

2023

Branding Strategies for Owners of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Johnson Chibuzor Ugwuoke
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Business Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Johnson Ugwuoke

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Gregory Uche, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Jorge Gaytan, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
July 2023

Abstract

Branding Strategies for Owners of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

by

Johnson Ugwuoke

MS, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland, 2007

BEng, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2023

Abstract

Non-implementation of branding strategies can hinder small and medium enterprises' (SMEs) financial success and business performance. Owners of SMEs who implement appropriate branding strategies can remain solvent beyond the first 5 years of operation. Grounded in the customer-based brand equity model, this qualitative multiple case study explored the branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The participants were six owners of SMEs from three SMEs located in Nigeria's southern region who have successfully used branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Sources for data collection were semistructured interviews with six SME owners, company archival documents, annual reports, and field project reports. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Four themes emerged: internet and social media, advertisement and service excellence, word of mouth and referrals, and company identity and personal value. A key recommendation is for owners of SMEs to utilize the internet and social media by attending appropriate training programs that can equip them with the adequate skills, knowledge, experience, and competence to identify the appropriate branding strategies for survival. The implications for positive social change include the potential for owners of SMEs to create job opportunities, provide social amenities and welfare, and support the economic development of the rural communities.

Branding Strategies for Owners of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

by

Johnson Ugwuoke

MS, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland, 2007

BEng, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2023

Dedication

The late Dr. Joseph A. Ikem (PhD), my father in-law, was a huge source of inspiration to my post graduate academic pursuits. I desired that someday you will read my doctoral study work, but you left us very unexpectedly. I dedicate this study to you posthumously for the significant influence you had on me.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge the contributions and support of my committee members, Dr. Greg Uche, Dr. Jorge Gaytan, and Dr. Franz Gottleib who patiently took me through this refining and reforming academic process. Also, I acknowledge the overwhelming understanding and support of my wife and children, who were evidently denied of my usual attention during the doctoral journey, yet cheered me to the end of the program. I cannot forget close friends whose words of encouragement kept me going. You all rock!

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem	1
Problem Statement	2
Purpose Statement.....	2
Nature of the Study	3
Research Question	5
Interview Questions	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	8
Assumptions.....	8
Limitations	8
Delimitations.....	9
Significance of the Study	9
Contribution to Business Practice.....	10
Implications for Social Change.....	10
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	11
CBBE Model.....	14
Related and Contrasting Theories and Models to CBBE Model	29

The Concept of Branding.....	42
Branding as a Tool for Value Creation for Companies	45
Social Media, Branding Innovation, and Marketing Communication	47
Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria.....	59
Brand Equity and SMEs’ Success.....	61
Transition and Summary	65
Section 2: The Project.....	66
Purpose Statement.....	66
Role of the Researcher	66
Participants.....	70
Research Method and Design	72
Method	72
Research Design.....	74
Population and Sampling	77
Ethical Research.....	79
Data Collection Instruments	82
Data Collection Technique	83
Data Organization Techniques.....	86
Data Analysis Technique	88
Reliability and Validity.....	90
Reliability.....	91
Validity	93

Transition and Summary.....	95
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change.....	96
Overview of Study.....	96
Presentation of the Findings.....	97
Theme 1: Internet and Social Media.....	99
Theme 2: Advertisement and Service Excellence.....	106
Theme 3: Word of Mouth and Referrals.....	111
Theme 4: Company Identity and Personal Value.....	115
Study Findings Related to Customer Based Brand Equity Model.....	118
Applications to Professional Practice.....	122
Implications for Social Change.....	124
Recommendations for Action.....	127
Recommendations for Further Study.....	129
Reflections.....	131
Summary and Study Conclusions.....	133
References.....	135
Appendix A: CITI Certification.....	183
Appendix B: Interview Protocol.....	184
Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to Participants.....	186
Appendix D: Interview Questions.....	188

List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Literature Review References.....	13
Table 2. Summary of Study References	13
Table 3. Development of Themes	98
Table 4. Internet and Social Media: Participants' Responses and Frequencies.....	99
Table 5. Advertisement and Service Excellence: Participants' Responses and Frequencies.....	106
Table 6. Word of Mouth and Referrals: Participants' Responses and Frequencies.....	111
Table 7. Company identity and personal value: Participants' Responses and Frequencies	115

List of Figures

Figure 1. Brand Resonance Pyramid32

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have become a significant part of global economies, propelling both economic growth and national development (Sandhu & Azhar, 2019). Although many countries have identified the importance of SMEs to national economic development, the sustainability of SMEs has remained a challenge (Ogunsanya, 2021). SME owners could adopt branding strategies as a critical success factor to address the need for product differentiation and improved customer patronage (Dressler & Paunovic, 2021). Owners of SMEs in Nigeria require knowledge related to the integration of branding strategies to sustain their businesses (Daugherty, 2021). In this study, I explored branding strategies that owners of SMEs use to improve their financial performance and survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Background of the Problem

SMEs are the pillars of most global economies, significantly contributing to economic growth, job creation, and the gross domestic product (GDP) of both developed and developing countries (Okundaye et al., 2019). Many owners of SMEs need an understanding of the impact of branding as a relevant resource for their business survival. Branding is one of the strategic business resources business owners use to improve marketing and financial performance (Hodge et al., 2018). Using effective branding strategies could improve the financial profitability of SMEs (Narteh, 2018).

Due to cost constraints and limited access to technology, SME owners may need to understand that branding could influence profits and ensure business survival. Firms that brand their products or services tend to have more long-term sustainability than those

whose products or services are unbranded (Dressler & Paunovic, 2021). Owners of SMEs in Nigeria should understand that using appropriate branding strategies could minimize financial losses and maximize sales. Therefore, SME owners should explore effective branding strategies that could lead to profitability and business survival. Further, appropriate implementation of branding strategies by SME owners could increase job creation, generate higher income, and pull the masses out of poverty in a developing economy such as in Nigeria.

Problem Statement

Not implementing branding strategies inhibits the growth potential of SMEs (Ogunsanya, 2021). Though SMEs accounted for more than 80% of employment generation in Nigeria, 85% failed within their initial 5 years of operation (Gumel, 2019). The general business problem is that some owners of SMEs do not effectively use branding, a choice that might negatively impact their financial success. The specific business problem is that some owners of SMEs lacked branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore branding strategies used by owners of SMEs to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The sample population consisted of six participants selected from three SMEs in Nigeria's southern region, each with a proven record of using branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to obtain revenue growth and sustainability for Nigerian SMEs, which could

increase taxes and employment for the community. An increase in the tax base might also translate into more revenue that community leaders could use to provide more social services to residents of communities.

Nature of the Study

Saunders et al. (2018) described three research methods in social science research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative researchers seek to explain *what*, *how*, and *why* of a phenomenon by exploring the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences, and using that information to understand the phenomenon under study (Alam, 2020). The qualitative method was appropriate for identifying participants' experiences related to the phenomenon under study, which was the branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Alternately, researchers adopting the quantitative method use data to test a hypothesis of interest by measuring and analyzing variables' characteristics or relationships (Saunders et al., 2018). The quantitative method was inappropriate for the study because I did not examine the variables' characteristics or relationships. Last, researchers use mixed methods to combine elements of qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection, analysis, and inference to provide a better understanding of a research problem than either method alone could yield (Palinkas et al., 2019). The quantitative component of the mixed method was inappropriate for the study because the purpose was to explore branding strategies that owners of SMEs use to survive the first 5 years of operation and not to test hypotheses.

Some qualitative research designs include (a) case study, (b) ethnographic, (c) narrative, and (d) phenomenological (Yin, 2018). The case study design is a practical design that involves an in-depth study of a complex phenomenon within a real-life context for a holistic understanding (Hancock et al., 2021). Researchers use the case study design to explore the *how, what, and why* of a phenomenon in its natural setting (Yin, 2018). I used the multiple case study design to analyze the data within each case and across different cases. The multiple case study design enabled me to understand the similarities and differences between the cases. Researchers using multiple case studies can analyze the data within and across cases, thus generating more robust and reliable empirical evidence than a single case study (Rashid et al., 2019). The ethnographic research design involves studying a group of people's social world and could require the researchers to live among the people they study (Saunders et al., 2018). I did not use the ethnographic design for this study because the purpose was not to explore people's social worlds.

Researchers also use the narrative inquiry design to describe events and happenings as the data by using narrative analytical procedures to generate explanatory stories (Ford, 2020). The narrative design was not suitable for the study because I did not intend to use events or happenings to develop a story about a phenomenon on participants' personal experiences. Researchers use the phenomenological design to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from participants' lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). A phenomenological design was not suitable for the

study because I intended to describe the phenomenon and analyze and generalize the findings to a larger population.

Research Question

What branding strategies do owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?

Interview Questions

1. How did you define branding strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
2. How did you measure the effectiveness of branding strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
3. What branding strategies were successful in surviving beyond the first 5 years of operation?
4. What media have proven to be most successful in delivering brand strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
5. What key challenges have you had in implementing branding strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
6. How did you overcome the key challenges in implementing branding strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
7. How did the branding strategies support your marketing programs used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
8. What, if any, additional information would you like to share about branding strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?

Conceptual Framework

I chose Keller's (1993) brand equity model, also known as customer-based brand equity (CBBE), as the conceptual framework for the study. The CBBE model is comprised of the following tenets: (a) brand identity, (b) brand meaning, (c) brand response, and (d) brand relationships. The brand equity model has a foundation in the concept that building a solid brand requires aligning the customers' perceptions with the characteristics of a product or service (Keller, 1993). Brand equity occurs when customers know the brand, which has strong, favorable, and unique associations in the customers' memory (Keller, 1993). The cognitive association of the brand in a consumer's mind can lead to an increase in customer patronage, revenue, loyalty, and sales (Keller, 1993). An analysis of Keller's brand equity model highlighted the role of business owners in each step of the brand-building process.

Using Keller's (1993) CBBE model as a foundation, Centeno et al. (2013) proposed a brand-building model for SMEs with five phases. The five phases include the brand as a (a) person, (b) product, (c) symbol, (d) organization, and (e) tool for continuous brand development and growth (Centeno et al., 2013). Business owners play a vital role in the five phases of the brand-building process and are critical to each phase's progress (Centeno et al., 2013). Similarly, Krake (2005) developed new guidelines for constructing a solid brand in SMEs. Understanding the significance of a business owner's actions to a successful brand implementation aligned with the purpose of this study, which explored the branding strategies SME owners use to survive beyond the first 5

years of operation. The CBBE model served as a suitable lens for understanding branding strategies owners of SMEs in Nigeria use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Definition of Terms

Affective commitment: Affective commitment is the customers' emotional attachment to a particular brand or store based on their identification with that store or brand (Iglesias et al., 2011).

Brand anthropomorphism: Brand anthropomorphism refers to the incorporation of various combinations of qualities and characteristics that resemble humans into brands (Golossenko et al., 2020).

Brand equity: Brand equity is the added value a branded product or service creates for the customer (Beig & Nika, 2019).

Brand resonance: Brand resonance is the strong and dominant psychological relationship and bond a customer develops with a brand (Habib et al., 2021).

Brand salience: Brand salience refers to the power of a brand in the minds of consumers (Kang et al., 2022).

E-brand community: E-brand community is a large virtual population that mutually accepts membership with a brand and uses a barrier-free communication channel that typically focuses on each other and consumption-based activities (Naqvi et al., 2021).

Retro-branding: Retro-branding is the relaunching of a brand through harmonizing the brand's past and the present by retaining the product's main attributes from the past while retaining the brand itself (Donzé et al., 2020).

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs): Small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) are non-subsidiary, independent business entities that employ between 250 - 500 people in developed countries, and 50 people or less in underdeveloped economies (Agada et al., 2021).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Researchers define assumptions of a study as factual statements without any supporting evidence (Weisman et al., 2020). For the current study, I assumed that branding strategies are tools owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Another assumption was that the qualitative multiple case study design was the most appropriate methodology and design to answer the research question. Also, I assumed that the interview questions relate to the study and would be adequate to reach data saturation. The final assumption was that the selected participants had experience developing and implementing branding strategies and answered the questions accurately.

Limitations

Limitations in research are the potential weaknesses of a study, usually outside the researcher's control, and associated with the research design or funding constraints (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2019). Researchers refer to limitations as those issues that would not be covered in the research for whatever reasons including limited resources (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2019). Researchers use limitations to set out the potential opportunities for future research on the topic under study (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). One of the limitations of this study was the sample size of the participants due to time and cost

constraints. Secondly, obtaining authorization from the participants to review proprietary company information was another limitation. Participants felt reluctant to disclose business strategies and decisions for fear of revealing secrets to competitors.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries that researchers set for themselves to make a study's aims and objectives possible to achieve (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2019). For example, researchers apply delimitations to the study's theoretical background, objectives, research questions, study sample, alternative approaches to the study, and the reasons for rejecting the alternatives (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2019). For this study, I selected a population sample from Nigeria's southern region only. I selected six participants from three SMEs as the sample size of my study.

Significance of the Study

Implementing successful branding strategies is valuable to sustain a small business beyond the first 5 years of operation. Brand strategy implementation could translate into excellent business value for SMEs (Odoom & Mensah, 2019). Owners of SMEs who develop more effective branding strategies might improve the brand marketing to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Creating a unique brand can motivate consumers, increase sales, and augment a competitive advantage that benefits business owners and their employees (Erkmen & Hancer, 2019). Owners of SMEs may increase their knowledge of branding strategies and create a competitive advantage to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Survival of SMEs implies a reduction in

market failures and business insecurity, thus increasing the potential for business growth and profitability.

Contribution to Business Practice

The results of the study could provide strategies that owners of SMEs might use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Owners of SMEs that implement brand-building efforts increase business performance and profitability (Odoom & Mensah, 2019); therefore, effective branding strategies contribute to the growth required for SME owners to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Owners of SMEs could leverage brand strategies to improve their company's image, attract new customers, provide better satisfaction for existing customers, and increase sales (Lin et al., 2019). Satisfied customers constitute positive publicity resulting in an improved brand image for SMEs (Mittal et al., 2019).

Implications for Social Change

The study's results might lead to innovative branding strategies, which could contribute to the successful growth of SMEs and result in higher employment opportunities for the community. In turn, employment generation may result in increased tax revenues for local governments. The implication for positive social change includes revenue growth and sustainability for Nigerian SMEs that could increase taxes and employment for the community. An increase in the tax base might translate into more revenue that community leaders could use to provide more social services to communities' residents.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Researchers conduct literature reviews to identify and synthesize relevant literature that provides readers with an understanding of the research topic, identifies research gaps, and signals future research opportunities (Paul & Criado, 2020). Xiao and Watson (2019) stated that researchers summarize, analyze, and synthesize related literature to test a specific hypothesis and/or develop new theories. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Though SMEs account for 80% of employment generation in Nigeria, 85% fail within the first 5 years of operation (Gumel, 2019). In a dynamic and highly competitive business environment, owners of SMEs devoting efforts to business performance and sustainability ought to be able to build strong brands to survive (Chokpitakkul & Anantachart, 2020).

Branding is the process of endowing products and services with the power of a brand. For branding strategies to be successful and create brand value, consumers must be convinced there are meaningful differences among brands in the product or service category (Braciničková & Matušinská, 2020). The strategy I utilized to synthesize and summarize the research topic focused on answering the following research question: What branding strategies do owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation? The literature review exercise generated extensive research resources that directly relate to the conceptual framework and themes associated with branding strategies. The focus of the literature review revolved around the following themes: (a) Keller's (1993) CBBE model, (b) the concept of branding and its value creation for

organizations, (c) branding innovations and marketing communication, and (d) branding strategies and SMEs' success. I obtained most of the literature sources from Walden University's Library. The search keywords and terms in the literature review include *brand awareness, branding, branding strategies, financial performance, Keller's brand equity, small businesses, and SME success*. This literature review included data ideas for reference. I found peer-reviewed journal articles from multiple databases such as ABI/INFORM, Business Source Complete, Complimentary Index, Emerald Management, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, Sage Premier, and Science Direct. I also searched the Thoreau Multidata base.

The literature review contains 209 references including 201 peer-reviewed journals, three non-peer-reviewed journals, two books, two conference papers, and one government site. Ninety-six percent of the sources were peer-reviewed journals, of which 90% had publication dates between 2019 and 2023. Table 1 presents a breakdown and classification of the sources used for the literature review. This doctoral study as a whole contains 318 references consisting of 291 peer-reviewed journals, seven non-peer-reviewed journals, 10 books, one dissertation, six conference papers, two government sites, and one internet site. Ninety-one percent of the sources used in this doctoral study were peer-reviewed journals, of which 87% had publication dates between 2019 and 2023. Table 2 includes a breakdown and classification of the sources used for the entire doctoral study.

Table 1*Summary of Literature Review References*

Literature Review Content	Total	No. of resources published between 2019 and 2023	Percentage of resources published between 2019 and 2023
Peer-reviewed journals	201	181	90%
Non-peer reviewed journals	3	2	66%
Books	2	0	0%
Conference papers	2	2	100%
Government sites	1	0	0%
Total	209	185	90%

Table 2*Summary of Study References*

Literature review content	Total	No. of resources published between 2019 and 2023	Percentage resources published between 2019 and 2023
Peer-reviewed journals	291	255	88%
Non-peer reviewed journals	7	6	85%
Books	10	3	30%
Dissertation	1	1	100%
Conference papers	6	5	83%
Website	1	1	100%
Government sites	2	0	0%
Total	318	271	85%

I organized the literature review beginning with a discussion of the conceptual framework. I used Keller's (1993) CBBE model as the conceptual framework for this study to analyze and explain various researchers' perspectives on branding strategies for SMEs' sustainability. Here, I present a review of related and contrasting theories and models. Next, I discuss the following themes: (a) the concept of branding, (b) branding as a tool for value creation for companies, (c) social media, brand innovation, and marketing

communication, (d) SMEs in Nigeria, and (e) brand equity and SMEs' success. The literature review section ends with a summary and transition to Sections 2 and 3 of this study.

CBBE Model

The CBBE model was the conceptual framework of this study. Keller (1993) developed the CBBE model, which consists of the following tenets: (a) brand identity, (b) brand meaning, (c) brand responses, and (d) brand relationships. When applied, the tenets of the CBBE model could enable small business owners to implement branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Aaker (1991) originated the concept of brand equity as a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value a firm and its customers derive from a product or service. Researchers generally categorize brand equity from three perspectives based on product view, financial view, and customer view (Lin & Chung, 2019).

Keller (1993) conceptualized brand equity measurement from only the firm's customers' perspective. Keller described CBBE as the customer's response to the marketing of a branded product compared to the responses toward the marketing of an unbranded product. For brand equity to occur, the customer must be familiar with and hold a favorable, strong, and unique cognitive association with the brand. Brand knowledge construct is a crucial antecedent to consumer-based brand equity. As a construct, brand knowledge is intrinsically cognitive, building on memory-related mechanisms and consisting of consumers' accumulated knowledge regarding brand memories (Langaro et al., 2018). Researchers have categorized brand knowledge into

brand awareness and image (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). Keller (2020) further stated that a brand has positive or negative brand equity if the consumer reacts more or less favorably to a brand than a generic product. Customers no longer need an extensive external product search once they can quickly identify with and stay loyal to satisfying brands while staying away from dissatisfying brands (Keller, 2020).

Branding is a necessary tool that business organizations use to connect with their customers. The CBBE represents customer-based behavior toward a branded product versus an unbranded equivalent (Faircloth et al., 2001). CBBE can lead to enhanced revenue, lower costs, and greater profits. Some researchers found brand equity as one of the most critical elements of customer equity (Qorbani et al., 2020). Keller proposed that organizations can translate the consumer response to brand marketing at various stages of the purchase decision-making sequence. Regardless, customers have a significant role to play in the success of brands. If customers do not value a brand or decrease the brand value, there may be a decline in the market due to the customers' devaluation of the brand.

Researchers have applied the CBBE model to investigate the customer satisfaction construct of brand equity, an essential element for determining the success of a brand and a measure of achieving the corporate goal of retaining existing customers. Keller's CBBE model identified four steps for building a solid brand, from brand identity to brand meaning, brand responses, and brand relationships. Using the CBBE model, Tran et al. (2020) investigated the impact of brand authenticity on customer satisfaction and found a positive relationship between brand authenticity and brand equity. Brand

authenticity resonates with the perception of quality, consistency, and durability (Fouladi et al., 2021). Consumers view authentic brands as a higher quality offering greater value (Tran et al., 2020). Consumers are more likely to purchase authentic brands than less authentic ones. Though consumers need to perceive startups and small businesses as authentic, the lack of record, heritage, quality commitment, and long-term communication prevents customers from perceiving them as authentic and accurate (Fouladi et al., 2021).

The augmentation of consumer attachment to a brand through increased customer satisfaction and brand trust could be an antecedent for business owners to develop better branding strategies. Raut et al. (2019) expanded the CBBE model to determine the influence of customer satisfaction and brand trust on brand equity outcomes. Notably, Raut et al. found that these two variables mediate brand equity, and incorporating the variables into the CBBE model enhances the variability of brand equity (2019). Brand managers may leverage the significance of brand satisfaction and trust to analyze the level of attachment consumers have with the brand and building substantial brand equity.

Keller's CBBE model did not include brand loyalty as a distinct component of brand knowledge. Consumers develop brand loyalty when they are willing to put in their time, effort, and money in pursuit of consuming the brand (Keller, 2001). Brand loyalty indicates the measure of attachment that consumers have towards a brand. Customer brand loyalty stretches along five levels, from a bottom level representing a disloyal customer, to a top level representing the proud, committed, and highly loyal customers willing to recommend the brand to others (Górska-Warsewicz & Kulykovets, 2020).

Loyal customers' recommendations could help attract new customers, increasing brand equity and value.

Researchers have used various dimensions of the CBBE model, such as brand awareness, brand image, and brand associations, to measure what drives customers toward brand loyalty (Yohana et al., 2020). Jadhav et al. (2021) applied the CBBE model to examine brand loyalty in the baby products industry, finding that factors such as brand image, perceived trust, and value play significant roles in motivating customers to stay loyal to a brand. According to Hoang et al. (2020), business owners that enhance their brand image tend to increase customer brand loyalty. Casteran et al. (2019) posited that lacking trust in a brand could result in less trustworthy brands. For customers to remain loyal to a brand, business owners should ensure they establish the quality of the product and the image of the brand.

Luxury brand consumers have emerged as an important consumer segment in several economies. Luxury brand firms seek to understand why consumers purchase luxury brands, what the consumers perceive as a luxury, and how the perception of luxury affects the consumers' consumption behavior (Naumova et al., 2019). Further, researchers have utilized the CBBE model to investigate the luxury brand consumers' segment on brand equity. Hyun et al. (2022) investigated the effects of website attributes on luxury brand equity. They found significant effects of emotional appeal, website design, and customer service on luxury brand awareness and brand loyalty. These dimensions of website attributes play a significant role in building a solid relationship between brands and customers, thus helping to achieve more significant brand equity.

The CBBE model has helped me understand the application, influence, and value of social media in businesses. With the internet era, social media platforms have provided a means for consumers to become active content creators by expressing their opinions, understandings, and perceptions about products and brands (Gong et al., 2020). The impact of social media in marketing has spread rapidly, altering how business owners market their products and communicate with consumers (Dolega et al., 2021). Participants in social media platforms create a community of brand users called a social media-based brand community (SMBBC).

The CBBE also indicates the outcomes of the interaction between customers and a firm. Businesses that have established SMBBC develop a better understanding of the customers' demands or suggestions, thereby improving adaptability and competitiveness (Hoang et al., 2020). The customers, conversely, better understand information concerning the brand's products or services. Utilizing two aspects of the CBBE, namely, brand awareness and brand loyalty, Hoang et al. (2020) examined the effects of SMBBC markers on CBBE and identified three components of SMBBC: shared consciousness, the obligation to the community, and shared rituals and traditions. Brand members in the community who believe their ideas and brand concepts are consistent hold a shared consciousness. Customers in a brand community exhibit a high sense of obligation that enables them to express suggestions to improve community operations in the brand community. The symbols of the brand community are the shared rituals and traditions that make members more likely to express improvement suggestions about the community operations in the brand community (Hoang et al., 2020).

Hoang et al. (2020) clarified how customers participate in value co-creation for firms through SMBBC. For one, firms can use rules and incentives to stimulate customers' willingness to share experiences and ideas that could help other members solve problems and improve the brand's products or service quality (Hoang et al., 2020). To promote the CBBE, firms should encourage customers to develop a sense of responsibility and obligation to the SMBBC and stimulate customers to change from passive to active roles as value co-creators (Hoang et al., 2020). Understanding the factors that foster brand community commitment is essential in building and maintaining brand equity in this social media era.

Business owners perceive social media as a tool to engage and interact with new potential customers and build strong relationships with them. Researchers have investigated various impacts of social media on CBBE (Amoako et al., 2019; Rusfian & Alessandro, 2021). Based on the synthesis and analysis of extant literature, Almestarihi et al. (2021) found that social media marketing activities successfully lead to an increased value proposition by offering a unique value to firms and customers. Business owners achieve the benefits of brand equity when they understand customers' brand choices that indicate individual, favorable responses to elements of a brand compared to other brands. Almestarihi et al. also noted that the CBBE's brand-building process starts with brand identity, brand awareness, and knowledge of customers' likes and preferences, followed by achieving a brand relationship. The elements of the CBBE brand-building process are similar to the operations of social media marketing platforms.

Researchers have adopted the CBBE in exploring the concept of place branding. Bose et al. (2021) stated that CBBE heavily influences place brand equity. Place branding aims to attract a target audience by enhancing the value proposition of a place through its unique identity (Bose et al., 2021). Place marketers have leveraged the unique associations rooted in the identity of a place to influence target customers. Based on the original CBBE conceptualization, Bose et al. (2020) developed the concept of customer-based place brand equity (CBPBE), defined as customer-based brand equity of a place. From a CBPBE point of view, Bose et al. developed a measurement instrument to examine the various perspectives of place branding, namely, regional identity, destination branding, and investment attractiveness. Bose et al. found that customers' loyalty to a place may drive them to consider the place as a tourist destination and may increase the investment attractiveness of the place. Bose et al. illustrated that the CBBE model could act as a foundational brand equity model applicable to the place branding phenomenon.

The CBBE model's application includes products, manufacturing, and place brand industries. Researchers could use the CBBE to analyze consumer perceptions regarding brand equity in the service industry. Cambra-Fierro et al. (2021) argued that business owners with strong CBBEs drive a chain of effects impacting corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, and customer engagement. To support the argument, Cambra-Fierro et al. analyzed the relationship between CBBE, reputation, customer satisfaction, and engagement in healthcare services, where problem-solving and wellness are critical factors to customer satisfaction. Cambra-Fierro et al. concluded that the CBBE has a decisive impact on the degree of perceived customer satisfaction and

corporate reputation in determining consumer satisfaction. In the service industry, business owners that reinforce and grow CBBE enhance the opportunity to build corporate reputation and boost customer connections.

The concept of branding is receiving significant attention from many different markets. Decision makers and marketers in the higher education industry have been spurred by the growing competition and economic pressures to respond by developing stronger brands (Stukalina & Pavlyuk, 2021). Researchers in the educational services sector have applied different brand dimensions of the CBBE to demonstrate a linkage between a brand's success and a customer's attitude towards a brand. Globally, students are the primary consumers of educational services that higher educational institutions provide (Roskosa & Stukalina, 2020).

Having identified two sets of students, foreign and local, Stukalina and Pavlyuk (2021) explored students' attitudes towards brand dimensions of a university's brand using the CBBE model. Stukalina and Pavlyuk found a notable difference between the foreign and local students' perceptions of brand equity and associated factors. International students focused more on brand resonance factors, while local students were more concerned about the imagery of the university brand. Because students are the primary consumers, the decision makers and marketers of higher educational institutions should consider the students' perception in developing an efficient brand marketing strategy for long-term competitiveness in both local and international settings.

SMEs increasingly recognize the value of branding and utilize it as a source of competitive advantage. Researchers have applied the CBBE model in the SME context to

identify and measure the influence of brand experience on perceived quality and brand loyalty. Jeon and Yoo (2021) identified ways grocerants, a dining business that combines grocery stores and restaurants, build brand equity through customer experiences. Jeon and Yoo confirmed that brand associations/image and perceived quality are important factors that increase brand loyalty. Consuming a brand is not merely a matter of utilizing products and services but a starting point for consumers to form brand loyalty, the highest concept in brand equity (Jeon & Yoo, 2021). Business owners view the customer experience beyond the satisfaction of the brand products' features to include cognitive and behavioral choices that the customer makes when interacting with the brand.

SME owners focusing on brand-building activities and brand management determine brand performance mainly through customer feedback and sales (Dressler & Paunovic, 2021). The need for a scale for measuring brand performance in SMEs prompted the development of the small- and medium-sized enterprise brand equity (SMEBE) construct. Relying on the CBBE model, Chokpitakkul and Anantachart (2020) developed the SMEBE construct and a brand equity measurement scale by examining the relationship between SMEBE and three customer response factors, namely brand preference, brand loyalty, and word of mouth. Chokpitakkul and Anantachart identified a positive effect of SMEBE on consumers' positive responses in various markets, including services, manufacturing, and trade sectors. The implication and benefit of the finding are that SME owners should build and measure their brand equity, which in turn influences the customer's positive responses as crucial drivers of long-term competitive advantage (Chokpitakkul & Anantachart, 2020).

Tenets of CBBE Model

Brand Identity. Brand identity is like human identity and reflects the traits or characteristics embedded into the brand. In the context of corporate brand orientation, Balmer and Podnar (2021) stated that brand identity is a critical construct that underpins what the organization represents and its distinctiveness; hence, offering a competitive advantage. Brand identity is a platform by which customers know, describe, remember, and relate to a brand. Several definitions of brand identity abound in branding literature. Lin and Chung (2019) defined brand identity as the customer's involvement with and acknowledgment of a specific brand. Tokes (2020) noted that defining brand identity entails defining the essential characteristics of the brand from a company's strategic point of view, formulating the vision and mission of the brand, defining central brand values, and identifying internal resources. The goal of brand identity includes building relationships with target groups. Relationships with target groups can be friendly, supportive, empowering, or similar to those between parents and children (Tokes, 2020). Organizations need a clear brand identity in the entire brand-building process.

A brand's distinctive characteristics drive the customer's preference for the brand. Several researchers have assumed that organizations construct their brand identity internally (Tokes, 2020; Yen et al., 2020). Shi (2019) investigated the role of the founder in the construction of brand identity in startups and small firms. Shi found that the founder's personality traits indirectly influence the brand identity construction for startups. The indirect role of the founder's personality traits affects startups that introduce and own innovatively new and functional products as their only brand. The founder's

personality traits play a direct role when startups introduce and own new but symbolic products as their only brand (Shi, 2019). The emphasis is that innovation-driven startups should build their brands based on product attributes rather than the founder's personality. This brand-identity building approach is consistent with destination brand identity building in the tourism industry. Yen et al. (2020) explained that destination branding involves identifying the unique attributes of a destination and integrating local elements that share such attributes to generate a unique identity. Oliveira and Abreu (2020) proposed a brand-building model that highlights brand identity as one of the four pillars of interdisciplinary interactions with the customer. The brand identity encompasses a series of factors essential for the brand's positioning and the customers' loyalty and confidence in the brand.

Brand Meaning. The second step in Keller's (1993) CBBE model toward building a solid brand is defining brand meaning. Beyond the brand identity of name, logo, and symbol, customers perceive brands without having to purchase or have direct experience with them. Brand meaning refers to the customers' perception of their personal value of a brand (Bracíníková & Matušínská, 2020). Brands take on social or cultural meanings for stakeholders other than customers and the firm. For young Chinese consumers, Wang and Qiao (2020) found that purchasing luxury-lite brands embodies self-identity and symbolizes self-indulgence, youthfulness, taste, disposition, and a trade-up for those who want to move up to the upper middle class. Bracíníková and Matušínská (2020) examined brand meanings for different categories of consumers based on generation, degree of education, and gender. They observed that younger generations

have more positive relationships with brands than older generations. Bracíníková and Matušínská also found that consumers with high school degrees have more positive perceptions about the brands than those consumers with other degrees of education, and gender has no significant influence on their perceptions. Various consumer groups ascribe different meanings to a brand arising from the group's perception of the brand, which could influence how much consumers evaluate and consume a brand.

The business world is witnessing unprecedented connectivity of humans regardless of time and location occasioned by access to the internet, technology, and devices. With heightened access to information and people, more stakeholders co-create brand experiences and meanings (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Brand meanings unfold at multiple levels resulting from dynamic co-creation processes among various actors. Sarasvuo et al. (2022) distinguished between co-creation outcomes for marketers' stakeholders and mutual outcomes shared by both, leading to new brand meanings. Brand meaning is an emerging property that stakeholders generate through their actions that shape and guide their behavior and practices toward a brand (Baker et al., 2022).

Where cultural and political changes define a new order in society, businesses have revived past brand meanings by retro branding, relaunching historical brands with updated features. Donzé et al. (2020) defined retro branding as the process of relaunching a brand by associating it with the past and combining old-fashioned forms with advanced functions. Consumers do not always want the latest, which is paradoxical because consumers tend to dislike the old. Consumers buy vinyl records, although there is Spotify, just like calligraphy has recently gained popularity even though there are

computers as writing tools (Olsson & Höglund, 2019). The blend between the past and present for a retro brand positively impacts consumers' responses under pronounced nostalgic feelings (Chen, 2021). Retro branding is gaining unprecedented momentum and widespread practice. The crucial question about retro branding is finding the perfect blend between the past and present.

Brand Response. The brand response is a crucial element of Keller's (1993) CBBE model. Romaniuk and Huang (2020) stated that firms assess the performance of their brands in the mind of the customers to understand when the brand equity is getting stronger or weaker. Firms measure brand response metrics to evaluate a brand's performance, provide accountability, and enhance brand awareness. Romaniuk and Huang (2020) focused on two response patterns that determine customers' perceptions of the brand: the relationship between past brand buying and eliciting perceptions about that brand and the underlying prototypicality of each brand attribute. Zarei et al. (2022) categorized customer responses into brand preferences, willingness to pay more, and customer loyalty. Brand preference means consumers buy a brand's product according to what they understand and their feelings for that brand, while willingness to pay more directly predicts customer purchase behavior. Xiaoyan and Xiaoling (2020) identified aesthetic design and connotation meaning as two routes that lead to customer response concerning brand design. For instance, in the case of luxury brands, it is not luxurious brands but the customer's perception of the brand that ascribes luxury to a brand.

A brand's long-term success primarily depends on the consumer's connection or association. Keller (1993) explained that the favorability, strength, and uniqueness of

brand associations are the dimensions that play an essential role in determining the differential response that makes up brand equity. The type of brand association is an indicator of the type of relationship that the customer builds with the brand. Keller presented a conceptual model of brand associations consisting of product attributes, attitudes, and benefits. Keller distinguished brand attributes according to how consumers directly relate to a product or service performance by identifying product-related or non-product-related attributes. Lin and Chung (2019) examined ways brand attributes such as brand size, brand identity, and segment extend the understanding of the impact of corporate social responsibility on brand equity. Brand attributes are perceptual in that the customers' perception of an attribute determines its importance.

Brand attitudes are a type of brand association that directly affects brand image. Brand attitude is the evaluative dimension of brand image that represents the synthesis of all relevant brand elements present in consumers' memory and derived from experiencing the brand at various levels (Langaro et al., 2018). Brand attitude is a classic variable for understanding and predicting customers' brand choices. Customers must experience a product or service and assess the functional, experiential, or symbolic benefits before developing a brand attitude. Brand attitudes are necessary because they form the basis for customer behavior.

Brand benefits refer to the personal value of a product when compared to other unbranded products in the same category. Keller (1993) defined brand benefits as what consumers think the product or service could bring to them. Functional benefits relate to actual product performance; the functional benefits are a rational reason customer buy

and consume a product (Yohana et al., 2020). A brand's symbolic or emotional benefits refer to the customers' feelings toward the brand beyond the product's functional features. Mostafa and Arnaout (2019) argued that social status, the need for uniqueness, self-expression, and cosmopolitanism are some symbolic benefits that luxury brand consumers accrue. Beyond being a communication tool between customers and businesses, brands offer other extended benefits. Zollo et al. (2020) examined the relationship between social media marketing and brand equity. Zollo et al. found that customers in the virtual consumer environment enjoyed the cognitive, personal integrative, socially integrative, and hedonic benefits of brands. The customer mindset towards a brand influences its performance in the marketplace as it guides the customers' actions regarding purchase quantities, frequency, and the price they pay.

Brand Customer Relationships. In Keller's (1993) CBBE model, forming a brand-customer relationship is the final step in building substantial brand equity. As increasing competition poses a challenge for organizations to retain their customers, the brand-consumer relationship may be a viable metaphor for developing and maintaining a long-term favorable association between the customer and the brand (Ozdemir et al., 2020). Phong et al. (2020) noted that branding contributes to customer loyalty. Though customers may be spuriously loyal to a brand for reasons such as affordable price, ease of accessibility, and location convenience, genuinely loyal customers show affection for the brand through the consistent purchase of the brand's products or services (Han et al., 2018).

The consumers' sentiments toward brands indicate their opinion, attitude, feelings, and overall likelihood of supporting or avoiding them (Fetscherin et al., 2019). Consumers' passion and commitment to a brand determine how they relate to it. Consumers could develop a strong or weak relationship with a brand and ignore other brands. The consumer-brand relationship depends primarily on the effectiveness of the brand meanings in the customers' minds, derivable from the customers' experiences (Sengupta et al., 2022). Brand-consumer relationships might take several forms, depending on how individuals develop relationships (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019). Several researchers agreed that the outcomes of CBBE in product brands include brand preference, repurchase intention, and willingness to pay a price premium (Phong et al., 2020; Tian et al., 2022). Uford and Duh (2021) tested and confirmed the same CBBE outcomes in service brands. Regardless of product or service brands, firms that build strong brands might perform well in the market regarding CBBE outcomes.

Related and Contrasting Theories and Models to CBBE Model

Keller's CBBE model primarily focuses on evaluating brand equity solely from the customer's perspective of a brand. Business leaders may also need the understanding and application of other related frameworks to harness the total value of brand equity from the customer's perspective. Keller developed other frameworks that complement and provide a better understanding of the CBBE (Keller, 2020). The related frameworks include the brand resonance model and associative memory network model. When trying to achieve brand equity using Keller's CBBE model, firms face the challenge of accounting for the influence of other stakeholders in the brand-building process. Multiple

stakeholders' sources contribute to brand equity and value (Ajour El Zein et al., 2019). Thus, to fully capture a richer picture of the sources of brand equity, business leaders should consider the effect and influence of other stakeholders' relationships in their branding strategy formulation. Also, a deeper understanding of consumer responses could give business leaders vital insights into customers' behaviors and reactions to various marketing cues. The two contrasting models that addressed the underlining gaps of the CBBE model are the stakeholder model of brand value and the stimulus-organism-response model.

Brand Resonance Model

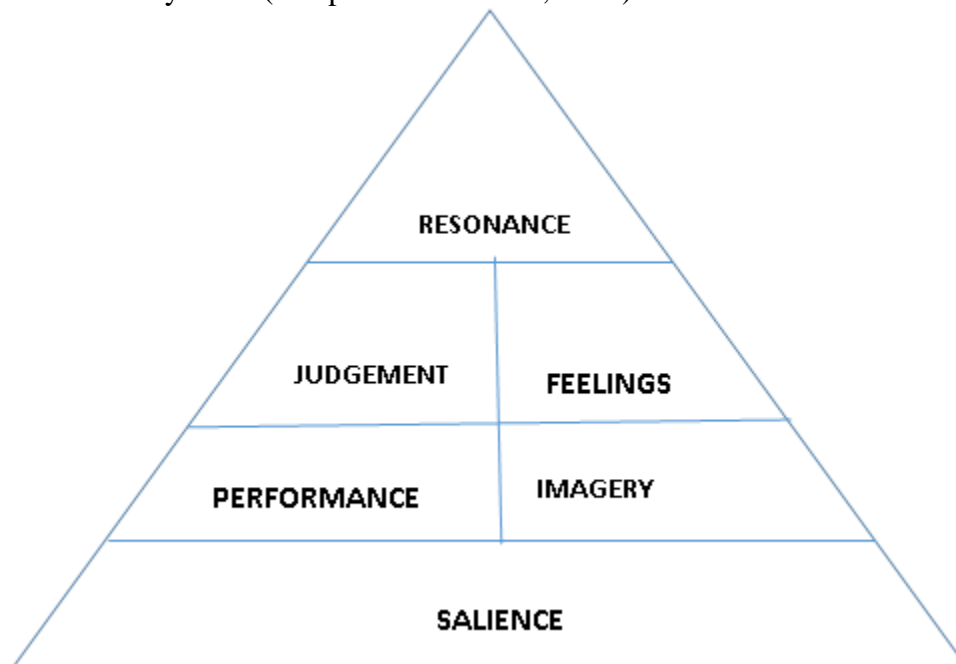
Keller (2001) expanded the scope of the CBBE model to provide a more comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the brand-building model in the marketplace. Keller (2001) pointed out that for customers to resonate with a brand, they need to use the brand products frequently and actively pay attention to the brand-related information forming a robust psychological attachment to the brand. The brand resonance model highlights the effect of expanding the CBBE four steps process of the e-brand building resulting in six brand-building blocks of a strong brand (see Figure 1).

The brand resonance pyramid is a bottom-up approach to how organizations can develop loyal relationships with their customers. Figure 1 depicts Keller's presentation of the connections between the brand building blocks in a pyramid structure with the ultimate goal of resonance. The pyramid involves six building blocks at different levels of brand development and objectives, emphasizing the duality of the route to brand building from the rational to the emotional route. The bottom of the pyramid begins the

brand-building process with brand salience which reflects the depth and breadth of brand awareness (Keller, 2020). Following the salience are the dual routes to brand building. The rational route includes performance (e.g., price, efficiency, durability, and reliability) and judgment (e.g., quality and credibility). In contrast, the emotional route includes imagery and feelings (e.g., fun and excitement). Keller (2001) defined brand resonance as the intensity of customers' psychological bond with the brand and the level of activity it engenders. Of these six brand building blocks, (a) salience, (b) performance, (c) imagery, (d) feeling, (e) judgment, and (f) resonance, Keller emphasized resonance as the most valuable.

Figure 1

Brand Resonance Pyramid (Adopted from Keller, 2001)



Resonance reflects the depth and intensity of customers' relationship with the brand and the extent to which customers feel they are in sync with the brand (Bareket-

Bojmel & Shuv-Ami, 2019). Customers attain brand resonance when they perceive a conclusive image of a brand, establishing a degree of attachment to the brand (Husain et al., 2022). The depth of the relationship determines the level of loyalty customers demonstrate toward a brand and the degree of customer engagement with brand activities. This level of relationship should be the ultimate goal of any firm.

Keller (2020) elaborated on the significance of brand resonance as a tool for understanding how brands at different levels of development could leverage secondary associations to enhance brand equity. Firms creating a new brand, adopting or modifying an existing brand, or combining an existing and a new brand can leverage secondary associations (Keller, 2020). Hasan and Hasan (2019) identified the following sources through which firms can achieve secondary brand associations; the use of a product's place of origin, distribution channel, celebrity endorsement, co-branding, sporting, community, or cultural events, and other third-party sources. Susanti et al. (2019) explained that these brand associations are a crucial determinant factor in customer satisfaction and can influence the customer emotionally towards the brand. Researchers have shown that customers' emotional brand attachments influence brand relationship quality leading to brand resonance (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019; Fetscherin et al., 2019).

Applying the brand resonance model could help organizations understand the brand relationship characteristics of different consumer segments, such as seniors, millennials, and luxury consumers. Researchers have found that elderly consumers are increasing due to greater life expectancy, wellness, and scientific progress (Gianluigi et al., 2020). Elderly consumers have become particularly important because they are

wealthier than younger generations, usually control most families' financial stock, and hold higher purchasing power (Gianluigi et al., 2020). Huang (2021) utilized the brand resonance model to explore the brand relationship behavior of elderly consumers and found that brand psychological attachment is one of the significant processing mediators for aging consumers to have positive brand responses. Furthermore, Huang highlighted the shortfall in the brand resonance model for explaining the behavior of elderly consumers due to the non-inclusion of service elements such as value co-creation, co-production, brand engagement, and brand participation.

Kang et al. (2022) identified another essential consumer segment, millennial consumers, referring to individuals born between 1980 and 2000. Mundel et al. (2021) recognized that millennials are highly educated, resistant to traditional marketing tactics, and digitally proficient, such that they can access the internet quickly and easily learn new habits and styles. However, these characteristics hold only depending on the country and culture. Kang et al. utilized the emotional route of the brand resonance model to investigate the factors influencing millennial consumers' consumption patterns in the Chinese luxury market. Kang et al. found that Chinese millennial consumers were more likely to buy luxury brands to integrate themselves with their peer groups.

Researchers have also identified luxury brand consumers as another consumer segment (Mostafa & Arnaout, 2019; Romaniuk & Huang, 2020). Luxury consumers have a solid emotional and symbolic association with a brand. Besides the symbolic value of luxury brands, consumers seek personal orientations such as boosting self-esteem, self-image, and self-identity values in these brands (Kumar et al., 2022).

Kowalczyk and Mitchell (2021) utilized the brand resonance model to investigate the behavioral attributes of luxury consumers. Kowalczyk and Mitchell identified luxury consumers based on three behavioral outcomes: (a) purchase intention, (b) willingness to recommend to a friend, and (c) willingness to pay a price premium. These behavioral outcomes accrue customer-based brand equity to a product brand.

The dimensions of consumer brand relationships might impact luxury brand consumption. Husain et al. (2022) utilized other related constituents of brand resonance (attachment, engagement, and judgment) to explore the consumption of luxury brands in India and indicated that brand resonance had a significant positive impact on Indian luxury brand consumers. Husain et al. observed that luxury consumers in an emerging economy like India might have a different level of perception of luxury brands than in western societies. The application of the brand resonance model in research complements the CBBE and might help scholars and practitioners to gain a better understanding of consumer behavior in different cultural, demographic, and economic settings.

Associative Memory Network Model

Keller (1993) first developed the concept of an associative memory network to explain the process of strengthening brand associations in a customer's memory. The application and the logic behind the associative memory network model (AMNM) are based on how consumer memory functions (Oh et al., 2021). In the AMNM, Mohanty (2018) visualized semantic memory or knowledge as consisting of stored information or nodes connected by links of varying strengths.

Keller (1993) indicated that the quantity and quality of information processing and the cues that lead to retrieval in the consumer's memory all contribute to solid brand associations in the consumers' memory. The retrieval cues may include brand names, product attributes, and benefits (Olsen et al., 2022). Understanding the associative memory network is vital to scholars and brand managers because building successful brands depends on distinct and unique brand associations. The AMNM is a dimension of brand image and knowledge, which are fundamental elements of Keller's CBBE.

In a dynamic market, where new competition continually enters the market space, established brands must defend themselves against new challengers to remain competitive. Olsen et al. (2022) indicated that firms adopt the unique selling proposition (USP) school of thought as a brand-building strategy by focusing on a few unique benefits of a brand rather than on several benefits. Once a few favorable associations have been established in the consumer's mind, they work to increase the strength of that association to achieve a competitive advantage (Olsen et al., 2022). Firms form brand associations when they communicate about brands through several media channels and receive responses from consumers based on the comprehension and perception of the message (Mohanty, 2018). Consumers may store much brand information in their memory, but it may not always be accessible (Olsen et al., 2022). Consequently, consumers might base their evaluations and judgment only on the information about the brand that is accessible in their memory.

Researchers have utilized the AMNM to conduct studies on branding and enrich the understanding of customer-based brand equity (Kim & Oh, 2020; Mohanty, 2018;

Olsen et al., 2022). With the growth in interactive tools that engage consumers and make adverts noticeable, memorable, and clickable, Kononova et al. (2020) applied the AMNM, an exploration study. They explored the relevancy and expectancy of thematic contextual advertising, an online automatic advert placement method, and the effect on brand recognition memory, advert brand evaluations, and advert brand purchase intentions. Kononova et al. suggested that there may be better strategies than placing predominantly relevant adverts because memory for relevant adverts decreases when in abundance; instead, they advocated for a mixture of relevant and irrelevant adverts.

With escalating competition between branded apps in recent years, Stocchi et al. (2021) generated guidelines for building robust branded apps by adopting the brand mental availability construct. The brand mental availability is a dimension of AMNM originating from the overall size of the network of brand attribute associations that a consumer retains in memory. Stocchi et al. posited that for any brand, the greater the mental availability, the greater the chance of thinking about it under different circumstances, and the greater the purchase probabilities. A customer's experiences of a brand create an image in the customer's mind, which is vital to achieving brand equity.

Applying AMNM can help firms promote more effective branding strategies and harness customer-based brand equity (Kim & Oh, 2020). Using social media has provided great opportunities for firms to market their brands and build relationships with their customers. Gong et al. (2020) noted that consumers play a significant role in building this relationship by becoming active content creators to express their opinions, understandings, and perceptions about products and brands, leading to brand knowledge.

Consumer brand knowledge is the bedrock of building the consumer-brand relationship. Gong et al. analyzed consumer brand knowledge structures using text mining and network analysis from more than 130 million consumer posts about mobile phone brands. Gong et al. found a positive relationship between a brand's position in the consumer's associative knowledge and intended brand strategy. This relationship could assist business leaders in achieving sustainable and prosperous brand performance.

Stakeholder Model of Brand Value

The stakeholder model originated from the stakeholder theory that addressed the problems associated with the effects of capitalism in business as it affects people's lives, highlighting that businesses affect more parties than just the shareholders (Stacy, 2022). The stakeholder theory has its roots in the emergence of strong forces of globalization and information technology, increasing societal awareness of the impact of businesses on communities and nations, resulting in more calls for openness, transparency, and responsibility from businesses (Freeman, 2010). The stakeholder theory asserts that companies should serve the various interests of stakeholders rather than only seeking to maximize shareholder value (Freeman, 1994). The implication is that companies should consider every entity involved in their business and that meeting stakeholder interest is a means for success and survival. Stakeholders encompass internal stakeholders (shareholders, managers, and employees) and external stakeholders (consumers, suppliers, media, financial institutions, sponsors, competitors, non-governmental organizations, research organizations, educational institutions, university students, and the government).

Jones (2005) developed the stakeholder model of brand value to strengthen the understanding of the sources of brand value by providing a richer picture of brand value and equity sources. According to Jones, the model requires analyzing the range of relationships the brand is engaged in and recognizing that brand equity is created through multiple relationships. The implication is that stakeholders other than customers could represent crucial sources of brand value. Brand value is then co-created through the relationships between the brand and its stakeholders (Jones, 2005).

Researchers have studied brand equity and brand value concepts from a single stakeholder approach focusing mainly on the customer (Romaniuk & Huang, 2020; Sengupta et al., 2022; Zarei et al., 2022). Successful relationships between firms and primary stakeholders can be valuable corporate assets with a competitive advantage and financial returns (Jones, 2005). Researchers have used the stakeholder model to explore and investigate the brand equity phenomenon (Kim et al., 2021). Exploring the consequences of customer engagement on other stakeholders, Clark et al. (2020) suggested that customers' brand engagement affects the stakeholders they are connected to, influencing their engagement. Such customer engagement can enhance or reduce other stakeholders' perceived value (Clark et al., 2020). The implication of the customer engagement effect on multiple stakeholders is that firms must carefully select interaction partners such as fellow customers, frontline service, and support staff, representing a challenge.

The stakeholder model expands the scope of brand equity as the assets that represent the outcome of relationships with multiple stakeholders. However, the model

needed to accommodate the interest of multiple stakeholders simultaneously. The implication of applying the model was that the attempt by organizations to address and accommodate the interest of one stakeholder group might adversely affect the interests of another. The stakeholder model might mask and inhibit the study of branding, thus contrasting the customer-based brand equity framework, the lens for conducting this study on branding.

Stimulus Organism Response Model

The stimulus organism response (SOR) paradigm originated from environmental psychology, where social scientists found that animals' simultaneous reactions to stimuli and responses serve as the basis for discovering the original behavior model (Tian et al., 2022). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) developed the SOR model to address the assumption that authors of early models of consumer behaviors considered regarding the rationality of consumers but was no longer tenable. The assumption diminished the relevance of the consumer's mental state and processes and the individual differences among consumers (Jacoby, 2002). The SOR framework focuses on identifying the environment (stimulus) external to consumers, which influences their inner states (organism) and affects their approach or avoidance reactions (response) (Manthiou et al., 2017). Researchers and practitioners used the model to explain specific behavioral patterns, such as why some people become nervous when asked to speak in front of a large crowd while others are genuinely enthusiastic (Tian et al., 2022).

Scholars and practitioners have applied the model to understand better customers' reactions and preferences and their favorable or unfavorable responses to stimuli

revealing their final reaction. For instance, Tian et al. (2022) used the SOR model to determine the factors influencing the repurchase intention of organic tea products among Bangladeshi millennial consumers. Tian et al. indicated that information quality (stimuli) is an essential predictor of customer satisfaction, trust, and perceived value (organism) which determines the repurchase intention (response). With the emergence of social media, and e-brand communities as a new method of customer engagement in an emerging economy, Naqvi et al. (2021) applied the SOR model. Naqvi et al. examined the influence of system quality and information quality (stimuli) on consumers' intellectual and emotional conditions (organism) and the effect on brand loyalty (response). Naqvi et al. found that improving the content, characteristics, performance, reliability, and accuracy of the information in the e-brand community can increase customer engagement leading to enhanced brand image and loyalty. Using the SOR model in consumer behavior research could lead firms and researchers to identify the significance and importance of improving information quality for enhanced consumer engagement and positive purchase behaviors.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic stirred researchers to investigate various consumer behaviors during a severe global crisis of such magnitude (Cana, 2020; Di Crosta et al., 2021; Lindenmeier et al., 2021; Pollák et al., 2022). Laato et al. (2020) applied the SOR model to investigate the link between three variables, unusual purchase intention, intention to self-isolate, and online information sources on the COVID-19 pandemic. Lato et al. found a link between the intention to self-isolate and the intention to make unusual purchases. However, Lato et al. noted that neither information overload

nor exposure to online information about COVID-19 affected how individuals perceived the pandemic. The findings confirm that the SOR model could be a robust framework to explain consumer behavior in the context of a pandemic (Laato et al., 2020).

The SOR model might help in investigating consumer behaviors in other varying contexts. For example, Kamboj et al. (2018) applied the SOR framework to investigate the customers' motivation to participate in social media brand communities, resulting in brand trust, loyalty, and co-creation. The strength of the SOR model lies in predicting consumer behavior and responses under various external business environments. Firms find value in predicting consumer behavior and responses to make necessary adjustments for more efficient marketing and branding strategies.

There are some limitations to the SOR framework. Bigne et al. (2020) raised concern about the inability of the SOR framework to accommodate consumers' automatic processing ability. Jacoby (2002) opined that the SOR framework failed to depict some constructs along the SOR linear sequence and to accommodate that certain phenomena may be stimuli and responses. For example, using the SOR, it is unclear whether to classify beliefs, attitudes, and intentions as inherent organism characteristics of consumers or results of some external stimuli. Also, Jacoby stated that the linear sequence of the SOR may blind researchers to the dynamic relationships amongst essential constructs. To address these limitations, Jacoby proposed an advanced version of the SOR using overlapping circles that accommodate consumers' conscious and unconscious processing mechanisms leading to behavioral intentions. The SOR framework helps understand consumer behaviors in various contexts but contrasts the

Keller's (1993) CBBE because the consumer responses could be either positive (approach) or negative (avoidance) behavior (Jacoby, 2002). Keller's CBBE framework focuses only on positive customer responses that lead to brand equity.

The Concept of Branding

Branding phenomenon has been signaling a product's characteristics to consumers for several years. Brands have become present in every aspect of society, from products and cities to universities (Vitelar, 2019). Besides the organizational product or service brands, new brand entities (place and personal brands) are stretching the branding space (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Place branding has become an emerging strategic concept in brand marketing. Grebosz-Krawczyk (2021) posited that place branding is about creating an identity of a place in people's minds through visual, verbal, and behavioral expressions of a place. Place branding should enhance the development of a place not only for leisure and tourism but also to attract inward investments, enhance the existing culture and heritage, develop facilities for residents, and welcome new residents, students, and employees (Grebosz-Krawczyk, 2021). Place branding and public diplomacy strategy could work together to broaden a place's reputation and role in international relations (Kim & Lee, 2021).

Place branding is a term that defines communication about places (Robson, 2021). However, business organizations have adopted place branding as a strategic marketing tool beyond communicating about places. Including place-based identity and heritage in branding strategies has become a successful business marketing tool (Vanhoose et al., 2021). According to Nursanty (2021), architectural mobilizations transform physical

objects into places that carry myths, ideologies, and narratives, which contribute positively to the marketing of a place. Sears and Weatherbee (2019) explored how small wineries use history, heritage, and place identity as critical elements of the branding and marketing activities that, in turn, contribute to future perceptions and understanding of the place. Local identity and heritage are necessary elements that imbue place branding with a transformative power for brands.

Place brands might not be successful without considering residents and their cultural practices. Sandbach (2021) argued that a place brand is not just the result of a projected place identity; instead, it involves the resident participation, context, and culture to co-create the brand. City branding, a subset of place branding, comprises many elements such as architecture and buildings, geographical aspects, economic situations, history, demography, and the city's residents (Grebosz-Krawczyk, 2021). Nursanty (2021) concluded that the role of the community is significant in place branding because the community is the perpetrator of the continuity of culture and ideology in a place. Successful brand management should entail developing place branding strategies that appeal to the residents as custodians of the place's culture.

Another branding entity gaining interest among scholars and practitioners is personal branding. Personal branding is a relatively recent invention, but the reality behind it has yet to be (Scheidt et al., 2020). Personal branding has become vital to individuals, society, culture, and the knowledge economy. Individuals use personal branding practices to help them compete in a crowded job market. The aim is to produce a distinction from peers by leveraging one's points of difference and defining an

individual's unique selling proposition (Scheidt et al., 2020). A solid personal brand depends on validation from others who help transform the individual's image.

Although the origin of personal branding traces to the marketing field, its application has cut across various industry professionals seeking to develop a desirable identity. In response to the global digitalization trend, Gorbatov et al. (2019) noted that many career seekers offer their skills and competencies globally and across the boundaries of industries and organizations through personal branding. Vitelar (2019) examined how Generation Z individuals related to personal brands and indicated that developing an online personal brand could help differentiate them in a highly competitive market. Social media managers responsible for managing organizations' brands and online platforms are occupying the forefront of personal branding. Personal branding has become increasingly important due to interconnectedness and high competition from technological advances.

One key characteristic of a successful personal brand is authenticity. Vitelar (2019) stated that authenticity is essential to personal branding efforts. Jacobson (2020) observed that social media managers use personal branding to build their reputation because the work on social media management is an integral part of their professional portfolio that follows them throughout their careers. Gorbatov et al. (2019) emphasized that effective personal branding not only achieves differentiation of a marked self but also conveys values and unique individual characteristics. Personal branding should not only involve creating an image to sell oneself but rather focusing on one's actions, values, and characteristics to attract the interest of the right kind of people.

Branding as a Tool for Value Creation for Companies

Firms use branding in various ways, such as naming the products, targeting, positioning, and communicating its benefits (Aripova, 2021). Over time, the value and worth ascribable to business organizations have transitioned from their physical and tangible assets to intangible assets such as their brand (Ajour El Zein et al., 2019). The transition occurred as businesses began using branding not only for information purposes but also for image-related purposes. According to Ajour El Zein et al., the value of a brand comes from its ability to gain an exclusive, favorable prominent position in the minds of many consumers.

Viewing the brand value paradigm from the customer product relationship perspective, Fernandes and Moreira (2019) described a brand's functional role as the utilitarian values of a brand associated with the objective benefit such as efficiency or reliability and inherent characteristics of the brand attributes. Consumers often signify a brand's functional value to its performance, competence, and durability (Kato, 2021). Researchers have noted that a brand's functional value helps to shape the customers' value proposition for a product (Coelho et al., 2020). Consumers lose trust and are less willing to pay for brands that do not meet their functional value (Yang et al., 2019).

A brand attracts symbolic value when the product or service meets a customer's self-expression or emotional needs. Sulhaini et al. (2021) defined a brand's symbolic value as when a product acts as a signal that shows who the consumer is. Individual consumers and their societies produce symbolic brands by defining their meanings (Sulhaini et al., 2021). Consumers who seek pleasure, comfort, safety, and relaxation

from using a particular brand accrue symbolic or hedonic value (Ekawati et al., 2021). Jin et al. (2018) explored the relationship between young Chinese consumers and Chinese domestic products/brands and found that symbolic values are desirable for Chinese brands in the eyes of young Chinese consumers.

Consumers use social media platforms to share information about brands and influence one another, ultimately creating brands' symbolic or hedonic values (Sulhaini et al., 2021). Ekawati et al. (2021) identified factors such as entertainment, amusement, and excitement of exploring new things that influence consumers in maximizing hedonic values. Hedonic values are also inherent in luxury brands. Mostafa and Arnaout (2019) examined the factors that drive Kuwaiti consumers to purchase luxury brands and found a positive relationship between social status, the need for uniqueness, perceived social image, and luxury consumption. The hedonic brand value affects consumer attitude. Consumers that perceive the hedonic value of a brand create a higher chance of developing an increased purchase attitude towards the brand (Mostafa & Arnaout, 2019).

Customers' experiences with a brand enhance their knowledge of it and tend to increase repeat purchases. Yang et al. (2019) investigated the functional and social benefits of Chinese brands and found that customers' desirability of Chinese brands depends not only on their perceived functionality but also on how much these brands help individuals gain social acceptance. Kim et al. (2019) identified brand value as a significant determinant of customer loyalty. Understanding a brand's functional and symbolic value is vital for businesses because they positively influence customers' purchase behavior.

Social Media, Branding Innovation, and Marketing Communication

Most organizations represent their business and offerings using brand innovations to identify and present the worth of new products and respond to the customer's needs. Huaman Ramirez et al. (2019) defined brand innovation as the ability to recognize and present the usefulness of new things and respond to the needs of consumers. Khamwon and Pattanajak (2021) noted that brand innovation helps to ensure that customers and users recognize, remember, and prefer brand offerings to those of competitors or substitutes. Brand innovations can transform commodities into prized products and convey meaning, intent, and value to their offerings and enterprise.

Social Media

Technological advances have created new capabilities and opportunities for both consumers and firms. Previously, firms used brands as rudimentary signs on products or services to certify their origin (Duarte & Freitas, 2021). However, with the new realities of information, communications, and technology, where media coverage has become dominant and omnipresent, brands have become more human and responsible (Duarte & Freitas, 2021). The hyper-connectivity in the world today, with heightened access to information and people, has allowed existing brands to expand their geographic reach and societal roles (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Brand managers and researchers grappling with these new realities have developed innovative communications strategy constructs such as social media branding, brand anthropomorphism, and crowdsourcing.

Social Media Branding

The proliferation of the internet has made it easier for companies to reach a wider sphere of consumers who have access to much information about brands and alternatives (Iankova et al., 2019). Successful brands do not only encourage, listen, and trust consumers' ideas but also put them into practice. Social media has transformed interaction and communication among individuals worldwide and has become essential to marketing strategies (Dolega et al., 2021). Over the past 15 years, the impact of advertising and marketing via social networks has grown in importance exponentially (Ford, 2019). Social media marketing helps to create new business opportunities, develop a stronger market position, or modify consumer behavior. Besides being a communication tool for amusement, social media has become an essential part of marketing strategies in business.

Despite the growing interest in social media as an effective marketing strategy, a knowledge gap exists in understanding how social media operates. At the beginning of the social media revolution, advertisers and marketers contemplated how the array of media vehicles would become to global consumers, and earlier studies raised questions about whether basic advertising laws could apply in this new environment (Ford, 2019). Various researchers have attempted to study the mechanism and relationship of social media with other marketing tools, such as viral marketing (Motoki et al., 2020). The impact of social media on brand management remains fluid and evolving.

To improve the understanding of social media marketing usage by SMEs, Tajvidi and Karami (2021) provided a new perspective on the effect of social media use on SMEs

and established the influence of social media on firm performance. Furthermore, Tajvidi and Karami found that marketing capabilities, such as branding and innovation, positively and significantly mediate the association between social media use and firm performance. Arora and Sanni (2019) reported that researchers had considered several variables and moderating factors in investigating firms' online presence and communication to optimize social media marketing strategies. The variables include the number of active followers on social platforms, the firm's active response to communication on the sites, how much time viewers spend on the site, market and industry size, and brand attitudes. Arora and Sanni considered other characteristics, such as the social platform functionality and improvement and the firm's ethical approaches.

Data from social media is becoming increasingly important for consumers' and organizations' decision-making processes. The general approach by most systems is to extract a "feeling" value from the comments, use average values of all comments to obtain the overall value of feeling, then create and rank alternatives (Peláez et al., 2019). Organizations face the challenges of correctly understanding the meaning of sentiments, the accuracy of determining the sentiment of comments, and the representation of extracted data. Though social media data analytics presents exciting opportunities, businesses should be cautious of potential biases in the data collection processes. Hargittai (2020) examined these bias issues and found a potential risk of generalizing the findings using data from social network sites to represent the larger population. Social demographics (age, income, ethnicity, and education level) are likely factors that define social network users and essential considerations for businesses using data from social

media networks in making decisions on communicating information about their products and services (Hargittai, 2020). In the online social brand space, increasing consumer and fan engagement is imperative to an organization's performance and its brand's success (Read et al., 2019). Businesses use a brand page, an online tool, to increase their fan and potential consumer base.

The ineffective use of social media sites could pose some risks to businesses. Security concerns are a major negative issue with social media because SMEs can become victims of financial risks through different viruses and spyware (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). Also, there are intellectual property and media risks concerning the protection of third parties or the publication of fake positive reviews (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). Deceitful firms sometimes collaborate with unknown persons and deliberately write fictitious reviews, known as opinion spam, to sound authentic and deceive customers (Aslam et al., 2019). SMEs must be mindful of these risks and pitfalls when deploying social media.

Detecting opinion spams create business challenges by polarizing consumer sentiments, impacting users' online interaction time, and degrading available information quality (Rao et al., 2021). Opinion spam has many forms, e.g., fake reviews, fake comments, fake blogs, fake social network postings, and deceptive texts (Aslam et al., 2019). Consumer concerns regarding data privacy and their ability to trust brands and platforms are additional issues regarding opinion spam. The way consumers, brands, policymakers, and social media platforms adjust and adapt to these concerns is still in flux and without a clear resolution (Appel et al., 2020). The privacy concern could

adversely affect how consumers view brands, and social media is becoming increasingly hostile, causing consumers to sometimes avoid social media presence. Dwivedi et al. (2021) addressed some growing risks and concerns associated with social media use. Dwivedi et al. noted that new social media policies are emerging in the marketing industry aimed at protecting children, preventing misleading advertisements, restricting types of advertising in specific industries (such as cannabis, alcohol, or tobacco), and dictating disclosure requirements for influencer marketing.

Despite an exponential increase in social media-related articles over the past few years, there are existent gaps that future researchers should address. New constructs such as social commerce optimization and social capacitance are emerging opportunities for research that can provide deeper meanings and understanding in social media marketing (Arora & Sanni, 2019). Using three lenses of consumer, industry, and public policy, Appel et al. (2020) explored the future of social media in marketing research. Appel et al. found that the future may go further in blurring the lines between what is online and offline, completely changing how customers and companies interact with one another and how social media influences consumer behavior online and offline.

Social media generates a large amount of data that business practitioners gather and analyze to make business and marketing decisions. Social media analytics is an upcoming trend in marketing research that includes sentiment analysis, natural language processing, text analysis, opinion mining, and predictive and content analysis (Ghani et al., 2019). To identify upcoming trends in social media marketing, Misirlis and Vlachopoulou (2018) used five distinct dimensions/criteria of classification to describe

social media metrics and analytics related to marketing strategy. The five classification dimensions were research methodology, type of analysis, the field of study, marketing objectives, and social media types/platforms. Misirlis and Vlachopoulou found that recent social media research indicates that Facebook and Twitter are the dominant platforms. Therefore, most of the literature focused more on Facebook and Twitter platforms.

Misirlis and Vlachopoulou (2018) concluded that the data used for analysis originates primarily from the two platforms suggesting that more research interest should be on determining the efficiency of other social network platforms as a marketing tool. Another area that provides an opportunity for future research is understanding a firm's ability to identify and leverage customer-owned resources that transform customers from passive receivers of the firm's social media offerings to active value contributors (Appel et al., 2020). Also, new technologies in the market suggest that the future of social media will be more sensory-rich. Appel et al. noted that one technology that has already started infiltrating social media is augmented reality (AR).

Brand Anthropomorphism

For decades, businesses have used brand rhetoric and representations to yield adverts that feature emotional appeals. Often, businesses use representations to humanize brands, making them relatable and attractive to different target customer segments (Sobande, 2020). Consumers are increasingly relating to and evaluating brands by imbuing personalities to products and brands just like they do with people (Lee & Oh, 2021). The brand personality concept addresses how to attract consumers with the human-like characteristics of a brand beyond functional product attributes (Radler, 2018).

Brand anthropomorphism refers to ascribing human-like characteristics and attributes to a brand to enhance consumers' ability to recognize the inherent values of the brand (Golossenko et al., 2020). Ali et al. (2021) noted that consumers naturally tend to anthropomorphize brands because they create a reality of their experiences and observations with a brand. The application of brand anthropomorphism takes the form of knowingly attributing human-like features, human-like minds, or human-like personalities to a brand (Yuan & Dennis, 2020). Therefore, owners of SMEs should be strategic in their branding strategies to improve their financial success and survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Brand anthropomorphism could be an effective branding communication strategy to enhance customer relationships. Brand anthropomorphism could be the primary driver of consumer brand relationships which in some respects are comparable to interpersonal relationships. Wan and Chen (2021) noted that people often experience a sense of comfort and pleasure as emotional responses to object anthropomorphism. Ali et al. (2021) suggested that when consumers anthropomorphize a brand as a person, their love for the brand may develop, leading to a higher level of loyalty. In contemporary digital communications, emojis and emoticons of facial expressions (sad, happy, smiley, sleepy, weepy, e.t.c.) are now available on mobile phones as nonverbal cues replacing text-based communication and infusing human features in mobile communication (Boutet et al., 2021).

Using first-person pronouns such as "I" and "My" to portray a brand has become a dominant marketing practice to foster social relationships with the customer. Amazon's

virtual assistant, Alexa, Apple's Siri, Microsoft's Cortana, and Google Assistant all come alive when using the first-person pronoun "I" (Hoy, 2018). Lee and Oh (2021) found that customers responded more favorably to using these pronouns in hotel advertising than in non-anthropomorphized communications. Yuan and Dennis (2020) showed in their study that consumers valued an anthropomorphism-induced product and were willing to pay more despite no additional benefit. These strategies aim to trigger the customers' perceptions of the brand as a living and social entity, changing how customers think and behave towards the brand (Golossenko et al., 2020).

Crowdsourcing

The direct-to-consumers (D2C) brand-building model that allows brand manufacturers to directly engage with their customers using social, mobile, and digital channels might have given rise to the crowdsourcing construct. Historically, firms relied on the creativity of internal resources and advertising agencies to develop ideas for branding strategies (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2019). Firms seeking deeper consumer relationships assume that valuable ideas and innovation can come from consumers, opening their ideas generation process beyond their internal resources to engage consumers (Derda, 2019). Recently, firms are beginning to experiment with crowdsourcing for new and creative ideas to build their brand. The process entails tapping into consumers' knowledge of the needs and solutions at various stages of new product development to improve innovative performance (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2019). In return, the firm rewards the customers whose ideas were selected.

Crowdsourcing is an innovative product and brand management strategy, especially in large companies (Nakanishi & Syozugawa, 2020). For large companies, crowdsourcing is an opportunity for brand manufacturers to give their customers a chance to participate in the generation of product improvement ideas (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2019). SMEs that have embraced the availability of technological innovations and the internet enhance their capability to implement crowdsourcing in solving problems. Nonetheless, Wulandari and Rahmah (2020) found that there needs to be more aware of crowdsourcing amongst SMEs due to a lack of exposure to the usage of crowdsourcing and minimal knowledge about e-business technology. Devece et al. (2019) suggested that SMEs adopt crowdsourcing to improve business performance.

Forbes and Schaefer (2018) observed that the construct of crowdsources is still in flux regarding its definition, implementation, and application to product development. Practitioners have adopted and applied several notions of crowdsourcing, such as crowdsending, crowdfunding, crowdvoting, and crowdsolving, making it a challenge to clearly define the construct (Dahl & Hofstetter, 2021; Wichman et al., 2022). In the context of online platforms and innovation contests, Dahl and Hofstetter (2021) identified the possibility of crowdsourcing participants relying on other customers' ideas for inspiration as a critical risk. According to Forbes and Schaefer, the state of flux explains the limited adoption of crowdsourcing in product development.

Branding Innovation

Branding innovation reflects an organization's ambitious, competitive effort resulting in a branding strategy to meet the customers' needs. Organizations that perceive

a problem or try to address unmet customers' needs initiate the iterative process of innovation, leading to the development, production, and marketing of an offering (Duarte & Freitas, 2021). Purchase and Volery (2020) suggested that branding is integral to marketing innovation by giving meaning to new products and services and facilitating their launch. Huaman Ramirez et al. (2019) defined brand innovation as the ability to recognize and present the usefulness of new things and respond to the needs of consumers. Business leaders adopt branding innovations to aid consumers in recognizing, remembering, and preferring brand offerings to those of competitors or substitutes (Khamwon & Pattanajak, 2021).

Branding innovation capabilities enable organizations to apply the technological innovations needed to develop new products and fulfill survival needs in a competitive market. Kristijono et al. (2020) stated that innovation is one of the leading resources that drive a company's success in the market to accept and implement new ideas, processes, products, and services. Leckel et al. (2020) reported that brand innovation is a component of the company's success and that innovation relies on technology for the marketing communication performance of SMEs. Brand innovation requires much effort, and achieving innovative performance requires great sacrifices.

Innovation and technology are increasingly influencing branding communication strategies. With the explosion of internet technology, digital advertising is currently the fastest-growing category of advertising, enabling businesses to work smarter and faster (Lee & Oh, 2021). According to Zhuofan et al. (2015), the rise and prominence of businesses in today's world rest on their technological capacities and their expressed

expertise in driving their marketing goals across various networks and social platforms. Branding enables consumers to differentiate one product from another. The more familiar a product is, the easier it is to market its product widely. Kurnianto and Dhewi (2022) stated that a good product becomes more visible with the power of a brand. Innovative branding is essential to differentiate products from competitors in the same category (Fitriani et al., 2021). Setiawan (2020) noted that brand strategy includes brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality. Businesses might improve their brand competence by utilizing technology or design innovation mechanisms.

The outcome of brand innovations and other capabilities might vary across firm sizes. Ogunsanya (2021) stated that brand innovation increases sales performance relationships in business management. Afriyie et al. (2019) opined that brand innovation positively affects marketing performance. By implementing brand innovations, owners of small businesses can achieve optimal performance as large firms equally. Small businesses may become more innovative because they have greater flexibility, versatility, and capacity to adapt to market communications.

Innovation is the degree to which organizations use technology to improve processes, products, and services and move from the existing state (Odoom & Mensah, 2019). Businesses may improve their brand competence by utilizing technology innovation or design innovation management mechanisms. Innovative branding is essential to show the difference between goods or services (Fitriani et al., 2021). Label packaging displays complete information about the product, thereby increasing consumer appeal. The more familiar a product is, the easier it is to market its product widely.

Marketing Communication

Marketing communication strategy might be a source of innovation and competitive strength since marketing communication and implementation positively affect SMEs' innovative performance (Finoti et al., 2017). Afriyie et al. (2019) posited that brand innovation positively affects marketing performance. Odoom and Mensah (2019) stated that brand innovation increases sales performance relationships in business. SMEs need to find new ways of operation through the lens of brand innovation (Gerlitz et al., 2021). SMEs may need support to trigger innovations to attract new investments and businesses (Gerlitz et al., 2021). SMEs should adopt a brand innovation-driven strategy and view marketing communications as a continuous, holistic process.

Building a solid brand and marketing communication could transform SMEs into large successful brands. In the retail business, digital marketing using social media tools and platforms has led to more customer engagement and more traffic, aside from being faster and more efficient than traditional marketing (Dolega et al., 2021). Both buyers and sellers now look forward to building long-term relationships with their consumers via the internet communities. Organizations should generate and communicate relevant innovations to sustain financial performance and achieve a competitive advantage in highly competitive business environments (Bagherzadeh et al., 2022). Digital marketing communication is essential for businesses to strengthen and promote innovation.

Marketing communication has a positive effect on the brand innovative performance of SMEs. Kurnianto and Dhewi (2022) stated that the rapid growth of technology on the internet and the digital world has significantly impacted marketing.

Most businesses are increasingly using social media and taking advantage of the opportunity to expand their marketing communications and raise their brand awareness (Amoako et al., 2019). There was a transition in the global marketing trend from traditional to digital communication. Thus, social media marketing has become more effective, allowing potential customers to access a wide range of product information and transact over the internet. As a result of these advantages, social media has become a most helpful tool for marketing communication. SMEs should adopt social media as a form of innovative marketing communication.

Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria

SMEs are becoming dominant in most global economies, providing job opportunities and reducing unemployment in many countries (Hardi & Puspitowati, 2022). The role of SMEs in community empowerment, poverty alleviation, employment generation, and income distribution are some of the factors contributing to their growing importance (Al-Tit et al., 2019). SMEs are vital to a nation's quest for economic growth and development. SMEs' potential for economic development cuts across developed and developing economies (Jibir et al., 2018).

In Nigeria, SMEs play a significant role in the nation's economic development. SMEs are the bedrock of Nigeria's industrialization and economic plan and a significant component of the national economic recovery and growth plan (Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Jibir et al. (2018) stated that SMEs contribute significantly to the GDP and national economic performance. Ogunsanya (2021) indicated that SMEs are the most common type of business in Nigeria, providing most of the daily needs of the

populace. Key benefits of SMEs in Nigeria include employment generation, income redistribution, industrial diversification, and increased competitiveness (Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Ogunsanya (2021) reiterated the perception of SMEs in Nigeria as an alternative means to escape paid employment to make quick money for personal survival, thus devoid of any long-term investment that could nurture its survival and sustainability.

Over the years, the number of SMEs in Nigeria has increased due to less capital, human resources, technical know-how, and managerial skills required to start (Tahir & Inuwa, 2019). Despite the rise in the number and the considerable potential contribution to Nigeria's economic development, owners of SMEs have been unable to yield the expected benefits to propel economic growth and development (Jayeola et al., 2018). Unemployment is still rising, poverty is increasing, and the national GDP is very low for a national population of nearly 200 million, resulting from the low survival rate and sustainability of SMEs in Nigeria.

Gumel (2019) found that small businesses face massive failure within the first 5 years of operation due to ownership, enterprise, and external business environment challenges. Lack of access to finance, poor infrastructural facilities, lack of access to technology, and insecurity are some socio-economic factors that negate the growth and sustainability of SMEs in Nigeria (Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Tahir & Inuwa, 2019). To mitigate these challenges, Gumel suggested some remedies, including (a) government policies facilitating cheap loans and provision of adequate infrastructure such as electricity, (b) elimination of double taxation, and (c) SMEs' adoption of internet-

based technology. Ali Qalati et al. (2020) found that social media adoption positively impacts SME performance. Therefore, SMEs in Nigeria should consider adopting innovative business strategies for long-term sustainability and survival (Agada et al., 2021).

Brand Equity and SMEs' Success

The power of a brand is in what customers have heard, learned, felt, and seen about the brand due to their lived experiences (Atilgan et al., 2009). Pina and Dias (2021) defined brand equity as the difference in consumer choice between the local branded product given the same level of product features. He et al. (2020) described brand equity as the firm's and customers' cognition of products and services. He et al. proposed that research and development could enhance the impact of brand equity on a firm's productivity. Firms measure brand equity due to their strategic role in building brand value. Substantial brand equity increases the prospects for brand extension strategy while offering protection from the competition (Beig & Nika, 2019).

Brand equity helps marketers focus, allowing them to interpret past marketing performance and design future marketing programs. Keller (2001) stressed that brand name is the most central of all brand elements when developing brand equity. Consumers' capacity to recognize or remember a brand's product varies depending on the proportion of brand marketing communication or consumer perception of the brand. Kurnianto and Dhewi (2022) stated that brand awareness is the ability of consumers to recognize or recall a brand, and customers respond to products or services based on the brand. Brand equity development is a necessary imperative for SME success.

Owners of product-driven SMEs tend to undervalue the potential of branding strategies as a valuable business asset. Therefore, owners of SMEs view branding as a business process for mainly large firms. Modern SMEs are adopting digital marketing communication tools and techniques as a necessity for growth and sustainability (Dumitriu et al., 2019). Building stronger brands could provide several benefits, such as better audience targeting and reducing traditional marketing expenses. Dumitriu et al. (2019) proposed a conceptual model to showcase the framework that links digital marketing techniques and tools and other vital elements that could increase brand equity for SMEs, thereby contributing to their growth and enhancing sustainability levels. According to AbdGhani et al. (2020), brand equity is considered one of the most critical organizational resources to ensure the strength of their companies. AbdGhani et al. opined that exploring the sources of brand equity is critical for businesses because higher brand equity increases revenue and lowers costs, leading to greater profits.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-economic contexts that characterize Nigeria's SMEs have affected SMEs' growth potential, leading to business failures. Ogunsanya (2021) observed that the socio-economic milieu characterized by institutional failures and acute poverty resulted in the heightened struggle for basic survival necessities and accounted for why the small business branding in Nigeria appears set for the ongoing malaise. However, consensual scholarly and practical facts suggest that branding is necessary for SMEs' survival and growth (Ogunsanya, 2021). Being endowed with immense human and capital resources, Ogunsanya concluded that Nigerian SMEs have the potential to become strong and competitive brands. Hafez

(2021) provided valuable insights for businesses to successfully manage SME activities that generate consumer interest in the corporate brand and prevent switching behavior. SMEs in Nigeria must understand the factors that could improve their branding potential.

For SMEs' success, brand equity is a critical factor (Dumitriu et al., 2019). A company must develop an appropriate reputation because buyers use the brand name to signal quality and value. Therefore, SME businesses must pay attention to the quality of their products and develop products that follow customer expectations of the brand to maintain brand equity. An SME's growth and long-term sustainability hinge on a marketing campaign that develops solid and differentiated brands from its competitors (Dumitriu et al., 2019). Hardi and Puspitowati (2022) stated that success is a company's growth and financial performance measured in volume, relative changes in net income, value growth, and relative changes in equity.

According to Kurnianto and Dhewi (2022), substantial brand equity is essential to raise a product's brand awareness and increasing marketing effectiveness. Branding is very impactful on a company's success in marketing its products. Stakeholders need to strengthen brand equity by building a strategy to compete with the most common competitors in the marketplace. Kotler and Keller (2009) stated that the role of brand equity is to create value addition to the products and services, thereby making the business survive and advance. Brand equity is an excellent public estimation of a product or service with the brand (Wilson, 2020). Brand equity affects SMEs' success because a brand reputation is identical to a company's reputation and positively influences customer loyalty to its products (Keni et al., 2021). SMEs' service excellence means

providing services that exceed customers' expectations and delight them (Hardi & Puspitowati, 2022).

Researchers indicated that reliable delivery of brand equity positively influences the success of SMEs (Hardi & Puspitowati, 2022). Reputable brand equity would have all-around advantages, including consumer loyalty. When consumers are consistently pleased with a particular brand, they will be loyal to its products and less likely to switch to other brands (Atulkar, 2020). Consumers would also like to share their good experiences with family and friends (Hardi & Puspitowati, 2022). The businesses might have an advantage over competitors because they would attract consumers to shop again by recommending the business to their friends.

Brand equity improvement plays a significant role in the success of SMEs' branding. The quality of brand equity in SMEs must continuously improve to create and increase customer loyalty, thus boosting SME success. According to Hardi and Puspitowati (2022), SMEs improve brand equity by improving their products' value and enhancing customers' experience. SMEs may face some challenges in building substantial brand equity. Due to SMEs' limited resources compared with larger companies, SMEs generally depend on collaborations with business partners to develop innovations internally for survival (Leckel et al., 2020). Despite the challenges that SMEs might face in brand building, it is inevitable for SMEs to survive without a strong brand culture.

Transition and Summary

Section 1 of this study included discussions on the background of using branding strategies for the survival of SMEs beyond the first 5 years of operation, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the nature of the study. I justified the qualitative multiple case study design and the conceptual framework anchored on the CBBE model using peer-reviewed sources. Section 1 also contained the operational definition of terms; assumptions, limitations, delimitations; and the significance of the study. In the literature review, I articulated the significance of branding as a strategic marketing tool and its importance for SMEs' success. In Section 2, I restate the purpose statement, discuss the role of the researcher, explain the research methods and designs used for this study, and examine ethical research issues concerning participants, population and sampling. I conclude Section 2 of this study with a narrative on data collection instruments and techniques, data organization techniques and analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present an overview of the study and research findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and future research, reflections, and summary and study conclusions

Section 2: The Project

This study focused on the branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive in business beyond 5 years. In this section, I restate the purpose of the study and discuss the role of the researcher, participants, research methods and design, population and sampling, and issues related to ethical research. Furthermore, I present narratives on data collection instruments and technique, data organization techniques and analysis, and discuss the reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The sample population consisted of six participants selected from three SMEs in Nigeria's southern region who had successfully used branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to obtain revenue growth and sustainability for Nigerian SMEs, which could increase overall taxes and employment for the community. An increase in the tax base might translate into more revenue that community leaders could use to provide more social services to residents of communities.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative research study, the role of the researcher includes selecting participants and organizing and analyzing data (Collins & Stockton, 2022). The role of the researcher depends on the aim of the research, the theoretical or conceptual stance, and the researcher's personality and values (Postholm, 2019). For a qualitative study, the

researcher is primarily responsible for collecting all the data through interviews, observations, document reviews, and through firsthand reflections (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The role of the researcher includes collecting data, analyzing the data, selecting the appropriate research method, and designing and managing the research process to inculcate ethical considerations and eliminate personal bias (Hargis, 2020; Torelli, 2019). According to Yin (2018), the role of the researcher includes (a) data collection, (b) data organization, (c) data analysis, (d) data interpretation, (e) a review of the literature to gather relevant information, (f) identification and engagement of participants, and (g) data storage and security. For the study at hand, my role as the researcher included (a) collecting literature materials on branding strategies SME owners use to survive in business beyond the first 5 years of operation; (b) formulating appropriate interview questions; (c) conducting interviews to collect data; (d) transcribing, coding, and analyzing data; (e) presenting study findings; and (f) maintaining ethical standards.

The relationship between the researcher and the participants should be cordial during the research process. Merriam and Grenier (2019) suggested that researchers should reflect on their relationships to the study and make decisions in the design so that the relationships do not affect the research outcomes. To ensure a transparent research process, the researcher should declare prior interactions with aspects of the research and practice self-reflection, acknowledge existing preferences, and express their positionality in the research process (Holmes, 2020). I had no prior personal or professional relationships with the participants of this study. From 2011 to 2023, I owned an oil and gas training business facility, providing specialized training and maintenance services to

Nigeria's oil and gas industry. Since venturing into the business world, I realized that most SMEs fail to exist soon after they come into existence. In this study, my primary motivation was to explore ways SMEs' owners in the southern region of Nigeria could utilize branding strategies to survive in their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operations.

The role of the researcher also includes adhering to the ethical research issues outlined in The Belmont Report. In 1978, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects produced The Belmont Report, which outlined the ethical principles and guidelines for protecting human subjects from abuse. The Belmont Report contains procedures to ensure that researchers adhere to the following three principles: (a) respect for participants, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). Respect for participants incorporates acknowledging individual autonomy and protecting individuals with diminished autonomy (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). Under the principle, participants have the right to participate voluntarily in studies with adequate information.

I communicated with the participants about the purpose of the research and the research procedure before providing the participants with the opportunity to ask questions on ethical issues. The principle of beneficence entails acts that protect the participants from harm and maximize the possible benefits of research (Brenna & Das, 2021). The principle of justice refers to issues of fairness in the distribution of research benefits and burdens (Brothers et al., 2019). To further my skills in this area, I attended the Collaboration Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training course on protecting human

research participants and obtained the CITI certification (see Appendix A). Following the principles of *The Belmont Report*, I gave participants the freedom to assess the risks and benefits of taking part in a study and voluntarily choose to participate through an informed consent process. I will share a summary of the study findings and conclusion with the participants, which could benefit their business.

The researcher is responsible for mitigating bias in a research study by maintaining objectivity throughout the research process (Mallon & Elliott, 2019). Johnson et al. (2020) stated that the researcher's preconceptions might influence the qualitative research process. A researcher could ensure bias-free research by having an evaluative mindset and self-assessment of the objectivity level (Dash & Verma, 2019). Some of the techniques qualitative researchers use to mitigate bias include (a) making sure they reach data saturation during the interview process; (b) using consent form and interview protocol to engage participants; (c) conducting member checking on data collected to ensure validity; and (d) ensuring interview questions are validated by experts and well-constructed to minimize bias (Yin, 2018). I used an informed consent form and interview protocol (see Appendix B) to gain the participants' attention to obtain data and information. Additionally, I carried out member checking by conducting the initial interview with the participants, interpreting the information shared by the participants, and finally sharing the interpretation with the participants for validation. Data saturation occurs when no new information, data, or themes emerge from the researcher's interviewing process (Guest et al., 2020). I conducted interviews with the participants by asking the interview questions (see Appendix D) until no new information and themes

emerged to ensure data saturation. I also asked the same open-ended questions to each of the six participants using the same data collection technique until no new information or pattern emerged.

Interview protocols are essential tools researchers use to extract detailed and rich data to understand the participants' experiences (Frost et al., 2020). Developing interview protocols helps researchers maintain a systematic method to secure information related to the research question (Braaten et al., 2020). A well-prepared interview protocol could contribute to the reliability and validity of research by ensuring the researcher adopts a uniform and consistent approach during the data collection stage of the study (Hoover et al., 2018). One benefit of the interview protocol is the reduction of bias during the data collection process. In this study, I used the interview protocol (see Appendix B) to organize the interview process and to minimize the possibility of personal bias.

Participants

Selecting suitable and appropriate participants for a research study is critical to ensure the credibility and validity of the research outcome (Yin, 2018). Wong et al. (2021) stated that recruiting and selecting research participants should depend on exclusion and inclusion criteria set by the researcher. Researchers should select participants with the required knowledge and experience regarding the research topic and phenomenon (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). According to Zong et al. (2021), researchers should have a set of criteria for selecting participants based on competencies and suitability for the study. I selected six participants from three SMEs in the southern region of Nigeria based on the following criteria: (a) had to be an owner of an SME, (b)

had been in business for at least 5 years of operation, and (c) used branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation successfully.

Gaining access to participants in a qualitative case study could be a complicated process. The researcher should explore several strategies to gain access to participants, including the purposive sampling technique, informed consent form, and interview protocol (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Peltoniemi & Suomi, 2019). After obtaining approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I sent a letter of invitation (see Appendix C) and the informed consent form to each of the target participants. The informed consent form contained information on the purpose of the study and sought the willingness of the participants to engage in the study. To identify the study participants, I used my business and professional networks. All the participants responded positively by consenting to participate in the study via return email. I accessed the participants through phone calls and also scheduled the interview appointments. Qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to choose participants who can provide in-depth information about the phenomenon under investigation (Townsend, 2019). I used a purposive sampling technique to gain access to the population for this study.

A researcher should establish a good working relationship with the participants to encourage openness and sharing of information about the research phenomenon (Kraft et al., 2019). Interaction and relationship-building in a research study are vital strategies a researcher can use to establish a good working relationship with study participants (Franco & Yang, 2021). Lawrence (2020) proposed using emails, telephone calls, and online social media platforms to establish relationships with participants. I established a

working relationship with the participants of this study by using telephone calls, email, and social media channels such as Twitter, Instagram, and Zoom contacts to share information about the research phenomenon. Researchers use the consent form to understand the study and associated risks clearly, solicit participants' consent to participate, and safeguard the participants' freedom to participate or withdraw from the study (Xu et al., 2020). I established a good working relationship with each of the participants by explaining the purpose of the study, respecting their views and cultural backgrounds, and providing assurance that their information would be kept confidential.

Research Method and Design

Selecting an appropriate research method and design for a study is critical to the success of the research process. Olajide and Lawal (2020) identified the research methods available to researchers, which are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. I used the qualitative method for this study. Some qualitative research designs include case study, phenomenological, ethnographic, and narrative designs (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). For the study, I used the multiple case study design to explore the branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Method

Qualitative researchers seek to explain the *what*, *how*, and *why* of a phenomenon by exploring the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the phenomenon under study (Willig, 2019). Researchers adopting a qualitative approach tend to address questions beyond what works towards what works for whom, when, how, and why (Busetto et al., 2020). Qualitative researchers use rich descriptive data to

uncover deeper meanings and explain human experiences and behaviors to make sense of a complex phenomenon (Willig, 2019). The qualitative method is characterized by flexibility, openness, and responsiveness to context (Busetto et al., 2020). The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because the intent was to explore and gain a profound understanding of a complex phenomenon. By conducting semistructured interviews using open-ended questions and reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts, I collected data on the branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Quantitative researchers seek empirical evidence by examining reality using data and mathematical and statistical processes to understand the relationships between variables (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). Specifically, researchers using quantitative methods understand the limitation in capturing the meanings people attach to social phenomena (Aschauer, 2021). Some researchers consider the quantitative research method effective in terms of summaries and the analysis of numerical data (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). In a quantitative study, researchers use statistical tools to analyze data and to ensure the generalizability of study findings and results (Godwin et al., 2021). Some scholars have questioned the suitability of quantitative research in assessing ideas and experiences of the social world (Powell, 2020). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because I did not intend to test the hypothesis relating to the branding strategies that owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

A mixed methods research methodology is an approach that combines quantitative and qualitative research methods in the same research inquiry (Baltrusch et

al., 2020). Researchers use mixed methods to combine and utilize both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analytical procedures (Gilmartin & Esterhuizen, 2020). Researchers use mixed methods to gain or advance knowledge of the connections or contradictions between qualitative and quantitative data (Shorten & Smith, 2017). Researchers using mixed methods aim to facilitate different avenues of exploration that could enrich the evidence and answer the research question more deeply (Shorten & Smith, 2017). Some researchers have argued that using mixed methods enables a researcher to understand a phenomenon better (Stahl et al., 2019). The mixed methods approach was not appropriate for this study because I did not intend to examine, collect, analyze, and integrate two data types that could lead to additional research time and funding.

Research Design

Some of the research designs qualitative researchers may use include case study, ethnographic, phenomenological, and narrative inquiry (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Using the case study design, a researcher could advance a more in-depth and focused approach that enriches and enhances the quality of the study (Alpi & Evans, 2019). Qualitative researchers use the case study design to explore a phenomenon and to obtain a clearer picture of the research findings (Nilmanat & Kurniawan, 2021). Apart from enhanced differentiation, improved brand focus, and context localization, researchers using the case study design tend to facilitate more vital positions for organizations within their specific context (Eugenio-Vela et al., 2019). Similarly, business and management researchers gain insights into real-world business problems using the case study research design to provide

solutions to business problems (Yin, 2018). I used the multiple case study design for this study.

I did not use a single case study design for this study because data obtained using multiple case study design from different study locations are more compelling and could make case study research more robust than a single case study design, as suggested by Schmidt et al. (2018). In addition, Schmidt et al. (2018) stated that a multiple case study is the most appropriate model to examine the organizational realities in a real-life setting through an in-depth exploration of a few cases. For this study, I used the multiple case study design over the single case study design because it was more robust and appropriate to explore the branding strategies SME owners use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Other qualitative designs I considered include phenomenological, ethnographic, and narrative designs. Researchers use the phenomenological design to comprehend how members of the target population view themselves concerning practical acts of living accessed through narratives, observations, and increased awareness of lived experiences (Awuviry-Newton et al., 2020). According to Engward and Goldspink (2020), the phenomenological design entails participants' lived experiences, the narratives, meanings, and interpretations they ascribe to previous experiences. Awuviry-Newton et al. noted that phenomenological design did not provide a theory for generalizing or predicting phenomena. The phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study because the goal was not to understand the unique lived experiences of a target population.

Ethnographic research design studies the lived expectations, complexities, contradictions, possibilities and grounds of any given cultural group and requires the researcher to live among the people they study (Zilber, 2020). Researchers use ethnographic research design to explore human social activities and culture-based knowledge through participants' observation (Cubellis et al., 2021; Schubert & Röhl, 2019). Ethnographic design is appropriate when the goal is to describe how a cultural group works or to explore the shared lived experiences resulting in a complex and complete description of a group's culture (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Ethnographic design is usually helpful when the researcher is conducting research in a single setting and typically involves lengthy participation or immersion in everyday life of a chosen group of people (Renjith et al., 2021). The ethnographic design was inappropriate for this study because the intent was not to observe participants, explore social activities, or investigate cultural issues.

The narrative design focuses on how people tell their personal stories and the relationship those stories have with people's lived histories (Harper et al., 2020). Narrative research encompasses the study of individual experiences and learning the significance of those experiences (Renjith et al., 2021). One consideration for narrative design is that the story should be some event or experience that has caused change within the person or specific situation (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The narrative design was unsuitable for this study because I did not intend to use events or happenings to develop a story on branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Data saturation is the point in the data collection when additional data do not result in new meaningful themes (Guest et al., 2020). As a critical element in a multiple case study design, data saturation enables the researcher to ensure research quality and validity (Yin, 2018). Data saturation or informational redundancy relates to the degree to which new data repeats itself in previous interviews (Saunders et al., 2018). According to Gill (2020), a researcher can reach data saturation when collecting data by selecting and interviewing participants with experience in the phenomenon. I conducted interviews with six SME owners to attain data saturation. To achieve data saturation using the multiple case study design, I continued interviewing participants until no new information or themes emerged.

Population and Sampling

Researchers may use different sampling techniques to select a sample size from a population because it may only be possible to study some of the population (Schreier, 2018). The population of a study should reflect the entire set of events, individuals, or objects that display the characteristics the researcher intends to study (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2019). To achieve a credible research outcome, a qualitative researcher should carefully consider selecting research participants using a sampling technique that aligns with the research objectives and phenomenon (Yin, 2018). This study's target population consisted of six owners of SMEs from three SMEs located in the southern region of Nigeria. I selected the participants for this study using three criteria. The selection criteria include: (a) had to be an owner of an SME, (b) had been in business for at least 5 years of

operation, and (c) used branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation successfully.

Sampling methods in qualitative research include purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling (Ames et al., 2019). For this study, I conducted a purposive sampling to select six owners of SMEs in the southern region of Nigeria who had successfully used branding strategies to survive in their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation. Researchers use the purposeful sampling technique to identify variations in the data and relevant codes and themes to answer the research question (Hjertstrand et al., 2021). The benefits of the purposive sampling technique in qualitative research include obtaining appropriate and valuable information from the informants and using limited resources effectively (Campbell et al., 2020). Purposive sampling enables a researcher to improve rigor and trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bagheri et al., 2019). Yin (2018) stated that qualitative researchers could use a sample size of between two and 50 participants. The sample size of six participants was adequate for the qualitative study requirement.

Qualitative researchers should carefully consider the interview setting, either physical or virtual, to ensure the convenience of participants as well as protect their privacy (McGrath et al., 2019). For this study, I conducted interviews via telephone conference or Zoom interaction. I requested the participants to select the best and more comfortable interview options and convenient times. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I did not conduct the face-to-face interviews.

Data saturation occurs when no new information, data, or themes emerge from the researcher's interview session (Guest et al., 2020). Saunders et al. (2018) stated that qualitative researchers must reach data saturation to justify using a particular sample size. Qualitative researchers achieve data saturation when extra data collected do not result in new themes, perspectives, and insight into the study's phenomenon for further analysis and coding (Farquhar et al., 2020). In this study, I continued to ask participants questions during the interview process until no new information or themes emerged.

Ethical Research

Researchers should address ethical issues related to using human participants in a research study. According to Davies (2020), qualitative researchers must pay attention to research ethics and professional codes of conduct when conducting studies with human subjects. Qualitative researchers should adhere to the three fundamental principles recommended in *The Belmont Report* in dealing with the research participants. *The Belmont Report* of 1979 prescribed ethical research principles and protocols a researcher working with human subjects must follow, including (a) *respect for persons*, (b) *beneficence*, and (c) *justice* (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). The principle of *respect for persons* incorporates the conviction that acknowledges individual autonomy and protection for individuals with diminished autonomy. Participants have the right to participate voluntarily with adequate information and to withdraw voluntarily (Hicks et al., 2021). For this study, I communicated with the participants about the purpose of the research and the research procedure and provided them with the opportunity to ask questions on ethical issues.

The principle of *beneficence* entails acts that protect the participants from harm and maximize the possible benefits of research (Brenna & Das, 2021). I will share a summary of the study findings and conclusions with the participants, which could benefit their businesses. Also, I ensured the privacy and protection of all information provided by participants. The principle of *justice* refers to issues of fairness in the distribution of research benefits and burdens (Brothers et al., 2019). I allowed participants to assess the risks and benefits of participating in a study and voluntarily accept through an informed consent process to participate. I completed the human research participant training as a requirement by Walden University and obtained the CITI certification (see Appendix A), covering research ethics on human subjects. I sought and obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University before embarking on the data collection process from the participants. The IRB approval number for this study is 02-03-23-1022232.

Qualitative researchers using human participants must provide intended participants with requisite and adequate information on the research as a basis for deciding whether to participate using the informed consent form (Sivasubramaniam et al., 2021). Xu et al. (2020) described the informed consent process as respecting intended participants by allowing them to make voluntary participation choices based on sufficient information usually documented in a consent form that participants read, complete, and sign. I started the informed consent process by emailing participants a letter of invitation for study participation (see Appendix C), introducing myself, and explaining the research objectives. Next, I sent the informed consent form to each participant by email detailing

research information, participation requirements, and consent to participate in the study.

For the participant who decided to be part of the study, I requested they individually reply to the email with the word “I consent.”

Participants should be allowed to withdraw their participation at any time during the research process (Clayton, 2020). A portion of the informed consent form contained information stating clearly the process that participants wishing to withdraw from the study should follow. The participant can withdraw from the study at any time by informing the researcher by phone or email without stating any reason (Clayton, 2020). No participant withdrew from this study. Giving incentives or payment could lead participants to conceal or fabricate misleading information (Fernandez Lynch et al., 2019). I informed the participants that there was no payment or other incentive for participating in this study.

Researchers are responsible for protecting participants from harm and ensuring confidentiality by keeping all relevant data in a secure location (Adashi et al., 2018). Protecting research participants includes ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of the information provided and data storage and complying with institutional and legislative requirements (Antonio et al., 2020). To ensure the confidentiality and protection of the names of the participants and the owners of SMEs, I assigned alphanumeric codes (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6) to identify the participants, and B1, B2, and B3 for the names of the SMEs. I used secured passwords to store the data obtained from participants. After 5 years of completing this study, I will delete the data and shred all confidential documents.

Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative data collection instruments are the channels through which the researcher answers the research question (Saunders et al., 2018). The primary role of a researcher in qualitative research is to serve as the main instrument for data collection and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). I served as the main instrument for data collection and analysis for this study. Qualitative researchers use different techniques to collect data, including structured, unstructured, and semistructured interviews; observation; document search; and review of archival documents (Ballena, 2021; Yin, 2018). The key instrument for data collection in this study was semistructured interviews (see Appendix D). Additionally, I collected and reviewed organizational documents, such as company brochures, flyers, administrative documents, and annual performance reports.

Semistructured interviews are the most common qualitative data collection technique researchers use to engage participants in a conversation using open-ended questions to seek insights into a participant's experience of a phenomenon (McGrath et al., 2019; Tavory, 2020). Using the interview protocol (see Appendix B) as a guide, I interviewed eligible participants using open-ended interview questions and asked follow-up questions to participants. During the interviews, I gained rich insights into the branding strategies owners of SMEs used to survive in business beyond the first 5 years of operation. Furthermore, I sought and obtained some company documents and archival records during data collection to facilitate methodological triangulation.

In a qualitative research study, the researcher is responsible for ensuring the reliability and validity of the data collection instruments and process (Huttunen &

Kakkori, 2020). Methodological triangulation is collecting and analyzing data from multiple sources, such as interviews, archival documents, field notes, and observations (Natow, 2019). Through the process of member checking, researchers validate data by sending the interpretation of interview responses to participants to cross-check the accuracy of the information provided (Slettebø, 2021). I carried out member checking by conducting the initial interview with the participants, then I interpreted the information shared by the participants. Finally, I shared the interpretation with the participants for validation by confirming via return email that the interpretations were accurate. I also conducted methodological triangulation by comparing member-checked data with data from my review of company documents and found that data alignment had occurred.

Data Collection Technique

Qualitative researchers use different data collection techniques such as surveys, interviews, direct or participant observations, site visits, video recordings, reviews of a company or archival documents, and a sample of existing data or records to obtain data in a study (Lobe et al., 2020). In a qualitative multiple case study, the following data collection techniques are available to a researcher, including (a) organizational documentation such as emails, annual reports, and archival records; (b) semistructured interviews; (c) videoconferencing; and (d) direct observations (Gruß et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). One of the techniques qualitative researchers use to conduct interviews from a distance instead of face-to-face interviews in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic is telephone interviews (Lobe et al., 2020). Due to the relaxed COVID-19 restrictions, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix B) and interview questions (see Appendix D)

to conduct face-to-face interviews. I left the interview time at the discretion of the participants. During the interview process, I took notes and conducted digital audio recordings of the participants' responses to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data collected.

Organizational documents provide data sources helpful in understanding the organization's past events, activities, and programs. Yin (2018) noted that organizational documents are primarily helpful for corroborating and augmenting evidence from other data sources. Synthesizing and evaluating data contained in documents could help researchers make sense of data from interviews (Mackieson et al., 2019). Reviewing and analyzing organizational documents could expose researchers to a voluminous set of data, which could result in a complex, time-consuming task (Mackieson et al., 2019). The review of organizational document was not time consuming for me, as I did not find them to be voluminous. The review of organizational documents allowed me to probe deeper into the firms' activities to gain better insights of the successful branding strategies and achieve methodological triangulation.

One main advantage of using the semistructured interview as a data collection technique is that researchers could develop questions surrounding predetermined themes to allow for flexibility in discussions and clarifications through follow-up questions during the interview of participants (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). According to Yin (2018), a significant side effect of using a semistructured interview technique for data collection is the possibility of the researcher's interjection of explicit or covert statements that may connote personal opinions and influence participants' responses. Using a

semistructured interview technique for data collection can also introduce bias in a study due to poor construction of questions or participants' basing their responses on personal interpretation (Yin, 2018). Despite the potential disadvantages of using semistructured interviews as a data collection strategy, researchers found the strategy very useful (Ahlin, 2019). Due to the relaxed COVID-19 restrictions, I conducted face-to-face interviews using the same interview questions (see Appendix D) and followed the guidelines in the interview protocol (see Appendix B). During the interview, I informed that participants that I could re-phrase the interview questions for clarity. Where the participants' responses were vague, I probed for more detailed responses and sought for additional information to increase understanding and clarification. I monitored the time to ensure that the interview did not elapse beyond the stipulated time frame. I recorded the participants' responses using a recording device. After interviewing each participant, I double-checked the device to ensure that the responses were recorded and there was no failure on the device.

The researcher could conduct a pilot study before the actual research to identify aspects of the research design that require adjustment (Lowe, 2019). A pilot study presents a practical opportunity for the researcher to test the effectiveness of the research instrument, identify possible weaknesses in the research design, and check the alignment of the proposed study process (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Pilot studies are more effective in research with a higher population sample size (Pearson et al., 2020). However, the sample size of the population could constrain the use of a pilot study. I did not conduct a pilot study for this study because pilot studies are more suitable for quantitative research

and not applicable to this study. Furthermore, I used the experts' validation strategy to obtain the views of the doctoral study committee experts that the interview questions are clear, understandable, and flexible, and participants can answer them quickly. Also, I verified the effectiveness of the interview protocol through accurate recording of participants' responses and member checking.

Transcript review and member checking are techniques through which participants self-review and adjust transcribed materials and the researcher's interpretation to align with canvassed information provided during interview sessions (Slettebø, 2021). According to Ellis (2019), transcript review and member checking as participants' self-confirming activities enable the researcher to achieve quality data collection, analysis, and research outcomes. Member checking allows the participants to validate the results of interpreted data or research findings for accuracy and, if necessary, provide corrections to the researcher to achieve accurate information (Brear, 2019). I adopted the member checking process to enhance the validity and reliability of the study by emailing my data interpretation summary of the transcripts to each participant for validation.

Data Organization Techniques

A researcher should ensure proper organization and storage of research data (Borycz, 2021). Data organization entails developing a file naming system, storage protocol, and secured access procedure during the mandated retention period to ensure ease of retrievability and uphold participants' confidentiality (Bohan & Kellam, 2021). According to Lindlof and Tylor (2019), data organization in research is also an approach

to enhance the reliability and credibility of the study. Note-taking and digital recording during interviews and collecting information from multiple sources enable researchers to effectively organize data and enhance the data analysis process in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Researchers use reflective journals as a pedagogical instrument that promotes their ability to reflect, criticize, and self-analyze (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017). I collected, filed, and labeled all data from multiple sources in folders on my computer for ease of accessibility and protection of data. Additionally, I used the reflective journal to self-analyze and sort out views that did not align with the research data to mitigate any adverse effect on the study. I backed up data on iCloud and flash drive to prevent data loss.

One primary element of the data organization process includes protecting the participants' identities through labels and coding (Lindlof & Tylor, 2019). I used codes such as P1, P2, P3...P6 to identify participants. Using pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants in a qualitative study is an ethical practice and an acceptable research process standard (Yin, 2018). I used pseudonyms to identify participants for this study. The protection and security of data are part of the ethical responsibilities of a qualitative researcher (Drysdale, 2020; Yin, 2018). I stored all data collected for this study safely in a password-protected electronic storage device. All hard copies of the data collected were stored in a confidential file, locked, and accessible to me alone. I will destroy both paper documents and electronic data after 5 years.

Data Analysis Technique

In a qualitative study, data analysis is the basis for presenting the results of a study prior to concluding from empirical evidence (Lindlof & Tylor, 2019). The primary objective of the qualitative researcher in analyzing data in a study is to interpret the meaning of the data by identifying patterns and themes to answer the central research question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The data sources for this study were from multiple sources, such as semistructured interviews, reflective notes, and a review of company documents. Different qualitative research designs require different data analysis processes (Yin, 2018). I used Yin's 5-step process to analyze the data for this study.

Yin's 5-step process of analysis is a nonlinear cycle of (a) compilation of a database, (b) data disassembly, (c) data reassembly, (d) data interpretation, and (e) conclusion (Yin, 2018). A database is an orderly compilation of all the data that preserves the collected data in a retrievable form to make the analysis easier (Yin, 2018). In step 1, I compiled and grouped the data by evaluating the responses to the interview questions. I used the voice web application to transcribe each participant's interview data. I scrutinized and compared my interpretation of the interview transcripts of the six owners of SMEs with my review of existing documents regarding branding strategies for business sustainability.

In Step 2 and Step 3, I used the NVivo 11 software tool to disassemble and eliminate consistent themes from the data and reassemble the data for a cluster of themes. NVivo is a computer-assisted software tool used in qualitative research to facilitate coding a large volume of textual data in nodes, showing commonalities among the

thematic nodes, and organizing data in hierarchical order (Alam, 2020). Using NVivo to analyze data enables researchers to add codes during data analysis and enhances the reliability of a study (Rossolatos, 2019). The steps to using Nvivo entail inputting textual data and defining an initial set of codes. Nvivo locates all the words and phrases in the textual data that match the codes, counts the incidence or occurrence of the words or codes, and conducts Boolean searches to locate the multiple combinations of codes in the data files (Alexander & Spencer, 2019; Yin, 2018). I created a file coding system for all the interviewees and other data collection sources. Also, I created initial codes relating to the research question and design from the data and inputted the codes into the NVivo application.

NVivo is a valuable tool in qualitative research for reviewing, merging, and refining collated interview data, thereby enhancing research information (Harif & Hoe, 2018). I inputted the textual data and field notes data into the computer for data analysis. I used the NVivo application to code, categorize, and build hierarchies of themes that provide meaningful insights related to branding strategies that business leaders use to ensure SMEs' sustainability in Nigeria. I constantly studied the data output to observe emerging patterns and themes that could expedite answering the research questions. Researchers compare responses from participants to make comparisons in emerged themes with each interview (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

After generating the codes, categories and themes, the researcher explains and interprets the data (Alam, 2020). Data interpretation explains how and why events occur, or people pursue a particular course of action (Yin, 2018). In Step 4, I analyzed the data

from the semistructured interviews and company documents for common themes, insights, and emerging patterns that would facilitate answering the research question and are relevant to the study's objective. An essential element of data analysis in research is establishing the correlation between the conceptual framework and study findings (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Yin (2018) suggested a continuous repetition of the cycles involving reviewing the research question, the data, and the data interpretation to enhance the ability to achieve findings and draw conclusions. The conceptual framework of this study was the CBBE model. In Step 5, I compared the emerging themes from the data analysis with the conceptual framework of this study. I analyzed the data to determine if the findings from multiple sources could lead me to draw similar conclusions. Methodological triangulation involves using various qualitative data collection sources to assure the completeness of data and robust conclusions (Dzwigol, 2020). The purpose of applying methodological triangulation is to increase the validity of the findings by seeking the convergence of multiple data sources (Natow, 2019). I compared the data collected from conducting semistructured interviews with data collected from the review of organizational documentation to determine if data alignment occurred. Finally, I triangulated and cross-referenced the data analysis outcome with themes apparent in the literature review to conclude.

Reliability and Validity

In a qualitative research study, the researcher is responsible for ensuring the validity and reliability of the study findings (Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers should

integrate quality validity checks into their research to strengthen the trustworthiness, credibility, accuracy, and truthfulness of research findings (Saunders et al., 2018). Validity depends on the context and purpose of the research study and its findings concerning the methods used to conclude the results (FitzPatrick, 2019). According to Yin (2018), reliability involves a researcher demonstrating that other researchers achieved similar results by repeating the data collection process. Reliability ensures the consistency, dependability, and replicability of research findings (Nigar, 2019). The critical elements in establishing the reliability and validity of a qualitative case study are (a) dependability; (b) credibility; (c) transferability; and (d) confirmability (Mendonça Alves et al., 2019; Yin, 2018).

Reliability

The concept of reliability in a qualitative research study relates to the stability and consistency of the research process and the study's findings over time (Yin, 2018). Reliability is a measure of the dependability of the research findings. The qualitative researcher could use the dependability of a research study to accurately depict a model dependent on the research results (Aizpurua et al., 2020). To ensure the reliability of research findings and the analysis provided, researchers must present the data in a manner that demonstrates clarity, coherence, and relevance (Caycho-Rodríguez et al., 2021). To establish reliability in this study, I documented the research process and used the interview protocol to ensure consistency during the interview process. I further used member checking to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the study findings.

Dependability

The dependability of a qualitative research study involves whether or not the researcher is consistent in using prolonged engagement, persistent observation, data triangulation, and member checking to achieve reliable research results (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). The dependability of the findings from qualitative research enhances the study's rigor and reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In a qualitative research study, some of the strategies for addressing the dependability of a study are (a) member checking, (b) audit trail of field notes, (c) reflexivity, and (d) methodological triangulation (Brear, 2019). According to Yin (2018), a researcher can use an interview protocol to record observational data and ensure dependability. For this study, I used member checking and an interview protocol (see Appendix B) to affirm the authenticity and dependability of the research findings. Member checking involves the participant's verification of the researcher's interpreted interview responses and feedback (Yin, 2018). I used member checking in this study by providing participants with my interpretations of their answers to interview questions and asking them to verify the accuracy of my interpretations. Methodological triangulation involves using multiple methods to obtain numerous data sources to produce a clear and concise understanding of a phenomenon and validate the integrity of the findings (Odiri, 2019). To establish dependability, I used an interview protocol to record data, cross-checked data collected through member checking, and conducted methodological triangulation using data from multiple sources.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research refers to the suitability of the research instruments, including methodology and design, for exploring the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2018). Researchers define validity as rigorously choosing a suitable research methodology and justifiably applying the chosen methodology to answer a research question (Nigar, 2019). The main components of validity in a qualitative study are (a) credibility, (b) transferability, and (c) confirmability (FitzPatrick, 2019; Moon, 2019). In the subsequent discussion of research validity, I presented narratives on the three critical aspects of validity.

Credibility

Credibility in a qualitative research study denotes the truthfulness of the researchers' presentation of data and accurate interpretation of participants' experiences and perspectives (McSweeney, 2021). Researchers ensure credibility in a qualitative study through methodological triangulation, rigorous data collection, participant engagement, and member checking (Johnson et al., 2020). The credibility of a study depends on the accuracy; consistency; and interconnections of the concepts, instruments, and constructs with research findings (Yin, 2018). For this study, I used methodological triangulation by comparing participants' responses with archived company documents to determine if data alignment occurred, thereby ensuring credibility. Furthermore, I conducted member checking by allowing the participants to review the summary of my data interpretation to ensure alignment with their respective opinions.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which a researcher's findings are applicable in other contexts and settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The primary strategy researchers use to determine transferability is a detailed verbatim description of the research process (Krawczyk et al., 2019). Researchers use triangulation and purposive sampling to enhance transferability (Yin, 2018). For this study, I achieved transferability by providing a detailed description of the research context and assumptions central to the study. Additionally, I used a purposeful sampling technique and methodological triangulation to ensure transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability involves corroborating or confirming results with peers and researchers (Trochim, 2020). Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to show that the data represent the participants' experiences and perspectives, not the researcher's preferences or biases (Ellis, 2019). Qualitative researchers should ensure the confirmability of research outcomes to strengthen people's confidence in the research outcomes and to ensure that the results derived from the analysis of data collected are not the researcher's preconceived positions (Holmes, 2020). Ellis (2019) recommended an audit trail to strengthen the confirmability of qualitative research. According to Wicaksono et al. (2021), researchers could use thematic data analysis, thick, rich data, data triangulation, member checking, and audit trails to achieve confirmability. I conducted audit trails, methodological triangulation, rich data description, and member checking to ensure confirmability.

Data Saturation

Data saturation occurs when no new information, data, or themes emerge from the researcher's interviewing process (Guest et al., 2020). Reaching data saturation during qualitative research is critical in ensuring the study includes adequate quality data (Fofana et al., 2020; Moon, 2019). Researchers could achieve data saturation in a qualitative research study through multiple data collection methods, such as observations, interviews, and documents reviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Farquhar et al., 2020). In this study, I conducted interviews with the participants by asking the interview questions (see Appendix D) until no new themes emerged to ensure data saturation. Furthermore, I conducted document reviews to obtain archival data.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I restated the purpose statement of the study and provided narratives on the role of the researcher, the eligibility criteria for selecting research participants, and the research method and design. Section 2 also contained information on the discussions of the population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and technique, data organization technique, data analysis, and the validity and reliability of the study. In Section 3, I present the study's findings and results, explaining how they apply to professional practice and social change. I also make recommendations for action and future research, reflect on the doctoral study process, and present the summary and study conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In this section, I discuss the study overview and present the findings on branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Using illustrations from the research participants' responses, I link the study findings with the conceptual framework regarding the CBBE model. Other topics I discuss in this section include applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and further study, reflections, summary, and study conclusion.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore branding strategies owners of SMEs used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The conceptual framework was the CBBE model, and the overarching research question was as follows: What branding strategies do owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation? Six owners of SMEs from three SMEs located in Nigeria's southern region who had successfully used branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation in their companies participated in this study. The participants' responses to the semistructured interview questions gave me the primary data to answer the overarching research question. I applied the methodological triangulation method by comparing the data collected from semistructured interviews with data collected from organizational documentation to determine if data alignment had occurred. The organizational documentation I reviewed included company brochures, flyers, administrative documents, and annual performance reports.

After interviewing the sixth participant, I concluded that no additional information or themes emerged, which indicated that I had reached data saturation. Based on the participants' responses to the interview questions, I identified four themes: (a) internet and social media, (b) advertisement and service excellence, (c) word of mouth and referrals, and (d) company identity and personal value. Within this study, the CBBE model related to the findings and provided a better understanding of the branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. In this study, I found that some owners of SMEs in southern Nigeria used a combination of branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Presentation of the Findings

To obtain relevant data, I gathered information from six participants who had successfully used branding strategies to help their business survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. After interviewing the sixth participant, I found no new information or emerging themes, thus indicating data saturation. Using NVivo 12 software, I organized the study data and conducted the thematic analysis to identify emerging themes and trends. To protect the participants' privacy, I created an identification code for each participant (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6). Using Table 3, I present participants' responses and the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Table 3*Development of Themes*

Theme	Internet and social media	Advertisement and service excellence	Word of mouth and referrals	Company identity and personal value
Question 1	P1, P4	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 P6	P1, P3, P4, P5	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
Question 2	P4	P2, P4, P5, P4	P1, P2, P3, P6	P1, P2, P4, P5
Question 3	P1, P4, P5, P6	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6	P1, P3	P3
Question 4	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6	P1, P4, P6	P3	None
Question 5	P1, P2, P4, P5	P3, P4	None	None
Question 6	P1, P3, P5	P4	P3	None
Question 7	P1, P3, P5	None	P1, P2, P4, P5	P4, P5
Question 8	P6	P6	P5	None

Using effective branding strategies could improve the financial profitability of SMEs (Narteh, 2018). SME owners could adopt branding strategies as a critical approach to address the need for product differentiation and improved customer patronage (Dressler & Paunovic, 2021). In a dynamic and highly competitive business environment, owners of SMEs devoting efforts to business performance and sustainability ought to be able to build strong brands to survive (Chokpitakkul & Anantachart, 2020). In the following subsections, I present the four themes that emerged from reviewing the company's archival documents, field notes, and the thematic analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions.

Theme 1: Internet and Social Media

The first theme was internet and social media, which recognized the importance of using the internet and social media to reach consumers. The internet and social media theme emerged from all the interview questions. Using Table 4, I present the frequencies of the responses by the participants on the theme of internet and social media.

Table 4

Internet and Social Media: Participants' Responses and Frequencies

Participant	Frequency of use by participants
P1	7
P2	3
P3	3
P4	6
P5	7
P6	4

The theme of internet and social media emerged from the interview data. All six participants affirmed using the internet and social media as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The proliferation of the internet has made it easier for companies to reach a wider sphere of consumers who have access to much information about brands and alternatives (Iankova et al., 2019). All six participants agreed that utilizing the internet and social media are critical to surviving beyond the first 5 years of operation. Responding to interview question 1, P1 said, "as a safety/quality consultancy business, we used the internet to get the attention of my customers by designing an interactive and user-friendly website." According to P1, "I tried as much as possible to get my target customers to understand and know that there is a new

product/service in town.” In response to interview question 1, P4 explained, “our first entry point of this company was to develop a website because we understand that many people are computer friendly.” According to P4, “immediately they [customers] search online for building materials, the company will come out on the website, we have described and showcased the products and services we offer, that is our first way of communicating to the public.” On further inquiry, P4 said, “later, we enrolled and joined Jiji – an online e-commerce platform – for marketing our products brand.”

Social media has transformed interaction and communication among individuals worldwide and has become essential to marketing strategies (Dolega et al., 2021).

Responding to interview question 2, P4 affirmed, “more recently, we have observed that e-commerce platforms have given us the highest traffic of customers.” P4 stated:

So, we are now devoting more of our time and resources to ensure that our product brand is quite visible and assessable online by taking steps and measures to optimize the ability of potential customers to see our branded products online.

In response to interview question 3, P1 noted, “we also used our website to promote the brand. The website hosted a gallery that was displayed previously.” Responding to interview question 3, P4 remarked, “I will say e-commerce platforms because e-commerce platforms have overtaken billboards, we have taken down all our billboards and have now gone to full time online branding.” In response to interview question 3, P5 attested, “we have used social media and our website to promote our brand name.” P6 asserted, “we also used social media brand marketing such as Instagram, WhatsApp status postings, and Facebook, which we discovered was a very effective way of

promoting our brand.” All six participants acknowledged that the internet and social media are critical in surviving beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Various researchers have attempted to study the mechanism and relationship of social media with other marketing tools, such as viral marketing (Jadhav et al., 2023; Motoki et al., 2020). Most businesses are increasing their use of social media and taking advantage of the opportunity to expand their marketing communications and raise their brand awareness (Amoako et al., 2019). Responding to interview question 4, P1 opined, “we engaged an IT consulting firm that designed our website. Our online presence is the most successful in delivering our brands. Through the website, potential customers from far outside the city were able to connect with us.” P2 stated:

One way we promote our brand is through our website. We devoted time and resources to developing an interactive, user-friendly, and catchy website. For our website to be visible, we ensured that each email correspondence, business flyer, business card or even company memorabilia refers to our website.

P3 remarked, “due to the nature of service we provide, we did not find social media productive in promoting our brand. However, our website was a very useful tool for promoting and showcasing our service brand.”

In the retail business, digital marketing using social media tools and platforms has led to more customer engagement and more traffic, in addition to being faster and more efficient than traditional marketing (Dolega et al., 2021). Responding to interview question 4, P4 said, “the most effecting media today is the website and online e-commerce platforms.” In response to interview question 4, P5 remarked, “social media

and our website. We got businesses from customers outside our location who informed us that they found out about us on the internet and then checked out the website for more details.” Responding to interview question 4, P6 stated, “with the spread of social media, we found it to be the most successful in interacting and building relationships with our customers.” P6 noted, “we used the social media tools to connect our several customers who share their experiences on our services and invite their friends and colleagues to join the online community.”

In the online social brand space, increasing consumer and fan engagement is imperative to an organization’s performance and its brand’s success (Read et al., 2019). According to Zhuofan et al. (2015), the rise and prominence of businesses in today’s world rests on their technological capacities and their expressed expertise in driving their marketing goals across various networks and social platforms. Responding to interview question 5, P1 remarked, “I realized that sometimes our website would not be accessible to the public for some time, and we may not even know there is a problem until someone calls to notify us. So poor internet connectivity was a challenge.” P1 noted, “cost of sustaining, designing and hosting online sites was prohibitive for a small business like ours.” In response to interview question 5, P2 affirmed, “one key challenge is the high cost of creating brand visibility in a competitive environment we operate.” P2 stated, “we were compelled to engage the services of web developers for a long time to continually explored ways to innovate and improve our website.”

From 2006 to 2023, the impact of advertising and marketing via social networks has grown in importance exponentially (Rosário, & Dias, 2023). Dwivedi et al. (2021)

addressed some growing risks and concerns with social media use, noting the emerging social media policies in the marketing industry aimed at protecting children, preventing misleading advertisements, and restricting advertising in specific industries. Responding to interview question 5, P4 commented, “high staff turnover is another issue, especially with managing and maintaining the e-commerce platforms.” P4 noted, “high turnover affects the time to respond online to follow the continuous stream of customer requests and questions.” In response to interview question 5, P5 asserted, “one key challenge is the promptness of responding to customers on social media. Also, optimization on social media platforms is a challenge.” P5 noted:

We need to increase our online traffic and presence to help increase the chances of optimization in search engines like google. Also, the lack of dedicated staff to monitor and maintain our online social media handles and presence is a challenge.

Arora and Sanni (2019) reported that researchers had considered several variables and moderating factors in investigating firms’ online presence and communication to optimize social media marketing strategies. In response to interview question 6, P1 opined, “we engaged the services of an IT consultant to ensure that our website was always active. In addition, he developed social media handles for us, and we started posting our activities on Instagram and Facebook.” P1 affirmed, “we managed our webpage, and social media handles ourselves until we could afford the cost of hiring a dedicated staff for that purpose.” Responding to interview question 6, P3 noted, “we continued to improve our website by including pictorial views of our services. We ensured that website was updated each time we completed a job, and that the information

on our webpage was up to date.” Responding to interview question 6, P5 stated, “we created a job position we called ‘social media optimizer.’ We did not recruit someone for this position but identified staff and provided the necessary training and additional incentives.”

To improve the understanding of social media marketing usage by SMEs, Tajvidi and Karami (2021) provided a new perspective on the effect of social media use on SMEs and established the influence of social media on firm performance. In response to interview question 7, P1 said, “the most successful one has been our website. So, our website provided a means of creating more awareness of our services to the public.” Responding to interview question 7, P3 affirmed, “we discovered the powerful impact of website to business marketing.” Responding to interview question 7, P5 informed:

Our website has supported our marketing strategies. We give away items at events bearing our website. Those items leave a memory in the minds of participants who reach out to us after the events to enquire more about our business.

In response to interview question 8, P6 advised, “not only should small business owners be very active and busy on social media spending money on ads, on graphic designs, etc. but when eventually they get the customers, they should ensure to deliver on the brand promises.”

For the review of company documentation, I reviewed each participant’s website and social media page. The social media pages contained active contents and customers’ engagement driving interactivity, brand visibility, and sales. For P1’s and P2’s company webpages, I observed that the webpage had rich visual illustrations of the core business

activities. The webpages also contained subsections on each major service provided by the company, along with client testimonials that reflected the level of satisfaction from P1's service delivery. For P3's and P4's company webpages, the visual representations of the company's products were evident. I observed that navigating through the various sections of the webpage was effortless and user-friendly. Interested persons viewing the webpages had options to contact the company by sending an email directly from the webpages or by using the telephone numbers provided on the webpages. P3 utilized the Instagram page to interact with customers and receive feedback on its products. P3 noted that, "positive feedback helped us to strengthen and evaluate the efficiency of our products . . . Negative feedback from customers provided us an improvement opportunity to alter or modify our products or the production process resulting to better products."

For P5's and P6 's company webpages, I noted that a blog page was hyperlinked to the webpages. The blog page also contained information about the company's vision and mission statements. At the owner's corner of the blog page, the owner shared stories of successful projects. Existing customers provided affirmation through the comments section to collaborate the project's success stories. Existing customers also provided feedback on the level of satisfaction with the products and services.

A review of the participants' websites and social media pages and the participants' responses to the interview question aligned with Dolega et al.'s (2021), Motoki et al.'s (2020), and Sulhaini et al.'s (2021) statements that owners of SMEs use the internet and social media as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. By analyzing this study's findings, I found that owners of SMEs used the

internet and social media as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Theme 2: Advertisement and Service Excellence

The advertisement and service excellence theme emerged from all interview questions but one. Using Table 5, I present the frequency of participants' responses to the advertisement and service excellence theme.

Table 5

Advertisement and Service Excellence: Participants' Responses and Frequencies

Participant	Frequency of use by participants
P1	3
P2	1
P3	3
P4	7
P5	3
P6	4

All six participants acknowledged using advertisement and service excellence as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. In responding to interview question 1, P1 remarked, "we also designed small makeshift signposts placed on strategic streets around the city. And sponsored minor golfing events where distributed our flyers and golf caps that bore our business name. P2 stated:

We strive to have excellence in everything we do. We strive to be known for excellent services. Our mission and vision statements are embedded in our brand.

The brand is the culture that our company wants to be known for.

P3 asserted:

My experience spanning over 17 years in the oil and gas industry was the foundation of creating a small service company that anchored its brand in excellent service delivery quality and excellence define what our brand stands for. We have seen customers continually trust our service brand because of our strong focus on quality and excellent service.

P4 emphasized:

Our products also come with a warranty, as a way to assure the public consumers of the quality. The key tenet of our brand is the quality of our products. We want to be known for the quality of our products, and the brand represents this quality. Our brand represents quality and durable materials. We used billboards strategically positioned at high-traffic points, especially the roundabout, with pictorial representations of our products and services. We also developed a radio jingle that plays at high traffic times, especially during the morning and evening hours' audience in their cars either going or returning from work. We partnered with business organizations whose businesses were related to the use of our products. Such partnerships enable us to showcase our product brands at exhibitions and conferences.

In response to interview question 2, P2 posited, "our excellence brand works because each project we complete speaks for us. We do not have to go out talking about our services." Responding to interview question 2, P3 explained, "we built our excellence and quality trademark on the backbone of very experienced engineers with a depth of

knowledge and experience to deliver our services.” According to P3, “we continually received customer feedback on our services, which became evident that our focus on quality and excellence was working.” In response to interview question 2, P4 stated, “through a feedback mechanism developed by an external consultant, we were able to track the effectiveness of each of these brand communication strategies.” On further inquiry, P4 opined, “the tracking result showed us that in the past 5 years, physical billboard advertisements provided the highest number of customers.” Responding to interview question 2, P6 asserted, “when we asked our customers how they got to know about us, we found out that our services and the brand promise were effective.”

In response to interview question 3, P2 noted:

Delivering excellent services far above our customers’ expectations. We provided a mechanism for our customers always to provide feedback for every service we delivered. We then utilized the customers’ positive feedback to improve our services and make them more efficient.

Some participants commented, “we tried some strategies like advertising. We created visibility for our service brand through sponsorships in oil and gas industry events” (P3). “I will say, visual presentation of our brand on billboards” (P4). “We developed very colorful and eye-catching flyers that are embedded in popular magazines distributed by a marketing company to the middle-class population” (P6).

Responding to interview question 4, P2 narrated ways the advertisement was critical to SME survival and asserted, “also, we developed a rich company profile document that showcases our pride in excellent delivery.” In response to interview

question 4, P4 said, “I have already mentioned that billboards, radio jingles, partnerships with related business organizations, distribution of flyers, and word-of-mouth marketing were some ways we communicated our product brand to the public and consumers.”

Responding to interview question 4, P6 emphasized, “our catchy flyers distributed through magazines were the most effective.” Responding to interview question 5, P3 opined, “initially, we invested the lean funds available to several branding strategies, such as public media advertising and radio and TV jingles that did not yield results.” In response to interview question 5, P4 commented, “firstly, dealing with multiple government agencies about the physical billboard, they deal with government agencies, you see multiple taxations on it, you see different agencies of government demanding for different levies and tax payments for the same billboard service.” Responding to interview question 6, P4 stated:

On the issue of multiple government taxation of billboards and signages, we partnered with a business association (Nigerian Institutes of Marketing of Nigeria) that liaises with the relevant government agency to streamline the taxes and levies on business owners for billboard and signages.

In response to interview question 7, P2 attested, “the quality of our work has branded us.” Responding to interview question 7, P4 stated, “customers and clients know what we stand for and the quality of our products.” In response to interview question 8, P6 affirmed, “some business owners may be very active and busy spending money on advertisements, and when eventually they get the customers, they cannot deliver on the brand promises.”

P2 and P4 provided International Organization of Standards (ISO) certificates for their companies. P4 disclosed that the ISO certificate is an external audit document that serves as an evidence for companies that comply with international standards and practices in their business. In reviewing the certificates, I observed that the certificates are valid for 2 years, and after this period a fresh audit of compliance must be conducted as a condition for renewal. The ISO certificate is a demonstration that the companies operate under the highest international operating standards and practices. According to P2, “a number of our customers request for evidence of valid ISO certification prior to engaging us in any project.”

P1, P3, and P5 provided some project completion reports. The reports highlighted the level of performance and satisfaction of their customers at the completion of each project. From my review of the documents, I observed that the customer feedback section of the report was important for building trust and confidence in the companies’ capabilities and potential for repeat business. The reports also served as a mechanism for communicating improvement opportunities for future projects. P5 had noted that, “the project completion report was a good marketing tool for prospective customers to learn about our capabilities from existing customers from external sources (existing customers).”

Based on my findings from the review of the ISO certificates and project completion reports, I confirmed that these findings aligned rather well with the findings from conducting semistructured interviews. The participants’ responses to the interview questions aligned with Gielens and Steenkamp’s (2019) statements that owners of SMEs

use advertisement and service excellence as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Historically, firms relied on the creativity of internal resources and advertising agencies to develop ideas for branding strategies (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2019; Lang et al., 2023). As applied in this study, all six participants used advertisement and service excellence as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Theme 3: Word of Mouth and Referrals

Word of mouth in public gatherings and customer referrals are crucial for businesses and critical to SMEs' survival beyond the first 5 years of operation. The theme of word of mouth and referrals emerged from all interview questions. The theme also emerged from my review of organizational documents. Using Table 6, I present the frequencies of the responses by the participants on the theme of word of mouth and referrals.

Table 6

Word of Mouth and Referrals: Participants' Responses and Frequencies

Participant	Frequency of use by participants
P1	3
P2	4
P3	7
P4	6
P5	2
P6	2

All six participants attested using word of mouth in a public gathering and referrals from customers as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of

operation. Responding to interview question 1, P1 could connect with the public, “I spoke to people in public functions and social gatherings.” According to P1, “as an avid golfer, I used the opportunity of the social interactions with fellow golfers to promote the business brand.” In response to interview question 1, P4 commented, “we used many flyers and engaged marketers that used word-of-mouth along with the flyers to communicate with potential customers, especially at several building sites.”

In response to interview question 2, P1 attested, “we know that the combination of the branding strategies was effective because the customers requested our business.” According to P1, “overall, the volume of new customers and repeat business from existing customers indicated that our strategies were effective.” Responding to interview question 2, participant P2 stated, “most of our new businesses come from referrals. Our main business focus is for the outstanding excellence jobs we deliver to speak for themselves.” In response to interview question 2, P3 noted, “our customers continued to call on us for expanded projects after each project was successfully delivered.” According to P3, “by the end of this year, we would have completed 10 years of continuous service to a particular customer, implying that our brand has been effective and successful.” Responding to interview question 2, P6 noted, “from the referrals and repeat business, we were able to measure what strategy worked and what did not.”

In response to interview question 3, P1 said, “we integrated our business in the public community by partnering with the gold club to host golf events.” In agreement, P3 stated, “we discovered it was not as effective as word of mouth and professional recommendations. We discovered that most of the players in our industry wanted to go

with the recommendations of trusted colleagues.” According to P3, “we created visibility for our service brand during professional networking events, conferences and seminars where we networked with other industry professionals. We also got businesses through referrals from existing customers.” Responding to interview question 4, P3 attested, “participation in networking events proved to be the most successful means of exposing our brand to the public.” In response to interview question 6, P3 asserted, “we decided to try other means to communicate and promote our brand, and eventually, professional networking gave us the breakthrough.”

Responding to interview question 7, P1 remarked, “also, word of mouth was very effective as I have met several customers by talking about our services while playing golf.” According to P1, “we have some customers that also engaged our services based on referrals from others that have experienced the efficiency of our services.” In response to interview question 7, P2 affirmed, “we did not need to do any more marketing as our customers always wanted us back to their facility.” According to P2, “they wanted us to be part of each project they execute. They referred us to other customers that wanted similar services.” Responding to interview question 7, P4 commented, “we have built relationships with such customers, such that even when we are out of stock of their needs, they are willing to wait for our products to become available before they can continue their projects.” In response to interview question 7, P5 attested, “we have been to several exhibitions and conferences, and we made some memorabilia.” Responding to interview question 8, P5 noted, “most of our clients are now aware that we are not just a survey

company but also a geotechnical service provider. We have seen this awareness translate to repeat businesses.”

I reviewed the exhibition attendance register provided by P5. During exhibitions and conferences, P5 requested existing customers and interested persons who visited the exhibition booths to register and make comments about their experiences with the use of the company services. Based on my findings from the exhibition register, existing customers made referrals to other potential customers about the quality of service offered by P5. I also reviewed contracts provided by P4. On a contract document, P4’s customer that awarded a 5-year contract mandated all its subcontractors to procure and install on its facilities only branded products from P4. The mandate from its customer was based on the durability and quality of P4’s branded products. Based on my findings from the reviewed exhibition attendance register and contract documents, word of mouth and referrals are useful branding strategies for business survival.

The participants’ responses to the interview question aligned with Jasin’s (2022) statements that owners of SMEs use word of mouth and referrals as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The study findings are consistent with Dhewi and Kurnianto’s (2023) position that word of mouth has a robust influence on brand equity. According to Jasin (2022), word of mouth positively and significantly impacts consumer purchase intention of SME products. Khan and Fatma (2023) noted that word of mouth has a positive impact on consumer purchase behaviors and boosts the effectiveness of marketing programs. On the basis of this study, I found that owners of

SMEs used word of mouth and referrals as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Theme 4: Company Identity and Personal Value

A company's brand identity is a critical construct that underpins what the company represents and its distinctiveness. The fourth theme was company identity and personal value, which recognized the importance of creating a unique company name, logo, slogan, and personal value for the business owner in the survival of SMEs beyond the first 5 years of operation. The company identity and personal value theme emerged from all the interview questions. Using Table 7, I present the frequencies of the responses by the participants on the theme of company identity and personal value.

Table 7

Company identity and personal value: Participants' Responses and Frequencies

Participant	Frequency of use by participants
P1	1
P2	5
P3	2
P4	3
P5	0
P6	1

P1, P2, P3, P4, and P6 affirmed using company identity and personal value as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Responding to interview question 1, P2 said, "we simply gave our company the visibility by putting together a rich company profile that showcased our services, how we delivered the services, our resources and our commitment to excellence." According to P2, "I loved

excellence right from childhood, so I influenced the company with this unique personal value.” In response to interview question 1, P3 explained, “my value system strongly influenced all that we do and aspired to be known for.” Responding to interview question 1, P4 affirmed, “our name is our brand. The name and our branded logo sell us.” In response to interview question 1, P6 remarked, “we decided that we must look for avenues and means to reach the customers, so we created a brand name that resonated with the service of housekeeping.”

A distinctive company identity is essential for a business to remain competitive. In response to interview question 2, P4 noted, “we have seen that having the right name can determine how customers and potential customers view the company’s services.” According to P4, “we had to change the company’s name from consulting company to geo-solutions company because we had lost some business opportunities because the customers perceived our company as just a consulting company and not a geo-services company.” P4 attested, “when we affected a name change, our business improved.” Responding to interview question 3, P1 remarked, “first of all, our business name reflected our brand.” In response to interview question 3, P4 illustrated, “for instance, when we identified the real estate market as our target market, we needed to change our brand slogan to a slogan we believed was more suited to that market.”

Responding to interview question 4, P2 opined, “also, we developed a rich company profile document.” P2 asserted, “we have observed how we designed our company profile document raises potential customers’ inquisition and desire to know us more. Also, our company logo design is a very key and important feature of our brand.”

On further inquiry, P2 explained, “it projects the result of excellence and the colors were deliberately chosen to reflect that excellence shines like a star.” In response to interview question 8, P4 stated, “our name and logo have supported our marketing strategies.”

According to P4:

We have been to several exhibitions and conferences, and we made some memorabilia and gave away items bearing our name and logos. Those items leave a memory in the minds of participants who reach out to us after the events to enquire more about our business.

The participants acknowledged that company identity and personal value are critical to SMEs’ survival beyond the first 5 years of operation.

P3 displayed the mission/vision statement document clearly on the facility’s building wall. On the mission/vision statement, P3 laid emphasis on the company’s commitment to enshrine the value of excellence in all its services to the customers. The document further narrated the foundation of the business based on the owner’s personal belief and ideology. Also, I reviewed the company profile documents for P2 and P6. I noted that each statement of the mission/vision statement began with the company name, highlighting the significance of the company brand name as synonymous with their service delivery. On further review of the company profile document, I observed that the company’s brand name resonated with the nature of service delivered. P4 shared a previous and current copy of the profile document that reflected a name and logo change to align with the focus on their target market.

The participants' responses to the interview questions and my findings from review of company documents aligned with Scheidt et al.'s (2020) and Vitelar's (2019) statements that owners of SMEs use company identity and personal value as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Aparicio et al. (2023) highlighted the essence of corporate identity as an important element for building successful brands in family business. In SMEs and startup firms, the business owner plays a role in the construction of brand identity (Shi, 2019). Murphy et al. (2019) noted that small business owners' personal characteristics and behaviors strongly influence the success of their businesses. The application of the business owner's personality and core values as a branding strategy can significantly influence the success of the business brand (Centeno et al., 2019). From the study findings, I confirmed that owners of SMEs used company identity and personal value as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Study Findings Related to Customer Based Brand Equity Model

Keller (1993) described CBBE as the customer's response to the marketing of a branded product compared to the responses toward the marketing of an unbranded product. Hanaysha (2023) examined the link between brand equity and SMEs growth and found that firms with high brand equity enjoy various advantages through greater market share and better brand value. Hyun et al. (2022) investigated the effects of website attributes on luxury brand equity and found significant effects of emotional appeal, website design, and customer service on luxury brand awareness and brand loyalty. The impact of social media in marketing has spread rapidly, altering how business owners

market their products and communicate with consumers (Dolega et al., 2021). With the internet era, social media platforms have become a means for consumers to become active content creators by expressing their opinions, understandings, and perceptions about products and brands (Gong et al., 2020). The study findings aligned with the position that owners of SMEs could survive beyond the first 5 years of operation by implementing branding strategies based on the CBBE model.

In relation to the CBBE model, successful businesses that adopt the use of internet and social media provides a means to encourage, listen to and adopt the ideas of customers. All six participants affirmed the use of internet and social media as a platform for easy and more efficient interaction and engagement with customers. Customer interaction through the use of internet and social media engenders the intensity of psychological bond in the minds of customers with a brand. Customer interaction could lead to a positive customer relationship, a key element of the CBBE brand building model.

The CBBE represents customer-based behavior toward a branded product versus an unbranded equivalent (Faircloth et al., 2001). Jeon and Yoo (2021) confirmed that brand associations/image and perceived quality are important factors that increase brand loyalty. Shi (2019) found that the founder's personality traits indirectly influence the brand identity construction for startups. Brand attitude is the evaluative dimension of brand image that represents the synthesis of all relevant brand elements present in consumers' memory and derived from experiencing the brand at various levels (Langaro et al., 2018).

As applied in this study, P1, P2, P3, P4, and P6 responses echoed Jeon and Yoo (2021), Langaro et al. (2018), and Shi (2019)'s statements on using company identity and personal value as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Company identity and owner's personal values correlated with the brand identity and brand meaning tenets of the CBBE model. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P6 agreed that their business identities are synonymous with their brand identities. In their responses, P1, P2, P3, P4 and P6 participants highlighted the significance of business brand identity relative to customers' perception of their products or services. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P6 indicated that business brand identity is a platform by which customers know, remember and relate to the business. Business brand identity, a key tenet of the CBBE model, is relevant in the entire brand-building process. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P6 also agreed that their personal values influenced their brand building process. Business owners that build a brand based on the owner's personal values could influence how customers evaluate, and ascribe meaning to a branded product or service. Brand meaning is another key tenet of the CBBE model.

Beyond being a communication strategy between customers and businesses, branding offers other extended benefits. Under the CBBE model, Keller (1993) defined brand benefits as what consumers think that a product or service could bring to them. Consumers view authentic brands as the higher quality that offers greater value (Tran et al., 2020). All six participants emphasized the importance of quality products and excellent service delivery as key elements of their branding strategy. Service excellence accrues additional benefits to the customers, thereby correlating with the brand benefits

aspect of the CBBE model. Also, all six participants stressed the significance of service excellence as a strategy for retaining their existing customers.

Likewise, the themes of advertisement, word of mouth and referrals also correlated with the CBBE model. Business owners use various means of advertisement to market their brands to their customers. All six participants utilized various forms of advertisements, such as print media, electronic media, e-advertising, word of mouth and referrals. The essence of advertisement, word of mouth and referrals is to create awareness and knowledge of a product or service in the minds of the customers. Brand knowledge construct is an essential antecedent to the customer-based brand equity. According to the tenets of the CBBE model, customers' familiarity with the brand could enhance the brand knowledge leading to the customers' favorable, strong and unique cognitive association with the brand. As applied in this study, all six participants affirmed using advertisement, word of mouth and referrals as branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Several researchers agreed that the outcomes of the CBBE in product brands include brand preference, repurchase intention, and willingness to pay a price premium (Phong et al., 2020; Tian et al., 2022). Brand authenticity resonates with the perception of quality, consistency, and durability (Fouladi et al., 2021). Researchers have used various dimensions of the CBBE model, such as brand awareness, brand image, and brand associations, to measure what drives customers toward brand loyalty (Yohana et al., 2020). As applied in this study, owners of SMEs used a combination of branding strategies involving the internet and social media, advertisement and service excellence,

word of mouth and referrals, and company identity and personal value to survive their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Applications to Professional Practice

Owners of SMEs that implement brand-building efforts increase business performance and profitability (Odoom & Mensah, 2019). SME owners could adopt branding strategies as a critical success factor that addresses the need for product differentiation and improved customer patronage (Dressler & Paunovic, 2021). This study's findings could provide owners of SMEs with knowledge on appropriate branding strategies for survival beyond the first 5 years of operation. Based on the study findings, the most significant contribution to professional practice might be providing a practical model for SME owners to develop branding strategies for surviving beyond the first 5 years of operation. The practical model could be the basis for improving financial success to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Creating a unique brand can motivate consumers, increase sales, and augment a competitive advantage that benefits business owners and their employees (Erkmen & Hancer, 2019). Satisfied customers constitute positive publicity resulting in an improved brand image for SMEs (Mittal et al., 2019). Using effective branding strategies could improve the financial profitability of SMEs (Narteh, 2018). Understanding the branding strategies owners of SMEs use to improve their financial success is crucial to their firms' survival beyond the first 5 years of operation. From the study findings, organizational leaders, including business owners, entrepreneurs, and governmental and nongovernmental agencies, may gain helpful information on branding strategies for

surviving beyond the first 5 years of operation. The public might learn the branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation from this study's findings.

Owners of SMEs in Nigeria require knowledge related to the integration of branding strategies to sustain their businesses. In a dynamic and highly competitive business environment, owners of SMEs devoting efforts to business performance and sustainability ought to be able to build strong brands to survive (Chokpitakkul & Anantachart, 2020). All six participants affirmed using a blend of branding strategies to improve their financial success to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. As a contribution to business practice, owners of SMEs could leverage the study findings to gain the better understanding and knowledge of branding strategies needed to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. New and upcoming SMEs' owners may use the findings of this study to understand the branding strategies for improving financial success to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Owners of SMEs could leverage brand strategies to improve their company's image, attract new customers, provide better satisfaction for existing customers, and increase sales (Lin et al., 2019). The study findings might add value to the SMEs' community by disseminating information, which could significantly contribute to information sharing and networking. Owners of SMEs seeking branding strategies for surviving beyond the first 5 years of operation may learn from the study findings. Some owners of SMEs with weak branding strategies may apply this study's findings to survival beyond the first 5 years of operation. Owners of SMEs that apply the study

findings could significantly enhance their performance by improving financial success to survival beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Brand strategy implementation could translate into excellent business value for SMEs (Odoom & Mensah, 2019). SMEs have become a significant part of global economies, propelling economic growth and national development (Sandhu & Azhar, 2019). Based on the study findings, the most significant contribution to professional practice may be identifying potential branding strategies that owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Owners of SMEs could use this study's results to understand the significance of using appropriate branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The knowledge gained on branding strategies may enable SMEs' owners to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. All six participants acknowledged that internet and social media, advertisement and service excellence, word of mouth and referrals, and company identity and personal value were fundamental to their firms' survival beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Implications for Social Change

SMEs play a significant role in global economies, propelling economic growth and national development (Sandhu & Azhar, 2019). Some factors contributing to the growing importance of SMEs include their roles in community empowerment, poverty alleviation, employment generation, and income distribution (Al-Tit et al., 2019). This study's significant implication for positive social change includes providing owners of SMEs with branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Owners of SMEs might successfully survive their firms beyond the first 5 years of operation by

studying the research outcomes and implementing excellent branding strategies. The existing and upcoming owners of SMEs could use the information from this study to enhance their branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Applying this study's findings might contribute to positive social change because effective branding could lead to organizational financial success, guaranteeing the firms' survival beyond the first 5 years of operation.

SMEs are the pillars of most global economies, significantly contributing to economic growth, job creation, and the gross domestic product (GDP) of both developed and developing countries (Okundaye et al., 2019). By implementing excellent branding strategies, owners of SMEs could improve their financial success and ensure the survival of their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation. With the business surviving beyond the first 5 years of operation, SMEs would continue to pay corporate taxes, which the municipal government could use to provide social amenities to the local community. SMEs' survival could contribute to social change by strengthening local economies, sustaining micro-enterprises, and creating job opportunities, thereby improving the welfare and amenities of the local communities. The implications for a positive social change for this study include the survival of SMEs beyond the first 5 years of operation, thereby improving the living conditions and well-being of the local citizens.

Owners of SMEs who implement the study findings might significantly contribute to the economy of the local community. SMEs are becoming dominant in most global economies, providing job opportunities and reducing unemployment in many countries (Hardi & Puspitowati, 2022). When SMEs survive beyond the first 5 years of operation

and are profitable, their corporate social responsibility activities might increase, leading to infrastructural and economic development in the host communities. Adopting branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation might assist owners of SMEs in increasing their company's financial success, thereby boosting the economic growth of the local community. New aspiring entrepreneurs could use the information from this study's findings to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation of their firms, which could create job opportunities for local citizens, thereby promoting socioeconomic growth in the local community. As illustrated in this study, using effective branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation might assist owners of SMEs in improving financial success and continuing to provide job opportunities to the local community.

Jibir et al. (2018) stated that SMEs contribute significantly to the GDP and national economic performance. Surviving SMEs might expand into more rural communities, leading to more employment opportunities, infrastructural and economic development, human capital development, and possibly improving the country's GDP. This study's implication for positive social change include using branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation, thereby maintaining socioeconomic stability for benefiting citizens, families, and communities. By survival beyond the first 5 years of operation, SMEs would continue to accomplish their corporate social responsibilities to the local citizens through awards of scholarships, sponsorship of local events, and the building of social amenities, such as healthcare, libraries, and schools. The public might

learn from the branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Recommendations for Action

Although SMEs account for over 80% of employment generation in Nigeria, they have a failure rate of 85% within the initial 5 years of operation (Gumel, 2019). Social media has transformed interaction and communication among individuals worldwide and has become essential to marketing strategies (Dolega et al., 2021). An effective branding strategy fundamentally improves SMEs' financial success to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The proliferation of the internet has made it easier for companies to reach a wider sphere of consumers who have access to much information about brands and alternatives (Iankova et al., 2019). Most businesses are increasingly using social media and taking advantage of the opportunity to expand their marketing communications and raise their brand awareness (Amoako et al., 2019). I recommend that SMEs owners should implement a combination of branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. I recommend that SMEs' owners adopt the internet and social media as a branding strategy to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Brand strategy implementation could translate into excellent business value for SMEs (Odoom & Mensah, 2019). Satisfied customers constitute positive publicity resulting in an improved brand image for SMEs (Mittal et al., 2019). From 2006 to 2019, the impact of advertising and marketing via social networks has grown in importance exponentially (Ford, 2019). According to Kurnianto and Dhewi (2022), a good product becomes more visible with the power of a brand. SMEs' growth and long-term

sustainability hinge on a marketing campaign that develops solid and differentiated brands from their competitors (Dumitriu et al., 2019). SMEs' owners should establish, implement, and maintain a compelling company profile and personal value to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. SMEs' service excellence means providing services that exceed customers' expectations and delight them (Hardi & Puspitowati, 2022). To sustain their businesses, owners of SMEs should enhance their advertisement and service excellence skills to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

Business owners could implement brand-building efforts to increase their business performance and profitability (Odoom & Mensah, 2019). By implementing excellent brand strategies, business owners could improve the company image, attract new customers, provide better satisfaction for existing customers, and increase sales (Lin et al., 2019). To improve the understanding of social media marketing usage by SMEs, Tajvidi and Karami (2021) provided a new perspective on the effect of social media use on SMEs and established the influence of social media on firm performance. According to Zhuofan et al. (2015), the rise and prominence of businesses in today's world rest on their technological capacities and their expressed expertise in driving their marketing goals across various networks and social platforms. Modern SMEs are adopting digital marketing communication tools and techniques as a necessity for growth and sustainability (Dumitriu et al., 2019). I recommend that owners of SMEs adopt appropriate branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

SMEs may need support to trigger innovations to attract new investments and businesses (Gerlitz et al., 2021). In the retail business, digital marketing using social

media tools and platforms has led to more customer engagement and more traffic, aside from being faster and more efficient than traditional marketing (Dolega et al., 2021). Ali Qalati et al. (2020) found that social media adoption positively impacts SMEs' performance. According to Ogunsanya (2021), consensual scholarly and practical facts suggest that branding is necessary for SMEs' survival and growth. Owners of SMEs should have adequate skills, knowledge, experience, and competency to identify the appropriate branding strategies for surviving beyond the first 5 years of operation. I will disseminate this study's findings to interested groups through presentations at my workplace, seminars and training, social media and network, conferences, and publications in academic and business journals on SMEs.

Recommendations for Further Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore branding strategies owners of SMEs used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Researchers have noted that a brand's functional value helps to shape the customers' value proposition for a product (Coelho et al., 2020). This study's findings, recommendations, and conclusions might contribute to existing and future research and close gaps in business practice regarding branding strategies that owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. This study was limited to a cross-sectional, exploratory qualitative, multiple case study involving semistructured interviews to collect primary data from owners of SMEs in different companies in southern Nigeria. I recommend that future researchers explore using longitudinal, explanatory qualitative,

phenomenological study, quantitative or mixed methods involving diverse participants from varying levels of management and stakeholders at different geographical locations.

Researchers should select participants with the required knowledge and experience regarding the research topic and phenomenon (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Selecting suitable and appropriate participants for a research study is critical to ensure the credibility and validity of the research outcome (Yin, 2018). A significant limitation of this study was the small sample size of six SME owners from three SMEs in southern Nigeria. Using larger or smaller samples, researchers could generate different themes showing significant differences in the study phenomenon. Therefore, I recommend further studies with a larger sample size from various geographical locations, such as America, Asia, and Europe. Further study with larger samples could provide helpful insight into branding strategies that owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

The role of the researcher includes collecting data, analyzing the data, selecting the appropriate research method, and designing and managing the research process to inculcate ethical considerations and eliminate personal bias (Hargis, 2020; Torelli, 2019). In a qualitative research study, the researcher is responsible for selecting participants and organizing and analyzing data (Collins & Stockton, 2022). I am a novice in academic research. Hence, my competency, skills, experience, and knowledge of doctoral study are evolving. Consequently, the study was limited to my subjective evaluation and accurate interpretation of the participants' responses to the interview questions. Also, this study was limited to my personal beliefs and professional background with the topic involving

the leadership strategies that owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Finally, the study was limited to the accuracy of information from the participants and the availability of company archival data. I recommend that future researchers comprise experts from related multi-disciplines in entrepreneurship and marketing to divulge some details I must have omitted in this doctoral study.

Reflections

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore branding strategies owners of SMEs used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. In compliance with ethical research and Walden University's IRB requirements, I completed the CITI web-based training, which improved my understanding of the obligations for using human beings in the research study. After that, I secured the IRB approval before engaging the participants in the research study. Using emails and telephones to contact the participants improved my networking, negotiation, empathy, inspiration, innovation, collaboration, and communication skills. Using the purposive sampling technique, I selected six owners of SMEs from three SMEs in the southern region of Nigeria who had successfully used branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The purposive sampling technique enabled me to select six owners of SMEs with relevant training, experience, skills, knowledge, and competency to answer the overarching research question.

In conducting this study, I used the qualitative research method to explore the branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. By conducting semistructured interviews and interacting with the participants, I improved

my listening, observation, communication, interpersonal, self-confidence, networking, emotional intelligence, inspirational, and problem-solving skills. Because I interviewed the participants at their preferred time and date, they expressed themselves freely, which enabled me to gain an in-depth understanding and knowledge of the research problem. After the data collection, I organized and analyzed the data, which helped me understand the research problem, identify the themes and patterns, and establish the study findings. Reflecting on my experiences in this study, I gained a better understanding of the doctoral study research process, improving my competency and skills in conducting academic research work.

From the study findings, I gained an in-depth knowledge of the research problem from six owners of SMEs from three SMEs located in Nigeria's southern region who had successfully used branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. I learned that owners of SMEs use a blend of branding strategies involving internet and social media, advertisement and service excellence, word of mouth and referrals, and company identity and personal value to improve their firms' financial success and survive beyond the first 5 years of operations. My new knowledge and understanding of the research problem positively changed my personal bias, ideas and values, preconceived beliefs, and perceptions of branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. I gained a better awareness of branding strategies that owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The experience I gained by embarking on this doctoral journey at Walden University has increased my confidence in conducting doctoral level research. Also, the experience has equipped me with an in-

depth knowledge on branding strategies SME owners use to survive their businesses. A deeper understanding of SMEs branding strategies has emboldened me for future research work on the topic of branding.

Summary and Study Conclusions

SMEs' owners need help using effective branding strategies to survive their firms beyond the first 5 years of operation. This qualitative multiple case study aimed to use the CBBE model to explore the branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. I administered eight open-ended questions through semistructured interviews with six SME owners from three SMEs in the southern region of Nigeria to collect the primary data to answer the research question. Secondary data sources include company archival documents, annual reports, and field notes. The four themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of data were: (a) internet and social media, (b) advertisement and service excellence, (c) word of mouth and referrals, and (d) company identity and personal value. From this study, I found that that owners of SMEs used a blend of branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

By implementing branding strategies, owners of SMEs could improve their firms' financial success to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation, thereby generating economic growth for local communities. By surviving beyond the first 5 years of operation, owners of SMEs would pay more corporate taxes, which local and state governments could use to provide social amenities to the local citizens. With sustained organizational competitiveness and profitability, owners of SMEs would continue to provide job opportunities for the regional communities. The public might learn from the

study findings the branding strategies that owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. Using the CBBE model as a lens for this study involving SME owners may fill a gap in the literature on SMEs' performance. The study findings align with previous scholars' conclusions on the significance of implementing effective branding strategies for an improved firm's financial success to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation.

References

- Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing brand equity*. The Free Press.
- AbdGhani, N. H., Nawi, H. C., & Rahman, A. A. A. (2020, November 26-27). *Sources of brand equity: An investigation in SMEs context* [Conference session]. International Conference of Advanced Materials Engineering and Technology, Langkawi, Malaysia. <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0053477>
- Adashi, E. Y., Walters, L. B., & Menikoff, J. A. (2018). The Belmont Report at 40: Reckoning with time. *American Journal of Public Health, 108*(10), 1345-1348. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304580>
- Afriyie, S., Du, J., & Ibn Musah, A.-A. (2019). Innovation and marketing performance of SME in an emerging economy: The moderating effect of transformational leadership. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research, 9*(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40497-019-0165-3>
- Agada, F., Dumani, M., Duke, E. S., & Oguru, F. A. (2021). Evaluating innovations in small and medium scale enterprises in Bayelsa State. *Journal of Economics, Finance, And Management Studies, 4*(7), 904-911. <https://doi.org/10.47191/jefms/v4-i7-03>
- Ahlin, E. (2019). *Semi-structured interviews with expert practitioners: Their validity and significant contribution to translational research*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526466037>
- Aizpurua, J. I., Papadopoulos, Y., & Merle, G. (2020). Explicit modelling and treatment of repair in prediction of dependability. *IEEE Transactions on Dependable and*

Secure Computing, 17(6), 1147-1162.

<https://doi.org/10.1109/TDSC.2018.2857810>

Ajour El Zein, S., Consolacion-Segura, C., & Huertas-Garcia, R. (2019). The role of sustainability in brand equity value in the financial sector. *Sustainability*, 12(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12010254>

Alam, M. K. (2020). A systematic qualitative case study: Questions, data collection, NVivo analysis and saturation. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 16(1), 1-31.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/qrom-09-2019-1825>

Alexander, B. C., & Spencer, T. (2019). Using NVivo software in teaching and learning qualitative research. *National Social Science Journal*, 51(2), 23-28.

https://www.nssa.us/journals/pdf/NSS_Journal_51_2.pdf#page=26

Ali, F., Dogan, S., Amin, M., Hussain, K., & Ryu, K. (2021). Brand anthropomorphism, love, and defense: Does attitude towards social distancing matter? *The Service Industries Journal*, 41(1-2), 58-83.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2020.186754>

Ali Qalati, S., Li, W., Ahmed, N., Ali Mirani, M., & Khan, A. (2020). Examining the factors affecting SME Performance: The mediating role of social media adoption. *Sustainability*, 13(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13010075>

Almestarihi, R., Al-Gasawneh, J. A., Al-jabali, S., Gharaibeh, M. K., Nowras, O. E., & Nusairat, M. (2021). The impact of social media marketing on brand equity: A systematic review. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education*,

12(6), 4073-4088.

<https://www.turcomat.org/index.php/turkbilmat/article/view/8378>

Alpi, K. M., & Evans, J. J. (2019). Distinguishing case study as a research method from case reports as a publication type. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 107(1), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2019.615>

Al-Tit, A., Omri, A., & Euch, J. (2019). Critical success factors of small and medium-sized enterprises in Saudi Arabia: Insights from sustainability perspective. *Administrative Sciences*, 9(2), 32--44. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci9020032>

Ames, H., Glenton, C., & Lewin, S. (2019). Purposive sampling in a qualitative evidence synthesis: A worked example from a synthesis on parental perceptions of vaccination communication. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 19(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0665-4>

Amoako, G. K., Okpattah, B. K., & Emmanuel Arthur, E. (2019). The impact of social media marketing on brand equity: A perspective of the telecommunication industry in Ghana. *Journal of Business and Retail Management Research*, 13(3), 113-122. <https://doi.org/10.24052/JBRMR/V13IS03/ART-11>

Antonio, M. G., Schick--Makaroff, K., Doiron, J. M., Shields, L., White, L., & Molzahn, A. (2020). Qualitative data management and analysis within a data repository. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 42(8), 640-648. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193945919881706>

Aparicio, G., Maseda, A., Iturralde, T., & Zorrilla, P. (2023). The family business brand: Cross-fertilization between fields. *Management Decision*.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/md-04-2022-0445>

Appel, G., Grewal, L., Hadi, R., & Stephen, A. T. (2020). The future of social media in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(1), 79-95.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00695-1>

Aripova, M. S. (2021). Importance of branding in hotel business. *Scientific Progress*, 1(6), 1092--1097. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/importance-of-branding-in-hotel-business/viewer>

Arora, A. S., & Sanni, S. A. (2019). Ten years of “social media marketing” research in the journal of promotion management: Research synthesis, emerging themes, and new directions. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 25(4), 476-499.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2018.1448322>

Aschauer, W. (2021). The re-figuration of spaces and comparative sociology: Potential new directions for quantitative research. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 22(2), 602-635. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-22.2.3739>

Aslam, U., Jayabalan, M., Ilyas, H., & Suhail, A. (2019). A survey on opinion spam detection methods. *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*, 8(9), 1356-1363. <http://www.ijstr.org/final-print/sep2019/A-Survey-On-Opinion-Spam-Detection-Methods.pdf>

Atilgan, E., Akinci, S., Aksoy, S., & Kaynak, E. (2009). Customer--based brand equity for global brands: A multinational approach. *Journal of Euromarketing*, 18(2), 115-132. <https://doi.org/10.9768/0018.02.115>

Atulkar, S. (2020). Brand trust and brand loyalty in mall shoppers. *Marketing Intelligence*

& *Planning*, 38(5), 559-572. <https://doi.org/10.1108/mip-02-2019-0095>

Awuviry--Newton, K., Tavener, M., Wales, K., & Byles, J. (2020). Interpretative phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of older adults regarding their functional activities in Ghana. *Journal of Primary Care & Community Health*, 11, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2150132720931110>

Bagheri, H., Mashhadi, A., Fadardi, J. S., & Fayyazi-Bordbar, M. R. (2019). Cultural correlates of social anxiety disorder in the Iranian population: A qualitative study. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health*, 21(4), 234-244. http://jfmh.mums.ac.ir/jufile?ar_sfile=280428

Bagherzadeh, M., Ghaderi, M., & Fernandez, A. S. (2022). Coopetition for innovation - the more, the better? An empirical study based on preference disaggregation analysis. *European Journal of Operational Research*, 297(2), 695-708. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejor.2021.06.010>

Baker, J. J., Fehrer, J. A., & Brodie, R. J. (2022). Navigating the emergence of brand meaning in service ecosystems. *Journal of Service Management*, 33(3), 465--484. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-07-2021-0261>

Ballena, C. T. (2021). Qualitative research interviewing: Typology of graduate students' interview questions. *Philippine Social Science Journal*, 4(3), 96-112. <https://doi.org/10.52006/main.v4i3.376>

Balmer, J. M. T., & Podnar, K. (2021). Corporate brand orientation: Identity, internal images, and corporate identification matters. *Journal of Business Research*, 134, 729-737. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.06.016>

- Baltrusch, S. J., Houdijk, H., van Dieën, J. H., & Kruif, J. T. C. M. (2020). Trunk exoskeleton acceptance and effects on self-efficacy in employees with low-back pain: A mixed-method approach. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, 31*, 129-141. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-020-09891-1>
- Bareket-Bojmel, L., & Shuv-Ami, A. (2019). The brand is my workplace. *International Journal of Manpower, 40*(5), 818-833. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-07-2017-0176>
- Barrett, D., & Twycross, A. (2018). Data collection in qualitative research. *Evidence Based Nursing, 21*(1), 63--64. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2018-102939>
- Bashan, B., & Holsblat, R. (2017). Reflective journals as a research tool: The case of student teacher's development of teamwork. *Cogent Education, 4*(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.1374234>
- Beig, F. A., & Nika, F. A. (2019). Brand experience and brand equity. *Vision: The Journal of Business Perspective, 23*(4), 410--417. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0972262919860963>
- Bigne, E., Chatzipanagiotou, K., & Ruiz, C. (2020). Pictorial content, sequence of conflicting online reviews and consumer decision-making: The stimulus-organism-response model revisited. *Journal of Business Research, 115*, 403-416. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.11.031>
- Bloomfield, J., & Fisher, M. J. (2019). Quantitative research design. *Journal of the Australasian Rehabilitation Nurses' Association, 22*(2), 27-30. <https://doi.org/10.33235/jarna.22.2.27-30>
- Bohan, J., & Kellam, L. (2021). Preparing a data archive or repository for changing

- research data and materials retention policies. *Journal of eScience Librarianship*, 10(4), 1216-1221. <https://doi.org/10.7191/jeslib.2021.1216>
- Borycz, J. (2021). Implementing data management workflows in research groups through integrated library consultancy. *Data Science Journal*, 20(9), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.5334/dsj-2021-009>
- Bose, S., Pradhan, S., Bashir, M., & Roy, S. K. (2021). Customer based place brand equity and tourism: A regional identity perspective. *Journal of Travel Research*, 61(3), 511-527. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287521999465>
- Bose, S., Roy, S. K., Alwi, S. F. S., & Nguyen, B. (2020). Measuring customer-based place brand equity (CBPBE) from a public diplomacy perspective: Evidence from West Bengal. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, 734-744. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.01.059>
- Boutet, I., LeBlanc, M., Chamberland, J. A., & Collin, C. A. (2021). Emojis influence emotional communication, social attributions, and information processing. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 119, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106722>
- Braaten, B., Kramer, A., Henderson, E., Kajfez, R., & Dringenberg, E. (2020, October 21-24). *Assessing complex constructs: Refining an interview protocol* [Conference session]. IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference (FIE), Uppsala, Sweden. <https://doi.org/10.1109/FIE44824.2020.9274260>
- Bracíníková, V., & Matušínková, K. (2020). Brand meaning for consumers from dissimilar Generations. *Scientific Papers of the University of Pardubice. Series D, Faculty of*

Economics & Administration, 28(1), 29-42.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hilda-Olele-3/publication/344427803_SciPap_28_01/links/5f7442af458515b7cf58d04b/SciPap-28-01.pdf#page=30

Brear, M. (2019). Process and outcomes of a recursive, dialogic member checking approach: A project ethnography. *Qualitative Health Research*, 29(7), 944-957.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732318812448>

Brenna, C. T. A., & Das, S. (2021). The divided principle of justice: Ethical decision-making at surge capacity. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 21(8), 37-39.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2021.1940358>

Brothers, K. B., Rivera, S. M., Cadigan, R. J., Sharp, R. R., & Goldenberg, A. J. (2019). A Belmont reboot: Building a normative foundation for human research in the 21st century. *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 47(1), 165-172.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1073110519840497>

Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C. (2020). How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2(1), 1-10.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>

Cambra-Fierro, J. J., Fuentes-Blasco, M., Huerta-Álvarez, R., & Olavarría, A. (2021). Customer-based brand equity and customer engagement in experiential services: Insights from an emerging economy. *Service Business*, 15(3), 467-491.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11628-021-00448-7>

Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters,

D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 1*(1), 1-10.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>

Cana, D. (2020). The impact of the current crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic on consumer behavior. *Studies in Business & Economics, 15*(2), 85-99.

<https://doi.org/10.2478/sbe-2020-0027>

Casteran, G., Chrysochou, P., & Meyer-Waarden, L. (2019). Brand loyalty evolution and the impact of category characteristics. *Marketing Letters, 30*(1), 57-73.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-019-09484-w>

Caycho-Rodríguez, T., Rojas-Jara, C., Ventura-León, J., Noe-Grijalva, M., Cabrera-Orosco, I., & Reyes-Bossio, M. (2021). Single item to assess for worry for cancer: Initial evidence of validity and reliability: *Enfermería Clínica (English Edition), 31*(4), 203-210. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enfcle.2019.11.002>

Centeno, E., Cambra-Fierro, J., Vazquez-Carrasco, R., Hart, S. J., & Dinnie, K. (2019). The interplay between SME owner-managers and the brand-as-a-person. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 28*(4), 555-572. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jpbm-10-2017-1645>

Centeno, E., Hart, S., & Dinnie, K. (2013). The five phases of SME brand-building. *Journal of Brand Management, 20*(6), 445-457.

<https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2012.49>

Chen, P. C. (2021). The effects of brand revitalization and retro branding on brand and purchase outcomes: The moderating roles of consumer nostalgia proneness and

self-construal. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 38(7-8), 771-799.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2021.2012233>

Chokpitakkul, N., & Anantachart, S. (2020). Developing and validating a scale of consumer-based brand equity for SMEs: Evidence from Thailand. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 27(3), 383-404.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/jsbed-04-2019-0138>

Christodoulides, G., & de Chernatony, L. (2010). Consumer-based brand equity conceptualisation and measurement: A literature review. *International Journal of Market Research*, 52(1), 43-66. <https://doi.org/10.2501/s1470785310201053>

Clark, M. K., Lages, C. R., & Hollebeek, L. D. (2020). Friend or foe? Customer engagement's value-based effects on fellow customers and the firm. *Journal of Business Research*, 121, 549-556. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.011>

Clayton, E. W. (2020). What should we be asking of informed consent? *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 48(1), 185-187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1073110520917009>

Coelho, F. J. F., Bairrada, C. M., & Matos Coelho, A. F. (2020). Functional brand qualities and perceived value: The mediating role of brand experience and brand personality. *Psychology & Marketing*, 37(1), 41-55.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21279>

Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. (2022). The theater of qualitative research: The role of the researcher/actor. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, 1-9.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221103109>

Cubellis, L., Schmid, C., & von Peter, S. (2021). Ethnography in health services research:

- Oscillation between theory and practice. *Qualitative Health Research*, 31(11), 2029-2040. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323211022312>
- Dahl, D. W., & Hofstetter, R. (2021). Crowdsourcing for marketing success. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1-5. <https://www.ama.org/2021/11/17/crowdsourcing-for-marketing-success/>
- Dash, S. S., & Verma, S. K. (2019). Researcher's journey in exploring ambivalence among closed ties: Addressing obstacles experienced. *IAHRW International Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 7(5), 1138-1143. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/0f08ab7c2d7df73eeeff692d36e76174/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=5347679>
- Daugherty, M. L. (2021). Small business marketing strategies for physical therapy practice owners. *International Journal of Healthcare Management*, 14(3), 710-716. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20479700.2019.1692505>
- Davies, S. E. (2020). The introduction of research ethics review procedures at a university in South Africa: Review outcomes of a social science research ethics committee. *Research Ethics*, 16(1-2), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1747016119898408>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage
- Derda, I. (2019). Advertising content acquisition through crowdsourcing platforms: Case study 1. *Zarządzanie w Kulturze*, 20(1), 47-62. <https://doi.org/10.4467/20843976ZK.19.003.10336>

- Devece, C., Palacios, D., & Ribeiro-Navarrete, B. (2019). The effectiveness of crowdsourcing in knowledge--based industries: The moderating role of transformational leadership and organisational learning. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 32(1), 335-351.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677x.2018.1547204>
- Di Crosta, A., Ceccato, I., Marchetti, D., La Malva, P., Maiella, R., Cannito, L., Cipi, M., Mammarella, N., Palumbo, R., Verrocchio, M. C., Palumbo, R., & Di Domenico, A. (2021). Psychological factors and consumer behavior during the covid--19 pandemic. *PLoS ONE*, 16(8), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0256095>
- Dimitrios, T., & Antigoni, A. (2019). Limitations and delimitations in the research process. *Perioperative Nursing*, 7(3), 155-162.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2552022>
- Dolega, L., Rowe, F., & Branagan, E. (2021). Going digital? The impact of social media marketing on retail website traffic, orders, and sales. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 60, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102501>
- Donzé, P. Y., Pouillard, V., & Roberts, J. (2020). *The Oxford Handbook of Luxury Business*. Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190932220.001.0001>
- Dressler, M., & Paunovic, I. (2021). A typology of winery SME brand strategies with implications for sustainability communication and co-creation. *Sustainability*, 13(2), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020805>
- Drysdale, T. (2020). Research data management in a cultural heritage organisation.

International Journal of Digital Curation, 14(1), 1-29.

<https://doi.org/10.2218/ijdc.v14i1.647>

Duarte, A., & Freitas, J. (2021). Social brands: The future of branding? *Academia Letters*,

Dhew1-6. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL455>

Dumitriu, D., Militaru, G., Deselnicu, D. C., Niculescu, A., & Popescu, M. A. (2019). A

perspective over modern SMEs: Managing brand equity, growth, and

sustainability through digital marketing tools and techniques. *Sustainability*,

11(7), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11072111>

Dhewi, T. S., & Kurnianto, M. (2023). Social media marketing and its influence on

brand equity: The mediating role of word of mouth and E-word of mouth. *Jurnal*

Pendidikan Ekonomi & Bisnis, 11(1), 01-11.

<https://journal.unj.ac.id/unj/index.php/jpeb/article/view/33361/14778>

Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., Jain,

V., Karjaluoto, H., Kefi, H., Krishen, A. S., Kumar, V., Rahman, M. M., Raman,

R., Rauschnabel, P. A., Rowley, J., Salo, J., Tran, G. A., & Wang, Y. (2021).

Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and

research propositions. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59, 1-

37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102168>

Dzwigol, H. (2020). Methodological and empirical platform of triangulation in strategic

management. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 19(4), 1-8.

[https://www.proquest.com/openview/3fcfdabe3dc8cf95b9ccc37e75613f7d/1?pq-](https://www.proquest.com/openview/3fcfdabe3dc8cf95b9ccc37e75613f7d/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=38745)

[origsite=gscholar&cbl=38745](https://www.proquest.com/openview/3fcfdabe3dc8cf95b9ccc37e75613f7d/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=38745)

- Ekawati, N., Yasa, N., Kusumadewi, N., & Setini, M. (2021). The effect of hedonic value, brand personality appeal, and attitude towards behavioral intention. *Management Science Letters*, *11*(1), 253-260.
<https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2020.8.008>
- Ellis, P. (2019). The language of research (Part 20): Understanding the quality of a qualitative paper (2). *Wounds UK*, *15*(1), 110-111. <https://www.wounds-uk.com>
- Engward, H., & Goldspink, S. (2020). Lodgers in the house: Living with the data in interpretive phenomenological analysis research. *Reflective Practice*, *21*(1), 41-53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2019.1708305>
- Erkmen, E., & Hancer, M. (2019). Building brand relationships for restaurants: An examination of other customers, brand image, trust and restaurant attributes. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *31*(3), 1469-1487. <http://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-08-2017-0516>
- Eugenio-Vela, J., De, S., Ginesta, X., & Kavaratzis, M. (2019). The critical role of stakeholder engagement in a place branding strategy: A case study of the Empordà brand. *European Planning Studies*, *28*(7), 1393-1412.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1701294>
- Faircloth, J. B., Capella, L. M., & Alford, B. L. (2001). The effect of brand attitude and brand image on brand equity. *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice*, *9*(3), 61-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2001.11501897>
- Farquhar, J., Michels, M., & Robson, J. (2020). Triangulation in industrial qualitative case study research: Widening the scope. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *87*,

160-170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.02.001>

Fernandes, T., & Moreira, M. (2019). Consumer brand engagement, satisfaction and brand loyalty: A comparative study between functional and emotional brand relationships. *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 28(2), 274-286.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-08-2017-1545>

Fernandez Lynch, H., Joffe, S., Thirumurthy, H., Xie, D., & Largent, E. A. (2019).

Association between financial incentives and participant deception about study eligibility. *JAMA Network Open*, 2(1), 1-10.

<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.7355>

Fetscherin, M., Guzman, F., Veloutsou, C., & Cayolla, R. R. (2019). Latest research on brand relationships: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 28(2), 133-139. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-12-2018-2167>

Finoti, L., Didonet, S. R., Toaldo, A. M., & Martins, T. S. (2017). The role of the marketing strategy process in the innovativeness performance relationship of SMEs. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 35(3), 298-315.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-01-2016-0005>

Fitriani, S., Unteawati, B., Widiawati, D. K., Apriyani, M., & Berliana, D. (2021). Brand equity development strategy to enhance the competitiveness of food small-medium enterprises (SMEs): Case studies on Fudia-Polinela agri-food centre.

Journal AGRISEP, 20(2), 289-304. <http://doi.org:10.31186/jagrisep.20.2.289-304>

FitzPatrick, B. (2019). Validity in qualitative health education research. *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, 11(2), 211-217.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.11.014>

Fofana, F., Bazeley, P., & Regnault, A. (2020). Applying a mixed method design to test saturation for qualitative data in health outcomes research. *PLoS ONE*, *15*(6), 1--12. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0234898>

Forbes, H. L., & Schaefer, D. (2018, 21-24 May). *Crowdsourcing in product development: Current state and future research directions* [Conference session]. 15th International Design Conference, Dubrovnik, Croatia.

<https://doi.org/10.21278/idc.2018.0161>

Ford, E. (2020). Tell me your story: Narrative inquiry in LIS research. *College & Research Libraries*, *81*(2), 235-247. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.81.2.235>

Ford, J. B. (2019). What we know about social-media marketing. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *59*(4), 383-384. <https://doi.org/10.2501/jar-2019-041>

Fouladi, S., Ekhlassi, A., & Sakhdari, K. (2021). Determining the factors affecting brand authenticity of startups in social media. *Qualitative Market Research*, *24*(3), 396-419. <https://doi.org/10.1108/qmr-04-2020-0048>

Franco, P., & Yang, Y. N. (2021). Exiting fieldwork “with grace”: Reflections on the unintended consequences of participant observation and researcher-participant relationships. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *24*(3), 358-374. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-07-2020-0094>

Freeman, R. E. (1994). The politics of stakeholder theory: Some future directions. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *4*(4), 409-421. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3857340>

Freeman, R. E. (2010). *Stakeholder theory: The state of the art*. Cambridge eText.

- Frost, D. M., Hammack, P. L., Wilson, B. D. M., Russell, S. T., Lightfoot, M., & Meyer, I. H. (2020). The qualitative interview in psychology and the study of social change: Sexual identity development, minority stress, and health in the generations study. *Qualitative Psychology*, 7(3), 245-266.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000148>
- Gerlitz, L., Meyer, C., & Prause, G. (2021). Marketing and branding strategy for the South Baltic sea region: Reinforcing regional innovation in SMEs through cross-border collaboration models in the age of transformation. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*, 8(4), 468-487. [https://doi.org/10.9770/jesi.2021.8.4\(28\)](https://doi.org/10.9770/jesi.2021.8.4(28))
- Ghani, N. A., Hamid, S., Hashem, I. T., & Ahmed, E. (2019). Social media big data analytics: A survey. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 101, 417-428.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.08.039>
- Gianluigi, G., Cesare, A., & Andrea, S. (2020). Elderly consumers and financial choices: A systematic review. *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, 25(3-4), 76-85.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41264-020-00077-7>
- Gielens, K., & Steenkamp, J. B. E. M. (2019). Branding in the era of digital (dis)intermediation. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 36(3), 367-384. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2019.01.005>
- Gill, S. L. (2020). Qualitative sampling methods. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 36(4), 579-581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334420949218>
- Gilmartin, J., & Esterhuizen, P. (2020). Shifting pedagogical priorities in facilitating mixed methods research, including postgraduate student's reflections. *GSTF*

Journal of Nursing and Health Care, 5, 1-7. https://doi.org/10.5176/2345-7198_5.1.8

Godwin, A., Benedict, B., Rohde, J., Thielmeyer, A., Perkins, H., Major, J., Clements, H., & Chen, Z. (2021). New epistemological perspectives on quantitative methods: An example using topological data analysis. *Studies in Engineering Education*, 2(1), 16-34. <https://doi.org/10.21061/see.18>

Golossenko, A., Pillai, K. G., & Aroean, L. (2020). Seeing brands as humans: Development and validation of a brand anthropomorphism scale. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 37(4), 737-755. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2020.02.007>

Gong, X., Wang, C., Yan, Y., Liu, M., & Ali, R. (2020). What drives sustainable brand awareness: Exploring the cognitive symmetry between brand strategy and consumer brand knowledge. *Symmetry*, 12(2), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sym12020198>

Gorbatov, S., Khapova, S. N., & Lysova, E. I. (2019). Get noticed to get ahead: The impact of personal branding on career success. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02662>

Górska-Warsewicz, H., & Kulykovets, O. (2020). Hotel brand loyalty: A systematic literature review. *Sustainability*, 12(12), 1-34. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12124810>

Grebosz-Krawczyk, M. (2021). Place branding (r)evolution: The management of the smart city's brand. *Place Branding & Public Diplomacy*, 17(1), 93-104. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-020-00167-2>

- Gruß, I., Bunce, A., Davis, J., Dambrun, K., Cottrell, E., & Gold, R. (2020). Initiating and implementing social determinants of health data collection in community health centers. *Population Health Management*, 24(1), 1-7.
<https://doi.org/10.1089/pop.2019.0205>
- Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PLoS ONE*, 15(5), 1-17.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232076>
- Gumel, B. I. (2019). Mitigating the challenges of small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. *SEISENSE Journal of Management*, 2(3), 82-99.
<https://doi.org/10.33215/sjom.v2i3.129>
- Habib, S., Hamadneh, N. N., & Khan, M. A. (2021). Influence of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and relationship marketing on brand resonance: A mediation analysis. *Sustainability*, 13(12), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13126833>
- Hafez, M. (2021). The impact of social media marketing activities on brand equity in the banking sector in Bangladesh: The mediating role of brand love and brand trust. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 39(7), 1353-1376.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJBM-02-2021-0067>
- Han, H., Nguyen, H. N., Song, H., Chua, B.-L., Lee, S., & Kim, W. (2018). Drivers of brand loyalty in the chain coffee shop industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 72, 86-97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.12.011>
- Hanaysha, J. R. (2023). Exploring the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing dimensions, brand equity and SME growth. *IIM Kozhikode Society &*

- Management Review*, 12(1), 22-38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/22779752221125265>
- Hancock, D. R., Algozzine, B., & Lim, J. H. (2021). *Doing case study research: A practical guide for beginning researchers*. Teachers College Press.
- Hardi, K., & Puspitowati, I. (2022). Success factors of small and medium-sized enterprises in Jakarta. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 655, 1070-1075. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220404.169>
- Hargis, H. (2020). Recorded participant ethnography in family homes: Children, social class, and the role of the researcher. *BMS: Bulletin de Methodologie Sociologique*, 146(1), 37-55. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0759106320908221>
- Hargittai, E. (2020). Potential biases in big data: Omitted voices on social media. *Social Science Computer Review*, 38(1), 10-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439318788322>
- Harif, M. A. A. M., & Hoe, M. K. A. (2018). Critical success determinants of client-server hardware system adoption: Malaysian SME business context. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Study*, 7(1), 65-80.
<http://buscompress.com/journal-home.html>
- Harper, R., Ward, L., & Silburn, K. (2020). The sum of us. Implementing a person centred care bundle: A narrative inquiry. *Applied Nursing Research*, 55, 1-5.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnr.2020.151276>
- Hasan, A. A. T., & Hasan, M. (2019). Secondary brand association influences on brand preference and purchase intention. *Global Media Journal*, 17(32), 1-6.
<https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/secondary-brand-association->

[influences-on-brand-preference-and-purchase-intention.pdf](#)

- Haven, T., & Van Grootel, L. (2019). Preregistering qualitative research. *Accountability in Research*, 26(3), 229-244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2019.1580147>
- He, Q., Guaita-Martínez, J. M., & Botella-Carrubi, D. (2020). How brand equity affects firm productivity: The role of R&D and human capital. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 33(1), 2976-2992. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2019.1686045>
- Hicks, R., Hines, K., & Henson, B. (2021). Demystifying the institutional review board: The official voice of perioperative nursing. *AORN Journal*, 114(4), 309-318. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aorn.13498>
- Hjertstrand, J., Palmgren, P., Axén, I., & Eklund, A. (2021). The Nordic maintenance care program: Patient experience of maintenance care: A qualitative study. *Chiropractic & Manual Therapies*, 29(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12998-021-00388-z>
- Hoang, H. T., Wang, F., Ngo, Q. V., & Chen, M. (2020). Brand equity in social media-based brand community. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 38(3), 325-339. <https://doi.org/10.1108/mip-01-2019-0051>
- Hodge, N. M., McMullen, C., & Kleinschafer, J. (2018). Taking a deliberate approach: The enactment of brand orientation in an SME context. *Journal of Brand Management*, 25(4), 395-408. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0095-3>
- Holmes, A. G. D. (2020). Researcher positionality: A consideration of its influence and place in qualitative research: A new researcher guide. *Shanlax International*

Journal of Education, 8(4), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v8i4.3232>

Hoover, S. M., Strapp, C. M., Ito, A., Foster, K., & Roth, K. (2018). Teaching qualitative research interviewer skills: A developmental framework for social justice psychological research teams. *Qualitative Psychology*, 5(2), 300-318.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000101>

Hoy, M. B. (2018). Alexa, Siri, Cortana, and more: An introduction to voice assistants. *Medical Reference Services Quarterly*, 37(1), 81-88.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02763869.2018.1404391>

Huaman Ramirez, R., Albert, N., & Merunka, D. (2019). Are global brands trustworthy? The role of brand affect, brand innovativeness, and consumer ethnocentrism.

European Business Review, 31(6), 926-946. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-11-2017-0202>.

Huang, C. (2021). Aging consumers and their brands: The customer journey perspective. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 34(1), 31-59.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-10-2021-0733>

Husain, R., Paul, J., & Koles, B. (2022). The role of brand experience, brand resonance and brand trust in luxury consumption. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 66, 1-16.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102895>

Huttunen, R., & Kakkori, L. (2020). Heidegger's theory of truth and its importance for the quality of qualitative research. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 54(3),

600-616. <https://www.philosophy-of-education.org/jope/>

Hyun, H., Park, J., Hawkins, M. A., & Kim, D. (2022). How luxury brands build

customer-based brand equity through phygital experience. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 30(5), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254x.2022.2052937>

e

Iglesias, O., Singh, J. J., & Batista-Foguet, J. M. (2011). The role of brand experience and affective commitment in determining brand loyalty. *Journal of Brand Management*, 18(8), 570-582. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2010.58>

Jacobson, J. (2020). You are a brand: Social media managers' personal branding and "the future audience". *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 29(6), 715-727. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-03-2019-2299>

Jacoby, J. (2002). Stimulus-organism-response reconsidered: An evolutionary step in modeling consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 12(1), 51-57. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327663JCP1201_05

Jadhav, D. S., Dhawal, N., & Bhatt, V. (2021). Applying the customer based brand equity model in examining brand loyalty of consumers towards Johnson & Johnson baby care products: A PLS-SEM approach. *ADBU-Journal of Engineering Technology*, 10(2), 1-8. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Viral-Bhatt/publication/353659604>

Jadhav, G. G., Gaikwad, S. V., & Bapat, D. (2023). A systematic literature review: Digital marketing and its impact on SMEs. *Journal of Indian Business Research*, 15(1), 76-91. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jibr-05-2022-0129>

Jasin, M. (2022). The role of social media marketing and electronic word of mouth on brand image and purchase intention of SMEs product. *Journal of Information*

Systems and Management, 1(4), 54-62. <https://doi.org/10.4444/jisma.v1i4.258>

Jayeola, O., Ihinmoyan, T., & Kazeem, Y. (2018). Environmental factors and the performance of micro and small-scale enterprises (MSEs) in Nigeria: Lessons from some selected MSEs in Ondo State, Nigeria. *Journal of Economics, Management and Trade*, 21(6), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.9734/jemt/2018/42079>

Jeon, H. M., & Yoo, S. R. (2021). The relationship between brand experience and consumer-based brand equity in grocerants. *Service Business*, 15, 369-389. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11628-021-00439-8>

Jibir, A., Ahmed, I., & Bello, A. (2018). Impact of small and medium scale enterprises on economic growth: Evidence from Nigeria. *Global Journal of Economic and Business*, 4(2), 236-244. <https://doi.org/10.12816/0047942>

Jin, T., Shao, W., Griffin, D., & Ross, M. (2018). How young Chinese consumers view Chinese brands. *Young Consumers*, 19(1), 55-69. <https://doi.org/10.1108/yc-09-2017-00740>

Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S. (2020). A review of the quality indicators of rigor in qualitative research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 84(1), 138-146. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7120>

Jones, R. (2005). Finding sources of brand value: Developing a stakeholder model of brand equity. *Journal of Brand Management*, 13(1), 10-32. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540243>

Kamboj, S., Sarmah, B., Gupta, S., & Dwivedi, Y. (2018). Examining branding co-creation in brand communities on social media: Applying the paradigm of

- stimulus-organism-response. *International Journal of Information Management*, 39, 169-185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2017.12.001>.
- Kang, I., Koo, J., Han, J. H., & Yoo, S. (2022). Millennial consumers perceptions on luxury goods: Capturing antecedents for brand resonance in the emerging market context. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 34(2), 214-230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2021.1944832>
- Kato, T. (2021). Functional value vs emotional value: A comparative study of the values that contribute to a preference for a corporate brand. *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*, 1(2), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijime.2021.100024>
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1252054>
- Keller, K. L. (2001). Building customer-based brand equity: A blueprint for creating strong brands. *Marketing Science Institute*, 1(107), 1-39. https://www.academia.edu/download/54131126/Customer_Basedbrand_Equity_Model.pdf
- Keller, K. L. (2020). Leveraging secondary associations to build brand equity: Theoretical perspectives and practical applications. *International Journal of Advertising*, 39(4), 448-465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1710973>
- Keni, K., Dharmawan, P., & Wilson, N. (2021). The influence of company reputation, brand satisfaction, and brand attitude on customer loyalty in the aviation industry in Indonesia. *Development Research of Management*, 16(1), 79-95.

<https://doi.org/10.19166/derema.v16i1.2743>

Khamwon, A., & Pattanajak, P. (2021). Brand innovation, brand trust, and brand loyalty of e-marketplace in Thailand. *International Journal of Business and Technology Management*, 3(3), 29-35.

<https://myjms.mohe.gov.my/index.php/ijbtm/article/view/15034>

Khan, I., & Fatma, M. (2023). CSR Influence on branding and consumer word of mouth: Mediating role of brand trust. *Sustainability*, 15(4), 1-10.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/su15043409>

Kim, H. G., Chun, W., & Wang, Z. (2021). Multiple-dimensions of corporate social responsibility and global brand value: A stakeholder theory perspective. *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice*, 29(4), 409-422.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2020.1865109>

Kim, H. S., & Lee, S. T. (2021). Peace talks: Public diplomacy and place branding in the 2018 Trump-Kim summit in Singapore. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 17, 155-167. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-020-00163-6>

Kim, S., Ham, S., Moon, H., Chua, B.-L., & Han, H. (2019). Experience, brand prestige, perceived value (functional, hedonic, social, and financial), and loyalty among grocerant customers. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 77, 169-177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.06.026>

Kim, Y., & Oh, K. W. (2020). Which consumer associations can build a sustainable fashion brand image? Evidence from fast fashion brands. *Sustainability*, 12(5), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12051703>

- Kononova, A., Kim, W., Joo, E., & Lynch, K. (2020). Click, click, ad: The proportion of relevant (vs. irrelevant) ads matters when advertising within paginated online content. *International Journal of Advertising*, 39(7), 1031-1058.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1732114>
- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2009). *Marketing management (13th ed.)*. Pearson International.
- Kowalczyk, C. M., & Mitchell, N. N. (2021). Understanding the antecedents to luxury brand consumer behavior. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 31(3), 438-453. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-09-2020-3126>
- Kraft, S. A., Duenas, D. M., Kublin, J. G., Shipman, K. J., Murphy, S. C., & Shah, S. K. (2019). Exploring ethical concerns about human challenge studies: A qualitative study of controlled human malaria infection study participants' motivations and attitudes. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 14(1), 49-60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1556264618820219>
- Krake, F. B. G. J. M. (2005). Successful brand management in SME: A new theory and practical hints. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(4), 228-238.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420510609230>
- Krawczyk, P., Maslov, I., Topolewski, M., Pallot, M., Lehtosaari, H., & Huotari, J. (2019, June, 17-19). *Threats to reliability and validity of mixed methods research in user experience* [Conference session]. IEEE International Conference on Engineering, Valbonne Sophia-Antipolis, France.
<https://doi.org/10.1109/ice.2019.8792676>

- Kristijono, N., Supratikno, H., Pramono, R., Sudibjo, N., & Purwanto, A. (2020). Social media data explication to support study on leadership style for sustainable investing. *International Journal of Control and Automation*, 13(4), 626-657. <https://doi.org/10.36418/syntax-idea.v3i3.1090>
- Kumar, V., Khan, I., Fatma, M., & Singh, A. (2022). Engaging luxury brand consumers on social media. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 39(1), 121-132. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-10-2020-4175>
- Kurnianto, M., & Dhewi, T. S. (2022). Social media marketing on brand equity of L'sima tourism, intermediating role: Electronic word of mouth. *Journal of Business and Management Review*, 3(1), 031-044. <https://doi.org/10.47153/jbmr31.2712022>
- Laato, S., Islam, A. K. M. N., Farooq, A., & Dhir, A. (2020). Unusual purchasing behavior during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic: The stimulus-organism-response approach. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 57, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102224>
- Lang, L. D., Behl, A., Guzmán, F., Pereira, V., & Del Giudice, M. (2023). The role of advertising, distribution intensity and store image in achieving global brand loyalty in an emerging market. *International Marketing Review*, 40(1), 127-154. <https://doi.org/10.1108/imr-06-2021-0200>
- Langaro, D., Rita, P., & de Fátima Salgueiro, M. (2018). Do social networking sites contribute to building brands? Evaluating the impact of users' participation on brand awareness and brand attitude. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 24(2), 146-168.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2015.1036100>

Lawrence, L. (2020). Conducting cross-cultural qualitative interviews with mainland Chinese participants during COVID: Lessons from the field. *Qualitative Research*, 22(1), 154-165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120974157>

Leckel, A., Veilleux, S., & Dana, L. (2020). Local open innovation: A means for public policy to increase collaboration for innovation in SMEs. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 153(3), 1-20.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2019.119891>

Lee, S., & Oh, H. (2021). Anthropomorphism and its implications for advertising hotel brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 129, 455-464.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.053>

Lin, F., Ansell, J., Marshall, A., & Ojiako, U. (2019). Managing and building B2B SME brands: An emerging market perspective. *PSU Research Review*, 3(3), 191-214.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/prr-04-2019-0010>

Lin, M. S., & Chung, Y. K. (2019). Understanding the impacts of corporate social responsibility and brand attributes on brand equity in the restaurant industry. *Tourism Economics*, 25(4), 639-658.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354816618813619>

Lindenmeier, J., Hodges, H. M., & Saliterer, I. (2021). Drivers of consumers' panic purchase behavior in the Covid-19 crisis: Validation of an affective and cognitive channel model. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 37(17/18), 1712-1735.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2021.1997290>

- Lindlof, T. R., & Tylor, B. C. (2019). *Sensemaking I: Analyzing, coding and managing data. Qualitative communication research methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Lobe, B., Morgan, D., & Hoffman, K. A. (2020). Qualitative data collection in an era of social distancing. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19 (1), 1-8.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920937875>
- Lowe, N. K. (2019). What is a pilot study? *Journal of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Neonatal Studies*, 8(2), 117-118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jogn.2019.01.005>
- Mackieson, P., Shlonsky, A., & Connolly, M. (2019). Increasing rigor and reducing bias in qualitative research: A document analysis of parliamentary debates using applied thematic analysis. *Qualitative Social Work*, 18(6), 965-980.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325018786996>
- Mallon, S., & Elliott, I. (2019). The emotional risks of turning stories into data: An exploration of the experiences of qualitative researchers working on sensitive topics. *Societies*, 9(3), 62-78. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc9030062>
- Malmqvist, J., Hellberg, K., Möllås, G., Rose, R., & Shevlin, M. (2019). Conducting the pilot study: A neglected part of the research process? Methodological findings supporting the importance of piloting in qualitative research studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1-11.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919878341>
- Manthiou, A., Ayadi, K., Lee, S., Chiang, L., & Tang, L. (2017). Exploring the roles of self-concept and future memory at consumer events: The application of an extended Mehrabian-Russell model. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*,

34(4), 531-543. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2016.1208786>

Mawhinney, L., & Rinke, C. R. (2019). The balance and imbalance of sampling former teachers hidden-by-choice: A snowball in summer. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 42(5), 502-512.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2018.1513480>

McGrath, C., Palmgren, P. J., & Liljedahl, M. (2019). Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical Teacher*, 41(9), 1002-1006.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1497149>

McSweeney, B. (2021). Fooling ourselves and others: Confirmation bias and the trustworthiness of qualitative research: Part 2 (cross-examining the dismissals). *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 34(5), 841-859.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/jocm-04-2021-0118>

Mehrabian, A., & Russell, J. A. (1974). *An approach to environmental psychology*. MIT Press.

Mendonça Alves, J. F., Valladão Novais Van Petten, A. M., Cermak, S. A., & de Castro Magalhães, L. (2019). Evaluation of the reliability and validity of the Brazilian version of the here's how I write: A child's self-assessment and goal setting tool. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 73(2), 1-10. <https://ajot.aota.org/>

Merriam, S. B., & Grenier, R. S. (Eds.). (2019). *Qualitative study in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. John Wiley & Sons

Misirlis, N., & Vlachopoulou, M. (2018). Social media metrics and analytics in marketing: A mapping literature review. *International Journal of Information*

Management, 38(1), 270-276. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2017.10.005>

Mittal, M., Agrawal, S., & Gupta, R. (2019). Gender difference in customer satisfaction and brand loyalty towards banking services. *IUP Journal of Marketing Management*, 18(1), 23-38.

<https://web.s.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=d6af78f4-4e22-47e8-847d-7bffb6382ebd%40redis>

Mohanty, S. K. (2018). Stakeholders' associative network memory model approach to evaluate brand building of make in India. *IUP Journal of Brand Management*, 15(2), 46-60. <https://tinyurl.com/49587365>

Moon, M. D. (2019). Triangulation: A method to increase validity, reliability, and legitimation in clinical research. *Journal of Emergency Nursing*, 45(1), 103-105.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jen.2018.11.004>

Mostafa, M. M., & Arnaout, J. P. (2019). What drives Kuwaiti consumers to purchase luxury brands? *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 30(1), 86-102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09593969.2019.1626259>

Motoki, K., Suzuki, S., Kawashima, R., & Sugiura, M. (2020). A Combination of self-reported data and social-related neural measures forecasts viral marketing success on social media. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 52, 99-117.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2020.06.003>

Mundel, J., Soopramanien, D., & Huddleston, P. (2021). Affordable luxuries: Comparing American and Chinese millennial consumers. *Asia Pacific Management Review*, 26(4), 215-225. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apmr.2021.02.003>

- Murphy, G., Tocher, N., & Burch, T. (2019). Small business owner persistence: Do personal characteristics matter?. *Journal of Small Business Strategy (archive Only)*, 29(1), 99-114.
<https://libjournals.mtsu.edu/index.php/jsbs/article/view/1193>
- Nakanishi, H., & Syozugawa, Y. (2020, 27-20 July). *The use of crowdsourcing as a business strategy* [Conference session]. Advances in Software Engineering, Education, and e-Learning Conference, Las Vegas, NV, United States.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70873-3_71
- Naqvi, M. H. A., Jiang, Y., & Naqvi, M. (2021). Generating customer engagement in electronic-brand communities: A stimulus-organism-response perspective. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 33(7), 1535-1555.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-01-2020-0053>
- Narteh, B. (2018). Brand equity and financial performance: The moderating role of brand likeability. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 36(3), 381-395.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/mip-05-2017-0098>
- Natow, R. S. (2019). The use of triangulation in qualitative studies employing elite interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 20(2), 160-173.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119830077>
- Naumova, O., Bilan, S., & Naumova, M. (2019). Luxury consumers' behavior: A cross-cultural aspect. *Innovative Marketing*, 15(4), 1-13.
[https://doi.org/10.21511/im.15\(4\).2019.01](https://doi.org/10.21511/im.15(4).2019.01)
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us

- learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 8(2), 90-97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2>
- Nigar, N. (2019). Hermeneutic phenomenological narrative enquiry: A Qualitative Study Design. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 10(1), 10-18. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1001.02>
- Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics [NNBS]. (2017). *National survey of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)*. <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/>
- Nilmanat, K., & Kurniawan, T. (2021). The quest in case study research. *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research*, 25(1), 1-6. <https://he02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/PRIJNR>
- Nursanty, E. (2021). The anatomy of place branding: Relating place transformation to community identity. *Place Branding & Public Diplomacy*, 17(1), 19-35. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-019-00157-z>
- Odiri, A. V. (2019). Awareness and use of data triangulation among university students in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 2(2), 299-304. <https://www.asianinstituteofresearch.org/>
- Odoom, R., & Mensah, P. (2019). Brand orientation and brand performance in SMEs: The moderating effects of social media and innovation capabilities. *Management Research Review*, 42(1), 155-171. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-12-2017-0441>
- Ogunsanya, A. A. (2021). Squaring small and medium businesses and branding post Covid-19 in Nigeria: Tripartite imperatives for performance. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 21(4), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2586>

- Oh, H., Lee, M., & Lee, S. A. (2021). Global or local brand? Hotel selection in global travel context. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 30(1), 104-117.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-08-2019-2509>
- Okundaye, K., Fan, S. K., & Dwyer, R. J. (2019). Impact of information and communication technology in Nigerian small-to medium-sized enterprises. *Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Science*, 24(47), 29-46. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jefas-08-2018-0086>
- Olajide, O. T., & Lawal, O. R. (2020). Triangulation method in management sciences research. *Annals of the University of Craiova: Economic Sciences Series*, 1(48), 141-154. <https://www.feaa.ucv.ro.annals.index.html>
- Oliveira, E. R., & Abreu, N. R. (2020). The challenge of brand building: Proposal of a model. *Brazilian Journal of Marketing*, 19(2), 470-494.
<https://doi.org/10.5585/remark.v19i2.17778>
- Olsen, L. E., Meling Samuelsen, B., Pappas, I., & Warlop, L. (2022). Broad vs narrow brand positioning: Effects on competitive brand performance. *European Journal of Marketing*, 56(3), 799-816. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EJM-02-2021-0090>
- Olsson, M., & Höglund, J. (2019). How young consumers use retro brands and retro products to mediate and express discontent towards the present.
https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/handle/2077/59374/gupea_2077_59374_1.pdf?sequence=1
- Ozdemir, S., Gupta, S., Foroudi, P., Wright, L. T., & Eng, T. Y. (2020). Corporate branding and value creation for initiating and managing relationships in B2B

markets. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 23(4), 627-661.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/qmr-12-2017-0168>

Palinkas, L. A., Mendon, S. J., & Hamilton, A. B. (2019). Innovations in mixed methods evaluations. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 40(1), 423-442.

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040218-044215>

Paul, J., & Criado, A. R. (2020). The art of writing literature review: What do we know and what do we need to know? *International Business Review*, 29(4), 1-7.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2020.101717>

Pearson, N., Naylor, P. J., Ashe, M. C., Fernandez, M., Yoong, S. L., & Wolfenden, L. (2020). Guidance for conducting feasibility and pilot studies for implementation trials. *Pilot and Feasibility Studies*, 6(1), 1-12. [https://doi.org/10.1186/s40814-](https://doi.org/10.1186/s40814-020-00634-w)

[020-00634-w](https://doi.org/10.1186/s40814-020-00634-w)

Peláez, J. I., Martínez, E. A., & Vargas, L. G. (2019). Decision-making in social media with consistent data. *Knowledge-Based Systems*, 172, 33-41.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.knosys.2019.02.009>

Peltoniemi, T., & Suomi, R. (2019). Eliminating medicine waste in a Finnish university hospital: A qualitative study. *Journal of Pharmaceutical Policy & Practice*, 12(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40545-019-0188-8>

Phong, L., Nga, T., Hanh, N., & Minh, N. (2020). Relationship between brand association and customer loyalty: The case of online retail industry. *Management Science Letters*, 10(7), 1543-1552. <https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2019.12.012>

Pina, R., & Dias, Á. (2021). The influence of brand experiences on consumer-based

brand equity. *Journal of Brand Management*, 28, 99-115.

<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-020-00215-5>

Pollák, F., Markovič, P., Vavrek, R., & Konečný, M. (2022). Return to the new normal: Empirical analysis of changes in e-consumer behavior during the covid-19 pandemic. *Behavioral Sciences*, 12(3), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12030085>

Postholm, M. B. (2019). *Research and development in school*. Brill.

https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004410213_004

Powell, T. C. (2020). Can quantitative research solve social problems? Pragmatism and the ethics of social research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 167, 41-48.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04196-7>

Purchase, S., & Volery, T. (2020). Marketing innovation: A systematic review. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(9-10), 763-793.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2020.1774631>

Qorbani, Z., Koosha, H., & Bagheri, M. (2020). An integrated model for customer equity estimation based on brand equity. *International Journal of Market Research*,

63(5), 635-664. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470785320954116>

Radler, V. M. (2018). 20 Years of brand personality: A bibliometric review and research agenda. *Journal of Brand Management*, 25(4), 370-383.

<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-017-0083-z>

Rao, S., Verma, A. K., & Bhatia, T. (2021). A review on social spam detection:

Challenges, open issues, and future directions. *Expert Systems with Applications*,

186, 1-31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2021.115742>.

- Rashid, Y., Rashid, A., Warraich, M. A., Sabir, S. S., & Waseem, A. (2019). Case study method: A step-by-step guide for business researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919862424>
- Raut, U. R., Pawar, P. A., Brito, P. Q., & Sisodia, G. S. (2019). Mediating model of brand equity and its application. *Spanish Journal of Marketing ESIC*, 23(2), 295-318. <https://doi.org/10.1108/sjme-04-2019-0021>
- Read, W., Robertson, N., McQuilken, L., & Ferdous, A. S. (2019). Consumer engagement on Twitter: Perceptions of the brand matter. *European Journal of Marketing*, 53(9), 1905-1933. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-10-2017-0772>
- Renjith, V., Yesodharan, R., Noronha, J. A., Ladd, E., & George, A. (2021). Qualitative methods in health care research. *International Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 12(20), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijpvm.IJPVM_321_19
- Robson, P. (2021). Public relations and place branding: Friend, foe or just ignored? A systematic review. *Public Relations Review*, 47(5), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102096>
- Romaniuk, J., & Huang, A. (2020). Understanding consumer perceptions of luxury brands. *International Journal of Market Research*, 62(5), 546-560. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470785319891109>
- Rosário, A. T., & Dias, J. C. (2023). Marketing on social media platforms. *International Journal of E-Business Research*, 19(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijebr.316969>
- Roskosa, A., & Stukalina, Y. (2020, 8-9 May). *Investigating students' perceptions of their university's brand* [Conference session]. International Scientific Conference

on Rural Environment. Education. Personality (REEP), Jelgava, Latvia.

<https://doi.org/10.22616/REEP.2020.015>

Ross, P. T., & Zaidi, B. N. L. (2019). Limited by our limitations. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 8, 261-264. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-00530-x>

Rossolatos, G. (2019). Negative brand meaning co-creation in social media brand communities: A laddering approach using NVivo. *Psychology & Marketing*, 36(12), 1249-1266. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21273>

Rugova, B., & Prenaj, B. (2016). Social media as marketing tool for SMEs: Opportunities and challenges. *Academic Journal of Business, Administration, Law and Social Sciences*, 2(3), 85-97. <https://tinyurl.com/57hjzfa>

Rusfian, E. Z., & Alessandro, J. D. (2021). influence of social media's marketing activity on local brand equity and consumer response: Using mix method approach. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 5(1), 767-780.

<https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v5ns1.1462>

Sandbach, K. (2021). Authenticity, local creatives and place branding: A case study from the Blue Mountains, Australia. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 15(2), 149-166. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPM-D-06-2020-0057>

Sandhu, M. R. S., & Azhar, T. M. (2019). Barriers to branding in SMEs: An exploration at surgical industry of Sialkot, Pakistan. *Paradigms*, 13(1), 134-144.

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A603360465/EAIM?u=minn4020&sid=ebsco&xid=ae1ac114>

Sarasvuo, S., Rindell, A., & Kovalchuk, M. (2022). Toward a conceptual understanding

of co-creation in branding. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 543-563.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.09.051>

Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality and Quantity*, 52(4), 1893-1907.

<http://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8>

Saunders, M. N. K., & Townsend, K. (2018). *Choosing participants. The SAGE handbook of qualitative business and management research methods*. Sage Publications. <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781526430212>

Scheidt, S., Gelhard, C., & Henseler, J. (2020). Old practice, but young research field: A systematic bibliographic review of personal branding. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01809>

Schmidt, H., Eisenmann, Y., Golla, H., Voltz, R., & Perrar, K. M. (2018). Needs of people with advanced dementia in their final phase of life: A multi-perspective qualitative study in nursing homes. *Palliative Medicine*, 32, 657-667.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0269216317746571>

Schreier, M. (2018). *Sampling and generalization. The Sage handbook of qualitative data collection*. Sage Publications.

Schubert, C., & Röhl, T. (2019). Ethnography and organizations: Materiality and change as methodological challenges. *Qualitative Research*, 19(2), 164-181.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794117744748>

Sears, D., & Weatherbee, T. (2019, June 4-6). *Putting branding in its place: History*,

heritage, and winery marketing [Conference session]. 20th Biennial Conference on Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing, online.

https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Putting+branding+in+its+place%3A+History%2C+heritage%2C+and+winery+marketing&btnG=

Sengupta, A., Wesley, S., Cavender, R., & Lee, M. Y. (2022). Global vs local: Analysis of the consumer-brand relationships in India. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 50(3), 361-376. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-08-2020-0306>

Setiawan, T. (2020). Implementation of customer-based brand equity strategy and integrated marketing communication in micro, small and medium enterprises. *Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research*, 189, 715-720. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.210831.136>

Shi, L. (2019). Conceptualizing the roles of founder personality traits in startups' construction of brand identity. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 25(1), 65-81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2018.1427656>

Shorten, A., & Smith, J. (2017). Mixed methods research: Expanding the evidence base. *Evidence Based Nursing*, 20(3), 74-75. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2017-102699>

Sivasubramaniam, S., Dlabolová, D. H., Kralikova, V., & Khan, Z. R. (2021). Assisting you to advance with ethics in research: An introduction to ethical governance and application procedures. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 17(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-021-00078-6>

Slettebø, T. (2021). Participant validation: Exploring a contested tool in qualitative

research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 20(5), 1223-1238.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325020968189>

Sobande, F. (2020). We're all in this together: Commodified notions of connection, care and community in brand responses to COVID-19. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(6), 1033-1037. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420932294>

Stacy, R. N. (2022). *Stakeholder theory*. Salem Press Encyclopedia.

Stahl, N., Lampi, J., & King, J. R. (2019). Expanding approaches for research: Mixed methods. *Journal of Educational Development*, 42(2), 1-3.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1321927.pdf>

Stocchi, L., Ludwichowska, G., Fuller, R., & Gregoric, A. (2021). Customer-based brand equity for branded apps: A simple research framework. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 27(5), 534-563.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2020.1752775>

Stukalina, Y., & Pavlyuk, D. (2021). Using customer-based brand equity model in the higher education context: Simulating the current university's brand. *Business, Management and Economics Engineering*, 19(2), 272-288.

<https://doi.org/10.3846/bmee.2021.14692>

Sulhaini, S., Rusdan, Sulaimiah, & Dayani, R. (2021). Global symbolic value orientation and positive electronic word of mouth towards local fashion brands. *Asia Pacific Management Review*, 27(3), 220-228.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apmr.2021.09.003>

Susanti, V., Sumarwan, U., Simanjuntak, M., & Yusuf, E. Z. (2019). How to manage

customer satisfaction through brand association and perceived value strategy. *Journal of Management and Marketing Review*, 4(3), 184-193.

[https://doi.org/10.35609/jmmr.2019.4.3\(3\)](https://doi.org/10.35609/jmmr.2019.4.3(3))

Sutton, J., & Austin, Z. (2015). Qualitative research: Data collection, analysis, and management. *The Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy*, 68(3), 226-231.

<https://doi.org/10.4212/cjhp.v68i3.1456>

Swaminathan, V., Sorescu, A., Steenkamp, J. B. E. M., O'Quinn, T. C. G., & Schmitt, B. (2020). Branding in a hyperconnected world: Refocusing theories and rethinking boundaries. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(2), 24-46.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242919899905>

Tahir, F. A., & Inuwa, F. U. (2019). Empirical investigation of the factors affecting micro, small and medium scale enterprises performance in Borno State, Nigeria. *International Business Research*, 12(4), 30-39.

<https://doi.org/10.5539/ibr.v12n4p30>

Tajvidi, R., & Karami, A. (2021). The effect of social media on firm performance. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 115, 1-10.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.09.026>

Tavory, I. (2020). Interviews and inference: Making sense of interview data in qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 43(4), 449-465. [https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09464-x)

[020-09464-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09464-x)

Tian, H., Siddik, A. B., & Masukujjaman, M. (2022). Factors affecting the repurchase intention of organic tea among millennial consumers: An empirical

- study. *Behavioral Sciences*, 12(2), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12020050>
- Tokes, G. E. (2020). Methodological framework for the analysis of brand identity construction. *Journal of Media Research*, 13(1), 22-40.
<https://doi.org/10.24193/jmr.36.2>
- Tomaszewski, L. E., Zarestky, J., & Gonzalez, E. (2020). Planning qualitative research: Design and decision making for new researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920967174>
- Torelli, J. (2019). On entering the field: Notes from a neophyte researcher. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 15(3), 64-92. <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.3.04>
- Townsend, R. E. (2019). *Leadership strategies for reducing operational costs in waste management businesses in Liberia* (Publication No. 8025) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. ScholarWorks.
- Tran, V. D., Vo, T. N. L., & Dinh, T. Q. (2020). The Relationship between brand authenticity, brand equity and customer satisfaction. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 7(4), 213-221.
<https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2020.vol7.no4.213>
- Trochim, W. M. K. (2020). *Knowledge base*. <https://conjointly.com/kb/>
- Uford, C. I., & Duh, H. I. (2021). Measuring the sources and outcomes of customer-based brand equity in a service industry. *African Journal of Business and Economic Research*, 16(2), 245-266. <https://doi.org/10.31920/1750-4562/2021/v16n2a12>
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (1979). *The Belmont Report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects' research*.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/e301872003-001>

Vanhoose, K., Hoekstra, M., & Bontje, M. (2021). Marketing the unmarketable: Place branding in a postindustrial medium-sized town. *Cities*, *114*, 1-9.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103216>

Vitelar, A. (2019). Like me: Generation Z and the use of social media for personal branding. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, *7*(2), 257-268.

<https://doi.org/10.25019/MDKE/7.2.07>

Wang, Y., & Qiao, F. (2020). The symbolic meaning of luxury-lite fashion brands among younger Chinese consumers. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and*

Management, *24*(1), 83-98. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-09-2019-0204>

Weisman, A., Quintner, J., Galbraith, M., & Masharawi, Y. (2020). Why are assumptions passed off as established knowledge? *Medical Hypotheses*, *140*, 1-5.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mehy.2020.109693>.

Wicaksono, R. B., Ferine, M., Dwi Lestari, D. W., Hidayah, A. N., & Muhaimin, A. (2021). Experience of Indonesian medical students of ethical issues during their clinical clerkship in a rural setting. *Journal of Medical Ethics & History of*

Medicine, *14*(6), 1-16. <https://jmehm.tums.ac.ir/index.php/jmehm>

Wichman, J. R. K., Weigand, N., & Reinartz, W. J. (2022). The platformization of brands. *Journal of Marketing*, *86*(1), 109-131.

<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F00222429211054073>

Willig, C. (2019). What can qualitative psychology contribute to psychological knowledge? *Psychological Methods*, *24*(6), 796-804.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/met0000218>

Wilson, J. A. J. (2020). Understanding branding is demanding. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(13/14), 1178-1189.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1801254>

Wong, C. A., Song, W. B., Jiao, M., O'Brien, E., Ubel, P., Wang, G., & Scales, C. D. (2021). Strategies for research participant engagement: A synthetic review and conceptual framework. *Clinical Trials*, 18(4), 457-465.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/17407745211011068>

Wulandari, S., & Rahmah, M. (2020). A survey on crowdsourcing awareness in Indonesia micro small medium enterprises. *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 769, 1-8. [https://doi.org/10.1088/1757-](https://doi.org/10.1088/1757-899x/769/1/012016)

[899x/769/1/012016](https://doi.org/10.1088/1757-899x/769/1/012016)

Xiao, Y., & Watson, M. (2019). Guidance on conducting a systematic literature review. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 39(1), 93-112.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456x17723971>

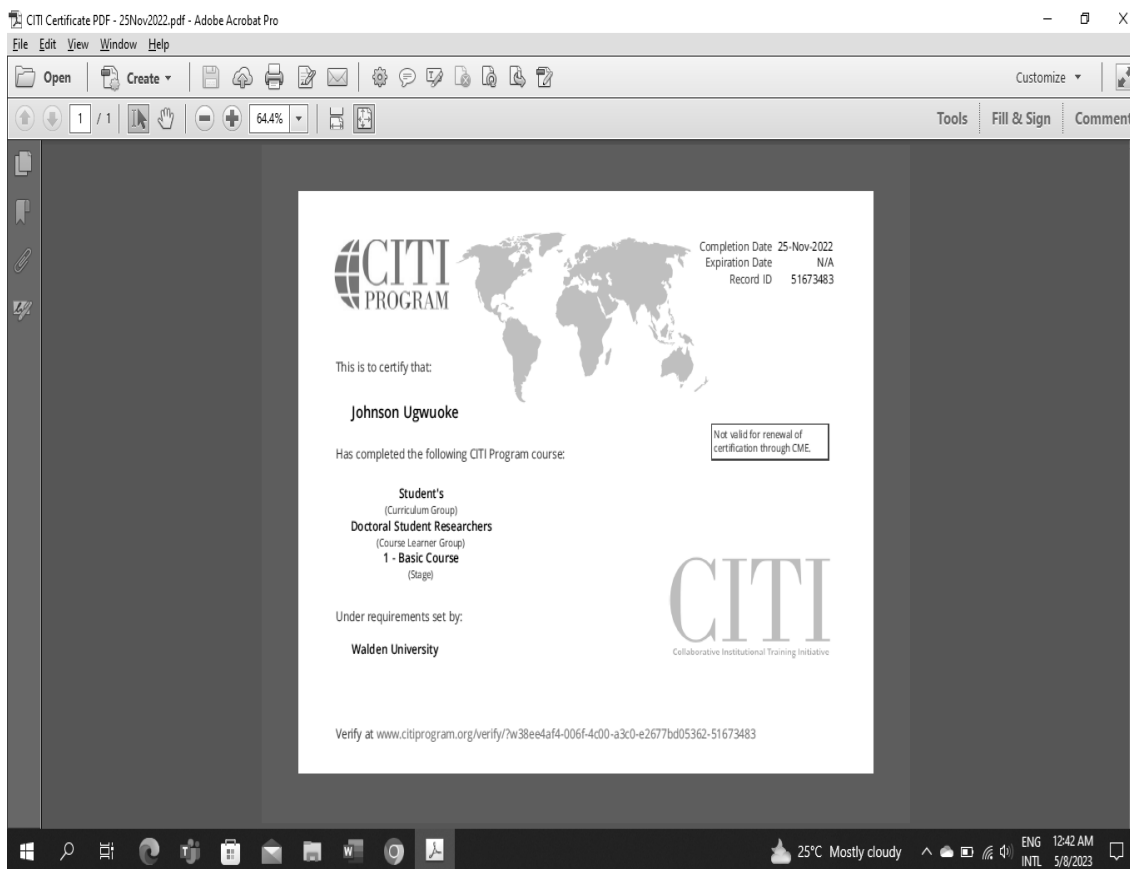
Xiaoyan, S., & Xiaoling, G. (2020). Brand should be gorgeous: A literature review of consumer response to brand logo design. *Foreign Economics & Management*, 42(1), 55-69. <https://doi.org/10.16538/j.cnki.fem.20191111.001>

Xu, A., Baysari, M. T., Stocker, S. L., Leow, L. J., Day, R. O., & Carland, J. E. (2020). Researchers' views on, and experiences with, the requirement to obtain informed consent in research involving human participants: A qualitative study. *BMC Medical Ethics*, 21(1), 93-103. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-020-00538-7>

- Yang, S., Jiménez, F. R., Hadjimarcou, J., & Frankwick, G. L. (2019). Functional and social value of chinese brands. *Journal of Global Marketing*, 32(3), 200-215.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08911762.2018.1545955>
- Yen, C. H., Teng, H. Y., & Chang, S. T. (2020). Destination brand identity and emerging market tourists' perceptions. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 25(12), 1311-1328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2020.1853578>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Yohana, F. C. P., Meilani, I. B. M. P. B., Suryawan, I. N., & Ronnie, R. M. (2020). The influence of brand awareness, brand image, and brand trust on brand loyalty. *Jurnal Manajemen*, 24(3), 412-426. <https://doi.org/10.24912/jm.v24i3.676>
- Yuan, L., & Dennis, A. R. (2020). Acting like humans? Anthropomorphism and consumer's willingness to pay in electronic commerce. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 37(2), 450-477.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07421222.2019.1598691>
- Zarei, A., Farjoo, H., & Bagheri Garabollagh, H. (2022). How social media marketing activities (SMMAs) and brand equity affect the customer's response: Does overall flow moderate it? *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 21(2), 160-182.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2021.1955461>
- Zhuofan, Y., Shib, Y., & Wang, B. (2015). Search engine marketing, financing ability and firm performance in e-commerce. *Procedia Computer Science*, 55, 1106-1112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2015.07.078>

- Zilber, T. B. (2020). The methodology/theory interface: Ethnography and the microfoundations of institutions. *Organization Theory, 1*(2), 1-27.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2631787720919439>
- Zollo, L., Filieri, R., Rialti, R., & Yoon, S. (2020). Unpacking the relationship between social media marketing and brand equity: The mediating role of consumers' benefits and experience. *Journal of Business Research, 117*, 256-267.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.001>.
- Zong, H., Yang, J., Zhang, Z., Li, Z., & Zhang, X. (2021). Semantic categorization of Chinese eligibility criteria in clinical trials using machine learning methods. *BMC Medical Informatics & Decision Making, 21*(1), 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12911-021-01487-w>
- Zyphur, M. J., & Pierides, D. C. (2020). Statistics and probability have always been value-laden: An historical ontology of quantitative research methods. *Journal of Business Ethics, 167*(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04187-8>

Appendix A: CITI Certification



Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Pre-Interview Activities	
Steps	Action
Participant selection	Contact participants via email, phone or in person using the eligibility criteria highlighted in the research study
Interview logistics: Set date, time, prepare tools, and venue for the interview	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Make interview appointments, highlighting dates and time for each participant b. Send an interview reminder a day before meeting to the interviewees c. Ensure that all the tools for the interview are available; e.g., audio recorder, note pad / iPad, pen, paper, etc d. Conduct all interviews via teleconference call. Time for the interview should not exceed 40 minutes
Interview Activities	
Interview introduction and stage setting: Introduction of participant and researcher.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Introduce myself as the interviewee b. Recap the purpose of the research study c. Review informed consent form d. Check informed consent endorsement and ask for further clarification where required e. Obtain verbal consent prior to beginning the interview, and written consent via email.
Begin with the ice breaker	<p>Use ice breaker to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. get the participants at ease before starting the interview and remove tension from the environment b. build a rapport with the participant with an aim of building trust and making interview participants feel comfortable to open up to the interviewee c. reduce nervousness or any skepticism of the participant d. remove inhibitions so that the participant can act freely and relaxed
Interview recording and initial probe questions	<p>Explain to the participants that you will record the interview. Begin with the following background information:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. educational background b. role in the current organization c. years of experience
<p>Interview questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ask participants open-ended questions b. watch out for non-verbal indications c. paraphrase when necessary and applicable d. following-up with probing questions to get in-depth and rich responses. 	Semistructured interview question 1-8 will be asked participants.
Wrap up the interview	<p>Conclusion:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. afford the participants the opportunity to clarify any of the response(s) given b. thank the participants for participating in the interview c. share your contact with the participant for follow-up concerns, clarification or questions
Post-Interview Activities	
Transcribing the interview	Transcribe the interview and email it to the participants for review
Member checking	Contact the participants and confirm the accuracy of the transcribed document. Furthermore, allow the participants to correct any misinterpreted information, where there is any picked up by the participant.

Schedule a follow--up member checking the interview	The purpose of the follow up is to ensure rigor and quality of the research. The synthesis must represent the responses of the participants. Ask for additional information if needed.
---	--

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to Participants

October 27, 2022

Letter of Invitation

Dear Sir/Madam,

As part of my doctoral research at Walden University, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting to explore branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The findings of this study may help owners of SMEs to identify branding strategies owners of SMEs use to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The participants for this study shall be owners of SMEs in Nigeria's southern region who have successfully used branding strategies to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. The mode of data collection shall be via telephone interviews and videoconferencing. The duration of the survey could take approximately 45 minutes. You may also be requested to provide documentation that is otherwise made available to the public regarding branding strategies you have used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation. All data collected will be treated as confidential, and your participation in the study is voluntary. Immediately after I complete the interview transcription, I will ask you to verify that I correctly transcribed the interview. I will send you the transcript electronically via email and request a response within 3 days if revisions are needed. Enclosed with this letter is the Participant Consent Form. If you are interested in participating in the study, kindly review the form carefully and send an email with the words "I consent". If you need any clarifications about the study, you may contact the researcher via phone at +234 703 150 0112 or via

email at johnson.ugwuoke@mail.waldenu.edu.

Sincerely,

Johnson Ugwuoke

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. How did you define branding strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
2. How did you measure the effectiveness of branding strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
3. What branding strategies were successful in surviving beyond the first 5 years of operation?
4. What media have proven to be most successful in delivering brand strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
5. What key challenges have you had in implementing branding strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
6. How did you overcome the key challenges in implementing branding strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
7. How did the branding strategies support your marketing programs used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?
8. What, if any, additional information would you like to share about branding strategies used to survive beyond the first 5 years of operation?