

E-BRAND MANAGEMENT IN INDIAN SMES: A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

DIVYANAMBIAR

SALFORD BUSINESS SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD, MANCHESTER

Submitted to the partial requirements of the degree of Master of Philosophy

September 2019

Abstract:

The intense competitive environment combined with discerning consumers and varied attention span persuades brands to be outstanding and distinct. A strong brand develops an emotional connect amongst organisations and customers by generating substantial value, so it is imperative that strong brands integrate digitalisation into their strategy. The digitalisation adopts the combination of electronic branding and online marketing to develop a brand over wide range of digital venues consisting of internet-based applications and online media content.

The research explores electronic brand (E-brand) management in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The literatures in the domains of SME branding and E-branding from a strategic perspective are under investigated areas, with a focus of extant literature being devoted to studies from the customer perspective. Hence this study reports an exploratory study which enables a consideration of wider perspectives on E- branding.

The study argues that SME branding activities are influenced by owner-managers, resource constraints, and online networking. The research considers conceptualisations on E- branding from the perspectives of owners/managers, including the success components and the challenges faced by the SMEs in managing E- brands.

Drawing upon the interpretivist research tradition, the study adopts interview with the Owner-Manager of ten SMEs in the Hospitality sector located in Kerala; a coastal state in southern India. The study contributes to academic knowledge and practice, most significantly in the development of E-brands for SMEs. The research not only adds to the scant research in the domains of branding and E-branding in SMEs but indicates possibilities for further research and future of E- brands in the SMEs.

Abbreviations:

E-brand	Electronic brand
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
HR	Human Resources
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
ORS	online retail service
OBC	Online brand community
OTAs	online travel agencies
SMAC	social media, mobility, analytics and cloud computing
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WOM	word of mouth
E-WOM	Electronic word of mouth

TABLE OF CONTENTS		
CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION	
1.1	INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	11
1.2	RESEARCH BACKGROUND	11
1.2.1	INDIAN SME DEFINITION	13
1.2.2	SMES IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT	14
1.3	RESEARCH PROBLEM	17
1.4	RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES	18
1.5	RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION	19
1.6	STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT	19
1.7	CONCLUSION	21
CHAPTER 2	LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1	INTRODUCTION	22
2.2	BRAND AS ASSETS	22
2.3	SME BRANDING	24
2.3.1	SME BRANDING IN START-UP FIRMS	28
2.3.2	B2B SME BRANDING	30
2.3.4	STRATEGIC SME BRANDING	34
2.3.5	QUANTITATIVE STUDIES IN SME BRANDING	35
2.4	ORGANISATION STRATEGY PERSPECTIVE	36
2.4.1	EXTERNAL STRATEGY PERSPECTIVE	36
2.4.2	INTERNAL STRATEGY PERSPECTIVE	36
2.4.3	SME BRAND ORIENTATION AND MARKET ORIENTATION	37
2.4.4	THE BRANDING RELATIONAL NETWORK	38
2.4.4.1	BRAND ORIENTATION	39
2.4.4.2	VALUES	40
2.4.4.3	CONSISTENT BRAND DELIVERY	40
2.4.4.4	REPUTATION	40
2.4.4.5	INTERNAL BRAND ORIENTATION	41
2.4.4.6	BRAND PROMISE	42

2.5	E-BRANDING	43
2.5.1	THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNET IN BRANDING	44
2.6	E-BRANDING IN SMES	45
2.6.1	E-BRANDING IN FASHION SECTOR	48
2.6.2	E-BRANDING IN ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITY	49
2.6.3	E-BRANDING IN HOTEL INDUSTRY	51
2.6.4	E-BRANDING IN SOCIAL MEDIA CONTEXT	53
2.7	DIGITAL ORIENTATION IN SMES	55
2.7.1	DIGITAL IMPACT IN THE ONLINE TRAVEL INDUSTRY	56
2.7.2	EMERGENCE OF OTA	57
2.8	E-BRANDING COMPONENTS	59
2.8.1	TRUST AND CUSTOMER PERCEIVED VALUE	59
2.8.2	WORD OF MOUTH	60
2.8.3	WEBSITE INTERACTIVITY	61
2.9	CHALLENGES OF SME BRANDING	62
2.10	GAPS IN LITERATURE	64
2.11	CONCLUSIONS	65
CHAPTER 3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
3.1	INTRODUCTION	67
3.2	PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH PARADIGMS	68
3.2.1	RESEARCH ENQUIRY	70
3.3	METHODOLOGY	71
3.3.1	INTERPRETIVISM	72
3.3.2	CHALLENGES OF INTERPRETIVISM	72
3.4	RESEARCH DESIGN	73
3.4.1	JUSTIFICATION FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	74
3.4.2	SAMPLING	76
3.4.3	KEY INFORMANT SAMPLING	78
3.4.4	SAMPLING SCHEME GENERALISATION	78
3.4.5	SAMPLING SIZE	78
3.4.6	FINDING SUITABLE ORGANISATIONS	79

3.4.7	DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES	79
3.4.7.1	INTERVIEWS	79
3.4.7.2	JUSTIFICATION FOR USING SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS	81
3.4.7.3	WEBSITE ANALYSIS	82
3.4.8	SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS	82
3.4.9	INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	83
3.4.10	SCREENING INTERVIEWS	83
3.4.11	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	83
3.4.12	PROBING	84
3.4.13	RECORDING AND TRANSCRIBING INTERVIEWS	84
3.4.14	VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	85
3.4.15	ENSURING VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	86
3.4.16	EXPLORATORY STAGE: PILOT STUDY	87
3.4.17	DATA QUALITY	88
3.5	DATA ANALYSIS	89
3.5.1	QUALITATIVE DATA	90
3.5.2	QUALITATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS	92
3.5.3	DATA COLLECTION APPLICATION	92
3.5.4	CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATE METHODS	93
3.5.5	RESEARCH LOCATION	94
3.6	RESEARCH LIMITATIONS	96
3.7	CONCLUSIONS	97
CHAPTER 4	FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS	
4.1	INTRODUCTION	99
4.2	OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH SAMPLE	100
4.3	ANALYTICAL PROCESS	102
4.4.1	E-BRAND MANAGEMENT FINDINGS IN THE ONLINE CONTEXT	103
4.4.1.1	LOW TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION AND INTERACTIVE	103
4.4.1.2	OPERATIONAL FOCUS	104
4.4.1.3	HIGH TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION	105

4.4.1.4	OPPORTUNITY FOCUS	105
4.4.2	E-BRAND ADOPTION IN THE ONLINE CONTEXT	106
4.4.3	ONLINE COMMUNICATION	107
4.4.4	SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND MANAGEMENT	108
4.4.5	ONLINE CONTENT MANAGEMENT	109
4.4.6	ONLINE PROMOTIONAL TOOLS	111
4.4.7	ONLINE TRAVEL AGENTS	112
4.4.8	ONLINE BRAND BENEFITS	114
4.5.1	THE INTERNAL STRATEGIC FOCUS	118
4.5.2	STRATEGIC CAPABILITIES	118
4.5.3	STRATEGIC VALUES	120
4.5.4	STRATEGIC EXTERNAL FOCUS	121
4.5.5	STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING	122
4.5.5.1	ROLE OF OWNER/MANAGERS	123
4.5.6	CONSISTENT BRAND DELIVERY	124
4.5.7	BRAND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT	125
4.6	E-BRAND COMPONENTS IN THE ONLINE CONTEXT	126
4.6.1	TRUST	126
4.6.2	TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN	127
4.6.3	INTERACTIVITY	128
4.6.4	E-BRAND EXPERIENCE	129
4.6.5	ONLINE POSITIONING	130
4.6.6	CONSISTENCY	130
4.6.7	OFFLINE FACTORS	131
4.6.8	WORD OF MOUTH	132
4.7	E-BRAND CHALLENGES IN THE ONLINE CONTEXT	133
4.7.1	BUDGETARY RESTRICTIONS	135
4.7.2	TECHNOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS	136
4.7.3	PROFESSIONALISM	137
4.7.4	TIME CONSTRAINTS AND COMPETITIONS	137
4.7.5	ONLINE REVIEWS	138
4.7.6	RISK IN E-BRANDING	138

4.8	CONCLUSION	139
CHAPTER 5	CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY	
5.1	INTRODUCTION	141
5.2	SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS	141
5.3	THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION	146
5.3.1	EVOLUTION OF E-BRAND KNOWLEDGE	146
5.3.2	CONTRIBUTION TO GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION	148
5.4	METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION	149
5.5	MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS	149
5.5.1	ONLINE REPUTATION	150
5.5.2	E-WORD OF MOUTH	150
5.6	LIMITATION OF THE STUDY	151
5.7	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY	152
5.8	CONCLUDING STATEMENT	153
	REFERENCES	154
	APPENDIX A	
	ETHICAL APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY	
	INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	
	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	
	PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM	
	PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET	
	PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER	
	ETHICAL APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY	
	APPENDIX B	
	THEMATIC ANALYSIS REPORT- DATA MATRIX	

	LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	
TABLE1	SME DEFINITION	14
TABLE2	SUMMARY OF SME BRANDING LITERATURE	26
TABLE 2.2	SUMMARY OF E-BRANDING LITERATURE	46
TABLE3.1	RESEARCH PARADIGM BELIEF SYSTEM	70
TABLE3.2	METHOD OF ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA	90
TABLE4.1	PROFILE OF SAMPLED ORGANISATIONS	100
TABLE4.2	PROFILE OF ORGANISATION AND INFORMANTS	101
FIGURE 3.1	THREE PHASE DATA ANALYSIS	91

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter opens an introductory discussion of E- brand management in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and provides an overview of the necessity to address this research area. The objectives of the research are presented, followed by the research justification. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

1.2 Research Background

The brand concept is a principle precept in marketing, supported by academics and scholarly practices (Dall’Olmo Riley, 2009; Heding et al., 2009). Brands are an important aspect which holds strategic significance within the organisation (De Chernatony & McWilliam,1990; Aaker, 1991; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Merz et al., 2009). Subsequently brand management within the SMEs are the concern of top management (Bjerre,2002) and a fundamental marketing issue (McEnally & De Chernatony, 1999; Quinton, 2013).

Recent years have seen the transition of branding and brand management from corporate spaces to online spaces (Christodoulides, 2009), which is a progression from broadcasting to networking in online platforms. Online branding involves social media interaction and integration with content networks (Goh et al., 2013). The rapid expansion in online media and social media combined with extensive adoption by customers, enabled brand marketers to maximise their potentials through novel virtual platforms (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Andzulis et al., 2012).

Several conceptualisations of the benefits of marketing through online media and social media have been postulated consisting of, building customer relationships (Waters et al., 2009; de Vries et al., 2012); increased customer engagement, loyalty (Mangold & Faulds,

2009; Yan, 2011; Ang, 2011; Sashi, 2012); developing customer insights through market research (Beer, 2008; Cooke & Buckley, 2008; Bryant, 2009; Casteleyn et al., 2009; Cooke, 2009), and creation of online brand communities (Bryant, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Zaglia, 2013).

Online media and social media stimulate a paradigm shift in marketing and branding (Fournier and Avery, 2011; Andzulis et al., 2012; Christodoulides et al., 2012; Quinton, 2013; Rapp and Panagopoulos, 2012), generating unique online spaces and marketing spaces. Accordingly, brands located in online platforms should confront an evolving environment to traditional branding platforms, with evidence signifying that organisations are gradually seeking to redesign the branding strategies due to the characteristics of online media (Bryant, 2009; Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Jones et al., 2009; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Quinton, 2013).

The prompt performance is one of the increased benefits due to the progressive transformation of internet brands (Hoffman, 2000), with numerous opportunities and challenges for brand marketers (Chun, 2004). The successful online brand strategies consist of building relationships, customer interactivity and tailored offerings (De Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004). The popular practice considered by organisations are the creation of brand follow up pages in social networking sites (Jones et al., 2009; Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Pentina et al., 2012; de Vries et al., 2012), with organisations using these platforms to support their brands and contributing direct associations to the pages from their websites (Michaelidou et al., 2011).

Despite the increased benefits of E-brands, there is a common notion on e-branding practices as intended only for large organisations, but in the recent decade small portion of literatures on E-branding practices in SMEs has emerged, which is still in an infancy state. The digital media is not considered as significant (Pentina et al., 2012) in all the SMEs (Harris and Rae, 2010; Pentina et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2013) with limited market resources. E-branding practices in the SME hospitality sector constitute the base for the study. To attain an overview of the SME organisations, the subsequent section classifies the nature and role of SMEs in the Indian Context.

1.2.1 Indian SME definition

The Indian SME definition is provided by the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which is a conglomerate directed by the SME ministry, Government of India. The SME is defined by the MSME Act of 2006, which supports in covering the investment ceiling of the sector. The MSMEs have been contributing widely to the expansion of entrepreneurial endeavours of the country through business innovations. The sector expands their domain across the sectors of economy with extended range of product and services to meet the demands of domestic and global markets (MSME Report ,2017-18).

The SMEs are classified as manufacturing and service enterprises. The manufacturing sector deals with the investments in plant and machinery and the service sector deals with the investments in equipment.

Table 1:

Manufacturing Enterprises – Investment in Plant & Machinery and

Service Enterprises – Investment in Equipments (Source: SME Chamber of India, 2017)

Manufacturing Enterprises – Investment in Plant & Machinery		
Description	INR(Rupees)	USD (\$)
Small Enterprises	above Rs. 25,0000 & upto Rs. 50000000	above \$ 62,500 & upto \$ 1.25 million
Medium Enterprises	above Rs. 50,000000 & upto Rs. 100000000	above \$ 1.25 million & upto \$ 2.5 million

Service Enterprises – Investment in Equipments		
Description	INR(Rupees)	USD (\$)
Small Enterprises	above Rs. 10,00000 & upto Rs. 20000000	above \$ 25,000 & upto \$ 0.5 million
Medium Enterprises	above Rs. 20,000000 & upto Rs. 50,000000	above \$ 0.5 million & upto \$ 1.5 million

1.2.2 The Role of SMEs in The Indian Context

The hallmarks of strong brands emanate from the successful organisations. The business that develops reputable brands represents superiority of the business culture and admirable entrepreneurial spirit. Despite the tradition and notion of brand building are for large

organisations, the small business has evolved during the last few decades for building businesses, developing stronger brands and nurturing entrepreneurship. The small business has shown their entrepreneurial skills and risk-taking capabilities by building successful business enterprises. The economy is looking forward to large number of small businesses that create employment opportunities and contribute to improving economic conditions. Thus, the small business is gradually creating brands that are recognised, recalled and accepted by people within the domestic and global market.

SMEs have demonstrated substantial potential and resilience in maintaining a steady growth rate and employment generation during global recession and economic slowdown (Das, 2017). The SMEs exhibit a crucial role in the socio-economic growth history of India by providing 45% of the manufacturing output and 40% of aggregate exports as of 2017-18 and by providing 18% of employment in the manufacturing sector and 34% employment in the service sector (Annual Report 2017-18; Ministry of MSME, 2018). The sector is a prominent provider of employment in urban and rural India. The SME in India is very significant to the country's economy facilitating expansion in local economies. The SMEs in the country persist in being competitive locally and globally provided the significance is given to the Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector (Pauchouri & Sharma, 2016).

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of India is expected to reach 8.5%, with the nation projected to be a USD 5 trillion economy by 2025 (Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance Fact Book, 2012). The MSME sustains as a pillar for economic growth, provided the right support and empowerment to the economic framework. The MSME aims to develop entrepreneurship and financial support catalysed by innovation over the subsequent decade by, primarily increasing the share of MSME contribution to GDP from the

present 8% to 15% by 2020, (Planning Commission, 2012), generating the employment levels to 50% of the overall employment, and increasing the workforce of MSME by 106 million in manufacturing and service sectors together (CII MSME Issues and Recommendations, 2014).

The SMEs at present witness drastic dynamism in operations due to various government initiatives and policies which can improve the growth of SME sector. The advent of internet and information technology exhibits a major role in business by providing affordable technology adoption to be competent in business. The use of online tools and technology makes business agile and supports business success according to market dynamics. The selection of suitable technology is very crucial for the business success, which leads the organisation to the heights of competency (Moghavvemi et al., 2012). The SMEs are more active and adjacent to the customers than the larger counterparts (Rathod et al,2016; Dresner, 2013). The Indian Government constantly motivates the SMEs to follow the model of socio-economic policies, which can expose the non-concentration of the economic authority with the large organisational group and lower the monopolistic practices (Banerjee & Dasgupta, 2009).

The SME is the backbone of future high growth business where the domestic and foreign companies make investments in the 'make in India' (2014) initiative and creates significant impact in the area of indigenisation. The 'make in India with zero defect and zero effect' is a slogan coined by the Prime Minister as essence of 'Make in India' initiative which manages advanced process and technologies. The recent trend in the MSME enhance the development of the business eco system which can consistently support business in gearing with good service and quality in domestic and international markets. The 'digital India' initiative

provides ample opportunity in promoting the MSME participation information, and digitalisation in line with Government vision.

1.3 Research Problem

The research sets out to address the gap in the literature concentrating on E- brand management in SMEs. The technologies are increasingly identified as the business facilitator and an inevitable tool for increased efficiency and effectiveness. The MSMEs in order to develop competitive advantage and global reputation strongly focus on new technology. The technology offers a pivotal role in facing competition and accepting challenges within the business. The technology dynamics rapidly drives the customer, business and business application, linking disruptive technology by disintegrating the boundaries. The business develops daily and becomes agile with the increased technology like social media, mobility, analytics and cloud computing (SMAC) and coincide to unleash better value and opportunity (KPMG Report, 2015).

In E- brand management within the SMEs refers to the strategic management who capitalises the capabilities to project the brand online. The study of online branding within SMEs contributes very little to published knowledge in the area and particularly contributes an analysis which integrates and associates the perspectives of strategic management in SME. It opens by considering a new outlook and approach for managers in developing the internet-based technology in the SME, where the experiences and involvement is widely scant thus far in the research literature.

E-branding and its increased benefits is a widely accepted contemporary phenomenon, however much of the literature on online brand/ brand digitalisation are fragmented and draw from different fields of brand identity, online marketing, e-commerce, visual identity design and strategy. From the perspective of this study, there are few notable issues with the present state of E-branding, which are; E-branding as fragmented and biased towards large organisation, despite the SME contributions to the country. The E-branding in SMEs are in the preliminary stage with narrow focus on the specific aspects of online presence.

The intent of the study is detailed in the following research aims and objectives to address these problems.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

In the light of the above discussion, the overall aim of the research is “to explore E-brand management in Indian SMEs, from a strategic perspective”.

Subsequently, the objectives of the research are to:

- I. To investigate how the e-brand is managed from the strategic perspective in the context of Indian SMEs in the hospitality sector
- II. To investigate how successfully are the components of an SME e- brand managed in the Indian hospitality sector.
- III. To investigate how effectively the challenges of e-branding are addressed by Indian SMEs in the hospitality sector

1.5 Research Justification

The discussions on the impact of online media and social media on brand management are extant and topical. Branding in the SMEs are an under-researched area (Abimbola, 2001). Most of the literatures available in the branding fields are influenced by corporate branding and branding of large organisations (Agostini et al., 2015). The small business is the backbone of developing nations with significant economic growth and GDP contribution, yet the branding within them are reasonably unclear (Culkin & Smith, 2000).

SMEs quite recently have shown evidence of brand investments (Hughes & Mina, 2010), despite constrained budgets. SME marketers have proved they are capable of managing and leveraging the full brand prospects (Berthon et al., 2008). According to different authors (Abimbola, 2001; Wong & Merrilees, 2005) branding is a major determinant of the SME market performance, which makes brand a dominant competitive strategy (Ramello and Silve, 2006). The existing inadequacies of theoretically grounded research on the influence of Online media on brand and brand management in the SME context engenders the motivation for this thesis.

1.6 Structure of the Report

The study report consists of five chapters, namely Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methodology, Findings, Discussions and Conclusions. The structure of this chapter is as follows; Introduction is stated at the start of this chapter, where the arguments explored in the individual chapters are outlined below.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review and includes a critical review and assessment of the relevant literature on branding, and particularly e-branding within SMEs. Particularly the limited research into branding/e-branding in SMEs is evident throughout the literature review. The chapter argues that branding in SMEs occur mainly through the social interactions which leads to the development of meaning and a common reality.

Chapter 3 explains the rationale for choice of research methodology selected for the primary research from an inductive perspective to analyse the individual perspectives of the Owner/manager within the SMEs, their interpretation of the world and individual experiences within the SMEs. Data was collected using qualitative face to face interviews conducted with the Owner/managers of the SMEs. The knowledge of reality is context-specific and identifies the individuality of the Owners/managers. The face to face interactions with the interviewee enhances and facilitates a complete understanding of the social phenomenon within the SMEs. The website analysis was undertaken to enhance in the understanding of e-branding within the SMEs, the online analysis helps in identifying the various website interactions of the organisation including the customer reviews and feedback.

Chapter 4 presents the findings and discussions from the research process. Moreover, the discussion in the chapter situates the research within the literature and highlights contributions to knowledge. These contributions spread the understanding of how online media and social media impacts brand management, and how brand management responds organisational need for adoption of the use of online media.

Chapter 5 concludes the study by re-examining the research aim and objectives set out in the current chapter, by underlining contributions to knowledge and generating implications for research and practitioners.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research area and explained the necessity for the research study. The overall aim and objectives were defined, and an outline of the study structure is presented. The following chapter builds on the overview, developing the relevant literature on branding and e-branding. The subsequent chapter reviews the literatures available on SME branding and E-branding in the SMEs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review aims to develop the present state of SME E-brand management by identifying the existing knowledge gaps. The chapter reviews and evaluates the literature pertaining to SME branding including e-branding in SMEs, and to address the research questions and objectives stated in the introductory chapter. In order to answer the main research objective, it is important to introduce the research areas where the concept of branding and e- branding are studied.

The following section 2.2 reviews the SME branding literatures, which begins with the insight on brands as valuable assets of organisations. Section 2.3 reviews the E-branding literatures within SMEs, to establish the present state of e-brand management in the SMEs. The following section 2.4 reviews the present strategic approaches within SMEs followed by the review of strategic e-brand components in the literature and the challenges incurred in e-brand adoption. Having established the present state of SME E-brand management, the research gaps are identified in section 2.5. Finally, section 2.6 concludes the chapter by reiterating the need to synthesis the literature review into a coherent conceptual model.

2.2 Brands as Assets

A brand is an identifiable product, service, (organization) person or place, augmented in such a way, that the buyer or user perceives to have relevant unique added values which match their needs more closely. Brands “*..attract and keep customers by promoting value, image, prestige or lifestyle*” (Rooney, 1995, p. 48). They convey information, reduce risks and

increase the customer trust (Knox, 2004), they enable brand recall and competitor differentiation (Palumbo & Herbig, 2000).

The brand building activities are justifiable as they create value for both consumers and organisations alike (Aaker, 1992).

Brands communicate with customers; they capture key values and messages, relating, for instance, to quality, excellence, consistency, reliability, modern, traditional, exciting, socially responsible, or entertaining. (Rowley, 2008, p.1).

The core of strong brands is encapsulated by Doyle (1998, p. 158) as “...*developing brand is a central issue for top management because it is a key determinant of corporate value*”.

Brand management is recommended as a critical success factor for the organisation (Helm & Jones, 2010). Branding is a ‘supportive mechanism’ for organisations to attain competitive advantage (Woods, 2000), which are equally important to SMEs and Large Organisations (Helander & Ulkuniemi, 2006) but, many SMEs fail to realise their branding potential (Merrilees, 2007). It is commonly understood that SMEs do not perform in the same way as large organisations (Fillis, 2007); (Culkin & Smith, 2000) mostly in adapting to the changing business environment (O’Dwyer et al., 2009; Hills & Cairncross, 2011), facing resource constraints (Walsh and Lipinski, 2009), structuring the enterprise (Culkin & Smith, 2001) , adoption of technology and managerial skills (Boohene, Sheridan, & Kotey, 2008).

As SMEs are a significant part of the local and global economy therefore the need for branding in the SMEs is an important business activity. It is essential to identify the branding practices developed by the SME management. The creation of a brand denotes a unique and an appropriate use of values as strategic options, which are synchronised with each other

(Lepak et al., 2007). The literature on SME branding is reviewed next to understand the present state of SME brands.

2.3 SME Branding

The SME organisations are among the growing academic interests within the broader area of brand management (Inskip, 2004; Krake, 2005; Berthon, Ewing, & Napoli, 2008; Ojasalo, 2008) and the SME brand is a multidisciplinary area with a base in ‘management, entrepreneurship and marketing’ (Krake, 2005; Merrilees, 2007; Plessis, 2015).

The prominent study on SME branding was coined a decade ago by Abimbola, (2001) who explores the role of brands as a competitive entrepreneurial strategy, according to the study SME branding foster innovation and develop market demand and conceptualised on five brand building guidelines(Keller, 2003,P:274). The study argues that branding principles are mutually inclusive for SMEs and large organisations. The study emphasis is on SMEs and focuses on branding by conducting extensive marketing campaigns and to develop an entrepreneurial flair in relations with stakeholders. According to Keller (2013), small business enterprise should elicit marketing attention and stability and recommends implementing marketing activity on more than one strategic association by occupying well integrated conventional brand elements like brand image, brand equity and brand extension in creating awareness.

The succeeding studies of Abimbola (2001) still focused on branding in large organisations (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2005). Until recent years the research approach focussed more on SME marketing by concentrating on sales, market performance and competitiveness in the business markets (Carson, 2009). As the increased scholarly foci was on large organisation, this led to deviated branding approaches from the conventional literatures

(Keller,1993;Burmann, Zeplin, & Riley, 2009), the approach turned out to be indeterminate and problematic when applied to small and medium enterprises due to the disparity between large and small organisations.

The initial studies on SME brand management appeared in 2005, the independent studies were conducted by Krake (2005) and Wong and Merrilees (2007). The important insights from the study of Krake (2005) are:

1. The brand management is not found as a priority
2. The SME is influenced by the owner or the manager in the internal and external brand management and brand building
3. Brand management in the SME depend on the business nature, company profile and the market
4. Creativity is critical in creating awareness
5. The budgets are limited and influence marketing activity
6. The objective of marketing activity is creating awareness

The following literature review Table 2.1 on SME brands are classified based on various contexts such as; SME start-up, B2C SME branding and B2B SME branding. This will be followed by a more in-depth discussion of the literature content reviewed.

Table 2.1 Summary of SME Branding literature

Author	Context
<i>Conceptual</i>	
Abimbola(2001)	SME brand building conceptual guidelines
<i>Start-up SME branding</i>	
Rode & Vallaster(2005)	A multiple case study of branding in SME entrepreneurial start-ups in Germany
Merrilees (2007)	Brand led SME new venture development model
Bresciani & Eppler (2010)	The study on Entrepreneurial branding issues among start-up SMEs in Switzerland.
Juntunen(2012)	Managers and employees brand identification in SMEs
Centeno et al (2012)	Development of brand communication and brand building in SME and developed a conceptual model of various brand building phases.
<i>B2B SME branding</i>	
Inskip(2004)	The case study of corporate brand building in 15 UK B2B SMEs
Krake(2005)	Brand management in 10 SMEs of consumer goods manufacturer in Netherlands
Ojasalo et al (2008)	Brand building in software SMEs
Spence and Essoussi (2010)	Multiple case study on SME brand building and Management in SME consumer goods

	<p>manufacturer in Monaco.</p> <p>Brand creation through design and modularisation in B2B SMEs</p> <p>To identify the relationship between brand orientation and business growth</p> <p>Combination and brand orientation and market orientation in business growth</p>
Olavi(2014)	
Hiroven et al(2013),	
Laukkanen et al (2016)	
<i>B2C SME branding</i>	Typology of branding in SMEs
Merrilees (2005)	A multiple case study of functional and symbolic perspectives of branding in Australian Wineries
Mowle & Merrilees(2005)	A multiple case study of brand orientation in eight Australian SME in service industry
Wong & Merrilees(2005)	To identify the Obstacles in brand identity creation
Plessis, Indayong &Marriot (2015)	
<i>Strategic SME branding</i>	
Abimbola & Kocak(2007)	A multiple case study of strategic brand management in 10
Roy and Bannerji (2011)	Brand competitiveness and readiness in entrepreneurial SMEs in India
	Strategic branding and financial performance in

Vrotnis et al (2011)	Italian Wineries SME brands as clusters in Slovenian SMEs
Vidic et al(2013)	A holistic conceptualisation of brand and
Tavares(2015)	corresponding difference in brand
<i>Quantitative study</i>	management within SMEs
Berthon, Ewing &	A survey of 263 New Zealand based B2C SMEs
Napoli (2008)	to study SME brand management
Chakraborty et al.	SME branding in India
(2013),	
Agostini ,Nosalla &	SME brand building and link towards sales
Soranzo (2015)	performance in Italian fashion Sector

2.3.1 SME Branding in Start-ups

The start-up phases of the SME are referred to as pre-launch phase and or in early years of operations. The existing literature in the field of start-up SMEs are very limited (Bresciani & Eppler, 2010). There are insufficient studies conducted on the start-up firms and SME branding (Juntunen, 2012; Spence & Essoussi, 2010). The study on branding in the start-up SMEs by Rode & Vallaster (2005) explored the role of SME founder in corporate brand building in Germany. The brand building role was conceptualised as corporate identity and corporate image. The corporate identity was further conceptualised as corporate culture, behaviour, corporate design and corporate communication. The study finds the corporate culture had little idea on business articulation, the corporate behaviour lacked formal Human Resources (HR) practices like selection, training and motivation. The ineffective corporate communications prevailed within the SME sector, where informal internal communications

were limited to emails and face to face conversation, where the external formal communication were constrained only to webpage. There was limited advertising and word of mouth promotion, and referrals were considered as promotional methods.

The study by Merrilees (2007) combined branding, marketing and entrepreneurial research to develop a conceptual model which specified the significance of branding as a base to start-up SMEs, and the role of SME Owners. This study identifies the probability of innovation and creativity within the start-ups. The role of brands is specified as an opportunity identifier, formulator of business models, easy access provider to customers, suppliers and sole responsibility of SME owners for stakeholder management, which correspond to the scholarly suggestions on the role of SME founders (Abimbola, 2001; Krake, 2005; Rode and Vallaster, 2005).

Bresciani and Eppler (2010) contributed on start-up firms brand practices in Switzerland. The study contributes to the literature on branding approaches among young firms, the study argue branding as an essential entity for the survival of start-up SMEs. They propose three phase guidelines; where the brand strategy should be explained by entrepreneur prior to inception, the brand design should be intact and brand building should be carried out with help of online technology and measuring tools.

Juntunen (2012) studied managers and employee identification on brand in the start-up SMEs and brand execution within the organisation. The study integrates the internal and external aspects within the organisation as begins with the stakeholders inventing new corporate name and continues with logo updating and developing communications material and services. The managers role is to identify the role of stakeholders in the organisation. The study states the organisation being a B2B organisation, it should be more publicised among stakeholders rather than individual customers. The study identifies the brand as personalised to the single

owner, who is the founder of the organisation. The research furthermore illustrates that the existence of branding concept was not a fresh concept within the start-up SMEs.

Centeno, et al.(2013) investigated the development of brand communication for brand building within Mexican SMEs. The study is based on the ‘contemporary marketing practices’ perspective and suggests SMEs respond to various brand communication activities which are effectively linked to various groups of customers on diverse platforms (Coviello et al., 2000). The brand owners were found to have key responsibility for the brand communication within the SME. The brands are supported by large number of brand communication activities, which were classified as (1) ‘close and personal’ communication from an interactional marketing approach; (2) personalisation of activities; and (3) transactional marketing approach including e-communications based on e-marketing.

The study of Roshanzamir (2018) on dilemmas of branding in start-up SMEs reviewed the challenges faced in brand building subjected to emotion, and innovation within the organisation. The study contributes to incremental approach in brand building from the initial stage. The lack of brand orientation, trust and consistency (Keller, 2000) compared to older firms was identified in start –up organisations (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012).

2.3.2 B2B SME Branding

Business-to-business (B2B) SMEs normally consider branding as secondary to traditional managerial topics such as manufacturing, operations, delivery and quality attributes (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011), despite clear significance of branding for industrial marketers.

The successful outcomes of branding are shared among the B2C and B2B companies (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011). In a B2B small business, branding is not an essential concept (Aaker, 2013) as in B2C business (Hoejmose, Brammer, & Millington, 2012). The B2B

SMEs consider branding as a formal procedure with clear goals (Horan O'Dwyer, & Tiernan, 2011). The B2B SMEs are frequently associated with larger transactions than B2C SMEs with diverse operations (Ghauri & Cateora, 2010).

Spence and Essoussi, (2010) conducted an exploratory study on brand building in SME manufacturing sector in Monaco. The study contributes theoretically to brand dimensions like brand identity, brand equity and brand management. The study identifies brand building as a concern of minority group consisting of Owners and the Senior Management within the Organisation. The hard work and determination of top management are the innovative quality drivers of the organisation, owner's values, and the SME brand identity development. This is the foundation of SME brand success, which agrees with the study of Krake (2005) undertaken in 10 SMEs in the Netherlands. The functional and symbolic brand values of SME Owners lead to strong brand image (Krake, 2005). The various diversification strategies and innovations improve SME growth which is consistent with internal competency. The integrated and efficient market communication strategy leads to brand equity, which resonates with the study of Abimbola (2001).

The empirical study on brand building in the software SMEs conducted by Ojasalo et al. (2008) identified the link of SME brand to the goals, accrued benefits, resources, co-operation of the external and internal factors. The study points out that SMEs have least interpretation on branding aspects and are constrained to brand name and logo (Wong & Merrilees, 2005), and the SMEs do not invest in paid advertising and the promotional activities.

Olavi (2014) studied brand creation through design and modularisation in B2B SMEs. The brand creation was through industrial design and the product modularity in the international B2B markets. The value of industrial design is an important marketing element in marketing

academics (Kotler, 2003). Design and aesthetics are identified as the strategic tools to create competitive advantage (Hertenstein et al, 2005).

Hirvonen, et al. (2013) studied the brand orientation and market orientation in Finnish small firms, and the study identified that SMEs abstain from branding approach (Horan et al. (2011); Wong and Merrilees, 2005). The study argues small firms are unaware of the brand orientation and its contribution towards the brand performance (Reijonen et al, 2012) and brand orientations do not have a direct effect on the brand performance. The study is consistent with that of Hankinson (2012) and Wong and Merrilees (2008), as the study shows brand orientation influences brand performance indirectly through brand identity, which is in accordance with the study of Baumgarth (2008), which states the customer mindset does not affect the brand performance. The study also resonates with the views of Urde (1999), where brand orientation generates strong positive impact on brand identity development. The brand-oriented firms argue to use the brand identity as the 'guiding light' (Urde et al., 2013).

The study by Laukkanen, et al, (2016), on B2B SMEs combined market orientation, brand orientation and business growth. The study empirically examines market relationship and brand orientation which impact the business performance. The study identifies that SME entrepreneurs are responsible for the day to day operations and entrepreneurial attitude is important towards brand building. The entrepreneurs are the visionary who leads the organisations (Hogarth-Scott, Watson & Wilson, 1996). The marketing practices in SMEs strongly reflect on the decision making, inherent skills and capabilities of the entrepreneurs (McCartin-Quinn & Carson, 2003). The entrepreneurial behaviour reflects the functioning of the firm (Poon et al., 2006).

2.3.3 B2C SME Branding

There are limited studies available on B2C SME branding, with the major studies on B2C SMEs were conducted by Merrilees (2005), and Wong and Merrilees (2005). Wong and Merrilees (2005) established a useful typology of SME branding to identify the degree to which the brand practices were conducted in the organisation. The typology consists of three factors which are “minimalistic, embryonic and the integrated”. According to the minimalistic approach, the organisation and its corresponding branding and marketing are at infancy phase. The ‘embryonic’ typology is the development phase of typology involving brand development and marketing activities. The ‘integrated’ phases consist of a strong branding and marketing activity with clear evidence of understanding customer necessities.

Mowle and Merrilees (2005) conducted a study on functional and symbolic aspect of branding in Australian SME wineries. The study intended to identify the branding principles and practices in the SME wineries. The study highlights functional and the symbolic approaches as value inherent in branding (Bhat & Reddy, 1998; De Chernatony, 2000). The study argues, the brand can have two approaches simultaneously, functional and symbolic approaches, where the symbolic values are prominent as they signify sustainable competitive advantages (Abimbola, 2001) and are interdependent.

The study on brand management by Plessis et al. (2015) in B2C handicraft sector in Laos identified the obstacles in building successful brand. The study identified that brand identity was created by the views and visions of the Owner-Manager and co-created by the quality products and geographic location. The study identifies the crucial role of the entrepreneur/business owner in brand building of the SMEs and the significant influence on the internal structure and culture of the enterprises.

2.3.4 Strategic SME Branding

The strategic SME branding focused on the premium market segmentation, competitive advantage and differentiations. Bresciani and Eppler (2010) argue brand development varies with organisations and is dependent on brand investment. The strategic decision making within the SMEs are limited. The entrepreneurs face challenges in distinguishing short term and long-term decisions, so they adopt a reactive and an emotional decision-making approach (Agostini et al., 2014; Bianchi et al., 1998).

Branding in the SME is a strategic pursuit in “personifying” the activities to provide personality (Ramello & Silva, 2006). The study on strategic branding in Indian SMEs conducted by Roy and Banerjee (2011) analysed the SMEs in the competitive B2B segment and brand readiness. The study identified that SMEs have diverse motivations for branding depended on critical brand components and market orientation. They developed a strategic branding guide, which is the Brand Initiative Framework which plots the degree of product criticality and degree of market orientation in a matrix format. The matrix is a guide for SMEs for adequate strategic decision making.

The study of Vrotnis et al. (2011), on the strategic branding and financial performance in Italian wineries, based on the previous work of Rossi et al. (2011) identified the local and international competitive situation and the power and potentiality of small business and the factors affecting the consumer behaviour by developing a preliminary prescriptive strategic branding framework.

Vidic et al. (2013) studied branding in Slovenian SMEs which investigate the role of branding and entrepreneurial attitude on branding strategy. The study results in SMEs classified into four clusters based on market position and future perspectives. According to the cluster they are divided as 1) Ignorant, where the micro business is predominant with little knowledge on branding and market growth. 2) The users, which are the developing business,

which are aware of branding and potential market growth, which acclimatise to generic strategy. 3) Low cost producers 4) Differentiated producers, where both are established small businesses which make use of brand orientation, interlinked with core strategic orientation. The ignorant and users are passive, where the low-cost producers and differentiated producers are proactive in the business strategy.

Pacheco and Tavares (2015) study on SME brand management contributed to a holistic conceptualisation of brand and their corresponding difference in the SME context , with a new research agenda for the future study on SMEs. The study states the Owner - managers approach brands in a unique way of brand development which links entrepreneurial orientation, brand management tactics and brand performance for long term success (Kantur, 2016).

2.3.5 Quantitative studies in SME branding

The comparative study on branding by Berthon et al. (2008), in 263 SMEs and 41 large organisations, identified that large organization had strong investment and customised brand delivery compared to small organisations (Parrot et al., 2010). Berthon et al. (2008) suggest that SMEs adopt branding like large Organisations, and proposed guidelines for SME managers to position their brand with limited budget and resources by focusing on brand essence, targets and consistency in communication (Lassen et al., 2008).

The study on brand building efforts in Italian SME fashion industry by Agostini et al. (2015) identified SMEs as market driven with importance to brands and trademarks (Davey et al., 2009). The results from the panel regression model indicate progressive association of corporate trademarks and brands with sales performance, and marketing expenses.

2.4 Organisation strategy perspectives

There exist mainly two general approaches in the organisations strategy literature; they are internal and external perspective. The internal perspectives of the organisation strategy are grounded on strategic orientation and the external perspectives are grounded on market orientation. The two perspectives are widely used in the organisations strategy concept which varies with the concept and content. According to Baden-Fuller (1995) the internal strategy deals with the internal change and the external perspectives deals with the market positioning. Srivastava et al (2001) illustrates the internal strategic management as the internal resources which are not constrained only to change management, and the external perspectives as the strategic focus based on the external environment.

2.4.1 External strategy Perspective

The external strategic perspective is grounded on the marketing concept. Market orientation facilitates the necessity for the firm to be market-oriented or market driven (Hurley&Hult, 1998). Market driven creates value by marketing activities and meaning to the customers. (Srivastava et al, 2001). Market orientation facilitates a clear idea to the customers (Srivastava et al, 2001).

Lafferty and Hult (1999) argues market orientation are dependent on five perspectives, preferably, decision making, market intelligence, cultural based behavior and customer perspective (Deshpande, Farley & Webster, 1993). The knowledge is equally applicable to large organisations and SMEs.

2.4.2 The internal strategy perspective

The internal strategic perspective aims in sustained competitive advantage (Srivastava et al, 2001). The internal strategy perspective is generated from the previous work of Penrose (1959) on organisational growth theory situated in the industrial organisation (IO)

economics domain, which view the organisation, as diverse economic units (Conner, 1991) with resource endowments (Wernerfelt, 1984). The internal strategy perspective tries to be successful by managing the organisations resources and assets.

2.4.3 SME Brand Orientation and Market Orientation Network

The study by Reijonen (2012) states, brand orientation differentiates the SME organisation as declining, stabilising and budding compared to market orientation, sound financial investment and business growth. The market orientation and brand orientation are directly proportional to financial performance, and indirectly proportional to business nature. The brand orientation results in increased finance and market orientation (Cadogan, 2012; Laukkanen et al., 2013).

Baumgarth (2010) indicated strong brand orientation on marketing and financial performance in B2B SMEs, with brand driven strategies (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007; Chen, 2013). Hiroven et al. (2016) argue the firms selected for the study are large organisations or high performing SMEs, with increased benefits and resources. The study on the brand orientation in SMEs and the empirical test on the impact on the brand performance by Hiroven et al. (2014), among the dataset of 255 respondents from Finland identified that brand orientation had little priority, as many enterprises desist from the concept of branding (Krake, 2005) with no brand performance measures (Horan et al., 2011) and adjustment to the market variations for survival (Berthon et al., 2008).

The brand orientation approaches are philosophical and behavioural (Urde et al., 2013). The SMEs are not completely aware of branding and its significance, so they remain refrained from branding with a focus of increased sales with associated risk and uncertainty (Hiroven 2014; Horan et al., 2011; Ojasalo et al., 2008; Wong & Merrilees, 2005). The entrepreneurial and the brand management practices approach towards the brand management and brand-

orientation are at an integrated stage which aligns with Wong and Merrilees (2005); Renton et al. (2015).

The study by Mitchell et al. (2013) on the future Research Agenda for SME Brand management provides new theoretical understanding by integrating new ideas of SME brand management and develops a conceptual framework with key research concepts as a future research guide. The propositions indicate brand management is dependent on both internal and the external factors of the business environment (Horan et al., 2011). The study developed a conceptual model with branding indispensability and branding readiness. The branding indispensability focus on the external factors and branding readiness focus on the internal factors within the organisation. The three different branding models were mentioned following the conceptual model, were practice branding, where SMEs showed less interest in branding activates, cluster branding, which relate to the development of independent clusters and technology branding which make use of corporate presence and corporate image.

The study by Chakraborty et al. (2013), analysed the importance of brand in Indian SMEs and identified that the idea of brand promotion was totally absent in the SME, with no special department for brand promotion. Word of mouth was considered as an important marketing tool. The study recommends the need for the SME brand building to reach the global market, as brand building was practised only by large industries. To create brand awareness among employees by owner-managers as this can also lead to SME brand success.

2.4.4 The branding relational network

In addition to the formal brand management models, the SME brand literature illustrates branding as interlinked in a relational network with other concepts, which are significant in an in-depth understanding of the present state of field. The important concepts relating to corporate branding applicable to the present study are brand orientation, values, internal

branding, consistent brand delivery and brand promise

2.4.4.1 Brand orientation

Brand orientation is an *“approach in which the process of the organisation revolves around creation, development and protection of brand identity in an ongoing interaction with target customers aiming of achieving competitive advantages in the form of brand”* (Urde., 1999; p:117). It is the mindset of the management which is beyond market oriented with focus on customer satisfaction. Brand orientation is a deliberate entity were active brand development are saturated which are imbued with the emotional and symbolic values.

The research by Wong and Merrilees (2007) stated the brand orientation diminishes the gap within marketing strategy and brand performance. According to Wong and Merrilles (2007), the companies with high brand orientation get more out of their marketing strategy than those with low brand orientation. The companies have a higher degree of focus on strategy development and implementation, where the marketing mix variables receive a higher attention. The brand orientation elements consist of commitment, understanding the brand and a behavioral component, like communicating the brand and treating the brand as a strategic resource (Hankinson, 2001b). Brand orientation involves some managerial responsibilities, which states *“responsibility for staff training on branding issues, responsibility for encouraging a pervasive brand culture within the organisation such that the brand becomes the hub of the organisational experience and responsibility for ensuring consistency in the expression of the brand values”* (Hankinson., 2001b, p: 355)

Brand orientation is appropriate within organisation and brand orientation involves cultural and behavioral values, which influence brand orientation norms, which influence brand oriented artefacts and brand-oriented behaviors (Baumgarth.,2009).

2.4.4.2 Values

The various authors on Organisational culture, such as Hatch and Schultz (1997), derived on Schein's (1992) conceptualisation of culture, from three analytical levels comprising artefacts, values and elementary assumptions. The values have a normative character and represent strategies, goals and philosophies which influence the observed actions of an organisation and where the leaders have an important decisive action in their formulation (Schein, 1992).

2.4.4.3 Consistent brand delivery

Kapferer (2004) emphasises the need for consistent brand delivery in achieving reputation. According to Kapferer (2004) the brand values and business development is the responsibility of brand managers, which is directly linked to the brand reputation. According to Chaudhari (2002) the brand reputation is a valuable intangible asset, where the study identifies the relationship between participations of consumers in brands consisting of brand familiarity, uniqueness and marketing outcomes. The study highlights brand reputation as the result of brand familiarity and uniqueness, which facilitates consistent brand delivery.

2.4.4.4 Reputation:

Brand reputation is influenced by brand credibility and trust (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Delgado-Balleas and Munuera-Aleman (2005) consider brand as consisting of expectations which the brand offers for a certain type of value. They state, *"providing this value in a consistent basis is at the heart of building strong relationships with consumers because they develop a sense of trust that the brand will continue to deliver the value"* (Delgado-Balleas et al., 2005; p:193). The trusts are linked with two elements, brand intentions and brand reliability, where the brand reliability refers to the ability to deliver brand consistent as promised. The reliability aspect is consistent to brand promise. Erdem and Swait (2004) suggest the brand

can signal credibility during the delivery of brand promise and deliver brand values and perceived brand trust. The brand trust is dependent on customers perceptions of the Organizations willingness to make promises and fulfill the promises made to customers. Hence brand reputation ascertains consistent brand delivery and promise which are interlinked with one another and embedded in the internal brand management process

2.4.4.5 Internal Brand orientation

The internal brand orientation is a significant aspect in turning the employees into ‘brand champions’. This is a tool for inspiring the employees in fulfilling the brand promise by guaranteeing that they transmute the brand values to reality when accomplishing the brand promise (Punjaisri et al,2009).

The major theme in the body of literature on internal brand orientation consists of the critical role of employees in brand promise delivery (King and grace, 2009). The organisation strategic management is concerned on promise management (Foster et al,2010) by communicating brand values to the employees and develop intellectual feeling and engagement with the brand.

There is no universal definition for internal branding, and they have not yet emerged, various authors agree the successful internal branding ensure, when delivering a service, employees shift the corporate identity to reality (Du Preez and Bendixen,2015; foster et al,2010). Miles and mangold (2005, P:535) developed a comprehensive definition for internal branding as, “The process by which employees internalize the desired brand image and are motivated to project the image to customers and other organisational constituents”

The concept of internal branding was outspread by Ulrich and Smallwood (2007) to leadership qualities of management adequate to build a leadership brand. The leadership

brand is considered as a reputed one for developing outstanding managers with unique set of skills geared to fulfill the customers and stakeholders expectations. Such brands encourage faith that employees and managers can constantly deliver the organizations promise.

In contrast the brand specific transactional leadership focus on specifying behavioral standards which constitute rewarding the employees based on performance. The transactional leadership monitors employees closely on the performance and the expected standards (Morhart et al, 2009).

Burmann et al., (2009) stated internal branding has three central constituents namely; brand commitment, brand citizen behavior and brand strength. The research shows the employee brand commitment results from brand focused HRM practices, effective internal brand communication, brand focused leadership and brand supportive corporate culture and structure, and the resource availability.

2.4.4.6 Brand promise

The brand promise is a significant aspect of the branding. A brand promise is an assurance made by the organisation to the customers on their expectations of services. The assurance is in terms of tangible and intangible benefits and experiences which lead to value proposition between organisation and customer.

Brand promise receives significant and prescriptive consideration in marketing and branding, by advocating marketing to involve in a promise-based approach (Gronroos,2006) and for promise centric of brand management (Delgado-ballaster & Munuera-Aleman,2005). The view of this promise adopts the brand promise triangle structure of creating, enabling and maintaining promises (Kotler, 1997). The brand promises are done through external marketing activities consisting of traditional marketing communications, guarantees, service

employees, physical facilities and services (Bitner, 1995). The promise via internal marketing consists of ensuring adequate employee skills, capabilities and motivational tools in delivering promises. Brand promise is a substitute for brand value proposition (Calonius,1992; Schultz,2001) and an essence of branding.

Having reviewed the literatures on SME branding, the e-branding literatures are reviewed subsequently in the next section.

2.5 E- Branding

The literature on E-branding are in the formative phase (Simmons, 2007). Chaffey (2008) describes online brands as brands mediated through websites, which are the sum of the product, service or organisational characteristics as perceived and experienced by the customer.

E-branding facilitates in developing communication strategies to create customer engagement in online context. The growth of e-branding is multidirectional, network connected and beyond marketers' control with vast opportunity for being the part of discussion forums, information sharing and reviews (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010), where internet users have the freedom of 'speech equality' (Kucuk, 2007).

The online brand focus on Web 2.0, social communities (De Chernatony et al., 2011), as web 2.0 technologies have received significant attention from collective users sharing the same platform. The advent of the web 2.0 made the internet a primary interactive and interpersonal media in the present scenario, with blogs as a visible signpost (Kapferer, 2010).The web is measured as a unique medium which transforms market function (Ota & Ota, 2011). The online brands have transformed organisations approach to business and individual interactions (Muntinga et al., 2011; Chang, 2013), by streamlining organisational functions. It

increases the organisation communication, productivity, customer relationships and values (Kim et al., 2011). There is a drastic increase in Organisations which invest in internet related technologies (Theodosios & Katsikea, 2012) as the “usage of internet has grown enormously in the recent years and so has its strategic application” (Taylor & Stutton, 2010; p. 952).

2.5.1 The Evolution of internet in Branding

The advent of internet had created greater impact on branding, the online branding has presented numerous opportunities for the brands. The e-brand evolution had led organisations gentrification, with interrelated advantages and disadvantages. The main activities online are the e-commerce and e-marketing which categorised under web 1.0 (Kambil., 2008). The internet has procreated new means of information sharing. The online branding opportunities focus mainly on Web 2.0, social communities and online brand building (De Chernatony et al., 2011). The web 2.0 technologies have received significant attention from 1990, the web has been a good platform clubbed with collective users by sharing same power. Each node in the internet is equal, so the internet users have the freedom of ‘speech equality’ (Kucuk., 2007).

The internet is recognised as an effective medium which has transformed the way in which the Organisation expertise approaches the business and individual interactions (Chang, 2013). The internet allows the Organisation to streamline the operations, to communicate, decrease operational cost, increase values, productivity and customer relationships (Kim et al, 2011). The web applications are enriched with extra ordinary capabilities (Martins et al, 2014). There are numerous Organisations which invest in significant amount of capital in the adoption of internet related technologies (Theodosios & Katsikea, 2012). The web is

measured as a unique medium which helps in transforming market function (Ota & Ota, 2011), where the “usage of internet has growth enormously in the recent years and so has its strategic application” (Taylor & Stutton, 2010; P: 952).

2.6 E-branding in SMEs

E-brand is the source of brand differentiation as it supports the organisations with increased sales, customer satisfaction and increased customer loyalty (Morrison & Crane, 2007). E-brand refers to online promise to the customers (Brodie et al., 2009; Christodoulides & De Chernatony, 2004) which are linked with the reliability of the organisation (Brodie et al, 2009). The customers in the online setting depend on trusted brand names, reviews and organisation reputation (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

E-brands take three roles based on business nature; as pure players, offline players and mixed players. To avoid obstacles from offline brand strategies to the online environment “e-adequate branding” was put forward by Treiblmaier (2004), which reflects on brand architecture, IT structure and cultural facets of the Organisation. The E-branding combines with traditional branding and integrates new approach in modern communication strategy which led to arising challenges in the marketing of enterprises (Treiblmaier, 2011).

The digital media including social media need authentic contents to be narrated apart from the meagre marketing messages (Fourier & Avery, 2011). The digital branding increases customer relationship (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010) and engagement through brand interactivity (Christodoulides, 2009). The customer relationship with brands and the communication equilibrium are highlighted in the present digital branding models (De Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004, Simmons et al., 2010). The various E-branding studies

are reviewed in the following Table 2.2. This will be followed by a more in-depth discussion of the literature content reviewed.

Table 2.2 Summary of E- Branding literature

Author	Context
Fashion Sector	
Rowley 2009	Exploratory study on online brand strategies.
Jones and Kim (2010)	Influence of retail brand trust and website quality in US clothing industry.
Online BC	
Nobre et al (2004)	Customer attitudes on E-brand.
Da Silva et al (2008)	Brand attributes of online retailers.
Brodie et al (2011)	Customer engagement in online brand community.
Wirtz et al(2013)	Managing brands and customer drivers in online brand community.
Hajli et al (2016)	Brand co-creation in online brand community.
E branding in hotel Industry	
Vernuccio et al (2012)	E brand approaches based on interactivity,
Seonjeong et al(2014)	personalisation and e-trust Study on improving online brand experience

<p>Chen-hui Lein et al 2015</p> <p>Hussain et al (2015)</p> <p>Abdulla et al (2016)</p> <p><i>Bareeda et al (2016)</i></p> <p>E branding in social media content</p>	<p>in congruity theory.</p> <p>Effect of online hotel booking effect on brand image.</p> <p>Interactive e-brand techniques preferred by customers.</p> <p>Conceptual model for hotel website with perceived website interactivity of customer perceived value.</p> <p>Online branding in hotel industry based on website interactivity.</p>
<p>Brunn et al(2012)</p> <p>Kovaoura et al(2013)</p> <p>Christodoulides et al(2010)</p> <p>Davies et al (2014)</p>	<p>Impact of social media over traditional media over and impact on social media brand communication.</p> <p>Develop a model of e-branding on rural Europe.</p> <p>Development of brand equity scale on measuring the online retail/ service equity.</p> <p>Social media brands by exploring consumer specific motivations.</p>
<p>Christodoulides& de Chernatony (2004)</p>	<p>Dimensionalising on-and offline brand composite equity</p>

Lee et al (2005)	Effect of trust beliefs on consumers online intentions
Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, (2011)	usage, barriers and measurement of social media marketing, investigation of SME B2B Brands
Wirtz et al(2013)	Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities
Seonjeong et al(2014)	Study on improving online brand experience on congruity theory
Quinton et al(2017)	online brand community through the eyes of self-determination theory
Labreque et al(2010)	online personal branding

2.6.1E-branding in the fashion sector

Rowley (2009) conducted an exploratory study on online brand strategies in the United Kingdom (UK) Online fashion retailers, which analysed the role of online medium in supporting the brands. The study identified the effective brand relationship are attained in online brands through the constant visual identity, role of online channels, innovation and brand values.

Jones and Kim (2010) studied the influences of retail brand trust and website quality in the United States (US) online clothing industry. The study identified that the attitudes and

behaviours of respondents play a major role in retail brand trust. The factors found to impact the online shopping experience are retail brand trust, off-line support, contribution and the quality of website like usability, information quality and visually appealing image. The offline brand support was acknowledged as a motivator for online shopping website selection.

2.6.2E-branding in online brand community

The study on customer response in online brands by Nobre et al. (2004) analysed customer attitudes on e-brands. The factors affecting the e-brand were concisely separated into three elements; customer retention, identification of the brand and the localisation of the brand. The study identified customers affinity towards branding in online media. The online brands led to innovation compared to traditional channel and develops interaction and increased consumer response towards the brand.

Da Silva et al. (2008) studied which brand attributes should be addressed by online retailers to attain a positive depiction of corporate brand images in the virtual environment. The study was conducted in an online book store. The study analysed the association of functional brand evaluation (brand attributes) and emotional brand evaluation (corporate brand image). The study identified certain factors like easily usable, personalisation, security and customer care as important in influencing corporate brand image in the online context.

Seonjeong et al. (2014) studied on improving online brand experience, by the application of congruity theory in customers online brand experience. The study was based on three main congruity theories of self-image, online-offline brand congruity and value congruity. The congruity theory is considered significant as it states individual's selection from the choices is based on perceived knowledge and attitude (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955).

An exploratory study on the consumer engagement in online brand community by Brodie et al. (2011), discloses the multidimensional and dynamic nature of customer engagement. The study investigated customer engagement in online brand communities which reflect on consumers interactive experiences and value co-creation among participants. The study states the various factors like customer loyalty, satisfaction, trust, emotions, empowerment are the customer behavioural traits in the online customer community which affect the customer engagement with online brands.

The study by Wirtz et al. (2013), in managing brand and the customer drivers in online brand community identified the value added by online customers to the brand. The online brands are dependent on the brand dimensions like the brand orientation, online media, investment and brand monitoring. The level of satisfaction in the online brand community consist of trust and commitment. The consumer engagement in the online brand community is dynamic which strengthens the customer association with the brand. The online communities create strong brand relationship and increases brand commitment.

Hajli et al. (2016) studied brand co-creation in online brand community in Iran. The study results in less research conducted on branding co-creation in the social media platform. The content analysis indicates increased social interactions among customers in online brand communities with their favourite brands which increases the brand relationship quality and customer brand loyalty. The firms also develop their branding strategies using social media and online brand communities through relationship marketing by using an online co-creation strategy. The findings depict the impact of social media on branding and improved brand relationships. The study states brands can adopt social media and networking as a vital marketing tool for the firms (Correia et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2011) where the adoption of technology enhances the growth in underdeveloped countries (Ebrahimian, 2003).

2.6.3E-branding in the hotel industry

The study by Chen-hui Lein et al. (2015) on online hotel booking analysed the direct and mediating effects of brand image, and its impact on trust, price and consumers booking intentions. The study identifies brand image, trust and reputation as three critical determinants of the customer intentions. Brand image is a key driver which positively influences customer intentions, reputations and increased customer trust in online booking and service associated with the brand.

Abdulla et al. (2016) proposed the conceptual model for an interactive hotel website based on perceived website interactivity and customer perceived value in Malaysian SME hospitality sectors. The motivation for the development of the conceptual model was from increased visitors to the hospitality website with few potential online bookings. The conceptual model suggests customer perception on hotel website interactivity influence customer value and intention for revisiting the hotel website for the future. This model is imperative as it offers a main idea to hoteliers on the likely aspects that can lead to positive online booking. Despite the huge investment in hotel websites they should result in favourable returns as sales revenue and profits. Besides hoteliers could also be profitable through cost savings by reducing the employee strength who performs manual booking. The study identifies customer perceived value as the mediator in website interactivity and the increased website interactivity leads to increased customer perceived value.

Bareeda et al. (2016) studied online branding in the hotel industry based on website interactivity as the branding tool, which is a differentiating factor in marketing media from conventional media (Liu, 2012; Wang et al., 2013). Website interactivity is a significant element in brand creation (Coyle and Thorson, 2001; Voorveld et al. 2013). The study on website interactivity reveals various dimensions of brand knowledge like 'brand image' and

‘brand awareness’ and has a positive impact on brand value. The study identifies online branding as a vital tool for the organisations marketing strategy, consisting of mission, vision and delivering values to customers and employees (Bareeda et al., 2016).

Vernuccio, et al, (2012) focused on e-brand management approaches. The study identified the main aspects of branding as interactivity, personalisation and e-trust. The factors of attitude and interactivity are indirectly proportional to personalization and directly proportional to e-brand. The successful launch and development of e-brand was identified as the responsibility of the strategic management, where they recognised interactivity as a synchronised two-way communication enabled for improved perception and personalised trust. In a highly competitive industry branding is one of the significant aspects with strong value proposition. It is a significant goal of organisation to position themselves to have a brand recall at the next instance. The various interactivity like ‘website interactivity, social interactivity and two-way communication activities’ (Voorveld et al., 2013) are found to have positive response to e-branding approach. The brand value has a positive effect on the brand image and the customers website access are dependent on brand awareness and brand image for the e-brand success (Liu, 2012; Wang et al., 2013). The business explores various ways to build strong brands through website interactivity and have a good bond with the customers through online medium (Shih, Hen & Chen, 2013), which led many companies to convert their marketing and operations online (Moss, Wulf, & Mullen, 2013).

The survey on the “Interactive e-branding in e-commerce Interfaces” by Rigas and Hussain (2015), identify interactive e-branding techniques as most preferred by customers. The study identifies the need for organisations online presence with strong brand identity, which can help consumers in achieving virtual assurance and trust. In the view of Seiders et al (2000) e-brands enhance brand trust in virtual environment and found the online relationships with e-brands only during the repeated purchase (Ibeh et al., 2005). The relationship and trust of a

brand can be improved by the website interactivity. The time constraints and limited cognitive resources are astounded by online customers who try to shorten by mental shortcuts (Rigas et al., 2016). The fact that virtual assistance is advantageous for the consumers and the online retailers are evident from the studies.

2.6.4E-branding in Social Media Context:

Social media is an important medium for promotion of branding, and the rise of social media has increased the development of brand-consumer relationship. Social media has received good acceptance among internet users and has been a new paradigm for the branding methods (Gao, 2016). Brand page in social media is very useful as it can reach out to internet users in fraction of seconds. The posting of social oriented contents has a positive effect on the brand personality. The self-congruity with the brand must be considered efficiently when the brand wants to benefit from the social media (Kaplan & Haenllein, 2010). The posting of the latest online updates and brand extended contents are beneficial to the brand (Gao, 2016).

Davis et al. (2014) conceptualised social media brands by exploring consumer specific motivations for developing a brand consumption structure. The conceptual model development proposes branding opportunities and analysis of the relationship between consumers and brand in the social media platform. The study developed a five-source conceptual model which include functional, emotional, self-oriented, social and relational model. This is significant in branding theory and encapsulates the social media branding theory within the five-source conceptual model.

The study by Coulter et al. (2012), on the impact of social media over traditional media identified the impact of social media brand communication on brand equity compared to traditional media. The study was conducted in three diverse sectors of tourism, pharmaceuticals and telecommunication. The study indicates, the adoption of social

media has created drastic changes in e-brands by introducing new channels of brand communication and customer brand engagement on social media platforms. The study created impact by the traditional media and the social media on the various brand equity dimension and depicts, the traditional media to influence more on brand awareness than the social media. The social media impacts on the brand image with more opportunities for consumers to participate in discussions and give opinions on the brands. A user generated social brand has impacted on the hedonic image and positive aspiration of social media contents. The consumers are the overall players in the social media and the organisation can make the brand attractive by two-way communication and networking rather than by the traditional media.

The study on the e-branding of rural tourism in Austria was conducted by Kavoura et al., (2013), to develop a model of e-branding for application of branding in the certain rural areas of Europe. The e-branding of tourism was based on the innovative technology of rural tour marketing. The rural tourism highlighted significance of the e-brand of destination, which can be linked with the wide interest and experiences of the new relations and new transactions.

The study on measuring e-brand equity of online brands were conducted by Christodoulides et al., (2010), with different phases of the online retail- service (ORS) brand equity. The study illustrates the brand equity scale has a strong psychometric property linked with emotions, online experiences, brand trust, cognition and satisfaction levels. The brand equity is viewed as the intangible entity as a passive or reactive result of marketing intervention (Brown et al., 2003).

2.7 Digital Orientation in SMEs

Quinton et al., (2017) identified the antecedents supporting the digital economy and digital technologies which significantly modified the organisation and marketing environments. The digital technologies created vast transformation in interaction between the organisations, customers and exchange values (Yadav & Pavlou, 2014). The digital orientations in SMEs are based on strategic orientations, which reflect the beliefs in carrying out business and corresponding activities (Zhou, Li, Zhou, & Su, 2008). The market orientations of the SME focus on creating and delivering customer value (Lonial and Carter, 2015). Which illustrate a strong relationship between the market orientation and the firm performance irrespective of them being large organisation or small and medium enterprises (Kirka et al., 2005; Reijonen and Kompulla, 2010).

The market orientated organisation attempts to meet the customised customer needs (Raju et al., 2011), as customer orientation is an element of market orientation (Reijonen & Kompulla, 2010). The market orientation, learning organisation and the entrepreneurial organisation are complementary to each other and help SMEs to have a better performance in the digital economy; these are the intangible competitive elements which makes an organisation unique (Hult & Kitchen, 2001).

The strategic orientations suggest the cultural and behavioural transformations which reflect on the external and the internal factors. The external factors are the competitive dynamics (Theodosiou et al., 2012) and the internal factors are based on top management focus, co-operation within the various department and the benefit systems (Gebhart et al., 2006). The organisations that are guided by the combination of market, technology and the entrepreneurial activities are equally positioned to benefit from the digital technology. The organisations marketing activities relate to attitudes and behaviours which support market

research, innovation and new ideas, where the cluster of them form the digital orientation. The digital orientations present various propositions which can enhance development.

2.7.1 Digital impact on the online Travel Industry

Numerous studies have been conducted on the impact of the digitalisation on various players in the travel industry. During the 1990s and the start of the 21st century had foreseen the digital influence to improve the functioning of travel and tourism industry. According to Kuom and Oertel (1999), the Internet and online services are suitable to present products and information about products including booking and transaction, registration activities, financial transactions and service completion compared to other distribution channels.

Buhalis and Licata (2002) presented the advantages and disadvantages of internet-based distribution for travel organisations as assessed by experts in numerous fields of tourism. This study identified the advantages which are estimated to overtake the disadvantages significantly. The key advantages are better flexibility, accessibility and improved penetration and customer reach. Furthermore, reduced distribution costs, improved customer interaction, quick identification and customer targets are treated as important benefits. The disadvantages identified are reduced human contact, face to face interaction and customer interaction opportunities.

Law et al. (2014) conducted a study on the travel industry based on the online and traditional preferences and identifies online travel agents as trust oriented and network oriented. The online environment is found to be powerful in extensive search and selection of organisations. Authors state the benefits of wide-ranging, timely and appropriate information

and balancing the tourism product and demand on the important information in online and travel tourism industry.

Berger et al. (2007) conducted a similar study on customer preferences on selection of travel agents, the study identifies the customer preferences for traditional travel agents rather than online travel agents due to the expertise and chances of getting assistance and face to face interactions and the credibility of the organisation. The online travel agents are identified as the preference based on convenience, and according to the authors conclusion online mediators are identified as customer preference based on their convenience and recommend face to face interactions for tourist organisations.

2.7.2 Emergence of Online Travel Agents

Buhalis and O'Connor (2005) state the advent of e-tourism and the Internet transforms the management, and marketing of tourism products and destinations. The stakeholders foresee the role is providing various opportunities and challenges in the tourism sector. Tse (2003) examined the dynamic changes relating to the relationship between the hospitality sector and traditional travel agents as the organisation makes use of their own website as booking service which leads to a big disintermediation, which is a challenge for travel agents. The study suggests traditional travel agents must re-transition themselves by contributing value-added services. In the study which attempts to recognise the transformation in the tourism distribution channel, Kracht and Wang (2010) expansively evaluated the composite assortment of intermediaries in this industry. The study states the tourism industry framework is network oriented, where all participants reform themselves by competing, co-ordinating and acquiring new relationship on regular base.

Lewis et al. (1998) argued for the benefits offered by the online travel agents that lead to prospects for future travel agents with the advent of internet technology. The adoption of online travel agents and tour operators as intermediaries is very important for the hospitality sector in the digital era. Moreover, the website develops distribution channels through adoption of various software technology (Buhalis and Law, 2008). The channels consist of online travel agencies, search engine and consumer database capable of information availability. The “dynamic packaging, involving more direct consumer involvement and choice, is replacing pre-packaged, tour operator programs” (Carroll & O’Connor, 2005, pp.9-10). The tourism sector dynamics and developments in the online industry lead to rapid adoption of online travel agencies (OTAs), which is an added online channel. The hospitality sector in the small business arena expects to deal with the booking transactions through inexpensive media, which makes OTAs as a better choice for consideration.

Zhang et al. (2009) studied the significance of co-ordinating the online media intermediaries in the tourism sector, which is very intensive and dependent on the relationship between the hospitality organisation and the OTA and which is complimentary to one another.

Hills and Cairncross (2011) studied the issues in developing a mutual understanding in corresponding distribution of power and assistances between both customers and organisations. The study was conducted on small business providers who consider working with OTAs as a disadvantage, due to inadequate return on investment, challenges of managing payments, opportunity of dealings with the reservation and the limited consideration on specific regional areas and the service providers in the areas.

2.8 E-branding components

The successful components of the e-brands are defined as the factors which make business successful. In online branding successful components can be considered as activities and practices which must be addressed to ascertain successful implementation.

2.8.1 Trust and customer perceived value

Trust is an important factor in online buying process (Gommans et al., 2001), and an essential feature of buyer-seller relationships. The role of trust in online conversation relations has been the topic of researchers' interests (Wu, Chen & Chung, 2010). Trust is defined based on three characteristic features, they are 'reliability; predictability; and fairness, 'all the factors have a significant part in increased competitiveness and developing flexibility in the online context (Agarwal et al., 2003). The understanding of Trust can also be simplified based on "*...confidentiality, honesty and integrity, as well as high ethical standards*" (Coulter et al., 2002, p. 35-50) and also as "*...security, privacy and reliability*" (Camp, 2001, p. 20).

Trust denotes an optimistic certainty on the reliability and dependability of a person or an organisation (Everard & Galletta, 2006). Trust is also developed when the customer has self-confidence in reliability and integrity of the organisation (Kim et al, 2009). The customer trust in the organisation can assist to reduce the cognitive risk and uncertainty by facilitating a long-term relationship (Gefen, 2000). The increased degree of trust in the online website and service providers reduces the risk in selecting the service provider (Gopalan et al, 2014). In addition, the online booking of hotels the customers tend to be more susceptible to the nature of services provided by the hoteliers. Customers believe in the services offered on the website and expect to obtain the services as provided in the website, the customer expectations are dependent on the trust of online website and organisations promise.

Therefore, an hotel industry can develop trust as one of their promotional tools for their success in the industry (Kim et al., 2009).

The abundant information rich websites diminish ambiguity and support customers with low level dissonance, resulting in improved website trust. The lack of trust arises from cyber consumers perceived lack of control over the access of their personal information during the online navigation process (Hoffman et al,1999, p. 80). Therefore, the attitude to security is a crucial factor influencing website trust (Aydin et al, 2005).

Even though customer value and its significance are an extensive area of discussion (Kim, 2011), the perceived customer value is defined as “*the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product/ service based on what is received and what is given*” (Zeithaml's 1988, p. 142).Moreover researchers have projected numerous supplementary components in the online context (Lexhagen, 2008). The customer perceived value is conceptualised in terms of three components; they are financial benefits, security and privacy. The online booking platform help customers in making price comparisons before making the final decisions. (Chiu, Wang, Fang, & Huang, 2014). The security and privacy factors are conceptualized as customer benefits based on functional, emotional, social value and freedom in decision making (Sigala, 2006).

2.8.2 Word of mouth

In an online environment, word of mouth is powerful in brand building (Vark, 2007). The online environment provides the opportunity for brands to be open and interactive. The word of mouth (WOM) communication has a strong effect on brand trust to customers on e-commerce. The WOM spreads quickly on the web compared to the offline environment, and

negative WOM generates brand distrust in customers (Harrison Walker, 2001). The marketing practitioners manage and link sites and build up potentially to linked sites.

Developing an emotional connection with the customers in the online environment is enormously valuable and very effective (Clauser, 2001). The website interactivity is ideal for facilitating business and in creating emotional connection with consumers and brands. The development of online communities facilitates customers web experience and provides opportunities for co-creation of online contents and strengthen customer loyalty and attachments in an online brand.

The online experience is a concept in cyberspace which drastically alter consumer perceptions of brand and consequently diminishes equity (Chang et al,2002). The online brands impact on perceptions on brands, which are transparent on internet.

2.8.3 Website interactivity

One of the benefits of the Internet is its capability for interactivity. Hence, the perception of interactivity has received considerable interest from scholars in many disciplines (Kim, 2011). Interactivity is “...*the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time.*” (Mollen & Wilson, 2010, p. 920). The most common components of interactivity are two-way communication, synchronicity, and monitoring (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). The two-way communication is conceptualized as an information flow enabling customer to respond quickly (Kim, 2011). Monitoring or user control is an extra essential element of interactivity which is conceptualized as choice capability (Yoo et al., 2010).

Interactivity signifies the website capability to permit users to link with potential customers through chats, blogs and social tools (Macias, 2003). Another aspect of interactivity which allows customers to examine or view tangible product services is termed demonstrability. Subsequent to Huang (2003), who states that demonstrability is the extent to which a website responds or incorporates with more humanlike feature product information at a faster pace.

2.9 Challenges of SME Branding

Despite remarkable contribution to Indian economy, the SME sector lack in adequate support from Government agencies and Public sector financial corporations, which obstruct the SME in being competitive at national level. The various problems faced by the SMEs are inadequate and untimely attainment of finance, unskilled manpower, inadequate capital, unavailability of suitable technology and low production capability (SME Chamber of India, 2017).

The branding is considered expensive among SMEs who face difficulties to afford branding with limited resources and budget. Abimbola (2001) suggests SMEs should overcome these difficulties by adequate planning, organising and proper understanding of brand involvement and interlinking the entire organisation to brand building. SMEs need to plan, propose and implement branding policy like the large companies. Berthon et al. (2008) argues that SME marketers have the capability for managing brands innovatively to influence the complete potential of their brands with limited budget availability. Brand management do not receive undivided attention in the day-to-day activities within the SMEs (Krake, 2005).

According to Abimbola (2001) the role of branding is found to have less competitive advantage. Abimbola explains that due to less availability of resources the SME the brands should focus on innovations, technology expertise, corporate branding, marketing campaigns

and creativity. The budget restrictions were identified as a prominent factor leading to lack of branding in SMEs, (Aaker, 2004).

Lack of understanding of customer expectations is a challenge faced by organisations, many online companies fail because they fail to understand their customers, and customised wants. The website also needs to be consistent in images and content. Some of the best sites have a reliable site map and links back to home page (Budac, 2014). All these which centres around the user are a challenging factor to many customers. The organisation lacks clarity of creating online identity, website design is another challenge of online branding for Organisations, where they stand out as a brand on strength and uniqueness in design.

In an online brand building process brand reputation starts and ends with building trust. Consumers have trust in the hosting brand to make the brand successful, but even more important are the trust that consumers have in their peers. If consumers have confidence that their peers know what they are talking about, they are more likely to follow their advice, whether that's advice about which product to purchase or how to fix a problem with a product they've encountered. It's up to brands to foster both brand-to-consumer trust and peer-to-peer trust by being the best stewards of authenticity and credibility in their online communities (Blancson, 2013).

The negative feedbacks, negative reviews, internet trolls have become more difficult for both consumers and brands to determine the reality. A single spam post or unfair review in online community has the potential to create a serious domino effect. There are contradictions associated with the SME branding, According to Berthon et al. (2008), Spence and Essousi (2008), branding is not a priority in the SME, and branding are applicable for large organisations (Inskip, 2004). According to Reijonen (2012) SMEs lack market positioning and distinctiveness in the market place. In the opinion of Ahonen (2008) most of the branding

studies are conducted empirically and lack more conceptual studies. The SME success are dependent on “, *desire for success and influence of Owner/Manager*” (Horan et al., 2011, p. 119).

2.10 Gaps in Literature

There are two interrelated gaps in the existing literature, the two gaps are identified from the SME point of view and from technology adoption point of view.

Primarily, as the SME branding research is in the developing phase, with limited knowledge on e-brand management. The past SME branding studies had a narrow focus on the aspects of the SME branding. The adopted limited frameworks are not integrated with the strategic perspectives of SME brand management, as the previous studies available on SME brand management were identified from the customer point of view.

The narrow focus of the previous SME branding research substantiates that a sound theoretical framework to direct a process-based SME e-brand management study could not be identified. However, enough studies on online branding and online brand management has been researched in several academic publications, where the research has been implemented from the customer point of view with wide focus on the online brand community and social media community. The studies were carried out in the selected online networks and community based on customer perception and value creation. The online studies concentrated more on website interactivity and website analysis as online tools. The researches examining the online brand management within the SME were mainly descriptive, theoretical or speculative. There were not many studies identified, which considered the online brand components and its management in the online environment. Considering the geographical study location, the e-brand management in Kerala, India was not available despite being an enchanting tourist spot in South India.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter reviews an extensive series of literature relating to branding and e-branding in SMEs to address the research question: How e-branding is managed from the strategic perspective in Indian SMEs? It has conducted the review through exploring and understanding the context of branding in SMEs and how e-branding is understood, conceptualised and used in SMEs, thus which discourse the research objectives. The review has illustrated the scantiness of literature, and more predominantly of research literature, regarding branding in SMEs, with the paucity being much more ostensible in area of e-branding in SMEs. Moreover, adequate literature has been found to arrive some conclusions which will be discussed.

Firstly, the chapter has explained the significance of branding and considering SMEs as an enterprise which is heterogeneous in nature. SME branding was found to be unknown in the early and late 1990's and the first study on the SME branding was coined by Abimbola in 2001. The branding was considered as the necessity for large organisations and SMEs had neglected the branding in the past years. The branding is considered as inevitable for every SME organisation from its inception. The little research into SME branding that has taken place often adopts the methods well-suited to large organisations where most of the Organisation branding research is situated and the limitations of the research methods in the context of SMEs may have contributed to the second conclusion where the extent and the depth of branding may be obscured.

The chapter has identified some support for the adoption and use of qualitative research for the study as a suitable basis for considering Owners attitude, including e-branding in SMEs as it could recognise the individuals, through their interpretation of the world and the experiences, and construct their own meanings which will enable the branding. It can also identify the perception, attitude and behaviour, which appear to be a significant aspect of the

SME owners branding, is enhanced through the establishment of common meaning based on the values and perceptions. Therefore, it can facilitate into understanding how branding particularly e-branding, occurs in SMEs which has not been clear from the past research.

There are various indications that branding in SMEs, alike other aspects of SMEs, may be highly influenced by Owner/managers. The influences appear to extend to the e-branding, even though this is complicated by indications that certain owner/managers can have less access to the technical skills and capabilities. There are certain emerging views in the literature which is at the greater extent of the Owner/manager influence may result from the multitude of research from the perspective of Owner/manager, even though this need further research. This leads to an additional conclusion that the research from the perspective of employees is necessary to provide a more holistic view of branding in the SMEs. The e-branding which is a contemporary phenomenon within the Organisation can make the organisation a huge success.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In chapter one of this thesis, the research aims and objectives were identified, followed by a review of extant literature in chapter two, which provided direction for the research with established theoretical base. This chapter explains the research process adopted to address the thesis objectives and outlines methodological choices.

Research phraseology refers to the quest for knowledge with scientific and systematic exploration (Kothari, 2015). The term methodology refers to applied research logic in a project comprising of research methods and contextual framework (Sarandakos, 2005). There are three types of business research, which are theory building research, theory testing research and problem centred practical research. This study is based on theory building research. As discussed previously in the introductory chapter, the objectives of the research are to:

- I. To investigate how the e-brand is managed from the strategic perspective in the context of Indian SMEs in the hospitality sector
- II. To investigate how successfully are the components of an SME e- brand managed in the Indian hospitality sector.
- III. To investigate how effectively the challenges of e-branding are addressed by Indian SMEs in the hospitality sector.

The chapter opens by discussing the main research philosophies of ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations that underlie each research paradigm of social science research and proceeds to discuss the exploratory study of the research. The

chapter then discusses the data collection and data analysis processes, followed by the research limitations.

3.2 Philosophical Research Paradigms

The understanding of philosophical research issues leading to choices and decisions are important to strengthen a chosen research position, as the research position implies "what, how, and why research is carried out "(Carson et al., 2001, p. 1). In the view of management researchers, Johnson and Duberley (2000, p. 1)

...how we come to ask questions, how we assess the relevance and value of different research methodologies so that we can investigate these questions, how we can evaluate the outputs of research, all express and vary according to our underlying epistemological commitments.

The research paradigm is defined as “set of linked assumptions about the world which is shared by a community of scientists investigating the world, which provides a conceptual and philosophical framework for the organized study of the world” (Deshpande, 1983). Every research philosophy is rooted on a particular paradigm or ‘world view’ (ibid.). Paradigms are theories on the nature of the world and understandable human characters (Denzin, 2000).

A research paradigm is a philosophical assumption with three elements specifically ontology, epistemology and methodology, existing within a particular research paradigm framework. The research philosophy reports ontological, epistemological and methodological issues and sequentially specifies the researcher’s view of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Ontology is reality, which is a branch of philosophy which attempts to examine the nature of reality (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The research purposes a set of beliefs on what is studied and subsequently Bryman and Bell (2015, p. 23) emphasize as “Ontological

assumptions and commitments will feed into the ways in which research questions are formulated and research is carried out”. The ontological question enquires whether the researcher views reality as objective, existing external to the individual and their subjective interpretations or subjective and socially constructed (Parkhe, 1993; Corbetta, 2003). The answer to this question on the nature of reality certainly regulates what can be known about that reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is the constitution of the knowledge (known as reality) to which epistemology relates (Parkhe, 1993).

Epistemology is the relationship between the reality and the researcher. The term epistemology is derived from the Greek word ‘episteme’ means knowledge (Hirschheim, 1992). Epistemology discovers how an individual perceives knowledge and how it becomes a philosophical entity, which determines the nature of “acceptable knowledge” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 27; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 16) in the research arena, it is the relationship between the researcher and the reality (Creswell, 2013).

Methodology is the step by step procedure followed by the researcher in discovering the reality (Perry et al., 1999). Subsequently, every paradigm faces three questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), namely:

1. Ontological question: On the form of nature, reality and what is there that can be known about from them
2. Epistemological question: Question on the nature of relationship among the researchers
3. The methodological question: What methods are best used to understand reality under study

3.2.1 The Research Inquiry Paradigms

The research paradigms guide the decision making and carrying out the research, it is a belief system (or theory) which formally establishes the set of research practices. The particular problem in social science is viewed in this thesis context, the four important inquiry paradigms in social sciences are post positivism, post modernism(transformative), interpretivism (socially constructed) and pragmatism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, Perry et al., 1999). The philosophical assumption of ontology, epistemology and methodology exists within the paradigm of the research framework. Table 3.1 which specifies the basic belief system within the social science research paradigms.

Table 3.1: Research paradigm Belief system in Social Science Theory Source: Adapted from Guba and Lincoln (1994); Perry et al (1999)

Philosophical Approach	Interpretivism	Post Modernism (Transformative)	Post-Positivism	Pragmatism
Ontology	Multiple realities are constructed through experiences and interactions	The research between researcher and communities/ individuals are studied, often a subjective-objective reality is identified	There exists single reality and there are lack of absolutes	Reality is based on “what is useful”, practical and how it works
Epistemology	The reality is constructed between researcher and researched entity. It is designed through individual experiences	The findings are co-created through multiple ways of understanding	The reality is constructed through research and statistics, the interaction with research subject is minimum. The validity of research is through peer and not participants	The reality is known through various tools and the evidence is obtained through inductive and deductive approach
Methodology	The literary methods of writing. The data collection is through interviews, observations and analysis of texts.	A collaborative process of research, political participation encouraged, highlights issues and concerns,	The scientific method of writing is used. The deductive method of testing new theories, specifying important variables and making comparisons with groups	The research process includes qualitative and quantitative methods.

3.3 Methodology Adopted

The ontological, epistemological and methodological philosophical assumptions within the framework of positivism, interpretivism, post positivism and pragmatism, identifies the interpretivist research paradigm as congruous to the researcher's world view. The approach to this thesis is guided by the interpretivist paradigm.

However, as mentioned in Table 3.1, the ontological approach in this study is subjective, owing to probability of multiple reality construction from individual's perception and actions (Lee & Lings, 2008; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Subjective perception is an interaction between researchers and research subject (Cunliffe & Karunanyake, 2013; Denzil & Lincoln, 2011). In the opinion of Bryman and Bell (2015), the social phenomenon is constructed from social interaction and constant reviews. Apart from enhancing the formulation of research questions, the subjective approach facilitates confidence in research conclusions. Furthermore, they increase the researcher's value by enabling the researcher to participate solely in the social phenomenon (Slavin, 1992).

The methodological assumptions of interpretivist research are identified by the nature of object in the study and the need of the research (Perry et al., 1999; Saunders et al; 2009). The aim of the research is to build theory on a nascent phenomenon. The information ensuing finds qualitative methods as most appropriate (Creswell, 1994; Churchill, 1999; Edmondson & McManus, 2007). The research will sketch out perceptions and attitudes of the research participants relying on methodological principles of interpretivism (Kelliher & Henderson, 2006; Lee & Lings, 2008). The researcher's probability of less direct interaction with research subjects, the possibility of research subject isolation from the specific context and deficiency in understanding the dynamic nature of social world has directed to propose the adoption of the interpretivist approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Robson, 2011; Silverman, 2011).

3.3.1 Interpretivism

The 'view of world' in interpretivism is idiographic. Interpretivism views the subject matter of social sciences including people and institutions, as incommensurable with the subject matter of natural sciences (Bryman & Bell, 2007), and considers social phenomenon as too complex to be explained by absolute laws (Saunders et al., 2009). Congruently, the aim of research in interpretivism is not to arrive at an explanation to facilitate prediction. The goal is to develop an understanding of subjective meaning of social phenomena within the research scenario (Carson et al., 2001; Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Interpretivism implies, knowledge is created from the prior experience. A researcher adopting the interpretive approach understands how the individual constructs tends to understand knowledge construction (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). As such, the interpretivist study adopted will facilitate in recognition of interviewee individuality and understanding of the world and interpret the results (Lee & Lings, 2008). Subsequently the research deals in exploring the online brand management in the context of Indian SMEs in the hospitality sector. It is significant how the research is conducted to understand the world from experiences and interpret the results. This enhances data richness in social context as overall research philosophy is based on the Interpretivist approach (Berger & Luckmann, 1971; Savin- Baden & Major, 2013).

3.3.2 Challenges of interpretivism

A significant criticism of the interpretivist approach relates to the incommensurability of knowledge claims. Knowledge assertions within the interpretivist paradigm are grounded on individual perceptions, generating a world of multiple realities which cannot be usefully associated with (Sobh & Perry, 2006), or generalised to another person's theory of reality (Easton, 2010).

Research in the field of marketing management deals with a 'real' external world and requires the comparison of several constructed realities (Healy & Perry, 2000; Sobh & Perry, 2006).

3.4 Research Design

The intimidating entity following the research problem in planning and designing of the research project is prevalently known as "research design" (Kothari, 2015). A research design is a strategy for an entire qualitative research study and the main objective of the research design is to define a clear road map to an entire research project (Myers, 2013). A research design denotes order in which the thesis is carried out for linking the research question, data collection, data analysis and interpretation in logical sequence (Hartley, 2004). The following subdivisions of this chapter clearly report these steps.

As intimated in Chapter 1, the present research is positioned within the field of branding, which is specifically found at the intersection of brand management and internet marketing. To report the paucity of research on brand management in the online context, this study adopted a qualitative research design, which was elucidated by the authors' ontological and epistemological assumptions illustrated in the previous section.

The preceding chapter (chapter two), reviewed the literature on branding, and revealed an extensive body of research knowledge on branding in traditional contexts, and a dearth of research on brand management was acknowledged.

The exploratory nature is consistent with "context of discovery" (Hunt, 1976), where the main objective was to attain the understanding of brand management in the content domain. The goal of the exploration is fundamentally concerned with understanding, as such the qualitative methods were considered mainly suited to the research.

3.4.1 Justification of Qualitative research

A qualitative approach to the present study could be justified as ‘methodological fit’ (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007). The authors state the application of quantitative method to any phenomenon which is at an initial phase with prior knowledge will result in a poor ‘methodological fit’. Certainly, a nascent phenomenon would not be properly understood or defined. Subsequently generating quantitative methods of acceptable quality will be problematic. Furthermore, the use of quantitative measures could lead the researcher on making “fishing expeditions” (Edmondson & McManus, 2007, p. 1171) by identifying the significance between the variables. As the online brand management in the SMEs is an under researched area, it would be premature for hypothesis formulation and hypothesis testing for quantitative research.

Quantitative research can give findings from the various tools like questionnaire, as formal and structured and which can be inappropriate to the informal and heterogeneous nature of SMEs and their branding (Nolan & Garavan, 2011). Conversely, qualitative studies, such as those of Abimbola (2001), Boyle (2003), Inskip (2004), Krake (2005), Merrilees (2007) and Spence and Essousi (2010), provide valuable insights into SME branding, and which advise on methods which may be specifically suitable to the study within the SME Environment. Subsequently the research on e-branding within the SMEs aims to develop rich, in-depth data so the qualitative approach is chosen for the study.

The key strength of the qualitative methods is the extensive focus on data collection relating to “naturally occurring, ordinary events, in natural settings” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p, 10). The choice to adopt the qualitative approach is strengthened by the supportive arguments from Tucker et al. (1995), accordingly qualitative research is predominant for business research as it “can answer numerous questions about the who, what, when, where, why, and how of communication” (p. 395) and give opportunities “to get in touch with the feelings,

concerns and needs of the business community” (p. 396). The qualitative approach is relevant when an in-depth experience based research is required (Orr & Menzies, 2012), being precisely relevant to the interaction and investigation within the social environment (Fossey et al., 2002).

According to Hynes (2012) qualitative research perceive perceptions, attitudes and feelings as documentation from the previous traditions which are internal to the organisation and business research context (Cassell & Symon, 2006). The significant advantage of qualitative research is the privilege in seeing and understanding the context where judgements and actions takes place. *"Qualitative research is a field of inquiry. It crosscuts disciplines, fields and subject matters. A complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term qualitative research"* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 2).

The qualitative method is chosen for the study due to the following reasons,

1. The research is concerned with ‘E-branding Perspectives of Owner/Managers in the SMEs’, which is likely to take place in a natural setting.
2. The research is exploratory in nature consisting of in-depth data collection, analysis and data Interpretation, moderated by the researcher.
3. The study is based on the phenomenon which is an under researched area where the subjective approach toward the data collection is very important and little could be done by adopting ratio or statistical data.
4. The research being a phenomenon-based study in the natural setting, the interpretive enquiry is inevitable, and where the researcher interprets on what is observed, felt and understood. The interpretations are inseparable from concepts, contents and pre-conceived notions.

5. The qualitative method is the best method to the study a subject in depth, within an organisation setting, for example ‘e-branding’ within organisations (Myers, 2013).
6. The plethora of options is available for the researcher to explore the diverse issues within the SME research
7. The qualitative method is very important for the study on institutions/organisations, as the research here deals with the SMEs as the organisations. This method is found effective than the conventional method of quantitative approach, which is objective in nature.
8. The study being focused on the SME organisations, the researcher should consider the cultural issues within the organisation.

3.4.2 Sampling

The entities in any field of inquiry form a ‘universe’ or ‘population’. An entire enumeration of all the items in the specified population is known as census inquiry. It can be assumed that in such kind of naturalistic inquiry, all entities are considered, none of the elements is left out and the highest accuracy is achieved (Kothari, 2015). According to Parasuraman (1991, p. 474) the sampling frame is the “listing of population units from which the sample is chosen”. In qualitative research there is no specified formula to decide optimal sample size (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Furthermore, the researcher in various settings needs to analyse ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the questions to produce an in-depth data (Gerring, 2010) where the sampling is useful.

The sampling framework of the study involves the branding issues related to development, management and reputation through engagement in electronic media. The hospitality sector was selected for the study as the sector is economically-effective, commercial based and has

wide presence online. The research population sector consists of SMEs which has online presence.

It is impossible to inspect every entity, precisely so a sample is chosen from the research population using non-probability method to provide confidence in the research (Silverman, 2011). In qualitative research, samples are not derived by statistical method and from the research population which is capable of generalisation, rather they diverge to “authentic understanding of peoples experience” (Silverman, 2011, p. 44), with abundant data and “nuanced understandings of social practices and situations” (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 57; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Subsequently, non-probability sampling methods were adopted, where the chances of selecting the SME is unknown (Bruman & Bell, 2015). The research population in the study consists of any SMEs which adopts online tools and has wide internet presence. Considering the sample availability and possibility of bias the criterion sampling (Robson, 2011) was selected as it is likely to be the information rich source. There is little possibility of using snowball sampling where the interviewee advice on other possible participants as, the relationship is suitable while examining inter-personal relationships, so the sample was unlikely to be representative of population (Robson, 2011).

The criterion sample for the study is based on the following criteria:

1. The organisation should be a SME (Based on the Indian SME definition)
2. Adoption of E-branding
(Maintaining an active website by integrating social media and adoption of online communications model)
3. A B2C Organisation
4. Located in a geographical area identified as tourist spot

3.4.3 Key Informants Sampling

The identification of a key informants sampling of the members provide authenticity to the qualitative studies as an in-depth understanding and knowledge could be identified from the data. It is very important to analyse the history of SMEs who adopted e-branding as an engagement activity and knowledge base of the key informants. According to Gummesson (2003, p. 490) “there is a wealth of information stored in the minds of people who have lived through important events with unique access”. The Owners and the managers who work on behalf of SMEs have a strong and a complete insight into the strategies which are the carriers of tactic knowledge throughout the functional locations of the clients.

3.4.4 Sampling Schemes Generalisation

The interpretivists study the phenomenon in the natural settings and attempt to interpret the phenomenon with regard to the knowledge and meaning attained from the participants (Denzil & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative researchers must “...*generalise words and observations to the population of words/observations representing the underlying context*” (Onwuengbuzie, 2003, p. 400).

The main aim of the study is not to be simplified to a population but to achieve insights on a new phenomenon or incidents. In interpretive studies, the qualitative researchers meaningfully select individuals, groups and settings for the research study to enhance the understanding of the underlying phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

3.4.5 Sampling Size

In a general context the sample sizes of the qualitative research should not be big, as it is very difficult in extracting the rich and varied data. Conversely Sandelowski (1995) argues the sample size should not be too small as it is difficult to attain data saturation (Flick, 1998; Morse, 1995) or theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). As such, ten (10) SMEs was identified as the study samples.

3.4.6 Finding Suitable Organisation

Seeking suitable organisations is probably a lengthy process, involving much planning and organising (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The search for suitable organisations at an initial stage was through self-selection supported by referrals, colleagues, and acquaintances. Social networks and web search were carried out for selecting the suitable organisation and the selection of organisations was based on previously discussed criteria.

3.4.7 Data collection techniques

The interviews were the main source of data collection. The data collection method is the qualitative semi-structured interview with the Owner/ Manager of the SME. The interviews extended from 45-60 minutes, conducted in the interviewee organisation at the suggested time by the interviewee.

3.4.7.1 Interviews

The rationale for selecting an in-depth interview method in interpretive research is supported by Fontana and Frey (2000, p. 646), who suggests that the interviews are active interaction which lead to context based results, which are like other form of social research, capable of revealing ‘how’ of the organisation or the ‘online-presence’ within the SME. The recommendations in qualitative interviews demanding a focus on the voices of the interview participants (Fontana & Frey, 2000) in order to obtain rich and quality data and improved understanding of topics which was under investigation (Gummesson,2005), and successfully framing the interviews as uprising process, was therefore used in the study.

According to Easterby-Smith et al. (1991), the primary issue that researchers should resolve is on the structure to be imposed on the interview, as “...interviews can be highly formalised and structured, or they can be akin to a free-ranging conversation” (p, 72). Depending on the degree of structure, Aaker et al. (1998) and Deacon et al. (1999) recognised three types of depth interviews, explicitly standardised, non-directive, semi structured and focussed. In the

standard view, the content and measures are set out in advance, the similar questions are read out in the same direction to all interviews, and those questions are mainly closed, with relatively little freedom of manoeuvre for interviewer and interviewee. Non-directive interviews, on the other hand are more likely everyday conversations, which are open, free flowing and informal, without specific, pre-set questions, although the interviewer has certain issues or topics to cover.

A semi structured interview falls somewhere between these two extreme forms and has been described as a “conversation with a purpose” (Deacon et al., 1999, p. 65). Akin to the non-directive interview, the semi structured interview pursues promotion of an informal and open-ended dialogue. The interviewer however retains some control and monitors by using an interview guide and focus on the problem to be encountered. The monitoring contains a repertoire of question to ascertain that similar information is obtained from every respondent. In the view of Patton (1990), the guide “...helps make interviewing more systematic and comprehensive “...and “keeps interactions focussed but allows individual perspectives and experiences to emerge” (p. 283). Furthermore, Brenner et al. (1987) states the use of a guide to direct an interview responds to reliability and validity concerns and benefits by maximum comparison in interviews and nullifying the likelihood of interviewer bias.

These three factors were considered in identifying the type of interview which is appropriate for namely paradigmatic issues, research context and subjects. The semi structured interviews were deemed more suitable for the subjects selected to participate in this study. In relation to this, Aaker et al. (1998) noted the semi structured interviews were suitable for professionals who have very little time and/or are “thought leaders” (p. 189).

In line with the semi structured approach, an interview protocol was planned to provide a degree of structural cohesion to the interviewing process (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). This

allows examination of a significant topic in the limited time frame for interviews. The interview guide starts with generalised questions and gradually puts forth prompts which will be required where the interviewees have not addressed these areas. Following good field research practice, prior to the main fielding of data, the semi-structured interview guide was piloted with three respondents

3.4.7.2 Justification for adopting Semi-Structured Interview:

The qualitative semi-structured in-depth interview which ought to have a consistent line of inquiry was conducted, it was flexible with fluid flow in the interview (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2010). The interviews are the significant tool to portray the history and experiences of interviewees (McNamara, 1999). The objective of the interview with the Manager/Owner of the Organisation is to extract the chronicles of SME E-brand management and the transformation after the advent of the internet, in an unbiased fashion. The Owners and the managers were chosen for the study as they were the key decision makers of the organisation and they were responsible directly and indirectly for the impact and the influence on the present and the upcoming developments of the brand in the organisations. The contemporary attitudes, feedback from the customers and the necessity for improvement will be beneficial in understanding the social phenomenon within the organisation. It is the strategic perspective that determines the organisation views. The interview also focused on the competitive choices which can support the SME in gaining and sustaining competitive advantage. It is intended to also permit interviewees certain relaxation levels to “express their perspectives” (Savin- Baden & Major, 2013, p. 359) and to explicate the understanding of questions, in a frame which can incorporate subjects within prescribed time constraints (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2010; Savin- Baden & Major, 2013).

3.4.7.3 Website Analysis:

The research focussed on evaluating and analysing websites, the website analysis assume the richness of the website and companies online experience as proportional to each other. Alternatively, the organisation website tends to be richer based on the organisations experience.

Li and Bernoff (2008) suggested two relevant strategies on the web: they are setting up a private community or monitoring of brands of blogs, microblogs and social media platform. The social media analytics being in an infancy state, yet it facilitates the organisation to assess the conversations online, conversation on negative comments and a positive call around the brand (Mandelli., et al,2010)

The website analysis will be conducted in two phases, Phase one will focus on the online interaction and social media presence. The study will focus on the brand's facebook, twitter and youtube channels, including the customer interactions and comments on the forums. Phase two analyse the interactions on social media by applying thematic analysis (Jorgensen and Philip, 2002). The analysis also looked back at historical communications which has gained media traction.

3.4.8 Selection and recruitment of participants within the research organisations:

The research design aims to ascertain integrity, quality and transparency with participants, in accordance with the University of Salford's specified ethical guidelines. In the research phase, all participants were made aware of the research purpose, methods and intended possible uses. A brief on the degree of participation and anonymity was assured to the participants. The participants in each research organisations were personally approached with an information sheet (Enclosed in Appendix A) also intended as a consent and agreement for respondent's participation in the interview (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The point of contact depended on each organisation, some organisations had managers as the point of

contact and the rest had the owners as the point of contact. The interviews were conducted with the person who is the decision maker of the organisation, and the one responsible for the digital developments within the organisation.

3.4.9 Interview Protocol

The interview protocol is significant in guiding and directing conversations, by optimising the available time. The interview comprehensively and systematically plotted questions to make sure the interview data can address the research objectives and questions (Patton, 2015). The interview protocol being short and simple form a “mental framework” as each topic with a sub heading consisted of additional and voluntary questions to enable and acquire more evidence and information on relevant and particular topics spoken by the interviewees (Cassell & Symon, 2006). The interview protocol was constructed by adopting the interview protocol using the framework of Bryman and Bell (2015). (see Appendix A)

3.4.10 Screening Interviews

The interview screening will be conducted through email communications with key informants. The email screening enables in understanding the background of the interviewee and provided the details of the sample satisfy the criteria and meet the requirements. After gaining the agreement of interviewees for participation, interviews will be arranged at a convenient time to fit the participant’s schedule.

3.4.11 Interview Questions:

The interviewers must think of the interviewees’ perception prior to interview for procuring valuable and quality data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The uses of open-ended questions facilitate findings to be published and perceptions collected through a friendly conversation are vital to ascertain that the interviewees are not uncomfortable. It is important in obtaining detailed information, it is important that ‘questions will be used which make the employee

feel more comfortable rather than ‘why’ question, which is pivotal to the study (Pechsiri & Piriyaikul, 2016).

3.4.12 Probing:

The use of probing facilitates results gained from interviews to report “...with some degree of accuracy, perceptions, judgements, decisions and particular areas of experience” (Johnson and Weller, 2002, p. 492). The elicitation techniques emerge as an exploratory study from an interpretivist perspective, by revealing subjective understanding (Ashworth, 2008). Subsequently, the interview guidelines were proposed which will remain open and flexible for accommodating any arising phenomenon and exploration of themes for interview flow (Tesch, 1994), which can help in eliciting the information relevant to the research questions (Lewis, 2004). The elicitation techniques are adopted in the context of research to “...aid in expert knowledge acquisition through the identification of explanations of domain process” (Johnson & Weller, 2002; P: 492). The main advantage of this method is the use of open-ended questions, which gives good opportunity for interviewees to express opinions on complex issues compared to closed questionnaire approach (Silverman, 1997).

The interviews questions were designed in such a way that the interview started in an open-ended way, with precise questions (Dick, 1998). The interview technique includes clarification and probing. The approach confirms proper understanding of questions-answers, and encouragement to participants in sharing experiences and in-depth concepts to attain quality and comprehensive data for analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2010).

3.4.13 Recording and Transcribing interviews:

Interview recording is an inevitable process to avoid poor and biased recall, even though it is a “matter of personal preference” (Yin, 2014, p. 109). The recording devices should not be a substitute to listen carefully during interviews as suitable response to interviewee’s reply is essential. The interviewees were approached prior to interview and sought permission for

electronic recording, in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the University of Salford. The comfortability of the interviewees prior to the interview was ensured. The interviewees were informed about the electronic device to avoid any distractions during the interviews. Brannan (2011) argues the electronic recording equipment recording will remind the interviewees to be clear and result in more measured responses to stimuli. Subsequently, the audio will be recorded to increase clarity using a voice recorder and a smart voice recorder on the mobile phone as a backup.

3.4.14 Validity and Reliability

The validity concepts had transformed from the historical perspective of knowledge as a 'reflection of reality' to a better perspective of knowledge as a 'social construction of reality' (Burr, 2003). The interpretivism of reality is understood as two different concepts, but they are equivalent to one another in both theory and practice (Norman, 2015). It is important to understand the individual interaction for social conflict identification (Wehr, 2015).

Validity is influenced by the researcher's perception and on selection of research paradigm (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Subsequently, researchers developed their concepts of validity and have adopted what they consider to be the most suitable in terms of quality, rigour and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Gubba, 1985). According to Klave (1999, p.236) the validity refers to the "...correctness of a statement, whereby a valid argument is well grounded, justifiable and convincing". Leedy (1997, p. 168) argues the validation of socially constructed data is a complex process, with qualitative researchers "in disagreement" on addressing the traditional topics on validity and reliability.

According to Saunders et al. (2000) reliability is if the measures yield the same results on various occasions, with similar results by other interviews and the clarity of how reason was made from the raw data. The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study.

The general way of approaching the reliability problem is to make as many steps as

operational as possible and to conduct research as if someone were always monitoring the work of research. regards to the social science researchers concern for reliability, it does not arise much for qualitative research (Silverman, 2005). The reliability is to be calculated, it is incumbent on scientific investigators to document their procedure and to demonstrate the categories that is used consistently.

3.4.15 Ensuring Validity and Reliability

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) consider validity as a reference to the amount of congruence that occurred among the explanations of the phenomenon and the world realities. According to them consistent refinement of the sampling and data collection techniques can enrich them. Creswell and Miller (2000) denotes that in order to ensure validity of interpretive studies, researchers should adopt any of the three options,

- Negative evidence (To explore multiple perspectives)
- Engagement in the field (The multiple attitudes on build “context”)
- Enriched data description (explicit details build credibility).

The strategies were vital to the research consequences developed in the thesis. In the interpretivist perspective, validity and reliability are present where the findings “reflects the phenomena of interest” (Pervin, 1984, p. 48), where the research enquires are planned for exploration (Gummesson, 2000). Creswell and Miller (2000, p. 124) have pointed out that the basic assumption is that “validity refers not to the data but to the inferences drawn”.

The concept of “good fit” was compounded by Gummesson (200, p. 93), where the theories, models and concepts deliver an understanding of the social context from a given perspective and reliability is attained by theoretical saturation. Validity and reliability are achieved after data ‘saturation’, thereby creating ‘suitable themes’ constructed on rich and detailed basis (Ashworth, 2008). The perception of ‘truth’ as ‘intentional fulfilment’ has been addressed by Cepeda and Martin (2005, p. 856) which will be adopted for the research.

In qualitative studies, multi-method approaches are generally employed by the researcher to assure the generalisability of the research in order to increase the reliability and validity. Moreover, Bashir et al. (2008) stated that researcher bias can be invalidated if the researcher spends enough time to study and employs multiple data collection strategies to validate and substantiate findings. It could be suggested that involving in multiple methods like interviews, recordings, and analysis will lead to more valid, reliable and varied construction realities from the data collection. According to Bashir et al. (2008) reliability and validity can be conceptualised as trustworthiness, rigour and quality with qualitative paradigm.

To increase the credibility of the interview, Johnson and Weller (2002) argue that the interviewees must be an expert in the area of study, which emphasises that the participants identified for the interview will be experienced in the topic area and be presently involved in the activity, so all the interviewees were the decision makers or the members from strategic management. The interview involved interviewees who were executives at managerial role or the owners at the SME.

3.4.16 Exploratory stage: Pilot Study

The pilot study with two key decision makers of the SME were conducted, the key informants include a manger and an owner of the SME. The screening of the sample for the interview was done through the website and was communicated through email (Attached in Appendix A) and an in-depth interview was conducted according to the convenient time by the interviewee. The interview duration was fixed to 60 minutes, but one of the interviewees could finish the interview within 40 minutes without much explanation. The interviewee could answer the questions and some extra information could also be extracted from the interview. The interview questions which was proposed early was amended to the new set of questions, and sort the ethical approval with the new questions, where the interviewee could answer smoothly (attached in Appendix, the interview questions).

3.4.17 Data Quality

As the research project concerns the qualitative research design of the data quality issues emphasis on adopting a trustworthy approach (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). According to Lincoln & Guba (1985, p. 289-301) the “data trustworthiness” consists of four elements “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability”. Credible research generates convincing and acceptable data where the individuals can have confidence, such confidence results from the data are presenting reality (Silverman, 2011; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The transferability in the research approach does not deal with generalisation as they aim at data richness and have applicable findings in various settings (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The dependability implies the data and corresponding analysis are obtained through a continuous process (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The confirmability denotes the resultant data as a result of data collection and analysis and results in the positionality of the researcher and enhances opportunity for confirming data and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

The congruence existed between my research question and the adopted methodology identified as “methodological coherence” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; P: 477). A significant aspect of the methodological coherence is the use of triangulation data from the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Gibson & Brown, 2009). This is likely to have tendency to resist data which are not suitable for the data analysis (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The audio trail of the research was supported by detailed explanation in notes. Even though the audio trail substantiates little data quality, it does not allow the following record of the research process for checking easily for the probable omissions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Additionally, for clarification, confirming the data and to increase the credibility, the interview transcriptions made available to three of the interviewees for checking reflections which can be presented in the research findings. This gave the opportunity for the interviewee to make corrections which may have been misinterpreted; moreover, I was conscious that the interviewee perceptions on reality is varied to that of researcher (Lee & Lings, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). As a researcher the positionality will also be clarified in the research environment being conscious of the potential influence of personal bias and pre-conceived notions (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). This synopsis reflection of the data quality issues will be developed in the following sections leading to conclusions.

3.5 Data Analysis:

This section outlines the procedures adopted for data analysis, the data of which is derived from three phases of this research. According to Patton(1990) the data analysis deliver sense, lessen volume, recognise trends and themes and develop framework for collaborating the essence which the data reveal. Bryman and Bell (2007) have explained that there are numerous accepted methods of qualitative data analysis. The below table illustrate the various data analysis techniques.

Table 3.2 Method of analysing Qualitative data (Adapted from Bryman and Bell ,2007)

Discourse analysis	Interpreting language used by individuals within a specific social context
Narrative analysis	Showcasing the stories and metaphors that people tell and use to interpret their lives and the social context of the world around them
Thematic analysis	The classification of textual units into specific categories for identification of inferences around a specific social phenomenon
Template analysis	Interpretation through the design of a template consisting of codes subject to continual review and change as the researcher gathers and analyses data in order to highlight themes and patterns within the data

3.5.1 Qualitative Data

The qualitative data from the interview transcripts were analysed in line with manual qualitative data analysis of Miles and Huberman (1984). More specifically, the analysis of qualitative data was carried out in three phases: Data reduction, data display and conclusion as illustrated in Figure 3.1 below.

The data reduction consisted of selection, focus, simplifying and lastly transforming data from transcripts. Data display is generated using data matrices which lead to further conclusion. Certain elementary conclusions emerged during data collection but was not finalised until the completion of entire data collection. The information was then coded and systematised in displays. It is to be considered that the qualitative data analysis took the form

of constant iterative process whereby researcher repeatedly moved among reduction, display and conclusion.

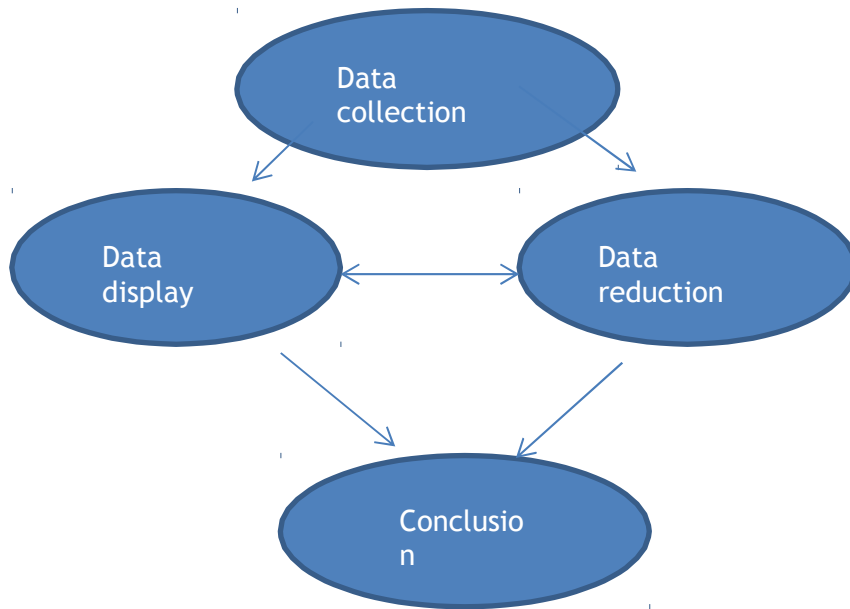


Figure 3.1: Three phases of data analysis Source: Adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994)

3.5.2 Qualitative thematic analysis

The data was manually analysed according to Miles and Huberman (1984) the “... interpretation cannot be taken over by computers even if software for treating qualitative data can facilitate the research” Gummesson (2003, p.485). The analysis using can be quick and efficient for interpretation process, moreover in the view of Gummesson(2003) , the use of software packages can support in the research but it should not take over from the author interpretation, as interpretation needs the researchers capability and consistency in data tuning as the research study unfolds (Ashworth,2008). This was tried to cover by adjusting the themes arrived from the study and the application of thematic constructs to facilitate analysis through the data attained from the SMEs.

The adoption of manual thematic analysis was advantageous as it allowed the researcher to get connected with the rich data as texts which were examined and transcribed through several reading during the data coding. The type of data can lead to theory generation within the interpretivist approach.

3.5.3 Data collection Application

In the interpretivist paradigm, the inductive method and qualitative data collection will be focussed on providing voice to the reality as perceived from the Managers in SMEs (Bryman & Bell, 2003). As a researcher adoption of various interpretive techniques is useful in describing and decoding the data collected.

3.5.4 Consideration of other Alternate methods:

Focus groups methodology and digital ethnography/ Netnography were considered but rejected for the reasons that are outlined under each one.

Focus groups:

The focus groups were not used for the study as,

1. There are chances of difference in opinions from the participants and discussions can get diverted from the main area of the study
2. The study location being an SME, there are increased chances of difficulty in controlling the situation and managing the employees.
3. The diverted discussion can lead to wastage of time and biased information
4. It will be difficult to engage and motivate people to participate
5. Some participants may find the focus group discussions and intimidating due to disagreements in discussions and being forceful to agree with the majority view.

The focus group has certain disadvantage when used in the online context, the possibilities for not considering the online focus groups are:

The main disadvantages of online focus groups are:

1. Very less opportunity to observe the discussions and the participants interaction
2. The online connectivity issues can be a problem
3. The people with less confidence in using the online tools may abstain from participation.

Netnography:

1. Participant observation method
2. Suitable for the study of communities
3. The researcher needs to be a participant in the study and should have virtual interaction
4. Less face to face interaction
5. Involves lots of observation, and involves lot of time

3.5.5 Research Locations:

The research will be carried out in Kerala, India. Kerala is the southern state located on the tropical coast, which has nearly 380 miles of Arabian Sea shoreline. The place is one of the famous tourist destinations of the Country. It is known for the palm-lined beaches, backwaters, canal networks. Inland consists of the Western Ghats, mountains whose slopes supports tea, coffee, spice plantations and wildlife. The national parks and national reservoirs are the home to elephants, langur monkeys and tigers. Kerala covers a geographical area of 38,864 square kilometres and consists of 31 million inhabitants approximately. Until the early 1980s, Kerala was reasonably an unknown destination, with most of the tourists preferring the Northern states of the Country.

The aggressive marketing campaign conducted by the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation(KTDC), a Government enterprise which promotes and attracts the overseas tourism prospects of the state. The Kerala Tourism Development Corporation is capable of transforming Kerala into an eye-opening and a memorable niche holiday spot in India. The tag line “Kerala-Gods own Country” (Dhanesh, 2010, p. 47; Harish, 2010, p. 160) was implemented in the tourism promotion campaigns and developed into a global brand. Kerala is regarded as the holiday spot with the highest brand recall. The ‘National Geographical Traveller’ (1999) had described the place as ‘one of the must-see destinations for the life time’, Kerala has been described as ‘India’s corner of paradise’ (Miller,1988, p. 592) and as

‘Gods acre’ (Chakravarti, 2001, p. 1). In 2010 Kerala was the host to 660,000 foreign tourists. The “Gods own country” campaign elevated to the National capital for the formation of “Incredible India” campaign (Harish, 2010, p. 160; Kant, 2009).

The state’s tourism schema encourages ecologically sustained tourism, give importance to the local culture, wilderness adventures and volunteering on the personal growth of local people and vegetation. The rationale for choosing the research location was due to various reasons, Kerala is densely populated among the Indian states. It is the first Indian state to be ranked in terms of Human Development Index (HDI). Kerala was the first destination in the country to be identified as an emerging market for wellness products which developed into a “strategic window of opportunity” and which transformed the comparative advantages and potentials of the state with the prevailing resources into competitive advantage (Prideaux et al., 2014, p. 56).

The promotion of Ayurveda, a system of medicine with historic roots in the Indian sub-continent became the significant refrain in its destination branding (Dasgupta, 2011). The place had successfully developed into a tourist destination with ample opportunities for SMEs in the hospitality sector. It is also an example of how the place can turn its comparative advantage into opportunities in employment and business. In addition, the Kerala hospitality and tourism sector had made a tremendous progress in E-commerce the recent years. It is expected the E-commerce industry will rise to \$20 million by 2018 (Das & Ara, 2015). Across the E-commerce platform the B2C brands in the hospitality sector have witnessed highest social media audience growth in relation to other industries.

The developments in tourism sector and wellness virtues small and medium hospitality Sector. The SME hospitality industry tries to make the best of the opportunity by maintaining highest level of online engagement. The posting of the online contents, designed to speak to

the customers values and personalises the intimacy and connection towards the brand, by integrating appealing visuals which can inspire followers to make use of their service.

3.6 Research Limitations

Even though the ontological and epistemological basis specifies the sensibility of this, there are certain constraints, precisely concerning generalisation and positionality. Researchers like Saunders et al. (2012) and Rodham (1998) argue that data collected from small sample can represent general happenings. According to Watson (2001, P: 7) such studies can generalise on the various processes in which the people are indulged, instead of discovering what materialise to “all managers or all organisations”, moreover Sayer (1984) emphasizes that “... providing there is no pretence that the whole population is represented, there is no reason why an intensive study should be less objective about its particular subject than an extensive study” (p. 83).

A potential limitation of the research could be positionality, as being the part of the research location environment, there are possibilities of influences like personal biases, preconceived notions and personal perceptions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, in the view of Watson (2011), the research provides plenty opportunities to achieve influential insights into people’s lives which must be additional to both the sensitivity and credibility of the research and understanding of how the process, e-branding in the SMEs are practiced.

Subsequently the research deals with exploring how e-branding is practiced in the SMEs. It is significant as the research analyses how individuals in certain organisations understand the world from various experiences and interpret these through the technology and system implemented. This requires richness in data collection in the social context as the overall research philosophy which is based on Interpretivist approach (Berger & Luckmann, 1971; Savin- Baden & Major, 2013).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the concept of a paradigm as an overarching frame notifying methodological choices, and which enabled the research to be situated within the interpretive realm. The chapter has explored the research methodology consisting of philosophy, design approach and the data analysis procedure, the research location selected for the study and the data quality, whole of which had directed to the following conclusions.

The interpretive approach appears to be appropriate with my research, as it had facilitated insights into how the owners/managers in the SMEs construct meaning through the interpretation of the world and the branding experiences. This has more probability in facilitating the discovery and interpretation of the social patterns and themes which can help in understanding the research area. Examination of the individuals and the branding environment can be capable of supporting and drawing out the data of participants based on their attitude, perceptions and behaviours. Even though previous literature and research have not widely overlooked on the e-branding within the SMEs, the inductive approach helps in the understanding of mutually branding and e-branding.

The interview method adopted for the study is the key to understanding the branding phenomenon within the organisation and the influence on content and the interpersonal interactions which seemed unlikely to be attained from other methodologies. The criterion sampling enabled the selection of the research organisations based on certain criteria as per the definition of the SME, and as addressable to the research question.

To conclude finally, all the chosen methodology discussed above facilitated in conducting the research and investigating areas within a conceptual framework for e-branding in SMEs. Having examined the impending research methodology application explicitly the corresponding chapter will explore the tentative conceptual framework model. The next chapter will present the outcome of the exploratory qualitative stage, required to identify the

content domain of online brand management, intertwined with relevant online branding literature.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the research conducted with the overall aim “to explore online brand management in Indian SMEs, from a strategic perspective” through the following objectives:

- I. To investigate how the e-brand is managed from the strategic perspective in the context of Indian SMEs in the hospitality sector
- II. To investigate how successfully are the components of an SME e- brand managed in the Indian hospitality sector.
- III. To investigate how effectively the challenges of e-branding are addressed by Indian SMEs in the hospitality sector

The chapter is organised into five sections. The first section includes the profile of the 10 SME organisations who participated in the research selected from the hospitality sector in Kerala, India. This is followed by a summary of the analytical process which involved careful examination of each interview transcript was analysed manually in order to identify recurrent themes. Section four of the chapter includes the findings and discussions of the primary research collected through the semi-structured interviews and organised under each research question (RQ) as follows:

- RQ1. How e-brand is managed from the strategic perspectives in the Indian hospitality sector?
- RQ2. How are the components of e-brand managed in the Indian hospitality sector?
- RQ3. What are the challenges of e-brand in the Indian hospitality sector?

4.2 Overview of Research Sample

This section presents the profile of the 10 SMEs selected from the hospitality sector in Kerala, India. The SME sector consisted of a wide range of variation in organisation size, experience, employee strength and resources, appropriate to reveal the information on e-brand management. The below table 4.1 provides the sample selection based on the criteria used for sampling;

- I. The organisation should be a SME (Based on the Indian SME definition)
- II. Adoption of E-branding
(Maintaining an active website by integrating social media and adoption of online communications model)
- III. A B2C Organisation
- IV. Located in a geographical area identified as tourist spot

Table 4.1: Profile of Sampled Organisations

SME Organisation	A B2C Organisation Yes or No	Adoption of E-Branding Yes or No	Located in a Geographical Tourist Area Yes or No
1	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 4.2 below provides more details of the profiles of the participants. The table reveals the profile of the ten organisations sampled including details of each organisations number of years of operations indicating industry experience, the designation of key informants from the organisation and their relationship with the online media/social media. These roles are identified inductively after the interviews with each key informant and based on their perception towards branding in the online environment. The interviews identified some informants as inert in the frequency of their management of online branding activities.

The sampled organisations (SME firms) were classified as start-up firms and established firms, the firms with less than 4 years of operating were classified as start-up firms and firms operating more than 4 years were classified as established firms.

Table 4.2: Profile of Organisations and Informants

Organisation	Years of operation	Designation of Informants	Role of Informants
1	2.5	Owner	Active Administrator
2	6	Marketing Manager	Active Administrator
3	4	Manager	Active Administrator
4	3	Owner	Active Administrator
5	3	Business Partner	Active Administrator
6	4	Manager	Reluctant Administrator
7	4.5	Marketing executive	Active Administrator
8	3.5	Owner	Reluctant Administrator
9	6.5	Sales Manager	Active Administrator
10	5	Marketing co-ordinator	Active Administrator

4.3 Analytical Process

The findings were thematically analysed manually ‘*to identify how the SME e-brand is managed from strategic perspective*’ in detail and summarised. It was considered not to let the literature review limit the consideration of probable themes, as it was expected that through thematic analysis the researcher is made aware of more features of the data that might occur elsewhere (Tuckett, 2005). The codes, categories and themes are explained following, at the conclusion which gives the specific part of my research data which progress via various stages.

The study started with the search for themes, primarily by examining each code and categorising appropriately. The codes categorisation consists of grouping related codes to framework of categories for more analysis. The terms category and themes were used interchangeably (Bazeley, 2009).

Following every code was examined according to the respectively category in context, reverting back to the original interview to verify that it actually was appropriate to its allocated category and that it “*reflects the meanings evident in the data set as a whole*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006,P:21).

4.4 Findings: RQ1. How the SME e-brand is managed from strategic perspective in the Indian hospitality sector?

This research question identifies e-brand management in the online context in the selected hospitality sectors. The study identified E-brand management and SME brand management as two different entities. Therefore, findings concerning E-brand management in the online context are presented in section 4.4.1, and findings concerning the SME brand management are presented in section 4.4.2.

4.4.1 E-Brand Management Findings in the Online Context

The online brands are the significant constituent in SME business context, which are supported by internet applications (Webster & Keller, 2004; Randell, 2011). The plethora of choices in brands and intense competition evidenced the necessity for online brands in the hospitality sector, which transparently assist people in making choices (Rubinstein & Griffiths; 2001).

The study identifies four E-brand strategic focused typologies for the study, the typologies identified are the 1) low technology adoption and non-interactive 2) operational focus 3) High technology focused and interactive 4) opportunity focused

4.4.1.1 Low Technology Adoption and Non-interactive

The low technology adoption and non-interactive strategy was found in start-up SMEs, the SMEs fail to understand the need of online technology and the increased benefits. At this strategic point the technologies are very useful for the SME, in increasing their role in the market and in providing good experience to the customers. At this strategic focus the SMEs in order to have an online presence just make use of a website, with email as a communication medium. This typology is influenced by the Web 1.0 technology adoption, backed up by the non-interactive website as one among the numerous technological tool available (Buhalis & Jun, 2011). This typology in the hospitality SME sector has low brand orientation and market orientation, they do not show much online technology capability. There is less provision for online customer engagement. These hospitality sectors mainly align with the traditional method of branding, which was practiced much preceding to social media and web 2.0 technologies.

4.4.1.2 Operational Focus

The operational focus on the day to day operations was found in the start-up SMEs hospitality sector. They focus mainly on carrying out the daily routine by sending and replying emails, answering telephonic enquiries and accept bookings. The operational approach within the SME hospitality sector belongs to a tactical sub type rather than the strategic approach. The SMEs in this sub type have a short term and a diminished focus as illustrated in the below quotation;

“We aim to serve our customers with good care and facilities, we do not get much time to update the website, we try answering all telephone enquiries and try to give the details of our services over phone.” (R4)

The focus on the day to day operations denotes they are least market oriented, the management often have the notion that they understand the needs and wants of the customer and they do excellent customer service. The competitor orientation is scant. The Owner/managers believe the small sector-oriented hospitality business serve niche market with no competitor threats and challenges. The quotation below reveals the view of an owner from the start-up firm;

“I am 100% percent confident that we are managing our business very effectively, we do not have any challenges from the other players, we get sufficient business for our smooth running and we do not face any issues from our business.....the customers are happy and not received any complaints from them.” (R8)

4.4.1.3 High Technology Adoption

The high technology adoption is found in sectors with more than four years of industry experience, the sectors are found to be highly competitive and they are opportunity exploitation focussed. They have a high business management capability. The strong business management capability consists of the competence of the owner/manager and making the online brand opportunities as the hub of activities. This strategic type has strong brand orientation and strong market orientation, supported by the role of young dynamic graduates in managing the information technology activities of the firm.

The increased technology adopted strategic focus on making use of the available opportunities to make web 2.0 to attract customers and create active customer engagement by making use of web 2.0 technologies. In this strategic type the organisations make use of OTA, and other available social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The level of customer involvement in this section is very high and provides a good networking experience between the company and consumers. The social networking tools facilitate in multiple platforms and increased activities. The quotation below demonstrates the views of those organisations on adopting the social media for their E-branding;

“The online brand is managed mainly through website, third party advertising.” (R2)

“Digital solutions are multiple and better targeted to audience..... giving brand high visibility.” (R10)

4.4.1.4 Opportunity Focus

The opportunity focus was identified in two of the start-ups firms apart from the experienced sectors; the focus in this sub type is identified as exploring market opportunities perceived by the strategic management as fast as possible. The market orientation is reasonable in this sub

type, with less effort is made for customised customer needs and competitor analysis. These sub types try to increase customer attraction and success of the organisation. The quote below identifies the views of the Owner-managers implementing the technology in their organisations;

“we also try to collaborate with good online advertisers and try to be visible to the customers” we make use of social media advertisement to get maximum visibility.” (R4)

“The majority of clients are from the digital channels...information due to finger tips due to our online presence.” (R8)

4.4.2 E-brand Adoption in the Online Context

Among the interviewed organisations, eight of the SMEs developed an integrated approach to brand management archetypes put forward by Wong and Merrilees (2005). The branding activities were strongly developed, but not necessarily formalised. The organisations were aware of branding activities considered branding as essential by adopting wide range of promotional tools including budget package, family package, websites, and advertising. The online promotion developed understanding and relationship between target groups (Fox, 2011).

The two organisations followed the embryonic branding approach of Wong and Merrilees (2005), where they were aware of the brand orientation, market orientation and the competitive advantage, but not much attention was given to branding aspects.

The companies adopting an integrated branding approach, concentrated on developing identity and communicating brand meanings. This approach is in line with the reductive and

pragmatic approaches suggested as a generic SMEs characteristic feature (Wong & Merrilees, 2005; Berthon et al., 2008; Ojasalo et al., 2008). Strong brand orientation is viewed by two facets namely; the significance placed on E-brand and the clear formulation of brand characteristics, by the owner-managers.

The following quotations from the respondents demonstrate the adoption of online media for the promotional activities;

“I would say 70% of our business comes from e-brand management. “ (R5)

“The majority of clients are from the digital channels, today information is on finger tips due to our online presence.” (R8)

4.4.3 Online Communication

The integrated communication channel and repetitions contributed to the success of brand communication in the SMEs (Godeshwar, 2008). The brand communications consist of one way and two ways of communications (Chinmona, 2016), the two-way interactive communication created customer engagement, as specified by Keller &Lehmann (2006) on the important role of consistent communications in developing a positive attitude in customers.

The SMEs online communication channels followed the ‘tradigital’ concept (Sig gizzler, 2009; Georgieva, 2016), where the digital skills and values are in harmony with the underlying traditional knowledge of the organisation and projects online with a digital overlay. The traditional methods support new trends and digital overlay. The traditional methods support new trends and digital branding efforts of the small business. The organisations use hard copy marketing materials like brochures and leaflets to strengthen the

relationship with customers. However, the organisations do not invest in television or radio advertisement.

The ‘tradigital’ concept is in line with the view of Allchin (2012), as a fusion of traditional and digital technique applied to marketing. This concept effectively applies traditional principles of marketing and branding to the digital aspect in attaining competitive advantage. The tradigital platform is considered as an efficient model for effective brand marketing strategy (Donovan, 2010). The strong brands in traditional environment of successful organisations, finds online brands as even more important in the online market (Rubinstein & Griffiths; 2001, p. 396).

The following quotations from the respondents demonstrate the adoption of traditional media for the promotional activities;

“we make use of flyers and leaflets in the town square..... at time we also give out leaflets for sponsorships.” (R6)

4.4.4 Social Media Brand Management

Every interviewee organisation adopted social media for promoting the online brand, where the social media has influenced both customers and organisation alike. The organisations considered social media as a new paradigm for branding methods (Gao, 2016), which align with Coulter (2012) who states, the online channels have gained traction in the last decade to include blogs, online communities and social networking.

Social media is identified as an effective tool for small business, which aligns with the previous study of Kirtis and Karahan (2011) and Birkner (2011) on the social media effectiveness through quick reach and cost saving. The study also supports the previous study of Hoek and Gendall (2003), on social media being a powerful tool which has extensive

reachability with wide audience, which is attractive and influences customers in decision making. Additionally, social media plays an important role in building relationships with customers.

The common social media tools used by the organisations are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Vine. Every organisation stated their presence in social media. Some of the organisations had an active Facebook page with customised information by which they control traffic leading to reviews. The Facebook advertisement is linked to the Facebook page to get more visibility than the external website.

The SMEs also emphasised their presence in Twitter which is a microblogging service and text based. According to the interviewees, social media increases the customer engagement with the organisation by updating posts, contents, reviews, comments and information sharing, as “... the concept of consumer engagement, explicitly accounts for the interactive brand dynamics” (Brodie, et al., 2011, P.272) The quotation below highlights the interviewees response on social media adoption;

“... the networking is also important we build our network at a daily basis and the interaction within the social media network should be effective so that we get more customer queries and reference from our past customers who were happy with our services.” (R7)

4.4.5 Online Content Management

The study identified attractive and informative content as an important element in online brand management, which aims to increase the website visitors and retain the visitors to the site (Booth & Janson, 2009). The organisation web site is the most important tool for

delivering brand online. The website was a home for the brand in the digital environment and is the source of content delivered through various electronic channels (Lipiainen et al., 2015).

According to the interviewees the rationale for managing content was to create customer interest and targeting customers, which is in line with the view of Halvorson and Rach (2012), on online content development and management which generate customer focus by communicating ideas in a simple storytelling manner (Baer, 2012; Davis, 2012; Handley & Chapman, 2011; Wuebben, 2012). The website contents are like storytelling, which is in accordance with the work of Sullivan (2013), on the benefit of information to audience with solid content for increased awareness and perception. The contents in the hospitality sector are a broader way of storytelling by using blog posts, articles, videos, infographics and the social media focus on content marketing within social networks.

Four of the respondents stated the importance of content management, the following quotes denote the views of an owner on content management;

“..... to connect with travellers by posting engaging content that attracts both their emotional needs, the power of social media enables hoteliers to tell their story in a unique way.” (R4,)

“if you want to be successful in content marketing, your goal should be to develop and distribute the absolute best information in the industry, if not why the customer should care for the industry.” (R6)

The interviewees also conveyed information on the nature of content as engaging and updated. The contents as an online communication tools helps in building trust through two-way interactive communication by customer and organisations, which aligns with as contributions by Barrett (2008), Stelzner (2011) and Michaelidou et al (2011) on online

contents as a communication opportunity for brands. A long-form content as video clips are provided by many of the organisations. A significant aspect of content drives customers at relevant points in decision making on the services, which corresponds to the view of Pulizzi and Barrett (2008), where content should be a ‘continuing engagement with the customer’. The performance of the contents is assessed by the percentage of returning customers and returning visitors, which align with the view of McFadden (2005) as the key performance indicators of the contents based on “...the depth of visit, returning visitors and percentage of new visitors”.

The SMEs did not possess any specific criteria for the content development and management, which was in accordance to the view of Bloomstein (2012) who stated small businesses had no specific content marketing strategy and as capable to identify the need and purpose of content management.

4.4.6 Online Promotion Tools

The online brand promotions within the organisation are carried out through multiple factors. The online promotions are through paid and unpaid platforms, platforms like Revaalo (like yelp), yahoo local and city search giving free listing of the hospitality sectors. The other significant promotion tool is Google Platform, which was expensive and only three of the interviewee organisations adopted Google, during the festival seasons to avail discounts in payment.

Out of the ten interviewed organisations, eight of the interviewees stated they maintain a massive database with information not only on clients, but everything that is connected to the sector. The database provides the opportunity to systematise branding and communication messages and to customise messages, which can enhance in improved efficiency of communications.

The organisations assess the actions carefully and analyse the market conditions. The digital arena supplies splendid options to monitor actions on internet. One of the interviewees indicated they monitor the new media environment and get information by monitoring customer actions, by analysing the data stream, postings on Facebook, Twitter and other online discussion forums. Another interviewer stated monitoring the number of visitors to web pages and email monitoring through campaign monitor; it counts how many people had opened the email and how many times they have viewed the email. They claim their business objectives include awareness and lead generation, the examples of lead generation consisting of information request are through email or newsletter or referrals (Burby, 2004).

In addition, the general conversations on the social media platform and recent trends are also monitored. The online monitoring helps the organisation to attain information on prospective customers, who are the potential leads to the organisation. The other interviewee organisations stated the need and benefits of adopting online travel agents for promotion. The following quotations highlight the organisations view on e-brand management through multiple sources;

“We manage e-brand through multiple sources like registered website...to promote my brand” (R1)

“We manage the online brand through various social media tools, though online campaigns and through third party promotions...” (R10)

4.4.7 Online Travel Agents

The findings from the study revealed almost all organisations OTA to improve their online brand presence. The OTAs are of two types; they are international OTAs and domestic

OTAs. Out of the ten interviewed organisations, nine interviewed organisations preferred local and international OTA as compared to single organisation which adopted only local OTA. The online travel agents are quite dominant in the virtual market. The independent hoteliers find it difficult to compete with direct online booking with specific commission, which adversely affect the profit margins in the competitive market (Marchant, 2015). According to interviewees, the OTA is a competitive industry and widely network oriented with good results, which is in line with the view of Kracht and Wang (2010) on the need of a complex global network where the participants need to compete and co-ordinate on a consistent basis.

The developments in Internet and travel industries, had given rise to online travel market with expected service and quality. The hospitality website remains a core of digital strategy which was in line with the view of Baloglu and Pekcan, (2006), on the website as the centre of digital strategy in organisations, but hoteliers recognize the management of both social media and internet distribution channels (Gazzoli et al., 2008) as a successful pre-requisite which is in line with the view of O'Connor, (2010) as social media and internet usage can contribute to online success.

The findings identify the benefits of adopting OTAs to facilitate increased sales volume and perceptions of market competency. This echoes Buhalis and O'Connor (2005) who contend the increasing profitability resulting in the adoption of online technology as a significant trend. Apart from sales, OTA adoption impacts on intangible factors like reputation, service quality and customer loyalty. The OTA adoption depicts an attractive avenue to build online presence, increased awareness and improved relationships among customers. The following quotations demonstrate the respondents view on OTA adoption;

“We manage e-brand through multiple sources like registered website...to promote my brand.” (R1)

“The online brand is managed mainly through website, third party advertising.” (R2)

“The world is digitalised, ... every online tool and method is important in copying with the competitors and being successful in the industry.” (R7)

4.4.8 Online Brand Benefits

Every interviewed SME stated the benefits of online brands however, the interviewees had different opinions on brand benefits. Three of the SMEs commented online branding as less expensive as compared to traditional branding methods. This is in line with Bresciani and Eppler (2010) who stated online medium as an affordable and beneficial medium for small and medium enterprises.

One organisation stated the online channel provides extended visibility and quick reach with an affordable price. It also helps in providing an opportunity for storytelling and information sharing which is in line with Adam et al. (2012). Hence an online platform is an excellent communication platform for content sharing. As Buhalis & Foerste (2015) state online information is very useful to the tourist to obtain detailed information.

The following quotations demonstrate the respondents views on low-priced online channel adoption;

“The certain channels of e-brands are not very expensive” (R1).... basically e-brand is very easier in the sense that you can reach out to many people through the internet as simple as than marketing locally through various traditional methods.” (R1)

“The e-brand building helps us to reach out the business name to prospective customers, it created a lot of opportunities in terms of enquiries and profitability, the e-brand is inexpensive, and has plenty of medium available to project the brand online.”

(R9)

The interviewees stated the quick reach of the internet which has increased the range of published information, and facilitation of quick replies via email and website enquiries. This aligns with Smith (2008), who asserts the benefits of internet in generating opportunities for organizations to efficiently shape their brands online and facilitate global reach. Most of the respondents revealed that quick reach as an effective feature of online branding. The information is reached within fraction of seconds.

The following quotations from the respondents demonstrate the customers preference for quick reach of information;

“Particularly e-brand can reach out to the people out of the city limits or all over the country by using e-brand channels.” (R1)

“It is less expensive for the organisation and the reach within the customers are limitless...the reach within the customers are very good and it has been very effective media to get enquiries from customers from far places.” (R6)

The small business brands had global impact due to online brands and increased social media presence, online travel agents website and blogs, which help to create a wider reach to the customer, which echoes with the view of Kambil (2008), on the digital revolutions and Web 2.0 technology adoption, which has created greater opportunities for the online technology platforms. This evidence of technology adoption also concurs with the view of Kietzmann et

al., 2011 and Greenberg, (2010), as the online brand building and its impact on customers and marketing activities as equally acknowledged by practitioners and academicians.

Most respondents stated the online impact as beneficial for the small business; the following quotations highlight the respondent's views on online impact;

"... the presence of websites, blogs and videos in twitter and facebook helps in providing good image to the customer" ...we also maintain separate blog and videos in our local directory, quick results are obtained for anyone who searches the online local directory in google." (R2)

"... almost 80% of the customers are through online, today I see online as an important medium in our enterprise, we depend on the internet in promoting and communicating to our customers." (R8)

4.4.9 Online Advertising

The online marketing advertising enables quick market information and trust (Chelariu & Osmonbekov, 2014). The SME brands use market driven branding which are associated with promotion and profits (Mowle & Merrilees, 2005). One of the interviewees stated on marketing benefits of the Organisation;

"We get more customers and depending on our marketing, so that the people are more aware of the brand." (R6)

The study shows online advertising are key drivers of sales with contribution to market share and a facility to charge premium price mediated by the brand reputation, which align with the views of Iyer et al. (2005), where the website can increase the significance and effectiveness through advertising. The increased advertising is beneficial for the organisation as it can lead to profitability of the firm, which aligns with Hallerman (2010) on the positive effect of

revenues, because of the targeted online advertising. The respondents from two organisations stated the benefit of market identification and target setting, as ‘to understand the brand essence, with correct focus on the targets, choosing the appropriate media with constant communication and finally the brand renewal by retaining the core unaltered’ (Lassen et al., 2008). The following quotations highlights the respondents’ views;

“The maximum number of customers, profitability, increased customer services and satisfied customers are the main target of our business.” (R2)

“... it is with the help of the brand that the organisation is capable of identifying the market opportunities.” (R3)

4.5 SME Strategic Management Context

The Strategic Brand within SMEs consists of various interrelated roles and responsibilities which are planned, defined, conveyed and managed across the functional business areas within the organisation. (e.g. Marketing, Human Resources, Finance, Procurement Departments etc.). Due to the increased role of the organisation, the strategic management assure that each functional business area recognises its effect on the managing brand assets that support organisation’s overall success.

It is critical for the organisation to develop a brand strategy, which can establish and maintain strong linkages among the business functional areas. The brand strategy within SMEs was a long-term organisation plan in creating value to the customers by maintaining quality, excellent services and good relationships. The study identifies two types of SME strategy focus; they are internal focus and external focus. The primary internal focus is on the SME identity and the primary external focus is on projecting the SME image to the customers.

4.5.1 The Internal Strategic Focus

The strategic identity focuses on the skills, internal capabilities and the core competencies to attain a strong identity of the sector, which is the link between the organisation and customer (Aaker, 2004) The strategy focusses on increasing customers, delivering customer experiences and positive customer feedback with star rating, which facilitates a strong online interaction with customers in digital platforms where the stronger presence allows SMEs to be more successful (Williams, 1991).

Every interviewed organisation stated the need for developing identity for successful functioning. The strategic approach within the SME consisted of treating employees as a strategic resource, with innovative ideas and core values which enhance the SME identity.

4.5.2 Strategic Capabilities

Among the interviewee organisations, eight organisations demonstrated their focus on capabilities. The capabilities of the organisation are the ability to manage the organisation successfully with limited resources through employees, digital opportunities and ability to achieve advantage over competitors. this is in line with the dynamic capabilities approach of Teece et al., (1997, pp. 509-513), as “the firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments”.

The organisations invest in training programs, which include interpersonal training, training classes for effective communication for managerial staff and workshops for the culinary staff. The two days training on software are also provided for the new staff.

The following quotes indicate the employees are treated as assets in the SMEs, with investment in technical and personality training provided within the organisation;

“... we have short term training programs with employees, on how to interact with customers and on customer service and satisfaction.” (R1).

“... one is professional for employees and for chefs and service people we give training courses and they try to implement well.” (R5)

“... training is provided after the research and development within the organisation, I work giving them idea on various changes that are been done every fortnightly we give training on changes, including communication.” (R8)

The digital infrastructure rollouts of superfast and dynamic technology to SMEs are significant in enhancing efficiency, innovation and capacity for utilising online opportunities. The findings indicate the digital capability within the organisation have a positive influence on the SME, with increased awareness, turnover, and reduced costs (Lubatkin et al., 2006; Protogerou et al., 2008). The increased capabilities of the SMEs take advantage of digital opportunities in providing digital awareness by increased initiatives through prevailing third party networks and improving online monitoring, which is in line with the contribution of Quinton et al. (2017) on SMEs excellence in the digital environment due to the digital technology in cost reduction and audience extension.

The digital branding aspects are conveyed to the employees and the employees are made part of the online branding process, as the employees are significant resources of the organisation (Riasi & Asadzadeh, 2015). The strategic view of the management articulates and inform employees on various aspects including purpose, vision and core values. The management

also ensures the employees understanding of SME identity. The quotations below demonstrate on the communication to employees.;

“The Employees are aware of the electronic channels and website they also access to Facebook and Instagram used by the company.” (R1, p. 4)

“every staff member of the organisation, is actively involved in branding of organisation, the internal staff also works towards attaining the vision of organisation, they actively involve in the branding procedures and be part of them by demonstrating skills and opinions in developing successful organisation.” (R7, p. 4)

4.5.3 Strategic Values

The findings demonstrate that values comprising of brand promise are implied in external brand building, rooted in the Owner-managers explanations of desired image and promise online. The combination of external brand building concepts are implied in consistency of values, which are referred to reputation instead of functional and emotional values cluster (De Chernatony, 2002b) or additional values (Urde, 2003).

The findings highlight that the brand promises are not explicitly and frequently communicated in SMEs (Anker et al., 2012), rather they mainly deliver on functional, symbolic or experiential promises. Some Owner-managers claim that their vision and brand promise are implied in the delivered brand rather than explicit communication. The congruence of the explanations of brand vision, purpose and brand promise illustrates that brand vision and brand purpose often encloses the brand valuation promise implicitly.

The brand vision reflection varies among organisations, the below quotations indicate the brand vision communicated within the organisation;

“Vision is reflected in the brand that is how we promote to achieve company’s vision.”

(R1)

Without proper vision the organization cannot be a success we try to do right thing in right time for our organization to make sure the organization is not affected by competitors”. (R4)

4.5.4 Strategic External Image Focus

The strategic external image focuses on external brand management capability supported by strong customer orientation. This image focus was found in four of the SMEs, which aims to attain favourable and unique image with customers. Customer orientation is the subset of this strategic focus. The findings identify strong image focus permits SMEs to be more successful (Badoc, 2001), and the communication of image with aggressive promotional strategies and quality are significant to SME success, which is in line with ([Lim & O’Cass, 2001](#); [McCracken, 1993](#)), who state a strong image can add value to customer by supplying meaning.

The below quotation from interviewees demonstrate their views on strong brand image;

“The image should be developed in customers mind and this image should be different from its competitors.” (R6, p. 2)

“we should aim in creating maximum brand awareness and with the awareness an overall outlook and the image of the brand should be projected to the customer to have maximum viewers and visitors to the website.” (R7, p. 1)

4.5.5 Strategic Decision Making

Decision making plays an important role in imparting image to customers in external strategic focus. The decisions within SMEs were based on the directorship to nurture the brand supportive culture followed by core values (Krake, 2005) and structure to provide the service, standards and resources that enable the desired brand management. The directorship of the owner discerns the strategic significance on brand management within SMEs, which aligns with the view of (Merilees, 2007) on enabled decision making by considering various underlying factors. The owner manager communicates to employees on the brand and ascertains clarity. The Owners makes sure appropriate employee for the job for better performance (Collins & Porras, 2004).

... "my role is more of a decision maker of all things we are planning." (R1)

"I decide on whom to tie up with, what to focus, what is the content." (R5)

"I used to make decisions on investment in e-brands and on various tariffs." (R9)

The decisions taken are made by analysing competitors and the services offered by them, the quote below illustrates how the organisation attempts to cope with the competitors and efforts used to be successful;

"I make constant visit to various website including competitors and try to make sure we are updated and attractive" (R8)

The customer focussed decisions are considered very significant within the SME, and factors like quality, value and customer experiences are given more importance. Almost all organisations emphasised on customer focussed decisions. The quotations below identify the customer focused decisions adopted by the SMEs;

“Customer is an asset to the organisation, the brand is build based on the quality and value.” (R1)

“... the website is made user friendly, values are given much priority, quality and services within the organisation are carefully examined and supplied with utmost importance. constant updates are necessary and aim to make maximum visible.” (R6)

“Customer is the king, we first look at the priorities of the customer, and they are reputation, quality and excellent services.” (R7)

One of the organisations stated the customer focussed decisions are taken as a step by step procedure within the organisation. The quotation below demonstrates on the interviewee views;

“it is done by series of steps, which starts from targeting the customers, managing them and by good customer relationship management and customer service.” (R2)

The brand image strategy within the Indian SME sector aligns with the views of Abimbola (2001), where the strategy within small and medium business is very competitive, and agrees with Anarnkaporn (2007), who suggested the significance of brand strategy and prioritising them within the SME. The section reports on how the SMEs achieve the strategic image focus by effective management in ten interviewed SMEs.

4.5.5.1 The role of Owners/Managers

The findings identify the desire and commitment of the Owner-managers towards the SME brand considerably influence the branding in the SMEs. In most of the instances the dedication of owner-managers runs their SME organisation from the previous experience in business. The findings identify that the Owner-managers display two diverse levels of desire and commitment to the SME brand.

The owner-managers who developed high level of energy and commitment to the brands are identified in strategic image driven organisations. Conversely the owner-managers with less commitment and dedication focus on other aspects of organisation, such as day to day operations within the organisation and to delivery excellent quality in services.

The findings align with the significant role of owners shown by the previous research (Krake,2005, Merrilees,2007), a significant understanding from the study are the Owners operate on two different levels of commitment to the SME brand. The high level of Owners commitment to the brand signifies the Owners commitment, energy and attention to ascertain the organisation decisions are conveyed through the brand. The Owner-managers at this level possess clear formulated strategies, which develops and displays entrepreneurial attitude (Merrilees, 2007). The low level of Owner-managers commitment towards the brand is demonstrated by their attention, energy and commitment on other business aspects than SME brand activities.

4.5.6 Consistent Brand Delivery

The brand driven management primarily use continuous monitoring to ascertain consistent brand delivery. A series of monitoring methods, deemed applicable by management in each SME brand, is employed. Monitoring through internal and external audits, as part of quality assurance systems, this is with corporate strategy focus. The consistent delivery is dependent on the nature of their brand (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003).

The organisation consistently improves the service standards and enforces corporate identity compliance throughout the sectors, and they try to attain competitive advantage through reliable insights. A long-term association of trust and consistency among the SME brand and customer strengthens the brand, in accordance with Lovelock et al., (1999) on consistency as an important focus in successful brand delivery. Customer feedback on the quality of the

brand delivery is formally sought in two of the organisations, the organisations also take the suggestions from the customers for improvement.

The following quote indicates efforts for the management of brand delivery within the organisations;

“I travelled to other resorts to have experiences and learn from them and implement changes in my organization in improving performance.” (R5, p. 3)

“The image should be developed in customers mind and this image should be different from its competitors.” (R6, p. 2)

“... we make sure correct things are conveyed on time and ensure smooth operations in the organisation, we aim to avoid confusion.” (R6, p. 3)

4.5.7 Brand Performance Assessment

Brand performance assessment is conducted either formally or informally in the SMEs. The assessment is conducted informally in three organisations and formally through surveys within five of the SMEs. Tendering success rate is used as assessment criteria in one of the organisations. The brand assessment relates to the marketplace behaviours and in turn loyalty (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999). The SMEs which were in operation for more than three years stated they consider industry recognition as a performance assessment. They consider awards as the recognition, from the tourism ministry. The ministry of tourism is a nodal agency which formulates policies and programs by co-ordinating various activities. The Kerala state tourism award for the best homestays and resorts highlights and increases the rating among the prominent hospitality sectors. The awards encourage them to be best of the operations with reputation and potential enquiries. Two of the SMEs conveyed the assessment for them

is through the finance and sales data, the profitability index is the assessment criteria of the organisation.

The following quotes illustrate the respondent's views on recognition;

“we have received the award from kerala tourism, we aim to make more facilities and aim to receive the national tourism award.” (R6)

“recognition is important and the important recognition what we hope to get is by the travellers review on the largest travel website.” (R3)

4.6 FindingsRQ2. How are the components of E-brand managed in the hospitality sector?

The E-brand components within the SME sectors are according to the conventional branding theories. The separate addressing of each of the components develops an explicit picture of the significance of the component and the relationship to the SME performance. The E-brand components within the SMEs are classified as online and offline factors. The online brands are significant as customers appear to better remember the information for familiar brands.

4.6.1 Trust

Trust is one of the factors stated by the organisations. According to the interviewees, Trust is considered by customers as a critical element of the brand, it influences the decision-making process in identifying the brand choice and usage. This aligns with the academic evidence on the essentiality of brand trust and security. The brand trust is established through a combination of familiarity, security and word of mouth (Hoffman et al., 1999), which is in line with Kania (2001) as familiarity with a brand create greater trust, except a person has a negative impact on a brand. Five of the interviewee organisations stated the significance of the trust factor. The quotations below illustrate the interviewee views on trust;

“The trust is an important factor of a good brand, we maintain the trust and are very truthful to customers. We continue trusting the brand and reach out customer with confidence.” (R2, p. 4)

“... trust, loyalty, follow ups are the ideal brand components.” (R7, p. 3)

“... trust is very important as the branding is considered, the customer value should be considered important.” (R9, p. 3)

The organisations stated they try to be trustful to the customers and they attempt to fulfil all the online promises made in terms of services and amenities. The SMEs do not charge any indirect or hidden charges apart from those advertised.

4.6.2 Technology and Design

One of the factor considered by the organisation was technology and design, the interviewees stated lack of good design, loading speed and inappropriate content can lead to online brand failure, which aligns with the view of Omanson et al. (2002, p. 1) on technology design “...as a critical consideration for companies on how to design their website to support the brand experience”. Website design is an important factor influencing customer satisfaction and enhances online brand success (Szymanski & Hise, 2000). The two SMEs which are in the embryonic stage (Merrilees, 2005) indicated they lack technology, and they consider technology as a very important status indicator of evolution, the fear of technology dominance is a reason to abstain from technology investment and be limited to a mere website prone to little updates. The following quotation illustrate the interviewee view on website design;

“Branding is a constant process we need to work continuously without any gap and need to be head of others.” (R5)

4.6.3 Interactivity

Interactivity is identified as an important component of successful E-brand (Ind & Riondino, 2001), (Voorveld, van Noort, & Duijn, 2013). The website interactivity represents an interactive many to many communications platform, which aligns with Steur (1992, p.) who focused on the concept of user control and defined interactivity as “the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time”.

According to the interviewees, interactivity is a two way communication in the online platform, the concept of interactivity has changed the traditional view of broadcast to networking, and improves communication quality, which is in line with Alba et al., (1997, p. 38) comments on interactivity as a “continuous concept capturing the quality of two way communication between parties”, which is also in accordance with Voorveld et al. (2013) views on the opportunities created by web interactivity in communicating the real time offers and content selected for effective communication.

Interactivity emerged as a common statement amongst interviewees, interactivity is the components that differentiates traditional media from online media by two-way communication, which aligns with the view of Yoo, Lee, and Park's (2010) assertion on website interactivity as key for brand's success. The two-way communication leads to customer's memorable experience and interactivity in establishing a strong bond with brand and customers (Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan, & McDonald, 2005). This interactive platform also gave opportunity for the organisation to clear the queries online and to maintain cordial relationship. The following quotations indicate the interviewee views on interactivity;

“We have a fascinating opportunity with the Web. as it is one-to-one communication it can be kind of very personal, and it's also interactive, and it's also private time with the person so it differs.” (R3)

“... a very scarce, excellent Web sites have got the right choice, in terms of it’s an interactive experience, feeling presence. You get the logic that there are other people included in this Experience.” (R6)

Most of the interactivity was based on influencing, interacting and social media. The more interactivity with customers had a positive impact for the organisation.

4.6.4 E- Brand Experience

The E-brand experience consists of customer interaction with the brand in the virtual space. The organisations make use of their best efforts to create positive customer experience and consistency in providing information, which supports the statement by Griffiths (2001, p. 401) that on the “... net you have to orchestrate everything you do to deliver a highly differentiated and consistent positive experience”.

The online experiences are unique to the customer, which can lead to positive results, and which can be communicated through referrals and word of mouth. The online brand experience is identified from the study as the successful connection between the organisation and the customer, which align with the views of Mitchell (2001) as “little things” – or “moments of truth”, which transform the understanding of brands and emergence of the brand is the summation of real-life interactions between customer and company.

The marketers monitor all the interactions to provide a positive experience for the customers. The positive online experience is created by the organisation, which can grasp the audience. Such organisations have a clear set of values of communication. The relationship between the brand and the online experience were explored in the interviews and views demonstrated in the following quotations;

“we keep monitoring the process often and any impact on how people perceive the brand.” (R3, p. 2)

“it is the understanding and analysing of the audience and understanding of what the brand stands for We should be able to deliver good online experience.” (R6, p. 3)

4.6.5 Online Positioning

Online positioning is conveyed by many of the organisations, the online positioning is a major factor which helps customers to identify the best hospitality sector based on the online star rating and reviews provided by the customers. Two organisations stated they position the brand by identifying direct competitors, understanding the competitors brand positioning and by comparing the uniqueness of the brand. The online rating and reviews make the online brand successful, which is according to the view of Pham and Muthukrishnan, (2002) on customers brand preference that impact to select a precise brand over competitors' brands.

The following quotations demonstrate the interviewees views on the positioning;

“... we want to position in 4 star rating, currently we have 3 star rating and working to move to 4 star rating in future.” (R5)

“... to develop good data base and conduct email marketing using tools like campaign monitor.....“I make constant visit to various website including competitors and try to make sure we are updated and attractive.” (R8)

4.6.6 Consistency

The consistency is a success factor of e-brand, the organisations make efforts to be updated and try to be updated with various technology tools and offers in achieving brand success. The consistencies and updates are noted and evaluated by the customers, which is in line with

the view of Lanseng et al. (2012), who states consistency influences the assessment of customers. The organisation has separate personnel who look after the constant updates, follow ups and clearing online queries. This is also in line with views of Fuchs and Diamantopoulos, (2010) consistencies and updates results in increased customer loyalty and attracts potential customers, which can lead to increased revenue (Porter, 1996).

The interviewees demonstrated the view of e-brand consistency within the organisations, which are supported by the following quotes;

“... we are active in all social media networks, we make regular updates or else we may loose prospective customers.” (R2)

“I along with my team work continuously for the achievement of success and make vision come true in our day today functioning and in long term success.” (R8)

4.6.7 The Offline Factors

The offline factors like brand name is found to have less impact on creating the online brand success, unlike the large organisation brand names, according to the view of Kent and Allen (1994), on advantage of prominent brand name significance in online market space. The brand name helps customers in reduced search cost, and cognitive effort while making decisions (Lands & Posner, 1987). According to the respondents the brand name has less importance in choosing a website and distinguishing the factors which the customers are looking for (Eid et al, 2011). According to two respondents, the customers mainly search through the well-known third-party websites where they are directed towards the hospitality home page based on their preferred amenities.

4.6.8 Word of Mouth

The word of mouth is recognised as an influential resource of information transmission. Word of mouth is also considered as an effective source with limited social contact boundaries, which is in accordance with, the views of Anderson & Salisbury (2003) that personal conversations and informal exchange of information with the acquaintances not only influence consumers choice, and their expectations. It is significant that WOM is beneficial as it provides quick information with substantial credibility (Barbett & Wallace, 2009, p. 36). The online brands create more opportunity for openness and involvement in the digital age. The various social media sites and forums are the key points to express the opinions. Henning et al. (2004,P:38-52), refer to this as “Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), where the communication refers to any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”. The marketers of the organisation are aware of the online customers and they are keen on discovering what people think of the brand and the companies try to convey in favour of customers, which is according to the view of Lindstorm (2006), as brand communication should be from the customer point of view apart from the marketing department.

4.7 Findings RQ3. What are the challenges of E-branding within the SMEs?

There are many key challenges faced by the SMEs considering the size, nature, competitors, technical and financial aspects.

One of the key challenges identified are on the design of E-brand management in the virtual environment combining the social media, e-reputation, web search perspective and online travel agents. Many of the SMEs do not have a clear idea on positioning the E-brand management in the virtual space without any disarray. This subsists in the e-tourism domain that is reachable through search engines (Xiang et al., 2008)

Some SMEs do struggle during holiday seasons due to multiple bookings and unavailability of services. The quote below demonstrate the confusion caused during the holiday seasons;

“... the overlapping of booking is a challenges faced by the hospitality sector, the promotions and bookings are done by various third-party websites and during peak time there are overlapping chances.” (R6)

Some of the official websites of the hospitality sector do not have the precise content and convincing information on brand and organisation, whereas the information on the brand, organisation and its services are presented as a written social media post by consumers with emotional elements (Inversini et al., 2009).

The quote below demonstrate the management views on the online content and comment;

“...some people are very much confused after going through our site they call for many enquiries after reading our website.....we help them manage successfully.” (R6)

“The positive reviews are very helpful for us, many people read the comments than visiting website and make the decision of booking our service.” (R9)

The SME many times fail to understand the e-brand space, and on utilising the online opportunities, they do not make use of the e-brand space to the maximum. They reason for not using internet technology as a communication tool between the organisation and the customer interface are due to technology anxiety and fear of inferiority in competing with large organisations in the same geographical location. E-brand platform carry out various differences in networking and combined operations of organisations and customers, this disparity is a challenge to SME organisation in developing their online reputation. The organisation make use of web offers and promise with sequential characteristics of the services provided by the organisation, where as the customers show more tendency on considering, comparing and commenting on the promised and offered services.

The e-branding in the online space is more complex oriented, the virtual platform should be more transparent, interactive and dynamic, this complexity is applicable only to the SMEs compared to the large organisations and large tourism websites (Buhalis et al., 2012). The SMEs try to be consistent with the customers and try to look ahead in carrying out the e-branding successfully.

The quotes below demonstrate the views of the owner-managers on the e-branding complexities experienced;

“...most of large companies have separate departments to look after the marketing and sales.” (R4)

“... since the big organisations their budget is bigger for marketing and staff is training.... large organisations have different branches and chains so they can be managed easily.” (R5)

4.7.1 Budgetary Restrictions

Out of the ten interviewed organisations, four of the interviewees responded stating budget as one of the challenges faced for online branding. According to one interviewee, small organisations have a limited budget compared to large organisations (Wong & Merrilees, 2005). The other respondents stated they lack finance for intense promotion and outdoor campaigns. The budgetary constraints are the biggest challenge for intense competition, where a large budget is needed for third party promotion and Google AdWords.

The quotations below state the respondents view on the budgetary limitation;

“Challenges are budgets compared to large organisations and competitors, as there are many players in the market today.” (R1, p. 4)

... “primary challenges are the budgetary constraints and competitors, the competitors may have lot of budgets in advertising and promotion, secondly bad reviews and unhappy customers are a big challenge and bad review on travellers website cannot be altered by us, feedbacks can affect the prospect leads.” (R8, p. 5)

Most of the SME financing are through bank loans, issued after credit guarantees and collaterals (Park, 2006). Three of the interviewees stated, the insufficient collaterals adversely affected the financial needs of the SMEs (Griffiths, 2003). This do not apply to other organisations, which is also in line with Thampy (2010), who mentioned the major bottle neck towards the growth of SMEs in India are due to the lack of financing ability.

4.7.2 Technological Constraints

Technology constraints is the biggest challenge faced by five of the organisations from the ten interviewed organisations. The main technology challenges included skilled people, resources and online updates (Ibeh et al., 2005). Two of the organisations reported they lack technical expertise which is the biggest challenge of the organisation, leading to less focus compared to big organisations

The following quotes demonstrate the views of the respondents on the technological challenges faced;

“...we lack talented people compared to large organisations, so we may lack in technology and professionalism compared to large organisations.” (R1, p, 4)

“... focus is a big challenge, there are so many channels and media available, so we need to know which is more effective and efficient media that are available to invest our time.” (R2, p. 4)

The SMEs are more reluctant to invest in the new technology, dissuaded by the associated risks in new investment, process change and digital disruption in the business functions (Ziff Davies, 2012). The e-CRM was hardly adopted by certain SMEs, instead they adopt their own website for marketing purposes by deterring the adoption of CRM software. The adoption of e-CRM was initially identified as “... an integrated sales, marketing and service strategy which is dependent on the co-ordinated enterprise-based actions.” (Kalkota & Robinson, 2001, p. 172). The challenges associated with website contents are in establishing a good balance with the editorial content (Swatman, Krueger & van der Beek, 2006; Fetscherin & Knolmayer, 2004).

4.7.3 Professionalism

Professionalism among the employees is a challenge faced by the organisation, incongruity between strategy and adopted technology in the SMEs mismatch at times causes assignment failure, the wrong choices made by the employees and the employee capabilities are also challenging factors for the SMEs. The technical and management skills control the total social and financial capital generated for the SMEs. Inadequate human capital has been found to deter the capability of SMEs (Longenecker, Petty, Moore, & Palich, 2006; Tusubira & Nabeta, 2013). The technical and management skills control the total of social and financial capital generated for the SMEs. Inadequate human capital is found to deter the capability of SMEs (Longenecker, Petty, Moore, & Palich, 2006), which is in line with Tusubira & Nabeta, (2013), view on human capital as excellent generators of management skills. The young graduates and diploma holders do not find SMEs as a good place to work with, this reduces the number of professional people within the organisation.

The below quote refers to the view of respondents on the professional expertise in the organisation,

“We lack professional people, we recruit the diploma holders through and train them, so we are lacking people... ..they also change jobs often which is also a challenge.”

(R6, p. 3)

4.7.4 Time Limitation and Competitors

Time constraints were specified by one of the organisation (Hoa, 2012), according to the interviewee,

“... challenges are budgets compared to large organisations and competitors, as there are many players in the market today, there are so many competitors in the market, so

they also form a biggest challenge for us, we at times loose our customer also.” (R1, p. 4)

More time is required to integrate brand communications through various channels along value propositions as search keys, and the opportunity for developing brand engagement (Rowley, 2004), this helps people in having more online experience, and are more likely to search alternate source of information (Ward and Lee, 2000).

4.7.5 Online Reviews

Online reviews are the challenge faced by four of the organisations, they affirm the effect of adverse reviews and comments in the traveller website, which is unalterable. The following quotes demonstrate views of the respondents;

“... customer expectations and loyalty are one of the challenges.... they make negative remarks or comments about our service in website.” (R4, p. 5)

“... the adverse online reviews on third party website is a challenge we face, but we try to overcome by doing the best as possible to avoid such comments.” (R7, p. 4)

There are new difficulties in arising anonymity in communication, adverse comments, negative reviews which deny the possibility of customer attraction. The digitalisation of WOM challenges the survival of geographical markets (Hennig, 2004), and the capability to conduct local marketing strategies.

4.7.6 Risks in Online Branding

The overlapping of bookings is a risk involving this sector. The organisations are involved in risk when multiple bookings occur during festival seasons and holidays. The overlapping

happens between the booking through websites, OTAs and the manual booking. This risk is due to the technical updates which are not operating '24x7' like in large organisations.

Other organisational risks are the various online transactions and interactivity within the organisation, new government policies like GST also cause risk for the organisation. 'GST is an Indirect Tax which replaced many Indirect Taxes in India. The Goods and Service Tax Act was passed in the Parliament on 29th March 2017. The Act was effective on 1st July 2017; Goods & Services Tax Law in India is a comprehensive, multi-stage, destination-based tax that is levied on every value addition' (GST India, 2018).

Finance is a risk as the small organisations are not able to benefit from loans as quick as large organisations. The following quotes highlight the views of the interviewees;

"They are the electronic processing of transactions and system reliability and some privacy issues, regulatory and taxation are the policies especially the GST." (R2, p. 4)

"If the performance is not good, initially the reviews will be bad and it will be difficult to recover from the negative reviews need to be care and cautious (R5, p. 4)

"The negative comments are risks were which cannot be altered by us, can turn down some prospective customers from booking. The poor feedback can affect the rating and the visibility in the google searches. If there happens more negative feedback or very low rating the third party website can deny our advertising." (R8, p. 5)

4.8 Conclusion

The chapter presented the findings reflecting the online brand management process within the sampled SMEs, this chapter adopted an advanced level of abstraction to refine research to online brand building. The chapter identified the findings following the analysis of the data collected from the Owner-managers of the ten SME hospitality sectors. The chapter identified

the online brand management benefits within the SMEs and how the brand is managed by means of the strategic management of the organisation.

The online brand success component was identified in the study and the managements of the components of the study are discussed following the challenges faced by the organisation and how to overcome the challenges faced by the SMEs. The chapter represents the categorisation for the online brand management within the SMEs and contributes to the process-based knowledge within the online medium of brand management.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the contributions made by the study, “E-brand management in the SMEs, from strategic perspectives in the Indian SMEs”. The chapter includes the contributions made by the research, regarding e-branding in SMEs and SMEs in general, to the research knowledge, to the research methodology and to the e-branding practices within SMEs. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the research prior to proposed suggestion for further research.

The literatures reviewed in chapter two, identified the previous studies on SME E-brands were mainly focused on customer perspective, with similar other branding studies on online brand community (OBC), and social media community. The absence of past studies on E-brands, specifying the role of SMEs in brand management, directed this study to online brand management from the strategic perspective. The study was conducted in the hospitality SME sectors of Kerala; a southern state in India.

5.2 Summary of Research Findings

The study examined the E-brands in SMEs by addressing the main research question, How E-brand is managed in the SMEs? The research objectives of the study are discussed below.

The first research objective was to explore the context of e-brand management in the SMEs from the strategic perspective and this research indicates the E-brand practices within SMEs are in an emergent phase. Within the locations specified, both SME branding and E-branding are influenced by the Owner-managers, subject to resource constraints.

The qualitative study carried out in ten SMEs facilitated understanding of brand management through online media. The qualitative study consisted of semi structured interviews with

Owner-managers at an allotted time range of 45 to 60 minutes. The interview was carried with the Owner-managers of the hospitality sector as the aim of the study was to identify the perspectives and role of strategic E-brand management.

The findings from the study reinforce the extant research which indicates brand relevance in the SME context. The brand relevance is dependent on the nature, size and geographical location of the hospitality sector. The study identifies two strategic approaches, they are; the strategic internal focused approach and strategic image focused approach within the SMEs.

The SMEs in the strategic internal focus, treats brands in a simple and informal way with the brand elements constrained to the logos, visual images and online advertisements. The organisation in strategic image focus, shows highest brand relevance with increased brand orientation and market orientation. The branding relevance in the organisations is influenced by the owner-managers determination and dedication. The brand orientation practices within the SMEs provide motivation for owner-managers to develop a strong brand management capability supported by creativity.

The role of the Owner-managers is not identified as unique across the SMEs of same sector. The hospitality sector owner-managers attitude on branding depends on their experience in business operations and resources, and the initial stage of operations tend to show less affinity on branding and online presence. The start-up SMEs concentrated on marketing activities and increased return on investment.

The research findings from the study indicated an integrated approach of branding practice within the SMEs (Wong & Merrilees, 2005). The strategic internal approach emphasizes focus on the day to day functioning of the sector. The organisations with strategic image focussed, indicates the intense role played by the Owner-managers in developing the SME brand by demonstrating the skills and capabilities within the organisations. The strategic

image focused approach is more dependent on the market orientation. The internal communication within the organisation is important in developing the online presence. The brand consistency and the brand enabling activities are important to assure the organisations success. The strategic image focussed approach aims to achieve positive image among customers. In the strategic image focused management type the owners-managers are highly brand oriented and market oriented. The online brand management is carried out through the multiple channels through registered website, online travel agents and social media, although it should be noted that the traditional method of communication still prevails in the SMEs. The online branding is found to create a greater impact among the customers and organisation due to quick reachability and reduced cost.

The online brand communication is essential to make the employees understand the branding practices and to convey brand promotion. The employees were treated as strategic assets within the organisation. The SMEs try to improve their capability by adopting diverse online techniques and tools to be outstanding in the market. The capability of the organisation was identified as the ability to manage the organisation successfully with limited resources like employees, digital opportunities and to take advantage over competitors (Teece et al., 1997, pp. 509-513). Training programs and skill development programs are conducted within organisation to enrich employee capability. The professional and interpersonal training for staff are considered as an adequate requirement for organisation success. The training for staff is essential as the customers tend to report on staff behaviour and communication in the online reviews, which can adversely impact the organisation. The owner-managers decision making is based on the digital tools, online branding decisions and the customer focussed decisions. The focus of the Owner-managers is on the day to day task in providing quality services to the customers.

Online brand restructures provide numerous opportunities for attracting customers. It is the project an organisation implements in creating a long-term impact. It helps in promoting the brand across several platforms and facilitates personalised communications with potential customers, through online channels like online advertisement, chat sites and social media; which strikes a balance between consistency, by being true to the brand. The customers are the foremost asset for the organisation, and it is important to involve customers in brand conversation; a significant means to drive customer engagement. The customer target campaign is also beneficial to reach out to potential audience which drives lead quantity and conversion. As such the digital platforms are identified as the influential pillars for lead generation.

The social media platform also engages with the customers through the voice of the brand and provides the mechanism to be a totem for brand building and to reach for highly targeted campaigns, with value addition to the brand. The travel and tourism sectors are experience-based activities (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008), which need to be communicated often. The communities, blogs, websites, travel reviews and social media offer the medium of information sharing among other users (Arsal et al., 2008). The websites increasingly gained popularity in online travellers' use of technology. The content management in the online setting is very significant in creating and delivering digital content to a potential target group in a suitable format. The value of the contents emanates subsequently from the content relevance.

The second research objective of the study was to understand, how the online branding components were managed in the Indian SMEs. The Digital branding medium has developed a pivotal role as an information sharing tool. In the digital space there is no dearth of information and customers have easy access. The sales and marketing personnel have evolved to encompass the branding elements to add value through building trust and earn

credibility in the long-term functioning. The factors affecting the e-brand components are online and offline factors. The critical success factors identified in online branding are trust, which is established through a combination of familiarity, security and word of mouth (Hoffman et al, 1999). The increase web interactivity represents an interactive way of many to many communications platforms, focused on the concept of user control and developing customised services; which are essential for the creation of online brands (de Chernatony&Christodoulides 2004). The consistency is one of the factor identified which is managed through continuous team work for achieving success and make vision come true by brand positioning which helps the customers to recognise the best organisation through online information search. The e-customer experience in the virtual environment is an important factor identified to have a better customer online interaction.

The offline factors consisted of the e-word of mouth which is considered as an effective source with limited social contact boundaries (Anderson & Salisbury, 2003) on personal conversations and informal exchange of information with the acquaintances. It is significant that WOM is helpful as it gives quick information with substantial credibility (Barbett and Wallace, 2009, p. 36).

The final objective of the research study was to identify the challenges within the SMEs in e-brand management- The challenges identified in the study are from two aspects; they are the SME challenges and the online challenges. The SME challenges are identified as budgetary challenges, technological constraints and competitors. The budget restrictions identified within the SMEs are the timely availability of the finance, loans from banks and the limited capital investment. The technology constraints are the expertise within the organisation to tackle various technology tools and provide updates. The competitors are considered as the challenge as the competitors may have more financial investment and technology tools and they are able to make huge investment in advertisement and promotion.

The challenges associated with E-branding are the online negative reviews and the low star rating provided by the customers. The negative reviews and ratings provided by the customers are in the third-party web domain, which is unalterable by the individual organisations. The other challenges identified are anonymity in communicators, out of context messages and digitalisation of WOM challenges (Hennig, 2004).

The results from the research objectives having been discussed; the subsequent section mentions the contributions of the study.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

The analysis of the e-branding in the SMES undertaken in this research contributes to the E-brand management theory. The first finding contributes to the evolution of E-branding knowledge in the SMEs. Second findings contribute to the positioning of the E-brand within in the SME Sector and third finding contributes to the location of the study.

5.3.1 Evolution of E-branding Knowledge

Primarily, drawing on the data collection in this research study, the analysis presented indicated that E-branding in SMEs is under-reported in research literature. Specifically, this research adds to knowledge about e-branding in SMEs. Despite the lack of acknowledgement of SME's significance to the economy, the GDP of India is expected to reach 8.5%, with the nation projected to be a USD 5 trillion economy by 2025 (Dept. of Economic affairs, Ministry of Finance Fact Book, 2012).

However, some studies have recognised branding in the SME context is generally addressed from the perspective of customers. Therefore, the second contribution of the research is associated with e-branding practices that include the perspective of Owner-managers. The available studies shows the e-brands are based on online based community and social media

community. The research has examined branding and e-branding in SMEs from perspectives of Owners/Managers and subsequently develops a broader picture of the multidimensional SME E-branding process involved. The adoption of a wider scope and the preliminary conceptual model of E-brand contribute to the process based new theory of SME E-brand management.

Second, the findings build on past studies that have identified the branding in the SMEs are influenced by the role of Owners/founder (Krake, 2005). The study indicates that the passion, initiative and influence of the Owners/managers are not uniform across the SMEs but differs across the SME brand management types. In the strategic image focus, Owners/managers are more committed to the brand management and shows strong brand orientation and brand management capability, where in the strategic internal focus, the owner/managers show less brand orientation and commitment towards the branding activities, they only have a meagre organisation website, and concentrate on daily operations and attract customer by the traditional means, they think the online brand presence is complicated and could be beyond their control.

The previous study on the SME owners have identified the owners awareness of internal capabilities of the organisation in the SME growth (Spence and Essossi, 2010), this was indicated by some of the Owner/managers, while some owner/managers shows the pursuit of growth to internal capabilities without giving much importance to the capabilities.

The study facilitates in the understanding of value positioning in the SME brands, the findings agree with past findings considering the use of functional, symbolic and emotional values in positioning the SME brand (Mowle & Merrilees, 2005). Concurrently, the study extends this knowledge by indicating the combination of these three values are adopted in SME brand positioning and are dependent on the brand approach of the organisation.

The study develops the brand knowledge by demonstrating the internal and external brand building which occurs within the SMEs, which varies from the brand building process of large organisation. The brand building in large organisation is a formal procedure (Urde, 2003; Balmer et al., 2012). Whereas, this study shows that the SME brand building is less formal. These differences in brand building are due to the small size, resource constraints and where the owner/managers have the control over the brand strategy. Despite the size of the organisation the high performing small organisation shows an integral brand approach and they have the brand practices that are similar to large organisations. The strategic image driven approach and strategic internal approach management type offer the description of increased brand relevance in highly performing SMEs approximates that of large organisations.

5.3.2 Contribution to Geographical Location

The previous study by McCann and Folta (2008) has emphasised the important role of the geographic clusters for the research study. The research study contributes to the understanding of E-brand management in the SMEs which highlights the study location as a significant factor in the geographical context of India. The study based on the location is generalizable across geographical context as the study location Kerala, was an attractive tourist spot, capable of transforming itself into an eye-opening and a memorable niche holiday spot in India, which had was promoted through tourism promotion campaigns with the tag line “Kerala-Gods own Country” (Dhanesh, 2010, p. 47; Harish, 2010, p. 160) .

The location being a host to 660,000 foreign tourists (Harish, 2010, p. 160; Kant, 2009), it creates splendid opportunities for hospitality sectors in this geographical cluster irrespective of the size. The model of E-brand management within this particular location could not be identified from the previous studies. The study based in the geographical context is a

“strategic window of opportunity” which transformed the comparative advantages and potentials of the state with the prevailing resources into competitive advantage (Prideaux et al., 2014, p. 56).

5.4 Methodological Contributions

The methodological contributions were to employ the coherent conceptual model to analyse the E-brand management practices of SMEs, the conceptual framework leads to the research strategy for the study, data collection and data analysis. The methodological contribution was important as little preceding studies were identified. The conceptual model employed before data collection was a novel contribution to qualitative interview approach with the e-branding domain, where the past studies had a narrow focus on particular aspects of the SME domain. The research methodology contributes to the theory of holistic process-based model of SME E-brand management.

5.5 Managerial Implications

The SME brand building focused on internal and external aspects within the organisation, are managed simultaneously by the owner-managers. The Owner-managers do not consider brand building as separate entities, despite the increased benefits on managing the brands separately. There should be an increased clarity among the Owner-managers in articulating the values as this can lead to reputation.

The owner-managers are the main influencers of values, strategy, decisions within the hospitality sector. The owner-managers need to recognise the skills and personal values in addressing the significant values to inherit core values and purpose for the effective functioning of SMEs in the long run.

The Online brand management practices are mainly conducted with the help of external consultants and third party websites. The owner-managers should develop expertise in knowing the entire branding processes through online mechanisms, which can assist in increased control over the online media and can also reduce the expenditure provided to external consultants.

5.5.1 Online Reputation:

The past studies of Fourier and Avery(2011) suggested the future of brand management are based on systematic brand protection and relatively passive reputation management than in active brand building.

The SMEs should plan to adopt a proactive strategy, where the knowledge of staff can effectively manage e-brand management, However to be successful the SMEs must be able to understand with blog and posts and develop authentic engagement (Fournier and Avery,2011). The SMEs should adopt an e-brand strategy as a part of daily process with associated risks and appoint employees to use formal rules and systems which can be used in responding to social media posts and clearing queries.

5.5.2 E-WOM Implication

The recent studies by Dekay (2012) have identified that many organisations do not respond to negative social media comments, and they just delete them. The organisations that respond to negative comments can explicitly transform the comments into useful opportunities in developing trust. The poor management of negative situations can create further negative e-WOM social media comments among the customers. The Owner-managers should develop suitable responsive strategies to respond to negative word of mouth comments (Henning-

Thurau et al., 2010), or the results of negative WOM comments which cause negative impacts on brand image and profitability.

The social media platform should be employed efficiently to share the information and to link the possibility of attracting customers and sharing information on all the social media sites.

This study identifies the customers online brand identification activities which create trust and maintain customer trust. The customers trust on the online brand facilitates in identifying strengths and opportunities for developing customer relationships. This customers trust and customer relationship can be used as an online media content planning tool to evaluate and establish strong competitive positioning in identifying and developing competitiveness. Adopting a strategic plan in developing customer trust and maintaining continual trust can assist in better understanding of the customer.

5.6 Limitations for the Study

The limitations stated here are the potential improvements to the process,

First, the qualitative research was conducted in ten SMEs in Kerala, a southern Indian state, which do not claim to be a representative of wider population of SMEs. Moreover the data collected from the face to face semi structured interview conducted in SMEs of different size, capital and amenities.

The limitation was the inability in generalising the findings of the study to the population of SMEs due to the small sample size compared to large represented samples adopted in the quantitative studies. Nevertheless, this limitation is generally attributed to the qualitative data research.

The second limitation is based on the research conducted on a specific industry and in a particular geographic location. Most of the SMEs used to study was highly or moderately

performing SMES in terms of profitability and returns, so the study could not include the weaker SMEs in the study.

By undertaking the qualitative research, the study did not seek broad generalisations, and indeed sought to identify in context on how e-branding is managed in the SMEs. The interpretivist approach of the study enabled to develop an understanding of how e-branding is undertaken in particular contexts. The various ideas for future research are aroused during the study and are outline in the following section.

5.7 Recommendations for Future Study

The research directions proposed for the future are, primarily to verify the veracity of e-brand management in different geographic cluster and industrial cluster. The case study research could be carried out in understanding the scenarios within the SMEs. The repetition of the research in various contexts can improve the SME E-brand management theory, with enhancing increased opportunities for attaining generalisability of the theory and data triangulation (Hussey & Hussey,1997).

The future research could involve study which tracks the SMEs over a period of time from the start-up to growth state to matured state, to develop more in-depth and clearer understanding of the brand management practices. The study can also identify the novel ways to identify a unique positioning of brand within complex global business markets. The study within the SMEs can also identify the decision-making complexity of the Owner-managers and biases in the SMEs, which are the managerial challenges due to judgment biases.

The scope of the research can be extended to develop understanding of SME brand management by including the employees, who manage the sales force and the distribution channels within the SMEs.

5.8 Concluding Statement

The research study has examined the management and conceptualisations of E-branding in SMEs, through an interpretive lens. The data generated from the research identified the E-brand management within the SMEs is the best way to be a successful organisation in terms of perceived awareness and reputation, despite the SMEs being the contributor to country's GDP and biggest employment creator. Hence the study on E-brand management within the SMEs has proven to be a justifiable area of study rooted in theoretical and practical grounds.

The data collected and analysed, identify the new E-SME brand management types which links the strategic brand management types. The new identified theory on E-brand management facilitates in the understanding of E-brand management in the SMEs. The study identifies how E-brand can be successful within the organisation by managing the online components within the SMEs and how they can overcome the various challenges in E-branding within the SMEs.

The study acknowledges the limitations and challenges which are linked in developing a new theory. Moreover, the study contributed to the E-brand management practices within the SMEs, which are scant. Subsequently, the study indicates the suggestions from past research and literature review through diverse range of hitherto unconsidered online brands. To conclude this study can be a stimulus for future research studies which can provide additional contributions to the available knowledge base on SME brand management in the online context.

References:

- Aaker, D. A. (1996). Measuring brand equity across products and markets. *California management review*, 38(3), 27-32
- Aaker, D. A., & Biel, A. L. (2013). *Brand equity & advertising: advertising's role in building strong brands*. Psychology Press, 67-79
- Abimbola, T. (2001). Branding as a competitive strategy for demand management in SMEs. *Journal of research in marketing and entrepreneurship*, 3(2), 97-106.
- Abdullah, D., Jayaraman, K., & Kamal, S. B. M. (2016). A conceptual model of interactive hotel website: The role of perceived website interactivity and customer perceived value toward website revisit intention. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 37, 170-175.
- Adam, N. R., Shafiq, B., & Staffin, R. (2012). Spatial computing and social media in the context of disaster management. *IEEE Intelligent Systems*, 27(6), 90-96.
- Agarwal, S., Krishna Erramilli, M., & Dev, C. S. (2003). Market orientation and performance in service firms: role of innovation. *Journal of services marketing*, 17(1), 68-82.
- Agostini, L., Filippini, R., & Nosella, A. (2015). Brand-building efforts and their association with SME sales performance. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 53, 161-173.
- Aldrich, H. E., & Cliff, J. E. (2003). The pervasive effects of family on entrepreneurship: Toward a family embeddedness perspective. *Journal of business venturing*, 18(5), 573-596.
- Anarnkaporn, A. (2007). Branding as a competitive advantage for SMEs. *RU. International Journal*, 1(1), 25-36.
- Anker, T. B., Kappel, K., Eadie, D., & Sandøe, P. (2012). Fuzzy promises: explicative definitions of brand promise delivery. *Marketing Theory*, 12(3), 267-287.

- A. Pereira Correia, P., García Medina, I., Fabiola González Romo, Z., & S. Contreras-Espinosa, R. (2014). The importance of Facebook as an online social networking tool for companies. *International Journal of Accounting & Information Management*, 22(4), 295-320.
- Arthur Rooney, J. (1995). Branding: a trend for today and tomorrow. *Journal of product & brand management*, 4(4), 48-55.
- Atanassova, I., & Clark, L. (2015). Social media practices in SME marketing activities: A theoretical framework and research agenda. *Journal of customer behaviour*, 14(2), 163-183.
- Aydin, S., & Özer, G. (2005). The analysis of antecedents of customer loyalty in the Turkish mobile telecommunication market. *European Journal of marketing*, 39(7/8), 910-925.
- Badoc, M. (2001). *O Marketing in the Start-Ups*, Bertrand Editor: Lisboa.
- Baer, M. (2012). Putting creativity to work: The implementation of creative ideas in organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(5), 1102-1119.
- Balmer, J. M., & Thomson, I. (2009). The shared management and ownership of corporate brands: the case of Hilton. *Journal of General Management*, 34(4), 15-37.
- Banerjee, S. B., Iyer, E. S., & Kashyap, R. K. (2003). Corporate environmentalism: Antecedents and influence of industry type. *Journal of marketing*, 67(2), 106-122.
- Barker, V., & Ota, H. (2011). Mixi diary versus Facebook photos: Social networking site use among Japanese and Caucasian American females. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 40(1), 39-63.
- Barwise, P., & Meehan, S. (2010). Is Your Company As Customer-Focused As You Think. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 51(3), 63.

Bashir, M., Afzal, M., & Azeem, M. (2008). Vol.IV No.1 pp35-45, Available at: <http://www.pjsor.com/index.php/pjsor/article/viewFile/59/38scientific> (Oct 2013)

Baumgarth, C., Merrilees, B., & Urde, M. (2013). Brand orientation: Past, present, and future, 973-980.

Beverland, M., Lindgreen, A., Napoli, J., Kotler, P., & Pfoertsch, W. (2007). Being known or being one of many: the need for brand management for business-to-business (B2B) companies. *Journal of business & industrial marketing*, 357-362.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1971). *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books. 220-230

Bhat, S., & Reddy, S. K. (1998). Symbolic and functional positioning of brands. *Journal of consumer marketing*, 15(1), 32-43.

Bianchi, M. (2010). Credit constraints, entrepreneurial talent, and economic development. *Small business economics*, 34(1), 93.

Bennett, S., Maton, K., & Kervin, L. (2008). The 'digital natives' debate: A critical review of the evidence. *British journal of educational technology*, 39(5), 775-786.

Boohene, R., Sheridan, A., & Kotey, B. (2008). Gender, personal values, strategies and small business performance: A Ghanaian case study. *Equal Opportunities International*, 27(3), 237-257.

Berthon, P., Ewing, M. T., & Napoli, J. (2008). Brand management in small to medium-sized enterprises. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 46(1), 27-45.

Berger, H., Dittenbach, M., Merkl, D., Bogdanovych, A., Simoff, S., & Sierra, C. (2007). Opening new dimensions for e-tourism. *Virtual Reality*, 11(2-3), 75-87.

Berger, P. Luckmann (1971) *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge.*

Bergman, M. M., & Coxon, A. P. (2005). The quality in qualitative methods. In *Forum: qualitative social research= Forum qualitative Sozialforschung: FQS* (Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. Art-34). 4-6

Bloomstein, M. (2012). *Content strategy at work: real-world stories to strengthen every interactive project.* Elsevier.

Boyle, E. (2003). A study of Entrepreneurial brand building in the manufacturing sector in the UK. *Journal of product and brand management*, 12(2/3), 79-93

Brannan, M. J., Parsons, E., & Priola, V. (2011). 11. Placing branding within organization theory. *Branded lives: The production and consumption of meaning at work*, 185.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Bresciani, S., & Eppler, M. J. (2010). Brand new ventures? Insights on start-ups' branding practices. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 19(5), 356-366.

Bruhn, M., Schoenmüller, V., Schäfer, D., & Heinrich, D. (2012). Brand authenticity: Towards a deeper understanding of its conceptualization and measurement. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 40.

Bryant, C. A., McCormack Brown, K. R., McDermott, R. J., Forthofer, M. S., Bumpus, E. C., Calkins, S. A., & Zapata, L. B. (2007). Community-based prevention marketing: organizing a community for health behavior intervention. *Health Promotion Practice*, 8(2), 154-163.

Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2015). *Business Research Methods* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. 518-524

Budac, C., & Baltador, L. A. (2014). Brand communication challenges in getting young customer engagement. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, *16*, 521-525.

Burmann, C., Zeplin, S., & Riley, N. (2009). Key determinants of internal brand management success: An exploratory empirical analysis. *Journal of brand management*, *16*(4), 264-284.

Buhalis, D., & Licata, M. C. (2002). The future e-Tourism intermediaries. *Tourism management*, *23*(3), 207-220.

Buhalis, D., & O'Connor, P. (2005). Information communication technology revolutionizing tourism. *Tourism recreation research*, *30*(3), 7-16.

Bulut, Z. A., Kökalan Çımrin, F., & Doğan, O. (2017). Gender, generation and sustainable consumption: Exploring the behaviour of consumers from Izmir, Turkey. *International journal of consumer studies*, *41*(6), 597-604.

Burr, V. (2003) *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.20-35

Carrete, L., Castaño, R., Felix, R., Centeno, E., & González, E. (2012). Green consumer behavior in an emerging economy: confusion, credibility, and compatibility. *Journal of consumer marketing*, *29*(7), 470-481.

Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C., & Gronhaug, K. (2001). *Qualitative marketing research*. Sage.

Cassell, C.M. & Symon, G. (2006) *Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*.London: Sage

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

Centeno, M. A., & Cohen, J. N. (2013). *Global capitalism: A sociological perspective*. John Wiley & Sons.38-64

Chaffey, D., Ellis-Chadwick, F., Mayer, R., & Johnston, K. (2009). *Internet marketing: strategy, implementation and practice*. Pearson Education.3-10

Chelariu, C., & Osmonbekov, T. (2014). Communication technology in international business-to-business relationships. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 29(1), 24-33.

Christodoulides, G., Cadogan, J., Veloutsou, C., & de Chernatony, L. (2012). Revisiting brand equity: evidence from three European countries.

Chiu, C. M., Hsu, M. H., & Wang, E. T. (2006). Understanding knowledge sharing in virtual communities: An integration of social capital and social cognitive theories. *Decision support systems*, 42(3), 1872-1888.

Clauser, R. C. (2001). Offline rules, online tools. *Journal of Brand Management*, 8(4), 270-287.

Cohen, L., & Manion, L. (2011). *Research methods in education (7th ed.)*. London: Croom Helm.

Collins, J., & Hussey, R. (2003). *Business research*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Collins JC Porras JI 1994 *Built to Last* London: Random House Business Books

Conceptual model of perceived customer value in e-commerce: A preliminary investigation. *Psychology & Marketing*, 20(4), 323-347.

- Corbetta, P. (2003). *Social research: Theory, methods and techniques*. Sage.9-25
- Corbin, J., Strauss, A. L., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research*. sage.
- Corstjens, M., & Umblijs, A. (2012). The power of evil: The damage of negative social media strongly outweigh positive contributions. *Journal of advertising research*, 52(4), 433-449.
- Coviello, N. E., Brodie, R. J., & Munro, H. J. (2000). An investigation of marketing practice by firm size. *Journal of business venturing*, 15(5-6), 523-545.
- Coviello, N. E., & Brodie, R. J. (2001). Contemporary marketing practices of consumer and business-to-business firms: how different are they. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 16(5), 382-400.
- Coyle, J. R., & Thorson, E. (2001). The effects of progressive levels of interactivity and vividness in web marketing sites. *Journal of advertising*, 30(3), 65-77.
- Coulter, K. S., Bruhn, M., Schoenmueller, V., & Schäfer, D. B. (2012). Are social media replacing traditional media in terms of brand equity creation?. *Management Research Review*.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). London: Sage,110-125
- Creswell, J. W. & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-131.
- Culkin, N., & Smith, D. (2000). An emotional business: a guide to understanding the motivations of small business decision takers. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 3(3), 145-157.

Cunliffe, A. L., & Karunanayake, G. (2013). Working Within Hyphen-Spaces in Ethnographic Research Implications for Research Identities and Practice. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(3), 364-392. doi: 10.1177/1094428113489353.

Davis, A., & Weinshenker, D. (2012). Digital storytelling and authoring identity. *Technology and identity: Research on the development and exploration of selves in a digital world*, 47-64.

Davies, D., & Dodd, J. (2002). Qualitative research and the question of rigor. *Qualitative health research*, 12(2), 279-289.

Davis, R., Piven, I., & Breazeale, M. (2014). Conceptualizing the brand in social media community: The five sources model. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, 21(4), 468-481.

Deacon, D., Pickering, M., Golding, P., & Murdock, G. (1999). *Researching communications: A practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis*. London: Arnold.

Denzin, N. K. (2000). Aesthetics and the practices of qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative inquiry*, 6(2), 256-265.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.

Deshpande, R. (1983). "Paradigms lost": On theory and method in research in marketing. *Journal of marketing*, 47(4), 101-110.

Dessart, L., Veloutsou, C., & Morgan-Thomas, A. (2015). Consumer engagement in online brand communities: a social media perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 24(1), 28-42.

Dhanesh, g. s. (2010). Kerala, God's Own Country. Public Relations Cases: International Perspectives, 40

Dick, B. (2003, May). What can action researchers learn from grounded theorists. In *Australian and New Zealand: ALARPM/SCIAR conference. Gold Coast.*

Donovan, R., & Henley, N. (2010). Principles and practice of social marketing: an international perspective. Cambridge University Press.

Dosi, G., Malerba, F., Ramello, G. B., & Silva, F. (2006). Information, appropriability, and the generation of innovative knowledge four decades after Arrow and Nelson: an introduction. *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 15(6), 891-901.

Doyle, M. W. (1998). Ways of war and peace realism, liberalism, and socialism.

Du Plessis, C. (2015). Academic guidelines for content marketing: research-based recommendations for better practice.

Easton, G. (2010). Critical realism in case study research. *Industrial marketing management*, 39(1), 118-128.

Easterby-Smith, M., Jackson, P. R., & Thorpe, R. (2012). Management Research (4th ed.). London: Sage.

Ebrahimian, L. D. (2003). Socio-economic development in Iran through information and communications technology. *The Middle East Journal*, 93-111.

Edelman, D. C. (2010). Branding in the digital age. *Harvard business review*, 88(12), 62-69.

Edmondson, A. C., & McManus, S. E. (2007). Methodological fit in management field research. *Academy of management review*, 32(4), 1246-1264.

Eren-Erdogmus, I., Cobanoglu, E., Yalcın, M., & Ghauri, P. N. (2010). Internationalization of emerging market firms: the case of Turkish retailers. *International Marketing Review*, 27(3), 316-337.

Fontana, A. & Frey, J. H. (2000). 'The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.)', *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fillis, I. (2007). A methodology for researching international entrepreneurship in SMEs: a challenge to the status quo. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 14(1), 118-135.

Fillis, I. (2000). Being creative at the marketing/entrepreneurship interface: lessons from the art industry. *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, 2(2), 125-137.

Fisher, D., & Smith, S. (2011). Cocreation is chaotic: What it means for marketing when no one has control. *Marketing theory*, 11(3), 325-350.

Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F., & Davidson, L. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian and New Zealand journal of psychiatry*, 36(6), 717-732.

Fournier, S., & Avery, J. (2011). The uninvited brand. *Business horizons*, 54(3), 193-207.

Fournier, S., & Lee, L. (2009). Getting brand communities right. *Harvard business review*, 87(4), 105-111.

Franco, M., de Fátima Santos, M., Ramalho, I., & Nunes, C. (2014). An exploratory study of entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs: The role of the founder-entrepreneur. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 21(2), 265-283.

Gandini, A. (2016). Digital work: Self-branding and social capital in the freelance knowledge economy. *Marketing theory*, 16(1), 123-141.

Gao, Q., & Feng, C. (2016). Branding with social media: User gratifications, usage patterns, and brand message content strategies. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 63, 868-890.

Gazzoli, G., Gon Kim, W., & Palakurthi, R. (2008). Online distribution strategies and competition: are the global hotel companies getting it right?. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(4), 375-387.

Ghauri, P., & Gronhaug, K. (2010). *Research Methods in Business Studies: A Practical Guide* (4th ed.). Harlow, England: Pearson Education Ltd.

Gebhardt, G. F., Carpenter, G. S., & Sherry Jr, J. F. (2006). Creating a market orientation: A longitudinal, multifirm, grounded analysis of cultural transformation. *Journal of marketing*, 70(4), 37-55.

Gefen, D., Karahanna, E., & Straub, D. W. (2003). Trust and TAM in online shopping: an integrated model. *MIS quarterly*, 27(1), 51-90.

Georgieva, V. (2016). social media developer-teacher's new role. *web of Scholar*, (7), 41-42.

Gerring, J. (2011). How good is good enough? A multidimensional, best-possible standard for research design. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(3), 625-636.

Gibson, W. J., & Brown, A. (2009). *Working with Qualitative Data*. London: Sage.

Gilmore, A., Carson, D., & Rocks, S. (2006). Networking in SMEs: Evaluating its contribution to marketing activity. *International Business Review*, 15(3), 278-293.

Ghosh, A. K., Chakraborty, G., & Bunch Ghosh, D. (1995). Improving brand performance by altering consumers' brand uncertainty. *Journal of product & brand management*, 4(5), 14-20.

Goldkuhl, G. (2012). Pragmatism vs interpretivism in qualitative information systems research. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 21(2), 135–146. doi:10.1057/ejis.2011.54.

Gommans, M., Krishnan, K. S., & Scheffold, K. B. (2001). From brand loyalty to e-loyalty: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Economic & Social Research*, 3(1).

Gopalan, A., Mannor, S., & Mansour, Y. (2014, January). Thompson sampling for complex online problems. In *International Conference on Machine Learning* (pp. 100-108).

Gromark, J., & Melin, F. (2013). From market orientation to brand orientation in the public sector. *Journal of marketing management*, 29(9-10), 1099-1123.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2(163-194), 105.

Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research, Context & Method* (pp. 491-514). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.13

Guest, G., Namey, E. E., & Mitchell, M. L. (2012). *Collecting qualitative data: A field manual for applied research*. Sage.

Gummesson, E. (2000). *Qualitative Methods in Management Research*. London:, Sage

Handley, A., & Chapman, C. C. (2012). B2B Content Marketing, 2012 Benchmarks. Trends and Budgets, verfügbar unter: http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/12/B2B_Content_Marketing_2012.pdf (25.05. 2012).

Hanna, S., & Rowley, J. (2008). An analysis of terminology use in place branding. *Place branding and public diplomacy*, 4(1), 61-75.

Hajli, N., & Lin, X. (2016). Exploring the security of information sharing on social networking sites: The role of perceived control of information. *Journal of Business Ethics, 133*(1), 111-123.

Harrison-Walker, L. J. (2001). The measurement of word-of-mouth communication and an investigation of service quality and customer commitment as potential antecedents. *Journal of service research, 4*(1), 60-75.

Helm, C., & Jones, R. (2010). Extending the value chain—A conceptual framework for managing the governance of co-created brand equity. *Journal of Brand Management, 17*(8), 579-589.

Helander, N., & Ulkuniemi, P. (2006). Marketing challenges in the software component business. *International Journal of Technology Marketing, 1*(4), 375-392.

Hennig-Thurau, T., Malhotra, E. C., Frieger, C., Gensler, S., Lobschat, L., Rangaswamy, A., & Skiera, B. (2010). The impact of new media on customer relationships. *Journal of service research, 13*(3), 311-330.

Hertenstein, J. H., Platt, M. B., & Veryzer, R. W. (2005). The impact of industrial design effectiveness on corporate financial performance. *Journal of Product Innovation Management, 22*(1), 3-21.

Hertog, S. (2010). Defying the resource curse: explaining successful state-owned enterprises in rentier states. *World Politics, 62*(2), 261-301.

Hills, J. R., & Cairncross, G. (2011). How small regional accommodation providers view and respond to online intermediaries. *Journal of Vacation Marketing, 17*(4), 249-262.

Hirschheim, R., & Klein, H. K. (1992). Paradigmatic influences on information systems development methodologies: Evolution and conceptual advances. In *Advances in computers* (Vol. 34, pp. 293-392). Elsevier.

Hirvonen, S., Reijonen, H., & Pasanen, M. (2013). The effect of strategic orientations on business performance in SMEs: A multigroup analysis comparing Hungary and Finland. *International Marketing Review*, 30(6), 510-535.

Hoejmose, S., Brammer, S., & Millington, A. (2012). "Green" supply chain management: The role of trust and top management in B2B and B2C markets. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 41(4), 609-620.

Horan, G., O'Dwyer, M., & Tiernan, S. (2011). Exploring management perspectives of branding in service SMEs. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 25(2), 114-121.

Hays, S., Page, S. J., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social media as a destination marketing tool: its use by national tourism organisations. *Current issues in Tourism*, 16(3), 211-239.

Hitz, M., Murphy, J., & Sigala, M. (2006). *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2006*. Springer-Verlag Wien.

Hughes, A., & Mina, A. (2010). The impact of the patent system on SMEs. Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge

Hunt, S. D. (1983). General theories and the fundamental explananda of marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 47(4), 9-17.

Hussey, J; & Hussey, R(1997). Business Research: A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students. London: MacMillan Business

Hynes, G. E. (2012). Improving Employees' Interpersonal Communication Competencies: A Qualitative Study. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), 466-475.

Ibeh, K. I., Luo, Y., & Dinnie, K. (2005). E-branding strategies of internet companies: some preliminary insights from the UK. *Journal of Brand Management*, 12(5), 355-373.

Inskip, I. (2004). Corporate branding for small to medium-sized businesses—A missed opportunity or an indulgence?. *Journal of Brand Management*, 11(5), 358-365.

Jo Hatch, M., & Schultz, M. (1997). Relations between organizational culture, identity image. *European Journal of marketing*, 31(5/6), 356-365.

Johnson, P., & Duberley, J. (2000). *Understanding management research: An introduction to epistemology*. Sage.

Johnson, J. C. & Weller, S. C. (2002). 'Elicitation techniques for interviewing'. In J. F.

Jones, C., & Kim, S. (2010). Influences of retail brand trust, offline patronage, clothing involvement and website quality on online apparel shopping intention. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 34(6), 627-637.

Jones, R., & Rowley, J. (2011). Entrepreneurial marketing in small businesses: A conceptual exploration. *International Small Business Journal*, 29(1), 25-36.

Jones, M. V., & Coviello, N. E. (2005). Internationalisation: conceptualising an entrepreneurial process of behaviour in time. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 36(3), 284-303.

Juntunen, M. (2012). Co-creating corporate brands in start-ups. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 30(2), 230-249.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.

Kapferer, J. N. (2010). All that glitters is not green: the challenge of sustainable luxury. *European business review*, (November-December), 40-45.

Kapferer, J. N. (2010). Luxury after the crisis: Pro logo or no logo. *The European Business Review*, (September-October), 42-46.

Kavoura, A., & Bitsani, E. (2013). E-branding of rural tourism in Carinthia, Austria. *Turizam: međunarodni znanstveno-stručni časopis*, 61(3), 289-312.

Katsikea, E., Theodosiou, M., & Makri, K. (2019). The interplay between market intelligence activities and sales strategy as drivers of performance in foreign markets. *European Journal of Marketing*.

Kim, J. S., Song, H. J., & Lee, C. K. (2016). Effects of corporate social responsibility and internal marketing on organizational commitment and turnover intentions. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 55, 25-32.

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business horizons*, 54(3), 241-251.

Kothari, C. R. (2015). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques*. New Age International

Krivokapic-Skoko, B., & O'Neill, G. (2011). Beyond the qualitative–quantitative distinction: Some innovative methods for business and management research. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 5(3), 290-300. doi: 10.5172/ mra.2011.5.3.290

Kucuk, S. U. (2008). Consumer Exit, Voice, and 'Power' on the Internet. *Journal of Research for Consumers*, (15).

Kuom, M., & Oertel, B. (1999). Virtual travel agencies. *Netnomics*, 1(2), 225-235.

Kalkota, R., & Robinson, M. (2001). E-Business 2.0, Roadmap for Success, Person Education. New Jersey.

Kambil, A. (2008). What is your Web 5.0 strategy?. *Journal of business strategy*, 29(6), 56-58.

Kantur, D. (2016). Strategic entrepreneurship: mediating the entrepreneurial orientation-performance link. *Management Decision*, 54(1), 24-43.

Kapferer, J.N. (2008). The new strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long term. (Fourth edition). Great Britain: Kogan Page Publishers.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.

Keller, K. O., Dekimpe, M. G., & Geyskens, I. (2016). Let your banner wave? Antecedents and performance implications of retailers' private-label branding strategies. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(4), 1-19.

Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of marketing*, 57(1), 1-22.

Keller, K. (2013). *Strategic brand management: Global edition*. Pearson Higher Ed.

Knox, S. (2004). Positioning and branding your organisation. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 13(2), 105-115.

Kothari, C. R. (2015). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques*. New Age International

Kotler, P., Keller, K. L., Ang, S. H., Tan, C. T., & Leong, S. M. (2018). *Marketing management: an Asian perspective*. Pearson.

Krake, F. B. (2005). Successful brand management in SMEs: a new theory and practical hints. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(4), 228-238.

Kracht, J., & Wang, Y. (2010). Examining the tourism distribution channel: evolution and transformation. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 22(5), 736-757.

Lassen, P., Kunde, J., & Gioia, C. (2008). Creating a clearly differentiated SME brand profile: The case of Montana A/S. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(1-2), 92-104.

Laukkanen, T., Nagy, G., Hirvonen, S., Reijonen, H., & Pasanen, M. (2013). The effect of strategic orientations on business performance in SMEs: A multigroup analysis comparing Hungary and Finland. *International Marketing Review*, 30(6), 510-535.

Laukkanen, T. (2016). Consumer adoption versus rejection decisions in seemingly similar service innovations: The case of the Internet and mobile banking. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(7), 2432-2439.

Law, R., Buhalis, D., & Cobanoglu, C. (2014). Progress on information and communication technologies in hospitality and tourism. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 26(5), 727-750.

Leedy, P. D. (1997). *Practical research: planning and design* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

- Lee, N., & Lings, I. (2008). *Doing business research: a guide to theory and practice*. Sage
- Lee, S. A., & Jeong, M. (2014). Enhancing online brand experiences: An application of congruity theory. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *40*, 49-58.
- Leek, S., & Christodoulides, G. (2012). A framework of brand value in B2B markets: The contributing role of functional and emotional components. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *41*(1), 106-114.
- Leek, S., & Christodoulides, G. (2011). A literature review and future agenda for B2B branding: Challenges of branding in a B2B context. *Industrial marketing management*, *40*(6), 830-837.
- Lepak, D. P., Smith, K. G., & Taylor, M. S. (2007). Value creation and value capture: a multilevel perspective. *Academy of management review*, *32*(1), 180-194.
- Lee, Z. (2013). Rebranding in brand-oriented organisations: Exploring tensions in the nonprofit sector. *Journal of marketing management*, *29*(9-10), 1124-1142.
- Lee, N., & Lings, I. (2008). *Doing business research: a guide to theory and practice*. Sage.
- Lewis, I., JANJAAP (JAKE) SEMEIJN, & Talalayevsky, A. (1998). The impact of information technology on travel agents. *Transportation Journal*, 20-25.
- Lewis, R. B. (2004). 'Nvivo 2.0 and ATLAS.ti 5.0: A Comparative Review of Two Popular Qualitative Data-Analysis Programs'. *Field Methods*, (16), 439-464.
- Lexhagen, M. (2009). Customer perceived value of travel and tourism web sites. *International Journal of Information Systems in the Service Sector (IJISSS)*, *1*(1), 35-53.

Lien, C. H., Wen, M. J., Huang, L. C., & Wu, K. L. (2015). Online hotel booking: The effects of brand image, price, trust and value on purchase intentions. *Asia Pacific Management Review*, 20(4), 210-218.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Denzin, N. K. (Eds.). (2000). *The handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2013). *The constructivist credo*. Left Coast Press.

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (2013). *Constructivist Credo*. Walnut Creek, US: Left Coast Press.

Lindlof, T., & Taylor, B. (2002). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California; London: Sage

Lexhagen, M. (2009). Customer perceived value of travel and tourism web sites. *International Journal of Information Systems in the Service Sector (IJISSS)*, 1(1), 35-53.

Lyon, F., Möllering, G., & Saunders, M.N.K. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust*. Cheltenham, Glos: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Macias, W. (2003). A beginning look at the effects of interactivity, product involvement and web experience on comprehension: Brand web sites as interactive advertising. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 25(2), 31-44.

Macias, W. (2003). A preliminary structural equation model of comprehension and persuasion of interactive advertising brand web sites. *Journal of interactive advertising*, 3(2), 36-48.

Mag, P. C. Com review, published Feb. 2012, Ziff Davis.

Marchant, C., Karampela, M., & Marshall, D. (2015). Maggie's Monster Bike & Hike Event: Marketing Planning in the Charity/Not-For-Profit Sector.

Manen, M. V. (1997). From meaning to method. *Qualitative health research*, 7(3), 345-369.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (1989). *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage

McCoy, S., Everard, A., Polak, P., & Galletta, D. F. (2008). An experimental study of antecedents and consequences of online ad intrusiveness. *Intl. Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 24(7), 672-699.

McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview* (Vol. 13). Sage. 1-12

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in education: Evidence-Based Inquiry*. New York. Pearson Education, Inc. 20-61

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2006). Evidence-based inquiry. *Research in education*, 6.

Matanda, M. J., & Ndubisi, N. O. (2013). Internal marketing, internal branding, and organisational outcomes: The moderating role of perceived goal congruence. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(9-10), 1030-1055.

Melewar, T. C., Lim, L. L., & Baumgarth, C. (2010). "Living the brand": brand orientation in the business-to-business sector. *European Journal of marketing*.

Merrilees, B. (2007). A theory of brand-led SME new venture development. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 10(4), 403-415.

Merrilees, B., Miller, D., & Shao, W. (2016). Mall brand meaning: an experiential branding perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(3), 262-273.

Merrilees, B., McKenzie, B., & Miller, D. (2007). Culture and marketing strategy in discount retailing. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(3), 215-221.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., Huberman, M. A., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. sage.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). Drawing valid meaning from qualitative data: Toward a shared craft. *Educational researcher*, 13(5), 20-30.

Michaelidou, N., Siamagka, N. T., & Christodoulides, G. (2011). Usage, barriers and measurement of social media marketing: An exploratory investigation of small and medium B2B brands. *Industrial marketing management*, 40(7), 1153-1159.

Mitchell, R., Hutchinson, K., & Quinn, B. (2013). Brand management in small and medium-sized (SME) retailers: A future research agenda. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(11-12), 1367-1393.

Moghavvemi, S., Hakimian, F., Feissal, T., & Faziharudean, T. M. (2012). Competitive advantages through IT innovation adoption by SMEs.

Mollen, A., & Wilson, H. (2010). Engagement, telepresence and interactivity in online consumer experience: Reconciling scholastic and managerial perspectives. *Journal of business research*, 63(9-10), 919-925.

Morrison, S., & Crane, F. G. (2007). Building the service brand by creating and managing an emotional brand experience. *Journal of brand management*, 14(5), 410-421.

Moore, K., & Reid, S. (2008). The birth of brand: 4000 years of branding. *Business History*, 50(4), 419-432.

- Mowle, J., & Merrilees, B. (2005). A functional and symbolic perspective to branding Australian SME wineries. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(4), 220-227.
- Muntinga, D. G., Moorman, M., & Smit, E. G. (2011). Introducing COBRAs: Exploring motivations for brand-related social media use. *International Journal of advertising*, 30(1), 13-46.
- Myers, J. L., Well, A. D., & Lorch Jr, R. F. (2013). *Research design and statistical analysis*. Routledge.
- Myers, M. D. (2013). *Qualitative research in business and management*. Sage.
- Merrilees, B. (2007). A theory of brand-led SME new venture development. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 10(4), 403-415.
- Narver, J., & Slater, S. (1990). The effect of a market orientation on business profitability. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(4), 20-36.
- Naudé, W. (2010). Entrepreneurship, developing countries, and development economics: new approaches and insights. *Small business economics*, 34(1), 1.
- Nedergaard, N., & Gyrd-Jones, R. (2013). Sustainable brand-based innovation: The role of corporate brands in driving sustainable innovation. *Journal of brand management*, 20(9), 762-778.
- Nobre, H., & Silva, D. (2014). Social network marketing strategy and SME strategy benefits. *Journal of Transnational Management*, 19(2), 138-151.
- Nolan, C., & Garavan, T. (2011, July). Lost in translation? Critiquing the HRD discourse in the small firm. Working paper presented at 12th UFHRD Conference.

Nolan, C. T., & Garavan, T. N. (2016). Problematizing HRD in SMEs: A “critical” exploration of context, informality, and empirical realities. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 27(3), 407-442.

Norman, Zoncita, Reflection on Social Construction of Reality (March 3, 2015). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2671077> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2671077>

O'Connor, B., Balasubramanyan, R., Routledge, B. R., & Smith, N. A. (2010, May). From tweets to polls: Linking text sentiment to public opinion time series. In Fourth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media.

O'Dwyer, M., Gilmore, A., & Carson, D. (2009). Innovative marketing in SMEs: an empirical study. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 17(5), 383-396.

O'Dwyer, M., Gilmore, A., & Carson, D. (2009). Innovative marketing in SMEs. *European Journal of Marketing*, 43(1/2), 46-61.

Ojasalo, J. (2008). Management of innovation networks: a case study of different approaches. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 11(1), 51-86.

Ojasalo, J., Nätti, S., & Olkkonen, R. (2008). Brand building in software SMEs: an empirical study. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 17(2), 92-107.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2003). Effect sizes in qualitative research: A prolegomenon. *Quality and Quantity*, 37(4), 393-409.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Teddlie, C. (2003). A framework for analyzing data in mixed methods research. *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*, 2, 397-430.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2007). Sampling designs in qualitative research: Making the sampling process more public. *The qualitative report*, 12(2), 238-254.

Orr, S., & Menzies, J. (2012). Using social networks and the Guanxi in case study research on Australian firms doing business in China. *Australasian journal of market & social research*, 20(1), 22-33.

Osakwe, C. N., Ciunova-Shuleska, A., Ajayi, J. O., & Chovancová, M. (2015). modelling the brand performance of smes in a fast growing african economy: the complementary role of brand orientation and customer retention orientation. *Economic Computation & Economic Cybernetics Studies & Research*, 49(4).

Osgood, C. E., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1955). The principle of congruity in the prediction of attitude change. *Psychological review*, 62(1), 42.

Pacheco, L., & Tavares, F. (2015). Capital structure determinants of Portuguese footwear sector SMEs: Empirical evidence using a panel data. *Tékhné*, 13(2), 145-157.

Palumbo, F., & Herbig, P. (2000). The multicultural context of brand loyalty. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 3(3), 116-125.

Parasuraman, A., Berry, L. L., & Zeithaml, V. A. (1991). Refinement and reassessment of the SERVQUAL scale. *Journal of retailing*, 67(4), 420.

Parrott, G., Azam Roomi, M., & Holliman, D. (2010). An analysis of marketing programmes adopted by regional small and medium-sized enterprises. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 17(2), 184-203.

Parkhe, A. (1993). Strategic alliance structuring: A game theoretic and transaction cost examination of interfirm cooperation. *Academy of management journal*, 36(4), 794-829.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. London: Sage.

Pechsiri, C., & Piriyaikul, R. (2016). Developing a Why–How Question Answering system on community web boards with a causality graph including procedural knowledge. *Information Processing in Agriculture*, 3(1), 36-53.

Perry Jr, W. G. (1999). *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*. *Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104.

Ploutz, L. L., Tesch, P. A., Biro, R. L., & Dudley, G. A. (1994). Effect of resistance training on muscle use during exercise. *Journal of applied physiology*, 76(4), 1675-1681.

Poon, J. M., Ainuddin, R. A., & Junit, S. O. H. (2006). Effects of self-concept traits and entrepreneurial orientation on firm performance. *International small business journal*, 24(1), 61-82.

Promsopee, I., & Thanaphonpavee, M. (2010). Digital marketing's impact on customers' perspective towards brand: Case study of Blackberry on Facebook

Pulizzi, J. & Barret (2008). *Get Content. Get Customers: How to Use Content Marketing to Deliver Relevant, Valuable, and Compelling Information that Turns Prospects Into Buyers*. Voyager Media, Inc.

Quinton, S., Canhoto, A., Molinillo, S., Pera, R., & Budhathoki, T. (2018). Conceptualising a digital orientation: antecedents of supporting SME performance in the digital economy. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 26(5), 427-439.

Raju, P. S., Lonial, S. C., & Crum, M. D. (2011). Market orientation in the context of SMEs: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Business Research*, 64(12), 1320-1326.

- Reid, M. (2008). Contemporary marketing in professional services. *Journal of services marketing*, 22(5), 374-384.
- Reijonen, H., Laukkanen, T., Komppula, R., & Tuominen, S. (2012). Are growing SMEs more market-oriented and brand-oriented. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 50(4), 699-716.
- Renton, M., Daellenbach, U., Davenport, S., & Richard, J. (2015). Small but sophisticated: Entrepreneurial marketing and sme approaches to brand management. *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, 17(2), 149-164.
- Rigas, D., Hussain, H. A., & Riaz, N. (2016). Online Branding and Marketing: A User Perspective. *International Journal of Sociotechnology and Knowledge Development (IJSKD)*, 8(2), 27-38.
- Robson, C. (2011). *Real World Research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rodham, K (1998). Manager or medic: the role of the occupational health professional. *Occupational Medicine*, 48(2), 81-84.
- Rode, V., & Vallaster, C. (2005). Corporate branding for start-ups: the crucial role of entrepreneurs. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 8(2), 121-135.
- Roshanzamir, A. (2018). Dilemmas of Branding for Start-ups. *ICDS 2018*, 72.
- Rossi, F. (2011). The challenges of antimicrobial resistance in Brazil. *Clinical infectious diseases*, 52(9), 1138-1143.
- Roy, D., & Banerjee, S. (2014). Identification and measurement of brand identity and image gap: a quantitative approach. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 23(3), 207-219.

- Roy, S. (2009). *Garments industry in India: Lessons from two clusters*. New Delhi: Institute for Studies in Industrial Development.
- Rowley, J. (2009). Online branding strategies of UK fashion retailers. *Internet research*, 19(3), 348-369.
- Rowley, J. (2004). Online branding. *Online information review*, 28(2), 131-138.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rubinstein, H., & Griffiths, C. (2001). Branding matters more on the Internet. *Journal of Brand Management*, 8(6), 394-404.
- Rupert Hills, J., & Cairncross, G. (2011). Small accommodation providers and UGC web sites: perceptions and practices. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 23(1), 26-43.
- Sandelowski, M. (1995). Sample size in qualitative research. *Research in nursing & health*, 18(2), 179-183.
- Sarantakos, S. (2005). *Social Research*. 3rd. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2012). *Research methods for business students* (6th ed.). New York: Prentice Hall
- Savin-Baden, M., & Major, C. H. (2013). *Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge
- Sayer, A. (1984). *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*. London: Routledge.
- Schroeder, J. E. (2009). The cultural codes of branding. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 123-126.

Schroeder, J. E. (2005). The artist and the brand. *European Journal of Marketing*, 39(11/12), 1291-1305.

Schultz, M., & De Chernatony, L. (2002). The challenges of corporate branding. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 5(2/3), 105-113.

Seiders, K., Berry, L. L., & Gresham, L. G. (2000). Attention, retailers! How convenient is your convenience strategy. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 41(3), 79

Shahzad, K., Bashir, S., & Ramay, M. I. (2008). Impact of HR practices on perceived performance of university teachers in Pakistan. *International review of business research papers*, 4(2), 302-315.

Shankar, V., Inman, J. J., Mantrala, M., Kelley, E., & Rizley, R. (2011). Innovations in shopper marketing: current insights and future research issues. *Journal of Retailing*, 87, S29-S42.

Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2000). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of management review*, 25(1), 217-226.

Slavin, R. E. (1992). *Research methods in education* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Baco

Shaw, R. S., Chen, C. C., Harris, A. L., & Huang, H. J. (2009). The impact of information richness on information security awareness training effectiveness. *Computers & Education*, 52(1), 92-100.

Smith, A. (2009). The Internet's role in campaign 2008.

Smith, D., & Culkin, N. (2001). Making sense of information: a new role for the marketing researcher. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 19(4), 263-271.

Sobh, R., & Perry, C. (2006). Research design and data analysis in realism research. *European Journal of marketing*, 40(11/12), 1194-1209.

Spence, M., & Hamzaoui Essoussi, L. (2010). SME brand building and management: an exploratory study. *European Journal of Marketing*, 44(7/8), 1037-1054.

Sigala, M. (2009, August). Geoportals and Geocollaborative Portals: Functionality and Impacts on Travellers' Trip Planning and Decision Making Processes. In *International CHRIE Conference-Refereed Track* (p. 28).

Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (4th ed.). London: Sage. Six

Simmons, G. J. (2007). "i-Branding": developing the internet as a branding tool. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 25(6), 544-562.

Singh, S., & Sonnenburg, S. (2012). Brand performances in social media. *Journal of interactive marketing*, 26(4), 189-197.

Stelzner, M. (2011). 2012 social media marketing industry report. *Social media examiner*, 7.

Strebinger, A. (2014). Rethinking brand architecture: a study on industry, company-and product-level drivers of branding strategy. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(9/10), 1782-1804.

Strebinger, A., & Treiblmaier, H. (2004). E-adequate branding: building offline and online brand structure within a polygon of interdependent forces. *Electronic Markets*, 14(2), 153- 164.

Swatman, P. M., Krueger, C., & Van Der Beek, K. (2006). The changing digital content Landscape: An evaluation of e-business model development in European online news and music. *Internet research*, 16(1), 53-80.

T., Hennig-Thurau, K.P., Gwinner, G. Walsh, and D.D. Gremler, Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet?, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 38-52.(2004)

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds). (2010). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Taylor, B. C., & Lindlof, T. R. (2013). Travelling Methods: Tracing the Globalization of Qualitative Communication Research, *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, 15(3), 11-30

Thrassou, A., & Vrontis, D. (2009). A new consumer relationship model: the marketing communications application. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 15(4), 499-521.

Theurer, C. P., Tumasjan, A., Welpe, I. M., & Lievens, F. (2018). Employer branding: a brand equity-based literature review and research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 20(1), 155-179.

Theng So, J., Grant Parsons, A., & Yap, S. F. (2013). Corporate branding, emotional attachment and brand loyalty: the case of luxury fashion branding. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 17(4), 403-423.

Theodosiou, M., Kehagias, J., & Katsikea, E. (2012). Strategic orientations, marketing capabilities and firm performance: An empirical investigation in the context of frontline managers in service organizations. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 41(7), 1058-1070.

Tse, A. C. B. (2003). Disintermediation of travel agents in the hotel industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 22(4), 453-460.

Urde, M., Baumgarth, C., & Merrilees, B. (2013). Brand orientation and market orientation—From alternatives to synergy. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 13-20.

Urde, M. (2013). The corporate brand identity matrix. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(9), 742-761.

Uusitalo, O. (2014). Brand creation via design and modularization—SMEs in international B2B markets. *Journal of Business Market Management*, 7(2), 354-379.

Vakratsas, D., & Ambler, T. (1999). How advertising works: what do we really know?. *Journal of marketing*, 63(1), 26-43.

Varadarajan, R., Srinivasan, R., Vadakkepatt, G. G., Yadav, M. S., Pavlou, P. A., Krishnamurthy, S., & Krause, T. (2010). Interactive technologies and retailing strategy: A review, conceptual framework and future research directions. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 24(2), 96-110.

Vernuccio, M., Barbarossa, C., Giraldi, A., & Ceccotti, F. (2012). Determinants of e-brand attitude: A structural modeling approach. *Journal of Brand management*, 19(6), 500-512.

Victor Tavares (2015). Brand Management in SMEs: Conceptualization of Differences and Research Agenda. *European Journal of Applied Business Management*, 1 (1), 2015, pp. 128-153

Vidal, R., & Hartley, R. (2004, June). Motion segmentation with missing data using power factorization and gpca. In *Proceedings of the 2004 IEEE Computer Society Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition, 2004. CVPR 2004.* (Vol. 2, pp. II-II). IEEE.

Vidic, F., & Vadjnal, J. (2013). The role of branding in SMEs: different perspective on the market. *China-USA Business Review*, 12(1), 79-88.

Vinhas Da Silva, R., & Faridah Syed Alwi, S. (2008). Online brand attributes and online corporate brand images. *European Journal of Marketing*, 42(9/10), 1039-1058.

Völckner, F., Sattler, H., Hennig-Thurau, T., & Ringle, C. M. (2010). The role of parent brand quality for service brand extension success. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(4), 379- 396.

Voorveld, H. A., Van Noort, G., & Duijn, M. (2013). Building brands with interactivity: The role of prior brand usage in the relation between perceived website interactivity and brand responses. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(7), 608-622.

Vrontis, D., Thrassou, A., & Rossi, M. (2011). Italian wine firms: strategic branding and financial performance. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 19(4), 288-304.

Walsh, M. F., & Lipinski, J. (2009). The role of the marketing function in small and medium sized enterprises. *Journal of small business and enterprise development*, 16(4), 569-585.

Ward, M. R., & Lee, M. J. (2000). Internet shopping, consumer search and product branding. *Journal of product & brand management*, 9(1), 6-20

Watson, S. (2008). Where are we now? A review of management development issues in the hospitality and tourism sector: implications for talent management. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(7), 758-780.

Wehr, D. S. (2015). *Jung and feminism: Liberating archetypes*. Routledge.

Wehr, P. (2015, February 14). Social reality construction. Retrieved from [crc@colorado.edu: http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/example/wehr7487.htm](http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/example/wehr7487.htm)

Wood, L. (2000). Brands and brand equity: definition and management. *Management decision*, 38(9), 662-669.

Wilkins, H., Merrilees, B., & Herington, C. (2007). Towards an understanding of total service quality in hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 26(4), 840-853.

Wirtz, J., Den Ambtman, A., Bloemer, J., Horváth, C., Ramaseshan, B., Van De Klundert, J., & Kandampully, J. (2013). Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities. *Journal of service Management*, 24(3), 223-244.

Wuebben, J., 2012. Content is Currency. Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey.

Yadav, M. S., & Pavlou, P. A. (2014). Marketing in computer-mediated environments: Research synthesis and new directions. *Journal of Marketing*, 78(1), 20-40.

Yeh-Yun Lin, C., & Yi-Ching Chen, M. (2007). Does innovation lead to performance? An empirical study of SMEs in Taiwan. *Management Research News*, 30(2), 115-132.

Yin, R.K. (2011). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. London: The Guildford Press.

Yin Wong, H., & Merrilees, B. (2005). A brand orientation typology for SMEs: a case research approach. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(3), 155-162.

Yin Wong, H., & Merrilees, B. (2007). Multiple roles for branding in international marketing. *International Marketing Review*, 24(4), 384-408.

Yoo, Y., Henfridsson, O., & Lyytinen, K. (2010). Research commentary—the new organizing logic of digital innovation: an agenda for information systems research. *Information systems research*, 21(4), 724-735.

Zhang, X., Song, H., & Huang, G. Q. (2009). Tourism supply chain management: A new research agenda. *Tourism management*, 30(3), 345-358.

Zeng, B., & Gerritsen, R. (2014). What do we know about social media in tourism? A review. *Tourism management perspectives*, 10, 27-36.

Zhou, K. Z., Li, J. J., Zhou, N., & Su, C. (2008). Market orientation, job satisfaction, product quality, and firm performance: evidence from China. *Strategic management journal*, 29(9), 985-1000.

Zwass, V. (1996). Electronic Commerce: Structures and Issues' *Int'l J. of Electronic Commerce*, 1, 1 (Fall, 1996) 3-23.

APPENDIX:

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of the information I provide for this project only		
I understand my personal details such as my name and email-address will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I will maintain the confidentiality of the fellow participants in this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of the information I provide beyond this project		
I agree for the data I provide to be transcribed and archived by the research and stored according to university procedures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that other genuine researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So we can use the information you provide legally		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials related to this project to Divya Nambiar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant [printed] Signature Date

Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Project contact details for further information:

Name:

email address:



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

The Crescent,
Salford, M5 4WT,
United Kingdom

0161 295 5000
www.salford.ac.uk

E –Brand management in Indian SMEs: Strategic and Operational Perspectives

What is the research about?

The PhD research study is on “**E –Brand management in Indian SMEs: Strategic and Operational Perspectives**”, within the wider context of SME hospitality Sector in India.

The focus of this research is to interview on your opinions and experiences of the e-branding concept and its implementation, development and outcomes.

I am interested in the views of Owner/Manager who currently adopt the e-brand for their Organisation. This is in the context of understanding and analysing e-brand management from the view point of Owner and Manager. I hope that

through your participation I may be able contribute to the understanding of e-brand management within the SME hospitality sector.

How will you be involved?

You will be asked to participate in an interview for 45 to 60 minutes duration. All meetings will be arranged at a mutually agreed time and location within your preferred location.

The interview does not have a strict protocol, and draws upon your experiences and reflections of e-branding. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time (up to the point of publication and dissemination) without prejudice and without providing a reason.

I will also undertake a content analysis of hotel's website, marketing catalogues, promotional material and blogs etc.

What information will be collected?

The interview will be audio recorded and the data collected will be analysed for thesis development, and wider publication and dissemination.

There is a possibility that the results from the data will be published in journal papers and/ or conference proceedings/ and/or presentations, and/or any form of dissemination as determined by the researcher. However, all participants' interview data will be anonymised as part of any form of dissemination, and individuals will not be recognised in anyway.

When undertaking the content analysis hotel's website, marketing catalogues promotional material and blogs etc. I will not name the hotel in any form of dissemination, although as the content analysis material is in the public domain, other actors' may be able to indirectly identify the hotel.

Data files will be securely stored archived and only used by the researcher and supervisors for the duration of the PhD programme, and up to three years post-graduation to facilitate dissemination.

Who is organising and sponsoring the study?

This study is organised and funded by **NAME** as a student at the University of Salford. I can be contacted as follows. A complaint can be filed with my supervisor.

Email:

Phone Number:



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

The Crescent,
Salford, M5 4WT,
United Kingdom

0161 295 5000
www.salford.ac.uk

Dear Manager,

I name, the undersigned PhD student at the University of Salford, would like to conduct a face to face interview with the senior managers of your organisation as the part of my research study.

My research topic is **E –Brand management in Indian SMEs: Strategic Perspectives.**

The interview duration could be between 45-60 minutes, and will try to understand and capture the thoughts and perspectives of the strategic leader within the Organisation, who presently are responsible for implementing and sustaining the e-brand of the Organisation. I

would like to understand and analyse the views of the management within the SME on E-brand management and the corresponding success and challenge factors. I will also undertake a content analysis of hotel's website, marketing catalogues, promotional material and blogs. When undertaking the content analysis the name of hotel will be made anonymous in any form of dissemination, although as the content analysis material is in the public domain, other actors' may be able to indirectly identify the hotel

All interview responses will be kept anonymous. Your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and finding could lead to the new development within the under researched areas.

I humbly request your participation and suggestion for a day and time at your convenience.

Thanks

Name

Sign

<p>how the e-brand is managed from a strategic perspective in the context of Indian SMEs in the hospitality sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How do you describe your SME brand? ➤ How do you manage your e-brand? ➤ What are the different e-brand management strategies of your SME? ➤ Why do you think e-brand management is important in the Indian hospitality SME sector? ➤ How e-brand building is positively linked to the success of your SME? ➤ Why should SMEs pay attention to e-brand management? ➤ How effective is your e-brand management compared to traditional brand management?
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How effectively are e-brand building techniques identified by the SME? ➤ How do you build an SME e-brand focussed on customer? ➤ How do you connect with customers through e-branding? ➤ How do you evaluate the changes in your SME e-branding? ➤ What are the different tools used in your e-branding? ➤ How do you decide to implement effective branding strategies/tools? ➤ How should SMEs develop integrated communication strategies to build a powerful e-brand? ➤ How do you update your e-brand to take account of new technologies? ➤ What are the factors affecting the e-branding decisions of your SME? ➤ What is your role in e-branding of the organisation? ➤ What expectations do you think your customers have with your e-brand, and how do you work to meet expectations?
<p>how successfully are the components of an SME e- brand managed in the Indian hospitality sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What are the components of your ideal SME brand? ➤ What are the components or characteristics of a successful e-brand? ➤ What are the key considerations for a successful e-branding? ➤ How do e-branding techniques benefit your SME? ➤ How do you work to achieve ebrand success? ➤ Do you think the company’s vision is reflected in the ebrand? ➤ How strong is your ebrand compared to your competitors? ➤ How do you work to convey your e-brand internally?

<p>how effectively the challenges of e-branding are addressed by Indian SMEs in the hospitality sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Are there any challenges involved in e-branding? How are they addressed? ➤ How do you balance the various risks involved in e-branding? ➤ How do you cope with the emerging e-branding trends in the hospitality sector? ➤ How do you perceive the restrictions on e-branding for an SME compared to larger organisations?
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

1. How e-brand is managed in the Indian hospitality sector?

Meta Code	Open Code	Quote from transcripts
-----------	-----------	------------------------

<p>Online brand management</p>	<p>Brand promotion (R1,P1) (R2,P1) (R3,P1) (R3,P2) (R4,P1) (R5,P1) (R7,P1) (R8,P1) (R10,P2).</p> <p>High technology users (R1,P1) (R2,P1) (R3,P1) (R3,P2) (R4,P1) (R5,P1) (R7,P1) (R8,P1)</p> <p>Social media tools (R1,P1), (R2,P1), (R2,P1), (R3,P1), (R4,P1), (R4,P1), (R7,P1), (R7,P2), (R8,P1), (R9,P1), (R9,P2).</p>	<p>“we manage e-brand through multiple sources like registered website...to promote my brand. (R1,P1)</p> <p>“The online brand is managed mainly through website, third party advertising” (R2,P1)</p> <p>Companies which was dependent on word of mouth publicity during inception, but today the situation is widely changed, brands are using much larger media options to communicate to wide audience” (R3,P1)</p> <p>Online media has been able to get more customers to our organisation (R3, P2)</p> <p>We take internet for granted, in fact many hoteliers do not realize just how much the internet has impacted the business(R4,P1)</p> <p>“I would say 70% of our business comes from e-brand management “(R5,P1).</p> <p>The world is digitalised,...every online tool and method is important in copying with the competitors and being successful in the industry(R7,P1).</p> <p>“The majority of clients are from the digital channels,information due to finger tips due to our online presence” (R8,P1)</p> <p>....e-brand enhances connectivity and networking (R8,P1)</p> <p>Digital solutions are multiple and better targeted to audience..... giving brand high visibility” (R10,P2).</p> <p>“we make use of face book, twitter, Instagram and vine...social media helps in getting maximum visibility all over the country through website and facebook” (R1,P1)</p> <p>“Also maintain an active presence in social media..... “the presence of website, blogs, ...help in providing a good image to the customer” (R2,P1)</p> <p>“the social media platforms that are available, innovation in marketing, sales and services are interesting elements.... create excited brands” (R3,P1)</p> <p>“We make use of social media advertising, third party advertising.... with customer through e-branding online....we make use of social media advertisement to get maximum visibility, today social media is widely used comparing to olden days”(R4,P1)</p> <p>“We have our own webpage were booking related videos and photos are been published and promotion is done through facebook and twitter also” (R7,P1)</p> <p>....“networking is done through social media and digital media”(R7,P2) “We use online advertising and advertising in other networking sites.. the social media</p>
--------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Brand/organisationsuccess (R1,P1), (R2,P1) (R3,P1), (R3,P2), (R4,P1), (R5,P1) (R7,P1), (R9,P1)</p>	<p>enhances connectivity and networking with people”(R8,P1). “We manage through websites, blogs and social media(R9,P1),...the networking is also important we build our network at a daily basis and the interaction within the social media network should be effective so that we get more customer queries and reference from our past customers who were happy with our services...the world is digitalised and majority of the customers are engaged in social media , which makes the brand building easier through online , we use Facebook, twitter, Instagram and promotional sites like trip advisor etc... (R9,P2)use to project the maximum online networking, make the best use of online platform...and all possible social networking facilities”(R9,P2) “We manage the online brand through various social media tools, though online campaigns and through third party promotions...” (R10,P2). “the resort is a place which is away from the city so the only way a particular e-brand can reach out to people out of the city limits and all around the country are by using e-brand channels and that is how e-branding has impacted positively on success of my SME”(R1,P1). “brand is how customers feel when they think of us, you can think of it as a reputation, things like amazing logo, friendly staff, reliable services and a good website can help in people form a positive impression about small business, but to be effective and successful we need to be honest of what the company represents ” (R2,P1) “e-brand is always a success to the organisation, online media has been able to get more customers to our organisation. The online media has been successful in creating emotional signals using social media. The brand creation needs to go beyond the advertisement and social media activities for the success of the organisation”(R3,P2) The main aspect of the SME is the competitiveness and success(R4,P1) e-brand is very important for the success of the SME, initially during the start up phase majority of our business were carried through e-branding. We update very frequently photographs and videos to have much visibility. 70% of our business come from online.(R5,P1) “It is the biggest success factor ...because it is only through the e-presence and e-</p>
--	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>SME visibility (R1,P1), (R2,P1), (R4,P1), (R5,P1), (R6,P1), (R7,P1), (R8,P1)</p>	<p>branding the public is able to identify usThe traditional methods of promotion...copying up with competitors and being success in the industry”(R7,P1) “The majority of the clients are from the digital channels, the clients get more information on finger tips due to online presence. The people get more exposure online and browse for more information, the bookings are done through websites. The reviews and feedbacks are useful for other customers as well as for us itself for improvement”(R8,P1) “The e-brand building helps us to reach out the small business name to prospective customers, it created lot of opportunities in terms of enquiry and profitability. e-brand has bought up immense opportunities to the small business like us, we get more customers from all over country and at times we get abroad customers too”(R9,P1) “branding is a need, as there are too many players they offer specialised services personalised to the needs and requirements of limited budget clients. Brand creates recognition, reputation and trusts resulting in better conversations and communication... helps in creating awareness and acceptance for services across borders, resulting in a faster adoption(R10,P2) “basically e-branding is easier in the sense that you can reach out to many people through the internet...helps in getting maximum visibility all over the country through. All those digital channels linked to all third-party market tools that we use”(R1,P1) “it is the only way you can get maximum visibility throughout the country or anywhere else...because with internet we get maximum visibility than the traditional brand management” (R1,P1) “ we also maintain separate blog and videos in our local directory in google search, the advertising in the local directory also helps in getting more customers” (R2,P1) “we also try to collaborate with good online advertisers, and try to be visible to the customers” ...” we make use of social media advertisement to get maximum visibility”(R4,P1) “we update very frequently the photographs and videos to have maximum visibility”(R5,P1) “majority of the customers are brand oriented, and they use search engines to find good deal on trips and stays, the 70%</p>
--	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>organisation image (R7,P1)</p> <p>Brand positioning (R5,P1)</p> <p>Identity creation (R3,P1), (R4,P2), (R5,P1), (R7,P1), (R9,P1), (R10,P2)</p>	<p>of the business are through websites, so the digital presence and frequent updates are very important "... Constant updates are necessary, the aim is to get maximum visibility to the customers "(R6,P1)</p> <p>"We always try to be on the top of the search list to get maximum visibility and customer visits"(R7,P1)</p> <p>"The different strategies include to have maximum visibility to the customers, to be more search engine friendly and to be in the first page during google search"...." It is through the digital channels, the hospitality sector can get more visibility"(R8,P1)</p> <p>"we should aim in creating maximum brand awareness and with the awareness an overall outlook and the image of the brand should be projected to the customer to have maximum viewers and visitors to the website"(R7,P1)</p> <p>"The image should be developed in customers mind and this image should be different from its competitors."</p> <p>"we want to position in 4 start rating, currently we have 3 star rating and working to move to 4 star rating in future"(R5,P1)</p> <p>"the social media platforms that are available, innovations in marketing and services are interesting elements in the firms and the efforts get picked up by the social media and create excitement in brands, the beneficial communication and media environment thus help in creating brand awareness and interest" (R3,P1)</p> <p>"social media helps hoteliers to connect with travellers by posting engagement content that attracts both their emotional needs, the power of social media enables hoteliers to tell their story in a unique way"(R4,P2)</p> <p>"We are targeting corporate groups so that we can increase our volumes and get more popularity and good identity among corporate groups" (R5,P1)</p> <p>"it is through online media that we are able to make customers understand the valueand create awareness of our brand to people" (R7,P1).</p> <p>"We being an Small organisation we need to be careful in our brand building, we should aim in creating maximum awareness and with awareness an overall outlook and the image of the brand should be projected to the customer to have maximum viewers and visitors to the website"(R7,P1)</p>
--	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Quick reach to customers (R1,P1), (R3,P2) (R4,P1) (R8,P2), (R9,P1)</p>	<p>can reach out to many people through the internet as simple as than marketing locally through various traditional methods” (R1,P1) “Today through online advertising, social media advertising, email marketing and websites we are showcasing ourselves to the public that we are a great organisation with good services at affordable price “ (R3,P1); “It is an easy and less expensive method of projecting our brand to the public”(R3, P2).. the social media has allowed anyone to be the publisher of the content(R3,P2). The e-brand building help us to reach out the business name to prospective customers, it created a lot of opportunities in terms of enquiries and profitability, the e-brand is inexpensive, and has plenty of medium available to project the brand online(R9,P1)</p> <p>“Basically e-branding is easier as we can reach out to many people through the internet as simple as that than marketing locally through various traditional methods, internet helps in getting maximum visibility through website and facebook and all those digital channels linked to the third party”(R1,P1)...”particularly e-brand can reach out to the people out of the city limits or all over the country by using e-brand channels”(R1,P1) “it is less expensive for the organisation and the reach within the customers are limitless...the reach within the customers are very good and it has been very effective media to get enquiries from customers from far places ” (R3,P2) “Internet has impacted the business, more importantly many don’t recognize how much the internet influence their business” (R4, P1) “...email replies are been provided within an hour” (R8,P2) “We aim to have maximum reach of online advertisement and get more customer enquiry...the e-brand has bought up immense opportunities to the small business like us, e-brand has bought up more customers and increased profits due to online channels”(R9,P1) “The e-brand building helps us to reach out the small business name to prospective customers, it created lot of opportunities in terms of enquiry and profitability. e-brand has bought up immense opportunities to the small business like us, we get more customers from all over country and at</p>
--	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Networking and connectivity (R6,P1), (R7,P1), (R7,P2), (R8,P1), (R9,P1), (R10,P1)</p> <p>Online promotion(R3,P1) Quick reach(R1,P1) Necessity Quick reach(R1,P1) Impact(R1,P1) Satisfied customers(R2,P1) Result oriented(R2,P1) Customer outlook(R2,P1) Brand name(R2,P1) SEOoptimisation/ friendly(R2,P1) Brand communication(R3,P1) compatible(R1,P1) Brand promise(R3,P1) trust(R3,P1) tourism brand(R1,P1) (R2,P1) hospitality brand(R4,P1) (R5,P1) Brand success (R2,P1) Brand building(R1,P2) (R3,P1) Pricing(R3,P1) Brand story telling(R4,P1) brand identity(R3,P1) Applications (R3,P1)</p>	<p>times we get abroad customers too”(R9,P1) “branding is a need, as there are too many players they offer specialised services personalised to the needs and requirements of limited budget clients. Brand creates recognition, reputation and trusts resulting in better conversations and communication... helps in creating awareness and acceptance for services across borders, resulting in a faster adoption(R10,P2)</p> <p>“the customer interactivity and connectivity is increased through online brand presence” (R6,P1) “networking is the main strategy in e- branding, we also concentrate on campaign marketing like campaign monitor and online banner advertising(R7,P1) “today the traditional media is taken over by networking, networking is through social media, digital media and word of mouth” (R7,P2) “e-brand enhances connectivity and networking with people”(R8,P1) “today the world is completely digitalised, we are living in the era of computers and majority of customers are engaged in social media”(R9,P1) “the way the customers choose a brand or make a purchase is rapidly evolving, driven by the widespread availability of information”....”consequently the relationship of the customer and the brand has changed, especially in decision making and speed”(R10,P1)</p>
--	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Multiple channels (R1,P1), (R2,P1), (R3,P1), (R4,P2), (R5,P1), (R6,P1), (R7,P1), (R8,P1), (R9,P1), (R10,P1)</p>	<p>“we manage e-brand through multiple sources like registered websites, third party websites and social media websites” (R1,P1)</p> <p>“the strategies are based on all e-brand marketing sources available facebook,you tube channel, registering with third party service providers in promoting the brand” (R1,P1)</p> <p>“We also maintain a separate blog and videos in our local directory, quick results are obtained for anyone who searches the online directory”(R2,P1)</p> <p>“the social media platforms that are available, innovations in marketing and sales and services are interested elements in the firms and effort gets picked up easily by the social media”(R3,P1)</p> <p>“social media empowers hoteliers to connect with travellers by posting engaging content that attracts both their emotional needs...best part is that social channels such as facebook,Instagram and twitter are free for business to use”(R4,P2).</p> <p>“brand is managed through the various online channels, email contacts through to the IT firms and other corporates, email is sent to HR managers of various corporate(R5,P1).</p> <p>“the brand presence in online channels is very important, the brand is managed by the use of various online channels like you tube, twitter, facebook, whatsapp and the company website(R6,P1)</p> <p>“We also concentrate on campaign marketing like campaign monitor and online banner advertising. We have third party.... we also create whatsapp groups with the existing customers”(R7,P1)</p> <p>“After the internet and www, we started our online activities through website, email,marketing,online advertising and advertising in other networking sites like makemytrip,trip advisor,yatra.com and agoda.com”(R8,P1)</p> <p>“We manage our e-brands through websites, blogs and social media, we also advertise in the third party website like makemytrip, trivago,yatra.com and trip advisor...majority of our customers are engaged in social media, which makes brand building is very easy”(R9,P1)</p> <p>“We manage the online brand through various social media tools, through online campaigns and through third party promotions” (R10,P1)</p>
--	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p>Marketing and Advertising</p>	<p>Market identification and target (R2,P1), (R3,P1)</p> <p>Third party advertising(OTA) (R1,P1), (R2,P2), (R4,P1), (R6,P1), (R7,P1), (R8,P1), (R9,P1)</p>	<p>The maximum number of customers , profitability, increased customer services and satisfied customers are the main target of our business(R2,P1) “it is with the help of the brand that the organisation is capable of identifying the market opportunities(R3,P1)</p> <p>“we manage e-brand through multiple sources like registered websites and other service providers”(R1,P1) “The e-brand is managed through the website and third party advertising” (R2,P2) “We have presence on websites, third party websites and social media networks(R4,P1) “ the advertisement and promotion are done through various third party websites like fakebook, MakeMyTrip...”(R6,P1) “we also have third party promotions and we are present in various online sites like trip advisor, trivago...”(R7,P1) “after the internet and www, we started our online activities through website, email marketing...”(R8,P1) “we also advertise in the third party website like MakeMyTrip...”(R9,P1)</p>
<p>Customer relations/customer oriented</p>	<p>Meeting customer expectation (R2,P1), (R3,P1), (R4,P1), (R4,P2), (R5,P1), (R7,P1), (R8,P1), (R10, P1)</p>	<p>“the presence of websites, blogs and videos in twitter and facebook also help in providing a good image to the customer, by giving them different pictures, views and sightseeing experiences...the advertising in local directory helps in getting more customers”(R2,P1) “..to be effective and successful, we need to be honest of what the company represents”(R2,P1) “the brand name itself is the perception for the customers which creates more expectation, the customers expects a lot when they hear the name of the brand, and the customer is ready to pay a higher price”(R3,P1) “we maintain a database and we maintain good relationships with customers through e-branding online(R4,P1) “we are able to connect with potential guests on their business page, leverage local tourism pages and quickly respond to customer inquiries via chat features...when a brand is engaging it connects with potential guests and encourages user generated content”(R4,P2) “we need to build a customer data set for this reaching customers are very important”(R5,P1)</p>

		<p>“we aim in creating maximum awareness and with awareness an overall outlook and the organisations image should be projected to the customer to have the maximum viewers and visitors to the website” (R7,P1)</p> <p>“the majority of clients are from digital channels and the clients get more information on the finger tips due to our online presence the reviews and feedback which they provide are very useful for other customers as well as for us for improvement”(R8,P1)</p> <p>“The way the customer chooses a brand or make a purchase is rapidly evolving, driven by a widespread availability of information. Consecutively the relationship of the customer and brand has changed, especially in decision making process and speed(R10, P1)</p>
--	--	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p>Factors affecting the branding decision</p>	<p>digital tools (R1,P1), (R2,P1), (R3,P1) (R4,P1), (R6,P1), (R7,P1), (R9,P1), (R10,P1)</p> <p>Business target (R2,P1), (R5,P1), (R7,P1), (R8,P1)</p>	<p>“We also make use of you tube channels, facebook, and twitter to promote my brand, the brand strategies are based on all the e-marketing strategies available facebook, you tube registering with third party service providers who helps in promoting the brand”(R1,P1)</p> <p>“ the presence of website, blogs, videos in twitter and facebook also help in providing a good image to the customer by giving them different pictures, views and sightseeing experiences”(R2,P1)</p> <p>“traditional market and advertising can say we are a good company with good services, but today through online advertising, social media advertising, email marketing and websites we are showcasing ourselves to the public that we are a great organisation”(R3,P1)</p> <p>“We make use of social media advertising, third party advertising,.we make use of social media advertising to get maximum visibility”(R4,P1)</p> <p>“the advertisement and promotion are done through various third party websites like facebook, makemytrip...”(R6,P1)</p> <p>“we also have third party promotion and we are present in various online sites like trip advisor, trivago...”(R7,P1) “majority of customers are engaged in social media”(R9,P1)</p> <p>“we manage the online brand through various social media tools, through online campaigns and through third party promotions”(R10,P1)</p> <p>“the maximum number of customers, profitability, increased customer services and satisfied customers are the main target of our business”(R2,P1)</p> <p>“we want to move to 4 star rating in the future”(R5,P1)</p> <p>“we try to be on the top of the search list to get maximum visibility and customer visits(R7,P1)</p> <p>“to develop good data base and conduct email marketing using tools like campaign monitor” (R8,P1)</p>
------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

2) How is e-brand managed from the strategic and operations perspective in the hospitality sector?

<p>Strategic Decision</p>	<p>online branding decisions (R1,P2), (R2,P2), (R3,P3), (R4,P2), (R5,P2), (R6,P1), (R7,P2), (R8,P2)</p>	<p>“people are aware of the social networking and are internet savvy, so we try to be very active in the online media, the different tools are again the internet tools such as facebook, WhatsApp, website and third party marketing campaigns”..... “the brand building through digital media could be very effective because majority of the people are dependent on internet.... brand building is a continuous process” (R1,P2)</p> <p>“We try to effectively choose our channels of communication with customers, today as majority of population search online for more information...we use twitter, facebook, Pinterest and Instagram all may all look like promising channels for branding the business”... “We try to effectively choose our channels of communication to customers, today majority of population including teenagers and youngsters are active on social networking sites, we use twitter, facebook... look like promising social channels for branding the business” (R2,P2)</p> <p>“ the new emerging internet era for brand creation is directed by the young talents”(R3,P3) “there are also website applications and search marketing tools ...can benefit from innovative technology aimed at improving the daily management”(R4,P2)</p> <p>“the reviews getting into our website can be searched from google, which is on the second page,the travel agents ad is always on the first page, they get to know the website easily than making google adwords, which is costly. We can only do for three months during December.”(R5,P2)</p> <p>“people are dependent on the internet and social networking, so they get more information from internet...internet is an excellent</p>
---------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Profit orientation (R1, P1), (R2, P2)</p>	<p>search tool for customers and majority of promotion and advertisement are put forward through internet”.... “the website is made user friendly, values are given much priority, quality and service within the organisation are carefully examined and supplied with utmost importance” (R6, P1)</p> <p>“we also connect to the maximum customers through the social media sites, like facebook, Instagram and twitter, we also pay to the digital advertising agency”.... “the e-branding techniques are identified according to the digital trends, and social media networks are very dynamic, and we identify the changes in various sectors” (R7,P2)</p> <p>“the email marketing is used to great extend which help us to identify on interested customers... our website is customer friendly, booking can be made easily”....</p> <p>“every brand building is based on the customer, customer is treated as an asset of the organisation, the main aim is to provide customers with value, quality, service and satisfaction” (R8, P2)</p> <p>“our main aim is to differentiate the brand from other players in the market and to position our brand more effectively, build and expose the brand and review the brand to get more audience” (R9, P2)</p> <p>“the first step in brand building is to create awareness by informing the target audience that you exist.... we feel comfortable and reassured to buy from a brand that we have already seen or heard before and display advertising aids in this process by creating millions of impressions” (R10, P3)</p> <p>“the main aim is to get more customer and more profits” (R2, P2)</p>
--	--------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Factors affecting decision making (R1, P2), (R1, P3), (R5, P3), (R6, P1), (R8, P3)</p> <p>Content management</p> <p>Pricing decisions (R1,P2), (R8, P3), (R9,P3)</p> <p>Competitor analysis (R2, P3), (R6, P1), (R7, P2), (R8,P3), (R9, P2), (R10,P4)</p>	<p>“the decision is taken on various factors, the team sits together with the third-party service providers we discuss with them with the various rates that can fit in our budget” (R1, P2) ...”my role is more of a decision maker of all things we are planning (R1, P3)</p> <p>“I decide on whom to tie up with, what to focus, what is the content” (R5, P3)</p> <p>“the content and budget are planned as part of process” (R6, P1)</p> <p>“if you want to be successful in content marketing, your goal should be to develop and distribute the absolute best information in the industry, if not why the customer should care for the industry”</p> <p>“I take decisions on tariffs, online content management, advertisement and third-party advertisements and Ad Words” (R8, P3)</p> <p>“Right now, it is all business based, according to promotion plan we upgrade things to give more services, quality and value in terms of pricing” (R1, P1)</p> <p>“the tariffs are very much important, we have different competitors who gives at competitive pricing and early bird offers” (R8, P3)</p> <p>“I used to make decisions on investment in e-brands and on various tariffs” (R9, P3)</p> <p>“A strong brand is the biggest asset to the company, which stay ahead of competitors. We try to observe competitors by analysing all the tactics and promotion pattern” (R2, P3)</p> <p>“in the planning process competitors are given more emphasis and we as the organisation try to be ahead of competitor” (R6, P1)</p> <p>“the effective brand strategies are decided by being competitive in the industry, we think to be a competitor in the industry and to be better than the competitor” (R7,P2)</p>
--	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Customer focused decisions (R1,P2), (R2,P2), (R4,P2) (R5, P2), (R6,P1), (R7,P2), (R8,P2), (R9,P2), (R10,P3)</p>	<p>“I make constant visit to various website including competitors and try to make sure we are updated and attractive” (R8, P3) “after analysing the competitors and the market, we plan to implement effective brand strategies, we do by analysing the present trends in the online industry” (R9, P2) “at first, we determine the target audience, then we identify the various competing brands and analyse various promotion methods (R10, P4)</p> <p>“customer is an asset to the organisation, the brand is build based on the quality and value” (R1,P2) “it is done by series of steps, which starts from targeting the customers, managing them and by good customer relationship management and customer service” (R2,P2) “social media helps to connect with travellers by posting engaging content that attracts their emotional needs. we are able to connect with the potential guests through the business pages and through social media networks” (R4, P2) “customers prefer mainly for rating and they look star facilities, I need to build a 5-star rating online to be more focused on customer...also restricted to the customer and plans tariffs based on the market changes” (R5, P2) “the website is made user friendly, values are given much priority, quality and services within the organisation are carefully examined and supplied with utmost importance. constant updates are necessary and aim to make maximum visible” (R6, P1) “customer is the king, we first look at the priorities of the customer, and they are reputation, quality and excellent services” (R7,P2) “customer is treated as an asset to the organisation, the main aim is to provide customers with value, quality, services and satisfaction. Our website is customer friendly</p>
--	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Customer Analysis (R1,P3), (R2,P4), (R5,P3), (R7,P3), (R8,P3), (R9,P3), (R10,P4)</p>	<p>and booking can be made easily” (R8,P2) “all branding is done in the online context focussed on customers. The customers today are mainly involved with internet for every information they do google search, so we try to focus more on google AdWords and to be on the first page following the search results(R9,P2) “we need to map series of steps in customer journey, which starts from point of consideration from potential customers and excellent services provided, and ensures everything goes very smoothly” (R10,P3) “basically everyone looks for quality and values so there is a lot of competition in the market but our goal is to maintain quality and be competitive in the market with our competitors and we work towards it constantly” (R1,P3) “the expectations are equally important as emotions. we never make false promises to customers, we don’t want to make them disappointed” (R2,P4) “expectations come from feedback, we get oral and verbal feedback, we take feedback positively and improve them(R5,P3) “the customers mainly look at various facilities are up to mark and do they match according to the advertisement provided. We always try to manage very efficiently the customer satisfaction” (R7, P3) “excellent service, satisfaction and value for the money spent, to meet the expectations we provide training to staff to handle customers effectively and efficiently” (R8, P3) “customers have great expectation on the money spent, they expect maximum return for the money spent, as owner the main duty is to make the customer extremely satisfied” (R9, P3) “customer expects 100% what they have seen online in the websites.... we make sure to meet these expectations and we have done our landscaping in such a</p>
--	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

		manner to meet cent percent of the expectations” (R10, P4)
Operation decisions	<p>Customer Reviews (R2,P3), (R5,P2), (R10,P3)</p> <p>Technology updation (R1,P3), (R2,P3), (R4,P2), (R5,P2), (R7,P2), (R10,P4)</p> <p>Lead generation(R3,P1) Customer engagement(R2,P1)</p> <p>Market research (R1,P3), (R8,P2), (R10,P4),</p>	<p>“today’s consumer interacts with brands in a variety of interconnected ways, switching from mobile to laptop, from social media to online reviews” (R2, P3) “the reviews are into our websites, which can be obtained after google search” (R5, P2) “The good reviews and feedback is beneficial for us , as we get more references through the reviews” (R10,P3)</p> <p>“technology updation is a constant process, technology is changing at every day , they come with new options”...we keep track of what they are providing as latest packages and how to use latest technology”(R1,P3) “staying up to date of social media conversations relevant to the brand and industry is important part of a strong and effective social media strategy”(R2,P3) “ we take the help of external consultant on which software to be bought and also get updates about new software in the market with good features”(R3,P3) “every hotel industry can benefit from innovative technology aimed at improving the daily management.....when hotels operations are updated in the system budget can be planned and arranged”(R4,P2) “fb we update almost every day, also the various happening like climate change and pictures , I also have watsapp group with interested guests”(R5,P2) “the e-branding techniques are identified according to the digital trends....we identify the various sectors and move according to the trends within the industry”(R7,P2) “we need to brand as people notices often...we constantly update our website and try to highlight any discounts, offers or any additional services”(R10,P4)</p> <p>“I do small research of my own on the various options available”</p>

	feasibility(R4,P3)	<p>(R1,P3) “understanding of customers are done first, we understand the way they search and we aim to give more visibility so we decide on which website to give our advertisement more(R8,P2) “at first we determine the target audience, then we identify various competing brands and analyse various promotion methods”(R10,P4)</p> <p>“... had two options during the start up phase, WOM and spending on advertising, the first option is almost outdated and for spending money we do a feasibility check before taking the decisions as we cannot be spending like large organisations(R4,P3)</p>
Capabilities	Continuous improvement (R1,P3), (R3,P1), (R4,P2), (R7,P3), (R8,P3), (R10,P4)	<p>“that is a constant process, so technology is changing at every day, we keep track of what they are providing as latest packages and how we use technology with our system and third-party system” (R1, P3) “it is with the help of the brand the organisation is capable of identifying the marketing opportunities, backed up by innovation and creativity(R3,P1) “one ability is to competitively target your hotel through the use of an online revenue management, were we have our Accounts person who manages them well and reports ” (R4,P2) “technology is very important and every time we make note of different technology and we keep up-to-date with the different changes, we also have an IT and animation expert to track the changes” (R7,P3) “I make constant visit on various website including competitors and make sure to try to update accordingly “(R8, P3) “we also try to be consistent, which is the only way we can be success in the industry” (R10,P4)</p>

	<p>Competitive environment (R3,P1) (R1,P1) Ascertain decisions(R2,P1)</p>	<p>the website easily than making google ad words, which is costly” (R5, P2) “We also pay to the digital advertising agency to be visible on face book and google advertisement” (R7, P2) “mainly with the help of websites like MakeMyTrip, yatra.com and agoda.com” (R8, P2) “social media, digital media advertising and our own website are the main branding tools” (R10, P3)</p>
<p>Branding decisions</p>	<p>Quality and value (R1,P3), (R5,P3), (R6,P1), (R7,P3), (R8,P3), (R10, P4)</p> <p>Brand planning (R1,P3), (R6,P1)</p>	<p>“basically, everybody looks for quality and value so there is a lot of competition in the market but our goal is to maintain quality and be competitive in the market” (R1, P3) “we take feedback positively and make to improve them be service based food based and we try to improve on various aspects” (R5, P3) “customers mainly look at various facilities are up to mark and they match according to the advertisement provided” (R7, P3) “excellent service, satisfaction and value for the money spent are the main expectations of the customer” (R8, P3) “we also create value and try to be honest in communication with the customers on the various services and facilities” (R10, P4)</p> <p>“my role is to make sure all the decisions taken are correct in discussions with people whom I am interactive with, my role is more of a decisionmaker of all the things we are planning” (R1,P3) “planning is adequate and done initially on website investment, the constant and budget are planned as part of process” (R6,P1)</p>

	SEO friendly promotion (R1,P3), (R6,P1), (R8,P2)	<p>“I can use free business option, but to get more visibility by search engines the better option is the paid form of promotion in google and other sites” (R1, P3)</p> <p>“the internet is an excellent search engine tool for customers and majority of promotion and advertisement are put forward through internet” (R6, P1)</p> <p>“the branding strategies are based on customers, today customers are tech savvy and they search in google for hospitality sectors and tourist places for locations, I aim to be on the first page during the search” (R8,P2)</p>
--	-----------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

3. How are the components of the SME e-brand successfully managed in the Indian hospitality sector?

Meta Code	Open Codes	Quotes from transcript
Branding elements	<p>Brand Name (R1,P3), (R6,P1)</p> <p>Brand recall (R2,P3), (R6,P2)</p> <p>Customer relationship (R1,P3), (R2,P4), (R5,P3), (R7,P3), (R8,P3), (R9,P3), (R10,P5)</p>	<p>“the name should be attractive and need to relate the name in future by people” (R1, P3)</p> <p>“the name can also attract the customer and bring them to visit the website and look at the facilities available and tariffs on offer within the hospitality sector” (R6, P1)</p> <p>“need to relate the name in future by people” (R2, P3)</p> <p>“when the customers hear the brand name they will be able to identify with them and recollect” (R6, P2)</p> <p>“everything I do is focused on customer, the customer should be happy and they should be extremely satisfied, so we try to maintain a good customer relationship management” (R1,P3)</p> <p>“engaging with target audience and constant updates online are very important” (R2,P4)</p> <p>“we need to manage the components very effectively , to be successful we need to be smiling and good customer service and be genuine and encourage staff to be humble”(R5,P3)</p>

	<p>Brand expectations (R1,P3), (R2,P4), (R9,P3)</p> <p>Brand trust (R2,P4), (R5,P3), (R7,P3), (R9,P3), (R10,P5)</p>	<p>“effective customer service are important for the brand”(R7,P3) “we make sure in providing excellent customer service with utmost care, so that there should not be any bad comments and negative reviews about us”(R8,P3) “the customer should be given proper value, and excellent services according to their expectation”(R9,P3) “... need to maintain a good relationship with our customers” (R10, P5)</p> <p>“quality of services is important, I am doing everything focussed on the customer” (R1, P3) “... engagement with target audience and constant updates online, by being active on social media, small and medium enterprises are missing out opportunity to develop brand create awareness with target group”(R2,P4) “online brand is basically a promise between the organisation and customers...the customer should be given proper value and excellent services as a result of their expectation” (R9,P3)</p> <p>“The trust is an important factor of a good brand, we maintain the trust and are very truthful to customers. We continue trusting the brand and reach out customer with confidence” (R2,P4) “we do not want to give them wrong impression, many have fancy pictures which are not actual” (R5,P3) “trust, loyalty, follow ups are the ideal brand components” (R7,P3) “trust is very important as the branding is considered, the customer value should be considered important” (R9,P3) “ we work consistently on achieving success, we try to be very trustworthy to customers and we need to provide them with good services and we want to make them happy and satisfied. We do not want to receive any negative feedback, we expect the customer to re-visit ...”(R10,P5)</p>
--	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Website interactivity (R2,P4)</p> <p>Offers (R4, P3)</p> <p>Technology and design</p>	<p>“the important success element of the brand is engagement with target audience and constant updates online, by being active in social media” (R2,P4)</p> <p>“We have an fascinating opportunity with the Web.as it is one-to-one communication it can be kind of very personal, and it’s also interactive, and it’s also private time with the person so it differs” (R3.P 2).</p> <p>“ . . a very scarce, excellent Web sites have got the right choice, in terms of it’s an interactive experience, feeling presence. You get the logic that there are other people included in this Experience” (R6,P2)</p> <p>“the website is made user friendly, values are given much priority, quality and services within the organisation are carefully examined and supplied with utmost importance. constant updates are necessary and aim to make maximum visible” (R6, P1)</p> <p>“flexible rates on seasons...of adjusting prices according to certain seasons” (R4,P3)</p> <p>“Branding is a constant process we need to work continuously without any gap and need to be head of others.”</p>
Brand benefits	Brand visibility (R1,P3), (R4,P3), (R7,P3), (R8,P4), (R10,P5)	<p>“Right now in the market e-brand is most important due to visibility from network sources, no traditional ways of promotion are used, social media and other networking sources are used.” (R1,P3)</p> <p>“Online travel agents are great showcase for their businesses and therefore an aid to increase marketing in other words generates more exposure of the brand” (R4,P3)</p> <p>“we work through online media, social media to get more visibility of our organisation to the public”(R7,P3)</p> <p>“I think e-brand technique benefit</p>

	<p>Social networking (R1,P3), (R7,P3), (R8,P4), (R9,P3), (R10,P5)</p>	<p>both the organisation and customer we get more visibility, accessibility and customers including domestic and international” (R8,P4) “great value for the money spent, need to be good to customer , and to have maximum visibility so that the customer should be able to recollect our name from the online visibility and services”(R10,P5)</p> <p>“right now in market e-brand is most important due to visibility from network sources...social media and other network tools are used”(R1,P3) “ we work through online media, social media etc to get more visibility of our organisation to the public”(R7,P3) “use to project maximum online networking and all possible social networking facilities”(R9,P3)</p> <p>“we get more customers including domestic and international” (R8,P4) “we get potential enquiries from the customers and we get good referrals from the past customers” (R10,P5)</p>
<p>Brand Success</p>	<p>Customer experience (R1,P4), (R5,P3), (R7,P3), (R9 P3), (R10 ,P5)</p>	<p>“there are customers who spent lot of time in my resort, we take feedback and suggestions for improvement from them” (R1,P4) “We normally close monitor the customers” (R5,P3) “customers mainly look at various facilities are up to the mark and do the match according to the web advertisement provided” (R7,P3) “We also contact through the customer emails and follow ups, we also do regular updates on social media” (R9 P3) “We get potential enquires from customers and good referrals from past customers” (R10 ,P5)</p>
<p>Brand Vision</p>	<p>Brand reflection (R1, P4), (R2,P4), (R4 ,P4), (R5 ,P3), (R6 ,P2), (R7, P3), (R8,P4), (R10, P5)</p>	<p>“Vision is reflected in the brand that is how we promote to achieve company’s vision”(R1, P4)</p> <p>“we often try to make the vision reflect in our brand and we always work on maintaing good standard of the company” (R2,P4)</p>

	<p>Brand consistency (R2,P4), (R4 ,P4), (R8 ,P4), (R10, P5)</p>	<p>“Without proper vision the organization cannot be a success we try to do right thing in right time for our organization to make sure the organization is not affected by competitors” (R4 ,P4)</p> <p>“Not cent percent we lack in expressing the brand, we can put in word, but implementation has challenges and there are some deviation happening” (R5 ,P3)</p> <p>“It is important component In branding the organization without a vision is not successful , so the organization should design a vision and work toward a vision.”(R6 ,P2)</p> <p>“We try to maintain the vision by providing good value and services.” (R7, P3)</p> <p>“Confidently I can say around the 70% of brand reflection is made I along with my team work continuously for the achievement of success and make vision come true” (R8,P4)</p> <p>“The company’s vision is reflected in brand we continuously work toward achieving success” (R10, P5)</p> <p>“we are active in al social media networks, we make regular updates or else we may loose prospective customers”(R2,P4)</p> <p>“social networks occupy a space of chief distribution for being free, effective , fast and efficient. In this channels it is important to communicate and we argue with concrete contents the reasons why people should come to our hotel. we keep offers fresh and updated and often promote them”(R4,P4)</p> <p>“I along with my team work continuously for the achievement of success and make vision come true in our day today functioning and in long term success” (R8 ,P4)</p> <p>“We continuously work towards achieving brand success by following the vision “(R10, P5)</p>
--	---------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p>Risk</p>	<p>Professionalism ,(R4,P5), (R5,P4), (R6,P2), (R9, P4)</p> <p>Time constraint(R1,P4)</p> <p>Online reviews (R4, P5), (R7,P4)</p>	<p>professionalism compared to large organisations”(R1,P4) “focus is a big challenge, there are so many channels and media available, so we need to know which is more effective and efficient media that are available to invest our time”(R2,P4) “large organisations have separate departments to look after the marketing and sales, they take care of online branding, and they also have various software services available to automatically update the customer data and to understand the various follow ups with customers” (R4,P5), “connectivity in remote area and too many players and competition, there are different website do not have same platform” (R5,P4) “the overlapping of booking is a challenges faced by the hospitality sector, the promotions and bookings are done by various third party websites and during peak time there are overlapping chances” (R6,P2) “missing of regular update is a challenge, pricing of the competitors is another challenge, the online advertisement is also an important issue”(R9, P4)</p> <p>“time is a big factor, because social media and networking takes a lot of time to build brands online including the writing of blogs, frequent updating and maintaining social media pages, making videos and so forth takes time.”(R1,P4)</p> <p>“customer expectations and loyalty are one of the challenges.... they make negative remarks or comments about our service in website” (R4, P5) “the adverse online reviews on third party website is a challenge we face, but we try to overcome by doing the best as possible to avoid such comments” (R7,P4)</p>
-------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Risk (R2,P4), (R5,P4), (R6,P2), (R7,P4), (R8,P5), (R9,P4), (R10,P6)</p> <p>WOM(R5,P4), (R6,P2), (R7,P4), (R8,P5), (R9,P4), (R10,P6)</p> <p>Restrictions (R1,P4), (R4,P5), (R5,P4), (R6,P2), (R7,P4), (R8,P5), (R9,P4), (R10,P6)</p>	<p>“they are the electronic processing of transactions and system reliability and some privacy issues, regulatory and taxation are the policies especially the GST(R2,P4)</p> <p>“if the performance is not good, initially the reviews will be bad and it will be difficult to recover from the negative reviews need to be care and cautious(R5,P4)</p> <p>“the connectivity and interactivity are the issues which need to be overcome, the organisation is unable to connect and interact customers on 24X7”(R6,P2) “ we get some financial assistance from the banks and we try to balance the risks well by being discipline and punctual”(R7,P4)</p> <p>“the negative comments are risks were which cannot be altered by us, can turn down some prospective customers from booking. The poor feedback can affect the rating and the visibility in the google searches. If there happens more negative feedback or very low rating the third party website can deny our advertising” (R8,P5) “risks are the overlapping of booking during peak seasons” (R9,P4) “effective internal management platform and social media at times damage the potential impact on reputation and engagement in order to effectively protect the social media reputation of the brand”(R10,P6)</p> <p>“basically we have budget limitation and talent people compared to large organisations, we lack professional marketing people with adequate experience..... we lack reputation and visibility compared to large organisation” (R1,P4) “most of large companies have separate departments to look after the marketing and sales” (R4,P5) “since the big organisations their budget is bigger for marketing and staff is training.... large organisations have different</p>
--	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

		<p>branches and chains so they can be managed easily”(R5,P4)</p> <p>“the training provided within the organisation by a trainer is employed on hourly basis and there is no fixed trainers on technology”(R6,P2)</p> <p>“restrictions on finance, technology expert and amenities” (R7,P4)</p> <p>“we need to focus more on marketing and promotion, finance is a restriction for us, for adding various activities like trekking, fishing, and other outdoor activities, as small organisation we find it is possible with higher investment” (R8,P5)</p> <p>“there are no much restrictions comparing to large organisations, apart from the infrastructure and complimentary benefits which they provide to the customers” (R9,P4)</p> <p>“the negative public reactions is a restriction,the campaigns and contents are copiable easily, there are duplicity happening with offers and contents, the site updating and social media network updating is time consuming and we need to be cautious on the various offers given in various sites”(R10,P6)</p>