deeply the customer thinks about service information and connects it to the brand knowledge, the stronger the final brand associations are. As it was discovered from the interviews with Spanish

and Italian representatives of language schools and their students, both types of respondents have a strong association with the brands of language schools such as job, travel, lifestyle, culture, communication or study. Apart from marketer-controlled sources of information, brand associations were also generated in a variety of other ways: by direct language course experience; from information reported about a brand from a language school or other sources (e.g. Facebook, newspapers, magazines or websites), especially by Word-Of-Mouth; by assumptions or inferences from a brand itself (e.g. its brand name or symbol); or from the identification of a brand with a language school, country, channel of distribution or some specific person, place or event.

Communication about the variety of services and thus the brand are connected to the choice of marketing channels that language schools use. The marketing channels may be ways of making customers aware of the services, to promote the brand through the marketing communication (Keller 2009). The marketing channels of language schools helped to create advertisement and promotion about a brand through magazine, newspaper, billboards and posters, own website and other sites, blog, e-mail, social networks (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter) and YouTube. Furthermore, the marketing channels were selected based on the assumptions about the marketing segments personal values. Achieving a specific group with a specific age, gender or income is not sufficient but a brand needs also to be socially accepted depending on the brand personality, which is based on the public associations of the brand (Keller 2009). These are evolved in the marketing activities and the purchase language courses situations where the intangible aspects are generated, which complies with language schools and their strategies behind the choices of the marketing channels and which segment they wanted to obtain.

Peoples beliefs may be reflected in the brands that should suit their style and connection to social groups (Ilaw 2014). It is claimed that students choose brands that are similar to their own personality and students' needs, associated with their self-identity and who they are. Even here, the option of marketing channels influences the comprehension of the brand's personality. Furthermore, the marketing campaigns combined with the internet sources are carefully chosen by language schools. Thus, the understanding of students choosing brands connected to their own personality is guiding, in combination with language schools' assumptions of the market and the marketing activities in order to gain the right target audience. This also matches with the channel strategy, where theory indicates that the services are associated with the choice of marketing channels, which influence the perception of the brand (O'Donnel 2011).

In addition, the joint actions between the employees and the owner of a language school are other activities where the owner or a marketer chooses the advertisements and tasks, combined

with informing the students about language courses and touching upon the intangible aspects, through letting the students experience the services. Therefore, the planning of the marketing activities in order to let the consumers experience the services is reached (O'Donnel 2011).

Some characteristics, such as a book, a location, a teacher, a method of teaching, the duration of lessons, classmates and a classroom, influence students in the shaping of meaning about language schools and their language courses. As the majority of students are satisfied with those characteristics, the meaning about language courses and about the brand has a strong and special significance for them.

However, certain difficulties that language schools mentioned during the interviews are the limited time for students' meetings with a marketer or an owner. Therefore, the information about language schools with their language courses and events is provided on the official website of a language school, on other websites and on social networks that can be used throughout students' online visits. Telephone calls are also done to reach students and to provide them with the information about language schools' services. Due to the students' hectic studying or working days, language schools also started adapting a marketer's or an owner's work hours based on the students' wishes. For language schools it is important to give the best possible affordable facilities to the students and to demonstrate them service empathy, where the meeting hours are chosen by the students even if it is at the evening. Service empathy is connected to the extent to which service providers are considered to be trusting, caring and having consumer's interests in mind (Keller 2012).

When managing the strategies for the service offer and the pricing, it is useful to be aware of competitors' offers in order to provide services with good quality and also to create competitive advantage (Keller 2009). Language schools pay attention to the development of the market and many of them are flexible regarding changes in the market. In relation to this, language schools' respondents mentioned that a marketer needs to be aware of the environment to suit their activities and strategies depending on the market. Otherwise, as a topic of interest concerning variety of services and the transparency of language schools, it would be tough not to adjust to that development. Another topic is about the demand of the students relating to qualitative services; thus, the consciousness of the students is also growing. Such information is collected and used in order to generate a comprehension of the market which coincides with Keller (2009), who states being aware of the competitors in order to generate a competitive advantage.

To generate a competitive advantage by taking into account the brand imagery that comprises the consumers' experience of the brand may also be related to the consumers' social needs that

should be considered (Keller 2009). Actions like taking responsibility throughout the value chain concerning the services, being open-minded and thinking about several options –that in some cases should be centred on the global perspective, as well as focused on being authentic– could be analysed as social needs to take into account. These are key thoughts the interviewed language schools work with. This demonstrates that the language schools are keen on listening to the students and their demands, but also on the information about the students, which is collected through the mentioned relationship between the language schools and their students.

5.1.3. Gaining brand response

The connection between language schools and their students provides information for SMEs that can be used in order to improve their offerings and marketing activities for them to suit the consumers' expectations. As the brand response is based on consumers' judgments about the brand and the associations that are generated in the minds are combined with feelings that should be elicited by marketing companies (Keller 2009). Judgments of consumers about a brand include parameters of quality, credibility, consideration and superiority (Keller 2012).

Before starting a language course in the chosen language school, students had had their expectation about the received service. The data of interview with students show that some students had had positive feelings and judgements about a language course and thus about the brand, but some of them had had negative ones. The fact of the existence of positive and negative expectations can be explained by the reason that at the moment of having expectations students didn't start to attend a language course in a language school, thus they could just imagine it. The theory suggests that although all types of consumers' responses are possible – driven rationally or emotionally– what matters is how positive these responses are (Keller 2012).

Motives or brand attitudes of students to study in a chosen language school were also revealed and analysed in the interview. Brand attitudes show customers' overall evaluations of a brand (Wilkie 1994). Thus, it was important to know about students' motives because they often create the basis for actions and behaviours of the students with regard to a specific language school. In general, such attitudes depend on concrete considerations regarding the attributes and benefits of the brand (Keller 2012). The students' attitudes towards a language school depend on how much they believe that the brand has certain associations that matter to them.

The parameters of judgments and feelings applying to the brands were analysed by the interviews with students and language school representatives. Those parameters are being original, trusting, informative, popular, mainstream, immediate, connected, interactive,

entertaining, young, fantastic, genuine, rebellious and changing. It was discovered that the opinions of both types of the respondents coincide or sometimes students have even better opinion of a language school than its representatives. Therefore, having good opinion of language schools, students have a strong link with their brands. Thus, the positive judgements and feeling of students are revealed about language schools.

Even if the positive judgements and feeling of students had high prevalence, however students and language schools' representatives were asked about their opinions concerning the improvement of language schools. Both types of respondents gave their reasons, which were discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, there is always something that can be improved in any organisation, including language schools, because of the modernisation, constant world improvements and progress.

Various values, for which language schools stand for and which influence judgements and feeling of students, were analysed. Those values comprise quality, moral, comfortability, modernity and available prices. Therefore, language schools' representatives promote their language schools indicating the values for which they stand for in order to have positive, accessible responses of students and thus generating a base for strong relationship.

5.1.4. Building brand relationship

The final step of the CBBE-model focuses on the relationship to the brand that is referred to the extent customers can identify themselves and feel a connection to the brand based on the individual values that may generate personal meaning (Keller 2009). The intensity or psychological bond stated in theory is hard to decide on, as the loyalty is intangible and can be measured concerning the repeated purchase. Though, the intensity and the loyalty are related as likely customers need to feel a psychological bond with a brand for buying it repeatedly.

The confidence in the services and preferences for a brand combines with the visibility of services by different marketing channels and gives more attention for language courses, thus it can be referred to the behavioural loyalty. The behavioural loyalty was about the quantity and frequency of the purchases of services that could lead to the brand relationship (Keller 2009). To measure loyalty of the students by quantity and frequency of language courses purchases is not so easy because service is not a product which can be bought more often and in a bigger quantity. However, the data from survey demonstrate that the majority of the students (55%) attended two or more language courses. Staying in the same language school, some of them continued to learn the same language in a higher level, while others felt curious about different

foreigner languages and started to learn them. This makes also easier for the students to get inspired by the option of combining several language courses in accordance with the various possibilities offered, which increase the quantity of services bought and also the chance of achieving a personal attachment by offering something else than just a service, like a especial experience and group spirit.

Another factor to provide the loyalty of students to a brand is the assertiveness in the decision and the desire to subscribe again for a language course in the same language school in the future or to advise it to somebody. Though, the mere satisfaction can be not enough (Steward 1997). Thus, we can see that students are not only satisfied with a brand and have positive opinions about it, but also create good reputation of the attended language school by Word-Of-Mouth. As it was revealed in the interviews, experiential, consequential and intentional WOM is the most effective method to attract new students in language schools.

The individual attachment or attitudinal attachment can be considered as the meaning that is created for the customer (Keller 2009). As the attachment that may be created through the language courses and events is based on the inspiration that the students can get through the experience that can be combined in various ways. For the students, the attachment can be referred to the customized offers they are provided with, the facilitated ordering system online on an official website or personally in a language school, the economic benefit and the simplicity in the provided information. This relates also to the values of the language schools about being a good business partner. Instead of just achieving benefits for themselves, they concentrate on supporting the students with personal and unique offerings.

Offering individual solutions that fit the different customers and their own brands is another way to obtain an attachment (Keller 2012). Furthermore, the relationship is built on an exchange where language schools are offering unique events and various language courses based on the students' conditions and needs, while the students are providing the language schools with information about the students' preferences. Considering that language schools have direct contact with the students not only personally, but also through social media and the official website, the information about students, their preferences and purchases is crucial. Other alternatives for the language schools to engage students are via the internet.

The active engagement and possible creation of a community for a specific language school are gained through the website of a language school, other websites, e-mail, YouTube and Facebook. The participation in online chat rooms, being ambassadors or visiting the brand-related websites are stated in theory as approaches of engaging above the purchase situations (Keller 2009).

When students identify themselves with a brand community it becomes as social phenomenon whereby students feel a kinship or affiliation with other students and employees associated with a brand. A stronger sense of community among loyal consumers can generate favourable brand attitudes and intentions (Algesheimer et al. 2005). The strongest affirmation of brand loyalty is when consumers spend their time, money and energy in the brand besides those expended for service purchase of the brand (Keller 2012). Perfect example of community of students about language schools is through Facebook where potential and current students may interact with each other regarding the posts about multiple language courses and other cultural activities, thus helping to communicate about the brand, advocating and strengthening the brand ties of other community fellows. For such an active engagement with a brand, some students have strong attitudinal attachment or social identity. The marketing campaigns of language schools also provide the students with the possibility to collect information at their official websites, where they can learn more about the language schools' services, interact in the comment fields or ask an online specialist any question, and share the information about a language course with their friends.

5.2. Marketing activities that may strengthen the brand equity

Keller (2012) claims that brand equity is a way of developing a comprehension that promotes the importance of including the brand into the marketing strategies. Concerning the work of interviewed Italian and Spanish language schools, this accords with theory, as the language schools have integrated marketing strategies and activities for brand equity, which consists of brand awareness, brand associations, brand image, brand quality and brand loyalty. It has been done not only through the marketing, but also through sales meetings, conferences and in the communication with the students. At the language schools big attention is payed to the brand identity combined with the core values, mission and vision.

Brand equity represents an integrated strategy that focuses on an inside-out approach or an identity-driven approach, where the brand takes central position for the organisation and the aim is to reach lasting competitive advantages with the brand (Urde et al. 2013). It can be referred to the interviewed language schools due to the first step in generating the brand identity with the properly chosen brand elements. Therefore, the language schools established a common language and the ground to further develop the schools. Through the common values and the identity, the language schools continue with the same simplicity throughout every activity, event,

promotion, strategy and action that should be concentrated on the simplicity and to let more students to enjoy and experience their language courses.

Another perspective that can be related to the brand equity is the brand orientation, which represents an integrated strategy and a strategic choice or a mindset that is about considering the brand as the starting point while formulating the organisation's strategy (Urde 1994). The mindset of the language schools' brands, considers and communicates a brand within a language school that penetrates all activities. As marketing and branding responsibles of language schools mentioned, their desired purpose for the students is to think of the core values when having a contact with the brand, thus the brand mindset should not just be present in the language schools but also in the students' minds to achieve strong relationships and competitive advantages for a Long-Run. This corresponds to the theory, meaning that strong brands are difficult to copy and it provides the chance to differentiate the organisation through the intangible aspects (Abimbola 2001; Mzunug et al. 2010).

The increased integration of the brand in the strategies of the language schools and the identity-driven approach where the brand is considered as the starting point can be seen as the main aspects in order to decide which activities to select, whereas the strengthening of the brand equity could be related to the brand orientation itself due to the language schools' brand focus that contributes to enlarged competitive advantages. Based on the promotion by different marketing communication channels, for example there are the offers of various services to the students and at the same time the creation of an increased awareness about language courses, events and a brand in general. This is visible in the numbers of the promoted segments, in the feedback of the students in the language schools or online, and in the increased quantity of visits on the homepage of the language schools. It can be related to the integrated strategy which has contributed to the continuity throughout all activities in the language schools and the communication to external parties.

The continuity in the communication could also be connected to the brand touch points which the language schools' representatives mentioned, where the knowledge confidence of the employees facilitates what to concentrate on based on the brand orientation which has helped to satisfy the students' needs and desires. It was stated that the goals of language schools were to make students, being at the brand touch points, to follow all the steps of traditional marketing funnel in increasing order: awareness => familiarity => consideration => purchase => loyalty. This coincides with the theory that claims all the mentioned steps naming them 'consumer decision journey', which has the purpose to reach customers at the moments that influence the most their decisions (Court et al. 2009). At the first step students consider an initial set of

different language schools' brands, based on brand perceptions and exposure to recent touch points. At the second step students gather information, adding or subtracting brands as they actively evaluate what they need and want. At the third step students select a brand at the moment of purchasing a language course. At the fourth step, after purchasing a language course, students make expectations based on experience to inform the next decision journey. And lastly, there are triggers or additional attractive offers provided by language schools that can make students loyal to their brand.

In practice, the decision-making process symbolizes a circular journey, with four main phases depicting potential battlefields where marketers of the language schools could win or lose: primary consideration; active evaluation, or the process of researching potential purchases of language courses; closure, when students buy a service; and post purchase, when students experience them studying in a language school. Therefore, language schools seek to be present for their students at each stage of pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. The traditional marketing funnel helps to bring a value, for example, by providing a way to realize the strength of a brand in comparison with its competitors at different stages and making possible to concentrate on different aspects of the marketing challenge. Furthermore, the marketing and branding responsibles have to spend more time analysing the market and in what sense they may obtain new solutions that benefit the students. Based on that the employees know the core values and what language schools stands for and should communicate. Thus, it becomes easier to know what kind of feelings they want to induce through their activities and how they want to encourage their students to subscribe for language courses.

Feelings and judgements that were induced, such as the interest and curiosity and more precisely the questioning that according to the language schools' representatives could be both negative and positive, is something that marketing responsibles should take into account and work on, as the students had proper feelings but they differed from the theoretical stated feelings. It can be debated that the language schools' representatives must be confident in knowing that their services and knowledge are of good quality, in order to be able to evoke feelings that necessarily are not only positive, in order to achieve an increased recognition of the brands.

Increased recognition and the language schools' will to offer unique solutions may also be connected to the idea of being good business partners. This can be demonstrated by the language schools' representatives who create benefits for both students and themselves in their service offerings in order to create strong relationships with loyal students in the Long-Run. The knowledge of the students is something the language schools are keen on, besides being open-minded about competitors in the market. The language schools seem likely to be open-minded

and willing to share their knowledge, as for example the news about organised events that got published in magazines.

The identified and conceptualized activities are summarized in Exhibit 5.1, to provide an overview of the marketing activities and a brief description of the strengthening effects they may have on the brand equity in the interviewed language schools. The demonstrated marketing activities are based on the researcher's interpretation of the empirical data, whereby the activities are subjectively selected. The revealed findings are context-dependent and based on the language schools' values of what can be considered as strengthening for them and their specific brand language field development. Furthermore, looking at Exhibit 5.1, the analysis provides data about the interconnection of the brand attributes and the brand building tools which are both outlined and used to identify and conceptualize the marketing activities. Thus, it seems to be difficult to have them separated as it was complicated to keep them apart from the brand elements that can be considered as the basis of the identity but impact on the whole continuity throughout a language school and its communication.

Brand attributes	Marketing activities	Strengthening brand equity
1. Generating brand identity		Increased brand awareness about language courses and events that helps more easily to recall and recognize the brand. Continuity, consistency and transparency in the communication.
Brand elements	Brand building	
	Simplicity (mission)	
	Service promotion	
	Marketing strategy	
	Target audience focus	
2. Creating brand meaning		Consideration about competitors in order to generate a competitive advantage considering points of parity and difference. Integrated strategy affects all brand touch points and the communication. The mix of traditional methods with innovative and dynamic structures. It provides confidence and helps to satisfy the educational needs of the students by brand performance and the psychological and social needs by brand imagery. By cultural activities and language courses, it creates entertaining and educational experiences, spirit, journey, common purposes, motivation to attend language courses, participation,
Marketing programs	Market research	
	Joint communication	
	Joint organizational actions	
	Variety of service offerings	
	Service empathy and qualitative facilities	
	Education of sales employees	

	Facilitation of information for students	enjoyment, socialization. It generates favourability, strength and uniqueness of brand associations.
	Global perspective	
3. Gaining brand response		The certainty of language schools' employees in kind of feelings and judgements that they want to evoke in students. Positive, accessible reactions of students about language schools and their services. Brand attitudes show students' overall evaluations of a brand. It provides service information for students relying on high brand knowledge. Offer of unique solutions.
	Rational and emotional persuasion of students	
	Value addition	
	Improvement business strategies	
4. Building brand relationship		Increased behavioural loyalty. This is visible in the repeated sales numbers of the promoted language courses, feedback of the students in the language schools or online and the increased quantity of visits on the homepage. Attitudinal attachment of the students through the inspiration and the experience. Students' identification with a brand community. Being ambassadors, students advocate and strengthen the brand ties of other community fellows. Language schools' create and maintain a relationship with their students by always trying to be a good business partner for both parties.
	Demand stimulation	
	Customer delight	
	Business concept demonstration	
	Customer engagement	
	Promotion through marketing communication channels	

Exhibit 5.1. Summary of the conceptualized marketing activities within the language schools

6. CONCLUSIONS

This section is dedicated for the summary of the research, the solution of the addressed aim for the case studies and the conclusions based on the main findings. This chapter then finishes with recommendations for future perspectives.

The characteristics of SME marketing are often developed through the perspective and theories accepted from studies on large organizations. Thus, the environment of SMEs, especially concerning branding, is different from the environment of larger organisations. This depicts that the research area is a previously understudied phenomenon about SMEs marketing, especially in service industry, since they work in different conditions from those of large organizations. Moreover, since the marketing activities in SMEs are developed pursuing large organizations, thus the marketing activities in SMEs seem to be insufficiently performed. Thereby, the aim of this thesis is to investigate developments of brand equity in SMEs from the Italian and Spanish language sector and to identify a way to conceptualize such processes. The aim was pointed to reach by combining the previous literature regarding product and service branding, branding in SMEs, brand equity, marketing, marketing activities and more general literature about SMEs, in order to determine the theoretical framework of the thesis. The limited amount of comparison could be due to the existing literature on the topic, considering that the area of the research of the SME marketing is scarce. However, the empirical data supported most of the conclusions done in the theoretical part of the study. For example, that branding in SMEs is reflected as an informal process. The empirical research consisted of case studies on Italian and Spanish language schools, which all belong to small and medium enterprises. Furthermore, the empirical analysis was done not only with the representatives of the language schools, but also with their students. The final framework was supplemented with the findings of the empirical data and in this way the theoretical framework was adjusted to its final shape.

In relation to the set aim, this research contributes to new insights to figure out SMEs marketing that may help SMEs to apply marketing activities in order to strengthen their brand equity. Particularly, drawing on case studies research, it infers that the work of the interviewed language schools to strengthen their brand equity could be considered as an ongoing process which needs to be maintained in the everyday activities of the schools. Therefore, brand equity cannot be perceived as a steady state achievement but is in constant need of development and improvement to ensure the success of the language schools in the Long-Run. Hence, also brand equity should be integrated into the long-term strategic focus in the marketing in order to become more competitive within their industry and to enrich a brand asset mindset in the schools, which may

result in a stronger brand and eventually could strengthen brand equity. Although a logo may exist for the language schools, the expansion of the brand should lead to the creation of a personality, the elaboration of a message and the communication of this message to current and potential students. Thus, it is important that marketers pay some concern to marketing activities, communication and branding since they positively affect sales.

In this thesis it was revealed that the integrated marketing activities in combination with the brand mindset is found to be important in the interviewed Italian and Spanish language schools in order to establish an identity in a school. The brand was found to be the centre of attention and was incorporated in the different marketing activities.

As it has been previously mentioned, the research confirms the possible lack of resources in SMEs. The same limitations were identified in SME literature (Abimbola et al. 2007; Ahonen 2008). This is also the case with branding, as smaller enterprises may not be able to use the full potential of marketing and branding due to their lack of resources regarding time, money and amount of personnel. Taking these limitations into consideration the solution of marketers of interviewed language schools was to develop a culture or a brand mindset amongst employees to foster a branding and marketing attitude. Providing education to employees on basic marketing activities, such as sustainable points of differentiation, enables a stronger and more positive mindset to emerge. Therefore, the joint communication with the same approach throughout all used channels with the brand in focus is a vital marketing activity in language schools which increases the recall of the brand awareness and creates a more recognizable brand on the market. The owners of the interviewed language schools first ensure that the vision, the mission and the core values of the language school are clear and understood by each employee at school. By clarifying the vision, the mission and the core values to their stuff the message is communicated to outsiders of the language school. When the stuff is well aware of the brand and the language school's goals, also the students get more aware of these. Other important parameters in marketing strategy are strong leadership, networking, reputation building and unique identity.

The change in the marketing communication environment due to technology achievements and internet has changed the world's interaction and communication. This change in the communication environment induced to adaptations to the branded societies in which people live nowadays, showing the use of strengthening brand equity. Thereby, the development of the communication environment has led to cheaper alternatives for language schools and SMEs in general to appear in the marketing communication environment by using social media as relatively cheap marketing options accessible. Whereas the competitiveness is increasing and the task to gain the customers' attention in the marketing communication environment has become

even more challenging. Therefore, the creation and the strengthening of brand equity matters as it helps customers to choose the brands they are familiar with and can relate to. The brand awareness affects the customers' buying behaviour in the way that the brand appears in the customers' evoked set, which is composed by the group of relevant brands that the customer chooses between when thinking about purchasing a service.

One of the ways to succeed in the market for language schools is to be active in marketing communication channels, where potential students are present, can inform themselves and also conduct the purchase of a language course service. That is how an owner or a marketer of a language school gets in contact with a large target audience. Thus, the communication was facilitated through using the marketing communication channels discussed in this thesis, such as the official website of the language school, other websites, Word-Of-Mouth, e-mail, telephone, magazines, newspapers, billboards, posters, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube. The case companies strategically chose marketing communication channels with a contact to the students in order to get their attention and thus strengthen the brand equity.

This research contributes to the practical guidance based on the identification of the conceptualized marketing activities and the conceptual framework, which might be used by practitioners motivated to strengthen brand equity in an SME, specifically in the language sector. The conceptual framework, shown in paragraph 2.4, highlights the interconnection between the CBBE brand attributes and the brand building activities which support the conceptualization of the process of strengthening brand equity. Thus, it is important to understand how to begin shaping and influencing such processes, whereas SMEs have different resources compared to larger organizations but still may pursue marketing activities to strengthen brand equity.

The study determines a way to conceptualize brand equity in language schools that can be useful for other SMEs interested in understanding the process of strengthening brand equity. Furthermore, the research shows strategic choices that might help to strengthen the brand equity and thus to increase the competitiveness. Therefore, this study might contribute to the bigger scale at the national Italian and Spanish business policies to promote the use of marketing activities for brands in support of SME growth, which can increase the competitive advantages for SMEs in Italy and Spain and, thus, can help them to survive and grow. This might be reached by applying conceptualized marketing activities and the perspective of using marketing communication channels in order to gain customers and to make them recognize an enterprise's brand.

6.1. Future perspectives

This researche has focused on the marketing activities, contributing to strengthen the brand equity. It could be beneficial to investigate how the information is collected by language schools in order to decide on what marketing activities they should be more concentrated. Furthermore, the measurement of the brand equity assets and the comparison over time concerning the strength of a brand in language schools could be looked into. There is an opportunity to develop further research about brand equity in SMEs applying different research methods such as qualitative and inductive, with the consideration of quantitative and deductive research methods of this study.

In the future, the survey of this study could be repeated with the same respondent groups such as marketers of language schools and their students in order to discover if the respondents' perceptions have changed. The survey could also be done with a bigger sample of employees in language schools to deepen the understanding about several marketing activities, such as joint communication and joint organizational actions among all employees. It would also be interesting to investigate which marketing activities influence brand equity the most.

As previously discussed, too little research attention has been put on service marketing, which can strengthen brand equity. Thus, it could be beneficial to develop more researches in such an understudied area. Another angle of study could be to investigate the relationship between the market orientation and the brand orientation in SMEs. Furthermore, it could be useful to enlarge scarce literature about SME marketing and to carry out similar surveys for other small and medium enterprises different from language sector and in a wider range of countries.

Lastly, further research could deepen the understanding of the phenomenon through the consideration about the importance of the networks of SMEs and the effects that they can render on choosing strategic marketing communication channels.

ABSTRACT

The reason for this research is to present marketing activities within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the area of branding. There are two types of problems which are going to be analysed in this thesis: theoretical and empirical ones. The main theoretical problem addressed in this study is the little literature on marketing in SMEs, particularly concerning brand equity. This focus of the research is important because nowadays SMEs recognise more and more the brand value and initiate to use it as a source of competitive advantage. Brands are among the most valuable assets owned by an organisation. This research and the theoretical framework rely on previous literature regarding product and service branding, branding in SMEs and corporate branding as well as brand equity, marketing, marketing activities and more general literature about SMEs.

The empirical problem is the grasped challenge of strengthening brand equity by marketing activities in small and medium Italian and Spanish language schools. "High brand equity results in stronger and more favourable consumer response to the brand and may generate brand sales" (Keller 1993). Thus, this thesis includes the analysis of customers' perception of brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations, brand image, brand identity and brand quality of Italian and Spanish language schools. This research makes a contribution by revealing new approaches present in the cases of language schools' marketing activities in order to enlarge consumers' recognition of the brands.

The applied method in this thesis is a quantitative approach consisting of a case study design with an online questionnaire. The study comprises a deductive argumentation derived from the generated knowledge from the data accumulated through interviews. It will help to evaluate the obtained data, which are rich in complex evaluations of the brand. As a result of the findings, it will be revealed how brand equity within SMEs can be strengthened by the usage of marketing activities in the most effective ways.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

AAKER, D.A. (1991) *Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name*, The Free Press, New York.

ARMSTRONG, G. and KOTLER, P. (2017) *Principles of marketing* (17th Edition), Pearson Education Ltd, Harlow (UK).

BESANKO, D. and BRAEUTIGAM, R.R. (2014) *Microeconomics* (5th Edition), John Wiley and Sons Inc, Hoboken (NJ).

BIRKS, D.F. and MALHOTRA, N.K. (2007) *Marketing research. An applied approach* (3rd European Edition), Pearson Education Ltd - Prentice Hall, London.

BLANCHARD, O. and JOHNSON, D.R. (2013) *Macroeconomics*. 6th edition. Pearson Education Ltd - Prentice Hall, New Jersey.

BLOOR, M., FRANKLAND, J., THOMAS, M. and ROBSON, K. (2001) *Focus groups in Social Research*, Sage Publication Inc, Thousand Oaks (CA).

BRYMAN, A. (1988) *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, Unwin Hyman Ltd, London.

BRYMAN, A. and BELL, E. (2011) *Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder* (2nd Edition), Liber AB, Stockholm.

BRYMAN, A. and BELL, E. (2015) *Business research methods* (4th Edition), Oxford University Press, Oxford.

BURNS, P. and DEWHURST, J. (1993) *Small Business Management* (3rd Edition), The MacMillan Press, London.

CAPON, C. (2009) *Understanding the business environment: inside and outside the organization*, Prentice Hall Financial Times, Harlow (UK).

CARSON, D. and GILMORE, A. (2007) "Teaching and research in small business enterprise marketing", in D. Hines and D. Carson (eds.), *Innovative Methodologies in Enterprise Research*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham (UK).

CRESWELL, J.W. (2009) *Research design: Qualitative and mixed methods approaches*, Sage, London.

CRESWELL, J.W. (2012) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publication Inc, Thousand Oaks (CA).

GARNER, M., KAWULICH, B. and WAGNER, C. (2012) *Doing Social Research: A global context*, McGraw Hill, New York.

GHAURI, P., GRØNHAUG, K. and KRISTIANSLUND, I. (1995) *Research methods in business studies: A practical study*, Prentice Hall, New York.

HAIR, J.F.Jr., WOLFINBARGER CELSI, M., MONEY, A.H., SAMOUEL, P. and PAGE, M.J. (2011) *Essentials of Business Research Methods*, 2nd edition, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, New York.

JACOB, I., KELLER, K.L. and PARAMESWARAN, M. (2011) *Strategic Brand Management - Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity* (3rd Edition), Pearson Education Inc, New Delhi.

KAPFERER, J. (1992) *Strategic Brand Management: New Approach to Creating and Evaluating Brand Equity*, Kogan Page, London.

KAPFERER, J.N. (2005) *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*, Kogan Page, London - New York.

KELLER K.L. (1998) *Strategic brand management*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey.

KELLER, K.L. (2000) "Building and managing corporate brand equity", in M. Schultz, M. Hatch and M. H. Larsen (eds.) *The Expressive Organisation: Linking Identity, Reputation and the Corporate Brand*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

KELLER K.L., APÉRIA, T. and GEORGSON, M. (2012) *Strategic brand management. European perspective* (2nd Edition), Prentice Hall - Pearson education, Harlow (UK).

KELLER, K. and KOTLER, P. (2012) *Marketing management* (14th Edition), Pearson Education, New York.

LEUTHESSER, L. (1988) "Defining, measuring and managing brand equity", *A Conference Summary*, Marketing Science Institute, Cambridge (MA).

LONGENECKER, J. C., MOORE C.W. and PETTY J.W. (2003) *Small Business Management – An Entrepreneurial Emphasis* (12th Edition), South-Western, Ohio.

LOUVIERE, J. and JOHNSON R. (1988), "Measuring Brand Image with Conjoint Analysis and Choice Models", in L. Leuthesser (ed.) *Defining, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity: A Conference Summary*, Marketing Science Institute, Cambridge (MA).

MCCARTHY, E.J. and PERREAULT W.D. (2002) *Basic Marketing: A Global-Managerial Approach* (14th Edition), McGraw-Hill - Irwin, Homewood (IL).

PALMER, A. (2006) *Principles of Services Marketing* (4th Edition), McGraw Hill, London.

PATTON, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd Edition.), Sage,. Thousand Oaks (CA).

SAUNDERS, M., LEWIS, P., and THORNHILL, A. (2007) *Research methods for business students* (4th Edition), Prentice Hall - Pearson Education, Harlow (UK).

SHIMIZU, K. (2016) *Co-marketing (Symbolic marketing) strategies* (5th Japanese Edition), Souseisha Book Company, Tokyo.

STOKES, D. (1995) *Small Business Management* (2nd Edition), DP Publishing, London.

STOREY, D.J. (1997) *Understanding the Small Business Sector* (2nd Edition), International Thomson Business Press, New Delhi.

OLIVER, R. (1997) *Satisfaction: A Behavioural Perspective on the Consumer*, McGraw-Hill, New York.

SCHWANDT, T.A. (2001) *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (2nd Edition), Sage, Thousand Oaks (CA).

SHOCKER, A.D. and WEITZ, B. (1988) "A perspective on brand equity principles and issues", In: Leuthesser L, editor, *Report Number 88-104*, Marketing Science Institute, Cambridge (MA).

WILKIE W.L. (1994) *Consumer behaviour* (3rd Edition), John Wiley and Sons, New York.

Articles

ABS (1997–98) "Small and Medium Enterprises: Business Growth and Performance Survey Australia" *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, vol. 55.

AAKER, D.A. (1996) "Measuring Brand Equity Across Products and Markets", *California Management Review*, vol. 38 (3, Spring).

ABIMBOLA, T. (2001) "Branding as a competitive strategy for demand management in SMEs", *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, vol. 3(2).

ABIMBOLA, T. and KOCAK, A. (2007) "Brand, organisation identity and reputation: SMEs as expressive organisations: a resources-based perspective", *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 10(4).

ABIMBOLA, T. and VALLASTER, C. (2007) "Brand, organisational identity and reputation in SMEs: on overview", *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 10(4).

AHONEN, M. (2008) "Branding – does it even exist among SMEs?" *Proceedings of the 16th Nordic Conference on Small Business Research*, May 21-23 2008, Tallinn (Estonia).

AIELLO, G., Donvito, R., Godey, B., Pederzoli, D., Wiedmann, K.P., Hennings, N., Siebels, A., Chan, P., Tsuchiya, J., Rabino, S., Ivanovna, I.S., Weitz, B., Oh, H. and Singh, R. (1993) "An International Perspective On Luxury Brand And County-of-Origin Effect", *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 16.

AILAWADI, K.L., LEHMAN, D.R. and NESLIN, S.A. (2003) "Revenue premium as an outcome measure of brand equity", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 67.

ALGESHEIMER, R., DHOLAKIA, U.M. and HERMANN, A. (2005) "The social influence of brand community: evidence from European car clubs", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 69.

ALI, H. and BIRLEY, S. (1999) "Integrating deductive and inductive approaches in a study of new ventures and customer perceived risk", *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 2(2).

ALVESSON, M. and SANDBERG, J. (2011) "Ways of constructing research questions: gap-spotting or problematization", *Organization*, vol. 18(1).

ANDERSON, J.C. and NARUS, J.A. (1998) "Business Marketing Understand What Customers Value", *Harvard business review*, vol. 76(6).

ANDERSON, A.R. and ZONTANOS, G. (2004) "Relationships, marketing and small business: an exploration of links in theory and practice", *Qualitative Marketing Research: An International Journal*, vol. 7(3).

ANDERSON, A. and GADDEFORS, J. (2009) "Market creation: the epitome of entrepreneurial marketing practices", *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, vol. 10(1).

ASAMOAH, E.S. (2014) "Customer based brand equity (CBBE) and the competitive performance of SMEs in Ghana", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, vol. 21(1).

BALMER, J.M T. and GREYSER, S.A. (2006) "Corporate marketing – integrating corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate communications, corporate image and corporate reputation", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 40(7/8).

BAUMGARTH, C., MERRILEES, B. and URDE, M. (2013) "Brand orientation and market orientation – from alternatives to synergy", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 66(1).

BENDIXEN, M., BUKASA, K. and ABRATT, R. (2004) "Brand Equity in the Business-to-business Market", *Journal of Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 33.

BERRY, L.L. (2000) "Cultivating service brand equity", *Journal of the Academy Marketing Science*, vol. 28(1).

BERTHON, P., HULBERT, J.M. and PITT, L.F. (1999) "Brand Management Prognostications", *Sloan Management Review*, vol. 40(2).

BERTHON, P., EWING, M.T. and NAPOLI, J. (2008) "Brand management in small to medium-sized enterprises", *Journal of Small Business Management*, vol. 46(1).

BHARADWAJ, S.G., FAHY, J. and VARADARAJAN, R.P. (1993) "Sustainable Competitive Advantage In Service Industries: A Conceptual Model and Research Proposition", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 57(4).

BLAIR, T. and CHIOU, S. (2014). "The Impact of Brand Knowledge on Consumers of Different Genders and from Different Cultures". *Asia Pacific Management Review*, vol. 19.

BISWAS, A. (1992) "The moderating role of brand familiarity in reference price perceptions*", Journal of Business Research*, vol. 25.

BOYLE, E. (2003) "A study of entrepreneurial brand building in the manufacturing sector in the UK", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, vol. 12(2/3).

BURMANN, C., JOST-BENZ, M. and RILEY, N. (2009) "Towards an identity-based brand equity model", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 62(3).

BUZZELL R.D., GALE B.T. and SULTAN R.G.M. (1975) "Market share - A key to profitability", *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 53 (January-February).

CAI, L.A. and HUANG, Z.J. (2015) "Modelling consumer-based brand equity for multinational hotel brands – When hosts become guests", *Tourism Management*, vol. 46.

CARSON, D. (1985) "The evolution of marketing in small firms", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 5.

CARSON, D. (1990) "Some exploratory models for assessing small firms' marketing performance (a qualitative approach)", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 234(11).

CARSON, D. (1993) "A philosophy for marketing education in small firms", *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 9.

CARSON, D. and MCCARTAN-QUINN, D. (1995) "Non-practice of theoretically based marketing in small business – issues arising and their implications", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, vol. 3(4).

CARSON, D., GILMORE, A., CUMMINS, D., O'DONNELL, A. and GRANT, K. (1998) "Price setting in SMEs: some empirical findings", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 7(1).

CARSON, D. and GILMORE, A. (1999) "Entrepreneurial marketing by networking", *New England Journal of Entrepreneurship*, vol. 12(2).

CARSON, D., GILMORE, A. and GRANT, K. (2001) "SME marketing in practice", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, vol. 19(1).

CARSON, D., GILMORE, A. and O'DWYER, M. (2009) "Innovative marketing in SMEs", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 43(Iss ½).

CENTENO, E., HART, S. and DINNIE, K. (2013) "The five phases of SME brand-building", *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 20(6).

CHAN, A. and XU, J.B. (2010) "A conceptual framework of hotel experience and customer-based brand equity: some research questions and implications", *International Journal of contemporary hospitality management*, vol. 22(2).

CHASTON, I. (1998) "Evolving 'New Marketing' philosophies by merging existing concepts: an investigation within small hi-tech firms", *paper presented at AMA Symposia on the Marketing and Entrepreneurship Interface*, Nene University College, Northampton (UK).

COBB-WALGREN, C.J., RUBLE, C.A. and DONTHU, N. (1995) "Brand equity, brand preference, and purchase intent", *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 24(3).

COURT, D., ELZINGA, D., MULDER, S. and VETVIK, O.J. (2009) "The consumer decision journey", *McKinsey Quarterly, Marketing & Sales Practice*, vol. 3.

COVIELLO, N.E., BRODIE, R.J. and MUNRO, H.J. (2000) "An investigation of marketing practice by firm size", *Journal of Business Venturing*, vol. 15(5-6).

CRIMMINS, J.C. (1992) "Better Measurement and Management of Brand Value", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 32 (July/August).

CULKIN, N. and D. SMITH (2000) "An Emotional Business: A Guide to Understanding the Motivations of Small Business Decision Takers", *Qualitative Market Research*, vol. 3(3).

CUMMINS, D., GILMORE, A., CARSON, D. and O'DONNELL, A. (2000) "What is innovative marketing in SMEs? Towards a conceptual and descriptive framework", *AMA Conference Proceedings*, July 2000.

DE CHERNATONY, L., DALL'OLMO R.F. (1998) "Modeling the components of the brand", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 32.

DELGADO-BALLESTER, E. and MUNUERA-ALEMAN, J.L. (2005) "Does brand trust matter to brand equity?", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, vol. 14(3).

DONTHU, N., LEE, S. and YOO, B. (2000) "An examination of selected marketing mix elements and brand equity", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, vol. 2(2).

DONTHU, N. and YOO, B. (2001) "Developing and validating a multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 52(1).

DOOLE, I., GRIMES, T. and DEMACK, S. (2006) "An exploration of the management practices and processes most closely associated with high levels of export capability in SMEs", *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, vol. 24(6).

ERDEM, T., SWAIT, J. and VALENZUELA, A. (2006) "Brands as signals: A cross-country validation study", *Journal of Marketing*, 70.

ESSOUSSI, L.H. and SPENCE, M. (2010) "SME brand building and management: an exploratory study", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 44(7/8).

FAIRCLOTH, J.B., CAPELLA, L.M. and ALFORD, B.L. (2001) "The Effect of Brand Attitude and Brand Image on Brand Equity", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, vol. 3(9).

FARQUHAR, P.H. (1989) "Managing brand equity", *Marketing Research*, vol. 1(3).

FARQUHAR, P. H. (1990) "Managing Brand Equity", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 30(40).

FORREST, J.E. (1990) "Strategic alliances and the small technology-based firm", *Journal of Small Business Management*, vol. 28(3).

FULLER, P.B. (1994) "Assessing Marketing in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 28(2).

GANESAN, S. (1994) "Determinants of long-term orientation in buyer seller relationship", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 58.

GRACE, D. and O'CASS, A. (2005) "Service branding: consumer verdict on service brands", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, vol. 12.

GRAHAM, P. (1999) "Small Business Participation in the Global Economy", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 33(1/2).

GRANT, K., GILMORE, A., CARSON, D., LANEY, R. and PICKETT, B. (2001) "Experiential research methodology: an integrated academic-practitioner 'team' approach", *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 4(2).

GUERSEN, G. (1997) "Marketing theory: its importance and relevance to entrepreneurs and small business", *Conference Proceedings: Research at the Marketing/Entrepreneurship Interface*, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago (IL).

GYAMPAH, K.A, KAPLAN, B., MEREDITH, J.R. and RATURI, A. (1989) "Alternative Research Paradigms in Operations", *Journal of Operations Management*, vol. 8 (4).

HANKINSON, P. (2001) "Brand Orientation in the Top 500 Fundraising Charities in the UK", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, vol. 10(6).

HARDEY, C., PHILLIPS, N. and CLEGG, S. (2001) "Reflexivity in organization and management theory: A study of the production of the research 'subject'", Human Relations, vol. 54(5).

HARTLINE, M.D. and KRISHNAN, B.C. (2001) "Brand Equity: Is It More Important in Services", *Journal of Services Marketing*, vol. 15(5).

HIRVONEN, S., LAUKKANEN, T. and REIJONEN, H. (2013) "The brand orientation-performance relationship: an examination of moderation effects", *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 2(8).

HOEFFLER S. and KELLER, K.L. (2002) "Building brand equity through corporate societal marketing", *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, vol. 21(1).

HORAN, G., O'DWYER, M., and TIERNAN, S. (2011) "Exploring management perspectives of branding in service SMEs", *Journal of Services Marketing*, vol. 25(2).

HUTCHINSON, K., MITCHELL, R. and QUINN, B. (2013) "Brand management in small and medium- sized (SME) retailers: a future research agenda", *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 29(11/12).

INSKIP, I. (2004) "Corporate branding for small to medium-sized businesses – A missed opportunity or an indulgence?" *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 11(5).

JÄMSÄ, P., TÄHTINEN, J., RYAN, A. and PALLARI, M. (2011) "Sustainable SMEs network utilization: the case of food enterprises", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, vol. 18(1).

JANISZEWSKI, C. and VAN OSSELAER, S.M.J. (2000) "A connectionist model of brand-quality associations", *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 37.

JOHNE, A. (1999) "Successful market innovation", *European Journal of Innovation Management*, vol. 2(1).

KELLER, K.L. (1993) "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer Based Brand Equity", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 57(1 January).

KELLER, K.L. (2009) "Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, vol. 15(2-3).

KERIN, R.A. and SETHURAMAN, R. (1998) "Exploring the brand value-shareholder value nexus for consumer goods companies", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, vol. 26(4).

KING, S. (1991) "Brand-building in the 1990s", *The Journal of Consumer Marketing*, vol. 8(4).

KIRBY, D.A. and SIU, W. (1996) "Approaches to small firm marketing: a critique", *Conference Proceedings: Research at the Marketing/Entrepreneurship Interface*, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago (IL).

KNIGHT, G., OMURA, G.S., HILLS, G.E. and MUZYKA, D.F. (1995) "Research in marketing and entrepreneurship: an empirical analysis and comparison with historic trends", *Conference Proceedings: Research at the Marketing/Entrepreneurship Interface*, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago (IL).

KNIGHT, R.M. (1995) "Barriers to innovations: a cross cultural comparison", *Conference Proceedings: Research at the Marketing/Entrepreneurship Interface*, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago (IL).

KRAKE, F. (2005) "Successful brand management in SMEs: a new theory and practical hints", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, vol. 14(4).

LASSAR, W., MITTAL, B. and SHARMA, A. (1995) "Measuring customer-based brand equity", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, vol. 12(4).

LOW, G.S., and R.A. FULLERTON (1994) "Brands, Brand Management and the Brand Manager System: A Critical- Historical Evaluation", *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 31(2).

LOW, M.B. and MACMILLAN, I.C. (1988) "Entrepreneurship: past research and future challenges", *60 Journal of Management*, vol. 14.

MACLACHLAN, D.L. and MULHERN, M.G. (1991) "Measuring Brand Equity With Conjoint Analysis", *paper presented at Sawtooth Software Conference*, Sun Valley (ID), January 1991.

MALHOTRA, N. and MCCORT, D. (2001) "A cross-cultural comparison of behavioural intention models: theoretical consideration and an empirical investigation", *International Marketing Review*, vol. 18 (3).

MERRILEES, B. and WONG, H. Y. (2005) "A brand orientation typology for SMEs: a case research approach", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, vol. 14(2/3).

MERRILEES, B. (2007) "A theory of brand-led SME new venture development", *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 10(4).

MERRILEES, B., MILLER, D. and M'ZUNGU, S.D. (2010) "Brand management to protect brand equity: a conceptual model", *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 17(8).

MILES, M.P. and DARROCH, J. (2006) "Large firms, entrepreneurial marketing processes, and the cycle of competitive advantage", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 40(5/6).

MOTAMENI, R. and SHAHROKHI, M. (1998) "Brand equity valuation: a global perspective", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, vol. 7(4).

MURRAY, J.A., O'DRISCOLL, A. and TORRES, A. (2002) "Discovering diversity in marketing practice", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 36(3).

MUSTAFFA, C.S. and BUSEN, S.M.S. (2014) "The role of interactive advertisements in developing consumer-based brand equity: a conceptual discourse", *The International Conference on Communication and Media* 2014, 18-20 October, Langkawi (Malaysia).

NETEMEYER, R.G., KRISHNAN, B., PULLIG, C., WANG, G., YAGCI, M., DEAN, D., RICKS, J. and WIRTH, F. (2004) "Developing and validating measures of facets of consumer-based brand equity", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 57.

NOBLE, C.H., SINHA, R.K. and KUMAR, A. (2002) "Market Orientation and Alternative Strategic Orientations: A Longitudinal Assessment of Performance Implications", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 66(4).

O'DONNELL, A. (2011) "Small firm marketing: synthesizing and supporting received wisdom", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, vol. 18(4).

ODOOM, R. (2016) "Brand-building efforts in high and low performing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, vol. 23(4).

ODOOM, R., NARTEH, B. and BOATENG, B. (2017) "Branding in small- and medium sized enterprises (SMEs): Current issues and research avenues", *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 20(1).

OJASALO, J., NÄTTI, S. and OLKKONEN, R. (2008) "Brand building in software SMEs: an empirical study", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, vol. 17(2).

ONKVIST, S. and SHAW, J.J. (1989) „Service Marketing: Image, Branding, and Competition", *Business Horizons*, vol. 32(1).

OPOKU, R.A., ABRATT, R., BENDIXEN, M., and PITT, L. (2007) "Communicating brand personality: are the websites doing the talking for food SMEs?" *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 10(4).

PAPPU, R., QUESTER, P.G. and COOKSEY, R.W. (2005) "Consumer-based brand equity: improving the measurement – empirical evidence", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(3).

PARK, C.W., JAWORSKI, B.J. and MACINNIS, D.J. (1986) "Strategic Brand Concept - Image Management", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 50(4).

PARK, C.S., and SRINIVASAN, V. (1994) "A Survey-Based Method for Measuring and Understanding Brand Equity and Its Extendibility", *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 31(2).

PETERSON, R.A. (2001) "On the use of college students in social science research: Insights from a second-order meta-analysis", *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 28(3).

REIJONEN, H. (2008) "Understanding the small business owner: what they really aim at and how this relates to firm performance", *Management Research News*, vol. 31(8).

RENTON, M., DAELLENBACH, U., DAVENPORT, S., and RICHARD, J. (2015) "Small but sophisticated: Entrepreneurial marketing and SME approaches to brand management", *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship,* vol. 17(2).

ROMANO, C. and RATNATUNGA, J. (1995) "The role of marketing: its impact on small enterprise research", *Conference Proceedings: Research at the Marketing/Entrepreneurship Interface*, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago (IL).

ROSELIUS, T. (1971) "Consumer ranking of risk reduction methods", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 35.

RUEKERT, R.W., WALKER, O.C. and ROERING, K.J. (1985) "The Organization of Marketing Activities: A Contingency Theory of Structure and Performance", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 49(1).

SIMPSON, M. and TAYLOR, N. (2002) "The role and relevance of marketing in SMEs: towards a new model", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, vol. 9(4).

SCOTLAND, J. (2012) "Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: Relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms", *English Language Teaching*. vol. 5(9).

SHARKEY, B. (1989) "The People's Choice", *Adweek's Marketing Week*, vol. 30(27, November).

SHOCKER, A.D. and SRIVASTAVA, R.K. (1991) "Brand Equity: A Perspective on its Meaning and Measurement", *Report (Marketing Science Institute)*.

STEWARD T.A. (1997) "A satisfied customer is not enough", *Fortune*.

STOKES, D. (2000) "Putting entrepreneurship into marketing: the processes of entrepreneurial marketing", *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, vol. 2(1, Spring).

THRASSOU, A. and VRONTIS, D. (2006) "A Small Services Firm Marketing Communications Model for SME-Dominated Environments", *Journal of Marketing Communications,* vol. 12(3).

URDE, M. (1994) "Brand Orientation – A Strategy for Survival", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*", vol. 11(3).

VALKOKARI, K. and HELANDER, N. (2007) "Knowledge management in different types of strategic SME networks", *Management Research News*, vol. 30(8).

WATSON, R.T. and WEBSTER J. (2002) "Analyzing the past to prepare for the future: writing a literature review", *guest editorial, MIS Quarterly* vol. 26(2).

WELSH, J.A. and WHITE, J.F. (1981) "A small business is not a little big business", *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 59(July/August).

WOOD, L. (2000) "Brands and brand equity: definition and management", *Management Decision*, vol. 38(9).

YIN, K.R. (2013). Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations. Evaluation Sage publications. vol. 19(3).

YOVOVICH, B.G. (1988) "What Is Your Brand Really Worth?" *Adweek's Marketing Week*, vol. 29 (August 8).

Internet sources

American Marketing Association (AMA), "Definition of Marketing", http://www.marketing-dictionary.org/ama, July 2013. [19-12-2019]

BROWN, M. (1996) "Brand Equity". Retrieved September 06, 2016, from Millward Brown: http://www.millwardbrown.com/mbglobal/whatwedo/brand/brandequity [23-01-2020]

Ekonomifakta (2018) "Företagens storlek". https://www.ekonomifakta.se/Fakta/Foretagande/Naringslivet/Naringslivets-struktur/ [21-12-2019]

ESOMAR (2018). "Global Market Research". https://www.researchworld.com/esomars-latest-global-market-research-report-values-global-research-and-data-industry-market-at-us-80-billion/ [17-12-2019]

European Commission (2019) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/structural-business-statistics/structural-business-statistics/sme [22-01-2020]

PEPPERS, R. (2003) "Using customer insight to build competitive advantage", *White paper*, pp.7, www.carlsonmarketing.com. [07-01-2020]

Young & Rubicam Inc. (1993) "Y&R Brand Asset Valuator Investigation". Retrieved September 06, 2016, from Young & Rubicam Group: http://www.yr.com/ [20-01-2020]

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Interview for language schools' representatives (English version)

Applying marketing activities to strengthen brand equity within SMEs: Case studies on Italian and Spanish Language Schools.

1. How many employees do work in your language school?
   - 2-9
   - 10-49
   - 50-249
   - Other
2. What is the structure of your language school?
   - Network
   - Single language school
3. In which and in how many cities / countries do you have your language school?
4. Which position holds the responsible for marketing and branding in your language school?
5. Which channels do you use to promote your language school? [Estimate each channel from the highest point 5 (from where you have the most students) decreasing to the lowest point 1 (from where you don't have students)].
   - Radio
   - Television
   - Journal
   - Newspaper
   - Billboard, poster
   - Own site
   - Other sites
   - Blog
   - E-mail
   - Facebook
   - Instagram
   - LinkedIn
   - Pinterest
   - Twitter

- YouTube
- Person

6. Which adjectives would you use to describe your language school? [Estimate the language school by proposed adjectives from 1 to 5 (where 1 is the lowest mark and 5 is the highest mark)].
    - Original
    - Trusting
    - Informative
    - Popular
    - Mainstream
    - Immediate
    - Connected
    - Interactive
    - Entertaining
    - Young
    - Hip and cool
    - Genuine
    - Changing
    - Rebellious

7. Which association/s do you promote for your brand?
    - Job
    - Travel
    - Vacation
    - Lifestyle
    - Culture
    - Communication
    - Other

8. What do you perceive as being the most important thing about your work with the marketing?

9. How do you perceive your work connected to strengthening your brand?

10. On which factors do you focus to convince a customer to study in your language school? Which are your competitive advantages compared to the other schools?

11. What kind of brand image do you want to create in the minds of your students? [Describe it in few words]

12. Does your school organize any events? If yes, which?

13. Which 3 values do you believe your language school stands for?

14. What are the strengths and the weaknesses of your brand?

15. Which are 2 main things that should be improved in your language school?

Appendix 2. Interview for students (English version)

Applying marketing activities to strengthen brand equity within SMEs: Case studies on Italian and Spanish Language Schools.

1. What is the name of the language school which you attend / attended?
2. How did you get to know the language school:
    - Radio
    - Television
    - Journal
    - Newspaper
    - Billboard, poster
    - Official site of the language school
    - Other sites
    - Blog
    - E-mail
    - Facebook
    - Instagram
    - LinkedIn
    - Pinterest
    - Twitter
    - YouTube
    - Person
    - Other
3. Which association/s do you have with the brand of the language school where you have / had a language course:
    - Job
    - Travel
    - Vacation
    - Lifestyle

- Culture
- Communication
- Other

4. Which adjectives would you use to describe the language school? [Estimate the language school by proposed adjectives from 1 to 5 (where 1 is the lowest mark and 5 is the highest mark)]:

- Original
- Trusting
- Informative
- Popular
- Mainstream
- Immediate
- Connected
- Interactive
- Entertaining
- Young
- Hip and cool
- Genuine
- Changing
- Rebellious

5. How satisfied are you with these parameters which may give you an image of the language school? Estimate from 1 to 5 (where 1 is the lowest mark and 5 is the highest mark):

- Book
- Location
- Teacher
- Method of teaching
- Length of lessons
- Classmates
- Classroom

6. How many courses did you attend in that language school?

- 1
- 2
- 3

- 4
- 5
- More than 5

7. Would you like to subscribe for a language course again in the future in the same language school or would you advise it to somebody?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

8. Do you think that the price is correct considering the received service from language school?

- Yes
- No

9. Which 2 things would you suggest to improve for the language school?

10. Which expectations had you had before the course started? Were they justified?

11. What are your motives to study in that language school?

12. What is your gender?

- Feminine
- Masculine

13. What is your nationality?

14. How old are you?

- Under 18 years
- 19-34 years
- 35-59 years
- 60-74 years
- 75-84 years
- From 85 and more years

15. What is your level of education?

- Secondary school
- High school
- Bachelor
- Master
- PhD

Appendix 3. Interview for language schools' representatives (Italian version)

Applicazione delle attività di marketing per rafforzare il valore del marchio nelle PMI : studio dei casi nelle scuole di lingue Italiane e Spagnole.

1. Quanti impiegati lavorano presso la vostra scuola linguistica?
   - 2-9
   - 10-49
   - 50-249
   - Altro
2. Quale è la struttura della vostra scuola di lingue?
   - Catena
   - Scuola di lingue singola
3. In quale e in quante città / paesi è presente la vostra scuola di lingue?
4. Quale posizione detiene il responsabile marketing e branding nella vostra scuola di lingue?
5. Quali canali usate per promuovere la vostra scuola linguistica? [Stima ogni canale di promozione dal punto massimo 5 (dove avete il numero massimo di studenti) diminuendo fino al punto minimo 1 (dove non avete studenti)]:
   - Radio
   - Televisore
   - Rivista
   - Giornale
   - Tabellone, poster
   - Sito ufficiale della scuola di lingue
   - Altri siti
   - Blog
   - E-mail
   - Facebook
   - Instagram
   - LinkedIn
   - Pinterest
   - Twitter
   - YouTube
   - Persona

6. Quali aggettivi useresti per descrivere la vostra scuola di lingue? [Stima la scuola di lingue con gli aggettivi proposti da 1 a 5 (dove 1 è il voto più basso e 5 è il voto più alto)]:

- Originale
- Fiducioso
- Informativo
- Popolare
- Mainstream
- Immediato
- Connesso
- Interattivo
- Divertente
- Giovane
- Fantastico
- Genuino
- Mutevole
- Ribelle

7. Quale/i associazione/i promuovi per il vostro marchio?

- Lavoro
- Viaggio
- Stile di vita
- Cultura
- Comunicazione
- Altro

8. Quale pensate che sia la cosa più importante del vostro lavoro di marketing?

9. Come percepisci il tuo lavoro collegato al rafforzamento del tuo marchio?

10. Su quali fattori vi focalizzate per convincere il cliente a studiare presso vostra scuola di lingue? Quali sono i vostri vantaggi competitivi rispetto alle altre scuole?

11. Quale tipo di immagine del marchio volete creare nelle mente dei vostri studenti? [Descrivili in poche parole].

12. La vostra scuola organizza qualche evento? Se si, quale?

13. Quali sono i 3 valori che credete che la vostra scuola abbia?

14. Quali sono i punti di forza e le debolezze del vostro marchio?

15. Quale sono le 2 cose principali che dovrebbero essere migliorate nella vostra scuola di lingue?

Appendix 4. Interview for students (Italian version)

Applicazione delle attività di marketing per rafforzare il valore del marchio nelle PMI : studio dei casi nelle scuole di lingue Italiane e Spagnole.

1. Qual è il nome della scuola linguistica che frequenti / hai frequentato?
2. Come sei venuto a conoscenza della scuola di lingue?
    - Radio
    - Televisore
    - Rivista
    - Giornale
    - Tabellone, poster
    - Sito ufficiale della scuola di lingue
    - Altri siti
    - Blog
    - E-mail
    - Facebook
    - Instagram
    - LinkedIn
    - Pinterest
    - Twitter
    - YouTube
    - Persona
3. Che relazioni / connessioni hai con il marchio della scuola di lingue dove hai frequentato il corso di lingue?
    - Lavoro
    - Viaggio
    - Stile di vita
    - Cultura
    - Comunicazione
    - Altro

4. Quali aggettivi useresti per descrivere la scuola di lingue? [Valuta la scuola di lingue con gli aggettivi proposti da 1 a 5 (dove 1 è il voto più basso e 5 è il voto più alto)]:

- Originale
- Fiducioso
- Informativo
- Popolare
- Mainstream
- Immediato
- Connesso
- Interattivo
- Divertente
- Giovane
- Fantastico
- Genuino
- Mutevole
- Ribelle

5. Quanto sei soddisfatto con questi parametri che possono darti un'immagine della scuola di lingue [Valuta da 1 a 5 (dove 1 è il voto più basso e 5 è il voto più alto)]:

- Libro
- Luogo
- Insegnante
- Metodo di insegnamento
- Durata della lezione
- Compagni di classe
- Aula

6. Quanti corsi hai frequentato in quella scuola di lingue?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Più di 5

7. Vorresti iscriverti di nuovo a un corso di lingue in futuro nella stessa scuola di lingue o comunque la consiglieresti a qualcuno?

- Si
- No
- Forse

8. Pensi che il prezzo sia corretto considerando il servizio ricevuto dalla scuola linguistica?
   - Si
   - No

9. Quali sono le 2 cose che suggeriresti per migliorare quella scuola di lingue?

10. Quali aspettative avevi prima di iniziare il corso di lingua? Sono giustificati?

11. Quali sono i tuoi motivi per lo studio in quella scuola di lingue?

12. Che genere sei?
    - Femminile
    - Maschile

13. Di che nazionalità sei?

14. Quanti anni hai?
    - Sotto i 18 anni
    - 19-34 anni
    - 35-59 anni
    - 60-74 anni
    - 75-84 anni
    - Dall'85 in poi anni

15. Qual è la tua istruzione?
    - Secondaria inferiore
    - Secondaria superiore
    - Istruzione superiore (laurea triennale)
    - Istruzione superiore (laurea magistrale)
    - Dottorato

Appendix 5. Interview for language schools' representatives (Spanish version)

Aplicación de actividades de marketing para fortalecer el valor de marca en las PYME: estudios de caso en escuelas de idiomas de Italia y España.

1. ¿Cuántos empleados trabajan en su escuela de idiomas?
   - 2-9
   - 10-49

- 50-249
- Otro

2. ¿Cuál es la estructura de su escuela de idiomas?

- Cadena
- Escuela de idiomas única

3. ¿En cuántas y en qué ciudades y países está su escuela de idiomas?

4. ¿Qué posición ocupa el responsable de marketing en su escuela de idiomas?

5. ¿Qué medios usa para promover su escuela de idiomas? [Valore cada medio entre la puntuación máxima 5 (de donde obtiene un alto número de estudiantes) y el punto mínimo 1 (de donde no obtiene estudiantes)]:

- Radio
- Televisión
- Revista
- Periódico
- Carteles o tarjetas impresas
- Página web oficial de la escuela de idiomas
- Otros sitios
- Blog
- E-mail
- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Personas

6. ¿Qué adjetivos usaría para describir su escuela de idiomas? [Valore la escuela de idiomas con los adjetivos propuestos del 1 al 5 (donde 1 es la calificación más baja y 5 es la calificación más alta)]:

- Original
- De confianza
- Informativa
- Popular
- Mainstream

- Cercana
- Conectada
- Interactiva
- Divertida
- Joven
- Fantástica
- Real y genuina
- Cambiante
- Rebelde

7. ¿Qué asociación o asociaciones promueve para su marca?
   - Trabajo
   - Viajes
   - Estilo de vida
   - Cultura
   - Comunicación
   - Otro

8. ¿Qué considera como lo más importante de su trabajo de marketing?

9. ¿Cómo considera que su trabajo está conectado con el reforzamiento de su marca?

10. ¿En qué factores se concentra para convencer al cliente de que estudie en su escuela de idiomas? ¿Cuáles son sus ventajas competitivas en comparación con otras escuelas?

11. ¿Qué tipo de imagen de marca quiere crear en la mente de sus alumnos? [Descríbalo en pocas palabras].

12. ¿Su escuela organiza algún evento? En caso afirmativo, ¿cuál?

13. ¿Cuáles son los 3 valores principales que cree que tiene su escuela de idiomas?

14. ¿Cuáles son las fortalezas y debilidades de su marca?

15. ¿Cuáles son dos las cosas principales que deberían mejorarse en su escuela de idiomas?

Appendix 6. Interview for students (Spanish version)

Aplicación de actividades de marketing para fortalecer el valor de marca en las PYME: estudios de caso en escuelas de idiomas de Italia y España.

1. ¿Cuál es el nombre de la escuela de idiomas a la que asistes o has asistido?

2. ¿Por qué medio conoció esta escuela de idiomas?
   - Radio

- Televisión
- Revista
- Periódico
- Carteles o tarjetas impresas
- Página web oficial de la escuela de idiomas
- Otros sitios
- Blog
- E-mail
- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Personas

3. ¿Qué asociación o asociaciones hace de la marca donde hace o hizo el curso de idiomas?
- Trabajo
- Viajes
- Estilo de vida
- Cultura
- Comunicación
- Otro

4. ¿Qué adjetivos usaría para describir su escuela de idiomas? [Valore la escuela de idiomas con los adjetivos propuestos del 1 al 5 (donde 1 es la calificación más baja y 5 es la calificación más alta)]:
- Original
- De confianza
- Informativa
- Popular
- Mainstream
- Cercana
- Conectada
- Interactiva
- Divertida

- Joven
- Fantástica
- Real y genuina
- Cambiante
- Rebelde

5. Indique cuál es su satisfacción con estos parámetros que pueden darle una imagen de la escuela de idiomas [Valore de 1 a 5 (donde 1 es la calificación más baja y 5 es la calificación más alta)]:
   - Libro
   - Ubicación
   - Profesor
   - Método de enseñanza
   - Duración de la lección
   - Compañeros de clase
   - Aula

6. ¿A cuántos cursos ha asistido en esta escuela de idiomas?
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5
   - Otro

7. ¿Le gustaría volver a inscribirse para un nuevo curso en la misma escuela de idiomas o recomendarlo a alguien?
   - Sí
   - No
   - Tal vez

8. ¿Cree que el precio es adecuado teniendo en cuenta el servicio de la escuela de idiomas?
   - Sí
   - No

9. ¿Qué 2 cosas sugiere mejorar en esta escuela de idiomas?

10. ¿Qué expectativas tenía antes de comenzar el curso de idiomas? ¿Se han cumplido?

11. ¿Cuáles son sus motivos para estudiar o haber estudiado en esta escuela de idiomas?

12. ¿A qué sexo pertenece?

- Femenino
- Masculino

13. ¿Cuál es su nacionalidad?

14. ¿Cuántos años tiene?

- 18 o menos años
- 19-34 años
- 35-59 años
- 60-74 años
- 75-84 años
- 85 o más años.

15. ¿Cuál es su nivel de estudios?

- Educación Secundaria Obligatoria
- Bachillerato
- Grado
- Máster
- Doctorado