



- Message In A Bottle

A case study of the brand identity creation in SMEs

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”I think you can do everything you want in life, if you want to find a way to do things, you will find a way”

- Maya Tsoclis Co-Founder NISSOS Beer

ABSTRACT

Title	Message In A Bottle – <i>A case study of the brand identity creation in SMEs</i>
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Key words	Brand Identity, SME, Brand identity creation, brand personality, organizational identity, brand as a symbol, brand as a product
Purpose	The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding on how SMEs can position themselves through brand identity, by investigating their strategic approach to brand identity creation and development.
Methodology	This research is based on an exploratory case study with an iterative approach. The data collection has primarily been conducted by personal interviews and secondary documents.
Empirical Material	The empirical material is based on four semi-structured interviews from the investigated company NISSOS and secondary data collection.
Conclusions	The findings from this study suggest SMEs to obtain a multi-angled approach in order to create a strong and coherent brand identity, by applying the strategies presented in the conceptual model. According to this, SMEs should narrow their product scope, communicate functional and emotional benefits, differentiate through the quality/value element and take advantage of possible positive associations emerging from the region of origin. Moreover, SMEs should illustrate an organizational identity characterized by community orientation and commitment of human resources to their vision. Finally, visual and heritage associations, metaphors, as well as human traits with positive meaning, should be connected to their brand identity in order to create differentiation and distinction in an environment of intense competition.

Thank you,

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1. Introduction

This chapter introduces and discusses the phenomenon background that sets the ground for this thesis. Further, the research question and the purpose are stated and clarified.

1.1 Problem Background

In the contemporary globalized and homogenized world the challenges and opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are numerous. For instance, while globalization advances and the accessibility to new markets and technologies increases, SMEs have the opportunity to expand their market scope and take advantage of innovations (Nganga, 2012). Gibb (1997) suggests the concept of the SME is as an adaptive and learning organization, which could gain competitiveness by bringing forward the experience and knowledge and in this way can add extra value to the service or product and its qualities. On the other hand, as Dutta and Evrard (1999) argue, SMEs have to cope with the intense competition of large and multinational firms, without having the latter's abundant financial and human resources. Nganga (2012) estimates the operating environment to become more challenging for SMEs, while the world moves towards a completely globalized economy, without trade barriers and with continuous privatization of public corporations. Consequently, in order to prevent these emerging threats, the founders of SMEs should start applying in their marketing and branding activities a more thorough and multi faceted approach. One technique of achieving it, is taking into consideration aspects that used to be implemented mainly in the context of large organizations, such as the creation and development of a strong and coherent brand identity.

Previous research in the field of the brand identity among SMEs is still fragmentary, without determining clearly a guide concerning how effective development should be carried out in a multi-angled and cohesive manner (Spence & Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2010;

Wong & Merrillees, 2005; Rode & Vallaster, 2005; Abimbola & Kocak, 2007; Krake, 2005; Boyle, 2003; Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007). In many SMEs, the founder or owner is a great part of the brand. In fact, he often has a great overview of the organization as a whole, but not always time or resources to focus on the brand building to the extent, as it is needed. However, the internal implications and the development of the brand identity are integral in order to decrease confusion internally, while everyone needs to have a clear vision of what the brand represents in order to be able to follow a created strategy.

The creation of a brand identity is the most essential step in the brand building process and illustrates how the brand wants to be perceived. At the same time, the main mission of the brand identity is to create meaningful associations with the product itself, a certain personality, a symbol, or the organization as a whole (Wallström Karlsson & Salehi-Sangari, 2008). The absence of a clear brand identity among SMEs may render brand positioning efforts and waste their already limited resources. Nowadays, it is clearly noticed among mature brands and their brand strategies are given a lot of time and consideration. It is commonly known that a strong brand identity is crucial for every organization and extensive research has been carried out during the past decade in the area of corporate branding. However, a limitation in the brand identity development among less mature firms can still be noticed. Prior research has mainly focused on large organisations or firms with a long track record (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2010; Keller 2008).

Developing the brand identity includes complex decisions and it is easy to underestimate the work needed in order to plan and execute a brand. This complicates the situation for the organization in the sense that it has no clear vision of how to manage a corporate brand (Knox & Bickerton, 2003). This paper aims to contribute to and endeavours to produce a richer understanding of the brand identity creation process in the context of SMEs. Indeed, this topic has been chosen due to the fact that the development of brand identity among SMEs is a relatively unexplored field of research. In addition, it is argued that in an

environment of increased competition, SMEs should take into consideration aspects of brand management that until now were not a priority for their founders, such as the creation of a powerful brand identity. The following study will focus on an SME operating in the beer industry in the Greek market, which will serve as an example for answering the main research question and creating guidance for entrepreneurs and SME's brand managers.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding on how SMEs can position themselves through brand identity, by investigating their strategic approach to brand identity building. Because of the limited scope, time and resource restraints, this study will not be generalizable to all SMEs. Instead, the purpose is rather to gain a deeper understanding of the subject at hand, which can be later exposed to further research and analysis. From a managerial point of view, this study provides business practitioners examples regarding how SMEs can develop a brand identity. This paper aims to provide an understanding of the implementation phase of the brand identity strategy internally and contribute to existing SMEs' branding literature. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the purpose of this study is not to examine how consumers perceive the brand identity of the case company, but to decipher how the company speaks about itself and builds its brand identity.

1.3 Research Question

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies implemented by SMEs while building their brand identity, the research question has been formulated as follows:

How do SMEs create and develop a brand identity?

2. Theoretical Framework

In the following chapter, an overview of the prevalent theories in the field will be presented. Divided into two parts, the chapter comprises: the first part covers the notion of brand identity; the second part presents the brand identity building in the context of SMEs.

2.1 Brand Identity

Though authors know about the heritage of the term “brand identity”, definitions vary in the literature with expert opinions diverging upon a common definition. For instance, Aaker (1996, p.68) outlines it as “... *a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members*”. Also, Kapferer (2008, p.102) explains that “*Identity expresses the brand’s tangible and intangible characteristics – everything that makes the brand what it is, and without which it would be something different. Identity draws upon the brand’s roots and heritage – everything that gives it its unique authority and legitimacy within a realm of precise values and benefits*”. Finally, Faust & Eilertson (1994, p.86) declare that “*Brand identity is much more than a logo; it is the name, personality, and defining attributes that represent the company and its products*”.

In many cases, brand is the most valuable asset of an organization, and thus, an important strategic resource for a company (Wallström, Karlsson & Salehi-Sangari, 2008). Urde (2003) clarifies that it is crucial for brands to play on their uniqueness in order to succeed. Hence, it is noteworthy to stress that a brand identity is substantial when building a strong brand.

In general, an individual is exposed to three thousand advertisement messages daily (Gibson, 2005), from brands that want to convey a message and create an impression in the consumers' mind (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p.537). Because of the extensive assortment of brand images, companies have to cope with coordinating their brand to their desired image. Brand managers must understand how the crowd perceives their company and make clear what they are and how they are different from others, namely competitors. Therefore, the brand identity becomes a convenient tool. It underlines how the company wishes to be perceived by its audience and is thus a central part during the internal brand development (Wallström, Karlsson & Salehi-Sangari, 2008).

By analysing both the core and extended identity of the company, strong, meaningful associations and benefits can be connected to the brand. According to Aaker (1996, p.85) the core identity remains when a brand is expanding into new markets or extensions with new products. It is built up by strong associations substantial over time and is referred to as the brand essence, which is a central part of the brand (Aaker, 1996, p.86). The brand essence is defined by Urde (2003, p.45) as *"the glue that holds the core identity elements together"*.

The core identity conveys and contributes to the brand's value proposition, which is the promise a brand wants to deliver the customer. The importance of communicating the core identity is to maintain credibility. Previous studies have asserted a relationship exists between a strong brand and clearly communicated brand values (Keller, 1993; Wallström, Karlsson & Salehi-Sangari, 2008).

To define a brand's core identity, the following questions presented by Aaker, (1996, p.87) are to be answered:

- What is the soul of the brand?
- What are the fundamental beliefs and values that drive the brand?
- What are the competencies of the organization behind the brand?
- What does the organization behind the brand stand for?

Since the core identity communicates the brand promise, the brand's actual functions and visual associations are communicated through the extended identity (Aaker, 1996, p.88). The company is required to provide a clearer picture of the brand, such as whom to target and enable the observer to describe the brand more thoughtfully.

Furthermore, the benefits must convey emotions or functionality in order to create value for the consumer. Previous studies have shown that negative associations related to the corporate brand are not easily erased and forgotten (Wallström, Karlsson & Salehi-Sangari, 2008). In order to remove the negative associations, firms attempt to communicate positive associations that involve targeting the members of the organization, changing graphical profile and brand values. To illustrate and understand brand identity building further, Aaker's (1996, p.79) brand identity system will be applied. The model consists of four internal elements, which aid the strategy of a brand's communication and contribute to clarifying the meaning of a brand.

2.2 Brand Identity System

Aaker (1996, p.79) presents the brand identity planning model, which highlights the importance of combining the brand as a product, personality, organization and symbol when developing a strong brand identity. By analysing the brand from these four viewpoints, the brand can be developed in a more cohesive manner through consideration of all of its facets. This also enables the marketers to analyse the brand image, which proves beneficial when positioning the brand in the consumers' mind (Urde, 2003). This model serves as a useful tool in understanding how the brand identity of the company example

used in this paper, NISSOS Beer, has been developed and has progressed over time, illustrating the brand as a whole from four different angles (Aaker, 1996, p.79).

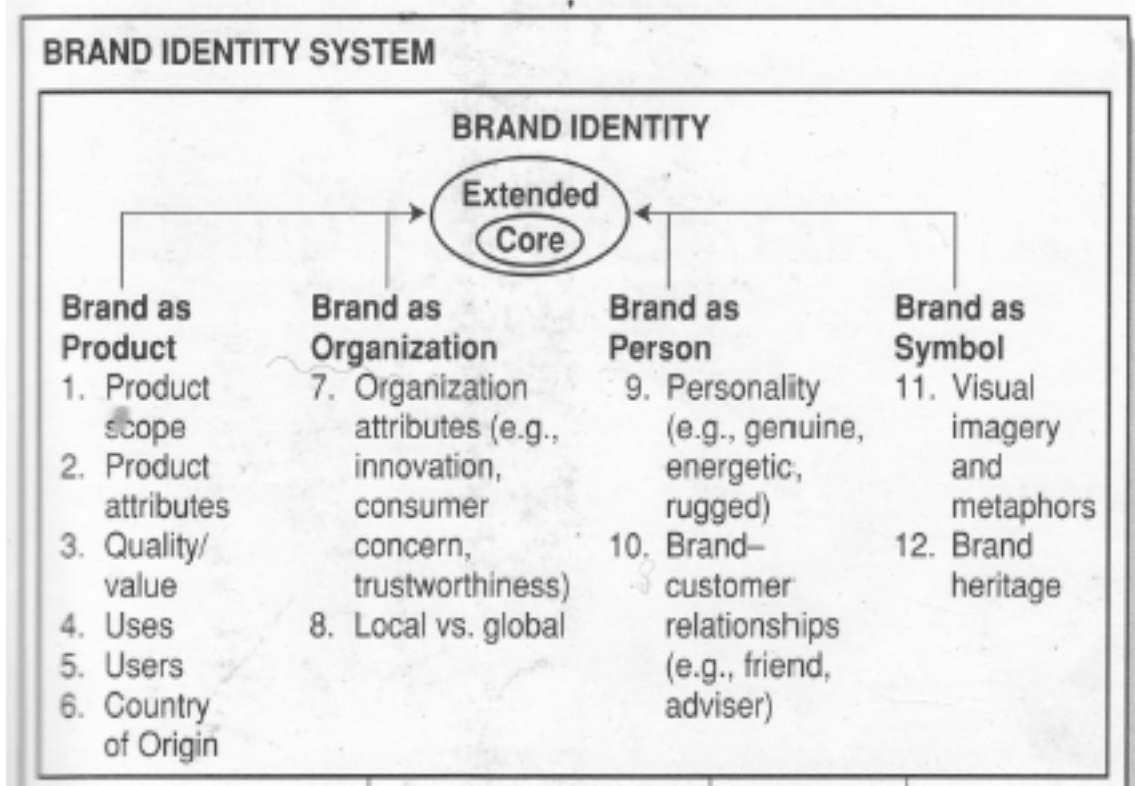


Figure 1: Brand Identity System (Aaker, 1996, p.79)

2.2.1 Brand as a Product

The first perspective that Aaker (1996, p.78) uses in order to give structure and depth to the notion of brand identity is *brand as a product*. Aaker (1996, p.80) insists that this viewpoint is crucial, as it is directly connected to brand choice decisions and the user experience. He argues that a brand should always be viewed as something more than just a product, to have the ability of differentiation and flexibility.

The first aspect of the brand as a product is the *product scope*, which refers to associations according to the product class. Aaker (1996, p.78) claims this perspective is pivotal and refers to it as not only able to recall the product category when a brand is stated, but rather the opposite. The brand should be recalled when the product class is being mentioned. For instance, almost everyone will answer when questioned that Heineken belongs in the beer product class; however, what is considered as more important for Heineken is to be evoked every time a consumer is thinking about the beer assortment.

The second aspect is the *product related attributes*. Those are the functional or emotional benefits that one can acquire from the purchase or use of a certain product (Aaker, 1996, p.80). In the context of the beer industry, those can be relief from thirst (functional) or mood improvement (emotional).

The third dimension of the brand as a product is the *quality/value element*, which refers to the ability of the brand to offer the right amount of quality at a rational price. The span of quality is either to be the highest quality in the product class or use price of admission, which is delivering the highest quality at right price value. Additionally, brand as a product can be associated with a *certain use occasion*, or a *certain type of user*.

Finally, there is the link of the brand as a product to *the country- or region- of origin*. The fact that a product comes from a certain place can be perceived as having a higher quality than others, even though the products are similar. Bilkey and Nes (1982) claim that consumers develop stereotyped images and behaviours towards specific products, according to the country of origin. For example, there is a positive inclination towards French wines or Belgian beers, although when it comes to hi-tech products, “made in Japan” is perceived as the best choice. A common marketing strategy is the implementation of flags, emblems, symbols or famous landscapes, monuments and buildings from the country-of-origin in order to increase brand awareness. However, it may occur that the communication

campaign wants to avoid possible negative effects associated with the country-of-origin. According to Aichner (2013), marketers should either underline the country-of-origin of the product when it is estimated helpful and positive, or try to hide it and avoid mentioning it when it could harm the strategy's desired aim. For instance, Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu and Hyder (2000) highlight that the car brand Jaguar avoided mentioning its British origin when it tried to launch a high-tech profile, which was not associated with the consumers' stereotypes about the British car industry. By alluding on the country- or region- of origin, the brand will be associated with the place of origin and will, hence, increase the associations and quality of their brand if the place is well known. However, it may occur that the communication campaign wants to avoid possible negative effects associated with the country of origin. In this case it is possible to underline regional or local geographical indications by using the name of a specific town or region, rather than the whole country (Aichner, 2013).

2.2.2 Brand as an Organization

The second perspective of the brand identity concerns *the brand as an organization*. When a firm struggles to distinguish its brand based on product attributes, it can use some organizational characteristics in order to differentiate itself. These characteristics signify the *values and culture* of the organization, the *human resources* of the company that may be committed to its vision, the *society or community orientation*, *the concern for customers and quality*, *the willingness to innovate and local presence and success* (Aaker, 1996, p.188). It is worth mentioning that the perspective of a brand as an organization includes fewer tangible and objective associations than the aspect of brand as a product. Consequently, it is more enduring and resilient to competitors, as it is much harder to copy a whole organizational culture and mentality, than product features (Aaker, 1996, p.83; McDonald, de Chernatony & Harris, 2001).

Equally, powerful brands become a visionary and an ideology if they manage to convey their corporate culture. Supported by Kapferer (2012, p.160) a brand must promote an ideal. This forms how the customer can easily distinguish firms within the same product class from one another and how some brands resonate in their heart, whereas others only repel. Further, firms with strong ideological foundations may become cult brands that can be understood and felt by certain sub-groups (Kapferer, 2012, p.160). This creates a community of the sub-group that understands the ideas, ideals and values of the firm.

2.2.3 Brand as a Person

The third step is the assessment of the *brand personality*. Brand personality is described as how the brand speaks about its products and the characteristics the brand would contain if it were a human being (Kapferer, 2004). Aaker (1996, p.141) defines the brand personality as the “*set of human characteristics associated with a given brand*”. Consequently, this may refer to demographic attributes (age, gender, cultural and economic capital), human personality features (such as caring, sentimentality and extroversion) or lifestyle (activities, hobbies and interests). Moreover, Aaker (1997) argues that the Big Five factors of the brand personality construct, where a brand identity can be properly built are: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. In fact she calls this procedure the “anthropomorphization” of the brand and claims that when the associations with the five factors are numerous and strong, the brand personality is enhanced.

In addition, according to Holland (1959), brands that the consumer feels connected to are most often those that he shares common ideas and beliefs with. This is further supported by Kapferer (2012, p.159), who claims the brand personality to be a psychological function that makes the consumer either attracted to the brand and thus identifiable with it, or alternatively not attracted to the brand and hence does not identify with it. Aaker (1996, p.84) emphasizes the fact that it is easier for customers to relate their identity with a brand, rather than the product attribute itself. This creates stronger ties between the firm and the

end consumer. Hence, a product brand can be self-expressive in the sense that a person can use the brand in order to express his or her personality (Aaker, 1996, p.84). As a result, consumers decide to purchase products that are in line with their ideal personality and serve as an extension of themselves.

This can also be realized through the brand communication. Ponnampalath (2007) has suggested brand ambassadors should represent the firm as an outward face of the brand or by sponsoring specific events to further contribute to associations that can enhance the brand personality. The outward face is most often created by real persons or cartoon illustrations that are in line with the brand's personality and can deliver a consistent communication over time (Kapferer, 2012, p. 159). Furthermore, as McCracken (1989) argues in many cases individuals who feel they can relate to the brand project their personality characteristics onto the brand identity.

2.2.4 Brand as Symbol

Finally, symbols are beneficial in increasing the recognition of the brand identity. Aaker (1996, p.84) claims three different types of symbols to be of importance: visual imagery, metaphors and brand heritage. According to him, a strong symbol "provides cohesion and structure to the brand identity" and contributes to the ease of brand recall by consumers.

By using symbols, the firm can convey the brand essence. The visual imageries become more powerful over a longer time period. Symbols are powerful to use in order to connect with identity elements, since one just needs a glance at the symbol to remember or recall the firm. Moreover, when combining a metaphor or slogan, the symbols can represent certain characteristics. Symbols are helpful to remember a brand's personality and culture. The brand essence and how the brand perceives itself can be judged by its visual symbols (Kapferer, 2012, p.169). When developing a symbol, the importance is to clarify how the brand identity pinpoints the chosen symbol. Since brands try to deliver a consistent message, a brand's logo is not changed very often; doing so can confuse the consumer and

ultimately prove detrimental to the value of the brand. When it is changed, the brand does so with the intention of modifying parts of its identity or brand personality (Kapferer, 2012, p.169).

The four viewpoints in the brand identity system do not need to be communicated collectively. Indeed, they can be used exclusively; however, Aaker (1996, p.78) highlights that it is necessary to recall which perspectives are suitable for a specific brand. The four pillars of this model will ground the structure of our empirical analysis shown in chapter five.

2.3 Small and Medium Enterprises

It is a common belief that in the last few decades SMEs and self-employment has become the universal remedy against unemployment and recession. In fact, SMEs cover the largest part of businesses in most developed and developing economies and are a significant source of innovation, new technology and employment creation (Hoffman, Pajero, Bessant & Perren, 1998; Tether, 2000; Dutta & Evrard, 1999). The development of these businesses creates new job positions and contributes to the economy of local societies, whilst simultaneously offering to their owners the opportunity for financial independence and a sense of variety, self-fulfilment, and self-sufficiency (Dobbs & Hamilton, 2006). A characteristic, which distinguishes SMEs from well-established companies, is the prevailing role of the owner/entrepreneur in the formers' competitiveness and performance.

In SMEs there may be several layers of managers, supervisors or job descriptions, but entrepreneurs retain almost total control and remain at the centre of the decision-making process (Goffee & Scase, 1995; Aaboen, Lidelöf, von Koch, Löfsten, 2006). Undoubtedly, as Piperopoulos (2010) states, such enterprises are sculpted around the 'personalities', technical know-how, and psychological, demographic and behavioural characteristics of

their owners-managers, who are most likely to also be their founders. Their growth potential and financial viability are highly dependent upon the proprietors' preferences, energies, talents, and plans.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that due to the informal and flexible structure of SMEs, brand identity construction is often considered not a requirement. Moreover, due to the prevailing role of the entrepreneur in the decision-making process and the resource limitations, brand identity creation and development is considered a field to not be extensively prioritized in the SME context (Spence & Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2010).

2.4 Brand identity building in SMEs

In the following paragraphs, an overview of the studies that included the notion of brand identity in the context of SMEs is presented, by using the categorization of Aaker's (1996, p.79) brand identity system.

2.4.1 Brand as a Product in SMEs

While large, well-established firms compete on brand persona rather than their products lines, in the brand management of the SMEs the product attributes play a major role in building brand identity (Spence & Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2010). Wong and Merrillees (2005) explain this strategic choice of SMEs' brand building as an attempt to gain a distinctive brand identity, through emphasizing the product differentiation, whilst faced with a lack of resources to execute more intense communication strategies. Furthermore, Abimbola (2001) stresses that a common concept among SMEs is creating a brand identity through secondary associations. Spence and Hamzaoui-Essoussi (2010) found that due to their limited resources, such association could be as simple as the country of origin, as it adds value to SMEs' brand identity using a low cost strategy.

2.4.2 Brand as an Organization in SMEs

As far as the organizational identity of SMEs is concerned, Rode and Vallaster (2005), showed that the founder's mentality is the cornerstone for its' shaping. Wickham (2006, p.13) emphasizes the fact that the entrepreneur's philosophy, experiences and perspective of the world are the foundations of the SMEs' identity. Equally, according to Rode and Vallaster (2005) these traits represent the internal part of the corporate brand. Abimbola and Kocak (2007) claim a crucial notion for an SME in order to build its brand identity is its organizational identity, while *"it provides the glue for entrepreneurial factors such as creativity, innovativeness and agility and influences SMEs' ability to successfully engage with the market process"* (p.423). A strong organizational identity enables SMEs to synchronise the qualities of the entrepreneur with the building of the brand identity. At the same time, as Barringer and Jones (2004) support, the owner sets a "lasting stamp" which has a constant influence on the organizational identity of the SME.

Moreover, Krake (2005) states that the heterogeneous and vulnerable organizational nature of SMEs has an impact on their branding strategies. Thus, he suggests that they should not waste their limited resources on more than one or two strong brands. Nevertheless, their flexibility and loose structure give a significant advantage over large organizations, due to their ability to integrate various parts of the firm in the branding activities (Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007). On the other hand, Russo and Perrini (2010) claim that SMEs are much more dependent on their community relations than their larger counterparts. Due to their nature and size, they are more exposed to dangers and need good relations with their local society in order to survive. In addition, while large organizations direct significant amounts of financial resources to build relationships with local communities, SMEs attempt to present themselves as embedded entities and part of the local community, in order to overcome their lack of resources (Russo and Perrini, 2010). Consequently, the notion that Aaker (1996, p.188) refers to as community orientation as an organizational aspect of the brand identity becomes crucial in the context of SMEs.

2.4.3 Brand as a Person in SMEs

In the context of SMEs, the human traits that are commonly associated with the brand are related to those of the founder. Krake (2005) stresses that in the context of SMEs the entrepreneur becomes the personification of the brand, as his vision, qualities and feelings become the core of the firm's brand personality. Thus, a great coherence should exist between the entrepreneur's personality and that of the brand, in order to build a successful brand identity (Spence & Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2010).

Furthermore, Boyle (2003) highlights the importance for small firms to identify and associate human values that can have a positive influence on their brand personality. For instance, she supports that values which have a positive evaluation by the majority of people such as ambition, courage, honesty, logic, politeness, self-respect, equality and peacefulness should be associated with an SME's brand personality. In fact, Boyle (2003) supports that due to the limitations in time and resources, entrepreneurial firms have to use unconventional ways and means of addressing the consumer's subconscious, by implying strong human value associations with the brand personality.

2.4.4 Brand as a Symbol in SMEs

Mowle and Merrilees (2005) attempted to identify branding activities of SMEs in the wine industry in terms of product-driven and marketing-driven branding. Their findings present SMEs' branding as product-driven, with a focus on functional values. In contrast, marketing-driven activities highlight symbolic values of the brand. Nevertheless, Mowle and Merrilees (2005), suggest that there will always be interdependence between functional and symbolic values. For instance, product quality (functional) is being used to promote the prestige and exclusivity (symbolic), while laid-back experience (symbolic) presupposes the functional aspect of an easy-drinking beverage.

3. Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological decisions and choice of research design. At the end of the chapter the validity of the study is presented as a means of giving a thorough overview of the study conducted.

3.1 Methodological Choices

This study is based on an iterative approach, which is a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. While the inductive approach is built on understanding people, contexts and situations, the deductive approach is based on existing knowledge and previous research to be supported by, for example a hypothesis (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp.12-14).

To understand how SMEs can develop a brand identity, the study focuses on how the case company expresses its thoughts about the brand NISSOS. To achieve this purpose, it was decided upon a qualitative method, since in-depth thoughts are considered to be difficult to both capture and understand when applying statistical tools. The goal of this study is to understand NISSOS's current brand identity in relation to the discussed literature, by analysing the brand specifically at one point in time. Supported by Gummesson (2004, p.117), this would have been more difficult with the incorporation of statistics. Thus, it is argued, a qualitative method is to be more appropriate for the research purpose. The problematization in this study is based on empirical material collected in Lund, Sweden and Athens, Greece during the spring of 2014. The majority of the empirical data consists of personal interviews with representatives from NISSOS, however additional documentation in the form of the company's magazine, website, and social media platform was used to support the empirical foundations. Personal interviews are according to Bryman

and Bell (2011, p.11) sorted as qualitative data collection and closely related to the inductive approach.

3.2 Research Design: Case Study

In addition to the research approach and supporting empirical foundations, the research design aimed to explain how the research question should be answered. This particular study was based on a case study design.

It is common practice that case studies are applied within business research. However, arguments concerning when a case study research is appropriate, frequently create misperception (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.60). According to Yin (2009, p.9) a case study is a suitable approach when trying to answer *how* or *why* questions and Eisnehardt & Graebner (2007) argue the design to be preferable if the approach is inductive.

The aim of this study was to increase the understanding of brand identity among SMEs by combining existing theories, primary data from in-depth interviews and available documents about NISSOS. Supported by Yin (2009, p.11), a case study is an applicable approach when handling and analysing various types of information, such as documents, interviews and observations. Further, when combining different sources, Yin (2009, p.116) claims that the researcher is more likely to end up with a solid case study. To answer the thesis research question and explore how a SME can develop a brand identity, it is argued an in-depth investigation was required. The aim of this paper was not to generalize, but rather to build an illustrative case.

The purpose was to investigate the development of brand identity among newly launched enterprises and the connection with NISSOS was achieved through the researchers' personal network. The founders of NISSOS gave access to documents about the firm and

employees, which could be interviewed. Supported by Yin (2007, p.104), a case study may be the proper strategy when one has knowledge about the case or has approval to study it. After gaining permission to use NISSOS as a case study company, an initial interview through Skype with the founder was conducted in order to discuss whether the case firm could fit to the purpose of the study. In total, four interviews were performed with representatives from NISSOS.

Case studies can be performed in three different ways: explanatory, descriptive and exploratory (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.62; Yin, 2003, p.3). The explanatory case study is favoured when the researcher uses multiple cases to explain the brand identity building process by incorporating surveys. Research conducted to describe and expand the phenomena of brand identity building in the collected data is known as descriptive case study (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.62). However, the aim of this study falls into the latter, exploratory case studies. This design is used when one wishes to add new perceptions to any phenomena, by analysing the collected data in detail. Thus, this case study is directed towards an exploratory approach. Since the study is based on one case example, it is referred to as a purposive sample (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p.175). The results from this study will generate a deeper understanding, rather than something to be seen as final.

3.3 Empirical Collection

The material presented in this study is built on primary and secondary data. Primary data consist of information derived from first hand qualitative interviews with the investigated firm collected by the researchers. These interviewees provided invaluable information about their perceptions concerning the brand identity development of their SME. By using open questions and excluding academic language, the questions in the interview guide were designed to be as understandable for our participants as possible. Additionally, by collecting primary data in Athens, it became possible to visit one of the founders, which was both interesting and provided unexpected yet additional value to the study. When collecting

primary data, it was taken into consideration that the interviewees' personal understanding would heavily influence the collected material, i.e. how they perceive the questions asked of them. This could be viewed as a criticism, due to the fact that the interviewees' can be biased and answer according to what they think suits them best.

In order to obtain a wide spectrum of knowledge in the field of brand identity building in the context of SMEs, many different types of secondary sources were used. Secondary data was collected prior to this study, derived from other projects (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.313). A number of reliable academic journals have been the primary foundation of the theoretical framework. Additionally, books related to the topics have been used to explain concepts and definitions.

The scientific articles used for the purpose of this study were collected from EBSCO (Business Source Premier), LUBsearch (www.lub.lu.se), EMERALD Group Publishing (www.emeraldinsight.com) and Google Scholar (www.scholar.google.com). In order to find relevant articles in the databases, the following keywords were applied; *brand identity, brand building + SME, organizational identity, brand identity theory, SME, SME branding, brand identity start-ups, corporate brand identity + SME and brand identity development.*

Primary Data Collection

It is argued that qualitative research is the probable infiltration of human judgment (Bryman & Bell, p.403). In this case study, one of the company's founders made available the names and telephone number of the other interviewees. What could be criticized is the lack of random sampling. However, NISSOS Beer is a small firm with only eight employees in total, the majority of which work within the production of the good itself, with limited insights into the firm's branding activities. Additionally, another criticism is the possibility that the case company could select employees they consider suitable respondents, which could generate skewed results and have a detrimental impact on the

final conclusion in terms of bias. Considering this in relation to the conducted interviews, the answers were seen as trustworthy since the interviewees gave both positive and negative insights, opinions and thoughts about NISSOS.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the focus of this study was based on the quality of the interviews instead of trying to attain a large number of respondents. According to Trost (2005, p.123) it is important to consider the circumstances of each case when deciding upon how many interviews are needed. For example, some might be able to draw relevant conclusions from little material, while others need more data to gain insights. In addition, with too much material, it may be hard to analyse relevant details or patterns (Trost, 2005, p.123). In this case study, a small sample design was preferred based on two interviews with the founders, one with an employee and an internal consultant. This is in line with Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.113) who argued that it is better to give more time to the interview guide and subsequent analysis, rather than strive for more interviewees, even though additional interviews would have potentially given the opportunity for further insights. Hence, it is argued that if more interviews were to be presented, it would not necessarily have led to a better study.

Accessibility

The accessibility of the case company was reached through the personal network of one of this study's authors. Prior to the interview, personal contact with each interviewee was initiated with the aim of gaining confirmation of their availability. The table below presents the accessibility and willingness of each interviewee to participate in this study.

Contact	Name	Contacted by	Accessibility	Willingness to participate	Interview	Length of Interview
Founder NISSOS	A. Kouris	Skype/Phone	Yes	Yes	Skype	100 min
Founder NISSOS	M. Tsoclis	Phone	Yes	Yes	Home	85 min
Employee	A. Iliadis	Phone	Yes	Yes	Skype	85 min
Internal Consultant	A. Psalti	Phone	Yes	Yes	Skype	45 min

Figure 2: List of Interviewees

Since this study consists of qualitative research, the primary data are considered to be adequate because the aim is not to strive for generalization of the findings. The timeline below demonstrates the first initiated contact with NISSOS and at what time in the research process the interviews were conducted.

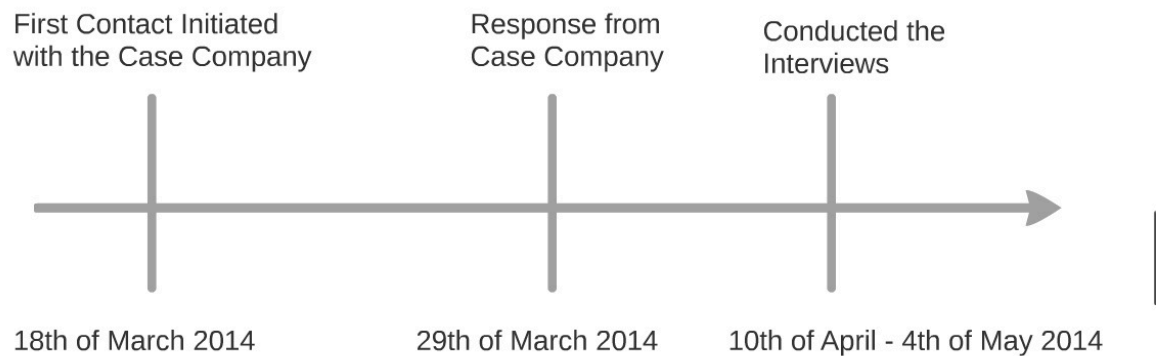


Figure 3: Timeline

3.4 Semi-Structured Interview

The study was based on four semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview is flexible in nature from the perspective of both the interviewee and the interviewer (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.474). According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012, p.126) interviews are defined as guided conversations and are essential in case study research. For example, they allow the researcher to ask follow up questions connected to the subject that are not in the interview guide and change the order of the questions during the discussion (Bryman & Bell, 2011 p.467).

Great effort has been made to ensure the structure of the questions minimize scenarios of yes or no answers. In fact, polar questions are not only hard to analyse, but as Bryman and Bell (2011, pp.251-253) argue, these answers may also create a dead-end to further discussions. The interviewees were aware of the subject of branding in SMEs before the actual interviews took place. In order not to exclude spontaneity in the given answers, the researchers ensured the interviewees were aware of research subject, but refrained from exposing the entire nature of the interview guide beforehand. However, the intention of the study was to underline and build a trustful relationship with the interviewee, especially due to the fact the majority of the interviews were conducted through distance channels.

Interview Guide

Before the actual interviews took place, an interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework of the study, in order to provide structure to the posed questions (*Appendix 1*). The questions in the interview guide directed to the founders consisted of three parts: the company, the brand strategy, and the entrepreneurial orientation. The interview guide was advantageous, since it concentrated on the conversation and created a better flow in the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.473). The interview guide was modified when interviewing the employee and the consultant, however its structure remained the same.

Interviews

In effort to answer the research question, a total of four interviews were conducted with individuals working within different positions at NISSOS. The interviews were based on individual conversations with: a) the co-founder and head of marketing activities, Kouris, b) the co-founder and creator of the magazine about Tinos “TAMA” (*Appendix 5*), Tsoclis, c) the head of distribution and production assistant Iliadis, and d) the internal consultant Psalti, who was working at NISSOS during the initial start-up phase.

Due to the limitation of time and physical distance constraints, one interview was conducted in person and the remaining three through Skype. However, the initial aim was to conduct all of the interviews in person. The Skype interviews took place in a quiet area, in order to limit potential distractions from the surroundings.

3.5 Processing, Analyzing and Presenting Data

The interviews with the founders were carried out in English, whereas the interviews with the employee and consultant were held in Greek. Directly after the interviews, the translation and transcription process took place in order to decrease the possibility of misinterpreting the discussion. Three interviews were made through the software Skype with video and voice recording and the remainder was conducted in person in Athens and recorded with a cell phone. The recording equipment was a leeway to go through the material several times until the transcription accurately corresponded with the actual interview. Two advantages of using recordings are that bias can be avoided, and any hesitations can be analysed at a later stage (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012, p. 148).

It is argued that it would be impossible and irrelevant to include all collected empirical material. The aim of the study was to obtain an objective approach during the translation and presentation of the data. This was fulfilled by direct quotations, in an attempt to avoid

skewing the content of answers with the researchers' pre-understandings (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012, p.132)

Since the purpose was to investigate how small and medium sized companies develop a brand identity in practice, the emphasis of this study has been to challenge the empirical material with the theories presented in the theoretical framework. This provided the opportunity to detect similarities and deviations from previous studies. The structure of the empirical analysis is divided into four parts, which follows the *brand identity system*-model presented by Aaker (1996, p.79), as it is considered to offer a wide and coherent perspective of the brand identity building process.

3.6 Criteria of Truth

In all research studies, it is important to examine the trustworthiness of the methods, theories and sources employed. In order to consider the study as qualitative, a number of criteria need to be accomplished. According to Bryman & Bell (2011, p.395) the criteria related to qualitative studies are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility

When discussing credibility in qualitative studies, it is often referred to as internal validity. The internal validity assesses whether the findings of the study have been confirmed by other researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.396). To ensure that this study is credible, several sources have been used to validate its findings, and extensive interviews have been conducted as a means of gathering empirical material. Since the interviews are based on two of the founders, one employee involved with the distribution at NISSOS, and an internal consultant, it is argued that the data collected was obtained from the internal stakeholders with the greatest knowledge and insights relevant for the purpose of the research. In order

to reach objectivity in this study, the empirical material was evaluated critically due to the possibility that the interviewees' might not be truly objective in their point of view.

By combining the data collected from the interviews with the accessibility to additional documents, it was attempted to ensure that the findings were consistent with the experienced reality of NISSOS.

Transferability

Transferability implies whether a study can be generalized in different contexts, such as to other firms or industries. Since this study was based on an iterative and qualitative approach, the intention is not to prove the phenomena or hypotheses, but rather reach a greater understanding of brand identity building in SMEs. According to Bryman and Bell (2011, p.398), in the context of qualitative studies it is very difficult to generalize the final conclusions. Since the models were applied to an investigated company, which differentiate from other firms in and beyond their industry, the study cannot be perceived as transferable. Nevertheless, the anticipation with the study is to gain a wider perspective of how small and medium enterprises develop their brand identity.

Dependability

The dependability in a study is referred to as the documentation of the research process and the extent to which replication of the study is possible to reach the same result (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.398). In order to obtain dependability the process has been documented by recording all interviews. Because the investigated firm was analysed at one point in time, it could be perceived problematic to reach dependability, since their current activities may change. However, the methodological reasoning was thoroughly described by providing the reader with a detailed description of the research process. In shedding light on how the

interviews were conducted and analysed, it was anticipated that the dependability of this study would be increased.

Confirmability

Confirmability implies the researchers' ability to maintain objective during a research process (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.398). It is important to highlight the relationship with the case company as the researcher's personal values played a central role throughout the research process. Previous experience and opinions are likely to have had an impact on the working process and conclusions drawn in the paper (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.414). As authors, personal interpretation and past experience might be conveyed unconsciously when analysing empirical data and theories. Therefore, it is impossible to ensure and assert complete objectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.398).

Concerning the investigated firm, neither of the authors has worked for nor has a personal relation to the company. This aspect can be regarded as advantageous for the study, since it reinforces no existing preconception, which would interfere with the researchers evaluation and objectivity of the company and subsequent research results.

To conclude, the researchers attempted to uphold an objective view throughout the research process, by ensuring the data were collected and analysed in a critical manner.

4. Empirical Findings

This chapter provides an overview of the Greek beer market, in order to generate insight regarding the environment in which the case company operates. Secondly, a short presentation of the case company will be presented.

4.1 Presenting the Greek Beer Market

In recent years, the Greek beer market environment has changed substantially. The evolution considered pivotal in changing the scenery was the creation of a vast number of microbreweries all over Greece. There are three categories of beer companies: The large multinationals, the big locals and the microbrewers. The major player in the Greek market is Athenian Brewery, which accounts for 58% of the market share (Korderas, 2013). They locally produce the products of several international brands and import a vast number of beer brands. Athenian Brewery is a member of Heineken N.V., which maintains the largest portfolio of beer producers in Europe. Since its foundation in 1963, Athenian Brewery has been the market leader of the Greek beer industry for four decades, although it recently started losing market share due to the reduction in beer consumption (Korderas, 2013).

The second biggest beer factory is Mythos Brewery. Since 2008, Mythos Brewery became a member of Carlsberg Club, which is the fourth biggest brewery organization in the world (Korderas, 2013). The firm distributes a vast number of well-known imported brands around Greece and occupies second place of market share with 12%. In addition, the third biggest beer producer is EZA, founded by the German multinational “Lowenbrau”, but besides the fact that it has passed to Greek owners, it has maintained its German oriented identity (Korderas, 2013).

The previously mentioned brands are multinationals and try to uphold a local aspect in their brand image. Two large local beer companies are exclusively Greek: Olympic Brewery and Brewery of Macedonia and Thrace. They account for 10% respectively 3% of the market share in Greece (Koumakis, 2014).

Greece's unique geography with hundreds of islands and millions of tourists each year encourages entrepreneurs to take the risk and create a microbrewery in a place away from the mainland. There are a remarkable number of small and medium breweries that were founded in several big touristic islands created with the purpose of targeting the large amount of annual visitors, especially during summer when beer is widely consumed. It is not only the islands that have representatives in the Greek beer market, but also the rest of the Greek periphery and a commonality amongst all of them is their similarity in size (Koumakis, 2014).

4.2 Presenting the Case Company: NISSOS Beer

NISSOS, which means island in Greek, is a small microbrewery from the island Tinos in the Cyclades archipelago in the Aegean Sea. The founders Alexandros Kouris, Maya Tsoclis, Elina and Costis Dallas launched the beer in 2012. According to their official site, their ambition was to *"become a model company, based on local production, but also an example of a regional investment that will add value to the economy of Cyclades, for the benefit of its residents, as well as its numerous visitors"* (Nissos Beer, 2013). The characteristic that distinguishes NISSOS Beer from mass produced beer is that it is created in small batches and is kept unpasteurized, without adjuncts or preservatives. The place where NISSOS Beer is being manufactured is a small village of Tinos, Vagia, in a building, which in the past used to be one of the oldest taverns of the island. The tavern was totally renovated and refurbished, in order to host the equipment of the brewery in 2012 (Nissos Beer, 2013).

“Companionship, tradition, talent, generosity, persistence, hospitality. The values that live in Nissos Beer. Beer, like wine and food, represents a place, is part of its identity and serves as its ambassador. On this account, Nissos becomes a cultural object that expresses the personality and special experience of the Aegean and the Cyclades group of islands”.

The aforementioned description from NISSOS' official site gives a first insight into its personal identity characteristics.

5. Empirical Analysis

In this chapter the collected empirical material will be presented in relation to the theories presented in the theoretical framework, in order to detect similarities and contradictions from previous studies. The structure of the empirical analysis follows the brand identity system-model presented by Aaker (1996).

5.1 NISSOS brand identity as a Product

According to Spence and Hamzaoui-Essoussi (2010) product features play a major role in the brand identity building of the SMEs, thus their main competition advantage is the product itself. On the contrary, large organizations have the advantage of a well-established and famous brand, which enables them to attain added value in the form of brand recognition (Spence & Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2010). When asked about the vision of NISSOS, Kouris, one of the founders and the head of branding and marketing strategies made an immediate association with the product attributes, stressing that their dream is:

“to be recognized as a very good quality beer which translates to a drinking experience for people”.

Kouris continued by describing the “*pour non-industrial process*” with which the beer is being produced, through means of a slow fermentation process with natural ingredients, excluding additives and chemicals. He described this as:

“The best form of beer, if I may use that”.

Furthermore, the product attributes became evident when Kouris was asked about the core values of the brand, stating that the most important value is the quality of the product and the natural procedure through which it is manufactured. The employee of the company, Iliadis, supported that the founders of NISSOS do not compromise on quality:

“My point of view is that what we do not negotiate at all is making an average beer. I mean, if there is something for the founders to invest in is that a truly nice beer can have a stable value in the market”.

Iliadis claimed:

“microbreweries differentiate on quality from the multinationals because the beers are produced in small quantity”.

This choice of NISSOS to highlight its distinction concerning product quality, confirms the views of Wong and Merrillees (2005, p.157), who argued that product differentiation is a common strategy for SMEs in order to build their brand identity, due to their restricted means for extended communication campaigns.

As Aaker (1996, p.78) and Wallström, Karlsson and Salehi-Sangari (2008) stress, the product related attributes of the brand identity are not only functional, but also provide emotional benefits. This aspect is more than clear in the case of NISSOS. Tsoclis insisted on the *“excellent quality”* of their beer, but at the same time she wanted the consumers *“to feel emotionally linked to this product because they feel how we have done it”*. In her point of view *“it is a product that gives pleasure, which is extraordinary”*. Similarly Kouris stresses:

“The mental process, not just the physical process of getting thirsty and wanting to drink a beer. The experience of tasting a product that makes you enjoy the specific moment when consuming it. That makes this moment memorable.”

On the other hand, Aaker (1996, p.78) defines the product scope as the associations made with the brand, concerning the product’s category. When Kouris was asked about the brand strategy of his firm, he replied that it:

“revolves around craft beer, not mass industrial beer. So if you want to model NISSOS as a brand you could say that we step with one leg on craft beer. I do not know how familiar you are with craft beer”

Continuously, Kouris described craft beer as *“a revolution around the world and a movement for non-mass beer”* and insisted that it is a totally different product category. Given this view, a very interesting aspect is that NISSOS is trying to narrow its product scope by choosing not to compete in the general field of the beer industry, but in the smaller segment such of craft beer. Consequently, narrowing the product scope can be identified as a strategy used by the researched SME in its brand identity building process, in order to be easily recalled in consumers' mind.

Finally, what Aaker (1996, p.80) describes as the quality/value element in the brand identity system is also highlighted by the majority of the interviewees. According to its founders, NISSOS is not a cheap beer, but they aim to differentiate their brand by offering the highest possible quality at a relatively higher price. For example, Kouris noticed:

“Craft beer competes on differentiation. What we as craft beer producers do is that we increase our differentiation and charge a premium price. We do not go for volumes, we go for margin. We go for higher prices and higher differentiation and how we produce differentiation? Because of a better product, so we produce excellent beer, with top ingredients with very sophisticated and natural ways to produce beer. And as a result we can create a better price so that the consumer pays a premium”.

5.1.1 The Country of Origin

One of the aspects of the brand as a product that Aaker (1996, p.78) includes in the brand identity system is the country of origin. Spence and Hamzaoui-Essoussi (2010) support that taking advantage of the country of origin is a strategy, which SMEs should use in order to build a brand identity, without wasting their limited resources. On the other hand,

Aichner (2013) takes into account the possibility that the country of origin provokes negative associations in consumers' minds. In the case of NISSOS all the interviewees agreed that at the moment, Greece as an association with the brand identity removes value, rather than adding. For instance the interviewees stated clearly that their aim is to create differentiation through being the only Cycladic beer and to create an identity, which is exclusively related to the Cyclades.

“Greece as a place, as a base of a business, does not add value at the moment. Some of us have been arguing for a long time that it does not add value, that even before the crisis it did not add a lot of value, or at least added less value than other country brands. What are we trying to do? We create differentiation through our origin, being the only Cycladic beer. There are mass Greek beers, there are several Greek beers really, but none of them are beers from Cyclades”

According to Aichner (2013) the strategy of highlighting the origin from a specific region or place is suitable in the case of avoiding potential negative associations related to the country of origin. From the empirical findings, it is obvious that NISSOS tries to build its identity through the specific region of Tinos and the Cyclades, rather than its general Greek origin. Tsoclis highlights the Cycladic identity of NISSOS, claiming that they wanted to create a product *“connected to The Cyclades”*:

“The Cyclades are a big part of Greece. If you think of Greece as a destination I guess that 80 % is the Cyclades, even if it is just a small place”

Finally, Kouris tried to explain the reason why the case company chose to differentiate through the region of origin:

“The fact is that NISSOS is a company located in the periphery. In comparison with the Greek brand name, which does not have a well-respected image during the last years due to the financial crisis, the Cycladic islands are a very popular destination, which appears to add value to our

brand. Tourism was always considered as Greece's heavy industry and its touristic regions such as the Cycladic islands have been its main attraction. However, in the previous years, the only small businesses that were gaining from this fact were placed in the service sector. During the last years, small production units started investing in adding value to their brand image through the aspect of their region of origin, especially in the drinking and food sector. What we want to take advantage of? The sun, the sea, the islands and the architecture of the region"

As a result, it is clear that NISSOS builds its brand through its Cycladic origin, taking advantage of the region's aspects that distinguished it as a famous touristic destination, demonstrating alignment with Aichner's (2013) findings.

5.2 NISSOS Brand Identity as an Organization

5.2.1 Brand Identity through Community Orientation

According to Aaker (1996, p.118) "*some organizations are simply "good citizens" and prove it in many ways*". In addition, he claims that one of them is community/society orientation, which at the same time is a substantial part of a brand's identity. The strategy of enhancing the brand identity through community orientation is more than visible in the case of NISSOS. Its founders agreed one of their most essential purposes for launching their new venture was to construct a "*chain of value-creation*" for the island of Tinos. For instance, it is noteworthy their concern is "*to not cannibalize the income of the local society by not creating their own retail stores*", their statements of wanting "*the local economy to make money out of NISSOS*" and their purpose "*everyone to benefit from it*".

Furthermore, Tsoclis, by publishing a magazine (*Appendix 5*) about the island of Tinos, except for using it for NISSOS' promotion, her main purpose was to "*communicate with the locals*". She spoke with the entrepreneurs of the island and asked them to create a budget for

a “free-press” publication, which is distributed in Tinos and on the boat. It is an annual magazine and as she said it is:

“a very expensive effort, but we created this thing for people of Tinos and the visitors, in order to thank them for the honour they make us by visiting our place”

Russo and Perrini (2010), highlight the fact that SMEs are part of their local community and people recognize them as an embedded entity in their region, illustrating it as a meaningful strategy to overcome the lack of resources for large social responsibility campaigns. In this case it is noteworthy how the people of NISSOS protest their carefulness and interest about their relationships with the community as well as how their brand is perceived by the society. For instance, Kouris states that:

“Our motivation is that we like this place, we want to spend time here, we want to create good things in this place and value here and not in any other place. Therefore this was our initial thinking and this is how we kind of went to Tinos and created the brewery here, there was not a commercial kind of motive. I mean if it was a commercial motive, we would have picked a larger island than the one that we currently operate in”

Nevertheless, when the interviewees were asked about how the locals regard the presence of NISSOS on their island, some interesting points of view were observed. For instance, one of the interviewees, although in the beginning stated that people were talking about it and anticipating NISSOS with enthusiasm, revealed that there were also some negative sentiments. There was a small part of the island to which he refers to as “hard-core locals”, who were keeping a hostile attitude against the new venture. Trying to explain this, he claimed that a part of the community did not accept NISSOS as a local product, due to the fact that its founders were not originally from Tinos. In this aspect, it is worth mentioning that the personal background of the entrepreneurs, which according to Barringer and Jones (2004) places a “lasting stamp” at the SME, has an impact on the community orientation and acceptance of the company, as part of its identity building process.

The notions of “*resistance to new ideas*”, “*difficulty to absorb innovations*” and “*a wait and see attitude*” were constantly present in the answers of the interviewees, when asked about the opinions of the local society towards the company. In fact, some of them justified this attitude with the fact that small and closed societies are always suspicious towards new and innovative ventures. Thus, it is obvious that the will of NISSOS to build its brand identity through community orientation was not a task without obstacles. However, it is clear that the intention of its internal stakeholders was to build its organizational identity by investing in the community orientation of their firm, by adding value to the region and winning the trust of local society. As Aaker, (1996, p.83) and McDonald, de Chernatony & Harris, (2001) claim, building a strong organizational identity is an intangible asset that distinguishes firms with similar products in an environment of intense competition.

5.2.2 Brand Identity through Organizational Values and Culture

NISSOS' founders present their company as having an organizational culture that encourages their employees to take risks and inspires everyone to feel like they are playing a major role in the enterprise. In fact, they declare that their vision for the brand is to belong to every single employee that works for them.

For instance, Tsoclis says:

“We try to make them feel that it’s our product, every one of us. And that is true actually, we are so few so that everyone plays a major role in the production”

Furthermore, the founders define NISSOS as a small, friendly firm, with a flat structure, an on-going open dialogue with room for the exchange of ideas. They describe themselves and the employees as “*simply a group of people working together and interacting*”, while stressing the informality of the relationships.

The employee, or the consultant of the company neither contradicts this point of view. They confirmed the aspects of NISSOS' as having a friendly and familiar organizational culture. Psalti described it as a *“low profile company which reflects the personal beliefs and principles in life of the founders”*, while Iliadis, when asked about the organizational environment stated:

“I make decisions the whole time, they (edit: referring to the founders) are coaches. And they try to encourage everyone to work in the fields that fit them, strategically always. The thing that they put me to produce beer is an honour for me, it was something that I wanted but didn't expect, I didn't invest on it and it is an honour that they let me in this know-how and learn those things. Ok, they saw that I had a strong will, I had the curiosity to see how this thing is done. I like beer very much, I drink a lot, I consider drinking a serious procedure, and I think it is a beautiful job to make beer, or wine or whiskey, whatever. I like it, it is my thing”

Throughout the conducted interviews, the claims of Wickham (2006, p.13) and Rode & Vallaster (2005), that the organizational aspect of the SME's brand identity is being built upon the philosophy of the entrepreneur, were consistently present. For instance, Iliadis states:

“I think Alexandros (edit: referring to Kouris) has put his personal motto which is good mood and good beers. And Maya (edit: referring to Tsoclis) has introduced her traveller mentality, I mean, her open horizons, that we head to everywhere, lets make some nice beers and take them to a lot of places. The spirit that indicates her mentality of taking a bag and travel with NISSOS to every corner of Greece, and after Greece I will take it outside the borders”

Moreover, the notion that was equally repeated was the commitment of NISSOS' human resources to the vision of the company, a characteristic that Aaker (1996, p.83) claims to be of great importance in the identity building process of a brand. For example, the employee of the company presented himself as amazed at how the founders have managed to spread their message about NISSOS all over the country, without a big network of employees.

According to him, it is because they do not use impressive words or deceive customers. In the end he stated enthusiastically:

“I am telling you, I was dying for working here! This freshness and the fact that we were building something tangible, a product from zero”

5.3 NISSOS Brand Identity as a Person

5.3.1 Brand as a Human Being

In the procedure of building a brand identity, a crucial stage is the creation of a brand personality. When a brand holds a clear and strong identity, it should be possible to describe it with the same vocabulary as when referring to a human being (Aaker, 1996, p.143). As Aaker (1997, p.348) supports *“personality traits come to be associated with a brand in a direct way by the people associated with the brand”*, which are its users and its internal stakeholders. In addition, McCracken (1989) states that there is a direct transfer of the personality attributes of the related people, i.e. the customers, to the brand. In this specific research, it was only possible to understand how the internal stakeholders build NISSOS' brand identity through several personality traits. It was obvious that a huge attempt was made to present their brand as *“authentic”, “sophisticated”, “trustful”* and *“honest”*, while *“truthfulness”, “sincerity”, “generosity”, “trust”, “love”* and *“passion”* were the main patterns, frequently repeated during the interviews. Furthermore, NISSOS was presented as a product by the terms *“sincere in its intentions”* and *“an idea that reflects on good intentions”*.

On the other hand, the notion of a brand, which is an *“ambassador”* and *“representative”* of a value system, as well as frustrations and aspirations, is the core of the company's personality. In fact, Tsoclis, presents the personality of NISSOS as an ambassador, being more important even from the product itself:

“we needed to create a product that could be an ambassador (...) this made us think of beer. But first of all, it was clear that we wanted to create an ambassador product. Then the beer came”

Finally, NISSOS was presented as a “*saviour*” for its employee and an “*educator*” in the field of beer, teaching people how to decipher the quality differences.

5.3.2 The “Anthropomorphization” of the Brand

According to Aaker (1997) brand personality includes demographic characteristics such as age, gender and class. It is worth mentioning that the people of NISSOS denied their brand as having an “attitude” or concentrating on addressing the upper classes. However, they all agreed that the product’s audience are people with high cultural capital and sophistication:

“people who can appreciate what they drink”, “who care”, “who are not cynical”, “who enjoy food and drink with their mind and not with their stomach”, “who are not narrow minded and blinkered”, “intelligent consumers”, “responsible consumers”, “who are seeking something special and exceptional”, “who are experienced, in the right mood and open to fresh ideas”.

The fact that this point of view is a recurring pattern among all the interviewees reveals that, at the end of the day, NISSOS is not simply for everyone, as Tsoclis claimed at the beginning of the interview. In fact, its personality is built upon certain prerequisites and its internal stakeholders are aware that they are appealing to a specific market segment, characterized by certain qualities. By observing this, it becomes clear that NISSOS as an SME is trying to gain differentiation through strategic personality building. It would be impossible to compete with its larger counterparts if it did not try to differentiate through a special brand personality, which offers a reason of existence in a marketplace with such intense competition. This tactic confirms Boyle’s (2003) opinion, who claims that, in order to surpass resource limitations, SMEs should identify with positive human characteristics and shape their brand personality according to them.

On the other hand, Aaker’s (1997) theory about the “anthropomorphization” of the brand through the Big Five factors of human personality can be clearly identified in the case of

NISSOS. Taking into consideration the emerged patterns through the interviews, the case company develops its brand personality by making associations with four out of Aaker’s (1997) Big Five factors; Sincerity, Excitement, Competence and Sophistication.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that Sophistication is the human personality attribute with which NISSOS’ brand identity tries to be most related to, made evident through the interviews. By associating the brand with characteristics such as sophisticated, educator, intelligent, open-minded, special, exceptional, and ambassador, its internal stakeholders create a brand personality, which is high in cultural capital and differentiates itself as an SME from the mass industrial brands. In addition, Sincerity is the second pillar where NISSOS is trying to gain distinction against its larger counterparts, by stressing the notions of authenticity and truthfulness, while Excitement (generosity, love, passion) and Competence (responsible, experienced, trustfulness) follow. Thus, the NISSOS’ strategy aligns with Boyle’s (2003) theory, which suggests that SMEs’ should use unconventional associations with original and positive human values, in order to build a brand identity.

Aaker’s Big Five Factors of Brand Personality on NISSOS

Sincerity	Truthfulness, Sincerity, Honest, Authentic
Excitement	Generosity, Love, Passion
Competence	Responsible, Experienced, Trustfulness
Sophistication	Sophisticated, Educator, Intelligent, Open-minded, Special, Exceptional, Ambassador
Ruggedness	-

Figure 4 Aaker’s Big Five Factors applied on NISSOS

5.4 NISSOS Brand Identity as a Symbol

5.4.1 Metaphors, Visual Imagery and Brand Heritage

Aaker (1996, p.83) claims the symbolic aspect of the brand identity becomes more powerful when including metaphors. In fact, a very strong metaphor emerged throughout the case study was when Tsoclis described NISSOS as an “arma”, which in ancient Greece was a horse-drawn carriage. She claims NISSOS to be a horse, which everyone can ride, carrying its qualities and values everywhere.

In addition, when Kouris tried to stress the differentiation of NISSOS he attempted to visualize a scenario of a visitor coming to the traditional environment of the Cyclades and having to choose between the mass industrial beers of multinational firms. He describes this experience as non-authentic, if not annoying:

“Imagine coming to Cyclades archipelago and having to choose between Corona, Heineken, Amstel, Fischer or Carlsberg. If not frustrating you, it would not add to the experience. The authenticity of the experience, which you kind of came to the place to have. If you go to a bar, you can always find Heineken. Then why come all the way to Greece?”

Undoubtedly, the enhancement of NISSOS’ brand identity through the use of metaphors and visual imagery is a central strategic choice, which is in line with Aaker’s (1996, p.85) theory of giving power, memorability and coherence to the brand by applying strong symbolic associations. For instance, Iliadis attempted to differentiate the brand identity by using powerful visual imagery. He visualized NISSOS as “*a beer that you want to drink in a full sunny daylight, to eat something that has to do with the sea, fish and seafood, which are things that fit with this taste*”. Simultaneously, he made a comparison with other beers:

“Beers that you want to drink in a winter wooden refuge in heavy glasses and huge tables. They are dark and with a high alcoholic degree, they make you have this mood”

It is worth mentioning that Aaker's visual elements are also connected to the company's marketing strategy of photographing the bottle around the Cycladic area. NISSOS' Facebook page, which, according to the founders is their main means of promoting the brand, is updated daily with artistic photographs (*Appendix 6*) of the product from various Cycladic islands, voluntarily sent and shared by consumers and friends: *"We had hundreds of people that did the same. They took the bottle, photographed it and sent it to us. Even professional photographers have done it without getting paid. They do it because they love it, they like the idea of NISSOS. It's funny, because now all beer brands are doing the same thing, they copied it"*

Furthermore, it is obvious that by choosing the colours of the blue sea and yellow sun in their logo (*Appendix 2; Appendix 3*), NISSOS' people invested its foundations in strong symbolic and visual associations that would differentiate its brand identity.

Moreover, Aaker (1996, p.85) claims that by increasing associations connected with a vivid brand heritage, a firm can build its brand identity in a meaningful and influential way. The founders of the case company chose a name, which in Greek means island, but is an archaic version of the term. In Modern Greek the word for an island is "nissi", while the word "nissos" was mostly used in the ancient version of the language. By doing this, they simultaneously attempted to stress the brand's heritage whilst highlighting the historical attributes of the brand's identity. Psalti considered NISSOS to have a strong brand heritage, despite being a young firm, due to their choice of having the factory in an old building with a long track record. Further, Kouris stressed beer and brewing to be *"strongly connected to the culture as being a cultural offering, such as French wine"*.

"When drinking a NISSOS", Kouris said "they don't consume only a beer, it is a beer with identity and heritage"

Due to the low number of beer producers in the Cycladic area, he wanted NISSOS to project the Cycladic values by using the brand heritage as a differentiation, while *“it adds to the story that we can tell people, by the beer being produced in the small island of Tinos”*.

Finally, it can be argued that the observations of this study are in line with the findings of Mowle and Merrillees (2005), who identified an interdependency of functional and symbolic attributes, in the creation of brand identity among SMEs. During the interviews the interrelation between functionality and the symbolism of the product was argued constantly and in many ways. In fact, the founder Kouris stated it clearly when asked about the brand strategy of NISSOS:

“We step with one foot in craft beer and the other in the Cycladic aura”

6. Discussion

The discussion evolves the findings from previous chapters and presents the conceptual model developed in an iterative manner by the researchers.

There is no denying the fact that the creation and development of a coherent and powerful brand identity is a task, which is given a lot of attention by large, well-established companies. Nevertheless, in the context of SMEs, brand identity building is a field that is not taken seriously into consideration, remaining an informal activity, influenced by the special characteristics of the entrepreneur and their limited resources. In an environment of intense globalization, business expansion and competition, SMEs are facing multiple obstacles, and it is crucial for their survival to include in their priorities the construction of an appropriate brand identity. This study endeavoured to decipher the implemented strategies by the case company in order to create and develop a brand identity, by using Aaker's (1996, p.79) brand identity system, which is considered to give a multi-angled perspective in the procedure of brand identity building. Simultaneously, it attempted to identify if the limited amount of current theories about brand identity building in the context of SMEs are apparent in the case company.

In fact, throughout the interviews with NISSOS' internal stakeholders, some very interesting aspects were observed concerning the brand identity building process that takes place in an SME. The researched company invests profoundly in all the four categories of Aaker's (1996, p.79) brand identity system. People of NISSOS appeared to have a thorough understanding and a multi faceted view of its brand identity, an approach that is contradicting the view that only well-established firms build their brand thoroughly.

The figure below illustrates the factors that, according to this study, shape the brand identity of the investigated SME. Each part of the conceptual model will be further clarified.

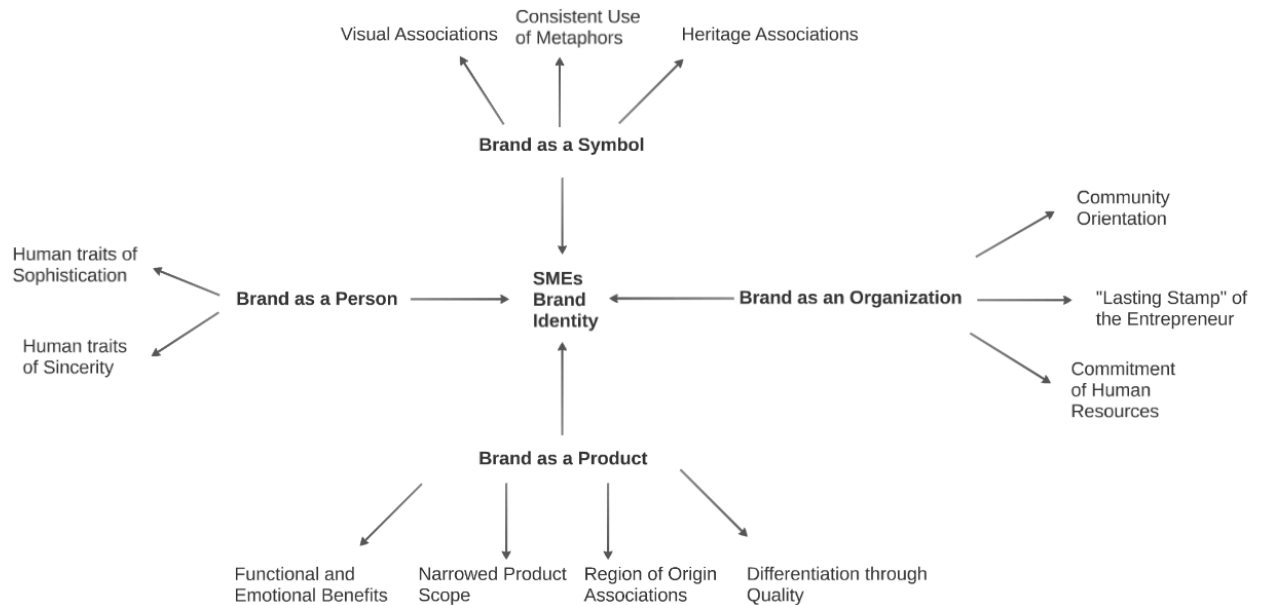


Figure 5 Conceptual Model

The first concept of Aaker's model (1996, p.79), that this study applied in NISSOS case in order to interpret how its brand identity is being developed, consists of the product related aspects of the brand. From the empirical analysis of the case company it appears that product characteristics play a major role in creating strong and powerful associations with its brand identity. It is worth mentioning the studies of Spence and Hamzaoui-Essoussi (2008), as well as Wong and Merrillees (2005, p.157) who are also supporting that SMEs' brand identity is built upon several attributes of the product. Moreover, the notions of functional and emotional benefits, as well as the quality/value element, are apparent in the case of NISSOS, proving that Aaker's (1996, p.78) concepts of brand as a product are both relevant and implemented widely by this specific SME.

On the other hand, an interesting strategy observed concerned the product scope of the researched case company. According to Aaker (1996, p.78), the product scope refers to the associations of the brand according to its certain product category. As he claims, a brand with a powerful identity has the ability to be recalled in consumer's mind, upon mentioning its product class. However, Aaker (1996, p.78) made this observation referring to pre-existing brands with a long track record. What is noticed in the study of NISSOS is that, in the context of an SME, there are attempts to narrow down the product scope as part of the brand identity, in order to increase the possibilities of being recalled.

Furthermore, according to Aaker's (1996, p.79) model, the last association of a brand's identity as a product is the country of origin. While studying the case company, it became clear that its main strategy in the brand identity creation through the country of origin involved another attempt of narrowing down. Instead of using negative associations that are currently related with Greek brands, NISSOS developed its brand identity more specifically through the region of origin, which is considered by the founders as adding extra value to the brand. The same concept can be found in the studies of Aichner (2013) and Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu and Hyder (2000) who highlighted the need to avoid harmful stereotypes that may emerge from a certain country in the consumer's mind. Given that NISSOS is an SME, it attempts to differentiate its brand identity through local attributes, taking advantage of a place that creates positive associations.

Moving to the organizational aspect of the brand identity, the most prevalent concept among the case company is its strong community orientation. According to Aaker (1996, p.188) the notion of society/community orientation is one of the most essential parts of the organizational notion of brand identity. However, the intended strategy of the company is not always translated to success. This was obvious in the NISSOS case and showed that the "lasting stamp" of the entrepreneurs (Barringer & Jones, 2004) has not always created positive associations with the identity of an SME's brand. Furthermore, it was observed

that the theories of Rode and Vallaster (2005), as well as Abimbola and Kocak (2007) were confirmed in that the personal characteristics and mentality of the entrepreneur is a credible cornerstone in shaping the organizational identity of the SME. Finally, the commitment of human resources, which Aaker (1996, p.188) claims as one of the essential parts of a brand's organizational associations, seems to have a substantial part in NISSOS' construction of the brand identity.

Moreover, this study identified the human characteristics that the internal stakeholders of the researched SME associated with its brand identity, by using Aaker's (1997) Big Five factors model. It is noteworthy that the brand identity of the case company is being developed mainly through the human traits of Sophistication and Sincerity. This observation confirms Boyle (2003), who argues for the advantages of associating positive human characteristics with the brand identity of entrepreneurial firms.

Finally, in the case company it was clearly revealed the symbolic aspect of the brand identity. In fact, the notions of visual imagery, brand heritage and metaphor were an integral part of its brand identity building process, as these aspects were constantly observed not only throughout the interviews, but also in the logo and the Facebook page of the company.

6.1 Summary of Discussion

After applying Aaker's (1996, p.78) brand identity system, by observing the empirical data, it was shown that the brand identity of the case company is developed through the four pillars: brand as a person, brand as a symbol, brand as an organization and brand as a product. Additionally, through the findings, this study illustrates how each pillar is constructed. Firstly, regarding the brand as a product, its identity consists of functional and emotional benefits, region of origin associations, the ability to deliver differentiation through quality and the creation of a narrowed product scope in order to increase

possibilities of being recalled. Secondly, by analysing the brand as an organization, a strong community orientation and commitment of human resources connected to the vision of the entrepreneurs was observed. Moreover, the brand as a person is mainly based on the human traits of sophistication and sincerity, which underlie positive associations. Finally, the symbolic aspect of the company's brand identity is primarily created through a consistent use of metaphors, as well as various heritage and visual associations.

7. Conclusion

This chapter presents an answer to the initial research question, managerial implications and suggestions for future research.

The purpose of this study was to obtain a deeper understanding on how SMEs create and develop their brand identity by applying an exploratory case study design. Based on existing theory, collected empirical material, analysis and discussion, the research question will now be addressed:

How do SMEs create and develop a brand identity?

The findings of this study are based on the four pillars of the conceptual model, which indicate the factors that play a major role in the development of SMEs' brand identity. Preferably, the small business narrows its product scope for ease of recognition and recall in its product class. Further, the firm communicates the brand's functional and emotional benefits and creates a differentiation based on the quality/value element. In addition, to shape the brand identity through the product attributes, the SME uses the region of origin to create a strong connection to a specific place and take advantage of possible positive associations of the region.

On the other hand, the process of developing a brand identity involves the creation of positive associations to the brand personality through human traits of sincerity and sophistication. An additional strategy in the SME's brand identity building procedure is the creation of symbolic associations based on visual imagery and heritage as well as consistent use of metaphors.

In most cases, SMEs consist of a small number of people and their commitment shines through the organizational aspect of the brand. Consequently, the commitment of human resources to the company's vision and its relations to the local community become significant steps on the SME's brand identity development progress. Furthermore, it was observed the background and personal image of the entrepreneurs to have an effect on the brand identity creation.

The theoretical contribution from this study is an increased understanding of brand identity building in the context of SMEs and the notion of a multi-angled approach in the brand identity development presented in the conceptual model. Finally, it is argued that the brand identity system initiated by Aaker (1996, p.79) does not only apply to large corporations; indeed, this study reveals the model to be also applicable to small and medium sized firms.

7.1 Managerial Implications

From a managerial viewpoint, this study provides the owners and managers of SMEs with a better understanding of the process with which a brand identity is being built. The conceptual model indicates the importance for SMEs' brand strategy to have a multi-angled perspective, in order to develop a coherent brand identity, which will differentiate the brand in an environment of extreme competition. In fact, it is argued that SMEs should apply a holistic approach and examine separately each of the brand identity's four pillars, thus shaping the brand identity with organizational, symbolic, personality and product attributes. Also, entrepreneurs should be aware of strategies such as narrowing the product scope as well as using the region of origin to gain differentiation, if the region is related to positive associations. Finally, the owners should be aware that their background has an effect on how the brand identity is perceived by the local society.

7.2 Future Research

It is important to highlight the exploratory nature of this research, which contributes to a deeper understanding of the brand identity development among SMEs. Nevertheless, the findings require greater investigation to further develop the model. Concerning future studies, it could be beneficial to apply the conceptual model to other small and medium enterprises in the beer industry in order to detect similarities and differences in a comparative case study. This research is based on a case study of a brewery located in the Cycladic Archipelago, an area not famous for producing beers; hence, further research based on SMEs breweries located in other parts of Greece would create the opportunity of comparing the brand identity development among SMEs from different regions.

Further, the conceptual model could also be applied to SMEs in different industries other than the beer sector, in order to understand diversity of the brand identity creation among SMEs. To refine the conceptual model and generalize findings from it, studies based on random sampling a large population with a quantitative nature are recommended. Finally, while this study lacks the perspective of the customer and consumer, future studies could incorporate the perceptions from external stakeholders, gaining a more thorough understanding of the procedure concerning brand identity development in the context of SMEs.

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Appendix 1, Interview Guide

Basic info:

Type:

Date and time:

Place of Interviewer:

Place of Interviewee:

Name of interviewee:

Position in the company:

Professional background:

Number of Employees:

Company age:

NISSOS

1. What is the vision of NISSOS?
2. What is the brand strategy?
3. How is the vision and brand strategy connected?
4. How would you describe the NISSOS culture/identity?

Brand Management and Brand Identity

5. What is the soul/ core identity of the brand?

6. How do you as a company want your brand to be perceived by customers?
7. What kind of branding activities do you use?
8. Do you have any measurable goals? If yes, which?
9. What do you think customers value most about your brand & associate with your brand?
10. How do you position your brand (uniqueness, target group / differentiate against main competitors?)?
11. What are the fundamental beliefs and values that drive the brand?
12. Does NISSOS actively work on changing/improving/enhancing the brand?
13. Have you done any collaboration? If so, was it successful?
14. How do you view the industry in relation to your brand?
15. How you got inspired for inventing your logo?
16. Have you observed a change in consumers attitude towards buying local products instead of imported?
17. Do you find it important to stress your local presence in your branding strategies? Why/why not? Any examples?
18. Do you find it important to stress your country of origin in your branding strategies? Why/why not? Any examples?
19. Do you see benefits of being a Greek brand? Do you take advantage of that?
20. How you responded to the crisis? Was it an obstacle or an opportunity for you? Did it influence your marketing strategies?

SME - Entrepreneurial orientation

21. Do you encourage people to take calculated risk with new ideas of possible market opportunities? [what do you think about new ideas and potential market that has some level of risk]
22. What are the competencies of the organization behind the brand?
23. What does the organization behind the brand stand for?
24. Do you seek out creative ways in running your marketing operations? [What is creativity for you when it comes to your brand?]
25. Do you actively introduce product improvement and innovation as a core focus of the company? (How?)
26. Would you say that your brand is a personification of the entrepreneurs (CEOs) character? Does he/she actively spreads the brand`s identity in the organization?
27. Do you think the behaviors of employees` influence how your brand is perceived by customers? [Do they share and communicate the passion for the brand?]
28. Would you consider including a second brand/sub-brand in the future?
29. What constraints do you face as an SME in the beer industry while expanding your brand (constraints: financial, staff, time...)

Appendix 2, NISSOS Bottle



Figure 6: NISSOS Bottle

Appendix 3, NISSOS Logo



Figure 7: NISSOS Logotype

Appendix 4, NISSOS Logo Sketch



Figure 8 NISSOS Logotype Sketch

Appendix 5, Magazine TAMA

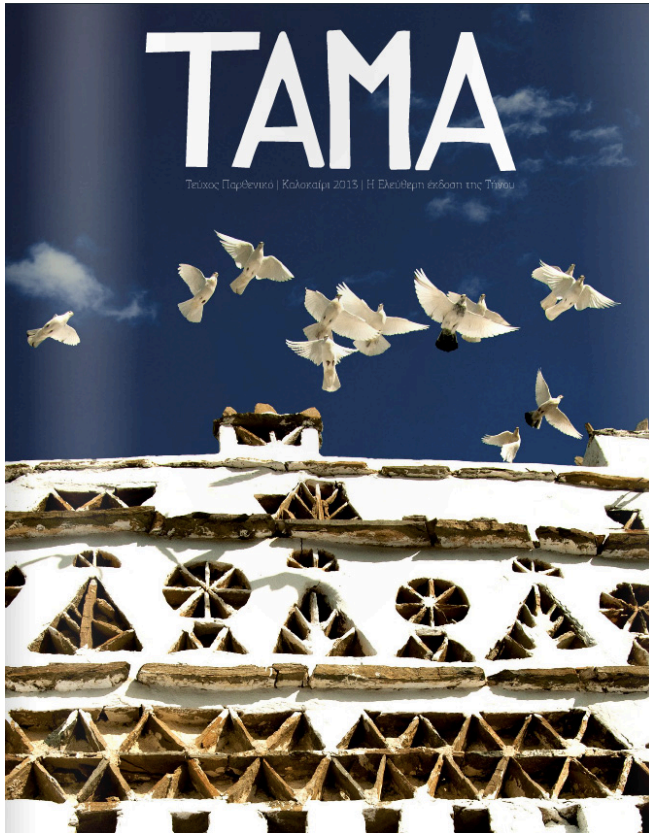


Figure 9 Front Page TAMA Magazine



Figure 10 NISSOS in TAMA Magazine

Appendix 6, Photographs of NISSOS from its Facebook page

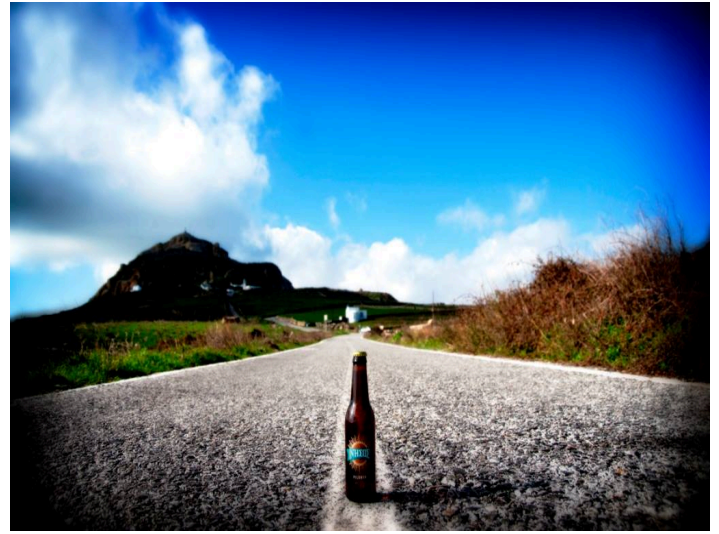


Figure 11 Pictures from Nissos' Facebook Page

